Suriname

An Asian Immigrant and the Organic Creation of the Caribbean’s Most Unique Fusion Culture

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Glossary of Relevant Terms

**Afro-Surinamer**: An individual of African descent who resided in Suriname at some point during its colonial period. This term refers to persons born in Africa and native Surinamers with some degree of African heritage and is often used in conjunction with the term ‘Creole’.

**Batavia**: The capital city of the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia), located on the island of Java. Batavia was one of the main staging points for Surinamese efforts to import Javanese contract laborers to South America for the express purpose of replacing the colony’s force of enslaved Africans, who had been liberated by The Hague’s unilateral abolishment of slavery.

**Creole**: Permanent residents of Suriname that possess a collection of European and African heritage. Note that the usage of the term ‘Creole’ varies by ethnic group. When Europeans discuss ‘Creoles,’ they are referring to people who have mixed heritage. When Surinamese Maroons use the term ‘Creole,’ they are referring to individuals of mixed heritage as well as Afro-Surinamers who have not joined the Maroon communities in the country’s interior due to a decision to remain near Europeans residing in the colony’s shore district or urban areas.

**Hindostani**: All individuals originating from the Indian Subcontinent throughout Suriname’s colonial period. The term is used to collectively refer to British India’s Hindus and Muslims and is useful because members of both groups decided to immigrate to the Dutch Caribbean.

**Hindustani**: Refers to adherents of the Hindu religion who left the Indian Subcontinent for opportunities to work as agricultural laborers in Suriname. While most individuals from the Indian Subcontinent can be addressed as a whole when discussing Suriname, it is sometimes necessary to separate Suriname’s British Indian Hindus from Muslims for purposes of clarity.

**NHM**: Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij (Dutch Trading Company). The NHM was a Dutch multinational company headquartered in the Netherlands with a focus on extracting profits from Holland’s collection of overseas colonies. The NHM controlled a number of large plantations in Suriname throughout the colony’s stint as a colony of the Netherlands.

**Marienburg**: Refers to a large plantation controlled by the NHM. A significant collection of documents from Marienburg’s past have survived to the present day, so scholars utilize it as a particularly useful case study while studying Surinamese plantations or the Dutch Caribbean.

**Paramaribo**: Suriname’s capital city, located on the Suriname River some distance inland from the colony’s Caribbean coastline. Paramaribo was the center of colonial Suriname’s urban life and a large number of European planters chose to reside in the city rather than on their estates because they would have more opportunities to socialize and felt safer in the city.

**Pathan**: Refers to Muslims residing in British India. A large number of Pathans decided to migrate to Suriname, and Munshi Rahman Khan was a member of this particular social group.

**Semarang**: One of the Netherlands East Indies’ major urban areas. Served as a major staging point for Surinamese attempts to export Javanese indentured servants to the Dutch Caribbean.
Preface
Cultural Development in the Dutch Caribbean Colony of Suriname

Western European colonialism throughout the Age of Exploration permanently altered the demographic structure of numerous regions around the world, including but not limited to Africa, the Americas, various parts of Asia as well as wide swaths of the Pacific. The discovery of the Americas changed European perspectives about the world and most colonial powers of the time period sought ways in which they could extract vast riches from the earth’s last unexplored continents. Although European polities were bound and determined to derive benefits from the discovery of the New World, they did not have the requisite human resources to successfully implement the principle of colonialism throughout the Americas. Thus, colonialism triggered one of the world’s largest human migrations as vast numbers of individuals were imported from Africa and Asia for the express purpose of aiding European efforts to extract wealth from transatlantic colonies. The Caribbean is particularly renown for cultural diversity as the region experienced large amounts of migration from various parts of the world as a result of European countries’ decision to finance development of colonies focused on the large-scale production of agricultural commodities such as sugar, which would be sold for vast profits on the open market.

Large-scale migration from the Old World to the Caribbean is normally associated with the transatlantic slave trade. The Caribbean’s connection to the slave trade results from the fact that most European counties that managed to secure landholdings in the region elected to import vast numbers of enslaved West Africans for the express purpose of providing the labor required to get successful agricultural colonies off the ground. The demographic impact of the fateful decision to import large numbers of West Africans to the Caribbean can be clearly discerned when one examines demographic trends across the region. To this end, some major Caribbean colonies such as Cuba (9.3%), The Dominican Republic (11%), Haiti (95%), Jamaica (92.1%)
and the Bahamas (90.6%) exhibit current demographic ratios that include a large number of Afro-Caribbean individuals. Although Afro-Caribbean individuals are responsible for a large proportion of the region’s changing demographics that directly resulted from activities related to colonialism, they were later supplemented by importation of agricultural laborers from Asia.

The former Dutch Caribbean colony of Suriname provides a fascinating case study that allows historians to examine multiple instances of large-scale demographic change within the Americas during the golden days of European colonialism. When one thinks about the ethnic composition of various polities within North, Central and South America, the ethnic groups that usually come to mind include Europeans and Africans as well as Native Americans. Europeans, Afro-Surinamese and Native people account for a significant proportion of Suriname’s existing population. However, the aforementioned groups collectively account for 46% of this particular country’s populace, which causes one to wonder where the remaining 54% came from. As it turns out, Suriname is an Asian-majority country and the latest data indicates that the remaining 54% of this former Dutch colony’s population is made up of Hindostanis (37%), Javanese (15%) and Chinese (2%). One does not normally associate Hindostanis (Hindus and Muslims that originate from the Indian Subcontinent), Javanese and Chinese with Caribbean colonies. Thus, the revelation that the Caribbean possesses an Asian-majority polity is remarkable to say the least due to the fact that introduction of a entirely new cultural group, which happens to be a significant majority, within a particular region of the world has the potential to spark formation of cultural practices that cannot be found elsewhere in the world. Thus, this paper’s topic is the exploration of how the Caribbean polity of Suriname became an Asian-majority country and how British Indians and Javanese immigrants influenced the development of the colony’s culture.

1 The CIA World Factbook field listing: ethnic groups offers the relevant data about the demographic composition of various Caribbean polities
2 The CIA World Factbook field listing: ethnic groups reports that Suriname’s population demographics are as follows: 31% Creole (mixed black and white), 10% Maroon (descendants of escaped slaves that settled in the interior), 2% Amerindian, 1% White, and 2% other for a total of 46%
3 Ibid
Primary Sources Connected to Immigration and the Development of Suriname’s Culture

Primary sources associated with various Asian migrations to Suriname are crucial if one hopes to understand the influence that Hindostanis, Javanese and Chinese had on the colony’s culture. Although the aforementioned ethnic groups make up a majority of Suriname’s current population, it turns out that the colony’s Asian migrants did not produce significant amounts of written materials detailing their experiences while living in the Caribbean. Thus, a large amount of Suriname-centric scholarship relies heavily on sources generated by Europeans that directly experienced life in this part of the Dutch Caribbean and happened to preserve their thoughts for future generations. To this end, archives within the Surinamese capital of Paramaribo as well as in various parts of the Netherlands contain a preponderance of primary sources written from a European perspective, which primarily exist in the form of large anthologies of official reports generated by individuals associated with the colonial government or for consumption in Holland. Since existing archives only offer access to primary sources that deal with European perspectives on Suriname’s development throughout its colonial period, trips to Suriname or the Netherlands for the purpose of combing through archives for primary sources would only produce official documents that provide little insight into the day-to-day activities of the colony’s population, which are far more crucial to cultural development than discussions of governmental matters.

Official archives within Suriname and Holland mainly contain information that deals with primary sources generated by Europeans who had direct experience with the colony and offer very little in the way of information directly generated by Asian migrants. However, some alternative means of studying Suriname’s cultural development throughout its colonial period are readily accessible to researchers. Suriname experienced a large amount of migration from India while it was ruled by the British Raj, and details regarding Hindostanis’ experiences in South
America often made their way back to the Indian Subcontinent as British Indians exhibited a great deal of interest in the welfare of the Indian Diaspora. To this end, an educated British Indian migrant by the name of Munshi Rahman Khan maintained a daily journal that detailed his experiences in Suriname and later consolidated his diary into an autobiography detailing events that transpired during his life in Suriname. Khan lived from 1874 to 1972 and left India for South America in 1898 at the age of 24. After arriving in Suriname, Khan established permanent residency in the colony and lived there until his death in 1972, which occurred just three years prior to Suriname’s attainment of independence from the Netherlands, which occurred in 1975.4

Mohan Gautam’s efforts to read the complete, original manuscript of Munshi Khan’s autobiography and his decision to produce an English summary of Khan’s work in 1995 made this particular primary source available to a wide audience of scholars interested in Suriname, and an English-language translation of the manuscript was published in Delhi, India in 2003.5 The publication of Munshi Khan’s Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer is significant to scholars of Surinamese history because it is the only surviving primary source generated by a first-generation Asian migrant to the Caribbean and provides unique insights into the interactions between Asians and Suriname’s other ethnic groups, which formed the basis of the colony’s cultural development.6 Khan’s autobiography is readily available for purchase through the mail and a variety of online book retailers, and I was able to procure a copy of Khan’s work for use during the compilation of this thesis. Khan’s Autobiography was an immensely valuable tool since it allowed me to gain an understanding of how Suriname’s culture evolved following the colony’s decision to import large numbers of Asian indentured servants, who staffed sugar estates following the Netherlands’ decision to disassociate itself from chattel slavery in 1862.

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4 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XII-XIII offer the relevant details associated with Munshi Khan and his life in Suriname
5 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XIV-XV, XLI offer information about Gautam’s study of Khan and publication in 2003
6 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XII cites Khan as the only known Asian-generated primary source related to Suriname
Munshi Khan’s *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer* provides a dossier of invaluable information regarding Suriname’s evolution following the colony’s decision to import Asian contract laborers to staff its great agricultural estates. However, I had to gain a sense of Suriname’s pre-existing cultural framework if I had any hope of understanding the true impact that British Indians and Javanese immigrants had on the colony’s culture. To this end, I turned to two other primary sources that contain a great deal of information about Suriname’s true nature prior to Asian immigration. As it turns out, another migrant was ultimately responsible for producing a primary source that offers a wealth of information about Suriname’s early colonial culture. John Gabriel Stedman was a Dutch mercenary who served in the Netherlands’ Scots Brigade during the colonial era. One of the Scots Brigade’s assignments during Stedman’s period of service was to assist Suriname in quelling revolts conducted by groups of escaped slaves known as Maroons. Stedman kept a diary of his daily activities during his time in Suriname, which he later converted into a primary source known as *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, which was published in Europe in the late 1790s following the completion of his tour of duty in Suriname and return to Holland.

Stedman’s time in Suriname occurred in the 1770s, thus he was exposed to a colony largely dominated by Europeans and Afro-Surinamers. Since Stedman kept a personal journal of his experiences in South America, numerous references to interactions between Suriname’s resident ethnic groups, particularly interactions between Europeans and Afro-Surinamese Maroons, appear in his *Narrative*. Thus scholars are able to infer the true nature of the colony’s cultural framework in the years prior to the genesis of Asian immigration to the Caribbean. Detailed study of Stedman’s *Narrative* helps one gain an understanding of how early Surinamese culture developed as well as some of the colony’s dominant social norms throughout the late
1700s and early 1800s. Attainment of a detailed understanding of early Suriname’s cultural framework prior to immigration from British India and Java is essential if one hopes to examine the environment that Asian immigrants encountered upon their arrival in South America as well as some of the pre-existing cultural attitudes present throughout Munshi Khan’s *Autobiography*. Pre-existing cultural attitudes are especially relevant because they reveal the origin of some biases that Hindostanis and Javanese experienced upon their arrival in Suriname as well as the rationale behind European favoritism for Asians over the colony’s Afro-Caribbean residents.

Stedman’s *Narrative* does an excellent job of illustrating European Surinamers’ general perspective on the colony’s African population. However, scholars have to understand how Afro-Surinamers saw the world around them if they hope to attain a full understanding of Suriname’s early colonial culture. Fortunately, Richard Price has done a great deal of historical work centered on Suriname’s existing Maroon population, which traces its ancestry to the slaves that decided to abandon their plantations in pursuit of freedom during the colony’s early days. *Alabi’s World* is Price’s seminal work in the field of Maroon historiography and contains a fantastic collection of oral history transcriptions obtained from conversations with living Maroons within Suriname as well as direct excerpts from other primary sources such as the ill-fated Moravian mission to Suriname’s Saramaka Maroon nation. Examinations of Price’s transcriptions of Maroon oral histories as well as other primary sources within *Alabi’s World* reveal the enmity between Suriname’s population of runaway slaves, also known as “Bush Negroes” and the colony’s European overlords. Furthermore, direct quotations from primary sources associated with *Alabi’s World* are italicized throughout this paper in order to achieve separation from the explanations and secondary information that Price provides as a means of clarifying the context in which Saramaka remarks and other primary sources were generated.
Secondary Sources Linked with Suriname’s Culture and Asian Migration to the Caribbean

When examined as a corpus of primary sources from a diverse collection of historical perspectives present within Suriname, Munshi Khan’s *Autobiography of a Indian Indentured Laborer*, Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam*, and Richard Price’s *Alabi’s World* provide scholars with an excellent appreciation of how Suriname’s early colonial culture formed as a result of interactions between Europeans and Afro-Surinamers. The aforementioned primary sources also clearly illustrate the extensive changes that occurred as a result of the colony’s decision to import Asian agricultural workers following The Hague’s unilateral resolution to terminate its relationship with slavery. Although primary sources provide detailed information regarding colonial Suriname, consultation of a series of secondary sources produced by historical scholars with experience in the Caribbean is essential in order to achieve an understanding of how the colony functioned throughout history.

To this end, secondary sources are useful when one wants to examine Suriname in terms of its hierarchical organization, how it implemented various programs such as the recruitment of British Indians as well as Javanese contract laborers, and how it operated following introduction of powerful foreign government agents such as the British Consul in Paramaribo. Even though my primary sources serve as an excellent corpus of information related to colonial Suriname, they do not address all of the pieces of evidence required to gain a thorough understanding of Suriname’s cultural development and the colony’s decision to import large numbers of British Indian and Javanese contract laborers. Thus, I naturally consulted a number of secondary sources when I needed to supplement information provided by my primary sources and/or fill some gaps in the information provided by my primary sources. The use of secondary research is noted in my footnotes, and a list of relevant secondary sources is enclosed in my bibliography.
Chapter 1
Suriname: An 18th Century Economic Powerhouse

South America’s vast mineral resources and abundance of fertile agricultural land prompted the creation of revenue generating overseas colonies directed by various European polities following the Age of Exploration, and these colonies soon encompassed a vast proportion of Western Europe’s economic activity. The Netherlands is best known for its enormously profitable colonies in the East Indies and Indonesia. However, the Dutch West Indies, encompassing the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao among other landholdings, produced a staggering amount of material wealth for their mother country. Although the Dutch Caribbean islands produced a significant amount of the Netherlands’ colonial economic output, the colony of Suriname, nestled on the northern coast of South America between Guyana (British Guiana) and Cayenne (French Guiana) produced most of the income generated by Dutch holdings in the new world. This income was produced primarily via large-scale agricultural enterprises concentrated on the cultivation of sugarcane and coffee products for export, and Dutch plantations within Suriname were heavily dependent on enslaved African laborers, whose presence largely paved the way for the creation of an incredibly profitable economic apparatus.

John Gabriel Stedman provides a complete rendition of Dutch Suriname’s general administrative structure in his Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam and according to this text, the House of Somelsdyk owned two-thirds of the colony. “1770 the house of Somelsdyk sold it’s share or portion of the colony [to] the town of Amsterdam for the sum of 63,636 pounds sterling, so that now the city holds in it two thirds and the other third still belongs to the West India company, which as I have said form together the Society of Surinam.” From a productivity standpoint, Suriname was arguably the crown jewel of Europe’s assorted Caribbean colonies. Stedman’s observations and interactions with various

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7 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 80 provides the relevant section of information
individuals during his time in Suriname indicate that the colony produced a huge amount of financial income for its inhabitants in addition to its proprietors in Holland. “In the first place in Surinam are computed to be about six or eight hundred plantations, producing sugar, coffee, cacao & cotton, besides some indigo and valuable timbers &c. The exportation of which 69,606 barrels of sugar at 60 florins per barrel, 49,846,082 pounds of coffee, 1,610,595 pounds of cacao, and 534, 153 pounds of cotton…making 6,524,262 florins annually.” Commercial agriculture was not solely responsible for Suriname’s revenue as Stedman later stated “if I now add what goes to Rotterdam & to Zealand besides the home consumption & the return of the rum and molasses, the indigo and the timber it will amount to so much more, this altogether 13,048,524 florins annually which supposing it was but 11,000,000 florins makes a yearly income of near one million in sterling money [pounds sterling],” which was a tremendous amount of money.

The one million pound sterling annual income generated by various economic activities within Suriname, as detailed by Stedman, was impacted by various costs that the colony incurred as a result of its dependence on the Netherlands and its need to generate enough funds to maintain a stable society. As a matter of fact, Suriname provides an interesting case study on how Europeans funded their colonies through debt, as the Society of Suriname had to pay “interest of 6 pr. cent for the national debt of 5 million [pounds] sterling due by the colony and what they are defrauded of by usurers, in Holland, where prodigious other charges are brought in and where those who have made the[i]r fortunes go to spend it and the amount will be found to produce at least 1,000,000 florins.” As a whole, Suriname’s agricultural productivity and reliance on debt funded by individuals in the Netherlands produced “no less a sum yearly than 6,000,000 florins which is clear profit to the Republic, principally for Amsterdam, Rotterdam &

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8 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 473-4 provides the relevant section of information
9 Ibid
10 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 476 provides the relevant section of information
Zealand—thus the inhabitants of Surinam get the[i]r share of the above treasure only 5,000,000 florins, which makes together as I said 1 million [pounds] sterling or 11,000,000 florins.”

Although Suriname’s inhabitants generated roughly 456,000 pounds sterling of raw income, the Society of Suriname imposed various taxes on the colonial population in order to provide miscellaneous public services such as the funding of imported militiamen intended to neutralize the threat of slave revolts and Maroon depredations on plantations and other colonial properties. Stedman notes that Suriname’s official offices of importation and exportation duties, excise taxes and small duties, taxation on heads [which imposed a tax of 2.10 florins upon all adults over the age of 12 and 1.50 florins per child under the age of 12, regardless of color], sale of slaves, and capture of negro deserters produced an annual income of roughly 1.282 million florins.

Once taxation is subtracted out of the income available to inhabitants of Suriname, the colony as a whole had access to around 338,000 pounds sterling per annum in the late 1700s, and this income secured Suriname’s place in the pantheon of Europe’s wealthiest overseas holdings, especially on a per capita basis. As far as economic activity within Suriname is concerned, its inhabitants often sought to generate wealth through activities such as speculation and the purchase of assets on credit. Stedman shines considerable light on such activities by his statement that “in this colony, [it] is too frequently the case, where plantations are sold upon credit, and which is left /by the absent proprietor/ to the sworn appraisers, who by selling them cheap find their accomplice in the buyer, and which while he lives at the above rate…like an upstart rascal as he is, massacres the negroes by double labour, ruins, and pillages the estate of all its productions, which he sells clandestinely for ready money, makes a purse.”

While the utilization of credit for the purchase of plantations and European proprietors’ tendency to quickly

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11 Ibid
12 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 476-8 provides the relevant section of information
13 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 366 provides the relevant section of information
flip landed properties for profit had detractors, such practices made contributions to Dutch Suriname’s extraordinarily elevated degree of high-margin agricultural economic activity.

**Description/Implications of Suriname’s Early Population Demographics**

Stedman’s numbers indicate that Suriname was one of the most economically viable European landholdings in South America, and the colony’s high degree of success is all the more impressive when its foundational demographics are examined in detail. “Suriname’s social hierarchy of the mid-1680s was as follows: some seven hundred local Europeans, of diverse social backgrounds and national origins, were already living in considerable luxury off the labor of 4500 enslaved Africans of equally diverse social and ethnic origins.”

As the colony’s demographics evolved, Afro-Surinamese individuals came to dominate the colony’s population, giving rise to one of the Caribbean’s most impressive ethnic majorities. Upon Stedman’s arrival in the colonies during the late 18th century, “Suriname’s slave population, which came from a variety of West and Central African societies, contained an unusually high ratio of Africans to Creoles, and of recently arrived Africans to seasoned slaves. The colony’s ratio of [Afro-Surinamese] to Europeans was also extreme—more than 25:1 and as high as 65:1 in the plantation districts.” For comparison, Jamaica’s ratio of Africans to Europeans, which was the most imbalanced in the West Indies during that particular time period, was merely 10:1.

Africans’ dominance of colonial Suriname’s population introduced social dynamics exclusive to the colony’s environs and engendered the creation of a uniquely bimodal society centered on two distinct power bases that could only develop within a specific subset of Caribbean colonies.

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14 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 4 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time.

15 Richard Price, quoted in Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, XIV provides the relevant section of information concerning Suriname’s population demographics during the early part of the Netherlands’ presence in South America.

16 Ibid.
Suriname’s bimodal society existed partly on the basis of constant tension among its Europeans regarding their minority status within the colony, and such tensions manifested themselves in Suriname’s rigidly divided class system, which perpetuated itself through a number of social institutions. For instance, as in all other Caribbean colonies, miscegenation occurred on a frequent basis within Suriname, and European men often attached themselves to particular African women in an institution known as a “Suriname marriage” due to the dearth of available European women, and these informal unions existed outside of any marital relations that Euro-Surinamese males may have had in their home countries. Stedman describes Suriname marriages in great detail in his account of the colony during the late 18th century and offers a distinctive perspective on this particular issue, as he became the subject of a rather notable Suriname marriage himself due to his romance with a Surinamese woman of mulatto descent.

On the subject of general Suriname marriages, Stedman writes that European “gentlemen all without exception have a female slave/mostly a creole/in their keeping who preserves their linens clean and decent, dresses their victuals with skill, carefully attends them /they being most excellent nurses/ during the frequent illnesses to which Europeans are exposed to in this country, prevents them from keeping late hours knits for them, sows for them &c.”17 European males derived a large proportion of the benefits resulting from their Suriname marriages, however, it is important to note that Suriname’s Afro-Surinamese population came to view close association with Europeans as a mark of high status within their immediate social circle. This elevated status can be seen in Stedman’s insistence that within Suriname marriages, “these girls who are sometimes Indians and sometimes Mulattos and often negroes, naturally pride themselves in living with a European whom they serve with as much tenderness.”18 Suriname marriages are an

17 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam, 47-8 provides the relevant section of information
18 Ibid
extraordinarily important social institution because they provide a possible explanation for the evolution of colonial Suriname’s rather convoluted colonial social hierarchy, which was used to categorize all of its inhabitants according to their particular mix of ethnicity, especially if the Surinamese individuals in question had any hint of African and/or Afro-Surinamese ancestry.

Children were one of the natural byproduct of Suriname marriages, and Suriname’s children were the product of an extremely diverse set of parents, thus the colony instituted a strict system of social categorization designed to precisely identify each person’s ancestry and the degree to which they could claim European descent. According to Stedman, early colonial Surinamese society possessed several categorizations based on ancestry and these categories were as follows: Afro-Surinamese, Samboes (Afro-Surinamese and mulatto parentage), Mulattoes (Afro-Surinamese and European parentage), Quaderoons (European and Mulatto parentage), Musi (Quaderoon and European parentage) and Europeans. As far as individuals with mixed Afro-Surinamese and European heritage was concerned, their bondage status was determined by their mother’s status. If an individual’s mother happened to be bound to an owner or to the society of Suriname as a whole, the child would be born into a state of bondage unless manumission was purchased from the owner or the Society of Suriname. Several examples of mixed-heritage slaves exist throughout Stedman’s book; however, this particular social class is examined primarily through the experiences of Joana, who was Stedman’s mulatto mistress.

Stedman reveals that Joana, the female partner within his Suriname marriage, was the daughter of a respectable gentleman named “Kruythoff who has besides this girl 4 children by a black woman called Cery, the property of a Mr. D:B….Kruythoff made the offer of above one thousand pound sterling to Mr. D:B------ to obtain manumissions for his offspring which being inhumanly refused it had such an effect upon his spirits that he became frantic and died in that
melancholy state soon thereafter, leaving in slavery and at the discretion of a tyrant 2 boys and 3 beautiful girls.”

Stedman’s Suriname marriage with Joana, who was a slave as a result of Kruythoff’s failure to secure manumission for his children, ultimately produced a child, and his quest to purchase the child’s freedom aptly illustrates the degree to which Suriname maintained control over its enslaved labor force. This state of control is evidenced by the fact that Stedman had to navigate considerable obstacles in order to secure his child’s manumission and was only successful due to some exceptional circumstances. As far as manumission of Stedman’s son is concerned, he asked a local Surinamese lawyer “whether it was not in the power of the governor and counsel, to relieve a gentleman’s child from bondage, providing he paid to its master such ransom as their wisdom should judge adequate? - I now received for answer that no money or interest, could purchase it’s freedom, without the proprietor's consent, since according to law, it was just as much a slave as if it had been…imported from the Coast of Guinea.”

The Society of Suriname’s insistence that children born to any individual belonging to the colony’s slave class inherited their parent’s bound status helped Europeans maintain control over the colony as it prevented the creation of a middle-class of free mixed-heritage individuals who would empathize with their enslaved parents and feel some degree of loyalty toward Afro-Surinamese slaves.

Suriname’s diverse population was not limited to its eclectic mix of Europeans and Afro-Surinamese as the colony’s European population harbored several pre-existing divisions. As in Europe, which was embroiled in the chaos broached by the Lutheran Reformation and the events of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which was especially significant in the Iberian countries of Spain and Portugal as well as their extensive landholdings in South America, one of the more significant divisions within Suriname’s early colonial population was based on basic religious

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19 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 88 provides the relevant section of information
20 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 291 provides the relevant section of information
differences, particularly between Jews and Christians. “Within the elite world of Suriname whitefolks, Jews held a place apart. Refugees from religious persecution in Brazil, some 200 Sephardim arrived in Suriname in the 1660s and were granted privileges that encouraged the formation of a relatively closed community with its own religious, judicial, educational, and even military institutions set within the larger colonial structure.”21 Although the Sephardim, along with Suriname’s other Jews, were somewhat segregated from the colony’s European population, they successfully constructed Jodensavanne, which was an important settlement within colonial Suriname and attained great financial success. “By the 1680s, they owned about one-third of the colony’s plantations, almost all along the Suriname River,” which adjoined the colony’s cities.22

**Suriname’s Bimodal Society: Further Instruments of European Control**

Restriction of all offspring from Suriname marriages between Europeans and Afro-Surinamese mothers with mixed heritage to the slave class was not the only means by which Suriname’s vastly outnumbered European population managed to maintain control of their Afro-Surinamese constituents. Suriname’s inequitable code of laws was one unfortunate result of European desire for control, and this legal system, particularly the murder statue, aptly illustrates Suriname’s development into a bimodal society with distinct rules for its Europeans and Afro-Surinamese inhabitants. Stedman reveals some of the intricacies of Suriname’s murder statue when he details one aspect of this particular Surinamese colonial law as follows: “It being a rule in the colony of Surinam that by paying a fine of 500 florins /not 50£/ per head you are at liberty to [kill] as many negro's as you please, with an additional price of their value should they belong to any of your neighbors, and then the murder first requires to be properly proved, which is

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21 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 4 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time.

22 Ibid
extremely difficult in this country, where no slaves evidence is admitted. Such are the laws of
the Legislature in Dutch Guiana.”

Aside from the fact that Europeans within Suriname could get away with murder of an Afro-Surinamese individual of any heritage mixture with a mere fine of 50 pounds sterling, one must note the fact that evidence submitted by slaves within Suriname’s courts was considered inadmissible, no matter how pertinent it was to the case at hand. Stedman’s remarks clearly illustrate the bias that Africans faced in the legal system as they were not able to defend themselves in court due to Suriname’s evidentiary rules and they were at risk of death should they offend any European wealthy enough to pay the 50 pound fine.

While Europeans accused of murdering a slave would only be subject to the previously mentioned 50-pound fine, enslaved Afro-Surinamese in addition to free individuals of Afro-Surinamese heritage would be subject to a far more appalling fate if they were suspected of killing a fellow man. Stedman offers some direct anecdotes of Suriname’s murder statute’s applicability to its Afro-Surinamese inhabitants when he comments on his discovery of “3 negroes in chains surrounded by a guard…one was condemned to have his head [chopped] off with an Ax for having shot a slave who had come to steal plantains on the estate of his mistress…The truth was however that this had been done by the mistresses absolute command, but who being detected & preferring the loss of the Negro to the penalty of 500 florins, allowed the poor man to be sacrificed.”

This particular anecdote reveals Europeans’ tendency to view slaves as replaceable and tools for accomplishing various tasks. Allowing a slave to take the fall for the intentional killing of another did not seem to constitute murder on the part of a European. Stedman also explains the consequences Afro-Surinamese individuals faced when convicted of murder by revealing that within the aforementioned party, “the third negro whose name was

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23 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 286-7 provides the relevant section of information

24 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 546 provides the relevant section of information
Neptune was no slave, but his own master, & a carpenter by trade, he was young and handsome—But having [killed] the overseer of the estate Altona in the Para Creek in consequence of some [dispute] he justly lost his life with his liberty” due to the racially-biased laws of Suriname.25

Formation of Suriname’s Intractable Maroon Society

Although a large number of Africans transported to South America lived out their lives under the bonds of chattel slavery, a subset of intrepid individuals took it upon themselves to escape their bonds and flee to the impenetrable jungle of the Amazon, where they formed communities with other runaway slaves in remote locations. These runaway slaves and their descendants are known as Maroons and/or Bush Negroes and they constituted a vastly important social subset of most South American and Caribbean colonies, including Suriname. Maroons throughout South America had varying motivations for running away. However, Suriname’s Maroons had a common cause around which they could rally. The sheer numerical superiority of Afro-Surinamese individuals within Suriname and persistent fears of potential slave rebellions, fueled in no small part by the events that took place during the slave rebellion in Berbice, as well as Francois-Dominique Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolt in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, occupied a large proportion of European Surinamese thoughts. The disproportionate attention devoted to people of African descent by Suriname’s European population was the primary motivating factor behind the decision to preserve European control over their Afro-Surinamese constituents via social institutions such as automatic placement of children with any hint of African heritage into slavery and implementation of legal codes that clearly favored Europeans.

Although such repressive measures were intended to preserve order within Suriname and protect the viability of the country’s enormously profitable agricultural enterprises, they had the

25 Ibid
unintended effect of rendering Afro-Surinamese desperate to escape chattel slavery. Ultimately, Afro-Surinamese individuals’ inability to achieve any semblance of justice led some of Suriname’s adventurous souls to form Maroon communities deep in the colony’s interior. Moreover, Suriname’s Maroon community played a significant role in the development of the colony’s early culture and social norms, and the events surrounding their formation need to be examined in order to gain an understanding of the social norms present in colonial Suriname. Richard Price presents several Maroon foundational myths in *Alabi’s World* in the form of Saramaka oral histories, which partner with Stedman’s *Narrative* to paint a picture of the motivations behind Maroon decisions to flee Suriname’s colonial society in favor of the jungle and the significant implications that strong Maroon communities had for Suriname as a whole. Surinamese Maroon folklore holds that the colony’s Bush Negro population formed as a direct response to injustices suffered on various plantations in 16th century Suriname. Consider the following anecdote, which addresses the formation of the Saramaka Maroon nation, arguably the most powerful social group in early colonial Suriname outside of the Dutch bloc in Paramaribo.

The key individuals as far as the foundation of the Saramaka Maroon Nation is concerned were Lanu and Ayako, two African-born Twi speakers who called themselves brothers prior to their arrival from Africa.26 “Lanu's gifts as a diviner and healer brought him special respect, tinged with fear. Osima, a fine-looking woman from Dahomey who worked in the white man’s house, became his lover and would sneak him special treats from the kitchens. Ayako, a natural leader, became plantation basya, bossman or driver, in charge of a whole gang of Waterland slaves. Ayako also found a woman named Asukume and they had a child named Dabi.”27 Ascension of trustworthy slaves to positions such as plantation drivers was one of the hallmarks

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26 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 3 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
27 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 4-5 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
of the Caribbean’s 18th century slave society, however, slaves who ascended to the available elevated positions on their plantations were not immune to indiscretion on the part of their owners and overseers. Poor treatment at the hands of plantation Europeans was a constant presence in Afro-Surinamese slave drivers’ lives and a large proportion of plantation bossmen undoubtedly felt trapped between competing factions as their bosses expected high levels of productivity and strict adherence to plantation regulations. On the other hand, while plantation proprietors expected enforcement of corporal discipline, fellow Afro-Surinamese likely resented basya attempts to discipline unruly or unproductive plantation laborers as such activities showed a lack of solidarity with drivers’ enslaved peers. Tension between basya allegiance to their superiors and solidarity with Afro-Surinamese peers was directly responsible for the genesis of the Saramaka Maroon nation within the inner reaches of colonial Suriname’s Amazonian jungle.

According to the Saramaka oral histories, Lanu departed Waterland when his wife/lover was beaten to death for giving him cane juice which the master usually drank and the plantation whites whipped Lanu nearly to death for his lover’s indiscretions, causing him to run away. There was no pursuit because the whites doubted that Lanu would survive long after his whipping.28 This particular sequence of events would normally have resulted in the death of the runaway slave. However, Lanu “was eventually taken in by an Indian tribe, whom Lanu uncovered with aid from the forest akupu [spirit] named Wamba. Ayako’s sister had an infant son and daughter, and the infant son was killed by a white overseer for crying too much. At that point, Ayako decided to run off with his sister and her remaining child, and they eventually reunited with Lanu.”29 At this point in time, Lanu and Ayako were briefly liberated from the auspices of their former white masters and could have easily elected to live out a solitary

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28 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 6-9 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
29 *Ibid*
existence in the Amazon with the Indians, far from the dangers surrounding colonial Suriname’s plantation regions. Although such an option must have appealed somewhat to Lanu and Ayako as “Lanu had vowed never to return to the areas where the whites were, but Lanu prepared Ayako for trips back to Waterland to try to liberate other slaves, and Ayako, who was a great obiama [holy man] rescued another obiama called Kwemayon, and Ayako eventually secured Asukume and Dabi,” igniting the presence of Suriname’s nascent Saramaka Maroon nation.\(^{30}\)

As Lanu and Ayako were responsible for providing for the individuals that they had liberated from Waterland and their small band was still extremely vulnerable to attacks by Suriname’s control-minded European population, who would stop at nothing to maintain the extravagant income they enjoyed as a result of their exploitation of enslaved Africans’ labor. Given their tenuous situation, Lanu and Ayako made the bold decision to raid a plantation, which achieved several goals, namely the procurement of provisions and essential supplies and the implementation of a campaign of fear against Suriname’s Europeans, which would hopefully deter incursions against the newly formed Saramaka Maroons. To this end, “Lanu and Ayako launched the attack that, more than any other single event, opened the hemorrhage that for the next seven decades would bleed the plantation society dry. According to the Saramaka oral histories, Lanu and Ayako decided to burn the Cassewinica plantation because they would find more tools there.”\(^{31}\) With Lanu’s meticulous preparations complete, “Ayako attacked at night, and his band killed the head of the plantation, a white man. They took all the things, everything they needed. And they sacked the plantation, burned the houses and ran” for their very lives.\(^{32}\)

The Saramaka incursion against the Cassewinica plantation and the murder of the plantation’s European overseer marked Suriname’s first open slave revolt, and it was recognized

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\(^{30}\) Ibid

\(^{31}\) Price, *Alabi’s World*, 9 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time

\(^{32}\) Ibid
as such by Europeans throughout the colony. David de Ishak Cohen Nassy, a notable chronicler of life within early colonial Suriname, utilized Portuguese Jewish archives to write a brief about Ayako’s attack on the Cassewinica plantation, which “he described as Suriname’s first true slave revolt. ‘There was in the year 1690 a revolt on a plantation situated on the Cassewinica Creek, behind Jews Savannah, belonging to a Jew named Immanuel Machado, where, having killed their master, they fled, carrying away with them everything that was there…The Jews…killed many of them and brought back several who were punished by death on the very spot.’”

Suriname’s Saramaka Maroons were not the only group of Bush Negroes that emerged via open rebellions against the constraints of chattel slavery and the monotonous nature of plantation life as the emergence of the Saramaka spurred groups of like-minded slaves into action. As a matter of fact, the “Nasis at Ma Pugusu had escaped very soon after the Machado rebellion, from plantations on the Cassipora Creek, the site of the first synagogue in the New World, just south of Jews Savannah [Jodensavanne].” Following the militant practices of Lanu and Ayako’s Saramaka Maroons, “Yeba, [the Nasi’s] African-born leader, brought up his forest-born sons to be fighters; for decades the Nasis, led by the brothers Kwaku Kwadjani and Kwaku Etja were in the forefront of battles with whitefolks’ armies.” While Suriname’s European population identified the colony’s Jewish population as outsiders who did not necessarily subject themselves to the colony’s social norms by virtue of their decision to congregate separately at Jodensavanne, Afro-Surinamese slaves made no such distinctions. Slaves, by virtue of their relatively low social standing, held no particular reservations about working for Jewish proprietors as Suriname’s Jews were likely grouped in with the colony’s other Europeans from their point of reference. Consider the fact that “Dombis [Dombi Maroons, a Saramaka

33 Ibid
34 Ibid, Alabi’s World, 14 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
subgroup], including Asukume’s sisters, brothers, and mother had marooned…from [an estate] that had once been the center of the sugar empire of the colony’s leading Calvinist cleric, whose title ‘Dominee’ (minister) the slaves spoke as ‘Dombi’” while under the auspices of slavery.36

In addition to the Saramakas and the Nasis, “there was by the turn of the century a third major cluster of Maroons—the Abaisa people—who traced their collective identity to a major rebellion at Providence Plantation, the southernmost estate on the Suriname River, in 1693.”37 The Abaisa rebellion is notable since it adversely impacted a third religious group that had found its way to Suriname’s plantation economy. “This singular plantation [Providence Plantation] was run by the Labadists, a utopian religious community that had fallen on hard times and seemed, according to contemporary Dutch observers, to be taking out many of its considerable frustrations directly upon its particularly ill-treated slave force.”38 Saramaka oral histories paint a stark picture of the substandard living conditions that Afro-Surinamese slaves had to endure prior to the final decision to permanently maroon from Providence Plantation. “In slavery, there was hardly anything to eat. It was the place called Providence Plantation. They whipped you until your ass was burning. Then they would give you a bit of plain rice in a calabash. That’s what we Abaisas have heard. And the gods told them that this is no way for human beings to live. They would help them.”39 Subsequent religious confirmation of the impending decision on whether or not to permanently maroon from Suriname’s plantation region spurred the Providence plantation slaves to execute their plan to escape slavery. The Saramakas claim that a collection of West African Winti gods “let each person go where he could. So they ran. They were loading the boats to go. It was frantic. There were so many, it looked like a fish-drugging party.”40

36 Ibid
37 Price, Alabi’s World, 17-8 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
38 Ibid
39 Ibid
40 Ibid
**European Reactions to the Successful Formation of Suriname’s Maroon Societies**

Successful establishment of various Maroon communities within Suriname’s Amazonian jungle caused fundamental changes in the colony’s sociopolitical profile, most notably on the part of Europeans and Afro-Surinamese persisting under the bonds of chattel slavery. “The problem of slave control and the fear of revolt had become central preoccupations of Suriname’s whitefolks. The Jewish militia that for years had hunted down stray rebels was now strengthened; in 1698 the government increased its cash bounty for a captured Maroon tenfold over the 1685 figure of five guilders.”\(^{41}\) Augmentation of Suriname’s colonial militia and increases in cash bounties did not mark the extent of Suriname’s Europeans’ initial reaction to the colony’s newly formed Maroon communities. As a matter of fact, “the various ‘exquisite tortures’ that for years had been used on recaptured runaways became routinized to include the standard removal of the Achilles tendon for a first offense, and the amputation of the right leg for a second.”\(^{42}\) Initial European attempts to re-establish control over Suriname’s interior involved a brutal campaign of terror designed for the specific purpose of wiping out extant Maroon communities. Saramaka oral histories provide captivating depictions of the dangers that they faced from white militias. “In those days, they might just be sitting down to eat a meal when... ‘Hurry! The whites are coming. Run for your lives.’ They would find a night’s campsite and be ready to sleep when divination advised that the whites would surely find them if they stayed. So they’d trek onwards. Until, finally, they got to that hill [Kumako], where they found ‘a couple of days’ of rest.”\(^{43}\) Kumako proved to be an fairly significant site within colonial Suriname, as it became the home of one of the colony’s more restive Maroon settlements as evidenced by accounts of subsequent conflicts between European Surinamers and Maroons.

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\(^{41}\) Price, *Alabi’s World*, 11 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time

\(^{42}\) Ibid

\(^{43}\) Price, *Alabi’s World*, 24-5 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
Firsthand accounts of Suriname from the era of Maroon community formation provide a substantial cache of information about Kumako and the role that it played during the region’s early colonial period. “Kaasi and his followers settled the massive village of Kumako, atop a stone mountain that rises abruptly from the forest, halfway between the Saramacca and Suriname Rivers…But Kaasi himself soon moved on… The other diverse groups already at Kumako—Dombis, Awanas, Nasis and Biitus—stayed on, wishing to be able to continue raiding the coast, as necessary and hoping they were far enough inland to prevent the whites from following.”

As far as the social organization of Kumako was concerned, its Maroons soon established a flourishing community that supported itself via daring raids on white settlements, which provided basic goods and additional individuals necessary for the prolonged existence of Suriname’s Maroon population. The Kumako Maroons eventually settled on a leadership structure that resulted in “Yeba of the Nasi clan [becoming] their chief; his sons Kwaku Kwadjani and Kwaku Etja…were among the foremost warriors.” To this day, Saramaka Maroons continue to cultivate memories of raids undertaken from their virtually impenetrable Amazonian fortress. “[During this period] women, weapons, and ammunition were our most pressing needs. And the Nasis were especially masterful bush scouts. The Nasis were famous fighters. They killed the whites near Seosa at the creek we call ‘Red Creek’ because of all their blood…Kwadjani and his brother Etja. That is where they fought it out with the whites, alongside their father Yeba. They raided the plantations” with substantial levels of success.

As previously stated, Suriname’s Maroon population fragmented into several distinct subgroups determined largely by the particular plantation that those individuals had marooned from. This division of the colony’s Maroons proved hugely problematic for Suriname’s Dutch

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44 Ibid
46 Ibid
government as they lacked a central mass of individuals against whom they could conduct decisive military action. “In 1749, the governor of Surinam decided that the only way to eliminate what he liked to call the Maroon ‘Hydra’ was: To divide them [the various groups] and, insofar as possible, deal with each in turn...[We should begin by mounting] one massive expedition and, even after conquering one or more villages and inflicting a crushing defeat, make peace, as the saying goes, with sword in hand.”

The strategy to subjugate Suriname’s Maroons via military intervention provided the colony’s Dutch government with some promising initial returns as “an expedition numbering hundreds of troops...managed to pillage and burn over four hundred large houses [belonging to the Maroons]” and ran them right off the land.

Although Suriname’s Europeans lauded the early returns of their military incursions against their Maroon adversaries, such results proved misleading as the colonial militia continually failed to strike a fatal blow against the Bush Negroes. As such, Saramaka oral histories contain accounts of the final battle between Kumako’s Maroons and the colonial militia.

In anticipation of an attack by the colonial militia, the Maroons buttressed Kumako’s defenses. “They were living on the mountaintop. And they dug a trench running from the very bottom up to the top. It was the only way to get in or out of the village. They cut big logs, just the width of the trench, and many men together rolled them to the top.”

Kumako’s defenses constituted a massive collection of deadly booby traps especially suited for Kumako’s severe, unforgiving terrain. Saramakas proudly recall, “When the whites came up the path, they did not know that things would come pouring down the trench to kill them. They came up and up until they were close. They could see the blacks. Then they [the Saramakas] released the logs. Well, there was

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47 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 29 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
48 Ibid
49 Ibid
no way to run fast enough to avoid them! They were mashed to a pulp. No way to escape alive. Bakakuun! That’s when they rained down those stones upon the whites” attacking Kumako.50

The devastating nature of the colonial militia’s rash decision to attack Kumako is underscored by the Maroons’ sizable margin of victory over their European adversaries, which was achieved through unconventional military devices that the whites were clearly unprepared to encounter. “The village was not on the very top of the mountain but on a plateau. There was only one entrance, along a depression, but they had not dug it out. Water, rushing down the mountain had made it, not men. At the top, they poised boulders, all kinds of stones. When the whites approached, they released the stones and finished off all the soldiers. Bakakuun!”51

Saramaka closing remarks on the Maroon victory at Kumako underscore the difficulties that Suriname’s colonial militia faced when dealing with Maroons, as they perceived martial conflict through existing European martial paradigms that were heavily dependent on the traditional use of firearms. “The whites’ guns were useless there. They [the Kumako Maroons] killed those whites like nothing. The big ditch, in order to get up the hill, you had to walk in it. They rolled the tree stumps down there, zalalatje, all the way down to the bottom. So many were killed!”52

Alternate Methods for Dealing with Maroons: Slave Infiltration

The Saramaka victory at Kumako coupled with the colonial government’s inability to achieve substantial gains against other Maroon settlements in Suriname’s interior mandated an alteration of tactics in the quest to rid the colony of its pernicious Maroon presence. As such, the colonial government turned to its slave population, of which a small proportion demonstrated a substantial degree of loyalty to their European overlords. The African-born creole slave known

50 Ibid
51 Ibid
52 Ibid
as Graman Quacy, who became a seminal figure within 18\textsuperscript{th} century Suriname, was of particular importance in the Dutch government’s efforts to defeat Maroons via subterfuge. Graman Quacy was the central figure in the 1755 confrontation between Europeans and Saramakas at Sentea; however, his actions need to be examined in depth as they reveal clues to Suriname’s complex social dynamics, particularly the overt animosity between the colony’s Maroons and Creoles.

Graman Quacy bears mentioning because he plays a large role within European plans to destroy Saramaka Maroon communities via infiltration of their ranks. Quacy “arrived in Saramaka pretending to be a new recruit from the plantations, using his powerful ritual knowledge to befriend Ayako and \textit{almost} became privy to the ultimate secrets of Saramaka invulnerability, with Wamba [a Winti forest god]—speaking through Yaya—warning Ayako that Kwasi was a spy; how Ayako set a trap and allowed Kwasi to return to the whites.”\textsuperscript{53} Having successfully gained information about the Saramaka Maroon community via Graman Quacy’s duplicity, Suriname’s Dutch overlords quickly put Quacy to work in an attempt to subjugate the troublesome Saramaka for good. “Kwasi returned the next year at the head of a colonial army of hundreds of men”, however, “during the final battles around Agamadja Creek, the Saramakas were able to claim their sweet revenge.”\textsuperscript{54} Saramaka Maroons call the time of their community’s foundation \textit{fesí-ten} (first-time) and crafted a specific ideology that was perfectly suited to the harsh realities of this particular historical epoch.\textsuperscript{55} The central tenet of fesi-ten ideology is as follows; “This is the greatest fear of all Maroons: that those times [the days of slavery and the struggle for freedom] shall come again. Hence the \textit{fesi-ten} is the fountainhead of the Saramaka

\textsuperscript{53} Price, \textit{Alabi’s World}, 32-3 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid

\textsuperscript{55} Price, \textit{Alabi’s World}, XII illustrates the gradual development of Maroon \textit{fesi-ten} ideology as well as associated beliefs and cultural practices
collective identity. It contains the true root of what it means to be Saramaka. “If we forget the deeds of our ancestors, how can we hope to avoid being returned to the whitefolks’ slavery?”

Graman Quacy’s attempt to subjugate the Saramaka to Suriname’s European overlords constituted a direct manifestation of fesı-ten ideology and provided the seeds for animosity between Bush Negroes and creoles who were openly loyal to the colonial government. While referring to the Graman Quacy incident, “Peleki, a Matjau descendant of Ayako, remarked: And that’s why, Friend, Maroons do not trust Creoles…Because of what happened to our ancestors. If you take one of them as a mati [formal friend], that’s what they’ll do to you. You must not trust them with a single thing about the forest. City people! They fought against us with the whites.” The root of overt Maroon distaste for Creole Surinamers stems from the fact that Graman Quacy happened to be a Creole and that he consciously “joined up with the whites to bring them [to Saramaka]…But if you teach an outsider something, well, little by little he’ll use it to kill you…Well, they didn’t trust [Kwasi] fully. They didn’t teach him all of their knowledge. And that’s why he didn’t triumph in the end. That’s why we say, if you teach a Creole or a white person, that’s what they’ll do with you. This is the one thing Maroons really believe.”

**Suriname’s Infamous Neeger Vrijcorps—The Elite Black Rangers**

The Graman Quacy incident demonstrated the willingness of Suriname’s Dutch colonial government to use Afro-Surinamese loyal to their cause as a means through which they could vanquish the troublesome Maroon Hydra. Maroon raids soon constituted a dire emergency within Suriname as “the most beautiful estates/ in this settlement called plantations/ were again seen blazing in flames and others laid in ashes while the reeking and mangled bodies of their

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56 Ibid
57 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 32-3 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
58 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 33 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
inhabitants were scattered alongside the banks of the River Cottica, and their effects pillaged by their own Negroes, who all fled to the woods...These new revolvers were distinguished by the name of the Cottica Rebels." The Cottica Rebels initially constituted just another cadre of maroons in the eyes of European Surinamers, however, “they soon became as formidable to the settlement as the Seramaca and Ouca negroes before them and were just going to give the finishing blow to the colony of Surinam in 1772—now all was horror and consternation—and nothing but a general massacre was expected by the great majority of inhabitants who fled from their estates and crowded to the town of Paramaribo for protection” from potential raids by newly empowered bands of crack Maroon warriors capable of wreaking havoc on plantations.

Military forces staffed primarily by European fighting men, whether drawn from the colony’s existing population for service in militias or imported from elite regiments on the Continent, had incredible difficulties achieving any form of success against various Maroon communities. One of the primary issues that European military forces ran into while out in Suriname’s dense rainforest was their susceptibility to the hot and humid climate as well as lethal tropical diseases that lacked distribution in the temperate latitudes of the Old World. The colonial government’s response to the difficulties of European militias was to establish an elite fighting force composed entirely of manumitted slaves who were bound to serve the Society of Suriname as a condition of their release. This force of Afro-Surinamese fighting men was known as the Neeger Vrijcorps in Dutch, or rather, the Black Rangers in English. Stedman, by virtue of his exposure to the Black Rangers during long military sojourns in the jungle, provides a wealth of information on the force as well as their interactions with their European comrades-in-arms and the Maroons that Surinamers of Dutch origin desperately wanted to subjugate.

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59 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam, 80-1 provides the relevant section of information
60 Ibid
61 Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam, 81 contains details about Black Rangers’ formation
The Black Rangers were initially formed by means of 116 slave volunteers, whom the Society of Suriname purchased specially from their planter-masters for the specific purpose of fighting Maroons; Surinamers made promises such as total manumission in order to secure the Black Rangers’ services in conflicts such as the Boni Maroon Wars.⁶² Suriname’s Black Rangers were supplemented by a corps of free colored and black individuals known as the Corps Vrije Mulatten en Neegers [Dutch], and these military organizations combined to provide the numerical core of anti-Maroon military expeditions in Suriname.⁶³ As far as the quality of the Corps Vrije Mulatten en Neegers and the Black Rangers is concerned, they enjoyed enormous successes in their expeditionary actions against the Maroons and Stedman steadfastly insisted that “one of these free negroes…[was] preferable to half a dozen white men in the woods of Guiana.”⁶⁴ The corps of Afro-Surinamer Rangers eventually evolved into a well-organized cadre of around 300 men who “were all volunteers, mostly stout strapping able young fellows, picked from the different plantations—who received for them their full value in money—none were accepted but such as were reputed to be of a very good character.”⁶⁵ The Rangers eventually developed a well-defined European style military hierarchy, as “their chief leaders are 3 or 4 white men called Conducters, to whom they pay the strictest obedience—and one or two of whom generally attend them when they set out on any enterprise of march of consequence, every ten privates have one captain who commands them in the forest by the different sounds of his horn…they are armed only with firelock and sabre” with which they proved unusually capable.⁶⁶

Any doubts European Surinamers had about the true loyalties of the Black Rangers were soon put to rest as “that the rangers and rebels must be the most inveterate enemies can be very

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⁶² Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam, XXIII provides details about this elite military unit
⁶³ Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam, 85 provides details about the Corps Vrije Mulatten
⁶⁴ Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam, 396 provides the relevant section of information
⁶⁵ Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam, 82 provides the relevant section of information
⁶⁶ Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam, 82-3 provides the relevant section of information
well accounted for—since notwithstanding the first are useful and true to the Europeans, they are certainly looked upon by the second as traitors—and the betrayers of their countrymen—being both the one and other party originally Africans from the coast of Guinea or creoles born in the colony of Surinam.” As the Rangers considered Maroons to be their mortal enemies and had a vested interest in proving their loyalty to the Society of Suriname as a means of preserving their newly-acquired manumission, arrangements for a financial reward system soon developed as the colonial government needed a method through which they could gauge the Rangers’ success in the field. As a result of this extrinsic motivation, it was “a maxim with the Rangers to chop off the right hand of every rebel negro they kill, for which they receive 25 florins, & for every one they send in alive 50 florins /also for finding a town or village 1,000 florins/ being a premium of about £5 sterling” that would be issued in cash upon completion of governmental verification.

Rewards for capturing Maroons and conflicts within Suriname’s dense jungle only intensified the hatred that Maroons and Rangers felt toward each other. Stedman recalls an incident “during which time a most abusive dialogue ensued, between the rebels, and the rangers, both parties cursing and menacing each other at a terrible rate, the first reproaching the others as being poltroons, and betrayers of their countrymen, whom they challenged the next day to single combat, swearing they only wanted to wash their hands in the blood of such scoundrels.” In this instance, the Rangers did not take the Maroons’ invective lightly and promptly made their feelings toward Suriname’s rebel Bush Negroes quite clear. The Rangers “ damned the rebels for a parcel of pitiful skulking rascals whom they would fight one to two in the open field if they dared to show their ugly faces, that they had deserted their masters, being too lazy to do their

67 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 86 provides the relevant section of information
68 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 387 provides the relevant section of information
69 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 408 provides the relevant section of information
work, while [the Rangers] would stand by the Europeans till they died; after which they insulted each other” by loudly voicing their opinions regarding the opposing group’s shortcomings.⁷⁰

The sheer deviation between the Maroon outlook on events in colonial Suriname, intertwined with fesi-ten ideology that held European Surinamers in great contempt due to fear of a return to chattel slavery, clashed with Afro-Surinamese Rangers, who saw the colonial government as a vehicle through which liberty could be achieved, induced an intractable division between these distinct social groups. Maroon distaste for free Afro-Surinamers, coupled with their contempt toward Suriname’s general slave population as a result of the Graman Quacy incident, solidified their formation into a distinct social group with accompanying cultural norms and a worldview that abhorred interactions with any vestige of European and/or colonial authority, including Afro-Surinamers that did not align themselves with Maroon ideology. Even though Suriname’s colonial government made a number of attempts to undermine Maroon communities in the colony’s interior, their efforts proved futile and Bush Negro culture soon began to flourish within remote inland areas. This flourishing Maroon culture came to play a key role in Suriname’s geopolitical matrix as they achieved near-total hegemony over the colony’s rather impenetrable interior while Europeans maintained control of coastal areas, including the plantation regions and the capital at Paramaribo. As Maroon hegemony over inland areas solidified and Suriname’s geopolitical matrix evolved into a bimodal structure with two competing power centers, the colonial government found that the likelihood of successfully subjugating Maroons was fading rather quickly and thus was forced to consider a peace accord.

⁷⁰ Ibid
The Peace at Sentea: Solidification of Early Colonial Suriname’s Bimodal Structure

As European Surinamers came to grips with the idea of conceding the existence of viable Maroons within their colony’s interior, the Maroons themselves encountered the need to address shifting paradigms within their own communities. “The oldest generation, men like Ayako whose whole adult lives had been devoted to war, remained wedded to First-Time ideology and turned their backs on compromise. Yet the generation coming to power, men like Abini who were then in their fifties, foresaw a brighter future through negotiation and eventually peace.”

As the next generation of Saramaka leaders solidified their power bases within Suriname’s evolving geopolitical matrix, the possibility of a formal peace accord with the Dutch government at Paramaribo grew increasingly likely. “As Saramakas remember this moment, Yaya said ‘that thing’ [her famous pronouncement]. It was she who had the god [Wamba, in her head]. She said that they should not be hostile to the whites any more. She said; ‘the person to whom this is unacceptable [Ayako] is the oldest of us all. When he is no longer here, well, peace will come’” because Ayako would not be able to resist efforts to bring the Saramaka their precious peace.

Yaya’s pronouncement was based on the notion that Ayako’s death would mark the end of the Saramaka old guard’s strident invective against Surinamers near the coast and thus facilitate expansion of the next generation’s inclination toward coexistence with the colony’s European governors. As it turns out, “Ayako’s death, sometime between 1756 and 1758, set the stage for the final rush toward peace. Ayako’s funeral, still remembered as one of the most lavish ever staged in Saramaka, provided the stage for the incident that Saramakas today think of as the proximate cause of peace.” Saramakas maintain clear memories of the events leading to their peace summit with the Dutch via oral histories, which state “it wasn’t long before the old

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71 Price, Alabi’s World, 33 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
72 Ibid
73 Price, Alabi’s World, 34 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
man [Ayako] died. Then they accepted the Peace. It was during [Ayako’s] funeral that Wii went into the forest. He went all the way to Djuka. And he saw the whites. He said ‘what are you doing here?’ They said ‘we came to you [Saramakas], but you killed us, so we went back and never came again.’ Then they gave him the Peace” that Maroons had coveted for generations.74

Although Saramaka leadership and the colonial government had made tentative peace overtures to their respective adversaries, the two parties still needed to hammer out a formal peace accord. As an aside, Suriname’s colonial government learned of the Saramakas’ initial intentions to strike a peace accord with European Surinamers almost by accident. “Wii had actually been suspected of killing Ayako by witchcraft and took refuge with the Djuka Maroons far to the east. Documentary sources confirm that Wii, who had taken refuge with the Djukas in the late 1750s, told colonial government officials who had been engaged in making peace with the Djukas that the Saramakas too wished to end hostilities.”75 Initial discourse regarding a formal peace accord between Saramakas and Paramaribo proved fruitful and plans for a formal ceremony signaling the end of hostilities quickly came together. Saramakas had dual goals going into the final peace conference with Paramaribo; their leadership needed to extract as many concessions as possible in order to make existence in Amazonia bearable while maintaining their ability to grow via immigration of runaways from the coastal plantation region.

“In early 1762, a delegation of Saramakas, led by Abini, traveled to the already ‘pacified’ Djukas, at Djuka Creek, to meet with colonial officials and discuss arrangements (including the enormous quantity of goods to be given to the Saramakas as tribute) for concluding a definitive peace…After difficult negotiations, centering largely on the quantity of gunpowder and shot to be given to the Saramakas,” the peace accord between Saramakas Maroons and the colonial

74 Ibid
75 Price, Alabi’s World, 34-5 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
government at Paramaribo was finalized on 19 September 1762. The Saramakas succeeded in securing significant concessions from Paramaribo while giving relatively little ground in return, thus securing their status as a legitimate political force within colonial Suriname. Furthermore, Maroon negotiators managed to conserve hegemony over the colony’s interior, solidifying the bimodal distribution of power within colonial Suriname with one sphere of influence centered on the European settlement of Paramaribo as well as the plantation districts and the other resting with strong Maroon settlements in the thick Amazonian jungle of colony’s impenetrable interior.

“From the Saramaka perspective, the highlights of the treaty were that the whites had granted them unconditional freedom with ‘forgiveness for all that had passed,’ access to Paramaribo and the coastal region for purposes of trade and commerce, and the periodic distribution of large quantities of tools, gunpowder, and other necessities, which they considered as tribute.” As far as specific concessions on the part of the Saramakas were concerned, “they had formally agreed to turn back all future runaways from whitefolks’ slavery (in return for a bounty) with the whites retaining the right to inflict capital punishment on such returnees, and they agreed to cooperate with the whites in pursuing any Saramaka, including a chief, who harbored new runaways.” Although the conditions of the Saramaka accord with Paramaribo were seemingly set in stone, the Maroons did not hesitate to exercise their newly acquired power and frequently sought to secure advantageous circumstances for themselves at the expense of the colonial government in Paramaribo. As such, the Maroons developed a specific political strategy intended to “maintain their collective momentum in dealing with the whitefolks. To Abini and his men, two concerns quickly emerged from their initial post-slavery encounters with colonial authority: (1) keeping a maximum stream of ‘tribute’ flowing in their direction in addition to (2)
assimilating as many newly arrived brothers and sisters from the plantations as possible” while evading the imposition of significant repercussions from the Dutch government in Paramaribo.79

European Surinamers universally panned the colonial government’s peace accord with the Saramakas as they felt it endangered their superior social status within the colony. “One planter wrote, with considerable discomfort, of the weakness of the government of Suriname when they offered [the Saramakas] freedom… and submitted to conditions so humiliating for us and so glorious for them… It is they who demand and receive our homage in the form of annual presents… a kind of annual tribute under the name of presents, which, at base, is nothing less than the public recognition of their superiority.”80 Tribute from Paramaribo was not the only method through which Saramakas asserted influence over the affairs of colonial Suriname. According to prevalent Maroon beliefs, “turning back any slaves made a person ideologically suspect… Moreover, there was strong perceived danger to anyone who turned in even an unknown other; upon the slave’s death, he would almost certainly become an avenging spirit, wreaking his vengeance eternally upon the lineage of the person who committed the act,” and Maroons as a whole were cognizant of the likelihood that captured runaways would be executed at Paramaribo as a means of discouraging further slave desertions to the colony’s inner reaches.81

Thus, Saramaka ideology mandated the absorption of as many runaways as possible due to ethical and moral prohibitions against returning marooned slaves and because new immigrants provided a natural method of population expansion. To this end, Moravian missionaries present in Saramaka territories throughout the 18th century remarked that the Maroons “only return those who are useless to them, and they keep the best ones for themselves… it is a very strange type of

79 Price, Alahi’s World, 43 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
80 Price, Alahi’s World, 45 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
81 Price, Alahi’s World, 52-3 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
peace, and the less said about it the better.”

Furthermore, “a nineteenth century historian, basing his analysis on diverse documents, wrote more generally, ‘the Bushnegroes were willing to turn in [only] the wrongdoers, murderers, and sorcerers.’” As a whole, Saramakas and other Maroon groups experienced high levels of success in their mission to absorb new runaway slaves while evading reprisals from Paramaribo, which expected that all escaped slaves would be returned to the coastal region for punishment and re-integration into plantation society. As a whole, “Saramaka chiefs…devoted a great deal of time and energy during the second half of the eighteenth century to delaying, dissimulating, and beclouding the issue [of runaway returns] and, in general, managed to turn back only occasional newcomers” that had obvious character flaws and/or did not happen to fit any of the Maroon community’s needs at that precise point in time.

Paramaribo maintained consistent pressure on Saramaka Maroons to return new runaways in the initial decades following the peace accord of 1762, however, the colonial government’s resolve weakened considerably following repetitive failures to extract any sort of concessions from the Maroons living on the fringes of Suriname’s high society. “After 1775, pressures from the government and its postholders [on the issue of runaway returns] waned markedly: Saramakas clearly maintained the upper hand.” Ample historical evidence for Maroon superiority on the issue of runaway slave returns is available as Saramaka oral history reveals “that during the early 1770s, most of the [150] slaves liberated by Musinga in his famous 1766 raid became the Faandakis, an important Saramaka clan.” However, Paramaribo’s failures to recapture significant numbers of new runaways from established Maroon communities in Suriname’s interior does not reveal the extent of the Dutch colonial government’s remaining

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82 Price, Alabi’s World, 113-5 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at this juncture
83 Ibid
84 Price, Alabi’s World, 53 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
85 Price, Alabi’s World, 147 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
86 Ibid
control over their former adversaries. Of particular importance was the restriction Maroon access to Paramaribo and other major European settlements via limitation of access to lodging and the ‘pass’ system unique to colonial Suriname. “Saramaka men found the attraction of a stay in Paramaribo exciting enough to outweigh the risks it entailed. They slung their hammocks, in large groups, either in government sheds near the fort or with freedmen friends and relatives (carpenters, blacksmiths or shoemakers) on the outskirts of town.”87 Even though Maroons enjoyed access to Paramaribo, they had to prove their freedom or risk being thrown into chattel slavery. As such, “with slavery in full swing, [Saramakas] could parade their hard-earned freedom, always carrying their staffs of office or cardboard passes from the postholder to prove their freedom, and enjoy some of the pleasures of town,” thanks to their hard-earned freedom.88

**The Fundamental Shift of 1862: Abolition of the Slave Trade in Dutch Colonies**

After pacification of various Maroon groups, including the Saramaka, and eviction of groups such as the Boni, who would not accept peace and eventually settled in the French colony of Cayenne, Suriname continued to function under a bimodal power structure roughly split between an European sphere of influence within Paramaribo and the colony’s plantation regions and an Afro-Surinamese maroon sphere of influence located deep in the colony’s Amazonian rainforest.89 Although Suriname and other Caribbean polities continued to produce vast amounts of material wealth through chattel slavery-dependent plantation agriculture, the slave trade as a whole was slowly falling out of favor around the world. The Netherlands were not immune to rising anti-slavery sentiments across the globe and moved to fully abolish slavery in all of its

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87 Price, *Alabi’s World*, 101 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
88 Ibid
89 Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 575 details the Boni Maroon migration to Cayenne
dependencies starting on 9 July 1862. The removal of slavery from all Dutch landholdings had major short-and-long term implications for Suriname as it put an end to the long-nurtured balance of power between Paramaribo and various Maroon polities occupying the colony’s vast inland landholdings and fundamentally changed the nature of the colony’s agricultural system.

Abolition of slavery forced Paramaribo to adopt a mindset that it had resorted to in 1762 upon political affirmation of Maroon autonomy from colonial rule. In a sense, European Surinamers had to psychologically release control of Africans, as Maroons were no longer bound by the accords that they had signed alongside colonial officials now that slaves were manumitted and could no longer be punished for marooning from their plantations. The loss of the only significant concession that Paramaribo had secured from Maroons during negotiations resulting in the Peace of Sentea with the Saramaka and other negotiations involving unrelated Maroon polities temporarily swung the balance of power toward the interior. Suriname’s interior enjoyed an unprecedented degree of power and influence as the colonial government essentially became subservient to Maroons by virtue of costly tribute distributions, which no longer had to be reciprocated by returns of runaway slaves. Meanwhile, plantations experienced significant downward pressure on revenue from mass-produced agricultural commodities due to increasing labor costs that materialized in the form of wages paid to former slaves who continued to render services to their former proprietors. Downward pressure on plantation revenues worked in concert with tribute payments to various Maroon polities to create a period of fiscal tightening within Suriname’s formerly decadent society. As such, Suriname and other Caribbean colonies desperately needed to restore their access to a labor force that was bound to the plantation as well as cost-controllable for a significant time period if they hoped to resurrect the levels of raw income and overall economic prosperity enjoyed during the days of unabated chattel slavery.

90 Fasseur “Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen,” 197-98 contains information about the Dutch decision to abolish slavery starting in 1862.
Introduction of Indentured Servants from British India and Java

Neighboring colonies such as British Guiana commiserated with Suriname’s economic plight, as they also needed to identify a practical way of restoring unfettered access to a cost-controllable labor force made up of individuals bound to a particular estate. Such access to a cheap source of labor was vital since a failure to restore low operating costs enjoyed in the days of chattel slavery portended the demise of the Guyana Shield’s profitable agricultural economy. Fortunately for the Guyana Shield’s landowners, John Gladstone, a British Guyanese planter, proposed an initiative capable of bringing large numbers of unskilled workers to northern South America when he made inquiries concerning possible importation of Hindostanis to Guyana in 1836. Gladstone’s efforts bore fruit as London passed the Emigration Law of 1837, which stated that importation of laborers from the Indian Subcontinent to various South American polities provided that contracts provided to Asian immigrants lengths did not exceed five years and contained an explicit renewal clause capable of extending the agreement for an additional 5-year term. Gladstone’s initiative presented plantation proprietors with a viable method through which they could resurrect a large proportion of the revenue generated during the days of slavery. One reason why importation of Asian indentured servants provided a useful conduit through which plantations could increase profitability was the existence of long-term indenture contracts, which bound laborers to their places of employment. Restriction of employment mobility on the part of plantation workers increased predictability of the agricultural labor force within South America and the Caribbean, as proprietors were no longer subject to the whims of a transient labor force as they had been in the period immediately following formal emancipation.

Furthermore, indenture contracts protected plantations from unforeseen increases in

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91 Tinker, New System; Weller, East Indian Indenture; Adamson, Sugar without Slaves; Laurence, Question of Labour; and Look Lai, Indentured Labor have information about Indian migration to British Guiana. De Klerk, Immigratie der Hindostanen details Indian migration to Suriname.
laborer wage demands as imported Asians’ wages were locked into a fixed schedule determined by the provisions of the contracts they signed prior to emigration to South America. Given the high attractiveness of importing British Indian indentured servants, Gladstone and others took action. As it turns out, importation of contract laborers from British India to various agricultural polities across the globe was not a new practice, and a particular Calcutta firm known as F.M. Gillanders and G. Arbuthnot, which possessed interests in various plantations on Mauritius, was the primary immigration agent for that particular part of the world. As F.M. Gillanders and G. Arbuthnot had prior experience with the movement of Hindostanis to foreign colonies, Gladstone made a point of approaching this particular firm with his plan to kick-start migration from South Asia to South America. As this business venture possessed a great deal of financial potential, F.M. Gillanders and G. Arbuthnot were eager to proceed, going so far as to state “we are not aware that any great difficulty would present itself in sending men to the West Indies.”92 As per Gladstone’s request, importation of Indian laborers from Calcutta to plantations in Guyana and other British Crown colonies began soon thereafter and experienced a high degree of success.93

British Guiana’s decision to import British Indian indentured laborers starting in 1837 undoubtedly caught Surinamers’ eye, and analysis of whether or not a similar venture would be successful within the colony took place in Holland. As Suriname’s domestic interests aligned with those of the Netherlands, Theodorus Roest van Limburg, the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, pursued completion of a treaty that would allow the Dutch to transport Hindostani contract laborers from India to Suriname. Van Limburg’s efforts were successful as he managed to persuade Edward Harris, who served as London’s minister plenipotentiary to the King of the Netherlands, to sign an accord permitting Holland to commence operation of enterprises related

93 Ibid
to importation of British Indians from Asia to Suriname.\textsuperscript{94} Indentured servitude was not the only subject of contention between the British and Dutch governments during the negotiation process as the indentured servitude importation accord also evolved into an imperial accord which granted the British Crown full control over various Dutch colonies within West Africa’s Gold Coast, particularly the polity of Ghana. On the other hand, London agreed to abandon all of its territorial claims to the Dutch East Indian island of Indonesian, thus enacting full Dutch sovereignty in that part of the world. As might be expected, negotiations leading up to the completion of this particular Anglo-Dutch pact lasted for several years and the Dutch Parliament did not receive the chance to formally approve importation of contract laborers from British India to Suriname until 1872, when it quickly passed through the Hague’s governmental apparatus.\textsuperscript{95} Following ratification of the agreement allowing importation of British Indian indentured laborers to Dutch colonies in South America as well as the Caribbean, recruitment and exportation of laborers in India commenced, and the first shipments of contract laborers from British India to Dutch colonial holdings disembarked at Paramaribo’s docks during 1873.\textsuperscript{96}

As it turns out, British Indians represented arguably the most important group of immigrants within Suriname’s colonial history as “historical sources show that the migrants who left for Surinam mostly came from the Bhojpuri area of British India, now covering the western part of Bihar and eastern Pradesh.”\textsuperscript{97} The Bhojpuri area of British India, also known as the United Provinces [U.P.], was a particularly fertile recruiting ground for migrants as its population was subject to several internal driving factors that promoted mass emigration from the region. Consider that Bhojpuri’s population was composed of a Hindi majority. However, it

\textsuperscript{94} Staatsblad no. 16, 17 Mar. and Bijlage II der SG 1870-1871, 307-11. The agreement was ratified on 17 Feb. 1872. Announced KB 27, 22 Mar. 1872, and in Suriname, GB no. 8, 3 May 1872. See also Adhin, “Immigratie van Hindostanen.” Cited: Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 31, 218
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid
\textsuperscript{96} KV 1874, 13 details arrival of Suriname’s first shipment of Asian immigrants on 30 June 1873. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 41, 220
\textsuperscript{97} Khan, \textit{Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, XVI contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
“was part of a region that Muslim rulers had designated as Hindustan. The immigration registers preserved in Paramaribo show that almost 80% of the migrants that arrived by ship from British India came from the U.P…. The U.P. was one of the most populated regions of British India and most people were involved in agriculture. The pressure on the soil was high and the region was known for its internal migration.”

A high degree of emphasis on agricultural cultivation, along with an inability to achieve economic productivity due to external pressures on agriculturally viable land and constant migratory pressures made Bhojpuri ripe for recruitment of indentured servants as its populace already had exposure to large-scale agricultural enterprises and did not possess a high degree of attachment to the region due to population flux. Contract laborers continued to emigrate from the Indian Subcontinent to various colonial polities around the world until the British Raj unilaterally decided to put a moratorium on the recruitment and exportation of Hindostani indentured servants in 1917. However, The Hague had successfully secured a plentiful supply of contract laborers from its main Asian colony of Java by the time the British Raj finally implemented a comprehensive ban on the recruitment of Hindostani contractants.

Although British India was a rather attractive source of new labor for Suriname’s plantations, they presented several problems for the colonial government, namely that they emigrated at the behest of a foreign government that did not necessarily give credence to Dutch interests. As such, issues with migration of indentured servants included the fact that all of Suriname’s Hindostani immigrants maintained their British nationality upon arrival in South America. Naturally, the influx of a large amount of foreign nationals into Suriname presented some issues for the colony’s Dutch leadership. One of the main issues that a large expatriate population presented was the fact that if immigration from India continued unabated, Suriname’s

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99 Ibid
99 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 25 details the British Raj’s decision to ban recruitment of Indian contract laborers and Dutch recruitment in Java
population would soon have a large contingent of British nationals. The presence of a sizable British population within Suriname presented serious problems, as it would undermine Dutch sovereignty over the colony due to the fact that Paramaribo would have to deal with potential political interventions from London and Georgetown (the colonial capital of British Guiana).

Furthermore, the Dutch realized that British Indians would likely retain loyalty to London rather than integrate into Dutch society. Another aspect of large-scale migration from British India that concerned Suriname’s Dutch governors was the fact that Hindostani contract laborers could defy the orders of the colony’s Dutch overlords by requesting direct assistance from Paramaribo’s resident British Consul. Since the British Consul’s primary task was to represent London’s interests while abroad, Surinamese authorities could never be sure that the Consul’s interests aligned with their vision for the colony. Furthermore, the presence of foreign embassies such as the British Consulate in Paramaribo signified a source of potential external interference in Dutch affairs, which was certainly unwelcome given the excessively competitive state of international politics during the historical period containing worldwide European colonization.

Given the inherent problems associated with indentured servant migration from British India, Dutch authorities within Suriname sought to exploit their connections to the densely populated Dutch colonies within Indonesia as well as other East Indian landholdings. Indentured servants imported from Dutch landholdings in Indonesia and elsewhere in the East Indies remained Dutch subjects upon their arrival in Suriname unlike British Indians and thus did not represent potential infringement on Dutch sovereignty in Suriname. Furthermore, another very attractive advantage of recruiting contract labors from Java for work in Suriname was that the Dutch would finally be able to assert the coveted right to pre-selection of the best candidates for

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100 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 43 holds information about Dutch concerns that Suriname would be overrun by a wave of loyal British nationals. 101 Indisch Genootschap, “Immigratie en kolonisatie” holds information that addresses Dutch concerns over London’s new Surinamese Consulate.
migration. The right to pre-selection is especially relevant since recruitment in British India was fraught with competition since the British, French and Danish all wished to import Hindostani contract laborers to their overseas colonies.\textsuperscript{102} As the Javanese represented an alternative source of labor that would circumvent the inherent problems that accompanied the importation of a large number of individuals from British India, Dutch authorities in Paramaribo and elsewhere began exploring ways to kick-start a migration program from the Netherlands East Indies. As a matter of fact, a significant number of concrete plans involving the importation of large numbers of laborers from Indonesia to Dutch Guiana were conceived during the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{103}

For instance, Surinamese companies engaged in large agricultural enterprises, such as the NHM, wanted to explore the possibility of recruiting contract laborers from a series of Dutch Indonesian possessions such as the islands of Madura and Java as early as 1873.\textsuperscript{104} Initial plans to import Javanese indentured laborers for work on Suriname’s plantations were scuttled due to competing interests within the Netherlands’ colonial empire, as the Dutch were loath to enrich a struggling colony at the expense of some of their more profitable landholdings in the East Indies. Essentially, the Dutch central government had no intention of depleting the population base of its commercially successful colonies within the Indonesian Archipelago for the express purpose of transporting individuals to South America to work on Dutch Caribbean colonies, which were seen as economically inferior to landholdings elsewhere. Furthermore, the Dutch could alleviate Suriname’s labor shortage via importation of Hindostani laborers and this option was preferable to importation of Indonesians, as the Netherlands’ Asian holdings would remain untouched.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{102} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 45 makes concrete refers to the fact that the Dutch had to compete with other colonial powers for Indian laborers
\textsuperscript{103} Kalff, “Javanese Emigrants,” 547. Already in 1818 General Johannes van den Bosch wanted to deport criminal Javanese to Suriname to work on plantation while serving their sentences. Other plans included the transportation of some Javanese villages in order to cultivate rice and the deportation of rioters in order to secure a more peaceful environment conducive to attainment of financial success from activities in Indonesia
\textsuperscript{104} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 44 possesses information concerning potential plans to import unskilled workers from Indonesia to Dutch Guiana
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid
Initial opposition to exportation of Javanese from Indonesia to Suriname was not limited to the Netherlands’ European policy-making bodies. Various Dutch government officials stationed in the Netherlands East Indies insisted that no compelling reasons for initiating enlistment and transportation of Javanese contract laborers from Indonesia to Suriname existed. However, different opinions existed within the Dutch colonial empire, and the Surinamese governor insisted that The Hague sanction migration of agricultural workers from Java and other parts of the Netherlands East Indies. Suriname’s governor’s rationale for promoting Indonesian migration was that such an endeavor would be successful due to the fact that Javanese immigrants would not be able to differentiate Suriname from Java upon their arrival in the Dutch Caribbean and/or South America. Although Paramaribo’s arguments in favor of Javanese migration to South America faced considerably unfavorable odds, Dutch Surinamers wielded considerable influence within the Netherlands’ colonial empire and continued to promote their interests. Even though Surinamers’ insistence that new Javanese immigrants would fail to differentiate between their Southeast Asian homeland and Suriname upon rested on a collection of logical fallacies, the new Dutch colonial minister, Keuchenius, was evidently sympathetic to Paramaribo’s entreaties. To this end, upon examination of key Surinamese rationales for importation of Javanese indentured servants, Keuchenius rubber-stamped Paramaribo’s proposal and went so far as to propose retraction of legislation forbidding contract laborer recruitment within Java. Keuchenius’ approval of indentured servant recruitment within Java was a boon for Dutch Caribbean colonies and Suriname wasted little to no time in taking advantage of its newfound ability to import Javanese laborers and this stream of migration began in 1890.

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106 SG 1889-1890, Bijl. 81 voor de Begroting refers to Suriname’s governor’s opinion regarding migration from Indonesia/Java and the fervent opposition of Netherlands East Indian government officials to this Asian immigration scheme. Cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 46, 220
107 Ibid
108 ARA, NHM, Q 1121-9184, 1890, cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 48 and 221 offers details about the 1890 genesis of Javanese migration
Chapter 2
Migration Reasons and Rationales: British Indian and Javanese Indentured Servants

Resurrection of Suriname’s once-formidable plantation economy was one of the major driving factors behind the Netherlands’ decision to commence large-scale importation of indentured laborers from British India and Java to Suriname. Although European interests were crucial as far as the genesis of Suriname’s system of indentured labor were concerned, the motivations behind Asians’ decisions to pursue employment in South America were perhaps even more important. The fact of the matter is that migration of British Indians and Javanese laborers to Suriname would not have been likely in the absence of incentives capable of inducing large-scale emigration from Asia. Analysis of rationales behind the decision of British Indians to leave India for South America reveals that “often it was a combination of poverty, personal and localized difficulties, coupled with a spirit of enterprise that brought people to one of the depots…. Most migrants had stated they were Hindu, often from the socially depressed classes,” which mostly included members of Hinduism’s long-suffering Sardar and Untouchable castes.109

The prevalence of socially depressed Hindus within the groups of British Indian migrants headed to Suriname was no accident, as “the emigration agents in India did not favor the recruitment of high caste Hindus for work on the overseas plantations. They generally preferred contract laborers from lower castes,” as lower-caste people were far more vulnerable to push factors such as low supplies of arable land and high rates of poverty and far more likely to agree to travel to South America in search of financial prosperity.110 This preference for lower-caste migrants on the part of recruitment agents due to sensitivity to push factors is evidenced by the fact that “Brahmins made up only 5 per cent [of indentured migrants] though according to the

109 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XVII-XVIII contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at this juncture
110 Ibid
census of India in 1931, they constituted 11 per cent of the Hindu population.”

Although Hindu migrants composed a significant proportion of British Indian laborers in Suriname, a significant Muslim contingent also found its way from the United Provinces and elsewhere in India to South America, where they performed a significant amount of labor on Dutch plantations. “The percentage of Muslims among British Indian migrants was around 17.5 per cent while the percentage of Muslims in the U.P. was around 12 per cent at the time of migration. Thus, the percentage of Muslims among the emigrants was relatively large.”

A number of explanations have been postulated in order to explain Muslims’ unusually high prevalence within the population of British Indian migrants headed for Suriname. Some of the reasons behind Muslim over-representation within the general population of Hindostani migrants to Suriname are postulated to be “that many recruitment agents were Muslims and that Muslims, unlike Hindus, faced no religious sanctions when traveling overseas. Besides, Muslims were not only over-represented in urban areas where recruitment was easier, they also faced severe hardships and low status,” which may have persuaded them to depart India permanently.

Motives for Hindostanis’ decision to abandon life in British India for the agricultural estates of Suriname also applied to the colony’s growing Javanese population. Many Javanese decided to leave Indonesia as a result of difficulties with the law, violation of sacrosanct Javanese cultural norms, a desire to elope with unapproved love interests in addition to a deeply ingrained sense of adventurism present within some enterprising individuals. Interestingly enough, Suriname’s large Javanese contingent rarely mentioned economic issues such as poverty and widespread land shortages within the densely populated Indonesian archipelagos as reasons for decamping for the Western Hemisphere. To this end, push factors were the main reasons.

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111 Ibid
112 Ibid
113 Ibid
behind migration from Java and British India as they deprived individuals of economic opportunities and social freedoms that they could find elsewhere.\textsuperscript{114} Since the primary purpose of indentured servant migration was to fuel Suriname’s need for a controllable, cost-effective agricultural labor force, men were the primary focus of recruitment efforts, however, females also formed a crucial segment of the labor force that Suriname was badly in need of as planters needed domestic workers as well as field hands. Recruiting males from British India and Java to Suriname was a monumentally difficult task, to say nothing of the cajoling required to persuade Asian women from the aforementioned polities to undertake the long journey to South America.

Contemporary officials familiar with intricacies of the process through which Surinamese plantations recruited Asian indentured laborers, such as Grierson, McNeill, and Lal, generally came to the consensus that Asian females willing to entertain thoughts of leaving their homelands usually consisted of widows. The high prevalence of widows within Suriname’s Asian immigrant population is unsurprising as British India and Java operated under heavily patriarchal social structures during the mid-to-late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Unfortunately, widows’ personal freedoms were heavily curtailed in Asia’s heavily male-dominated societies, thus widows saw migration as a way to assert their personal rights and often jumped at the chance to escape overly strict social restrictions they experienced on a daily basis. Although responsible for a significant amount of emigration, receipt of widow status on the part of British Indian and Javanese women was not the only factor that drove female emigration from Asia to Suriname. Also prevalent within Suriname’s Asian arrivals were prostitutes, abandoned women, and victims of family quarrels that frequently erupted between mothers and daughters-in-law within multigenerational households common in Asia.\textsuperscript{115} Thus, female emigration to Suriname and other Caribbean

\textsuperscript{114} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, page 52 offers information regarding factors behind British Indian and Javanese decisions to emigrate to Suriname

locales as indentured servants was far more likely to be the result of social push factors than anything else, as they were not expected to serve as family breadwinners. Contrast the relatively light economic responsibilities of women in British India and Java with those of males, who were more likely to be swayed by push factors such as lack of available land as contemporary Indian and Javanese social norms virtually required them to financially support their families.

Examination of the contract terms that British Indian and Javanese indentured laborers were subject to upon arrival in Suriname highlights the power of the push factors driving them out of Asia as said contracts severely limited their personal freedom as well as their pay scale. Indentured servants’ contracts stated that contracts that laborers from British India and Java slated to work at the NHM estate at Marienburg or other similar agricultural holdings explicitly stated that indentured servants were required to complete either seven hours of field work or ten hours of factory labor per day. All laborers worked on a uniform wage plan, which stipulated that male laborers would earn a minimum wage of fifty cents a day and females worked for a discounted rate of thirty-five cents a day. Laborers were to be paid weekly and any money received in advance was to be repaid no more than a year following the laborer’s arrival in South America, and monetary advances were commonly serviced via automatic wage garnishments.116 In addition to the aforementioned terms regarding daily labor obligations and the rather meager wage scale that Asians were subject to, indentured servant contracts also stipulated that contractants had to work a minimum of 300 days per year.117 Even though indentured servitude contracts mandated a that fixed number of hours were to be spent doing agricultural labor on a daily basis and limited the financial wages that Asians could earn in exchange for their work in

116 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 47, provides good information regarding wages as well as terms and conditions set out in Asian laborers’ contracts
117 Ibid
the fields and factories of Suriname, they did contain stipulations designed to benefit Suriname’s indentured laborers, and this set of stipulations addressed vacation time as well as other niceties.

As far as Asian workers’ contractually-guaranteed ancillary benefits were concerned, plantation management could not require British Indians or Javanese laborers to work during the three-day celebration marking the Islamic New Year, on Sundays, and on holidays recognized by the colonial government in Paramaribo. Furthermore, standard contracts binding Asians workers to estates such as Marienburg required proprietors such as the NHM to provide basic necessities such as free housing, potable drinking water and ready access to medical care except in case of injuries incurred through misconduct or other malicious behavior on the part of the contractant.\textsuperscript{118} Although benefits such as breaks during public holidays, housing, and medical care were certainly beneficial for Asian indentured servants within Suriname, potential recruits often struggled with the decision to make a long-term commitment to a faraway colony to which they had no personal connections. However, such concerns were allayed via a contractual right to free return passages from Suriname back to Asia, and once a British Indian or Javanese indentured laborer’s original contract expired, they were free to sign a follow-on agreement which would bind them to their estate for another five years in exchange for a signing bonus and maintenance of the guarantee to a free return passage to Asia upon completion of the contract extension.\textsuperscript{119} However, it is important to note that almost all of Suriname’s new laborers retained no control over their destinations upon arrival in South America as the NHM was legally able to transfer the rights of some of its contractants to other agricultural estates within Suriname shortly after their arrival in Paramaribo provided that all the relevant parties, including

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid
but not limited to the governor of Suriname, agreed to such a move.\textsuperscript{120} Note that such accords were oftentimes rubber-stamped due to the influence that planters wielded within Suriname.

Note that the contractually stipulated penal sanction was one of the more important instruments of controlling Suriname’s Asian indentured servants. The penal sanction itself was relatively simple in that it stipulated that dereliction of duty and incidents during which Asian contract laborers refused to perform their assigned tasks were punishable by stints in Surinamese jails. The penal sanction provided a stark divide between the working conditions of indentured servitude as opposed to free labor as it provided employers with the right to prosecute Asians guilty of breaking their contracts in criminal courts. Furthermore, this particular aspect of Suriname’s legal code is unique in that breach of contract is universally regarded as a civil offense, yet violators were subject to criminal prosecution, which was not a widely accepted practice within Europe, European overseas colonies or anywhere within the Western world.\textsuperscript{121}

The imposition of criminal penalties by Suriname’s colonial government in the cases of indentured servants who chose to break their contracts constituted an extension of planters’ control over their charges. The penal sanction essentially made Asian indentured servants vulnerable to proprietors’ biased assessments of whether or not laborers were performing sufficient amounts of work. This vulnerability seriously undermined the personal freedoms of Suriname’s new arrivals as they lost the ability to defend themselves against breach of contract accusations emanating from their superiors and thus had to maintain an exceedingly high work rate during their time on the clock. Furthermore, labor ordinances such as the penal sanction implemented significant penalties for offenses such as intentional efforts to damage and/or break any implement required for the completion of tasks in the field or within factories as well as

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid
\textsuperscript{121} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 80, provides in-depth details regarding Suriname’s penal sanction and its applicability in colonial criminal courts.
carelessness resulting in the loss of tools, machinery, or other items belonging to estates. The penal sanction also meted out punishments for incidents in which Asian contractants were suspected of drunkenness, laziness or an unwillingness to work in addition to the use of abusive and/or vulgar language directed toward authority figures present on their estates. Contractants also could not simply go absent without leave or desert as their contracts bound them to specific estates, thus Asians were denied the right to switch employers should they desire to do so.¹²² Notably, the penal sanction criminalized several popular avenues of nonviolent resistance that Afro-Surinamese slaves had resorted to during Suriname’s era of chattel slavery, thus Asian contract laborers lost the ability to covertly resist their employers should instances of ill treatment arise during the duration of their five-year stint in South America’s Guyana Shield.

**Suriname’s Formidable Recruitment Apparatus within British India and Java**

Passage of legislation enabling importation of indentured laborers from British India and Java and the presence of push factors within India and Java that were sufficiently strong enough to compel migration were certainly vital to the revival of a controllable, cost-effective labor force within Suriname. However, all of Paramaribo’s best-laid plans were doomed to fail unless the colonial government instituted an elaborate recruiting operation capable of steering a large number of individuals toward migration to South America. All things considered, Suriname stationed full-time recruiters in British India and Java, and these recruiters worked to access two distinct pools of candidates for emigration to South America. The recruiters’ primary objective was to pursue transient individuals already engaged in a wide-ranging job search within their homelands. Transient workers were attractive targets for Surinamese estates since they generally had a high degree of economic and geographic mobility and were often willing to entertain the

¹²² Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 88-89 provides in-depth information regarding offenses and punishments meted out in Suriname’s penal sanction
possibility of leaving Asia to start a new life elsewhere. This particular pool of laborers was attractive to Suriname’s recruiters because they represented the group of people who were most likely to pursue the idea of starting anew in Suriname, where they could take full advantage of economic opportunities, such as land acquisition for farming, that were scarce in India and Java.

Aside from the relatively large population of transient workers present within British India and Java, Suriname’s recruiting network also targeted people living relatively stable lives within their home villages. Recruitment of settled villagers differed from recruitment of migrant workers in that a high degree of persuasiveness and occasional episodes of duplicity were required if recruiters hoped to convince them to abandon their Asian roots in favor of a South American adventure. When villagers were subjected to sales pitches involving emigration to Suriname, they were often provided misleading information about working conditions and contract stipulations as well as their final destination. For instance, Suriname’s penal sanction was one of the strictest in the Western Hemisphere and it is likely that the colony’s Asian recruiters omitted this important detail while hitting up villagers that they saw as potential migrants. To this end, recruiters’ failure to mention Suriname’s penal sanction constituted gross misrepresentation on their part as their recruits did not have a clear idea of the conditions they agreed to work under upon formal agreement to terms of a South American labor contract.

Misrepresentation on the part of indentured servant recruiters went far beyond omission of Suriname’s penal sanction as recruitment agents in British India achieved a certain degree of infamy for obfuscating several truths about life in South America and the significant challenges that imported laborers would face upon arrival. The tendency of agents within Suriname’s Asian recruitment network to paint an overly rosy picture of life within the colony was one of the main

123 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 54-55 provide in-depth information regarding the primary pool of Asian people that Suriname’s recruiters targeted
124 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 54-55 provides a listing of information regarding recruitment of settled villagers within British India and Java
issues that plagued the colony’s quest to import large numbers of contract laborers from Asia to South America. Also, the constant issue of unscrupulous recruitment was only exacerbated by the fact that sleazy sales practices could not be easily addressed via mechanisms such as new legislation or ramped-up inspections of agents’ activities.\textsuperscript{125} Observations corroborating the tendency of recruitment were especially prevalent in British India as officials in that particular polity had a vested interest in the welfare of their subjects under the auspices of a foreign power. As such, officials within the upper reaches of British India’s colonial government determined that a vast majority of desertions from Surinamese agricultural estates were in all likelihood a result of illegal recruiting practices, “deceptions practiced by unscrupulous recruiters,” and that the high degree of difficulty involved in obtaining migrants wiling to move to South America incentivized irregularities within the recruiting process that took place in India and Java.\textsuperscript{126}

Unscrupulous recruiters were a major part of the overall recruitment apparatus intended to dispatch willing and able laborers from British India to Suriname’s plantation district. However, their efforts would have been in vain without the presence of an extensive bureaucracy intended to facilitate acquisition of indentured servants. As far as this bureaucracy was concerned, Suriname’s main contact within British India was the Emigration Agent, who was always an European male directly appointed by the governor of Suriname. The Emigration Agent was in charge of every single aspect of Paramaribo’s recruitment efforts within India and resided in Calcutta. The Emigration Agent’s residence was located an convenient distance from Garden Reach, which was located a few miles from the city and housed the central migrant depot that accommodated potential migrants before their sea voyage from Asia to the Guyana Shield. As mandated by his agreement with the Society of Suriname, the Emigration Agent took it upon

\textsuperscript{125} Reference IOLR P/872 Bengal Emigration Proceedings P/1152 Emigration from the Port of Calcutta 1877-78, statement by the Protector of Emigrants Dr. V. Richards, P/1307 1878-79, statement by the Protector of Emigrants J.G.C. Grant, and P/1633 1881-82, statement by Emigration Agent Van Cutsem for this information regarding desertions from Surinamese plantations. Directly cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 35, 218

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid
himself to appoint depot personnel such as doctors, interpreters and other miscellaneous officials in addition to the recruitment network’s subagents.\textsuperscript{127} The emigration agent, as the head of Suriname’s recruitment efforts in India, possessed significant incentives to ensure maximum acquisition of indentured laborers as he received an annual salary in addition to a financial premium for every indentured servant successfully dispatched from British India.\textsuperscript{128} Although the presence of the emigration agent played a sufficiently large role in the success of Suriname’s plan to import large numbers of laborers from British India to South America in order to resuscitate the colony’s agricultural productivity, he received considerable assistance from a byzantine network of underlings and minions that extended across the Indian Subcontinent.

Subagents played a vital role within Paramaribo’s vast British Indian recruitment apparatus, as they were largely responsible for coordinating grassroots recruitment within various parts of the Indian Subcontinent. Subagents were generally Indians belonging to one of the multitude of ethnic minorities present in India under the British Raj and they were generally responsible for maintaining district-level sub-depots that fed into the main depot in Calcutta. These sub-depots were mostly concentrated in the Indian states of Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces, and British law did not recognize the role of subagents. However, the subagents were the driving force of Suriname’s regional recruitment efforts as they hired native Indians responsible for conducting active, on-the-ground recruitment efforts in various locales across the Subcontinent.\textsuperscript{129} One interesting aspect of the use of minority-group members within the recruitment apparatus was that British India’s Hindi majority transposed the general character of the recruitment system on these individuals as a result of their minority status. However, such

\textsuperscript{127} De Klerk, \textit{Immigratie der Hindostanen}, 53-4 contains descriptions of Asian emigration agents and the role they played during recruitment

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid

\textsuperscript{129} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 35 offers some information about the role/legal status of subagents within Suriname’s Indian recruiting network
characterizations were not unmerited as Indian grassroots recruiters frequently resorted to shady recruitment methods and were universally perceived as individuals of questionable character.\textsuperscript{130}

As rampant population growth placed severe pressure on arable land within British India, males experienced increasing levels of difficulty in obtaining land plots capable of agricultural productivity levels high enough to support a family. Suriname’s colonial government was astute enough to pick up on this particular social difficulty within British India and rapidly moved to take advantage of the colony’s plentiful supply of arable land as a powerful recruiting tool. After the Netherlands’ central government made the decision to pass legislation ending slavery in all of its landholdings, effective in mid-to-late 1863, Paramaribo grappled with issues caused by declining agricultural production on the colony’s plantations. Suriname was also experiencing low levels of natural population expansion and Paramaribo desperately wanted to engineer a solution to the colony’s persistent issues with low population density. The Society of Suriname eventually implemented a program intended to encourage expansion of the colony’s small-scale agricultural economy by enacting legislation designed to facilitate individual pursuits to obtain land. This particular legislative bill included clauses allowing Asian immigrants possessing evidence of a completed indenture contract as well as consistent adherence to principles of civilized conduct to take advantage of the colony’s liberal land policies. Settlers who chose to acquire land from the Society of Suriname gained access to designated plots of uncultivated land for six years, during which they could attempt to produce items essential to the subsistence of a nuclear family or agricultural commodities that could be sold for a profit on the open market.\textsuperscript{131}

Although this particular piece of land legislation presented relatively attractive terms to Asian migrants bound to the system of indentured servitude, it came with several caveats that

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid
\textsuperscript{131} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 55-6 offer some information about the Society of Suriname’s policies for granting land to immigrants as well as former Asian contract laborers in an effort to simulate population growth within the colony and augment the agricultural production of plantations
limited the benefits that Asians could derive from land ownership. For instance, individuals that chose to take advantage of Suriname’s free land program were responsible not only for the land’s agricultural productivity but also maintenance of water infrastructure elements such as dikes and sluices, which were intended to harness hydropower for agricultural applications. As it turns out, Agent General J.F.A. Cateau van Rosevelt, who served as the primary caretaker of Asian immigrant welfare within Suriname, was rather dissatisfied with the colony’s land program. Rosevelt’ opposition to Paramaribo’s land policies emanated from concerns that immigrants would find it difficult to cultivate patches of previously untamed jungle while maintaining labor-intensive structures necessary for exploitation of Suriname’s enormous hydrological resources.\(^\text{132}\)

Maintenance of water infrastructure on land acquired through this particular program was not the most important caveat, however, as Suriname’s Asian migrants irrevocably surrendered their right to a free passage back to their homelands upon receipt of land via participation in Paramaribo’s land distribution program following termination of their contracts.\(^\text{133}\) Nonetheless, the promise of free land undoubtedly served as a powerful recruitment tool capable of aiding the emigration agent’s quest to inform Indians of the benefits that South America could afford them. This land inducement along with other factors, helped drive Suriname’s recruitment apparatus within British India, and this recruitment system eventually became enormously successful. As a matter of fact, British India’s United Provinces, which were known for high degrees of emphasis on agriculture and social unrest directly related to general poverty engendered by severe regional economic failures, produced roughly 80 percent of Suriname’s Asian immigrant population.\(^\text{134}\)

As Paramaribo’s indentured servant recruitment efforts were focused in Java as well as British India, the Society of Suriname had to implement a viable recruitment apparatus in that

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\(^{132}\) Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 56 provides in-depth information about J.F.A. Cateau van Rosevelt’s reservation about Suriname’s land programs

\(^{133}\) Ibid

\(^{134}\) De Klerk, *Immigratie der Hindostanen*, 49 for immigration statistics from the U.P. and cites the U.P.’s dominance of migrant demographics
section of the world or else risk getting shut out of the Javanese indentured laborer derby. As expected, the Indonesian system of indentured servant recruitment closely mirrored various elements of the wildly successful British Indian recruitment system, however, such emulation did not benefit the indentured laborers themselves. Paramaribo’s Javanese recruitment efforts ostensibly followed the existing British Indian model in that professional recruiters handled the procurement of willing contract laborers. However, the downsides of employing professional recruiters in Java mirrored problems in British India, as professional recruiters were frequently guilty of abusing their charges in innumerable ways. Licensed emigration agents headed Suriname’s Indonesian recruitment efforts, and these emigration agents relied heavily on subordinate henchmen known as handlangers or wereks (field recruiters) as far as grassroots recruiting was concerned as the subordinates were more familiar with local customs, thus they were more likely to successfully persuade Javanese to make the difficult trip to Suriname.\footnote{Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 52 provides information about structural nature and organization of Suriname’s Javanese recruiting apparatus.}

Unfortunately, emigration agents were so reliant on hired minions that the subordinates frequently ended up running the show themselves. Various contemporary accounts insist that recruiters were detested throughout Java to the point that Indonesian villagers did not pass up opportunities to physically beat up employees of Suriname’s Javanese recruitment apparatus.\footnote{Ibid} Recruiters within Java often relied heavily on chicanery and entrapment in order to secure a viable supply of labor for Suriname. The fact that a common ploy used to acquire signed indenture contracts was to force potential recruits into indebtedness through gambling evidences entrapment on Java.\footnote{Ibid} Suriname’s Javanese recruiters gradually acquired the habit of promising Indonesian women that they would find suitable marriage partners upon arrival in South America. Furthermore, landless Javanese men were habitually enticed by recruiters’ tales about

\footnote{Ibid}
tanah sabrang (land across the sea), where they would find abundant supplies of gold, land, and willing women. Unfortunately, many Javanese failed to find the aforementioned items in quantities approaching recruiters’ claims upon arrival in the Guyana Shield and endured five years of hard labor as a direct result of rampant fraud within the Javanese recruitment system.\textsuperscript{138}

As abuses within the Javanese indentured servant recruitment system proliferated, grassroots recruiters acquired a decidedly negative reputation, which manifested itself in several elements of Javanese society, including religious practice and perceptions of recruiters, who were likely considered a distinct social class within Java. For instance, recruiters’ reputations were tarnished to the point that an nationalist Islamic organization within Java known as the Sarekat Islam required prospective members to take an oath stating that they “would not steal, would not recruit, and would not lie”.\textsuperscript{139} As far as social perceptions of recruiters was concerned, they were increasingly seen as tricksters, or untrustworthy since a significant number of former Javanese contract laborers felt that their recruiters had cheated them and they felt tricked as a result of their recruiters’ chicanery and were chained for five long years as a result of subterfuge during the recruiting process. Javanese indentured laborers who successfully completed their five-year contracts went so far as to claim that the uses of magical powers, known as guna-guna were the primary reasons behind their decision to leave Java for a significant period of time. Javanese stories about tricksters and con men, potent magical potions capable of subjugating one’s free will, and nefarious spirits articulated migrants’ disappointment about life in Suriname, which did not resemble the fecund paradise promoted by recruiters.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid
\textsuperscript{139} Meijer Ranneft, “Misstanden,” 62. Ezerman (Omtrent de koeliewerving,” 1269) writes that Suriname’s impressive cadre of Asian recruitment agents could easily be recognized by their assemblage of dog-whip, banknotes, secretive actions, and exaggerated amicability with officials.
\textsuperscript{140} See stories about magical power in De Waal Malefijt, Javanese of Suriname: Segment, 29; Grasveld and Breunissen, “Ik ben een Javaan uit Suriname,” 9-31; and Verhey and Van Westerloo, “De weg terug,” 4, who claim that all of their informants told the same type of story about magic and bewitchment during the contract laborer recruitment process prior to Javanese departures for South America and the Caribbean.
Interestingly enough, Suriname was not the only polity taking part in the competition for indentured servants from Java, as the island of Deli also needed an influx of capable workers during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. At this point in time, Deli was a crucial part of the Netherlands’ Asian trade empire and potential Javanese indentured servants preferred to migrate there for a number of reasons. Commonly cited reasons for strong Javanese preferences toward migration to Deli were that the island happened to lie within the Indian Archipelago, which placed it in geographic and cultural proximity to Java, far outstripping the similarities between Indonesia and various South American polities such as Suriname. Furthermore, individuals who agreed to the terms of a labor contract with estates in Deli were only bound for three years, which paled in comparison to the five-year commitment required by Surinamese plantations. Finally, the Delian recruitment apparatus and transportation network surpassed Suriname’s system of labor procurement as far as organization and efficiency were concerned. Interestingly enough, Deli’s cadre of professional recruiters were one of the main obstacles that Paramaribo had to overcome if it wanted to successfully recruit sufficient quantities of Javanese indentured servants for the long-term migration from Indonesia to South America’s Guyana Shield.141

Convenience to Java and other parts of Indonesia, more favorable contract terms, and superior organization of indentured servant importation were not the only advantages that Deli held over Java in the pursuit of contract laborers for agricultural enterprises. Individuals familiar with various recruitment efforts within Java, such as colonial authorities and other contemporary observers, generally agreed that the optimal recruiting methodology as far as the Javanese were concerned was utilization of former contract laborers as salesmen due to their familiarity with Javanese culture, which granted them instant credibility with the general population. Recruitment via former contractants came to be known as the laukeh (old hand) system and Delian planters

141 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 53, provides information regarding Javanese preference for migration to Deli over immigration to Suriname
made liberal use of *laukeh* recruitment as far more Javanese successfully repatriated from Deli than from Suriname. The sheer numerical superiority of Delian returnees gave Delian agricultural barons a significant recruiting advantage over their South American colleagues, as they were able to mount a grassroots recruiting campaign that was far more credible than any recruitment method that Surinamese planters could ever put into practice within Indonesia. A relative dearth of repatriated indentured laborers was not the only disadvantage that Suriname’s recruiters faced when dealing with competition from Deli. Recruiters acting as agents for Surinamese planters within Java also had to deal with the fact that repatriating Javanese habitually told stories that painted rather unfavorable pictures of life in South America while returnees from Deli apparently did not engage in such activity. Although recruitment in Java presented more challenges than British India, Paramaribo was eventually able to secure a steady stream of willing migrants in spite of fierce competition from other agriculture-centric colonies.

Munshi Khan’s personal experiences with Suriname’s recruitment process within British India astutely highlight the fraudulent actions of local recruiters as well as some of the labor procurement system’s inherent misrepresentations. Khan states that he was in an unfamiliar city when “two Muslim men, with feminine faces, approached me. I guessed they were money-minded and wicked men…. They reciprocated my greeting and asked me to be introduced. I said I was staying at the Parade Inn and planning to catch the 8 o’clock train to Chandpur. Then they lied to me and said that the train had been rescheduled and was now to leave at noon according to the new timetable.” This particular segment of Munshi Khan’s recruitment anecdote demonstrates several typical elements of Suriname’s recruitment pattern within British India.

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142 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 53, provides more detailed information regarding the *laukeh* (old-hand) recruitment system within Indonesia
143 De *betovering*, edited by Hoefte. See also ARA, NHM, U 1139-9185, 1908; and SSM 7 Mb. 18 Feb. 1909, 520; and the discussion of the Van Vleuten propositions, SSM 13 Mb. 20 Apr. 1919 for more information about negativity on the part of Javanese repatriates from Suriname as opposed to attitudes displayed by individuals with work experience on Delian estates and elsewhere. Cited: Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 53, 222
144 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 73 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
First, Suriname’s agents within British India made liberal use of Muslims as grassroots recruiters, and Muslims fulfill this very role in the case of Munshi Khan. Secondly, Munshi Khan fell victim to fraudulent practices on the part of the recruiters when they told him that the train timetables had changed, and actions such as these were fairly common within British India.

As Munshi Khan’s account of his encounter with Muslim recruiters unfolded, he fell victim to further chicanery on the part of Suriname’s grassroots agents as they spun an overly idealistic tale of what Suriname had to offer. Khan recounts that he “was trapped in their net… ‘Are you interested in doing a job?’ one of them asked. ‘What kind of job?’ I inquired. ‘A government job’ one said and then asked me if I had any education. I told them that I had passed middle school. They responded happily and said that I could be made a sardar. ‘You shall be paid twelve annas each day and your work would be to supervise laborers in the sugar business.”’

In this particular segment of Khan’s conversation with his recruiters, the recruiters deliberately misled him about the positions available in Suriname as no contract laborer was made a sardar (labor supervisor) immediately upon arrival since that post was reserved for individuals who had already spent some time in Suriname. To make matters worse, Khan would not be performing supervisory duties as the recruiters claimed, but backbreaking agricultural fieldwork following his arrival in South America and initial assignment to a particular estate.

The grassroots agents also provided incentives to Khan provided he agreed to accompany them to a coolie depot. As Khan recalled, the recruiters stated “’if you have any doubt regarding your payment you may come and get registered yourself at the government office. If you follow me then I can show you the labourers who would be working under you. If you agree then your boarding and lodging shall be free from today onwards and the chief will bear your expenses.”

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145 Ibid
You will enjoy life, and if you work honestly, you will be duly promoted.”¹⁴⁶ Stating that Khan would ‘enjoy life’ consisted a serious case of misrepresentation on the part of his recruiters, as it is exceedingly difficult for any human to enjoy performing mandatory intensive agricultural fieldwork for long periods on a daily basis. Furthermore, alluding to the fact that Khan would be able to see his so-called underlings with no strings attached was simply a means through which his recruiters could get him down to the depot in order to finalize a formal contract of servitude.

Also, in Khan’s case, his recruiters stuck closely to the standard script utilized across British India in that they used economic enticements to pique interest in possibly signing a contract and making the trip to South America. As aforementioned, the recruiters notified Khan that he could possibly make twelve annas per day in Suriname. “Twelve annas per day meant Rs. 24 [24 rupees] per month, and this amount was very difficult to earn [in India]. I started to convince myself and said to myself: ‘Why not work for some time? If it does not suit me, I would quit. If I am registered with the government, everything should be alright and my salary would also be ensured’. With this one-sided thought in mind I consented to go with them.”¹⁴⁷ Note that Khan does not seem to have any knowledge of the minimum five-year contract period as evidenced by the statement that he would quit if the work did not suit him. Also, Khan appears to believe that he is destined for a government job with the British or some other foreign polity when in reality he would be bound to the Netherlands’ Society of Suriname, which was essentially a private enterprise backed by the Dutch government and as such did not qualify as a entity that could offer public service appointments as the recruiters claimed. Additionally, Khan’s recruiters clearly failed to mention Suriname’s harsh penal sanction that was applicable

¹⁴⁶ Ibid
¹⁴⁷ Ibid
to any and all indentured servants while they were giving him the hard sell on emigration to
South America, as such information would likely have dissuaded Khan from leaving India.

Coolie Depots: The Final Stopping-Off Point before South America

Following sufficient interest on the part of recruits such as Munshi Khan, Suriname’s
recruitment apparatuses in British India and Java needed places to store willing migrants as ship
trace from Asia to South America occurred on a rather intermittent basis. Also, the individuals
involved with recruitment efforts in British India and Java undoubtedly wanted to separate their
new prospects from the general public as popular opinion of recruiters was decidedly negative.
General negative perceptions of recruiters was especially important in the final stages of the
process that would take Asians to Suriname as public opinion may have had the ability to
dissuade new contractants from making the journey to South America. In order to prevent last-
minute desertions to external influences such as voyage timing and less than stellar public
opinion of indentured servitude as a whole, newly recruited potential emigrants were
consolidated in buildings that amounted to little more than closed warehouses supervised by
licensed recruiters. These buildings functioned as depots for individuals who had agreed to
immigrate from British India and Java to South America and the sanitary conditions present
within the aforementioned depots were naturally dreadful. New recruits were consistently fed
high-calorie diets to ensure that they were capable of passing the physical examination that had
to be conducted prior to departure for South America and frequently signed preliminary contracts
of indenture during their time in Asian sub-depots. As expected, most recruiters prioritized
preparation of candidates for inspection by the local authorities as well as individual medical
examinations over human rights as bounties, which made up a huge proportion of grassroots recruiters’ annual disposable income, were dependent on procurement of approved migrants.\textsuperscript{148}

As expected, the widespread presence of fraud within British India and Java’s indentured servant recruitment apparatuses extended to the regional sub-depots. One reason why fraud and misrepresentation extended to sub-depots was that recruiters and their immediate superiors had to successfully pass their charges through various inquiries on the part of emigration authorities charged with overseeing migration to South America and the Caribbean. Any risk of failure to pass potential emigrants through inspection would be disastrous for recruiters; as such an event would result in the loss of bounties, which were heavily dependent on volume and turnover. In order to minimize problems with emigration authorities within British India and Java, recruiters generally pressured their newly acquired collections of potential migrants to declare to the emigration authorities that they had previous experience in the agricultural sector and had made the decision to immigrate to South America via their own free will. Once a sufficiently large group of potential migrants coalesced in a particular sub-depot, trains were summoned to transport them to Suriname’s central depot, which was located in Calcutta. Once new recruits arrived in Calcutta, they began to formalize their commitment to work in Suriname for five years and preparations for the voyage from the Indian Subcontinent to South America commenced.\textsuperscript{149}

Munshi Khan, by virtue of his participation in the great recruitment mechanism that Suriname implemented within British India, provides an excellent account of the events that took place within the Calcutta depot, and these events provide a window through which the cultural impact of emigrants’ decision to leave Asia can be examined. Mushi Khan recalled that until emigrants “reached the [Calcutta] depot, we had been allowed to cook our own meals in the

\textsuperscript{148} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 38 offers some detailed information about conditions within sub-depots as well as official policies and procedures

\textsuperscript{149} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 38 offers in-depth information about declaration of occupation and transport from sub-depots to the Calcutta depot
manner we wanted…. Besides, everyone followed his own rituals and systems…. People acted according to the rules and regulations of his or her caste and religion and followed the system and recognized high castes and labeled the untouchables, etc. They had thus managed to preserve religious sanctity,” which was vital to the proper functioning of Indian society.\footnote{Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 77-8 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time}

Although maintenance of religious sanctity on the part of Hindu recruits was certainly possible in the days leading up to arrival in Calcutta’s central depot, required activities upon arrival caused any thoughts of religious sanctity to fall by the wayside as the emigration agent and his underlings treated new arrivals in the same general manner, especially in the area of personal hygiene. “In the depot, we got up at 8 o’clock and the sardar [supervisor], whom was a fat Brahmin, gave each of us soap, oil, etc. and ordered us to refresh ourselves in the River Bhagirathi…. It was the ebb tide and all the men and women began to wash themselves.”\footnote{Ibid} The practice of having all new recruits bathe in the river together was especially significant as it marked a turning point for emigrants headed to South America. “The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and others laughingly began to throw off their threads and necklaces into the river saying: ‘Mother Ganges, we offer you our belongings, if ever we return, we shall adorn them again’. They then oiled themselves and took a bath and thus became one with the Sudras.”\footnote{Ibid} The dedication of personal belongings to the Ganges was significant because it demonstrated that emigrants had come to terms with the possibility that they would never return to India. Furthermore, removal of the caste system through bathing with members of other castes constituted a serious violation of Hinduism’s central tenets, however, communal bathing absolved emigrants of religious responsibilities and readied them for the voyage to Suriname.
Communal bathing was not the only method that the Calcutta indentured servant depot used to encourage abandonment of Hindi social norms in favor of a more collective approach, as communal dining was also required, though not in a hygienic manner. Khan recalled that on a daily basis, “at 10 AM, the food was ready and the jamadar now distributed a tin plate and an earthen pot. From the plate we had to eat food while the pot was used to keep water for multifarious activities like drinking, washing hands and face, and washing after defecation, etc. This was highly unhygienic and especially against the habits of the Sanatanis [Orthodox Hindus] who had earlier followed their beliefs rigidly.”153 The hygienic practices of the Calcutta depot essentially forced ultra-Orthodox Hindus to abandon their religious practices, however, a relatively large proportion of Hindu depot residences did not adhere to any particular orthodox beliefs. As far as these non-orthodox Hindus were concerned, the mechanics of dining within the depot helped damage their connection to Hinduism. Potential emigrants lined up “in two separate queues, one for men and the other for women. There was no separation based on caste, religion, or class… Nobody said a word about anyone being untouchable or of another religion and all shared one mess and the food… They never objected to their plates being used by different castes and therefore had made the food impure and destroyed their religion.”154

Destruction of religious norms within the Calcutta depot sparked evolution of a rather laissez-faire society that placed a premium on free interactions between various groups of people that would not normally interact within the general population of British India. As Khan recalled his experiences in the Calcutta depot, he mentioned that, “the breach of religion did not end [at the dining table] and these people resorted to infidelity. They had not brought their wives along and they did not hesitate to have other women from different castes and creed to keep them

153 Ibid
154 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 79 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
company. They also were close and intimate with the untouchables and ate, drank, and had fun with them, and started relations with their womenfolk.” 155 At this point in time, the culture that Khan encountered within the Calcutta depot was rather unique and a microcosm of what he could expect on the voyage to South America and within Suriname itself, as Hindus had far fewer motivations to maintain the caste system. In Khan’s experience, once emigrants had spent enough time in the Calcutta depot, they would come to notice the lack of differentiation between an “uppercaste person and the lower castes. No Hindu wore the sacred thread or had put tilak on their foreheads. No other Hindu symbol was to be found among them. All Hindus had become Sudras. There was no differentiation any longer between Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, or Sudras. However, the Muslims with their beards and topi could still be singled out,” indicating that they preferred to maintain ties to Islam during preparations for emigration to Suriname. 156 Moreover, Islam does not possess instruments of social organization that mirror the Hindi caste system, nor does it impose restrictions such as vegan diets or otherwise, thus Muslims faced far less pressure to abandon their cultural and religious norms relative to Hindustani labor emigrants.

**The Voyage to South America: Crossing the Kala Pani (Black Waters)**

Upon completion of the indoctrination and assimilation process that took place within the Calcutta depot and within Java, newly minted emigrants were ready to undertake arguably the most momentous phase of the entire indentured servant experience, the trip across the ocean to Suriname. Much like the difference in degree of religious abandonment between Hindus and Muslims within the Calcutta depot, the voyage itself held a distinct significance for adherents of the two religions. For Hindus, traveling across the sea made returning to India rather difficult

155 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 80 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
156 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 78 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
from a cultural perspective due to the fact that Indian society generally categorized members of Hinduism’s upper castes as outcasts once they crossed the *kala pani*. A significant number of the individuals that Munshi Khan encountered during his time in the Calcutta depot were members of the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishyas castes. According to the Hindu prohibition on crossing the *kala pani* those individuals would retain the status of a Sudra if they chose to return to India, thus it was likely that those individuals would never return to Asia once they started the journey to Suriname, which required crossing huge swaths of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

On the other hand, Sharia naturally encourages long distance travel by virtue of the Hajj, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and occurs as a result of the Quranic declaration that every practicing Muslim has to make a religious pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during their lifetime. As a result of Islam’s inherent nature, Asian Muslims, including Munshi Rahman Khan, who chose to immigrate to Suriname for the purpose of fulfilling an indentured labor contract, did not find the prospect of a long sea voyage as their Hindu compatriots did. Thus the journey from British India to Suriname was not nearly as momentous for Muslims, who could foresee a simple return and immediate re-integration into their old social circles upon arrival in various Asian polities, unlike Hindus who faced the task of re-integrating into the caste system.

Even though the religious implications of crossing the *kala pani* were drastically different for Hindus and Muslims immigrating from British India and Java to South America, adherents of both religions experienced roughly equivalent conditions on board the vessels taking them to Suriname. As a whole, Asian emigrants were provided with sufficient nutrition as Khan recalled, “on our ship more than half of the passengers hailed from West Punjab and South Bundelkhand. Therefore, rice and rotis were served thrice a week while on Sundays we were

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given chura or biscuits. Every fifteenth day, fresh sheep meat and rotis were given to us. Daal, vegetables, tamarind chutney, tinned meat and limejuice were also provided daily.”

According to the aforementioned uniformity principle, religious prohibitions that Hinduism and Islam placed on the consumption of certain food items were completely ignored as “everyone, be it Hindu or Muslim, was forced to eat what was served. If anyone resisted, he would have to fast.” Furthermore, the erasure of lines of demarcation between the various creeds present within British India as well as the many castes of Hinduism within the Calcutta depot transferred to the ships carrying emigrants to South America. “On board, there were no distinctions between high castes and low casted, Hindus or Muslims, or other racial distinctions… Persons, who were rigid in their religious practices, had not been allowed to board the ship to Surinam. No Brahmin could remain chaste among us in Surinam since everyone had to eat meat, etc,” which was a violation of Hinduism’s emphasis on a vegetarian diet, and this state of being prevailed until emigrants’ vessels reached their ultimate destinations within South America or the Caribbean.

**Initial Arrival in Suriname: The Paramaribo Depot and Initial Plantation Assignments**

Arrival in Suriname marked the conclusion of Asian indentured servants’ migration from British India and Java to South America, and several important events followed emigrants’ ships’ entrance into the Suriname River. The first step that new indentured servants had to accomplish in order to initiate their integration into Suriname’s sociocultural fabric was a stint at the Combé depot in Paramaribo, where all new arrivals were gathered prior to receiving their initial work assignments. An initial spell in Combé was vital for Asian migrants as it allowed them to acclimate to their new surroundings in the company of familiar faces, which undoubtedly quelled

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158 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 83 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
159 Ibid
160 Ibid
161 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 85 has detailed references to general conditions within Paramaribo’s Combé depot
some of the trepidation that new arrivals felt upon their arrival in South America. Furthermore, consolidation of new arrivals in Paramaribo’s depot allowed existing residents of Suriname to cultivate an understanding of their new laborers and provided a venue in which migrants could potentially meet relatives or acquaintances they had known in India or Java. According to Khan, “the depot at Paramaribo was more comfortable and quieter than the one in Calcutta… On Sundays, people from outside were allowed to visit the depot and meet the inmates. People from our country who were already working on the plantations came in search of men from their own village or hometown, or in search of their relatives” among the collection of new arrivals.  

After an acclimation period within the Combé depot in Paramaribo, laborers received their initial work assignments and were allocated to the estates where they would work for the next five-plus years. As expected, emigrants did not have any control over their destinations and were merely dispatched to agricultural estates that needed an infusion of labor in order to achieve increases in productivity. However, it appears that indentured servant recruits had a small degree of control over who their future co-workers would be. As Khan recalled, “During weekdays, men were dispersed to different plantations as per requirement. My friends signaled me to join them when they were assigned their place of work. On the first day of such an allocation, my friend Subhan and I sat among the crowd of recruits” in the hopes of getting sent to the same estate. The mechanics of the assignment process itself appear to have been based on seating order, which was not pre-determined in any way, thus assignment of workers to estates occurred on a somewhat informal basis. Munshi Khan recalled the assignment process, and contended that “even though people on our ship who had been in Surinam before had warned us not to sit [in the front] on the first day since the place of appointment would be Nickeri, we left it to Allah

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162 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 89 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
163 Ibid
who would decide upon our destination. After all, we had to work somewhere. With Khuda’s support, on that first day the first six, including the two of us, were allotted to work on the plantation Lust en Rust,” known as Skerpi in Sranan Tongo [Suriname’s local dialect].

One of the interesting aspects of the arrival of British Indian and Javanese indentured servants in Suriname is their relation to the institution of slavery, which was essentially being replaced by the new Asian immigrants. Khan hints that the British Indians and Javanese were well aware that they were replacing slavery when he remarks “initially, the habsis [blacks] from Africa were brought to Surinam to work as slaves. Later, on 1 July 1863 they were freed from bondage. Ten years later, i.e., on 5 June 1873, the first batches of 408 Indian immigrants were brought to Suriname from India by the ship named Lalla Rukha. These Indians had come to work on a 5-year contract (girmit).” Ultimately, a sizable number of British Indian emigrants found their way to Suriname over the duration of the indentured servant program, and Khan paints a picture of the total number of British Indian immigrants that entered Suriname. During the remainder of 173 following the Lalla Rukha’s arrival in Paramaribo, “four more shiploads were brought from India. Thus during the very first year, 1501 men, 556 women, and 390 children were brought to Surinam from India. By 1926, 64 ships laden with workers had arrived in Surinam from India and [until] 1938, 41 ships were sent from Surinam to India. Out of the total of 34,024 men, women and children who had come to Surinam, 11,659 returned” to British India. Javanese immigration to Suriname was not nearly as prolific due to competition from Deli and other locales within the Netherlands East Indies [Indonesia]. Only a tiny fraction of Javanese emigrants leaving from municipalities such as Batavia and Semarang decamped for South America. Between 1902 and 1910, a total of 145,066 Javanese left Batavia and Semarang

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164 Ibid
165 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 86 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time
166 Ibid
for greener pastures and only 4 percent of migrants, or about 5,433 individuals, ended up in Suriname. Note that the 5,433 Javanese migrants absolutely paled in comparison to Suriname’s massive retinue of 34,024 migrants from British India, resulting in an immigrant population ratio of 7 British Indian indentured servants for every contractant from the Indonesian Archipelago.\(^{167}\)

Paramaribo’s efforts to import large numbers of Javanese contract laborers were not deterred by less than promising early returns provided by immigration agents in Indonesia, and despite heavy competition from Deli and other Indonesian islands, a significant number of Javanese eventually found their way to Suriname. Suriname’s nascent community of Javanese immigrants eventually experienced exponential growth and expanded from 5,433 individuals in 1910 to a total of 32,962 people at the close of World War I. As it turns out, Javanese immigration flow increased dramatically after World War I as the end of global hostilities engendered the dissolution of British India’s vast system of contract labor recruitment and exportation. To this end, a majority of Javanese immigrants to Suriname arrived between 1917 and 1928.\(^{168}\) Interestingly enough, Suriname’s indentured servant recruitment program produced a migrant population that was nearly evenly split between British Indians and Javanese, with 34,024 immigrants from British India and 32,962 arrivals from Java. Thus, neither group possessed numerical superiority over the other, thus British Indians and Javanese made up a roughly equal proportion of Suriname’s population. However, it is important to note that British Indians vastly outnumbered the Javanese in the early years of the program, as nearly 29 percent of Suriname’s British Indian contract laborer population was imported during the eight-year period ranging from 1889 to 1896. Furthermore, the highest net volume of British Indian indentured servants arrived in 1873, which was the first year during which Paramaribo made

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\(^{167}\) Van Vollenhoven, *Rapport over de werving*, 32 (table) has a detailed breakdown of multiple years of relevant Javanese immigration statistics

\(^{168}\) Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 61 and 62 (table) have details on Suriname’s post-World War I British Indian and Javanese immigration statistics
efforts to import agricultural laborers from various parts of Asia. Even though Hindostani workers started arriving in large numbers during the late 19th century, Javanese contractants did not start arriving en masse until after 1917, when India ended its relationship with contract laborer recruitment agencies operating on the behalf of various European colonial powers.\textsuperscript{169}

**Initial Influence of New British Indian and Javanese Arrivals on Suriname’s Society**

Mass arrivals of indentured servants from British India and Java had an enormous influence on Suriname’s general population demographics, as the colony’s population had not previously included a significant number of individuals with Asian heritage. Also, the new immigrants provided a significant proportion of Suriname’s population growth during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Around 67,000 Hindostanis and Javanese arrived in Suriname during the years in which Paramaribo actively sought to recruit Asian contract laborers to fill the colony’s need for agricultural workers and additional settlers. The highest total volume of British Indian and Javanese immigration to Suriname occurred in 1907, 1908, and 1909 when more than 2,000 new British Indians and Javanese entered the colony on an annual basis. Note that an 1880 census of Suriname’s population counted 49,309 individuals, and the colony’s population had more than tripled by 1938, when the colony was home to 152,589 individuals, representing an increase of 103,280 people, of which 61,895 were immigrants.\textsuperscript{170} When Hoefte’s raw numbers are taken into account, immigrants accounted for 59.9% of Suriname’s unadjusted population growth. However, the actual figure was probably much higher since the given statistics do not take organic population growth such as population increase via reproduction on the part of India and Javanese couples into account. This dramatic change in

\textsuperscript{169} Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 61 provides detailed information about the total number of British Indian and Javanese immigrants in Suriname as well as details on the years during which the colony experienced the largest numbers of arrivals for the two classifications of Asian contractants.\textsuperscript{170} Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 189 offers a collection of extremely detailed information about Suriname’s changing population demographics and their relationship to immigration from Asia. Emigration of Asians from Suriname to parts of Asia approximated 19,307 during this period.
population demographics within Suriname eventually gave rise to fairly mixed opinions about Asians within Suriname’s pre-existing ethnic groups, which had occupied the Guyana Shield for a longer time period than the new arrivals and had endured the trials and tribulations of slavery.

Initially, Suriname’s agricultural barons and the colonial government in Paramaribo expressed significant contentment with the newly arrived Asian contract laborers, going so far as to state that the influx of newcomers had invigorated the colony’s pre-existing labor force. Note that initial impressions on the part of planters and colonial administrators may have emanated from the fact that the Asians had arrived at a particularly convenient time as the *Lalla Rookh* had managed to arrive just before State Supervision was slated to end on 30 June 1873. The end of State Supervision is especially significant as it would have resulted in an abnormal wage increase for agricultural workers in the absence of Asian contract laborers, thus the new arrivals saved the colony an inordinate amount of money as far as labor costs were concerned.\footnote{KV 1874, 13 provides detailed information regarding the impending ‘abnormal wage increase’. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 41, 220} Initial positive reactions on the part of Suriname’s plantation proprietors and the colony’s central government in Paramaribo was certainly understandable given that the new British Indian and Javanese immigrants theoretically had the ability to provide agricultural enterprises with a means through which they could escape Creoles’ rising wage demands. A theoretical reduction in raw labor costs would subsequently lower Suriname’s agricultural labor costs and undoubtedly increase margins for all agricultural products, thus enhancing the colony’s gross revenues and net margin.

However, the potential for economic improvements soon lost its luster and enthusiasm for the new arrivals declined when the colony’s first Asian indentured laborers failed to live up to the unreasonably high expectations that native Surinamers had placed on them upon arrival. Failure to live up to expectations on the part of the colony’s new arrivals can be chalked up to the fact that Asians’ language and customs impeded their integration into a iconoclastic...
plantation society dominated by native Surinamers, whose cultural norms diverged radically from those found in locations such as British India and the Indonesian Archipelago.\textsuperscript{172} Asian difficulties with the languages of Suriname was a result of European Surinamers’ tendency to speak Dutch or the local Sranan Tongo dialect, which is an English-based creole language that enjoys widespread distribution in Suriname among Europeans and Afro-Surinamese and possesses Dutch, Portuguese and African linguistic elements.\textsuperscript{173} Since British Indians and Javanese immigrants had little to no experience with the aforementioned languages, their inability to acquire proficiency in Suriname’s lingua franca (either Dutch or Sranan Tongo) was logical. Although linguistic difficulties were understandable, they greatly aggravated the colony’s planters as Asians had difficulty communicating with most native Surinamers and interaction between Asians and natives was essential for plantations’ financial success.

In addition to difficulties with the language, lack of patience on the part of Suriname’s great landowners hampered the effectiveness of the first British Indian and Javanese indentured servants to arrive in the colony. As a result of a great rush to get recently arrived indentured servants out into the fields, planters predictably refused to give newly arrived Asian indentured laborers time to ‘season,’ or acclimate to the colony’s harsh tropical climate, and Consul Cohen complained that the high demands that fieldwork placed upon workers’ bodies was reflected in the high incidence of illnesses and deaths among the colony’s growing force of contractually-bound agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{174} Cohen commented on Indian laborers’ situation in diplomatic correspondence when he made the following remarks regarding contract laborers; “It should be seriously pointed out to the Dutch government that, unless proper measures are immediately

\textsuperscript{172} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 41 discusses difficulties that cultural barriers presented as far as Asian integration into colonial Suriname’s society
\textsuperscript{173} For more information on the various linguistic elements that make up Surinamese Sranan Tongo, refer to the language’s reference page in the Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online, which can be accessed via the link provided in the “Winford” entry in the bibliography
\textsuperscript{174} PRO: FO 37, piece 558, Governor of India to Secretary of State for India 12 Feb. 1875. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 41-2, 220
taken to afford adequate hospital accommodation and medical attendance to Indian immigrants in Surinam, we shall find ourselves under the necessity of suspending emigration thither.\textsuperscript{175}

By virtue of British Indian and Javanese residence in Southeastern Asia, which harbors a tropical climate, the Dutch expected that they would experience a relatively seamless adjustment to the hot and humid environs of South America; however, such expectations were based on flawed assumptions. Like Europeans, British Indians and Javanese lacked exposure to killer tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, which were raging across South America, and new indentured servants experienced a high pathogenic fatality rate. Furthermore, many of the new arrivals lacked exposure to agricultural labor despite the assurances of grassroots recruiters in Calcutta, Batavia, and Semarang. This particular inefficiency within the recruitment system is aptly demonstrated in the case of Munshi Khan, who was a schoolteacher and thus ill-prepared to perform the hard physical labor required on plantation estates.\textsuperscript{176} Note that the prefix ‘Munshi’ denotes someone who has received education and subsequently become a reputed schoolteacher.

Failure of British Indians and Javanese to adjust to Suriname’s reliance on Dutch and Sranan Tongo along with their inability to ward off unfamiliar diseases and acclimate to the work that they were expected to perform produced negative sentiments within Suriname. As such, a common perception of Asian emigrants was that they emanated from the relative dregs of British Indian society. Native Surinamers were probably susceptible to this particular viewpoint since contemporary observers fell victim to the recurring habit of insisting that the Dutch recruited individuals of questionable character that the British chose to reject from their society in the pursuit of moral purity.\textsuperscript{177} Unfortunately, this view was all too prevalent in South America and throughout the Caribbean during the era of Asian indentured servant migration, and data

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, direct quotation attributable to Consul Cohen during his service in Paramaribo enclosed in the document mentioned in footnote 41
\textsuperscript{176} Khan, \textit{An Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, XII provides some information regarding Munshi Rahman Khan’s history as a schoolteacher and the significance of the “Munshi” prefix, which denoted that the holder was a schoolteacher and/or occupied in education
\textsuperscript{177} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 37 offers a collection of information regarding perceptions of individuals that recruited to work in Suriname.
from various historical sources demonstrates that widely held beliefs about the character of British Indians were fairly inaccurate. For instance, comprehensive data delineating the caste affiliation and social status of freshly minted contract laborers departing British India’s main immigration depot in Calcutta’s Garden Reach section demonstrates that the composition of migratory groups headed for South America’s Guyana Shield were actually proportionate to India’s existing population demographics. Thus, Suriname did not receive a disproportionate number of migrants from Hinduism’s lowest caste, known as the Untouchables. British Indians found these negative perceptions hard to battle even upon their arrival in Suriname and other Caribbean polities, and negative perceptions of Hindostanis persisted until the 20th century.

European Surinamers tended to believe that British Indian indentured servants, who as subjects of a foreign empire were probably subject to overt skimming of the best laborers for destinations such as British Guiana, which would directly benefit the British Crown. In contrast, the Javanese migrated from an area already under Dutch rule to Suriname and were not subject to suspicions of skimming to the degree that British Indians were. Thus, commencement of labor emigration from Java likely brought about expectations that the Javanese indentured servants would offer a higher rate of return than British Indians due to inherent differences in the quality of individual workers. In summary, Paramaribo anticipated receiving laborers capable of performing more work on a per-person basis than the British Indians from Java. However, such expectations were soon deflated and despite the presence of official reports containing effusive praise of Javanese laborers, which existed for the sole purpose of maintaining a consistent stream of contract laborers from Batavia and Semarang to Paramaribo, Marienburg’s upper-level management expressed concerns about their new supply of agricultural workers in private

178 Ibid
company. They habitually categorized Javanese contract laborers as ‘slow,’ thus new arrivals from Indonesia did not earn as much money as native Surinamers expected them to procure.\textsuperscript{179}

Characterization of Javanese workers as ‘slow’, whether merited or not, was not the only reason why Suriname’s agricultural barons were dissatisfied with their Indonesian indentured servants. Unfortunately, issues tended to crop up because Javanese laborers seemingly blew all of their money on opium, which is a highly addictive narcotic capable of creating severe chemical dependencies within frequent users.\textsuperscript{180} Concerns over opium abuse among Javanese working in Suriname gradually reached the point that proprietors started taking voluntary preventive measures. As anticipated, Javanese abuse of opiates contributed to the formation of a negative feedback pattern in which drug abuse contributed to low energy levels, prompting declines in productivity and a corresponding drop in wages. Decreases in financial solvency increased despondency among Javanese laborers, and the aforementioned increase in emotional despondency inspired increased drug use and perpetuated the negative feedback loop that gradually destroyed some Indonesians’ capacity for working. Members of Suriname’s plantation hierarchy were fully aware of the narcotics abuse issues that their Javanese charges faced and took steps, such as paying workers in pre-prepared meals, intended to inhibit laborers’ ability to acquire opiates.\textsuperscript{181} However, such anti-drug measures had limited effectiveness as far as stopping chronic opium use among Suriname’s large contingent of Javanese contract laborers.

The colonial government in Paramaribo quickly started attempting to assign blame for the low quality of the emigrants they were receiving from the Indonesian depots at Batavia and Semarang. Paramaribo’s wrath soon alighted on those responsible for recruiting willing migrants and members of Suriname’s upper colonial hierarchy, inclusive of individuals involved

\textsuperscript{179} SSM 4 Mb. 14 Jan. 1892, 222 provides information about Marienburg concerns regarding the aptitude of Javanese contract laborers and their ability to operate successfully within the colony’s pre-existing system of plantation agriculture. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 49, 221
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid
with large-scale agricultural enterprises such as the NHM plantations at Marienburg and elsewhere, were of the opinion that Paramaribo’s Javanese recruitment agency was responsible for the low-quality laborers that managed to find their way to South America. Hence, Suriname’s power brokers suspected that the E. ‘t Sas Company had intentionally recruited individuals of questionable ability in an desperate attempt to fill a pre-set quota of 100 migrants, which happened to be a maximum rather than a minimum. Furthermore, Surinamers went so far as to claim that the second group of laborers rustled up by the Javanese recruiters included thieves and common criminals.\(^\text{182}\) Such accusations of criminal activity among the new arrivals torpedoed public opinion of Javanese immigrants within Suriname and gave rise to public unrest over the economic impact that the new Asian immigrants were having on Suriname’s creoles.

Public unrest over the impact of British Indian and Javanese arrivals on Suriname’s existing Creole population eventually split into two factions, one focused on the benefits that immigration brought to the colony, and one focused on the drawbacks of indentured servant importation from Asia. Late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century Creole Surinamers were second or third-generation Surinamese of African descent, who were descended from slaves and maintained strong social, cultural, and even economic ties to their plantation communities. Creoles’ close connection to their former plantations made them economically vulnerable to the arrival of Asian indentured servants as British Indian and Javanese contractants absorbed a huge proportion of the jobs that Creoles had previously held, thus decimating their earning power. Despite the economic damage that Creoles experienced, some members of Suriname’s pro-immigrant faction transformed into hard-liners who ardently campaigned for further importation of British Indians and Javanese. One argument that proponents of government-sponsored immigration to Suriname made was that the sugar industry drove the economy of Suriname and that plantation labor forces

\(^{182}\) Ibid
simply had to consist mostly of immigrants because the prevailing opinion throughout the colony
was that Suriname’s Creoles were simply far too inconsistent, unreliable, lazy and demoralized
to serve as a competent source of agricultural labor. Some supporters of large-scale Asian
migration to Suriname took anti-Creole invective further by insisting that the introduction of
competitors for jobs in the colony’s agricultural sector would teach Creoles virtues such as the
inherent value of hard work and the importance of discipline while performing one’s job.

On the other hand, Suriname’s anti-immigrationists unabashedly accused British Indian
and Javanese migrants of characteristics that pro-immigrants readily observed in the colony’s
existing Creole population. Essentially, members of Suriname’s faction of anti-immigrationists
strongly insisted that “one Creole was worth two immigrants; the latter were considered riffraff,
unwanted by the British. Hence migration would create a society composed of the ‘scum’ of
other countries.” As a matter of fact, in the eyes of the anti-immigrationists, Suriname’s
Creoles held the key to sustainable development of the colony’s socioeconomic fabric. The anti-
immigrationists’ vision for Suriname’s future envisioned a Creole-driven colony possessing a
diversified economy with a reduced degree of emphasis on commercial agriculture. Members of
Suriname’s anti-immigration faction strongly believed that Paramaribo needed to end artificial
economic protection of the colony’s plantations, which were already heavily dependent on sugar
subsidies. Furthermore, the plantations were responsible for a high proportion of the social
anomalies that contributed to tension within Suriname and the planters’ business interests no
longer aligned with the colony’s general population or with the prevailing interests of the Dutch
government in The Hague. Furthermore, according to opponents of British Indian and Javanese
immigration, Suriname’s plantation proprietors were tantamount to detached sugar barons who

183 SG, II, 1878-1879, 5 DEC. 1878; 1879-1880, 15 Oct. 1879 possesses commentary related to the state of Suriname’s potential creole laborers. Cited in Hoeffe, In Place of Slavery, 26, which also contains thorough discussion of other rationales espoused by pro-immigration Surinamers
184 Ibid
185 SG, II, 1879-1880, 15 Oct. 1879 possesses some commentary about Creole superiority over Asians. Cited in Hoeffe, In Place of Slavery, 26
knew of only two ways of doing business: via harsh measures against contract laborers, who had no choice but to suffer under the cruel auspices of their exceedingly wealth and power-hungry absentee overlords, or via receipt of considerable financial subsidies from the Dutch treasury.\textsuperscript{186}

Suriname’s anti-immigrationists were not only upset about the perceived lack of moral character among the colony’s new Asian imports and the continued patronage of large-scale agricultural enterprises that demanded constant concessions from the colonial government in Paramaribo and the Dutch government in the Netherlands. Opponents of immigration ardently believed that Suriname’s power brokers were ignoring the fact that the colony’s Creoles represented a perfectly viable labor force capable of keeping the cash crop engine humming. Development of a reliable Creole labor force was key to the anti-immigrationists’ view of what Suriname was destined to become as it moved forward in time. According to proponents of utilizing Creole labor over the efforts of Asian immigrants, increasing economic growth and prosperity within Suriname was only possible if the colony’s pre-existing land and labor resources were managed in a sustainable manner rather than via a profit-at-all-costs mentality. To this end, Suriname’s anti-immigrationists vehemently disagreed with the suggestion that the colony lacked a suitable labor supply; the colony’s agricultural barons simply wanted to secure “contract laborers as their temporary slaves.”\textsuperscript{187} Despite heavy opposition, Paramaribo continued to pursue recruitment and importation of indentured servants from British India and Java as per planters’ wishes for a bound labor force analogous to Afro-Surinamese slaves.

\textsuperscript{186} SG, II, 1878-1879, 5 Dec. 1878, possesses some information re: popular opinion of Surinamese planters. See Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 26
\textsuperscript{187} SG, II, 1879-1880. 15 Oct. 1879 provides commentary about planters wanting "temporary slaves." Cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 26
Chapter 3
The Hierarchical Structure of the Indentured Labor System

Interestingly enough, British Indian and Javanese indentured servants were subject to a dual hierarchy during their time in Suriname. The first hierarchy that new arrivals from British India and Java came into contact with was Suriname’s state-level administrative apparatus, which was intended to deal with all matters related to Asian indentured servants. Following an acclimation period, indentured servants were assigned to various agricultural estates where they came into contact with the plantation-level hierarchy responsible for facilitating production of agricultural commodities. Suriname’s state-level hierarchy tasked with administration of the colony’s indentured servant population, also known as the Immigration Department, was made up of several segments. As it turns out, Paramaribo’s Immigration Department primarily dealt with Suriname’s newly arrived immigrants, including administration of various items such as indenture contracts. Although the Immigration Department was able to focus solely on the welfare of Suriname’s new arrivals, their administration of immigrant matters frequently fell short of acceptable standards that generally governed maintenance of a large labor force.

For instance, Asian indentured laborers often failed to receive their registration certificates and were frequently denied access to a listing of the terms and conditions of their contracts because the Immigration Department did not have the foresight to request copies from recruitment agencies in British India and Java. Since laborers could not access their registration certificates or the terms and conditions, they experienced difficulties when they wanted to exercise some of their contractually-guaranteed rights or when they wished to check that their employers were living up to obligations delineated by contracts of indenture.\textsuperscript{188} As could be expected, Surinamese planters and other involved employers took advantage of the Immigration Department’s consistently poor administrative practices, as they badly wanted to keep labor costs

\textsuperscript{188} De Betovering, edited by Hoefte, 102-3 discusses practices that the Immigration Department engaged in while overseeing Asian immigrants
low in order to maximize historically significant agricultural profit margins that continued to finance the colony’s continued existence within South America’s fecund Caribbean coastline.

Despite difficulties in its overall administrative structure, Suriname’s Immigration Department asserted itself shortly after Asians’ arrival in Paramaribo via the presence of the Agent General, who served as the head of Suriname’s indentured servant importation efforts. Note that the Office of the Agent General had been founded to protect contractants against wanton abuses of power by plantation proprietors and others. The agent general, while fulfilling his duties as director of the Immigration Department, was usually the very first member of the Surinamese hierarchy that Asian immigrants laid their eyes on following arrival in Paramaribo. Moreover, the agent-general was responsible for receipt of various documents that dealt with Asians arriving on that particular vessel and usually conduced ship-wide inspections in the presence of a doctor or other qualified medical personnel. Once the medical examination concluded, the agent general was responsible for dividing immigrants among the various Surinamese estates that had requested an influx of labor, however, the agent-general could not separate families that migrated from Asia as a collective group, thus, migrant families were usually assigned to the same estate. The agent general was not only responsible for dealing with indentured servants upon arrival, he also bore responsibility for a rather vital series of continuing responsibilities that had to be fulfilled in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the new system of Asian contract labor, which entailed constant monitoring of plantations.

As such, the agent general’s main tasks were to assume direct responsibility for the continued supervision and control of Suriname’s new cadre of Asian contract laborers.

Supervision of the colony’s British Indian and Javanese population required the agent general to

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189 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 80 discusses information regarding the purpose behind the foundation of the Surinamese Agent General’s post
190 *De Betovering*, edited by Hoefte, 60 provides info. about prohibitions on separation of Asian immigrant families upon their arrival in Suriname.
maintain an awareness of the immigrants’ social life as well as complaints emanating from inhospitable working and living conditions on Suriname’s great plantations. In the interest of preserving labor peace, the agent general generally made an attempt to conduct unannounced visits of each plantation on an annual basis, and these surprise visits generally occurred on very short notice and in the absence of a predetermined itinerary. Visiting on short notice and without an itinerary was an attempt on the agent general’s part to keep agricultural proprietors from covering up the harsh working conditions that Asian contractants faced on a daily basis.\(^{191}\)

The agent general’s multifaceted responsibilities did not only include meeting new arrivals at the dock in Paramaribo and monitoring the working conditions that British Indians and Javanese were subject to on their agricultural estates but also several humanitarian concerns. The most prevalent humanitarian concern that the agent general involved himself with was the ongoing care of indentured servants’ earnings, which he undertook in order to prevent instances of financial fraud and undue loss of income; however, Suriname’s agent generals also concerned themselves with other important items. Essentially, the agent general ended up, in loco parentis, serving as an arbiter of various matters throughout Suriname as he was often required to act as a paternalistic adviser as far as the financial savings of Asian contract laborers were concerned. Furthermore, individuals who assumed the post of agent-general usually bore responsibility for the care of Surinamese orphans, who were often simply distributed to childless couples from the same ethnic group to ensure preservation of a stable nuclear family environment for the youth in question. Moreover, the agent general also served as an ad-hoc estate advisor as he was also responsible for the administration of deceased contract laborers’ personal estates as well as the conclusion of any outstanding personal affairs that required some external intervention.\(^{192}\)

\(^{191}\) De betovering edited by Hoefte, 102-3 discusses agent general obligations to protect indentured servants via unannounced estate inspections

\(^{192}\) Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 81, 84 details responsibilities that the agent general held to Asian contract laborers outside of his inspection tours
As it turns out, Suriname had three agent generals throughout its lengthy era of British Indian and Javanese indentured servitude, J.F.A. Cateau van Rosevelt, G.H. Barnet Lyon, and C. van Drimmelen, all of whom were very active in enforcing the indentured servants’ rights and were exceedingly well-liked by both British Indians and Javanese.\(^{193}\) As a matter of fact, J.F.A, Cateau van Rosevelt was so well-liked by the Asian indentured laborers that he earned the affectionate nickname “coolie-papa.” Furthermore, British Indians as well as Javanese fell into the habit of calling subsequent agent-generals “Rosevelt” as homage to J.F.A. Cateau van Rosevelt’s consistent pattern of benevolence toward his charges, which tended to antagonize the colony’s agricultural barons.\(^{194}\) Van Rosevelt became so widely known for his consistent efforts on the behalf of Suriname’s population of Asian contract laborers that he is still regarded as one of the best Surinamese administrators of all time and contemporary officials such as Consul Cohen insisted that Van Rosevelt’s “ability, impartiality and zeal cannot be overestimated.”\(^{195}\) Other officials, such as British Consul Annesley, made it abundantly clear that Van Rosevelt was certainly “an honest, hardworking and capable Gentleman who does all in his power to see that the immigrants are well treated.”\(^{196}\) Another British Consul, Consul Wyndham, also remarked, “the protection [of immigrants] could not be in better hands” as far as he was concerned.\(^{197}\)

Suriname contained a rather large number of estates and the agent general could not hope to administer them all directly from his office in Paramaribo. Thus Suriname’s Immigration Department made use of nine sub-agents called District Commissioners.\(^{198}\) As far as Suriname’s Immigration Department was concerned, the district commissioners had by far the most personal

\(^{193}\) Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 84 possesses an in-depth discussion of Suriname’s 3 Agent Generals and their status within the Asian community

\(^{194}\) Bubberman, \textit{Cateau van Rosevelt} provides a short biography of J.F.A. Cateau van Rosevelt. Kartick, \textit{James Crosby}, 3 notes that a very similar phenomenon occurred in British Guiana, where James Crosby, who served in a post similar to the Surinamese agent-general, attained such a high level of esteem among his vast collection of Asian constituents that “the immigrants referred to his office and even his successors by his name”.

\(^{195}\) PRO: FO 37, piece 560, Harris to De Willebois, 8 Jun. 1876 provides UK Consul Cohen’s comments. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 84

\(^{196}\) FO 97, piece 588, Consul to FO, 11 Jan. 1890 for Consul Annesley’s high opinion of Van Rosevelt. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 226

\(^{197}\) FO 97, piece 588, Consul to FO, 11 Jan. 1890 possesses all of British Consul Wyndham’s comments. Cited: Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 226

\(^{198}\) Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 87 clearly refers to the consistent employment of nine district commissioners throughout Suriname’s vast territory
contact with British Indian and Javanese indentured servants and served as executive officers in charge of administrative items and routine supervision of estates. District commissioners were obligated to inspect each plantation residing within their assigned areas on a monthly basis. While such obligations were intended to serve as a protective measure for Suriname’s Asian contract laborers, the Immigration Department’s district commissioners also had to serve as de facto district governors due to a relative paucity of qualified administrators within Suriname. Moreover, additional political obligations made it nearly impossible for district commissioners to fulfill their inspection responsibilities and other duties to the colony’s cadre of indentured servants. Furthermore, unquestioned impartiality was often difficult to achieve due to inherent conflicts of interest among the district commissioners’ many overlapping commitments. The relative paucity of employees within Suriname’s Immigration Department and the colony’s widely dispersed government officials forced District Commissioners to take on a rather impressive list of responsibilities that were vital to the central government in Paramaribo.

District commissioners were responsible for various administrative minutiae such as tax collection, compilation of statistical data for various purposes, registration of newborns and acknowledgment of deaths within their assigned territories, issuance of all summons required by complaints mandating a trial within district courts, and the implementation of sentences and punishments meted out by these regional courts. The cumulative weight of the aforementioned political and administrative duties rendered district commissioners incapable of carving out sufficient time to deal with immigrants and the issues that they faced on a daily basis. As opposed to the agent general, the District Commissioners’ rather lengthy list of administrative tasks made it hard for them to spend a significant time with Suriname’s Asian indentured

199 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 87 provides a discussion of district commissioners’ various responsibilities within the Immigration Department
200 Ibid
201 Ibid
servants, who soon came to view District Commissioners as their mortal enemies for a number of reasons, which sharply contrasted with their generally positive dealings with the agent general, who could almost always be relied upon to advocate for immigrants and their human rights.

One reason why British Indians and Javanese viewed District Commissioners as foes was because as employees of the government, District Commissioners usually investigated charges that indentured laborers had broken their contracts, advised the presiding judge during court sessions convened to deal with breach of contract cases, and meted out the court’s prescribed punishment. Another, more pertinent reason why British Indians and Javanese came to dislike Suriname’s District Commissioners was their seemingly endless fraternization with the colony’s landed elite. British Consul Annesley provided a rather scathing commentary on district commissioners’ frequent interactions with Suriname’s ruling class, including planters as well as their European overseers and plantation labor drivers via the following statement:

The District Commissaries are simply police officers, who act as Public Prosecutors. They are also supposed to act as Protector of Immigrants. In my humble opinion (and also in the opinion of many inhabitants of this colony) they are not in the least qualified for the position they occupy…. Their chief object seems to be to show their power… Yet when he visits an Estate on duty, he does not think it beneath his dignity to eat and drink with the Manager. If a Cooly makes a complaint, the manager and overseers, and perhaps a driver, are asked for their opinion in the case and then the Cooly is bullied and told that he lies. No trouble is taken to inquire into the complaint. If the Cooly asks for a pass to go to the Immigration Agent General or to the consul he is intimidated and the pass as a rule refused. If the Cooly leaves the Estate without a pass he is prosecuted. -Quotation on District Commissioners directly attributed to British Consul Annesley.

Clearly, Suriname’s newly arrived British Indian and Javanese indentured laborers had less than optimal relations with the government agents tasked with supervision of their welfare on the colony’s great agricultural estates. However, Asian laborers were also exposed to hierarchies on their respective plantations, and these power structures had a larger impact on laborer welfare.

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202 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 87-8 offers in-depth details regarding district commissioners’ role in judicial cases involving breach of contract. 203 PRO: FO 37, piece 642, Report on the General Condition of the Indian Immigrants in Surinam during the years 1880, 1881 and 1882. Cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 88, 226 when discussing British perceptions of the role that district commissioners played in Suriname’s governance.
The plantation hierarchy that British Indians and Javanese were subject to operated under a multilayered structure somewhat resembling that of the Immigration Department. Marienburg, an important estate within Suriname was organized according to a strict hierarchy and served as the general model for the colony’s other plantations, although there was considerable deviation. At Marienburg, the upper echelon of the plantation personnel hierarchy was composed of individuals such as the director, the administrative and financial agents, an accountant, the head overseers, the chef-de-fabrication, and the chief engineer. This particular cadre of individuals consistently formed a closed social group that was nearly impossible to break into from below.

Furthermore, employees such as subordinate engineers, junior overseers, assorted medical personnel and panboilers constituted Surinamese plantation society’s middle class while the lower class of the plantation personnel hierarchy was usually made up of individuals who worked as clerks, assistants and drivers, and the lower class of plantation employees were much closer to the Asian contract laborers than individuals residing in the middle or higher tiers of plantation employment. This group of plantation officials was responsible for the daily administration of Marienburg as well as other estates around the colony, and consisted of a rather diverse group of individuals, which reflected Suriname’s overall demographics of the period.

According to a staff personnel survey conducted by the NHM at Marienburg in 1918, Director Shedden, also known as massa Cheddi, was of English origin while the rest of Marienburg’s top tier employees were Dutch nationals. The middle group contained a German overseer, however, the other individuals residing in this particular subset of the plantation hierarchy were either Dutchmen or Creoles, and the Creoles were of both black and colored extraction. Blacks from British Guiana exclusively filled the lower-echelon post of panboiler and the senior nurse happened to be a Dutch national. Members of the plantation corps of

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204 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, page 95 possesses a discussion of the upper, middle and lower tiers within Surinamese plantation employment
paramedics were exclusively colored Creoles from Suriname. The greatest diversity was found in the skilled laborer class, which included Dutchmen as well as black and colored Creoles. Furthermore, Surinamese clerks throughout the early 20th century, particularly after 1920, were frequently of Javanese or British Indian origin and often lacked an agricultural background.\(^{205}\)

Interestingly enough, plantation hierarchies did not become the sole purview of European Surinamers; rather, the estates gradually came to be dominated by Suriname’s Creole population. Creole domination of the estates is especially interesting given that Paramaribo imported Asian indentured servants for the express purpose of replacing Creoles. There were several reasons why Creoles came to dominate Suriname’s colonial plantation hierarchy. However, the main contributing factor to Creole presence within plantation hierarchies was a paucity of available European nationals. Dutchmen who wished to pursue a career in the Netherlands’ immense array of colonial outposts tended to prefer the far more lucrative outposts in the Indonesian Archipelago to the apparent drudgery present in Suriname. Moreover, the chances of attaining any type of significant promotion were disastrously low in Suriname and daily obligations were as high as twelve hours during the eight-month-long agricultural season. As it turns out, the NHM had to incentivize placement into Surinamese posts by offering six months of paid leave once its employees had completed six full years of service in South America.\(^{206}\) The tendency for adventure-minded Dutchmen to emigrate to the Dutch East Indies rather than Suriname and the colony’s relative unpopularity within Holland contributed to a severe shortage of Dutchmen, which mandated the use of Creoles in plantation positions that would ordinarily be occupied by Europeans. Thus, as far as Marienburg was concerned, Europeans and Creoles occupied the fifty to sixty positions that were most important to the plantation’s financial success throughout the

\(^{205}\) See SSM, personnel list Marienburg, relevant years (1918-1920s) for results of the listed survey. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 95, 227

\(^{206}\) See SSM 14 Mb. 3 Jun. 1919, 684 for Dutch preferences for placement in Indonesia over Suriname and the incentive of six months’ paid leave. The NHM’s rationale was that employees would gain a newfound appreciation for Suriname’s tropical climate after re-familiarizing themselves with Holland’s cold/rainy climate. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 95, 227 when discussing careers available within Suriname
early 20th century. However, between 1928 and 1939, Creoles held roughly three-quarters of the aforementioned jobs. Marienburg possessed an average of 15 European employees during the aforementioned time period and European wives accounted for roughly 60% of this total, while around 8 European children resided of the plantation with their families at any given time.²⁰⁷

Given the close cooperation between Europeans and Creoles required to ensure smooth operation of estates such as Marienburg, it might be expected that the two groups had a civil working relationship at minimum, however, that was not the case. Dutch social conventions generally held that racial discrimination was virtually nonexistent within Suriname, yet complaints that Europeans treated non-white Surinamers in an unbecoming manner persisted.²⁰⁸

Ill-treatment of non-whites by Europeans was due to the fact that old scars from the days of slavery were still imprinted on the respective psyches of Europeans as well as Creoles, and often manifested themselves in unexpected ways. Estates like Marienburg were extremely isolated from Suriname’s population center in the Paramaribo area by virtue of the huge amounts of land needed for the cultivation of their agricultural commodities. Thus, the estates were individually responsible for entertaining their staffers. Interestingly enough, entertainment options on the estates were often responsible for internecine conflict, and tensions between Creoles and Europeans at Marienburg generally surfaced at the overseers’ social club, which served as the only source of officially sanctioned entertainment on the plantation for a long period of time.²⁰⁹

Consider that internecine conflict between Europeans and Creole Surinamers was often centered on Marienburg’s lawn tennis court, which served as an addendum to the preexisting overseers’ club and opened in 1918.²¹⁰ The lawn tennis court ultimately served as the primary source of

²⁰⁷ ARA, NHM annual reports, relevant years (1928-39) discuss some estate employee demographics. Cited: Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 95, 227
²⁰⁹ Ibid
²¹⁰ SSM 14 Mb. 19 Sept. 1919, 696; see also SSM 19 Mb. 31 Mar. 1924; 26 Mb. 12 Mar. 1931, 128; and 30 Mb. 29 Nov. 1935, 624 cite the grand opening of the Marienburg overseers’ club’s lawn tennis court, which was a place of restricted access. Cited: Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 96, 226
entertainment at Marienburg’s overseers’ club as plans for amenities such as a clubhouse, swimming pool, piano, and a regular schedule of parties never materialized despite numerous promises from upper management. Contemporary sources insist that Europeans and Creoles alike experienced considerable difficulties with the concept of sportsmanship and had difficulties coming to sporting terms with each other as far as the tennis court was concerned. For instance, in 1923, Marienburg overseer Dirk Hermans authored a letter in which he mentions that the wife of Doctor Wesenhage went so far as to get into a fistfight with Mrs. Welle, who was the spouse of the NHM agent at Marienburg, due to the fact that the latter adamantly refused to play lawn tennis with a Creole during a bout of unsporting and undoubtedly discriminatory behavior.

Suriname’s plantation hierarchy was not the exclusive purview of Europeans and Creoles as the colony’s estates relied heavily on a special group of people known as *mandurs*, or drivers. Marienburg’s upper management generally recruited its *mandurs* from its pre-existing cadre of Asian contract laborers and the main purpose for doing so was to attain a group of capable assistants for the plantation’s overseers. The number of *mandur* recruits was heavily dependent on the total acreage undergoing agricultural cultivation, however, Marienburg generally employed a maximum of forty Asian contract laborers as drivers. Daily tasks for the plantation’s *mandurs* included checking to make sure that each laborer attended to their tasks as well as recording workers’ wages in a little book, which was later submitted for routine verification. Unsurprisingly, *mandurs* were often trapped between their bosses, who saw them as mere extensions of the lowly British Indian and Javanese social class composed almost entirely of unskilled contract laborers, and their countrymen, who saw them as traitors who had defected to

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211 SSM 14 Mb. 19 Sept. 1919, 696; see also SSM 19 Mb. 31 Mar. 1924; 26 Mb. 12 Mar. 1931, 128; and 30 Mb. 29 Nov. 1935, 624 provide information about planned amenities for Marienburg’s overseers’ club that never materialized. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 96, 227
212 SSM, file not numbered, 9 Jan. 1923/31 Dec. 1923, contains an document titled “Letter, pl. Zoelen aan oom Nandy en tante Zize van neef Dirk. This letter contains information about the tennis-fueled fistfight between European women over behavior during a tennis match. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 96, 227 when discussing the tensions centered around various sporting activities at Marienburg’s overseers’ club
213 ARA, NHM 9473, Reisverslag Bierens de Haan, 13; SSM 14 Mb. 29 Nov. 1929, 987 cite *mandurs*. Cited: Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 89, 226
the Europeans’ side. Mandurs as well as overseers tended to be hugely unpopular among their constituents and were frequently accused of engaging in criminal activity such as thievery, blackmail and the perpetration of physical violence, yet, such sentiments were certainly not undeserved. In one particularly notable incident of fraud among Suriname’s mandurs, some contract laborers received sums of money exceeding the wages they had actually earned while engaged in plantation-centric occupations due to the fact that their supervisors had made a conscious decision to file erroneous wage reports that overcharged management for labor costs. Ultimately, a group of two overseers and four mandurs retrieved the excess wages from their workers for the express purpose of lining their pockets at the expense of plantation ownership.

Despite problems with the driver system on plantations within Suriname, including Marienburg, the mandurs were indispensable. The mandurs provided an indispensable link in the plantation hierarchy due to their high proficiency in various East Asian languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Javanese, and Malay. Management also put forth financial incentives such as admittance to higher pay grades and issuance of weekly credit at the plantation shop in order to persuade candidates to accept promotions while simultaneously maintaining mandur loyalty to the plantation hierarchy. Additionally, management wielded the power to demote mandurs back to the lowly rank of laborer, and the threat of a pay cut as well as vaporization of store credit often ensured driver loyalty. Ultimately, incentives to cooperate with Europeans were too much for even the most hardened mandurs to resist as it was very difficult to earn money in Suriname and the benefits of a higher pay rate in addition to freebies from the plantation shop were too much for selected British Indian and Javanese immigrants to turn down. As a result of

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214 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 89 offers a set of references to accusations of thievery, blackmail, assault and other crimes on the part of mandurs
215 SSM 5 Mb. 18 Jun. 1899, aan de DC Beneden Commewijne. Note that since this charge could not be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, the directors of the involved plantation ended up firing the two overseers, made the decision to expel two mandurs from the premises, and demoted the remaining mandurs to the rank of laborer. This information about mandur expulsion is provided in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 89-90, 226
216 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 91 for a dossier of information about Mandur linguistics and incentives tied to promotion from laborer to driver
mandurs’ loyalty to their superiors, they often served as willing informants for Suriname’s minority European population. Although mandurs generally occupied a social class nestled between the upper echelons of Suriname’s social hierarchy, such as the colony’s great sugar barons, and the lower class, which was generally made up of labor grunts, they essentially functioned as mere tools for the enforcement of ideas and discipline passed down from management. Representation of fellow Asian laborers’ rights was certainly not under the mandurs’ purview. As a whole, linguistic differences between northern European languages such as Dutch and English, and the languages spoken by Suriname’s contingent of British Indian and Javanese laborers, which included exotic dialects such as Hindi, Urdu, Javanese, Malay, and even Chinese were nearly insurmountable for a large proportion of Suriname’s population. Thus, it is certainly possible that the colony’s agricultural economy would have simply collapsed without the mandurs’ unique ability to readily act as translators for Europeans and Asians alike.

Socioeconomic Fabric of the New Plantation System: Cultural Perceptions and Interactions

The distinct Immigration Department and plantation hierarchies certainly affected British Indian and Javanese indentured servants’ work lives. However, as members of the lowest social class within Suriname’s plantation, Asian indentured servants spent the majority of their time interacting with coworkers. Thus, internecine relationships between Suriname’s four major ethnic groups while residing in situ on the colony’s plantation had the largest impact on British Indian and Javanese laborers’ South American experience. One of the more interesting aspects of Suriname’s colonial plantation society was that European Surinamers who were intimately involved with plantation operations made their preferences eminently clear as far as the labor force was concerned. As a general rule, European Surinamers usually favored Javanese contract

217 Ibid
laborers over their British Indian counterparts, while Asians benefited from perceptions that they were superior to Creoles as well as Afro-Surinamers. Members of the colony’s collection of plantation caretakers, as well as other employers, made liberal use of the old ‘divide and rule’ strategy and actively worked to split their labor force along ethnic and/or racial lines in order to reinforce pre-existing segmentation of the colony’s population of unskilled workers. Taken as a whole, the preferences and deliberate policy adjustments on the part of Suriname’s European population served to strengthen existing lines of demarcation within the colony’s labor force.218

Plantation policies were heavily based on European perceptions of themselves relative to Suriname’s other ethnic groups, namely Creoles, British Indians and Javanese. As a general rule, European Surinamers generally perceived themselves as superior to all of the colony’s other ethnic groups as far as cultural trappings and intellectual ability were concerned. Furthermore, Europeans also made conscious efforts to interfere with social interactions between Suriname’s other ethnic groups. Planters, along with high-ranking plantation employees, acquired the habit of describing their laborers in a contradictory manner, electing to extol the virtues of Asian indentured servants when it was convenient while disparaging their labor force when it was deemed appropriate to do so. The constantly alternating episodes of approval and disapproval of Asian contract laborers among European Surinamers created a significant amount of ideological confusion among the colony’s unskilled labor force, and this ideological confusion reinforced previously demarcated divisions between Creoles, British Indians, and Javanese.219 Europeans were fully aware of the consternation that their actions created and used tension between various ethnic groups to their advantage. Comments made by Marienburg’s plantation director certainly reveal the extent to which interracial tensions were fueled by Europeans’ tendency to discuss

218 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 94 provides a discussion of European Surinamers’ preference for Javanese contract laborers over British Indians and the preference for Asians over Creoles and Afro-Surinamers as well as divisions throughout the colony’s large contract laborer population.

219 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 104 offers a thorough discussion of European Surinamer perceptions of others and Asian ideological confusion.
race in broad terms. For instance, Europeans possessed a virtually unshakable belief that Javanese laborers were simply not capable of working under Creole supervisors due to the fact that the Javanese called Creoles ‘orang hitam’ (black people). Furthermore, Javanese generally thought that Suriname’s Creole population was an uncivilized subset of the population that lacked significant culture and traditions.\textsuperscript{220} Despite obvious tensions between Javanese contract laborers and Creole overseers, Marienburg’s staffers continued to assign Creole and Afro-Surinamer overseers responsibilities that included direct supervision of British Indian and Javanese contract laborers among other things.\textsuperscript{221} Marienburg’s decision to pair Javanese with Creole overseers directly benefited the plantation’s Europeans as fissures between Asians and Afro-Surinamese would ensure that the groups participated in internecine conflict, which would prevent any insurrections against established European authority on that particular property.

Creoles and Europeans worked together at the top of plantation hierarchies, however, Europeans maintained rather negative opinions of their fellow native Surinamers. Europeans tended to hold deep-seated beliefs that their black employees suffered from inadequate intellectual development. Furthermore, certain elements of Suriname’s European population strongly felt that Creoles as well as Afro-Surinamers possessed a rather high level of personal arrogance and that this particular racial characteristic prevented ‘improvement’ efforts from taking root.\textsuperscript{222} It is important to understand that European Surinamers’ negative perceptions of Creoles and Afro-Surinamers, while incredibly erroneous, had a rather deep history rooted in the colony’s bygone era of chattel slavery. At this particular juncture of Suriname’s sociocultural development, Europeans seem to have experienced great difficulty disassociating themselves with deep-seated beliefs about the supposed inferiority of Africans, which were used to justify

\textsuperscript{220} SSM 28 Mb. 31 Jul. 1933, 375 offers information about Javanese referring to Creoles as “orang hitam” and Javanese perceptions of Creoles as uncivilized and lacking significant cultural trappings such as a set of cultivated ethnic traditions. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 104, 228.

\textsuperscript{221} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 104 proffers information regarding Creole and Afro-Surinamer supervision of British Indian and Javanese laborers.

\textsuperscript{222} ARA, NHM, AA 1150-9186, 1919 provides a set of notes about ‘arrogance’ and ‘improvement’. Cited in Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 104, 229
the exploitation of millions of lives for short-term financial gain. Although Suriname had moved past employment of African slaves and was now employing significant numbers of contract laborers from Asia, the colony’s elite clung to some of the old social institutions that afforded them the ability to become one of the wealthiest classes of people in the entire world and relentlessly sought out any confirmation of their perceived superiority over other cultures.

To this end, several negative ideas about black and colored populations residing in the Western Hemisphere pervaded Suriname as well as other major agricultural colonies and the emergence of rather dubious nineteenth and early twentieth century ‘scientific’ literature extolling the fundamental differences between the world’s mélange of races had a significant impact on the colony’s landed elite.\textsuperscript{223} This so-called scientific literature may explain why Suriname’s planters as a group felt more closely connected to British Indian and Javanese contract laborers than the Creole and Afro-Surinamese population, which had cohabitated the colony with their European overlords since the early days of Dutch colonial settlement in South America. Some scholars have suggested that European Surinamers clearly favored Asian contract laborers, whether British Indian or Javanese, over Creoles and Afro-Surinamers due to the fact that Asians possessed physical features that reflected Euro-centric conceptions of how the ‘ideal’ person should look like whereas Africans bore little resemblance to individuals that originated from the Netherlands and other northern European polities.\textsuperscript{224} Since most Asians generally bore more of a resemblance to Europeans than Africans did, contemporary colonial observers tended to simply categorize all Hindostani and Javanese contract laborers as far more ‘civilized’ than either freedmen originating from Western Africa or Surinamese Creoles.\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{223} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 104 broaches a discussion about ‘scientific’ literature concerning differences in race during the 19th/20th centuries

\textsuperscript{224} Brereton, \textit{Foundation of Prejudice}, 24 for a set of notes about the Euro-centric ‘ideal person’ ideology that most European Surinamers favored

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid
European preferences of British Indian and Javanese contract laborers over the pre-existing Afro-Surinamese population did not preclude plantation management from utilizing divisions between the colony’s Hindostani, Javanese and Malay populations to their benefit. Fears of insurrections against European rule dating back to the days of slavery ran rampant through Suriname’s colonial psyche and the colony’s agricultural barons had to prevent the various ethnic groups that made up the new plantation labor force from coalescing into a single body based on common interests and complaints about working conditions on the great estates. One way that a large group with disparate interests coalesces into a relatively uniform body is through domination of a majority group, and while British Indians and Javanese laborers were simultaneously arriving in Suriname, European managers at plantations such as Marienburg made conscious attempts to ensure that their workforce had a roughly equal proportion of Hindostani and Javanese contract laborers. The dogged pursuit of demographic balance within plantation workforces was solely intended to prevent dominance by one particular ethnic group, and British Indians were of particular concern since Europeans strongly felt that the Hindostani were more likely to mount dangerous insurrections against the bourgeoisie than the Javanese.226

Another way that a large collection of people with divergent agendas can coalesce is through the efforts of strong, charismatic leaders, and British Indians as well as Javanese were more likely to respond to leaders that came from their own ethnic groups. Distribution of positions of authority among Suriname’s various ethnic groups was a popular tactic employed order to prevent the coalescence of a powerful group of Asian contract laborers under leaders emanating from their particular ethnic group. Thus, at Marienburg, plantation watchmen, who were in charge of security measures such as protecting the estate from intruders, also assumed

226 ARA, NHM, W 1142-9185, 1911; and Onze West, 18 Jul. 1903, no. 395. ARA, NHM 9473, Reisverslag Bierens de Haan, 5, mention the fact that most Javanese were residents of urban areas, thus they were not as good as the Hindostanis at agricultural labor. However, many Surinamers felt that the Hindostani population had to be limited due to the British Consul’s power. Manuscripts cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 105, 230
the responsibility of keeping Asian contract laborers on the premises. Since plantation owners and managers tasked their watchmen with sensitive items such as prevention of desertion by indentured servants, they had to maintain ethnic diversity within their cadre of employees. Maintenance of diversity was implemented to ensure that Javanese watchmen were able to control their British Indian co-workers and vice versa, thus preventing any agglomeration of Asian ethnic groups that could result in popular insurrections evocative of the various armed Maroon revolts that had terrorized Suriname’s entire plantation region throughout the past.227

**European Perceptions of the Javanese and Javanese Opinions of Other Ethnic Groups**

Suriname’s European population tended to fall victim to widely accepted racial and ethnic stereotypes, and their view of Asian indentured servants fell into this pattern. As far as Asian contract laborers were concerned, Suriname’s agricultural barons soon developed a clear tendency to favor Javanese employees over the British Indians. Planter tendencies to favor the Javanese stemmed not from their physical prowess, which was generally considered inferior to the Hindostani, but rather because Javanese workers exhibited a high degree of ‘docility’ and ‘orderliness’ and were often far more willing to sign new labor contracts than their British Indian counterparts.228 Interestingly, European preference for Javanese contract laborers over indentured servants hailing from British India stemmed not from any unique Javanese capability to perform a greater volume of work than British Indians, but the belief that the Javanese were far easier to control than their Hindostani brethren. The main rationale behind Suriname’s

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227 Onze West, 18 Jul. 1903, no. 395 clearly mentions that Javanese were more likely to be city dwellers and thus generally were inferior workers relative to Suriname’s Hindostanis. Although Hindostanis were considered to be vastly superior workers relative to the Javanese, their numbers had to be limited, otherwise, the British Consul and the Agent-General would likely meddle in the plantation’s affairs like in the preceding years. 228 ARA, NHM, Z 1144-9183, 1913; Indische Mercuur no. 19, 1895, and nos 12 and 42, 1900, as well as no. 16, 1908; SSM 4 Mb. 16 Aug. 1899, Bijl. 349, Mb. 5 Jun. 1893, 247, Mb. 26 ov. 1891 aan Gouverneur; Van Blankensteijn, Suriname, 50, 251; KV 1908, Bijl. M; Verkade-Cartier van Dissel, De Mogelijkheid van landbouwcolonisatie, 169; and Van Traa, Suriname 1900-1940, 41. The manuscript citations that note European Surinamer perceptions of Javanese laborers and that are related to this particular footnote can be found in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 103, 229
conscious decision to implement importation of contract workers from Asia was to replace the
permanently bound, cost-controllable labor force that the colony’s plantations lost access to
when The Hague decreed that all Afro-Surinamese slaves were to be emancipated in 1863.

Suriname’s plantation barons craved a high degree of control over their labor force and
commonly held stereotypes led them to believe that Javanese contract laborers offered them an
avenue through which they could recapture the ideal labor force of old. Conceptions of Javanese
as the ideal work force persisted since they were quite unlikely to resist orders and commonly re-
indentured, thus providing proprietors with more years of controllable, cost-effective labor,
which protected agricultural profit margins and enhanced estate revenues. Furthermore,
Suriname’s imported British Indians benefited from the presence of the British Consul in
Paramaribo, since this government official was a representative of the British Home Government
in London and thus could advocate for its citizens while they sought employment abroad. The
British Indians’ ability to petition their consulate upon receipt of unfair treatment at the hands of
their employers may have played a role in planter preference toward Javanese contract
 laborers. Note that the Javanese were Dutch subjects and lacked access to an external resource capable of
advocating for them, unlike the Hindostani, who could always consult with their official
consulate should they experience difficulties while working on plantations in Suriname.

As a matter of fact, Suriname’s stereotypical beliefs regarding the general character of
Javanese individuals did not form in a vacuum as they emanated from previously established
Dutch opinions of Indonesia’s population, which had served the Netherlands’ interests for quite
some time. As colonizers of Asian polities such as the Netherlands East Indies, the Dutch had
high levels of prior exposure to the Javanese and already thought of them as a group of people
inclined toward characteristics such as submissiveness, politeness, cleanliness, apathy, and a lack
of regard for their material future. Furthermore, Dutch Surinamers generally felt that Javanese laborers were far less ambitious than British Indians as far as monetary gain was concerned. Javanese individuals’ apparent disregard for financial concerns endeared them to Suriname’s wealthy agricultural barons due to the fact that a seemingly apathetic workforce that had no apparent designs on upward mobility was simply far less likely to make a fuss over the meager wages that agricultural workers generally received during this particular epoch of Surinamese colonial history. Furthermore, Suriname had gained a reputation as a decadent colony because its resident European population was notorious for leading an exceedingly opulent lifestyle filled with great levels of wealth and absurd expenditures on various luxurious items. The Javanese actually fit into Suriname’s existing cultural paradigm rather nicely as they certainly sought out luxury items such as high-end foods and expensive clothes. The Javanese were also notorious for their relentless pursuit of an abundant supply of high-grade opium, and often found the time to participate in lucrative activities that carried some risk, including but not limited to gambling.

Although Suriname’s Javanese laborers were notorious for their pursuit of a good time fuelled by drugs and gambling binges, contemporary sources remarked that they appeared to display extremely low energy levels and an unwillingness to work, and often found themselves accused of thievery and other petty crimes. Accusations of petty criminal activity and suspicions of apathy toward their contractual obligations cast a dark shadow over Suriname’s resident Javanese population and conspired to limit their effectiveness as far as quantity and quality of agricultural work was concerned, which undoubtedly annoyed planters throughout the

229 Ibid
230 Indische Mercuur no. 19, 1895, and nos 12 and 42, 1900, as well as no. 16, 1908; as well as Verkade-Cartier van Dissel, De Mogelijkheid van landbouwkolonisatie, 169; and Van Traa, Suriname 1900-1940, 41 offer information about Javanese contract laborers’ relentless pursuit of high-end luxury items and opium as well as their apparent proclivity for participation in gambling episodes of stunning duration while in Suriname.
231 Ibid
colony as they were already hard-pressed to achieve margins capable of funding economically viable agricultural enterprises and could not afford to experience declines in worker efficiency.

External perceptions of Javanese indentured laborers did not encompass the entirety of Indonesians’ experiences within Suriname as they formed a strong cultural identity as well as intractable opinions about the ethnic groups with which they interacted on a daily basis in the fields of the colony’s great agricultural estates. The Javanese generally saw themselves as a bongso luhur (elevated people) due to the superiority of their own language and adat (customs), which they considered vastly superior to the linguistic and cultural trappings of groups such as British Indians and Creoles.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, Javanese contract laborers acquired the rather nasty habit of discussing Creole Surinamers and Hindostanis in terms of moral characteristics associated with wajang kulit (figures present in Javanese shadow puppet play). The Javanese often associated Creoles with butta (monster) figures due to their perceived physical ugliness as well as their proclivity to engage in behavior that was coarse and rough, including but not limited to excessive lust in matters of love, tendency to anger quickly if provoked and desire for creature comforts such as an abundant supply of quality food and drink and other materialistic items.\textsuperscript{233}

The Creoles were not the only ethnic group that the Javanese considered inferior as British Indians were compared to rather undesirable aspects of Indonesian culture. The Javanese also compared their Hindostani co-workers to anuman (a tricky ape with god-like qualities) due to Indonesian perceptions that British Indians were inclined toward an insatiable greed for financial riches, had a proclivity for drunkenness and often engaged in behavior that could only be categorized as crude and cunning as well as untrustworthy.\textsuperscript{234} Javanese disregard for Creoles and British Indians was not unforeseen, as certain individuals within Suriname’s political

\textsuperscript{232} Suparlan, “Javanese in Surinam,” 95-117 discusses the Javanese self-perception as a bongso luhur due to their superior language and customs
\textsuperscript{233} Ibid
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid
hierarchy had forecast issues between new arrivals from Java and British India. As a matter of fact, certain elements of Surinamese society made significant attempts to undermine efforts to import Southeast Asian indentured laborers to South America prior to initial recruitment of contract laborers on Java and in other parts of Indonesia. Opposition to importation of Javanese laborers was mostly based on the perceived animosity between the so-called Hindu and Malay (Indonesian) races, and some individuals went so far as to predict a ‘colonial disaster’ of epic proportions resulting from financial losses as a direct result of episodes of sectarian conflict within Surinamese plantations’ increasingly diverse collection of Asian contract laborers.²³⁵

**European Attitudes Toward British Indians and British Indian Perceptions of Outsiders**

As one of the major cultural groups within Suriname’s indentured servant population, British Indians had a large impact on the overall success of Paramaribo’s plan to replace chattel slavery with a cadre of contract laborers. Suriname’s Javanese and British Indian laborers were consistently lumped together into the same economic class by virtue of their occupations and status as recent immigrants. However, as far as Suriname’s sociocultural fabric was concerned, perceptions of Hindostani contract laborers diverged greatly from most commonly held beliefs regarding the Javanese. For the most part, British Indians suffered from a relatively similar set of negative perceptions whether they chose to pursue employment in Suriname or elsewhere. Such negative perceptions were the result of contributing factors such as cultural mistrust, issues that resulted from communication barriers between various ethnic groups, and severe power imbalances dating back to the extent of planter control over chattel slaves during Suriname’s early colonial period, during which the colony prospered at the expense of enslaved Africans.

²³⁵ ARA, NHM, Q 1122-9184, 1891 lists references citing the aforementioned ‘colonial disaster’. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 104, 229
Outside of India, Hindostani laborers tended to occupy marginal economic and social positions due to the fact that they were constantly subjected to indignities stemming from their low wages, working conditions that closely mirrored those present during the era of chattel slavery, and their status as temporary residents of a foreign polity. Furthermore, British Indians’ unique culture, inclusive of their language, customs, and moral systems as well as their loyalty to the ‘heathen’ Hindi religion, also contributed to their placement into low social classes while pursuing employment outside of the friendly confines of the Indian Subcontinent. While flawed cultural perceptions certainly played a large part in the shunting of British Indians to the dregs of society whenever they pursued employment abroad, their social classification also resulted from power imbalances present in nearly every colony. As an expatriate population, Hindostanis generally had no way of asserting their influence as a collective group, thus foreign governments such as the Dutch outpost in Paramaribo and members of most colonial upper hierarchies, such as colonial Suriname’s immensely powerful cadre of absentee agricultural barons as well as their hand-picked employees experienced little to no resistance when they undertook malicious efforts to subjugate British Indian workers in the name of economic gain.

Note that the cultural trappings of British Indians, their suffering under slave-like conditions on Suriname’s great agricultural estates, and their relative lack of political efficacy do not offer an adequate explanation for why the Hindostani were generally disliked by the colony’s European populations. As a whole, most European Surinamers possessed the unfortunate tendency of questioning the moral character of individuals that did not belong to their particular ethnic group, and this moral interrogation was especially pernicious as far as British Indians were concerned. Contemporary observers of British Indian indentured servants, whether in Suriname or elsewhere, generally agreed that the Hindostani possessed an unparalleled work

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236 Brereton, Race Relations, and “Foundations of Prejudice”; La Guerre, “Afro-Indian Relations,” 49-51; and Look Lai, Indentured Labor, 255-6
ethic, although they could be somewhat careless while performing their tasks, and that they exhibited the desirable quality of personal thrift. Even though most British Indians were lauded for their work ethic and thriftiness, they were also categorized as being extremely prone to bouts of anger and violence, and some contemporary descriptions of Hindostanis state that they were ‘bloodthirsty,’ ‘querulous,’ ‘cantankerous,’ ‘exacting,’ ‘revengeful,’ and so thrifty that they would not hesitate ‘to kill somebody for a dime’ or eat dirt in order to save only a few cents.  Although British Indians’ extreme thriftiness could be looked down upon, it was certainly understandable given the fact that they received criminally low wages and liquid forms of money could be exceedingly difficult to acquire within Suriname and other far-flung colonial outposts.

Javanese contract laborers were often categorized as having little to no ambition for financial success or upward mobility by contemporary observers in colonial Suriname. On the other hand, British Indian indentured servants were afforded a modicum of respect by European Surinamers because most members of this ethnic group felt that Hindostanis were focused on attaining financial success and worked hard to make their goals a reality. Although aspirations for financial success and a strong work ethic should have endeared British Indian laborers to their overlords, Suriname’s agricultural proprietors saw the colony’s Hindostani population in a negative manner. All other things being held equal or constant, British Indians were the more dangerous ethnic group within Suriname’s contract labor population as they were far more likely to resist wage reductions or other cost-cutting measures on the plantations. Furthermore, in the eyes of Suriname’s agricultural barons, the ambitious nature of British Indians made them far more likely to participate in insurrections against authority than the Javanese. Thus, British Indians encountered a work environment that dramatically diverged from working conditions.

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237 Ibid. Also see Indische Mercuur, no. 53, 1892, 789; Indisch Genootschap, Immigratie en Kolonisatie, Verkade-Cartier van Dissel, De Mogelijkheid van Landbouwcolonisatie, 169, Karsten, De Britsch Indiers, 5 for a discussion of how most British Indians were perceived while they worked in Suriname where they generally toiled as part of the colony’s cadre of agricultural or industrial contract laborers on plantations.
that the Javanese experienced on a daily basis as estate staffers and proprietors considered them threats to Suriname’s high-margin agricultural productivity. Fear appears to have been the chief impetus behind European Surinamers’ tendency to harbor prejudices against British Indian laborers and may explain the overwhelmingly negative perceptions that constantly dogged the colony’s Hindostani population. Such racial prejudices and negative perceptions were expressed via outright hostility, general antipathy, mere indifference, barely-concealed mistrust and utilization of thinly veiled sarcasm as well as open public ridicule of Indians. Furthermore, a significant number of contemporary observers cite noteworthy episodes of violence involving Hindostanis, with a particular emphasis on crimes of passion, including the seemingly heathen practice of ‘chopping-up’ wives that dared to flout Hinduism’s sacrosanct cultural norms.238

Variance in the baseline cultures of Continental Europe and the Indian Subcontinent also possess a significant degree of relevance as far as European perceptions of Hindustani laborers within Suriname was concerned. Additionally, British Indians were also seen as very likely to plot against their plantations’ hierarchies and general work requirements, and these schemes represented potential roadblocks to maximal profitability for Suriname’s agricultural barons. Note that the threat of British Indian-led schemes intended to rob planters of opportunities to maximize their financial returns was not the only reason why they experienced a great deal of prejudice within South America. Most European Surinamers adhered to a strong Judeo-Christian moral framework, and British Indian contract laborers were often considered ‘immoral’ because their exotic cultural and religious practices did not adhere to the teachings of the aforementioned Abrahamic religions. Furthermore, members of Suriname’s powerful upper classes categorized Hindostani contract laborers as exceedingly cunning, and planters often protested British Indian workers’ perceived proclivity for resorting to simulated illnesses when they did not want to work

238 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 103 offers a thorough discussion of fear and its impact on contemporary perceptions of British Indian immigrants.
in the fields. Also, most contemporary observers were of the opinion that a large proportion of Suriname’s Hindostani population was “apt to mix so much that is false with what is true, that it required great patience to separate the truth from the falsehood.”

European Surinamers firmly believed that the colony’s British Indians were apparently masters of subterfuge and the art of telling partial truths and concealing pertinent information instead of telling outright lies. Thus, Hindostanis represented more of a management challenge than the Javanese, who seemed more concerned with securing luxury goods and enjoying private gambling sessions than hatching plots intended to derive material benefits at the expense of the colony’s agricultural proprietors.

One impact of these European beliefs was that perceptions of British Indian laborers’ quality declined shortly after immigration from the Indian Subcontinent commenced. Planters believed they were difficult to manage and did not provide sufficient labor benefits to counteract the additional management difficulties that they had to deal with on a daily basis. To this end, staff members associated with estates such as the NHM’s central agricultural concern at Marienburg opined that the overall quality of British Indian laborers available for work on Suriname’s great agricultural estates had deteriorated over a period of several years and that an increasing amount of new immigrants were simply too sickly for heavy labor and/or did not possess the requisite qualifications for the kind of work required to maintain the functionality of large agricultural enterprises such as plantations.

Negative perceptions that British Indian emigrants repeatedly faced while working within Suriname undoubtedly filtered back to the Indian Subcontinent through channels such as the British Consul in Paramaribo and ex-laborers who successfully repatriated from South America to Calcutta. European Surinamers’ overly negative opinions about British Indians as a whole produced a growing tide of resistance to

239 Jenkins, *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs*, 91 for a thorough discussion of the negative cultural and social perceptions that Hindustanis often had to confront while seeking gainful agricultural employment within Suriname as a result of tension with the colony’s other ethnicities.

240 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 103 engenders the genesis of a discussion regarding management’s sentiments toward their Hindostani laborers.
emigration under the auspices of formal long-term labor contracts within India, which was still ruled by the colonial government of the British Raj. Such opposition to Hindostani indentured servitude in foreign colonies merely complicated an already difficult recruitment process, which my very well explain the declining quality of migrants traveling from Calcutta to Paramaribo.\textsuperscript{241}

Negative opinions of other ethnic groups within colonial Suriname were not the sole purview of European Surinamer opinions of Hindostani indentured servants, as British Indians were certainly guilty of harboring negative opinions about external ethnic groups. Of particular importance were British Indian opinions on their Javanese coworkers, and the general Hindostani stereotype of Javanese was that Javanese contract laborers were \textit{malahi}, which loosely translates to “idiots.” Moreover, a significant proportion of British Indians exuded a sense of superiority to their Indonesian co-workers due to the fact that Hindostanis could easily gain access to the British Consulate and assert rights that London’s diplomatic presence within Suriname afforded British citizens, whereas the Javanese, as Dutch subjects, were wholly at the mercy of the Dutch colonial government in Paramaribo and could not appeal to foreign powers for assistance.\textsuperscript{242}

The presence of British government officials within the Surinamese capital was no accident as the agreement between Theodorus Roest van Limburg, the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, and Edward Harris, Britain’s minister plenipotentiary to the Dutch Monarch, mandated it.\textsuperscript{243} Article XIX of the agreement between Theodorus Roest van Limburg and Edward Harris stated that all immigrants originating from the geographic confines of British India “shall, in the manner as other subjects of the British Crown, and conformable to the ordinary rules of international law, enjoy in the Netherland Colony, the right of claiming the assistance of the British Consular Agent and no obstacle shall be posed to the labourer’s resorting to the Consular

\begin{footnotes}
\item[241] Ibid
\item[243] Adhin, \textit{Immigratie van Hindostanen}. The final diplomatic agreement between London and The Hague was formally ratified on 17 Feb. 1872.
\end{footnotes}
Agent and communicating with him” for any reason that could be pertinent to employment on Suriname’s great agricultural estates.\textsuperscript{244} Suriname’s Hindostani population as a whole were full-blown British subjects until 1927, and enjoyed protections afforded them under international law such as the presence of a strong government official associated to the government of their home country during the duration of their presence within South America’s remote Guyana Shield.\textsuperscript{245}

Interestingly enough, Britain placed a great deal of emphasis on the welfare of its citizens in Suriname and the British Consulate in Paramaribo actively protected British Indian interests throughout the colony in a consistent manner. As one might expect, Paramaribo was rather displeased by the British Consulate’s mere presence as well as the amount of power that various Consuls managed to accumulate over an extended period of time. As a matter of fact, London’s Consuls struck fear into the hearts of Suriname’s great agricultural barons as well as the colonial government, which was responsible for representing Dutch interests. Consul Cohen was the official representative of the British home government during the initial wave of contract laborer arrivals from India, and he openly criticized the conditions that Indian immigrants had been subjected to during their voyage and went so far as to halt all migration from British India to Suriname. As a matter of fact, Suriname’s governor remarked that Cohen had “too much time on his hands and is too concerned with details” relating to Suriname’s recruitment of Hindostani contract laborers.\textsuperscript{246} Once migration resumed, Cohen maintained his vigilance and constantly made suggestions that he felt could improve the process of importing contract laborers from British India to the Dutch Caribbean.\textsuperscript{247} Representatives of the British Crown, including the consul in Paramaribo clearly had the power to interfere in Suriname’s internal affairs and were unabashed to do so in order to protect their subjects, as evidenced by Consul Cohen’s decision to

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid
\textsuperscript{245} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 80 makes clear references to Hindostanis maintaining their coveted status as British subjects until the year 1927
\textsuperscript{246} ARA, KG no. 70, 1873 holds this quote about Consul Cohen’s vigilance on behalf of Hindostanis. Cited: Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 86, 226
\textsuperscript{247} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 86 provides an in-depth description of Consul Cohen’s bold actions while on duty, which embittered Paramaribo
stop migration from British India altogether due to unsatisfactory conditions in South America. Antagonism on the part of the British Consul continued beyond Consul Cohen’s tour of duty in Paramaribo. George Annesley, who succeeded Consul Cohen as London’s formal diplomatic representative to Paramaribo, had absolutely zero confidence in Suriname’s Dutch colonial authorities and the colony’s general population as far as their ability to implement acceptable treatment of newly-acquired Hindostani contractants within their places of employment.  

Consul Annesley experienced considerable difficulties during his term of office in Paramaribo, and such difficulties were often the direct result of planters’ refusal to cooperate with the stipulations set out by the treaty between Britain and the Netherlands for fear of being caught violating its terms. As such, Consul Annesley concluded that his responsibilities mirrored those of a full-time detective rather than those of an official foreign diplomatic detachment. He constantly faced fears of being misled by “these mealy-mouthed people here who are always ready to vanish over any short-comings I may find out.”  

Annesley later lodged an complaint about the Surinamese authorities’ consistent uncooperativeness and secretiveness, and noted that the colony’s governor declined to respond to multiple requests for contract laborers’ wage sheets, which would demonstrate the precise tasks performed by British Indians on various agricultural estates as well as their compensation for said labor. Obfuscation of such information on the part of the Dutch authorities was likely due to the fact that Suriname’s planters protected their profit margins above all other concerns and were willing to run the risk of punishment in order to propagate economic success. Even though planters risked punishment by mistreating their laborers, they managed to conceal such actions through other methods of social control.

\[^{248}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{249}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{250}\text{PRO: FO 37, piece 642, Confidential Report from Consul to Foreign Office, 20 Feb. 1883, and Consul to Foreign Office, 21 Jul. 1883. Some strong rumors that importation of contract laborers from India to Suriname would be halted because Consul Annesley had lodged several formal complaints about the way Hindostanis were treated in Dutch Guiana started swirling in 1884 (SSM 2 Pbo 3 Jan. 1884, 7 immi). Furthermore, the authorities were terrified of a rapid increase in British diplomatic influence within Dutch Suriname. Cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 86, 226.}\]
Annesley actually claimed that the majority of Hindostani contract laborers, except those who were fortunate enough to work in close proximity to Paramaribo, could not make appointments to visit with him without punishment and that he was “not allowed to go to the Estates, much less examine the books of the planters or the tasks of the Coolies” for improprieties such as abuses of contract terms dictating indentured servant benefits and wage theft by planters and managers.\textsuperscript{251}

When British Consuls managed to take inspection tours of Suriname, they frequently had to deal with obstacles engendered by planters who were seemingly always aware of impeding inspections. Annesley gives an account of one such inspection tour, undertaken with Suriname’s Immigration Agent General and Medical Inspector when he states “I could not find much cause to complain, everything having been, as I afterwards learnt, prepared for our visit. The hospitals were ‘fixed’ up, the bedding was clean, some of which in fact had the appearance of being little used. The huts of the Coolies were as a rule in good order. Of the Immigrants themselves we however saw very little, as they were carefully kept out of sight” in order to avoid scandals should the Consul observe less than ideal working conditions while conducting his inspections.\textsuperscript{252} Efforts to obfuscate the true nature of working conditions on Suriname’s plantations experienced a great degree of initial success as the British Consuls, for a time, were sufficiently duped by actions undertaken by plantation staffers. Consul Annesley mentions that he “labored under the impression that the Immigrants in this colony were on the whole well off…. I gradually became more and more aware of the true state of affairs, until at last I lost confidence in everybody.”\textsuperscript{253} Once Suriname’s successive British Consuls became aware of intentional duplicity on the part of the colony’s agricultural barons, they undertook rigorous inspections of working conditions and advocated for their charges, thus contributing greatly to

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid
British Hindostani perceptions of their superiority over Javanese and Creole co-workers. The fact of the matter is that Hindostanis did benefit from protections that other Asians did not enjoy, thus they had a greater sense of security than their counterparts from the Indonesian Archipelago.

British Indians considered themselves superior to the Javanese. However, Hindostani relations with Suriname’s Creoles quickly took on a rather negative tone. As the two ethnic groups gained exposure to each other in the fields of Suriname’s great agricultural estates, most British Indian contract laborers started to categorize their Creole co-workers as uncivilized and lazy as well as excessively pretentious and prone to putting on airs. Suriname’s Hindostani laborers strongly believed that Afro-Surinamese Creoles’ perceived tendency to engage in uncivilized behavior and sloth as well as their apparent insistence on engaging in pretentious behavior had driven the colony’s once-prosperous agricultural economy into a destitute state. Since British Indians felt that the pre-existing population of Afro-Surinamese Creole laborers had nearly ruined Suriname, Hindostanis felt that their arrival from Asia had clearly saved the colony from certain financial ruin.

Interestingly enough, Hindostani feelings of superiority over Suriname’s Javanese population quickly carried over to the colony’s Creole population.

British Indians saw themselves as members of an exalted state in India and believed that they were the only source of economic success in Suriname as Creoles had been unable to keep the colony’s economic growth on track by themselves. Cultural tensions between British Indians and Creoles were not limited to perceptions of economic superiority. Contemporary observers generally agreed that most Hindostani contract laborers were rather unsettled by the physical appearance of Creoles as well as pure Afro-Surinamers. To this end, the fact that Creoles and Afro-Surinamers possessed features such as kinky hair and extremely dark (black) complexions,

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254 Brereton, *Race Relations*, 188, and *The Foundation of Prejudice*, 24; Speckmann, *Marriage and Kinship*, 36 offer a thorough discussion of Hindostanis’ pre-existing biases against Afro-Caribbean people, whether in Suriname or within Crown colonies such as Trinidad and Jamaica.
which were associated with impure virtues such as ungodliness and pollution in Hindi culture, formed the basis of British Indians’ negative perceptions of that particular cultural group. Interestingly enough, Hindostanis acquired negative perceptions of individuals of African descent prior to migration from Asia to South America, and these pre-existing prejudices were likely the result of long-standing British biases against Africans deriving from slavery.²⁵⁵ Note that Hindostani individuals would have come into contact with British beliefs regarding Africans due to the fact that the British Raj governed the Indian Subcontinent during this time period. Thus, it is entirely plausible that Hindostani laborers’ pre-existing bias against Creole people due to the fact that they received significant levels of exposure to anti-African sentiments from individuals that had resided in the British Crown colony of Jamaica.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, it is very likely that Hindostanis transferred Hinduism’s notions of caste superiority from India to the Caribbean and applied this particular social organization method to the region’s Afro-Caribbean population. Therefore, Suriname’s pre-existing racially charged environment encouraged British Indians to pass judgment on the culture and moral systems of their African counterparts and amended their worldview to include Afro-Caribbean individuals in Hinduism’s lowest castes.²⁵⁷

**Attitudes and Perceptions of Suriname’s Creole Population Following Asian Importation**

As a general rule, European Surinamers, particularly the Dutch, clearly preferred Asian contract laborers to the colony’s pre-existing Creole population due to issues of control as well as popular beliefs that the Asians were more likely to submit to the desires of their overseers. Preference for the Asians over individuals of Afro-Surinamese heritage was certainly not lost on Suriname’s Creoles, who were more than aware of their place within the colony’s hierarchy of

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*
²⁵⁶ Ehrlich, “Race and Ethnic Identity,” 21 and “East Indian Integration,” 130 discuss Hindostanis’ prior exposure to anti-African bias in Jamaica
²⁵⁷ Look Lai, *Indentured Labor*, 255 argues that Hindostanis readily applied the Hindu worldview on their new surroundings, including Africans
ethnic groups. Many Creoles served as overseers, which presented plantation managers with a difficult situation requiring delicate navigation since most “coolies only want[ed] to work under white overseers.” Furthermore, Creole overseers repeatedly lodged complaints stating that they were mistreated and that they received a disproportionate share of criticism regarding their ability to fulfill the duties required by their particular employment assignments. Also, most plantation managers’ tendency to distrust their Creole employees is evidenced by the following remark that Suriname’s Creole population was interspersed with “people who for years can do a satisfying job and then unexpectedly become dishonest.” Suspicions of dishonesty on the part of Creoles by Suriname’s European ruling class placed Afro-Surinamese individuals in a rather precarious position as they were lumped in with British Indians as far as moral character was concerned, which subordinated them to the colony’s Javanese population. Subordination to Suriname’s new arrivals was not well received by Creoles at all since they felt that as some of the colony’s original inhabitants, Afro-Surinamese held a greater claim to the colony’s success.

The Creoles were decidedly unenthusiastic about Paramaribo’s plan to staff Suriname’s plantation with contract laborers imported from Asia due to the fact that importation of British Indians and Javanese indentured servants harped on xenophobic fears harbored by a large number of Afro-Surinamese, increased competition for agricultural jobs and produced an undesirable decline in wages (from the Creole perspective). As a whole, Surinamese Creoles followed the lead of Creole populations in British Guiana and Trinidad in claiming that they were the original builders of all of Dutch Guiana’s estates, thus they were responsible for a large proportion of the colony’s financial success. Since Creoles and Afro-Surinamese individuals

258 SSM 16 Mb. 4 Jan. 1920, 708; see also SSM 8 Mb. 11 Dec. 1916, 643; and 16 Mb. 28 Apr. 1920, 713 for a discussion of Asian preference to work under European overseers. Furthermore, plantation Zoelen’s upper management fired an Afro-Surinamese overseer because “he did not exercise any authority over the Javanese and because a woman had hit him after he had scolded her.” See Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 99, 228
259 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 99 provides information about Creole complaints related to mistreatment and undeserved instances of criticism.
260 SSM 16 Mb. 31 Mar. 1921, 728 possesses a transcription of this quote about Creole Surinamers. Cited in Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 99, 228
claimed responsibility for engineering the vast influx of wealth that occurred during Suriname’s early colonial period, they argued that they possessed undisputed primacy over the new arrivals from Asia as far as distribution of the colony’s vast reserve of financial wealth was concerned.  

Conflict over who deserved to derive the most benefit from the contract labor system quickly arose and it soon became clear that lines of demarcation had arisen between Suriname’s Creole and Asian population, inclusive of both British Indians and Javanese. Interestingly enough, these internecine divisions were driven partly by cultural barriers between people of African heritage and individuals originating from British India. Asian contract laborers and ex-slaves of Afro-Surinamese descent possessed comparable degrees of mutual contempt toward one another and developed stereotypical views that were used to judge members of the rival ethnic group. As a whole, Creoles looked down upon Suriname’s Asian population due to the fact that Afro-Surinamese individuals felt that the colony’s new cadre of immigrants were interlopers. Furthermore, irrevocable cultural barriers between Creoles and Asians contributed to internecine tension between the two ethnic groups as Creoles failed to gain an appreciation for the lifestyle that Asian immigrants chose to adhere to while working on Surinamese plantations. Note that the Creoles frequently took advantage of opportunities to denigrate Asians, particularly Hindostani contract laborers, by hurling verbal insults that revolved around the derogatory term ‘coolie.’ Most Asian immigrants felt that the term ‘coolie’ was degrading because it ostensibly referred to their status as bound laborers who essentially lived in poor conditions resembling those of chattel slavery for the duration of their contracts, which often ran for about five years.  

British Indians were not the only ethnic group that suffered under the unerring contempt of Suriname’s Creoles, as Javanese contract laborers also suffered under a hail of insults and

261 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 102 provides a discussion of initial Creole resistance to Asian immigration as well as assertion of ‘first rights’

262 Ibid
derogatory nicknames. Suriname’s Creoles commonly used Sranan Tongo terms such as ‘lau-lau Japanese’ (idiot Javanese) and ‘saka-saka Japanese’ (inferior Javanese) while referring to their Indonesian co-workers. Also, the Sranan Tongo phrase ‘Kan, sang ju sabi ju kong dja nanga karta na ju neckie,’ which roughly translates to ‘Man, you don’t know anything, you came here with a card around your neck,’ was often utilized by Afro-Surinamese Creoles when they wanted to remind Javanese individuals of the fact that they owed their presence in South America to Paramaribo’s unilateral decision to implement importation of indentured servants from Asia for the express purpose of keeping the colony’s great estates from descending into financial chaos.

**Initial Impressions: Internecine Conflict Following Integration of Asian Contract Laborers**

Given that British Indians, Javanese, Creoles, Afro-Surinamese and Europeans started interacting on Suriname’s agricultural estates shortly after Asians started arriving as part of the program to import indentured systems in order to resuscitate Suriname’s agricultural labor force, episodes of internecine conflict were to be expected as each group needed time to acclimate to the colony’s new mix of ethnic groups. As a whole, Suriname’s plantations were ground zero for conflict between members of ethnic group as large numbers of individuals from different backgrounds frequently came into contact with minimal or no supervision. As an indentured servant, Munshi Khan was party to several inter-ethnic conflicts during his time working Suriname’s plantations. One particular incident stands out to Khan, and he recalls the events as follows: A particular Javanese indentured servant “who had done the measuring work, had gone home for lunch at noon and returned at about 2 p.m. At that time, Manager Warner was on his way home for his meal when they both met. I saw them exchange words in a heated manner and

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264 Ibid
sensed some punches were to follow. I quickly hid myself behind a tree trunk and told the Javanese who was with me to hide in the drain so we would not be witnesses to this incident.”

Khan’s premonitions of violence between the Javanese plantation grunt and Manager Warner soon came true as the two clearly had a score to settle. Khan seems to have been on the side of the Javanese in this incident and recalls how “I knew that the manager was at fault and my presence would prevent the Javanese to beat him and if he did so, I would have to pay witness in court to protect the manager against the Javanese. I had good reasons to avoid this unpleasant task as nobody (neither Hindustanis nor Javanese) liked the manager,” and both parties would not be sorry to see the manager suffer under a hail of well-deserved pugilistic activity. The wishes of the plantation’s Asian population were soon realized as “seeing no one near, in particular not me, the Javanese got hold of the manager and threw him on the ground. He then kicked him and gave him some blows that made the manager bleed from the face.”

The Javanese laborer’s decision to beat up his manager for failing to respect Asian rights was significant for two reasons. First, Munshi Khan’s support for the Javanese indicates that in the early days of indentured servitude, Hindostani and Javanese felt more closely aligned to each other than with any other ethnic group within Suriname as a result of their shared Asian origins and their common suffering under the bonds of their contracts. Secondly, historical precedent within Suriname clearly indicates that the most common punishment awaiting a laborer that decided to beat down one of his superiors was death as many slaves had suffered that very fate following insurrections against tyrannical superiors. However, Asian indentured servitude had ushered in a new era for the colony and laborers now had some legal protections against their bosses. To this end, Munshi Khan recalled that if a contract “laborer would not return to work in

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265 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 152 contains the relevant section of information on Suriname at that point in time.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid.
time, the manager was at liberty to deduct money from his payment accordingly. The Javanese was on a contract of 12 annas per day and if he worked less than the contract stipulated for 3 consecutive days, the manager was allowed to sue the laborer and he would be sent to jail. A manager was not entitled to do anything more than that as far as I know.”^268 As far as unskilled workers were concerned, a short spell in the county lockup represented a far superior outcome than losing one’s life to the auspices of an unethical boss, thus Asian Surinamers had more ability to assert their contractually guaranteed personal rights than Afro-Surinamese slaves.

Interestingly enough, Manager Warner was at the epicenter of another violent incident that underscored early tensions between Suriname’s pre-existing population and the colony’s new British Indian and Javanese contract laborers. According to Munshi Khan, when Manager Warner “had come to Skerpi, it had been dry season. By that time, he had already lost his first finger of his right hand. This had happened when he had been working as a skreeman on the Constancia plantation. A contract worker named Alopi Singh had chopped off his finger. Reason was the manager’s irksome and rough behavior.”^269 Under Suriname’s system of chattel slavery, managers’ and overseers’ crude behavior toward Afro-Surinamese slaves frequently went unpunished as slaves had no way to retaliate as they would lose their lives if they dared lift a finger against an European Surinamer. However, Suriname’s Asian contract laborers were not subject to such repercussions thanks to protections afforded them by the labor contracts and the British Consul in Paramaribo. According to Khan, “One day in plantation Constancia Alopi Singh and Warner had a tussle over work. Warner Sahab had pointed his index finger to Alopi and threatened him with dire consequences and said ‘Luku bung boi, mi go sori yu.’ The

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268 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 153 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
269 Ibid
Kshatriya had then lost his temper as he did not like to be treated this way by a dogla. As frequently happens when men lose their temper, a physical confrontation between Warner Sahab and this particular Kshatriya soon followed. The Kshatriya “was a wrestler and had no difficulty in overpowering Warner. He then snatched the chopper [machete] from Warner’s hands and cut off his index finger saying: ‘From now onwards you shall not point this ‘look you finger’ at anyone’…Warner Sahab was sent to the hospital. After Warner left the hospital, the court decided to put Alopi Singh in jail for 9 months, while Warner was ousted as manager of Skerpi and forced to leave the plantation altogether due to unnecessary violence against workers.

Interestingly enough, Suriname’s legal apparatus conferred punishment onto a European overseer as well as a Hindustani contract laborer for committing battery against each other. Ordinarily, Suriname’s historical precedent would dictate the immediate execution of a laborer who dared to mutilate an overseer, as that was the accepted practice during the colony’s era of chattel slavery. However, as previously mentioned, indentured servants’ contracts and the presence of the British Consul in Paramaribo made execution of Asians guilty of minor crimes unlikely, so the colony’s legal system had to adjust accordingly, which it did by implementing punishments for plantation staffers guilty of crass conduct toward Asian contract laborers. Furthermore, any laborer guilty of crimes against his or her plantation hierarchy would ordinarily become a pariah as they would be unwanted by the vast majority of estate owners, who merely wanted to reap agricultural profits with minimum amounts of difficulty. Alopi Singh was nearly demoted to pariah status, however, Suriname’s cadre of Asian contract laborers managed to intervene on his behalf. “When Alopi Singh finished his term in jail, the owner of plantation Constancia refused to take him back, and since he was still under contract, he was, as the rules

Ibid
Ibid
confirm, sent to the Agent-General of the Immigration Department. The Bara Sahab would then decide where he could complete his contract work. He tried various plantations but no plantation owner accepted Alopi Singh.”

Plantation owners’ refusal to absorb Alopi Singh into their cadre of contract laborers was certainly understandable as they were undoubtedly wary of his baggage and afraid that a similar act might occur on their estate, which would undermine their ability to extract profits from Suriname’s fertile tropical soil. However, Alopi Singh had allies within the colony’s Hindostani population and those allies made sure that he was not left out to dry. One of Alopi Singh’s allies turned out to be none other than Munshi Khan himself, and Khan took the time to discuss the matter with the owner of his estate, which needed laborers.

After deliberations over whether or not Alopi Singh represented a good fit for the plantation as a whole, ownership approved Khan’s request to invite him to work in the fields of that particular estate. When taken into context, Alopi Singh’s second chance at gainful employment within Suriname represented a significant departure from the colony’s historical practices, which frequently gave unskilled laborers no room for error in their interactions with superiors. However, note that this shift in Suriname’s general methodology of dealing with laborers possessing checkered pasts is certainly representative of the transformations that Asian indentured servants helped initiate within South America’s northern coast. Ultimately, Suriname changed dramatically following importation of Asians, and these alterations made the colony a better place to live as well as chase dreams of making a large fortune in large-scale agriculture.

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272 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 153-4 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time.

273 Munshi Rahman Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 154 possesses very detailed information about Alopi Singh’s re-hire.
Chapter 4
A Day in the Life of an Asian Indentured Servant: Daily Tasks and Responsibilities

Even though considerable degrees of internecine conflict existed between Suriname’s Hindostani, Javanese and Creole populations, they all shared similar working conditions and toiled under the same group of overseers. Furthermore, British Indians and Javanese were paid in similar manners, and such payments were often manipulated to keep outlays from plantation treasuries to a minimum. The vast majority of contracts signed by Asian immigrants to Suriname dictated that the associated signees could be paid according to two distinct compensation schemes. One of the payment options available to plantation owners and managers was the day system, which compensated workers according to a fixed daily rate. Although some estates chose to adopt the day-rate system, most plantations elected to follow a compensation system that paid workers according to the number of tasks that they managed to carry out. As a general rule, laborers were paid after they had completed their assigned tasks, and a task was defined as an assignment that the average Asian laborer could reasonably complete within seven hours of fieldwork or throughout a 10-hour shift in a plantation factory, both of which constituted an full work-day for all intents and purposes. The task system was theoretically equal to the day-rate system since Asian contract laborers would hypothetically receive the same amount of gross wages regardless of the financial compensation scheme that their superiors elected to adhere to.

Even though the daily wage and task systems maintained theoretical equality as far as the money earned by contract laborers, the task system was far more vulnerable to manipulation and Suriname’s agricultural barons certainly took advantage of opportunities to extract the maximum possible amount of labor per monetary unit. To this end, British Indian and Javanese contract laborers insisted that their managers and overseers intentionally assigned tasks were exceedingly

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274 SSM 7 Mb. 18 Feb. 1909, 520 notes the day-rate and task-centric methods for paying Asian laborers. Cited: Hoenie, In Place of Slavery, 114
difficult to complete within the confines of a full workday. Most Surinamese power brokers consistently manipulated the task system because such dastardly practices precluded Asian contract laborers from earning the guaranteed wage amounts stipulated by contracts signed in India and Java. Moreover, Dutch colonial authorities in Paramaribo, plantation proprietors, and Asian laborers used vastly different definitions of the average worker and average performance while on the job, which were the baseline metrics that determined most wage calculations. Variations in these baseline metrics could heavily influence individual workers’ compensation for each individual pay period as well as the total amount of liquid funds spent on labor costs, thus the aforementioned interest groups relentlessly pursued agendas centered on adoption of average compensation metrics that had the potential to align with their particular set of interests.

Munshi Khan, by virtue of his long-term employment in Suriname’s agricultural industry, provides a fascinating window through which daily work conditions and upward mobility through plantation hierarchies on the part of Asian indentured servants can be examined. Daily work conditions are of the foremost importance in judging the overall experience of British Indians and Javanese contract laborers in Suriname and Khan details such conditions starting with his very first day on a Surinamese plantation. “By manager’s order, the night guard woke us up at four in the morning to cook our meals and get ready for work. We were to report for work at 6 a.m. We hurriedly cooked whatever we were able to, ate some of the food and kept some rice in our saucepans for lunch. We picked up our choppers [machetes] and tiffin and walked off with the sardar when the bell rang.” As an educated man in British India who filled the post of schoolmaster in his native country, Munshi Khan, like many of his fellow contract laborers, was not accustomed to the intensive labor required to propagate a successful

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275 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 114-5 offers a discussion of the task compensation system and its importance in determining workers’ wages.
276 Ibid
large-scale agricultural enterprise.\textsuperscript{278} This overt unpreparedness for life in Suriname on the part of British Indians persisted despite insistences to the contrary on the part of recruiters, who intentionally encouraged their charges to self-identify as agricultural laborers in order to collect the maximum possible amount of bounties afforded them by the recruitment system in India. As such, Khan’s sardar “took us to the cacao fields and allotted a bed each for every couple. A woman was to work with me. We were to cut about -0 feet of grass and collect it in the centre. For the cutting of grass of one bed, we would get Rs. 1.50 each. The sardar then left us. I had never expected such a job. It made me cry. ‘Did I deserve this?’ I thought. I had spoiled my life for nothing. But now it was too late to regret,” as nothing could be done to erase Khan’s contract, which bound him to work on a specific Surinamese estate for five full years.\textsuperscript{279}

As a rather high numbers of new Asian arrivals came from occupations other than agriculture in British India and Java, they required seasoning before they could be expected to achieve full productivity. In order to facilitate transitions from Asia to South America’s harsh tropical climate, Paramaribo provided temporary financial support for Suriname’s new arrivals. This financial support came primarily in the form of temporary wage guarantees. “A minimum amount of Rs. 2 was paid to even those who could not do the work properly during the first 3 months. Utensils and choppers were freely provided. Therefore, newcomers were a liability for the government during the first 3 months.”\textsuperscript{280} The stipulations of this agreement essentially decreed that Suriname’s Asian imports had 3 months with which to acclimate to their new environment, after which they would be expected to sustain themselves as government support would dry up after roughly 90 days. Khan recounts this support by mentioning that Suriname’s legal regulations dictated that British Indian and Javanese laborers “were to work on a minimal

\textsuperscript{278} Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XII offers information about Khan’s various occupation while he was living in India
\textsuperscript{279} Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 92 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
\textsuperscript{280} Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 93 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
salary during the first 3 months, but had to be provided all living expenses. After this, each person would be paid according to his or her job. If I could not work under these conditions, how could I earn to fend for myself and save something? My days of easy living were now over and I had to resort to physical labor and face the tune of destiny.” Mental seasoning to the new labor paradigm was essential if new Asian arrivals hoped to survive Suriname’s excessively demanding plantation economy, since they would be subjected to long periods of drudgery accompanied by European Surinamers’ unrealistic expectations of astronomical productivity.

While necessary, mental seasoning was not sufficient for success as an indentured laborer as physical acclimation to the conditions also had to occur. Munshi Khan endured this process and detailed it in his autobiography in the following anecdote: “Soon my hands became sore due to blisters and my arms hurt. I was confounded. I tried to do as much as I could and returned to my room at four in the evening after the day’s work was over…. Every day we followed this routine while the sardar guided us in our work. Finally the weekend arrived and on Saturday, we received our first payment…. The owner took 25 per cent of the total we earned.” From an acclimation standpoint, it is surprising that Suriname’s agricultural barons decided to skim royalties off of the top of contract laborers’ earned wages, however, such skimming fulfilled a specific purpose. As a general rule, new arrivals were unproductive in the field while they seasoned and wage skimming likely helped plantation proprietors hedge against financial losses due to accidents, poorly executed work, and low turnover/productivity levels on the part of their new laborers. Thus, plantation skimming essentially wiped out the extra support that British Indians and Javanese received from the government and made the process of acclimation to South America even more difficult for the Asians as they were deprived of financial subsidies.

281 Ibid
282 Ibid
Interestingly enough, Munshi Khan appears to have acclimated far better than his peers as a result of his relatively high level of education, which gave him insight into the compensation schemes that Asian contract laborers were subject to as well as the importance of discharging the debts he had acquired as a result of his long voyage from British India to South America. Khan actually mentioned “I had managed to cut more grass than the rest of my colleagues during the first week. I had cleared two and a quarter beds and was given 25 paise (one fourth du anna) extra.” Khan’s high productivity reveals that not all Asian contract laborers opted to continue receiving government support for the stipulated three-month period, as an opt-out provision existed. As a matter of fact, indentured laborers were required to compensate Paramaribo for the subsidies that they received during their first three months in South America. Thus, this opt-out provision was attractive to those who could earn enough money to justify invoking it because it would reduce the debts that contract laborers owed Paramaribo. Munshi Khan stated “though the government was to support all ‘new immigrants’ during the first 3 months, not everyone was bound to accept this support. When I learnt about it, I refused to accept this provision and after just 4 weeks, I paid of my debts to the government. I now was paid according to my labor,” and did not require subsidies or other debt instruments that were made available to contractants.

A universal tendency of large expatriate populations throughout world history is the international transportation of remittances from individuals in financially well-off polities to relatives back home as emigrants often felt they were responsible for supporting their families from afar. Remittances generally commence once individual shave achieved personal and financial stability and Suriname’s British Indian and Javanese populations predictably followed this human tendency. Once Munshi Khan settled into his work routine, time stated to fly by.

283 Ibid
284 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 96 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
“One year passed in this way: working and teaching people on my plantation. I wrote several letters to my father and also sent some money during that period,” as he undoubtedly wanted to remain connected to his family in India. It is also possible that Khan also felt a certain degree of responsibility for supporting his family as he made the decision to leave them without notice.

### Indentured Servant Relations With Suriname’s Plantation Hierarchy

Relations with superiors have a disproportionate impact on individuals’ experiences within their workplaces. In the case of chattel slavery, Afro-Surinamese slaves were utterly subjugated to the wishes of their owners and overseers. Thus they had very little personal efficacy, which gave them no reason to care about the welfare of the plantation. In the early years of Hindostani and British Indian migration to Suriname, European overseers maintained their positions of power over the plantation’s labor force. However, the presence of the British Consul broke the absolute power of Suriname’s plantation hierarchies as the Dutch now had to deal with possible interference by a powerful foreign government in colonial affairs should the Consul catch wind of malicious actions on the colony’s agricultural estates. One specific incident that Munshi Khan experienced early in his tenure illustrates the indirect influence that the British Consul had on daily events within Suriname, and this incident predictably involved a wage dispute between plantation management and British Indian as well as Javanese laborers.

During this particular point of Munshi Khan’s indenture, Munshi Khan along with other British Indian and Javanese laborers on his estate were involved in the process of harvesting cacao beans for export. “It had not rained adequately and the produce was not much. If it rained well, the fruit would be plenty and we would get five annas for one basket of cocoa. Yet if it remained dry, only two annas were paid for one basket…The new manager built a new container

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in which cacao could be stored, which was about 20 duim long and its width was about 20 duim. The old container had been 18 duim long with a width of 12 duim.**286 Ordinarily, construction of a new storage container for cacao beans would not elicit a significant response on the part of a plantation’s indentured labor force. However, this particular instance was different. According to Munshi Khan, “in the dry season, the old container was used as an standard measure. Yet when the rains came and the cacao production increased, the manager ordered the supervisor to tell the men that the new container would be used from the next day onwards. The rate for one full container was fixed at one rupee only because he claimed that the diameter of the container was less than the earlier one.”**287 As would be expected, Munshi Khan and the rest of the plantation’s labor force were rather unhappy about the cut in wages that a move to the larger container would ultimately represent. “We thus decided to protest against the lower wages. I was supposed to lead the team by posing as the first one who would get his cacao measured, and while I would protest against the new way of measurement, the rest would support my reaction” in hopes of preserving the prior measuring system and the associated level of compensation.288

The next step in Rahman Khan’s plan to protest the change in compensation on his plantation was to involve his direct superiors. Ordinarily, if an Afro-Surinamese slave wished to dispute working conditions within his estate, he had no recourse but to Maroon from the plantation in an attempt to leave the institution of slavery behind for good. However, individuals like Rahman Khan had some security when they tried to address shortcomings or grievances related to the system of indentured servitude due to the presence of the British Consul in Paramaribo who would undoubtedly advocate on the behalf of London’s Hindostani subjects. Given that Khan possessed some form of job security, plans to confront the plantation hierarchy

286 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 101-2 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
287 Ibid
288 Ibid
proceeded. When the cacao harvest had concluded for the day, Rahman Khan and other loaded the products of their labor for the day and proceeded to the plantation’s central area, where Khan “entered the storehouse and saw the new container and asked the skreeman Sahab: ‘How much will you pay for this full container?’ He asked, puzzled: ‘Has the sardar not told you about the new rate?’ I replied: ‘He has indeed told me about the new rate. Yet, I will not use this new rate. I want 18 annas for the new container’. The skreeman said that this would not be possible,” and the sardar concurred with the skreeman’s statement. Suriname’s plantation hierarchy was based on plantation staffers’ preservation of absolute control over their workers. However, the looming shadow of the British Consul in Paramaribo was eroding management’s ability to act as virtual dictators over individuals residing on agricultural estates. Rahman Khan and his contemporaries felt comfortable enough to proceed with their refusal to accept a wage cut. Khan replied to assertions of the sardar and skreeman that a wage increase for the larger container with a statement that the option of receiving only one rupee for filling the container was certainly not acceptable since it represented a rather large pay cut, and “both the sardar and skreeman went away angrily. I piled up my cacao, covered it with bakoven (banana) leaves and went home…. The following morning, we again went to the fields and collected the fruits. In the evening the measurement had again started and the same thing was repeated. The manager then sent a message by wire to the police inspector in which he complained about us [Asians].”

Ordinarily, involvement of the authorities in matters involving a conflict between plantation staffer and labor grunts spelled certain doom for the workers. However, Suriname’s new social order was rapidly changing the way authorities dealt with demands emanating from British Indian and Javanese camps as the British consul certainly had the muscle to back its

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289 Ibid
290 Ibid
subjects up. To this end, a major came to investigate the cacao-centered disturbance on Rahman Khan’s estate and “I told Major Sahab then that I was willing to use the old container as a measurement instrument at the same rate, but would not consent to measurement through the new container even if the rate would be one rupee per container. Major Sahab asked for the old container. I said that the manager knew about it. The old container was brought and the major took out his yardstick when I asked.”

In this instance, one basic difference between Asian indentured servants laboring under the auspices of Suriname’s system of contract laborers and Afro-Surinamese slaves working within the institution of chattel slavery becomes apparent. As foreign nationals, a decent proportion of British Indians and Javanese received a modicum of quality education before emigration to South America whereas Afro-Surinamese and Creole individuals, by virtue of repression under chattel slavery, did not have access to a high degree of formal schooling. Thus, Asians, particularly Hindostani who benefited from British India’s system of public education, were far better positioned to win arguments with plantation superiors on the basis of logical and mathematical proof than Afro-Surinamese, who did not have access to any type of educational system. To this end, Munshi Khan recalled, “I requested [Major Sahab] to compare the two containers. He did accordingly, and the old one was 18x12 (216) square duim, while the new one was 20x20 (400) square duim. I asked Major Sahab whether it was appropriate to give someone one rupee for 400 square duim while already 18 annas were received for 216 square duim. Was it right” for the laborers to take such a outsized pay cut?

There is a high probability that an argument such as Rahman Khan’s would have been roundly rejected during Suriname’s epoch of slavery, however, the results of Khan’s struggle against proposed pay cuts on his plantation reflected changing social norms within Suriname.

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291 Ibid
292 Ibid
These changing social norms can be observed in the reaction of Major Sahab, who was sent to quell the unrest over new cacao measurement standards. After considering Munshi Khan’s argument, “Major Sahab turned to the manager and said, ‘if you take this man to court, you shall be fined Rs. 500 as a result. It will be better if you increase your wages for the new container’.

The manager was stunned. He now had to give more for the new container. We saluted both of them and went home after measuring our cacao. This was my first encounter with the authorities” and it aptly illustrates the transformation that Suriname had undergone since the genesis of Asian indentured servant importation. It is clear that sheer intimidation of low-level laborers no longer served as an acceptable means of controlling labor costs since laborers now had the ability to proffer substantial resistance to measures seen as heavy-handed or unfair, and the authorities could no longer be counted on to unequivocally support plantation staffers.

**Characteristics of a Potential Asian Leader of a Plantation Estate Within Suriname**

After a sufficient period of time in South America, Hindostani and Javanese contract laborers started to assimilate into Suriname’s culture by acquiring proficiency in languages and social customs belonging to other ethnic groups, and Munshi Rahman Khan was no exception to this phenomena. According to Khan, “after 2 years of stay on the plantation, I had learnt to speak Nengre and Javanese,” and the acquisition of those languages undoubtedly helped him surmount communication and cultural barriers that presented difficulties for other members of Suriname’s Hindostani ethnic group. Given the great difficulties that European Surinamers had communicating with their charges, who spoke Hindi, Urdu, Javanese, Nengre and Malay rather than Dutch or English, someone like Munshi Khan who possessed proficiency in several

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293 Ibid
294 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 106 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
Asian languages was an ideal candidate for leadership positions on the plantation. Difficulties coordinating the various ethnic groups were one reason why Suriname’s system of indentured labor sometimes failed to produce satisfactory results. However, educated individuals such as Rahman Khan, who could speak several Asian languages, represented the solution to problems of coordination, which the colony’s Europeans could not solve by themselves due to their apparent inability or unwillingness to pick up the Asian languages spoken within Suriname.

The plantation on which Munshi Rahman Khan toiled was rather unique in that its owners adhered to exceedingly progressive ideas on the best way to handle contract laborers. According to Khan, the owners of the plantation that he was contracted to were “four brothers: Frans Horst, Dolf Horst, Diderik Horst and Louis Horst. Their father’s title had been Horst and he had been in charge of Skerpi for 52 years. He had ordered that no worker, be it a freeman or a contract labourer, should be troubled or jailed because they were here to earn for themselves and their families. His sons followed the advice of their father.”

Treating low-level laborers well was definitely a departure from widely accepted behavioral norms within Suriname as a large proportion of the colony’s Europeans probably felt that British Indians and Javanese were little more than extensions of the old system of chattel slavery. Furthermore, the Horst proprietors departed from the profit-focused mindset that tended to pervade most of colonial Suriname’s plantations, “and even if they had to suffer losses, they did not put anyone in prison. Only an obvious offense like robbery or fighting could land one in jail. If someone went against the rules of the plantation, he was ordered to do heavy work. The plantation was a jail for such men.”

The Horst family did not owe their exceptional nature to their father’s mandate that contract laborers were to be treated with respect and their unwillingness to jail indentured

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295 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 102-3 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
296 Ibid
servants for flouting minor social expectations or plantation rules. Unlike other planters, the Horst clan seemed to find real value in getting to know their workforce and discovering an appreciation for elements of Asian culture. Under such favorable circumstances, Munshi Khan’s suitability for leadership positions within the plantation did not go unnoticed for long. Given his experiences in the field and popularity with the laborers following events such as the incident over wage cuts for cocoa harvesters along with his language proficiency, management had a viable candidate for an elevated post within the plantation hierarchy, and Skerpi’s higher-ups certainly noticed. “Dolf Horst was the cleverest and deft in running the plantation. He was well-versed in the Hindustani language…. Dolf Horst was a nice man and very extrovert. He mixed with the Indians. When news of my activities reached him, he came down to the plantation to look into the matter personally. He found no fault with me and told the manager that I was good enough to become a sardar,” as Khan’s ability to manage crises and win over a large proportion of the plantation’s Asian labor force aptly illustrate his rather impressive leadership qualities.297

Although some individuals within Skerpi’s hierarchy were opposed to Munshi Khan becoming a sardar, the wishes of the owner eventually prevailed. Skerpi’s manager was particularly against to Munshi Khan’s attainment of a leadership position within the plantation hierarchy, however, his opposition to the new sardar’s appointment was in vain. “The manager had tried every trick to test us but had failed. Finally, one evening he called me to his residence…. The manager spoke: “I wish to make you a sardar.’ I said that I did not want it but the manager would not listen: ‘You are under contract and must go where I depute you and do whatever job I tell you to do.’”298 The manager’s demands that Khan meet his demands by agreeing to become a sardar were predictably met with a certain degree of resistance as Khan

297 Ibid
298 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 105-6 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
undoubtedly wanted to maintain his superiority over the manager in the grand scheme of plantation power dynamics. At this stage, a small bit of intransigence could pay off handsomely for Khan as the Horst family had clearly deemed him worthy of a position as sardar and ordered the manager to make it so. To this end, Khan stated “I said that he was correct: ‘Yet, I have been brought here from Calcutta to toil as a labourer and not to work as a sardar. I can earn more in the fields than as a sardar. What will I do with that kind of job?’ The manager replied: ‘I cannot force you, but the owner has ordered me to promote you to the post of sardar and even I wish that you take up this duty.’”

Given that the manager was only offering Khan the job based on Skerpi’s owners’ demands, Khan ultimately had no choice but to accept. “Hearing about my garamsara [owner], I had no choice but to accept his order. Garamsara Sahab had recommended me so how could I refuse” such an assignment that had been so earnestly requested of me?

A post as sardar definitely appealed to Munshi Khan. However, he was not willing to take a promotion if conditions facing members of that particular class on Skerpi stayed the same. To this end, Khan stated “if you want me to work as your sardar, I have three demands before I start, otherwise I shall back out’…. ‘Firstly, I should be allowed to decide how much has to be paid to someone. I want to judge according to the severity of the assignment and I must have the right to raise the amount paid up to 12 annas if needed.’” This particular demand of Khan’s is notable because he was effectively asking for access to the plantation’s purse strings as labor costs represented one of the highest production expenditures that Suriname’s plantations incurred on an annual basis. Giving this power to an individual who identified with the ethnic groups that dominated the population of unskilled workers within an agricultural estate marked a massive shift in the way of doing business within Suriname. Munshi Khan was not satisfied with access.

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299 Ibid
300 Ibid
301 Ibid
to Skerpi’s purse strings, he wanted control of other levers of power, which he clearly indicated following his first demand: “Secondly, if someone does not do his work properly, you may deduct from my allowance but not from the worker’s wages. You should allow me to decide upon his or her remuneration. Thirdly, your behavior towards me should not be like that meted out toward your other sardars because if I am treated badly, I shall have my own solutions.”  

Here, Khan effectively nullifies the power of Suriname’s penal sanction within Skerpi’s microeconomy and hedges against Europeans using his elevated position to pressure him into treating his fellow contract laborers poorly should they ever clash with the plantation’s management.

Protection of his own interests was not the only thing on Khan’s mind during negotiations for his appointment as a sardar of Skerpi. “The manager asked me: ‘Why have you made such demands?’ I replied that ‘all the fighting and tussles, which take place here revolve around payments and favoritism. The skreeman and the manjha (manager) favor those people who work less but spy on others. These men always get their full share while those who labor hard have to bear the brunt.’”  

As it turns out, Khan’s request for control over wage disbursements not only represented an attempt to gain access to one of Skerpi’s financial power levers, but to improve working conditions for his fellow contract laborers by eliminating favoritism of individuals known to snitch on others for personal gain. Elimination of this favoritism would improve relations between workers and cut down on interpersonal conflicts, which almost always resulted in lost revenue for the plantation due to injury, etc. Khan continued to explain his three requests by insisting that British Indian and Javanese contractants “are reprimanded for even minor faults, which they indeed make at times. Because of these, money is deducted from their wages, which is given to the less deserving. This is unjustified and I am dead set against such practices

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302 Ibid
303 Ibid
because it breeds ill feeling among the labourers and at times even causes fighting. A sardar has to face these situations every now and then” during his stints as plantation superintendent.\textsuperscript{304}

Taken as a group, Khan’s three demands were tantamount to a mission intended to ensure his effectiveness in the field. One thing to remember is that large groups of people are often able to overpower their superiors if said superior is powerless, and Khan wished to avoid this scenario. If Khan successfully gained significant control of wage disbursements as well as punishments and acknowledgement as an equal by the Europeans, Skerpi’s contractants would view him as a legitimate power center and thus would have greater reason to obey him than a typical sardar. This increased control of the workforce would undoubtedly allow Khan to direct it more effectively, resulting in increased productivity and Skerpi’s Europeans conceded that they found Khan’s points valid. Moreover, Khan’s three requests “opened the eyes of Manager Sahab who admitted that I was right. ‘I had never thought that much,’ he said, ‘the garamsara and I will grant you what you demand and everything will be done according to your policy.’”\textsuperscript{305} Interestingly enough, Skerpi’s owners did not solely intend to make Munshi Khan an sardar. They intended to make him an absolutely integral piece of the plantation’s success and Dolf Horst took the unthinkable step of granting Khan nearly unlimited power over the estate’s operations and labor force as many felt he was the best qualified administrator available.

“The owner smiled and said: ‘Rahman Khan, I believe in your honesty and truthfulness. I know a Muslim like you is absolutely trustworthy. Do not worry about anything and work here as if it were your home. Run the plantation as you think proper and pay the wages according to your assessment. We four brothers will not obstruct you.’ He shook my hand and left.”\textsuperscript{306} In this short exchange with Munshi Khan, Dolf Horst did something that was fairly unprecedented

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid
\textsuperscript{306} Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 107-8 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
within the confines of Suriname. Horst essentially turned over control of his plantation to a member of the so-called ‘untrustworthy’ British Indians and told him to manage it as the Indian saw fit. Khan’s commentary on his newfound power reveals some of the perceptions that Suriname’s Hindustani held toward the colony’s Europeans as well as the degree of control that Dolf Horst granted him. According to Khan, Dolf Horst and his kin “were Christians but acted as promised. The owner, throughout life, never failed to remember his promises. If the plantation needed new labourers, the owner even allowed me on his behalf to go with the money and the register to the Office of the Commissioner who had to sign the labour contracts,” which enabled Munshi Khan to obtain additional workers for cultivation of agricultural commodities.307

This particular collection of Khan’s thoughts is significant for two reasons. First, Khan reveals general British Indian prejudices against European Christians when he hints that Dolf Horst and kin behaved in a manner contrary to that of most Christians within Suriname, who were apparently untrustworthy and prone to breaking promises. Secondly, Khan was probably one of the only contract laborers allowed to actually handle money and labor contracts on the behalf of his plantation owner as such activities were crucial for financial success and Hindustani and Javanese were generally considered too untrustworthy or incompetent to engage in such activities. Therefore, Khan’s successful acquisition of the ability to conduct third-party business concerning plantation funds and labor contracts represents his transcendence of social expectations of Hindostani. Even though Munshi Khan succeeded on his own merits, his adherence to Islam might have played a role in his success, as Suriname’s Europeans were able to exclude him from categorizations of British Indians that targeted Hindus. Furthermore, Munshi Rahman Khan also took care of Skerpi’s legal matters whenever the need arose. “I also attended the courts as the representative of the plantation. I was indeed trusted so much, that the

307 Ibid
 Commissioners Uiten (Sahab) and Granada (Sahab) would refer to me at times as ‘the owner of Skerpi.’” Descriptions of Munshi Khan as ‘the owner of Skerpi’ were exceedingly accurate as he had effectively taken on all of the duties belonging to members of the typical Surinamese plantation hierarchy, and the Horst family could count on him to maintain affairs while they were away in Paramaribo. In effect, Khan’s appointment as sardar replicated the Directur system that many Surinamese plantations operated under in the era of slavery in which a proprietor would appoint an general manager, known as a Directur, to oversee the affairs of the plantation while he sequestered himself in the far more comfortable environs of the colonial capital at Paramaribo.

Maintenance of the various trappings of power obtained via Munshi Khan’s agreement with Dolf Horst was not limited to the handling of wage disbursements, punishments for failure to adhere to plantation expectations, conduction of third-party business and attendance during court cases involving Skerpi. Rahman Khan also acquired the power to appoint his own inferiors shortly after his appointment as sardar of Skerpi. “A few days after having become a sardar, my friend Subhan was appointed as night watchman. The skreeman was suspended from his post after 3 months and all the work in the fields was conferred on me. I however requested two more assistants to help me in my work. Accordingly, a sardar named Sakhawat Khan and a junior assistant named Ribo of Malaysia were assigned to work under me.” Establishment of inferiors pushed Khan further up the plantation hierarchy and entrenched his position of power over the day-to-day operations of Skerpi, and the nature of his work life soon underwent dramatic changes. As Khan was now responsible for so many of the plantation’s administrative tasks, he could not possibly spend time in the field and “my own work was now limited to seeing that everything went right, guiding my assistants, distributing the payments every Saturday and

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308 Ibid
309 Ibid
submitting my own reports and accounts to the manager,” who would convey such records to Dolf Horst as well as various other interested parties in Paramaribo and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{310} Although Munshi Khan’s new trappings of power were certainly impressive, he also acquired one final benefit after being named head supervisor of Skerpi. “When I had become a supervisor (sardar,) I had been promoted to a higher pay scale. The manager had said: ‘Your contract decides the level of your payment but when you become a freeman, you will get your full payment.’”\textsuperscript{311} Interestingly enough, a mere laborer had risen to become arguably the third most powerful man within Skerpi’s plantation hierarchy behind the owner and manager, which was a state of affairs that would certainly have never happened during Suriname’s preceding era of chattel slavery.

**The End of an Asian Indentured Servant’s Contract and the Steps Following Freedom**

Once Munshi Khan attained the rank of sardar, he maintained this position until one of the most important moments in any Asian contract laborer’s life occurred, the expiration of the contract binding him to one owner and one estate for five years. “My contract expired in 1903. On Monday 13 April 1903, Manjha Sahab called all of us. He gave us certificates by which we became freemen (free from the bondage of the plantation contract). The manager told us: ‘Now that you are released from the contract of the garamsara you are free to go anywhere you please. However, if you wish, you may enter into a new contract.’”\textsuperscript{312} Although Munshi Khan had attained a great degree of power by rising from a mere grunt to the rank of sardar while simultaneously becoming the third most powerful man on his estate, the prospect of personal freedom was far more appealing than another five years as an exalted sardar. “We thanked Manjha Sahab, took the papers in our hands and said: ‘We will not renew our contracts, we

\textsuperscript{310} Ibid
\textsuperscript{311} Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 127 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
\textsuperscript{312} Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 123 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
rather prefer to be freedmen.’ Manjha Sahab again tried: ‘If you want a contract here in Surinam once again, you will get Rs. 100 each for a fresh five-year contract and you once again will work as an indentured labourer under the same conditions as you did before.’" 313 If anyone was likely to re-indenture, it would be Munshi Khan given the fact that he had secured extremely optimal working conditions for himself during his time at Skerpi and such conditions would continue had he chosen to re-indenture. Furthermore, the prospect of a 100-rupee signing bonus was undoubtedly somewhat tempting, however, Khan along with his entering class of indentured laborers could not be dissuaded. Manjha Sahab continued to work on the new freedmen by harping on the 100-rupee signing bonus. To this end, Manjha Sahab stated: ‘‘For each one of you the owner of the plantation spends Rs. 166, out of which you get Rs. 100 while the rest of the amount will go to the government.’’ We just nodded but did not comment further,” as each Hindostani was undoubtedly eager to obtain his long-awaited freedom and depart the estate. 314

As a new freedman, Munshi Khan certainly had the right to request a free return voyage to India, which his initial contract with the Society of Suriname provided for. However, like a large number of former indentured servants, Khan chose to remain in the colony and started looking for a way to establish a venture through which he could produce sufficient income to economically support himself. As Suriname was a predominantly agricultural economy outside of the capital at Paramaribo, a continued presence in this particular economic sector suited many ex-indentured servants as they had extensive prior experience in the sector as well as contacts that would help them attain success. To this end, Munshi Khan “went to Asraf in Domburg. After consulting Asraf, I bought plot no. 119 at Lalkondre [one of Suriname’s government

313 Ibid
314 Ibid
plantations], which was not far away from the sluice near the river across the cemetery.\footnote{Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 127} I bought it for Rs. 200. I brought my family and belongings from the plantation and started living in my own place,” as a small-scale landowner and agriculturist, free from the demands of life as a contract laborer for the first time in five years.\footnote{Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 128} In order to support his family, Rahman Khan plunged into the task of raising subsistence crops as well as crops intended strictly for sale, which entailed owning “nine cacao beds and had also cleared the forest and planted banana trees, cassava and other crops, which could help me make my living” as a Surinamese freedman.\footnote{Ibid}

Although engaged primarily as a small-scale agriculturalist, Rahman Khan also took side jobs to earn more money, as farming likely did not provide many opportunities to gain a financial surplus and/or disposable income. “My father-in-law had some land in Laluwiki [Laarwijk] near the River Suriname but he himself worked the railways. On his request, I consented to go with him. The three of us (i.e., my father-in-law, Asraf, and myself), used to cut the jungles for the construction of a railway track. I was able to save Rs. 22 after 3 weeks of work there,” which undoubtedly helped Rahman Khan make ends meet.\footnote{Ibid} Working for Suriname’s nascent railroads did not constitute Munshi Khan’s only additional stream of income intended to supplement his agricultural earnings, as Khan himself soon found another government job that was connected to the plantation he had purchased his plot from. “Meneer Weijtink, the Commissioner of Domburg, summoned me. He told me that the late Jahangir, a translator/interpreter (tolk) who had lived across [from] my newly purchased house, had also been the lock-keeper. Sir Weijtink therefore requested me to take up the job now that Jahangir had died and I had started living near the sluice.”\footnote{Ibid} The prospect of additional income for such
an easy job undoubtedly had great appeal for Khan and he wasted very little time considering Meneer Weijtink’s offer. Following a short period of contemplation regarding acceptance of the lock-keeper position, Meneer Weijtink “gave me the keys and said that I would be paid Rs. 100 per year for this work. I thanked him respectfully and accepted the offer. Mr. Niboer, who was the manager of the place, had also been present there. With great pleasure, I started my new government job,” which guaranteed a coveted stream of disposable income on an annual basis.\(^{320}\)

**Reinstatement as Sardar: Plantation Recruitment of Suriname’s Talented Asian Freemen**

Despite Munshi Khan’s absence from Skerpi, he was certainly not forgotten, and the actions of Skerpi’s higher-ups aptly illustrate how important Rahman Khan was to the general welfare of the estate. Once Khan attained his freedom and left the estate, “Dolf Horst, had searched for me and suspended the manager there. He took over the charge from him. After some time, he wrote a letter to manager Mr. Niboer Sahab asking him to send me to the plantation. Mr. Dolf Horst and Niboer were friends. Mr. Niboer called me and said, ‘your garamsara wants to talk to you. I can give you 3-days leave. Go and listen to what he has to say.’”\(^{321}\) One particular element of Dolf Horst’s actions during this time period is of importance. First, Horst chose to suspend Skerpi’s manager for allowing Khan to leave without mention of possibly continuing on at the estate as a freedman sardar. This particular action made it clear that Dolf Horst valued Khan’s contributions to the estate far more than his manager’s, thus Rahman Khan, although he was officially the third-most powerful man at Skerpi, had actually attained such a high level of importance that ownership saw him as the manager’s superior. Once Khan arrived at Skerpi to find out what all of the commotion was about, “Mr. Dolf Horst

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\(^{320}\) Ibid

\(^{321}\) Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 134 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time.
and his wife were very pleased and they behaved nicely…sir told me that he was having problems with the contract workers on the plantation. They had become rebellious and were out of control. He needed me to run the plantation.” 322 Such an admission on the part of a Surinamese plantation proprietor illustrates changing social paradigms within the colony. Native Surinamers had clearly come to realize that the presence of a competent hierarchy of British Indian and/or Javanese leaders was essential to a plantation’s economic success. An Asian hierarchy was essential because Europeans and Creoles often found it difficult to relate to British Indian and Javanese cultural norms and communication was increasingly difficult given the preponderance of Hindi, Javanese and Malay languages within the colony’s Asian population.

Dolf Horst’s desire for Munshi Khan to return to Skerpi as a sardar certainly had some impact. However, Khan was understandably reluctant to go back to the place he had been bound to for five long years. Khan recalled “I then told him that I was very happy at Lalkondre because the Commissioner was very kind to me and that I would be unable to resign” the position of lock keeper or abandon my agricultural plot. 323 Although Munshi Khan was leaning toward maintaining a residence at Lalkondre and tending his small agricultural plot, Dolf Horst and his cohorts were not so easily dissuaded as they understood how Khan’s importance to their plantation’s financial success and they ended up dispatching a “clerk to Commissioner Weijtink. The Commissioner then called me and we talked at length in the presence of manager Niboer Sahab and the clerk. Finally, the Commissioner said: ‘Meester Rahman Khan, you are indebted to Mr. Horst. He is now old and the contract labourers are not afraid of him. Without you it will be impossible to run the plantation. You must return and control the situation there.” 324 As Dolf Horst and his staffers had succeeded in convincing Commissioner Weijtink to participate in their 322 Ibid 323 Ibid 324 Ibid
efforts to recruit Munshi Khan back to the plantation to fill his old role of Sardar, Khan now had fewer reasons than ever to resist Skerpi’s all-out recruiting efforts. As a matter of fact, Commissioner Weijtink took an active part in Khan’s recruitment by telling him “you must return and control the situation [at Skerpi]. I will see that you have no problem.’ Mr. Niboer was of the same opinion. I had no choice. In 1907, I again joined the plantation in Skerpi and got paid fully. Work began as usual and everyone did his bit to resume normal routine under my orders” once an agreement had been finalized for Khan’s return to plantation Skerpi as sardar.325

Munshi Khan’s return to Skerpi undoubtedly boosted the estate’s performance and eased Dolf Horst’s concerns about his labor force, which was composed mainly of Asian contract laborers and required Khan’s supervision. Although Khan was able to improve his plantation’s short-term outlook, he was powerless against larger economic forces that constantly threatened the Horst family’s ownership of their plantation. Like many other plantations within Suriname, Skerpi was partially funded by debt secured by the plantation’s asset value rather than cash, and debt service payments wore down the estate’s supply of liquid funds. “The cacao disease had already indebted [the estate] and moneylenders pressed hard for money. The four brothers fought over the debt. They also owed me Rs. 200. Seeing all this, I told Mr. Dolf Horst that I could not continue there any longer because the sale of the plantation could land me in trouble. Dolf Horst was a clever man. He understood” my rationale for deciding to leave the estate.326

Shortly after notifying Dolf Horst of his final decision to resign as sardar due to Skerpi’s financial difficulties, Munshi Khan made preparations to depart the estate once again. However, Khan had several meaningful interactions with the Horst family before he bid them farewell. “Before leaving Skerpi, however, I met my friends who had become like brothers to me and then

325 Ibid
326 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 137 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
proceeded to my garamsara. The couple was very sad. They wept as if I was a member of their family. They said that even if the plantation was sold I must come and visit them. I said: ‘Insha Allah’ and Mrs. Horst wept bitterly." The reactions of the Horst family to Munshi Khan’s departure from the estate reveal that he was considered a very close friend due to his contributions while working on the estate as well as his faithful maintenance of the estate’s affairs while the Horst family repatriated to Paramaribo. Such an outlay of emotional affection for a member of Suriname’s force of plantation grunts would have been unthinkable in the era of slavery. The colony’s changing demographics and decision to employ a labor force emanating from cultures that diverged wildly from accepted European norms mandated increased reliance on British Indians and Javanese capable of transcending cultural barriers between Europeans and Asians and such reliance engendered positive interpersonal relations. Also, interpersonal relations between trusted Asians and Suriname’s plantation proprietors was not limited to that of employer and employee as familial bonds also came into play. To this end, Munshi Khan reported that Mrs. Horst “had cared for my eldest daughter Mariyam when my wife had been ill and expecting, and Dolf Horst had himself cut the cord because I was not home at the night of her birth. Mariyam was named after Mrs. Horst [Marie]. Both of them would drop in at my place every now and then and always gave some gifts to Mariyam or me. Mrs. Horst…had treated Mariyam as her own daughter,” and such intimate relations underscored the gradual intertwining of the colony’s previously demarcated Asian and Native Surinamer populations.\textsuperscript{328}

Unfortunately, Munshi Khan’s ominous premonitions about the fate of Skerpi came true. However, the events surrounding Skerpi’s entrance into financial administration highlighted the changing position of British Indians within Suriname. To this end, Khan attained even greater

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid \hfill \textsuperscript{328} Ibid
importance throughout Skerpi’s bankruptcy proceedings and his elevated position was certainly symptomatic of transformative trends throughout Surinamese society. “The plantation Skerpi had been sold. Mr. Toni Nassy had given [the Horst clan] a loan of 10,000 rupees and the Horst family had been unable to return the sum. They had to give up their father’s place, which they had kept for over 52 years, and give it to Mr. Tony Nassy. Mr. Nassy was a businessman. He had no idea about farming,” thus he was eminently unqualified to maintain a major agricultural estate like Skerpi. Given Toni Nassy’s inexperience in managing the affairs required for operation of an agricultural estate, Munshi Khan became a prime recruiting target for Skerpi’s new ownership. Toni Nassy and his contemporaries quickly located Khan and gave him a recruiting pitch, however, Munshi Khan replied by saying “I had my own fields and cows to look after and was unable to return. [Toni Nassy] asked, ‘Is the land registered in your name?’ I answered in the negative. He said: ‘do not worry; my men will take good care of your cows. The contract labourers will cut grass and do whatever is necessary. Your orders shall be followed here as it was during the days of Mr. Horst,” when Khan served as Skerpi’s sardar.

Toni Nassy followed the precedent set by Dolf Horst by offering Munshi Khan full reinstatement of his responsibilities should he choose to return to Skerpi as a freedman sardar for the third time, however, Khan was further incentivized by Toni Nassy’s promise that his affairs in Lalkondre would be looked at while Khan worked as Skerpi’s sardar. Furthermore, Toni Nassy stepped up recruitment of Munshi Khan by treating Khan as an honored guest within his home. Khan recounts his meeting with Toni Nassy by saying “we were still talking when the memsahab [Mr. Toni Nassy’s wife] laid the table. I pulled my chair away from the dining table thinking Mr. Toni Nassy was to eat his meal. But instead he held my hand and asked me to join

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329 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 139-40 contain the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
330 Ibid
him saying I was his guest and knowing that I was a Mohammadan, he had ordered nothing that was against my religious code. I could say nothing, and sat down.”³³¹ This specific instance of congenial interaction between a European Surinamer and a former Hindostani *pathan* contract laborer is particularly significant because it clearly demonstrates that some degree of equalization as far as relations between European Surinamers and the colony’s resident Asian population was occurring. Furthermore, the gradual cessation of internecine tension between European Surinamers and Asian immigrants was a watershed moment as far as development of a cohesive Surinamese culture during the time period following full cessation of chattel slavery.

This recalibration of European-Asian relations within Suriname likely due to gradual acclimation via long-term exposure and forced cooperation due to the dire consequences that the colony’s agricultural economy faced if its labor system broke down. Recruitment of Munshi Khan moved beyond dinner as Toni Nassy invited him to partake in a communal activity usually reserved for members of the same ethnic group. “After dinner, as we sat down to smoke a cigarette, [Toni Nassy] took out Mr. Niboer’s letter and read it aloud saying that he had come to know about me only through this piece of paper. He said: ‘I hope you will neither disappoint Mr. Niboer nor me and take charge of my plantation.’”³³² Communal smoking between a Hindostani and an European as well as congenial relations on the part of a Hindostani and European that had not previously met marked a significant turning point within Suriname’s sociocultural fabric. Clearly, these two ethnic groups were evidently acclimating to each other, as demonstrated by mutual participation in communal activities such as dining and the traditional evening consumption of tobacco, which had previously been undertaken in homogenous groups.

³³¹ Ibid
³³² Ibid
Ultimately, Toni Nassy successfully convinced Munshi Khan to take a new position at Skerpi and Khan recalls this particular life decision in a vivid manner. “In 1913 I sold my land in Hansu and once again started working in Skerpi. Manager Gomes was easy-going and as promised, Toni Nassy took care of my cows. Both of them were kind and helpful. When my sons or I were ill, they took great pains to procure medicines for us and ensure our wellbeing. We were treated as family members” due to Khan’s importance to the plantation’s financial success.\(^{333}\) The fact that Toni Nassy followed through on his promise to care for Munshi Khan’s cows demonstrates that unspoken agreements between European Surinamers and their Asian compatriots were gaining strength and not broken so easily as they had been in the colony’s past. Interestingly enough, European treatment of Munshi Khan as an equal survived a leadership change within Skerpi’s upper hierarchy. “After a year, Mr. Gomes, our manager, replaced Mr. Currie of the Belwaarde plantation. Mr. May succeeded Gomes. Mr. May was a true kafir [black] but he behaved like a white man. He had married Paula Sai of Umra whose father was a honorable man among the Muslim community. She had a kafir mother and she looked more like a black. Yet her face resembled that of a full-blooded Hindustani” of the type found in India.\(^{334}\)

When taken as a collective whole, Munshi Khan’s experiences and ability to hold on to his elevated position through an ownership change as well as turnover among Skerpi’s upper management established that Suriname’s European population was starting to leave its prejudices against Asian contract laborers in the distant past. It is entirely possible that Suriname’s European overlords had begun to see the colony’s Asian population as nominal equals at minimum and came to realize that they were capable of performing administrative tasks essential to the success of the colony’s plantations. Furthermore, Munshi Khan’s assumption of a cordial

\(^{333}\) Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 142 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time

\(^{334}\) Ibid
personal relationship with an Afro-Surinamese manager and that same manager’s decision to take a wife who was half Afro-Surinamese and half Hindustani shows that relations between Suriname’s Asians and Creoles had finally started to achieve equilibrium. This state of relative harmony contributed to increasing levels of stability within Suriname, and stability was surely preferable to the open strife between the two groups following Asians’ arrival in South America.
Chapter 5
Asian Repatriation: The Foundations of Suriname’s Eclectic Mix of Cultures

Although Paramaribo’s importation of indentured servants was initially intended to augment the colony’s shrinking agricultural labor force, they soon put the system of recruiting contract laborers from British India and Java to another purpose. The impetus for Paramaribo’s decision to alter the central mission of its contract laborer program came about as a result of comments made by a foreign government official. An Indian government official by the name of Dr. D.W.D Comins visited Suriname in 1891 and wrote a number of reports centering on the social conditions that Hindostani immigrants experienced once they attained residency within South America. Comins made note of the fact that there were very “few opportunities afforded for making a livelihood away from the estates.”335 An inability to attain financial success in places other than Suriname’s great agricultural estates undoubtedly contributed to unrest among the British Indians and Javanese and may have caused them to entertain thoughts of repatriation.

Although persistent struggles to find gainful employment outside of Suriname’s plantations certainly affected the morale of the colony’s Asian population, D.W.D. Comins offered a solution to the economic issues that Asians faced within their South American residence. Comins remarked that Hindostani laborers residing in other Caribbean polities such as Trinidad and British Guiana experienced fewer obstacles to gainful employment outside of large plantations following termination of their original labor contracts. The primary reason why Asians experienced better post-contract employment outcomes in Trinidad and British Guiana was that there were fewer restrictions on Asian land ownership within the aforementioned British colonies, thus immigrants could easily transition from field laborers to owners of small farms once they fulfilled all of their contractual obligations. Comins also insists that large variations in land ownership rates within British Guiana and Suriname readily explains the disparity in those

335 Comins, Note on Emigration to Surinam, 5 offers a discussion of Comins’ thoughts on the social conditions that most Hindostanis experienced
colonies’ repatriation rate as only 2% of British Guiana’s Asian population chose to repatriate to their points of origin following completion of their labor contracts whereas 30% of Suriname’s Hindostani and Javanese immigrants departed the colony when their labor contracts expired. Comins’ observations of the difference in demographic trends between Trinidad and Suriname undoubtedly sparked discussion in Paramaribo, and policy changes soon followed. To this end, the fairly radical notion of boosting Suriname’s population via recruitment of large numbers of permanent settlers started to gain credence among the colony’s various power brokers. Contemporary observers agreed that the lack of a stable population with significant interests in the health and well being of Dutch Guiana served as a severe impediment to the South American colony’s progress as it moved forward with plans for further development. Nevertheless, Paramaribo remained quite focused on the continued support of Suriname’s agriculture-dependent economy. Thus, a majority of the colonial government’s plans to induce the migration of permanent colonists centered on increased recruitment of Asian laborers as permanent settlers once they were free of outstanding obligations to their previous employers.

Since most immigrants to Suriname during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were Asian contract laborers specializing in agricultural work, the most plausible solution to Suriname’s population growth issues was to grant newly freed indentured servants a way to continue utilizing their skills in crop cultivation. Once 1895 rolled around, Paramaribo decided to move forward with the suggestions that D.W.D. Comins had made during his 1891 visit to Suriname and implemented a program intended to encourage the colony’s Asian immigrants to remain in South America once their labor contracts expired. This particular colonization program offered British Indian and Javanese immigrants land while simultaneously maintaining

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336 Ibid. Also see Comins, D.W.D. Note on Emigration from the East Indies to British Guiana. Calcutta: n.p., 1893 for further information
337 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 55 offers a discussion of permanent Asian colonization’s significance to Suriname’s long-term demographics
their right to return to Asia free of charge upon expiration of their labor contracts. Asians who
decided not to return to their points of origin received an signing bonus of around Dfl. 100 in
addition to the promised parcels of land, and the program successfully encouraged large numbers
of British Indians and Javanese to remain in Suriname.\textsuperscript{338} As could be expected, a majority of
Asians made attempts to cultivate smallholdings once they terminated their labor obligations to
plantation owners and sought independent employment outside of Suriname’s plantation district.

As a general rule, repatriation was fairly common among British Indian and Javanese
migrants to Suriname as many wanted to return home after five long years in the fields of South
America and constant exposure to foreign cultures via Europeans, Creoles and Afro-Surinamers.
Immigration data dating from 1878 to 1920 indicates that 11,623 British Indians, representing
roughly 33.9\% of Suriname’s total Hindostani population, made the decision to repatriate to
India. On the other hand, existing Asian migration records for years ranging from 1896 to 1939
demonstrate that a total of 7,684 individuals of Dutch East Indian origin, representing around
23.3\% of Suriname’s Javanese population, managed to return to Indonesia once they completed
their labor contracts.\textsuperscript{339} Exploration of permanent colonizers’ experiences is certainly
worthwhile as 66.1\% of British Indians and 76.7\% of Javanese migrants ultimately settled in
Suriname rather than making the return voyage to India or the Indonesian archipelago, and
individuals such as Munshi Khan are immensely useful in this regard. Munshi Khan and other
like-minded migrants certainly attained a high degree of personal success during their stints in
the South American wilderness and decided to remain in the New World following expiration of
their labor contracts. Although some British Indians and Javanese may have chosen to follow
Khan’s path and remain in Suriname in order to take advantage of generous land policies, not all

\textsuperscript{338} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 56 offers a in-depth discussion of Paramaribo’s decision to implement a land incentive program for Asian laborers
\textsuperscript{339} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 63-4, particularly table 4.2 on page 64, can be utilized to trace repatriation figures cited in original colonial records
permanent residents remained in Suriname for this reason. Most immigrants based their decision to stay in Suriname on negative factors rather than incentive programs sponsored by the colonial government in Paramaribo. As a general rule, Asia migrants were mindful of the possibility that they would bring shame to their families and face ridicule upon their return to Asia due to the fact that they had failed in their quest to become wealthy via employment in distant colonial outposts. Repatriates’ success was often judged by financial wealth and many potential returnees intentionally delayed their departure from South America to India or Java for the express purpose of accumulating additional savings that would theoretically pre-empt episodes of shame and ridicule upon their long-awaited arrival at coolie terminals in Calcutta, Batavia or Semarang.  

Although remaining in Suriname in order to earn money that would prove that the voyage was worthwhile was certainly an admirable pursuit, many Hindostanis and Javanese ultimately failed to attain significant savings and harmed their chances of ever returning to Asia. It was not uncommon for former contract laborers’ decision to delay their departure for Asia to evolve into involuntary adoption of permanent residence in Suriname. Consider the fact that once former contract laborers renounced their right to a free return passage to either British India or Indonesia in exchange for a Dfl. 100 signing bonus and the receipt of land parcels throughout Suriname, they often found it rather difficult to accumulate sufficient funds for the return passage to Asia, which cost roughly Dfl. 150 per passenger in 1909. Financial considerations were certainly a motivating factor behind decisions on the part of British Indians and Javanese to remain in Suriname as money was extremely hard to come by, especially if one worked as a smallholder, which required capital investment and offered little in the way of quick returns. Furthermore, if an indentured servant acquired a family while in the colony, he or she would have to fund the

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340 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 63 provides a discussion of some negative factors that pre-empted Asian immigrants to remain in Suriname

341 Ibid
entire family’s voyage to Asia, which proved an insurmountable obstacle save if the family was willing to split up. Moreover, a significant number of Asian contract laborers had intended to escape push factors in their homelands by undertaking the voyage to South America with no designs on a possible return. Other contract laborers chose not to repatriate because they simply did not want to endure another long sea voyage. Other reasons why British Indian and Javanese migrants chose not to return to Asia included the acquisition of a common-law spouse who happened to either belong to another ethnic group, caste, or even religion, or had previously made the decision to renounce their right to return to Asia. Also, Asians who had been born in Suriname or arrived at an extremely young age frequently chose to identify with South America rather than unfamiliar Asian polities and rarely wished to return to their homelands, and the parents of children that self-identified with Suriname or other South American polities often chose to remain in the New World with their children rather than return to India or Java.  

Concerns over the impact that migration would have on maintaining bonds between parents and children hailing from distinct generations was not the only limiting factor that pushed Asians to stay in Suriname rather than travel back to their homelands. For instance, the caste system was ever-present within British Indians’ countenances. Thus, most Hindustanis experienced greater difficulties than their Javanese co-workers as far as the decision to return to Asia was concerned due to additional complications engendered by British India’s rigid caste system. As a whole, British Indian society generally classified high-caste individuals as mere outcasts upon their return from abroad for their decision to cross the *kala pam* (black waters). Thus, many *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* had virtually no incentive to return to India as they would not be able to reclaim the exalted status that they had held prior to departure for Suriname.

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Furthermore, Caribbean Hindus did not place nearly as much importance on variation in caste as their Indian compatriots did, thus the caste system had much less influence in the Western Hemisphere than it did in Asia. British Indians considering a return to their homeland had to carefully ponder whether they wanted to leave the far less restrictive environment of their new Caribbean residences behind as British India’s strict caste hierarchy would reassert itself over all Hindus immediately following their return from South America. The fact that the caste system would immediately reassert itself over all returning Hindus was especially significant because Suriname engendered a large number of cross-caste marriages, which were taboo in India. As far as couples who chose to get married in Suriname were concerned, if their partners originated from a caste other than their own, they were exceedingly unlikely to repatriate due to the fact that they would be seen as outcasts due to violations of the Hindu taboo on marrying across castes.

Sociocultural obstacles such as generational divides and the Hindu caste system’s overarching influence on British Indian society were not the only reasons why Asian immigrants ended up becoming permanent residents of South America. As it turns out, although oceanic transportation from British India and Java to Suriname occurred on a regular schedule due to the colony’s need for additional laborers, the reverse was not true as it was sometimes difficult to find ships traveling from Paramaribo to various points within Asia. Ships offering former Asian contract laborers a means via which they could travel back to Asia departed from Paramaribo rather erratically, and the difficulty of securing a timely return voyage to either British India or Java forced a large number of potential repatriates to incur debts as they passed the time in Paramaribo. Accumulation of debts by former contract laborers actually forced a significant number of Asians to sign new contracts of indenture or find other forms of gainful employment.

which further complicated efforts to return to Asia. Furthermore, only thirteen of the years between 1878 and 1911 procured any ships willing to take Asians from Suriname to British Guiana. Also, opportunities for alternative travel routes were scarce because repatriates only received the opportunity to travel to British Guiana in order to board a ship traveling to India during six of the years in the aforementioned date range. Thus, Suriname’s Asian population had few options for transportation to their home continent and competition for berths on ships traveling to British India or Java was undoubtedly fierce as a large number of potential migrants were pursuing a fixed number of travel slots. Although some British Indians and Javanese successfully repatriated back to India and the Indonesian archipelago, conditions in Asia were often unfavorable for the arrivals due to social issues. As a matter of fact, a multitude of “returned emigrants or ‘repatriated’ got ‘stranded’ in the Akra camp (Metiabruz, Calcutta) where they remained, ‘helpless,’ ‘aged’ or ‘infirm’ and desperately hoping for the government of India to send them back to one of the colonies as in India they felt unwanted. Some of them were indeed prepared to take any ship to wherever it would bring them as they felt everything was better than remaining in India.” Since familial and social difficulties were common among returners from South America upon arrival in Asia and transportation was very hard to obtain, many British Indians and Javanese made the logical choice to settle in Suriname.

Permanent settlement of large numbers of British Indians and Javanese immigrants within Suriname following completion of their contracts invited formation of solidarity as well as maintenance of imported cultural traditions among the colony’s various Asian ethnic groups. As it turns out, British Indians and Javanese successfully maintained the strength of most or all

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345 KV’s from relevant years provide in-depth data on ships traveling from Suriname to Eastern Asia. Cited: Hoeft, *In Place of Slavery*, 63, 223
346 Mangru, *History of East Indian Resistance*, 229, 309 refers to ship departures from British Guiana to Eastern Asia. Mangru states that around 13 Indians managed to return to India by way of British Guiana in 1938 and 11 Indians undertook an identical journey via British Guiana in 1949
of their various cultural trappings for three distinct reasons. First of all, new arrivals from Asia usually disseminated information about current events as well as major changes within their homelands to individuals who hailed from the same place and had been in Suriname for a significant period of time. Secondly, Asians were able to maintain strong ties to their pre-existing cultures because they needed to establish a sense of belonging in a foreign country and one of the easiest ways to accomplish this goal was to foster a strong sense of ethnic solidarity based on common interests such as language and culture. Moreover, ethnic solidarity was augmented by the fact that most immigrants suffered from geographical as well as social isolation and often turned to the construction and maintenance of their ethnic identities in order to foster a decent sense of security as they slowly acclimated to conditions within Suriname.\[348\]

Resolve to maintain customs and traditions connected to British India and Java certainly helped Suriname’s Asian population maintain a firm hold on their cultural identities, however, attitudes on the part of Suriname’s ruling class, particularly its Europeans, furthered the process of cultural maintenance within the colony’s Asian communities. Of significant importance is the fact that Suriname’s colonial authorities as well as the colony’s agricultural barons and the Asian immigrants themselves considered almost all contract laborers as temporary migrants.\[349\] Asians’ temporary status robbed them of any incentive to integrate into the colony’s culture as British Indians and Javanese laborers undoubtedly considered the maintenance of cultural traditions native to their homelands to be far more important as they would need to be prepared for the eventual voyage back to Asia. Also, some plantations went so far as to adopt official policies encouraging the active preservation of traditional practices emanating from Hindostani and Javanese cultural heritage. Interestingly enough, the colonial administration in Paramaribo soon

\[348\] Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 158 refers to the three main reasons for a strong sense of cultural solidarity among Suriname’s Asian migrants
\[349\] Ibid
followed suit and diversity initiatives on the part of multiple groups of European Surinamers undoubtedly contributed to the transference of those South Asian cultures to South America.\textsuperscript{350}

Maintenance of cultural traditions within Suriname’s British Indian and Javanese communities certainly helped the colony’s Asian population maintain close ties with their homelands. However, expatriate populations tend to channel their collective experiences into organic cultural development, which is facilitated by separations from a culture’s main power centers as new ideas and/or schools of thought often find less resistance within widely dispersed populations. Thus, the vast distances separating British India and the Indonesian archipelago prevented flawless transference of those polities’ cultural norms. Asian cultures usually did not experience a clean transfer to Suriname as there were far too many obstacles. For instance, the adaptation process that British Indians and Javanese endured while acclimating to Suriname’s harsh tropical environment clearly impacted a number of imported Asian cultural elements such as language and religion, which played extremely important roles in shaping Asian worldviews.

Hindostani and Javanese contract laborers originated from a number of regions within their home countries, which naturally harbored a number of pre-existing regional variations in language and culture. When Asians arrived in Suriname, they quickly came into contact with individuals from other parts of their homelands. Such interaction of individuals that adhered to regional variations of the same national culture quickly sparked a process of cultural syncretism in which several provincial variations of British Indian and Javanese culture were incorporated into decidedly unique iterations of Hindostani and Indonesian culture that could only be found within Suriname.\textsuperscript{351} Language and religion are the biggest institutions within a culture as they determine how members communicate with one another and how they frame the community’s

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid
worldview and perspective on external affairs. Incidentally, Asian attempts to preserve as much of their cultural identity as possible soon began to revolve around religious celebrations.\textsuperscript{352} However, such practices were certainly not immutable due to the vast distances separating Asia from the Americas. Thus, British Indians and Javanese populations within Suriname and elsewhere in the Caribbean experienced alterations of their pre-existing spiritual belief systems.

Although Suriname’s British Indian and Javanese communities did a lot of legwork as far as maintaining their imported cultural traditions, some degree of credit is certainly attributable to the colony’s political climate during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. To this end, the Dutch colonial government was quite indecisive regarding its cultural policies. At times, Paramaribo promoted cultural policies intended to encourage the assimilation of Asian immigrants into a homogenous society based on values indigenous to Christian schools of thought that dominated the West during this particular time period. On the other hand, Suriname’s colonial government also went through periods during which it took a more pluralistic stance and actively encouraged recognition of cultural differences emanating from the colony’s incredibly diverse population.\textsuperscript{353} Paramaribo’s vacillation between implementation of policies intended to assimilate all of the colony’s ethnic groups into an homogenous society and attempts to encourage multiculturalism within Surinamese played a vital role as far as Asian cultures’ success within this specific area of South America. Since Suriname’s colonial government did not pursue aggressive assimilation policies on a consistent basis, Asians were more or less free to practice their cultures in manners that they saw fit. Thus Hindostani and Javanese cultures experienced organic evolution as a result of their constituents’ new ideas and practices in areas such as language and religion, and such evolution may not have occurred without implicit approval from the colonial authorities.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid
The Unique Nature of Suriname’s Hindustani Population

Arguably the most important consideration to keep in mind when evaluating the gradual evolution of Hindostani culture within Suriname is the fact that Indian nationalism, even within the Subcontinent itself, had not yet reached its apex. Hindostani contract laborers departed an Indian Subcontinent that had not yet developed a fully-fledged national identity or the bonds of unity that usually define a fully developed nation. For the most part, residents of British India associated themselves with Bengali, Maratha, Rajput, Sikh or Hindustani peoples rather than with India as a whole due to the fact that the long-standing colonial government of the British Raj had generally precluded the development of communal and national identities within the Subcontinent up to that point in time. The lack of a national identity among the Hindostani arriving in Suriname certainly invited formation of an entirely new set of societal norms given the low likelihood of resistance from individuals determined to preserve common cultural norms originating in India, as there were no common cultural norms of any kind at this point in time.

As it turns out, Suriname’s British Indians took full advantage of their cultural innovation opportunities via development of original forms of language and religion, which eventually became embedded in the colony’s collective psyche. The time period ranging from 1891 to 1916 was absolutely crucial to the development of the Sarnami dialect among Hindustanis residing in Suriname. For the most part, British Indians utilized various regional languages such as Avadhj, Bhojpuri, Braj, Hindi, Urdu, Magahi, Maithili and Pahari upon their arrival in South America. As Hindustanis gained further exposure to Suriname’s other ethnic groups, they acquired some expertise in languages such as Sranan Tongo, Dutch, and English, which were combined with the pre-existing Indian regional dialects to form a new language that J.H. Adhin named Sarnami-

Hindustani in 1964. Over time, the new language dropped the second part of its original moniker and came to be known as Sarnami. Sarnami eventually evolved into an useful Indian lingua franca through which Hindostanis could easily communicate with their Surinamese compatriots.

Sarnami represents a departure from existing British Indian cultural traditions due to its unique blended nature. Sarnami was essentially an entirely new language based on synthesis of a multitude of languages and dialects found throughout Northern and Central India. Furthermore, Sarnami is of particular interest to linguists and Theo Damsteegt insists that it does not mirror any of India’s existing languages or dialects. As a matter of fact, Sarnami possesses a unique combination of grammatical elements from a number of different Indian languages. Moreover, Suriname’s relative isolation from British India and other parts of Asia encouraged development of exclusive grammatical forms that do not seem to appear in any other Hindostani language.

Thus, it is entirely possible that Sarnami represented an entirely new offshoot of the Hindi language family once it was developed in the South American interior. Development of new grammatical elements was not the only factor separating Sarnami Hindi from other Indian languages spoken exclusively in Asia; Sarnami also had other especially distinctive features.

As it turns out, the organic development of Sarnami and its status as a common language among Suriname’s Hindostani population engendered the assimilation of a number of loan words from Sranan Tongo, which was Suriname’s main lingua franca as far as communication between different ethnic groups was concerned. As Suriname moved into the nineteenth century, Hindi became the language of prestige for a majority of the colony’s Hindus. Adoption of Hindi as an prestigious language within South America mirrored prior developments in British India, which had seen most of its Hindus choose to adopt Northern Indian Hindi as the country’s language of

356 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 163 provides a discussion of linguists’ opinions on the uniqueness of Sarnami relative to other Indian dialects
prestige during the 1800s.\textsuperscript{357} Adoption of Hindi as a prestige language within Suriname indicates that Sarnami Hindi had evolved into a fully-fledged pidgin language encompassing elements from various European, Asian and African languages, all of which possessed extremely different grammatical constructs. In all likelihood, the pidgin nature of Sarnami Hindi rendered it unsuitable for ceremonial proceedings involving instances of complex writing such as the adjudication of wills, thus mandating the adoption of formally codified Hindi for those purposes.

Moreover, the development of Sarnami Hindi was unique to Suriname and illustrates the extent to which cultural amalgamation occurred within this particular Caribbean colony. The creation of pidgin Indian languages such as Sarnami was restricted to Suriname and did not appear to occur elsewhere in the Caribbean. Interestingly enough, British Indian migrants to Crown colonies such as British Guiana and Trinidad ended all relations with Indian languages shortly after their arrival in the Caribbean. One plausible explanation for the development of Sarnami Hindi within Suriname as opposed to other colonies that hosted British Indian contract laborers may be that the Dutch adopted social and cultural policies that diverged from those of other Caribbean colonial powers such as the British.\textsuperscript{358} As a general rule, the Dutch were very tolerant of the various cultures they encountered within the Netherlands’ far-flung empire as well as multiculturalism within their collection of overseas polities while the British Empire tended to emphasize adoption of a unified English identity throughout their colonies. British Caribbean colonies such as Trinidad and British Guiana placed a great deal of emphasis on the superiority of the English language and English culture. Since London placed great importance on the English language and culture, migrants to British Crown colonies were usually encouraged to adopt English social norms should they want to fully assimilate into polite society. On the other

\textsuperscript{357} Damsteegt, “Sarnami,” esp. 98-104; “Language Maintenance,” 79-80; Kishna, “Language and Language Use,” 4-7 offer more information about the eventual adoption of Northern Indian Hindi as Suriname’s language of prestige in the face of growing dependency on pidgin Sarnami

\textsuperscript{358} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 163 refers to Dutch colonies’ social and cultural policies as well as their influence on the formation of Sarnami
hand, Dutch colonies such as Surinam were not subject to any directives regarding language or culture as The Hague was concerned with other items of importance. Since the Dutch home government did not concern itself with linguistic or cultural uniformity, colonial administrations such as Suriname’s government saw no need to implement consistent cultural or educational policies of their own. Paramaribo actually encouraged multiculturalism on a semi-regular basis and went so far as to support official academic instruction in various South Asian languages, which certainly contributed to the organic development of languages such as Sarnami Hindi.359

Sarnami Hindi represents a significant development as far as amalgamation of Hindostani culture within Suriname, however, the colony’s resident British Indian population carried out additional forms of organic cultural development as they acclimated to South America. The acclimation process that British Indians underwent upon arrival in Suriname resulted in a wholly new form of Hinduism in addition to Sarnami Hindi, and Suriname’s unique brand of Hinduism varied greatly from that particular religion’s established forms within the Indian Subcontinent. Around 80% of Suriname’s British Indian migrants adhered to Hinduism and these immigrants imported the religion’s extremely flexible character to the Caribbean. Dutch Guiana’s British Indian migrants originated from an incredibly diverse set of religious beliefs and had different opinions on items such as the true role of the caste system, various religious rituals, validity of other beliefs, the practice of praying to multiple deities, the importance of sacred religious sites such as shrines, observance of festival days and localized traditions involving the materialization of supernatural entities.360 Interestingly enough, Hindu immigrants from British India managed to synthesize their many religious beliefs into a distinct religion known as Caribbean Hinduism,

359 Ibid
360 Vertovec, “‘Official’ and ‘Popular’ Hinduism,” 127-128; Van der Yeer and Vertovec, “Brahmanism Abroad,” 153 offer further information about the diversity of religious practices within the Hindu religious umbrella and their relative importance to the practice of Hinduism as a whole
which deviated from the original variety of Hinduism present in the Indian Subcontinent.\textsuperscript{361} The complex relationship between British Indian Hinduism and Surinamese Hinduism is akin to the relationship between a mother language and its various offshoots as the two religions shared the same foundation but differ in several crucial areas. Furthermore, these crucial differences can alter the religious experience of Hindu adherents within the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

Application of the Hindu caste system represented one of the more important ways in which Surinamese Hinduism diverged from Hindi beliefs prevalent in British India. The caste system provided the organizational framework for the Hindu religion and provided guidance for the development of India’s social structure. Hindu castes heavily influenced the lives of their members as they determined individuals’ relative ranking within India’s social hierarchy. Castes also adjudicated the type of occupations available to their members, and a majority of a particular caste’s members were likely to specialize in a rather narrowly focused range of jobs concentrated in one particular sector of the Indian economy. Moreover, Hindu castes adhered to a fairly diverse collection of religious practices and caste-specific customs determined the various spiritual rituals and traditions that members were expected to perform. The caste system also restricted Indians’ marriage options, as they were endogamous. Thus, unions between members of different castes were taboo throughout the Indian Subcontinent. Although Hindu castes assumed overly corporate characteristics, the system as a whole was highly localized and most segregation occurred at the village or district level rather than on a purely national basis.\textsuperscript{362}

While the organizational principles associated with the caste system flourished within the Indian Subcontinent due to their unparalleled aptitude for serving as tools of social organization, Suriname’s eclectic culture represented a stark departure from the organization present in British

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\textsuperscript{361} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 164 offers references to the formation of a unique Caribbean Hindu religion that diverged from Indian Hinduism
\textsuperscript{362} Ghurye, \textit{Caste and Class}, 2-20 offers information about the various sociocultural functions that castes served within the Indian Subcontinent
\end{flushright}
India. Thus, the caste system could not replicate its effectiveness in South America. Since castes were unable to function as prescribed following their importation from British India to Suriname, they started evolving to fit the South American landscape and underwent several radical transformations. Contemporary observers generally agree that the Hindu caste system failed to assert itself within the Caribbean, at least as far as its original form is concerned. The caste system later underwent a period of transformation as Hindostani immigrants sought to mold British India’s organizational framework into an apparatus that would effectively address their needs while working as contract laborers in South America. C.J.M. de Klerk insists that individual castes were forced to abandon their corporate natures and surrender their individuality upon arrival in Suriname in favor of an unprecedented nationalistic Hindu caste, which was invariably closed to all other ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{363} Interestingly enough, Suriname’s Hindi migrants assimilated Suriname’s other ethnic groups into the caste system as external population units came to represent social classes that were roughly equivalent to British India’s sizable collection of lower castes such as \textit{sudras} and Untouchables. Interestingly enough, the demise of Caribbean Hinduism’s formal caste system occurred via construction of strong bonds between very distinct Hindu sects, which valued bonds with their countrymen over associations with Suriname’s vast hodgepodge of other ethnic and religious groups, which were probably perceived as outsiders.

As it turned out, Hindostani indentured servants organically developed a strong sense of solidarity among themselves, and this sense of solidarity also applied to individuals who chose to pursue livelihoods centered on the maintenance of small farms following the conclusion of their labor contracts. Furthermore, it appears that a majority of British Indians felt that everyone that had decided to migrate from the Indian Subcontinent to Suriname shared a common fate, and this strong sense of collectivism overwhelmed Hindus’ pre-existing habits of segregating themselves

\textsuperscript{363} De Klerk, \textit{Immigratie der Hindostanen}, 167-8 offers a discussion of the evolution of an unique nationalistic Indian caste within the Caribbean
from the rest of the ethnic group via caste distinctions. Contemporary observers such as D.W.D. Comins mention that Hindostanis seemed to disregard caste-specific laws and restrictions once they departed Calcutta for South America. Open disregard for formalized aspects of the caste system may have stemmed from conditions within the Calcutta depot since living conditions within the staging area for emigration to South America subjected inhabitants to practices such as communal bathing and dining, that rendered emigrants impure as far as the caste system was concerned. Rendering of individuals as impure generally destroyed all intentions of continued adherence to Hinduism as most impure individuals were simply shunted into the lower castes and became Sudras or even Untouchables according to Hindi religious law. However, such practices did not continue in Suriname. One of the last vestiges of the original Hindu caste system present within Suriname was high-caste immigrants’ general ambivalence about working under drivers and supervisors originating from lower castes. Furthermore, Brahmins and Kshatriyas exercised disproportionate amounts of influence within Suriname’s Hindu community, which mirrored the Indian Subcontinent’s existing sociocultural fabric. Moreover, low-caste immigrants routinely paid their respects to other migrants who had belonged to superior castes while living in British India. As it turns out, several contemporary sources familiar with Surinamese Hinduism detail the comprehensive collapse of the Hindu caste system within South America and the Caribbean.

D.W.D. Comins discussed Suriname’s Hindus in considerable detail following his travels throughout the colony and revealed that “[Hindu immigrants] wear sahib’s clothes and hats, talk a patois which is considered to be English, drink rum, keep fowls and pigs, often in their houses if permitted, and eat them and eggs when they require them. Their belief is that no man can call himself a Hindu who has crossed the sea, so they lose all respect for the caste and the religion of

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364 Comins, *Note on Emigration to British Guiana, 25* and *Indische Mercur* no. 53, 1892 offer info. regarding the relative abandonment of castes
365 Ibid
their fathers which they neglect, and acquire no other in their place.” Interestingly enough, even though most of Suriname’s Hindu migrants appear to have abandoned their association with the Hindu religion, they still adhered to several fundamental beliefs that proved unshakable, no matter the character and devotion level of individual British Indians within South America. Comins clearly remarked that Suriname’s nominal Hindus “still wear amulets and charms and believe in the evil eye, ghosts, and devils innumerable, but in no God. One of their reasons for not returning to India is that they would be despised and mobbed in their native villages or have to spend much money for readmission to their caste,” thus wiping out a substantial amount of the financial benefits gained via hard labor on Suriname’s vast collection of agricultural estates.

Lack of caste purity on the part of Hindustani migrants to Suriname did not represent the only reason why Hinduism’s caste system failed to gain a foothold within South America and the Caribbean. Even though the caste distribution of Suriname’s Hindostani immigrants mirrored British India’s population demographics, the caste system broke down due to a lack of viability within South America. As it turns out, Suriname’s unique demographics made it rather difficult for the castes to survive in a manner similar to their state of existence within British India. The simple fact of the matter was that many castes’ populations were simply far too small for them to ever attain the requisite self-sufficiency required to support the caste system’s strict endogamous policies. Furthermore, endogamy was also precluded by the immigrant population’s extremely skewed sex ratio, which rendered large numbers of Indian males unable to find suitable mates within South America. Moreover, laborers’ lives were strictly regimented while they fulfilled the terms of their contracts, and this particular brand of regimentation did not allow Hindostanis to avoid contact with members of other castes or to maintain the practice of caste commensality.

366 Quote regarding British Indian immigrants following their assumption of permanent residency within Suriname, attributed to D.W.D. Comins. India Office Library and Records “Emigration Proceedings” (1893); See also unpublished note on Suriname, quoted in Tinker, New System, 209.
367 Ibid
as workers often had to eat with members of other castes as well as with adherents of religions other than Hinduism. One of the main tenets of the Hindu caste system is maintenance of separation between castes, and such separations are usually facilitated via the assignment of castes to distinct groups of jobs, in addition to predetermined social roles and the implementation of caste-specific regulations. However, Suriname’s system of indentured labor classified British Indians into one large social group and most Hindostani held similar types of agricultural jobs.

Agricultural estates’ methodology for dividing work assignments among their large cadres of Asian contract laborers did not rely on ideas of occupational specialization present within the Hindu caste system. All contract laborers were compelled to obey the policies and procedures set forth by plantation owners and managers. Since European Surinamers held virtually all of the decision-making power within the colony, members of the upper castes lost a great deal of their political influence and economic clout as they were now unable to simply adjudicate matters via exercise of political, economic, or judicial authority as those levers of control were inaccessible to virtually all Asians, regardless of caste or religious affiliation. As a general rule, plantation staffers needed to maintain as much control as possible of their labor force in order to achieve maximum productivity, and higher-caste individuals represented a set of potential usurpers of authority since British Indians were theoretically accustomed to following the lead of Brahmins and Kshatriyas due to their time in India. This particular characteristic of the caste system contributed to its demise since some Surinamese agricultural barons favored members of the lower castes due to the fact that contractants hailing from high castes were often perceived as having a ‘pernicious’ impact on other Asian indentured servants. The caste

368 Smith, Raymond T., and Chandra Jayawardena. “Caste and Social Status among the Indians of Guyana.” 43-92 offers further details regarding strict regimentation on Suriname’s plantations and the impact that externally-imposed systems of social interaction had on the Hindu caste system. 369 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 165 offers a discussion of European usurpation of high castes’ means of asserting power over the lower castes. 370 Smith and Jayawardena, “Caste and Social Status,” 49, 50-52. See also Speckmann, “Caste System,” 206; Klass, East Indians in Trinidad, 25-26; Comins, Note on Emigration to British Guiana, 79 for planter opinions on the “pernicious” influence of higher-caste Hindus on their estates.
system’s descent into irrelevance was also accelerated by the ascent of ideas that challenged the legitimacy of the Surinamese caste system on a fundamental level. Members of the high castes consistently failed to observe taboos associated with their status due to the fact that they had to meet various obligations to planters and other superiors within Suriname. Thus, questions of religious impurity, particularly deliberations of whether or not the theoretical purity associated with upper castes such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas had been permanently tainted by contact with Sudras or even Untouchables, often broached themselves within the colony’s Hindu population.

Even though high-caste Hindustani lost a great deal of their influence and despite the gradual destruction of Hinduism’s caste system at the hands of demographic and sociocultural forces present within South America, the caste system did not completely disappear. As it turns out, the Hindu caste system was deeply ingrained into the consciousness of migrants from British India and maintenance of some hierarchical traditions suited this particular population because doing so helped foster connections with the Hindu homeland. An authentic caste system based on Hindi sociocultural philosophies rooted in British India may have failed to take root in Dutch Guiana and elsewhere in the Caribbean following the arrival of migrants from the Indian Subcontinent. Nevertheless, Suriname’s Hindu migrants retained some cultural elements that were inextricably associated with Hinduism’s caste system. For instance, most Brahmins retained access to privileges that mirrored their rights within the Indian Subcontinent’s existing sociocultural fabric. Surinamese Brahmins retained their exalted status relative to the rest of the colony’s Hindu population and continued to receive top billing within the Hindu system of social stratification. However, Caribbean Brahmins’ exalted status happened to be based on principles that were rather divergent from justifications for high status within British India. As it turns out, Brahmin tendencies to occupy positions of power was the product of their ability to consolidate.

371 Smith and Jayawardena, “Caste and Social Status,” 49; Brereton, “Experience of Indentureship,” 26 provide information about caste taboos.
power within the Caribbean as well as their desire to preserve their status as the capstone of the British Indian social hierarchy at the expense of individuals belonging to the lower castes.372

Although Brahmins faced numerous challenges as far as consolidation of power atop Suriname’s Hindustani hierarchy was concerned, they ultimately succeeded thanks to domination of Hindu religion. *Brahmins*, or *pandits* as they were called in Suriname, managed to maintain their exalted status at the head of the Hindu social hierarchy and soon initiated successful plans to strengthen their status within the colony’s Hindu community. *Brahmins* initially functioned as simple *karam kandis* (ritualistic experts), however, their rather detailed knowledge of the Hindu religion turned into a competitive advantage over other castes as *Brahmins* were eventually able to form a monopoly based on their expertise in Hindu rituals and knowledge of various Hindu religious documents such as the *Vedas*. Interestingly enough, religious mystics known as *gurus* had monopolized the trade in sacred religious knowledge within the Indian Subcontinent, but Suriname suffered from a severe lack of *gurus*.373 Thus the colony’s *Brahmins* took advantage of an avenue though which they could ascend to the top of the Hindostani social hierarchy within Dutch Guiana as many British Indian migrants wished to maintain their religious beliefs while working in South America and the Caribbean. Since great emphasis was placed on maintaining some facsimile of Hindu religious traditions within Suriname, the colony’s *Brahmins* gained unprecedented importance since, as *pandits*, they were instrumental as far as the promotion as well as preservation of dossiers of traditional knowledge associated with the Hindu religion and British Indian culture. Moreover, the fact that *Brahmins* held the primary responsibility for

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372 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 165 provides a discussion of the methods that *Brahmins* used to maintain their place atop the Hindu hierarchy. 373 Van der Veer and Vertovec, “Brahmanism Abroad,” 149, 156-61; Dumont, “Caste,” 34; Singh, “East Indians and the Larger Society,” 49; Vertovec, “‘Official’ and ‘Popular’ Hinduism,” 135. Note that Surinamese Brahmins increased the number of functions that they performed upon arrival in South America and often worked as astrologers, exorcists, family priests, funeral priests, healers, ritual specialists, teachers, and temple priests. As far as specific religious practices were concerned, Caribbean *Brahmins* acquired a near-monopoly over the performance of *bhagwats*, also known as *vagnas* (complex religious ritual centered around the reading of sacred texts), *kathas* (ritual based on recitation of sacred lore), formal *puja* and the *sanskaras* (formal rites of passage). Brahmins also protected their positions via endogamy and assertion of a birthright that allowed them to fulfill each of the aforementioned religious and ceremonial roles throughout the entirety of their residence in the Caribbean.
preservation of religious knowledge within Dutch Guiana engendered the ‘Brahmanization’ of Surinamese Hinduism. Hindus within Suriname gradually adopted a fixed repertoire of religious rites recommended by their Brahmins and constant observance of this particular set of Hindu rituals accelerated the ‘Brahmanization’ of Hinduism within Suriname. As a matter of fact, Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec claim that the evolution of Caribbean Hinduism represents an ethnicization of Hinduism under the leadership of the region’s Brahmins.\textsuperscript{374}

Munshi Khan, by virtue of his long residence in Suriname and time spent cultivating Skerpi, gained a high level of exposure to Hindu religious practices that he was familiar with from his time in British India. To this end, some anecdotes in Rahman Khan’s autobiography offer deep insights into how the Hindu religion transformed upon arrival in South America. As previously stated, the caste system began to deteriorate due to the fact that Brahmins did not have to rigidly observe Hindu religious taboos as they did in the Indian Subcontinent. To this end, “the so-called Brahmins of Surinam... distilled alcohol, sold and drank it, sold milk and cows, ate every conceivable non-vegetarian dish, and slept with women of different casted and religions to attain their ‘salvation’ by producing offspring from them. They committed all the sins mentioned in the Vedas. Despite committing all types of sins, they still claimed to be chaste and pure!”\textsuperscript{375} Lack of adherence to Hindu taboos on the part of Surinamese Brahmins was indicative of a far-reaching modification of Hinduism’s fundamental principles within the Western Hemisphere as Brahmins were clearly no longer expected to uphold Hinduism’s strict standards concerning religious purity as presented in the Vedas of that particular Asian religion.

Another way in which Surinamese Hinduism deviated from British Indian Hinduism was the way in which the religious authorities approached conversion. Suriname’s Hindus quickly

\textsuperscript{374} Ibid
\textsuperscript{375} Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 80 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
attained a proclivity for converting members of other religions as they probably were of the opinion that numerical solidarity was of the utmost importance while dealing with external loci of power such as the Dutch colonial government in Paramaribo as well as the British Consul, also located in Suriname’s capital. Although Munshi Rahman Khan remained a Muslim throughout his time in South America, he encountered requests to convert and later released a condemnation of Hindu conversion practices due to their deviation from baseline Hindu principles. According to Rahman Khan, conversion requests often happened via close personal associates and “while I was in the Kanpur depot, Babu Ramnarayan Singh had indeed asked me to change my religion and caste and declare myself a Brahmin because in that way it would have been easier for me to earn money in Surinam. But I deemed this to be a sinful act. I had no intention of cheating my disciples. I was afraid of Khuda [Allah] and did not convert as was asked from me.”

Despite resistance to conversion on Munshi Khan’s part, not all Muslims within Suriname possessed the same loyalty to Allah and the Qur’an and were thus vulnerable to conversion requests made on the behalf of colonial Suriname’s fairly eclectic mix of Hindu sects.

Khan had personal experiences with conversion of Muslims to the Hindu faith and he mentions “Sukhnandan (whose son Sukhdeo I had taught) informed me on 22 February 1934 that pandits had converted six Muslims to the Sanatan Dharm. Of these six, one was Allahrakhi, a sex worker and another was her pimp, Alladin. Pandit Ramanand of Skropuhlo, a leader of the Sanatan Dharm Mahamandal, had carried out the cleansing. What a shameful act!”

Intentional conversion of Muslims to Hinduism went against long-established Hindu traditions and represented a further splintering of South America Hinduism from the practices and methodologies found in the Hindu religion’s homeland of British India. Conversion of Muslims

376 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 98 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
377 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 224 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
to Hinduism was considered a violation of Indian Hindu tenets for a number of reasons. First, accepting religious outsiders and impure individuals into “one’s community is abominable. The one who does this, not only offends his religion, but also treads on a path which leads to hell and has no way to rid himself of this sin. This is because the Brahmin who allows a low caste person to perform rites like gurumukh, or Om, or yagna, himself is transformed into a Sudra, and the Sudra becomes a Brahmin and is entitled to all the rights of a Brahmin.”\textsuperscript{378} In this case, Brahmins essentially transfer their exalted, high caste status to members of the low castes in exchange for Sudra status, which represents an illogical sacrifice on the part of those willing to undergo the conversion process as far as individuals like Munshi Rahman Khan were concerned.

One of the main concerns surrounding conversion of Muslims and other non-Hindus into Hindus was the fact that Hinduism provided very little supporting evidence for the validity of these conversions, and Munshi Rahman Khan later alludes to the issue of conversions’ religious legality. In order to protest the tendency of Suriname’s Hindu population to perform conversions of outsiders, Munshi Khan authored a series of letters to the colony’s pandits, intending to “send their reply to Hindustan so that people back home could learn how the staunch Sanatanis of Surinam have followed their religion; how they have spread their holy religion by these conversions and what their thoughts and deeds are: how they let the Muslims perform pujas to their holy deities and heavenly bodies and disgrace them.”\textsuperscript{379} Although Munshi Khan and other like-minded individuals firmly opposed conversions, they conceded acceptance of this particular religious practice should Hindus find concrete proof of valid conversions within its collection of religious texts. To this end, Khan maintained, “if someone in our homeland were to prove that there indeed is a veda-mantra in the Sanatan Dharm that sanctions this cleansing and conversion,
I shall accept it. In that case, you can even change a Brahmin into a Sudra and vice versa like the Arya Samajis are doing, and spread a foul belief. Nobody would question you in that case.”

Despite his staunch opposition to the Hindu practice of converting infidels from their previous religion to Hinduism, Munshi Khan likely came to the realization that he and others in his camp could do little about the growing conversion phenomena since Suriname was not subject to the social pressures present within British India, and Khan closes the matter by stating the following to adherents of conversion sects: “You may do what you think proper. On 24 February 1934, I wrote two chautals and sent them to different pandits all over Surinam seeking a reply regarding these activities. In these chautals I have proven that these acts of conversion are against the spirit of the Vedas. None of the Vedas does sanction such so-called purification rites” intended to transmute non-Hindus or Sudras into Brahmins while booting Brahmins to the low castes.

Although lack of adherence to Brahmanism, particularly the taboos associated with that caste, and a newfound emphasis on conversion gradually resulted in ideological separation of South American Hinduism from the Hindi religion practiced on the Indian Subcontinent, the two distinct Hindu sects maintained some commonalities. Given the radical social and religious transformations engendered by British Indians’ migration to the Caribbean, it is not surprising that the region’s Hindus decided to observe a reduced number of religious rites and festivals relative to Hindus residing in British India. Although Suriname’s Hindus certainly cut back on performance of rites and attendance of religious festivals, they continued to heavily emphasize life-cycle rites observing events such as birth, marriage and death just as they had done prior to their decision to depart British India for South America and the Caribbean Sea. Maintenance of rituals such as marriage rites as well as beliefs in the sanctity of the Hindi samsara concept,
which included emphasis on birth and death as manifestations of an individual’s never-ending wheel of life helped maintain connections between Surinamese Hindus and their compatriots in British India. Preservation of certain rites and beliefs were not the only way in which South American and Caribbean Hindis maintained solidarity with their British Indian brethren as members of both sects still honored the same divine points within the Hindu religious calendar. Thus, Surinamese Hindus made the logical decision to continue observing some, but not all of Hinduism’s major religious festivals. As far as adherents of Caribbean Hinduism were concerned, the region’s major religious festivals happened to be the *Ramnauni* and *Krishna Janmashtmi*, which were birthday celebrations for Hindu deities known as Rama and Krishna.\footnote{383 Ibid}

**Transference of Indonesian Culture to the Northern Coast of South America**

Transmutation of Hindustani culture via migration of British Indians to Suriname was one of the hallmarks of South America’s epoch of indentured servitude, however, Javanese experiences have to be taken into account as that particular sociocultural group composed around half of Suriname’s total contract laborer population. As it turns out, the cultural demographics of migrants traveling from Java and other locales within Indonesia to Suriname diverged greatly from those of Hindostani migration from British India to South America and the Caribbean. The most important thing to keep in mind when considering Javanese migration to Suriname is that the demographic nature of Javanese immigration from the Indonesian Archipelago to the Dutch Caribbean diverged from the British Indian case. A multitude of ethnic and religious groups migrated from British India to Suriname. Conversely, the Javanese population group dominated migration from the Netherlands East Indies to Dutch Guiana. Although Javanese laborers dominated migration from Indonesia to Suriname, contractants from other Indonesian population
groups, such as the Sundanese and Madurese, accounted for a small proportion of Paramaribo’s arrivals from the Dutch East Indies. The dominance of one particular group within Suriname’s migrants from the Indonesian archipelago meant that immigrants from that particular part of the world lacked incentives as well as opportunities to meld a variety of distinctive regional cultures into a multifaceted fusion culture unique to Dutch holdings in the Caribbean.

Other contributing factors to the lack of an unique Indonesian fusion culture within Suriname included the fact that a significant proportion of Javanese immigrants focused their life force onto their powerful desire to repatriate back to Java as soon as possible. Interestingly enough, Javanese contract laborers’ tendency to orientate their worldviews toward Indonesia provided this particular cadre of immigrants with a viable method for escaping the reality of their lowly status within Suriname. In this case, Indonesia functioned as a ‘superior’ homeland, and this specific role within the Javanese worldview allowed Javanese contractants to rationalize their struggles within Dutch Guiana as well as their subsequent desire to return to Asia. Moreover, Javanese immigrants constantly interacted with each other while in Suriname, which engendered camaraderie within the colony’s sizable Indonesian community. Conscious maintenance of a strong sense of community solidarity aided preservation of Javanese cultural heritage within Suriname. Close interactions among Javanese likely presented that particular ethnic group with extremely limited incentives to pursue interpersonal connections with other ethnic groups, and successful interactions between various sociocultural groups are absolutely crucial as far as development of prosperous pidgin cultures in unfamiliar regions of the world.

As a matter of fact, unique elements of Javanese culture inhibited Indonesian interactions with Suriname’s Hindostanis, Creoles, Europeans and Afro-Surinamese. The *jaji* (shipmate)

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384 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 168 provides a discussion of demographic trends present within Javanese migration from Indonesia to Suriname
385 Ibid
bond was especially important as far as maintenance of Javanese cultural solidarity was concerned. Javanese immigrants addressed their shipmates via conventional kinship terms accompanied by the ‘jaji’ suffix, and terms such as mak-jaji (mother), pak-jaji (father) and yu-jaji (older sister) were widely used within Suriname’s Indonesian community. Furthermore, Javanese cultural concepts such as rakun (emphasis on cultivation of a strong sense of harmony via practices such as conflict avoidance) and sambatan (the practice of providing communal assistance to community members engaged in large-scale projects such as home construction) were readily transferred from Indonesia to Suriname. This strong sense of community among Suriname’s Javanese likely reinforced those migrants’ tendency to interact only with members of their particular ethnic group as well as their adherence to Indonesian cultural norms. Thus limited interactions between Javanese and Suriname’s other major ethnic groups severely curtailed the ability of the colony’s other cultural groups to modify traditional practices imported directly from the Netherlands East Indies. However, Javanese culture within South America and the Caribbean, while an extremely close facsimile of existing Indonesian sociocultural norms, experienced minor alterations due to practical considerations emanating from Suriname’s unique population demographics, particularly the presence of ethnic groups not found within Java.

Such modifications, although rather limited in scope, are easily delineated upon close examination of cultural trappings utilized by Suriname’s migrants from the Netherlands East Indies. Javanese had served as the primary language of Suriname’s cadre of Dutch East Indian immigrants dating back to their initial arrival in the colony. No new version of the Javanese language developed as a result of accelerated interaction between individuals hailing from different parts of the island. However, once the Javanese community had established itself within

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386 Davids, “East Indian Family,” 393, and Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad*, 92 offer a discussion of the jaji bond. Note that no literal translation for the term jaji exists, however, this term may originate from a similar Hindi term jahaji, since the Hindostanis referred to shipmate bonds as jahaji bhai.
South America, Javanese did creolize to the point that linguists often refer to the Surinamese-Javanese language. Although Surinamese-Javanese differs somewhat from the original iteration of its mother language, it appears to precisely mirror Javanese as far as phonology, morphology and syntax are concerned. Although Indonesian Javanese and the Surinamese iteration of the Javanese language maintained consistent grammatical structures despite their existence in distant polities, they are considered distinct dialects due to a extremely important element of language.

The primary difference between the version of Javanese utilized in Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia and Surinamese-Javanese can be found in the lexicon of the two languages. Surinamese-Javanese absorbed a significant number of loan words from the colony’s other major languages, namely Sranan Tongo Creole and Surinamese Dutch, and these loan words, which originated from languages that had also undergone a process of creolization, differentiate South America’s Javanese language from the unadulterated iteration utilized within the Netherlands East Indies. Interestingly enough, the Javanese language followed earlier precedents established by Sranan Tongo in that it heavily borrowed from elements of Suriname’s existing lingua franca in order to facilitate interaction between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages that would have been rather difficult to achieve otherwise given the wide range of linguistic variations between Suriname’s collection of European, African and Asian dialects.

As far as diversions were concerned, Suriname’s Javanese migrants naturally turned to familiar leisure activities that had attained widespread popularity within Indonesia. Thus, Dutch Guiana’s Indonesian contract laborers usually used their free time to chat with one another (omong-omong in Javanese), smoke, drink, and gamble. As it turns out, the Javanese were exceptionally fond of gambling, which was to be expected as games of chance were frequently

388 Ibid. Vruggink also discusses Surinamese-Javanese’s liberal usage of loan words from the colony’s diverse collection of creolized languages
played throughout the Indonesian Archipelago.\textsuperscript{389} The proclivity of Javanese immigrants to spend large amounts of time and financial capital on games of chance irritated their supervisors to no end because gambling reduced laborers’ effectiveness in the field, rendering them less cost-effective than management hoped. Gambling among Suriname’s Javanese population became so widespread that members of the colonial government and individuals associated with the upper reaches of various plantations’ hierarchies began to universally regard gambling as a pernicious and uncontrollable social evil because games of chance had a propensity for inciting criminal mischief as well as improper behavior among the colony’s Indonesian population. Nevertheless, the Javanese continued to indulge themselves and regularly participated in popular games such as blackjack, \textit{main dadu} (dice) and \textit{tyekèn}, which was a card game that originated from China. Games of chance tended to be the sole purview of Suriname’s Javanese population, however, Hindostanis sometimes participated. Although Indian contractants were allowed to participate in Javanese gambling sessions, members of Marienburg plantation’s hierarchy indicated that the Hindostanis had a tendency to cheat while gambling and were often shunned by the Javanese.\textsuperscript{390}

As in other regions of the world, gambling had a pernicious influence on Suriname’s Javanese population as chronic gamblers often paid a steep price in order to fuel their addiction for the adrenaline rush provided by high-stakes gambling escapades. Unfortunately, Javanese proclivity for gambling was mostly confined to the male population of that particular ethnic group but women and children often bore the brunt of foul tempers engendered by gambling-driven financial losses. Excessive gambling among Suriname’s Javanese community resulted in an noticeable uptick of domestic violence directed against women and children, alcohol and drug abuse, which usually morphed into full-blown addictions as a result of Asian contract laborers’

\textsuperscript{389} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 159 offers a detailed listing of leisure activities that members of Suriname’s Javanese population tended to favor.

\textsuperscript{390} ARA, NHM, CC 1151-9186, 1920 offer references to Javanese games of chance and accusations that the Hindostanis cheated while gambling. This piece of information regarding relations between Suriname’s British Indians and Javanese is cited within Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 160.
persistent attempts to forget about significant gambling losses, and episodes of theft, which generally transpired when some degenerate gamblers were attempting to recoup financial losses via means other than games of chance. Rampant gambling within the ranks of Suriname’s contract laborers also encouraged the open use of blackmail and other adverse methods of debt collection, and blackmail undoubtedly contributed to the formation of deep fissures among Dutch Guiana’s Javanese community since creditors would often stop at nothing to collect on debts owed as a result of gambling victories. Creditor persistence was exacerbated by the fact that cash was extremely difficult to obtain within Suriname, thus many Javanese suffered through financial insolvency due to their cultural proclivity for engaging in games of chance.

In addition to financial insolvency, Javanese gambling within Suriname’s agricultural estates exposed this particular population subset to power abuses from above as members of the colony’s plantation hierarchy often used financial debts as a tool through which they could tightly control Javanese grunts. Mandurs as well as overseers were notorious for attempts to “enrich themselves by forcing their subordinates to play and lose.” Some heavy gamblers managed to lose all of their possessions of value, including the agricultural tools that they needed in order to perform their plantation jobs. Thus, behavioral patterns centered on episodes of degenerate gambling rendered some contract laborers incapable of performing assigned labor tasks and plunging them into further debt due to the fact that purchase of new agricultural tools required access to liquid pools of financial capital. Expenditure of financial capital on agricultural tools and other job-related necessities broached other problems within Javanese society, and these issues threatened to bring down Suriname’s carefully crafted system of indentured servitude. One of the secondary repercussions that gambling had for Suriname’s

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391 Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 160 provides a discussion of the severe gambling consequences that engulfed Suriname’s Javanese community.
392 ARA, NHM, U 1139-9185, 1908. For a listing of similar reports, see EBG, Jb 1917, PK 167. Cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 160, 239
393 Ibid
Javanese population was that excessive participation in gaming sessions caused regular participants to suffer from chronic exhaustion. It was not uncommon for people to gamble nonstop from dusk to dawn, and loss of wages often rendered Asian indentured servants incapable of buying any food, and consistent failure to maintain a sufficient caloric intake caused degenerate gamblers to suffer from severe undernourishment. The killer combination of chronic sleep deprivation and undernourishment negatively impacted labor productivity as well as the total amount of wages earned by Asian contract laborers, and sometimes even resulted in hospitalization if sufferers were too weak to function within Suriname’s plantation society.\textsuperscript{394}

Suriname’s central powers soon came to the realization that habitual gambling among the Javanese represented a serious threat to the colony’s agricultural economy due to reductions in contract laborer productivity levels, and several measures designed to reduce the scope of gambling on the colony’s agricultural estates were soon implemented. For instance, decision-makers within Marienburg’s upper management were fully aware of the fact that gambling among British Indian and Javanese indentured laborers created numerous issues throughout the estate. Human resources issues such as excessive loss of wages and malnourishment within the contract laborer population pervaded Marienburg to the point that management unilaterally decided to start paying part of contract laborers’ wages in rice. Although the policy of partially issuing Asian workers’ wages in rice was well intentioned, it was rendered ineffective by the fact that British Indian and Javanese gamblers quickly started betting with their officially-issued rice rations while participating in gambling parties. Marienburg’s management eventually caught on

\textsuperscript{394} Hoefte, \textit{In Place of Slavery}, 160 provides a discussion of secondary effects connected to rampant gambling among Suriname’s Javanese
to the new practice of gambling with rice rations and started providing ready-cooked food as part of workers’ wages instead of rice in an effort to restore some degree of sanity to the plantation.\textsuperscript{395}

Surinamese-Javanese migrants’ proclivity for gambling activities extended far beyond the confines of estates that they worked on while fulfilling the terms of their labor contracts. Javanese migrants who had successfully completed their labor contracts and were waiting for opportunities to repatriate to Indonesia commonly had to spend time in Paramaribo’s coolie depot before they could gain passage on ships traveling back to Asia. Residence in the coolie depot provided few entertainment options and gambling naturally became one of the primary recreational activities among this specific subset of Suriname’s resident Javanese population. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for potential repatriates to lose all of their belongings via participation in gambling parties within the coolie depot, and most Javanese who suffered such a fate commonly decided to sign a new labor contract that required them to remain in South America rather than return to Java empty-handed.\textsuperscript{396} The tendency for migrants to renew their labor contracts out of necessity after suffering large gambling losses within the coolie depot or elsewhere undermined the contractually guaranteed right to a return passage that all migrants received prior to their decision to depart Asia for South America. Furthermore, self-inflicted restriction of the right to return to Asia undoubtedly produced a sense of powerlessness among the Javanese as they likely felt that they were trapped in a foreign land and could not escape.

Given that plantation-level reforms intended to curb Suriname’s runaway gambling epidemic were largely ineffective, the colonial government in Paramaribo soon decided to take action lest the Asians’ leisure activities undermine the colony’s financial profitability. To this end, several stringent colony-wide measures were put into effect, however, government decrees’

\textsuperscript{395} ARA, NHM, W 1134-9185, 1903; BB 1145-9185, 1914; U 1132-9184, 1901; De Betovering edited by Hoefte, 95 offer a discussion of the various measures that Marienburg implemented in an effort to curb Asian gambling on the estate. Cited: Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 160-1, 239
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid
effectiveness was limited because gambling had become ingrained into Suriname’s culture at that point in time. Suriname’s *Koloniale Staten* ultimately passed a law that prohibited all gambling activity throughout the colony. However, this particular piece of anti-gambling legislation was extremely difficult to enforce as Suriname’s colonial police force did not possess nearly enough manpower to adequately supervise the colony for signs that Asian migrants were participating in games of chance. Furthermore, Suriname’s colonial police rarely conducted anti-gambling raids in Javanese *kampungs* due to the fact that those particular sections of the colony were extremely dangerous for outsiders, and police officers were usually reduced to fascinated observers when they did come across gambling activities within *kampungs*.\(^397\) Paramaribo’s proclamations of gambling’s illegality within Suriname’s borders had little impact, and the gambling epidemic continued to ravage the colony’s Indonesian population. Contemporary observers maintain that the Surinamese-Javanese had far more issues with gambling than their compatriots in Indonesia and that the relevant authorities could do very little to solve the colony’s problems with rampant gambling since games of chance possessed a great deal of importance within Javanese culture.\(^398\)

The pernicious influence of Javanese Surinamers’ addiction to gambling was certainly not limited to financial losses as many unlucky gamblers turned to substance abuse in order to dull the pain of their losses. As it turned out, a sizable number of Asian contract laborers turned to alcohol as a palliative since it was an extremely accessible substance and could easily be used to temporarily forget about the trials and tribulations of life within Suriname. Since Suriname functioned as a Dutch sugar colony, sizable quantities of high-proof rum, which was produced by processing byproducts of sugar cultivation known as molasses, were readily available and the colony’s Asian populations was known for its propensity to consume significant amounts of rum.

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\(^{397}\) Bielke, *Niti Pawaii*, 12; ARA, NHM, BB 1145-9185, 1914; SSM 10 Mb. 6 Mar. 1916, 1224; and 13 Verslag vergadering ter bespreking van het vraagstuk der Javanen immigratie voor Suriname, 7 Apr. 1918. Manuscript sources are cited in Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, pages 161, 239

\(^{398}\) Ibid
Interestingly enough, the sale of rum to British Indian and Javanese contract laborers indicates that Paramaribo prioritized private interests over the public welfare. Rum is one of the primary byproducts of sugarcane cultivation and its presence on the open market presented Suriname’s agricultural barons with a secondary revenue stream capable of supplementing their already stupendous earnings from exportation of sugarcane to the developed world.\(^{399}\) Although alcohol abuse among the colony’s contract laborers as well as the unwillingness of the colonial hierarchy to address the issue was certainly problematic, Suriname’s Javanese, as well as other Asian immigrants, often turned to social activities other than drinking in order to dull the pain of their gambling losses and the personal issues that occurred as a result of severe financial hardship.

As in parts of Asia, practices such as the open consumption of tobacco, opium and *ganja* (*cannabis sativa*) attained widespread popularity among Suriname’s Asian migrants. Although Paramaribo attempted to curb opium and *ganja* use within the colony via passage of twentieth-century legislation that explicitly forbade the consumption of those substances, Asians generally disregarded those laws. Thus, Suriname experienced a major increase in opium and *ganja* use throughout the 1900s as the Dutch colonial government was incapable of sufficiently monitoring the population for illegal drug use, and penalties for partaking in opiate or *ganja* consumption were rarely handed out.\(^{400}\) Paramaribo’s inability to monitor opiate and *ganja* use among its Asian constituents soon encouraged the development of a number of illegal smuggling rings as well as black markets where opiates and marijuana could be bought and sold away from the watchful eye of the Dutch colonial government. Furthermore, Suriname’s location near several major British Caribbean islands and the area’s tropical climate were extremely helpful to regional purveyors of illegal drugs. Asians usually obtained their *ganja* from illegal growers located

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\(^{399}\) Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 159-60 offers a discussion of Asian contract laborers’ predisposition to excessive alcohol abuse while in Suriname

\(^{400}\) Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 160 offers in-depth discussion of early prohibitions on opium and *ganja* as well as insufficient monitoring efforts
within Suriname and most of the colony’s opium arrived by way of smugglers arriving from neighboring British Caribbean colonies such as Trinidad and British Guiana, where Hindostani residents were legally allowed to manufacture products derived from poppy seeds within their residential districts. Examination of sales registers obtained from several early 20th century Surinamese retailers indicate that there was a noticeable spike in opiate use among British Indians and Javanese in 1909 while Chinese migrants rarely purchased opium for personal use.

Interestingly enough, the relative weakness of measures intended to curb opium and ganja use throughout Suriname clearly illustrates that Paramaribo was only able to maintain a very limited degree of control over the colony’s population as a whole as the government was often rendered incapable of enforcing its own regulations. Opiates and marijuana are arguably far more addictive than alcohol and likely contributed to a large proportion of Suriname’s lost agricultural productivity among Asian contract laborers, thus it would be reasonable to conclude that the majority of Suriname’s drug issues were attributable to the colony’s unique geography as well as the government’s inability to enforce its anti-drug policies. Contemporary sources indicate that a significant number of British Indian and Javanese immigrants acquired addictions to ganja and opium well after they arrived in Suriname. However, Marienburg’s overseers indicated that opium smokers were certainly present within groups of newly arrived contract laborers. Marienburgers’ comments are unsurprising due to the fact that a large proportion of Central Javanese men were addicted to opium. Moreover, it is likely that issues with opiate addiction within Indonesia were due to concentrated British efforts to produce excessive quantities of poppy-derived adulterants, which were key to London’s efforts to control China’s enormous population. Control of mainland China was important to London because subjugation

401 Tinker, New System, 213 offers a discussion of ganja and opiate use within Suriname as well as opium smuggling from the British Caribbean
402 Onze West, 14 Aug. 1909 offers information about data identifying the level of opium use among Suriname’s Indians, Javanese and Chinese
403 ARA, NHM, W 1134-9185, 1903 and De betovering, edited by Hoefte, 96 discuss of opium-related comments by Marienburg’s management
404 Rush, Opium to Java, 28-30, 34 has a discussion of opium addiction within Central Java as well as other sections of the Indonesian island
of the Chinese would allow Great Britain to attain its goal of establishing an extremely lucrative
global trade network centered on a diverse collection of colonies scattered throughout East Asia.

As a longtime resident of Suriname, Munshi Rahman Khan had several firsthand
experiences with Asian users of *ganja* and he recounts such experiences in his autobiography.
One particular instance involved an ominous shadow flitting around the Lalkondre estate on
which Rahman Khan resided following his departure from Skerpi, and this particular event
highlights the problems wrought by Asian use of *ganja* and other psychedelic drugs. Rahman
Khan was the only individual on Lalkondre brave enough to approach the shadowy spirit, which
was rumored to be a devil or other evil spirit of some kind, haunting the estate and recounted his
experiences. “I approached the shadow and behold! There stood the Kabir Panthi sadhu clad in
his long white gown with his large protruding eyes as still as a statue. I scolded him: ‘You idiot,
what the hell are you doing in the middle of the night on top of government’s property. People
come and go here and you keep just mum? Cannot you say something or cough when somebody
draws near? Move and give way!’” The reason for Kabir Panthi’s refusal to reply to
individuals whom approached him was soon revealed; he was under the influence of psychedelic
substances and clearly not in a lucid state of mind. “The sadhu did not reply to what I had been
shouting but instead said: ‘Mother (mai) of Marienburg and Father (baba) of Alliance.’ Hearing
this, I realized that this man was under the influence of cannabis (ganja) and therefore talking
nonsense. I closed the sluice, returned home and fell asleep” after encountering Kabir Panthi.

The consequences of Kabir Panthi’s decision to consume psychedelic substances while
visiting Lalkondre soon became apparent as Munshi Khan soon went after the man’s host. “I
called Ramanand and told him that I was going to sue him. He politely asked me: ‘Bhaiya,

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405 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 131 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
406 Ibid
please let me know my mistake.’ I told him that he invites those strange sadhus to his place, creating terror by their awkward behavior. I then narrated the whole incident. Ramanand was very ashamed” due to the fact that one of his visitors had inconvenienced the inhabitants of Lalkondre and such interruptions to plantation life were symptomatic of Suriname’s general problem with illegal drug consumption. As the episode came to a close, Ramanand “apologized with folded hands and said: ‘I shall at once tell this sadhu to leave. You are correct. This man had no cannabis with him last night and so filled his chilam [pipe] with dhatura seeds. It is due to the great intoxicating value of these seeds that he must have gone to the dam in the middle of the night,” unnecessarily frightening the entire population of Lalkondre plantation in the process of acting out his drug-induced aspirations to wander about in a ghostlike manner.

Islam: Divergence in Religious Practices Among Suriname’s Large Muslim Population

Religion is by far the most important element of culture on a global basis and Suriname’s Muslim population steadfastly maintained its adherence to Islam throughout their time in the South American jungle. As Suriname’s Muslims originated from two distinct locations, some relatively minor variances in religious practice were to be anticipated. Suriname’s first Muslims originated from the Punjab region of British India. Hindostani Muslims adhered to a collection of Quranic religious laws known as the Hanafitish shari‘ah. The Hanafitish shari‘ah focused deeply on Indian Muslims’ homeland, thus Hindostani mosques always pointed toward the East and their literary works and ritual language were based on Urdu rather than Arabic. Punjabi Muslims were subjects of British India during the genesis of indentured servant migration from

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407 Ibid
408 Ibid
409 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 167 provides a discussion of Indian Muslims and the presence of the Hanafitish shari‘ah within Suriname
Calcutta to Paramaribo. Thus this particular group of Muslims made significant contributions to the religious diversity of Suriname’s Hindostani population as well as the colony as a whole.

Although Hindostani Muslims pioneered Islamic religious practices within Suriname, their spiritual hegemony was soon ended by the arrival of migrants from Java, which was a Muslim-majority country at this point in time. Even though Hindostani and Javanese Muslims possessed some commonalities as far as religious practice was concerned they could not be lumped together into a common group. Javanese Muslims practiced a brand of Islam that differed from the version practiced in the Punjab in that they primarily adhered to a set of Islamic religious laws known as the Shafiitic shari’ah and oriented their mosques so that they would point westward toward Mecca in the manner of Islamic temples located on Java and elsewhere in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{410} Note that the slightly differing orientation of Punjabi and Javanese mosques within Suriname was perfectly acceptable as the Earth’s circular nature makes it possible to face Mecca by facing either east or west. Thus adherence to fundamental Islamic religious norms was quite unaffected by culturally mandated directional variances in South American mosque construction.

Mosque orientation was only one manner in which Punjabi Muslim religious practices deviated from those of Javanese Muslims within Suriname. For instance, the major Indonesian population centers in Java and Suriname were not known for having high numbers of religious disciples. Elderly Javanese men known as santri, which roughly translates to learned or religious men, were generally responsible for maintaining the Indonesian community’s strong connection with Islam. The santri typically favored a shari`ah-centric brand of Islam and strove to fulfill the requisite Islamic religious duties, including observance of pre-prescribed fasting periods in addition to performance of the requisite five daily prayers and adherence to principles of Islamic living on a regular basis. Moreover, the santri were familiar with the basic tenets of the Islamic

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid
faith as well as the Qur’an, which they could partially recite in Arabic. Although Suriname’s santri performed rather crucial duties as far as religion within the colony’s Javanese community was concerned, they only made up a very small proportion of the Indonesian population as a whole. The santri were vital members of Suriname’s Javanese community as well as the main population within the Indonesian Archipelago since their virtual monopoly on Islamic religious information allowed them to retain a high degree of control over Javanese spiritual affairs.411 

The fact that only a small subset of Javanese bothered to follow the Qur’an’s prescribed form of Islam reveals that the greater Javanese population most likely followed religion casually at best and attached little to no importance to traditional Islamic rites. Also, Javanese Islam followed the lead of multiple major world religions in that it encouraged individual assimilation of elements from traditional Indonesian religions in order to facilitate conversions within that particular region of the world. Most members of the Javanese community within Indonesia and Suriname practiced a syncretic brand of Islam that implicitly endorsed the inclusion of traditional practices and mystical beliefs from other Asian religions. The open incorporation of other Asian religious beliefs into a customized form of Islam follows a Javanese philosophy known as kejawèn, and kejawèn ultimately encouraged the creation of a unique brand of Islamic faith that combines elements from animism, Buddhism and Hinduism. It is likely that Islam’s presentation of Allah as an abstract figure encouraged adherence to kejawèn within the Javanese community since spirit worship was far more consequential as far as daily life was concerned. Indonesians believed that regular interaction with animistic spirits present in the natural world had the ability to impact an individual’s life on a day-to-day basis and could solve minor problems while Islam provided a general framework that facilitated the organic development of a very distinct

411 De Waal Malefijt, Javanese of Surinam: Segment, 153-55 offers a discussion of Javanese religious practice and Suriname’s Islamic santri
Javanese worldview. This Islam-centric worldview helped Indonesians address issues that were simply far too complex for animistic worship of spirits present within the natural world such as their perceptions of Suriname’s other ethnic groups and their presence in South America.

Emphasis on devotion to animistic spirits residing in the natural world is very evocative of many Asian religions such as Daoism and Shinto, thus it is unsurprising that native Javanese religions possessed similar elements. Overt similarities between Javanese religious practices and the belief systems present in other parts of Eastern Asia become even more apparent when one considers that Javanese spirits had the ability to house themselves in multiple types of locations, including natural or material objects. Although the spirits of Javanese cosmology could house anywhere, they were thought to favor ceremonial objects, and the practice of making individual offerings to Indonesian sajèn (spirits) on the behalf of deceased relatives was rather common within Suriname. Javanese ancestral offerings usually included a collection of items such as flowers, food, matches and tobacco as these objects were thought to curry favor with the sajèn, who would theoretically render assistance to supplicants’ deceased family members once they were favorably disposed toward that particular group of people. The practice of making material offerings to animistic spirits such as the sajèn indicates that the Javanese did not place a very high degree of emphasis on adherence to orthodox Islamic religious practices as fulfillment of beliefs connected to traditional Asian religious practices were vital to the Javanese worldview. Ultimately, the fundamental tenets of basic Javanese religious beliefs, whether in the Indonesian Archipelago or South America, included an emphasis on animistic religious practices devoted to appeasement of spirits in the natural world as well as long-gone ancestors rather than adherence

412 Van der Kroef, “Javanese Messianic Expectations,” 308; and De Waal Malefijt, Javanese of Suriname: Segment, 151, 159-60 provide a good discussion of Javanese kejawèn philosophy and reference to syncretism with animistic religions as well as Buddhism and Hinduism. Malefijt insists that Allah’s status as a supreme being with infinite power indicates that he does not need blessings, prayer or offerings to strike a bargain
413 Ibid
414 Geertz, Religion of Java, 11-12; De Waal Malefijt, Javanese of Surinam: Segment, 160-63; Van Wengen, “Javanen in de Surinaams se samenleving,” 84 offer discussions of the materialistic ancestral offerings made to the sajèn by Javanese individuals around the world.
to orthodox Islamic beliefs. Furthermore, this particular prioritization of core religious beliefs aligns nicely with spiritual practices prevalent in other East Asian polities as well as the principle of syncretism, which played a huge role in the transformation of Suriname following arrival of indentured servants from various Asian polities such as the Dutch East Indies and British India.

Spiritual beliefs centered on animistic *sajèn* spirits were not the only manner in which Javanese religion deviated from the orthodox form of Islam that the Qur’an prescribes. As it turns out, Javanese religious beliefs prioritized other rituals that are not discussed in the Qur’an. The *wong Agami Jawi* (people who follow the Javanese religion) placed a extremely elevated degree of emphasis on the socioreligious rite known as the *slametan*. *Slametan* rites, which replaced a diverse collection of orthodox Islamic rituals such as formal liturgical prayer, possess a mystical character absent from Quranic practices and formed the core of Surinamese-Javanese religious practices. Given that the core elements of Javanese religious practices within the Indonesian archipelago and Suriname focused on spirits found in the natural world as well as ancestral worship, one could expect that the *slametan* would align with such values, and such expectations are correct. As a matter of fact, the *slametan* primarily functioned as a ritualistic sacrificial ceremony intended to honor various spirits within Javanese cosmology. Furthermore, *slametans* also celebrated a collection of personal milestones that take place throughout an individual’s life cycle such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death, and immigrants who had recently made the trip from Indonesia to South America utilized *slametans* in order to ask the spirits to confer happiness, prosperity and tranquility onto them while they toiled in Suriname.

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415 Van Wengen, “Javanen in de Surinaamse samenleving,” 75-82; Geertz, *Religion of Java* as well as Woodward, *Slametan* provide a discussion of Slametan rites within Suriname and their importance to the colony’s Javanese community. Note that Geertz and Woodward provide distinct descriptions of the slametan. Geertz argues that inclusion of animism, Hinduism and Buddhism within Javanese Islam synthesized a unique religion in which Islamic elements were dominant and that the slametan is simply a prototypical animistic rite. On the other hand, Woodward insists that the slametan rite is a mystical interpretation of Islam that does not seem to prioritize elements from other Javanese religious systems 416 Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 11; Woodward, “Textual Knowledge,” 66-83 provide a discussion of the basic nature of Javanese *slametan* rituals
Note that the Javanese incorporated psychological principles into their religious practice and practices concentrating on the mind’s well-being were undoubtedly useful within Suriname’s taxing work conditions, which the Javanese often found trying during the few months following emigration from Indonesia. To this end, Slametan ceremonies concentrated on attainment of a particular mental state, which was called slamet. The slamet state of being is usually described as the elevated condition that results from acquisition of psychological and social homeostasis.

The goal of slamet acquisition is to guide an individual’s mind to a resting state that facilitates acceptance of pre-existing social conditions within the person’s current living environment, and attainment of this particular state of mind reduces the possibility that adherents will preoccupy themselves with personal conflicts or even supernatural occurrences. The general environment of slametan rites provided an ideal tone for slamet acquisition and the intent of the religious rituals were invariable and immutable, as they facilitated Surinamese-Javanese well being for the duration of their contracts and during the time period leading up to repatriation to Indonesia. 417

While Javanese Muslims readily incorporated elements of traditional Indonesian religions into their divine pantheons, Punjabi and other Hindostani Muslims took the opposite approach. Punjabi Muslims were generally far more westernized relative to their Javanese counterparts and desperately wanted to purge Hindu religious elements from their particular brand of Islam. This particular cadre of Surinamese Muslims heavily emphasized the popular (and rather spectacular) festival of Tadja, also known as the Muharran. The Punjabis’ Tadja festival celebrates the first month of the Islamic calendar and commemorates the seventh century A.D. deaths of a particular pair of brothers known as Hassan and Husain, who possess a high degree of importance within

417 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, 169-70 provides a thorough discussion of slamet acquisition as well as its importance to the Surinamese-Javanese
the Islamic faith since they were Mohammed’s grandsons. Hassan served as Islam’s fifth caliph, however, he was forced to abdicate and later died. Following his brother’s death, Husain tried to re-establish his family’s power base by leading a cadre of Shi’ite supporters in an open rebellion against Damascus’ ruling caliphs. However, Husain’s revolt failed and a faction of Sunni Muslims decided to massacre Husain and his followers near Karbala. The star-crossed nature of Hassan and Husain’s lives provide the basis for the Caribbean’s Muharran festival.

Even though Hindostani Muslims wished to separate orthodox Islamic traditions from Hinduism and other ‘heathen’ religions, their spiritual practices could not avoid all external influences. The Caribbean presented an ideal environment for modification of British Indian Islam due to the presence of large numbers of competing faiths followed by an incredibly diverse collection of ethnic groups. As far as Caribbean iterations of Islam were concerned, the Tadja festival ultimately acquired a decidedly secular character after experiencing increasing amounts of participation by non-Muslims initiated a process of creolization. For instance, Suriname’s version of the Tadja invited participation of a diverse collection of ethnic groups including Javanese, Hindostani and Creoles, whose inclusion became far more common as the colony continued to facilitate interactions between Asians and Afro-Surinamers. The initiation of Creoles’ participation in the Tadja undoubtedly created a unique set of semi-hybridized religious rituals that inevitably incorporated elements of Hinduism, various Islamic practices, elements of Javanese animism and traditional Winti beliefs from various parts of West Africa, particularly the Gulf of Guinea and the Congo. Winti beliefs originating from the Gulf of Guinea and the Congo are especially relevant in this context because they represent religious beliefs that South and Southeast Asians like British Indians and Javanese are unlikely to have encountered outside

418 Speckmann, Marriage and Kinship, 30-31; Moore, Cultural Power, 221-26; and Trotman, Crime in Trinidad, 209 offer information about the importance that Punjabi Muslims placed on the Tadja/Muharran festivals within the Caribbean as well as its connection to Hassan and Husain
419 Hoefte, In Place of Slavery, page 241 offers a discussion of the specific reasons why Hassan and Husain hold so much importance in Islam
420 Mansingh and Mansingh, “Hosay” provides a discussion of the creolization of the Tadja religious festival within various Caribbean polities
of Suriname. Winti beliefs provide an interesting case study into Asian assimilation of external religious beliefs as prior exposure within British India and Java can virtually be ruled out due to the vast distances separating the Indian Subcontinent and the Indonesian Archipelago from the major West African polities that produced a majority of South America’s Afro-Surinamers.
Chapter 6
Munshi Rahman Khan: A Living Embodiment of Religious Syncretism among Muslims

Munshi Rahman Khan is a remarkable man in many respects. However, the most notable aspect of his long tenure in Suriname was not the great success he attained as a plantation sardar but the degree to which he illustrates religious syncretism within Suriname. Despite the fact that Munshi Rahman Khan was a devout Muslim and appeared to regard Allah very highly, he relied on his extensive knowledge of the Hindi language as well as various Hindu religious scriptures to gain a sense of respectability and a reputation as an erudite person. Furthermore, Rahman Khan appears to have been extremely cognizant of Hinduism’s caste system and appears to closely identify with high-caste Hindus, whom he considered his peers, as opposed to lower-caste Muslims, who were seen as equivalent to sudras or Untouchables. Identification with a particular ethnic group often engenders acceptance of their cultural norms, and Rahman Khan followed this particular pattern during his time in India thanks to the region’s unique culture.

British India possessed a rather eclectic sociocultural fabric throughout Mushi Rahman Khan’s childhood due to the fact that Rajput Hindus and Pathan Muslims enjoyed access to similarly elevated places within the Indian Subcontinent’s existing social hierarchy, and most Brahmins pursued harmonious relations with educated Muslims. Furthermore, use of the Urdu language was not restricted to India’s Muslim population and a significant proportion of Indian Muslims also used Hindi on a regular basis. Moreover, notable differences between Hindi and Urdu were virtually absent and the two languages often combined to form a general ‘Hindustani’ language, which functioned as the primary lingua franca of India under the British Raj as it ostensibly allowed India’s Hindus and Muslims to easily converse in a mutually intelligible

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421 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, XXX provides references to Khan’s association with Hinduism and high-caste individuals rather than with members of his own religious group that were seen as socially unacceptable and shunted into the lower castes.
Development of a language that could be utilized by British Indian Hindus and Muslims was a crucial development because it engendered the creation of common education standards for Hindus and Muslims, and implementation of uniform educational standards across ethnic groups drew the Indian Subcontinent’s major ethnic groups into a relationship based on mutual respect. Education-based compatibility between British India’s Hindus and Muslims is illustrated by the fact that Rahman Khan took a great deal of pride in his education, which promoted a sense of equality relative to India’s educated Hindus. Thus, Khan naturally associated with a number of upper-caste Hindus and valued their mode of religious thinking to such an extent that he made concentrated efforts to master Hindu philosophy, which mirrored the pathans’ behavior codes.

Furthermore, Khan’s acquisition of a transcendent understanding of various Indian religions was only made possible by his unparalleled ability to reach across pre-existing divisions between the Indian Subcontinent’s distinct Hindu and Muslim populations. Munshi Khan’s ability to reach across the religious divide between Hindis and Muslims became apparent to others shortly after his arrival in Suriname, and many Hindis working on the colony’s plantations actually started to regard Rahman Khan as a venerated teacher of Hindi scripture. At some point during his early days in Suriname, Khan recited an Hindu holy scripture known as the *Ramayana* at the request of a Hindi laborer known as Panditji, and at the end of Khan’s recitation session, Panditji “summoned Chandrasekhar and told him to accept me as his guru and learn from me because I could teach him hundreds of mantras while [Panditji] had been able to teach him just one so far. Saying this, [Panditji] turned to me and requested me to accept Chandrasekhar as my pupil because though he was a Brahmin, he was as ignorant as a Sudra.”

Khan’s ascension to the status of a Hindi guru was cemented following the aforementioned

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422 Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, XIX provides good information about British India’s sociocultural fabric and the ‘Hindustani’ lingua franca, which resulted from organic synthesis of Hindi and Urdu within India’s general population during the British Raj.
incident as his knowledge of Hindi divine scriptures spread throughout the colony. “From that
day onwards, Chandrasekhar regarded me as his teacher and I began teaching him and a few
more men who had shown interest…. During his remaining days he learnt quite a lot and even
went to a few places to recite the katha himself. When he became a freeman, he decided to go
back to Hindustan,” and it was at this point that Rahman Khan’s unique ability to take on the
mantle of a Hindi guru even though he personally adhered to Islam became apparent. As a
general rule, employment was difficult to find in India due to pressures placed on arable land by
the subcontinent’s growing population. However, Hindi gurus were generally in demand and
Chandrasekhar’s encounter with Munshi Khan helped open that career path up to Chandrasekhar
upon his return to India and resumption of his birthright access to the exalted status of Brahmin.

As Khan recalls, once a return to India was upon him, Chandrasekhar stated “’Please
teach me gayatri mantras because if anyone ever asks me to recite these I shall be embarrassed.’
‘How many do you want to learn?’ I asked. ‘How many are there?’ he queried. I said: ‘Twenty-
four.’ He then pleaded with folded hands and requested me to teach him all of them. I picked up
a small copy, and wrote down the twenty-four gayatri mantras and gave it back to him” for future
consumption within British India. As it turns out, the thirst for religious education among
India’s enormous Hindu population was so severe that even a man armed only with the twenty-
four gayatri mantras could achieve elevated social status within India’s sociocultural fabric.
Chandrasekhar would likely have been able to take advantage of India’s religious status quo
thanks to Khan’s teachings, and Khan was aware of this fact as evidenced by the following
statement: “[Chandrasekhar] had come as an illiterate from Hindustan but went back as a pandit.

425 Ibid
426 Ibid
He had no money when he returned but he acknowledged that he had acquired just enough knowledge to make a living back home” as a guru to religion-starved Hindus within India.\(^\text{427}\)

Khan’s work with individuals like Chandrasekhar quickly earned him a reputation as a great guru within Suriname and Khan was treated as such. “Because of my knowledge of Hindi, very few men believed that I was a Muslim and most of them thought I was a Brahmin who had fled the country and that I had adopted a new name to hide my identity. Many would therefore touch my feet in reverence. Some would even insist that I become their guru but I politely and firmly declined their requests.”\(^\text{428}\) Although Munshi Khan remained loyal to Allah and the Islamic faith during his time in Suriname, his frequent exposure to Hinduism via activities such as serving as the guru to a wide collection of Hindus clearly influenced his personal ideology. As a virtual guru, Rahman Khan came into contact with other respected minds in the field of Hindu religious beliefs and such episodes led him to consider the place that Hindu religious beliefs held within his personal faith system. As it turns out, “Balwant Singh had become an ascetic. Regarded as an sage, he had thousands of followers…Balwant Singh was invited to grace various occasions in Hindu and Muslim families alike…. Whenever I was in Kanara and when Baba Balwant Singh visited the Jachtlust plantation, he would ask me to recite from the Ramayana,” and these recitations evidently passed muster with the great Hindu sage of Suriname.\(^\text{429}\) As Munshi Rahman Khan and Balwant Singh grew close, the latter became emboldened and even made the radical suggestion that Rahman Khan consider formally associating himself with Hinduism due to his extensive knowledge of that particular religion.

Balwant Singh “would tell me: ‘I have been very close to many sadhus in Hindustan but no one could recite and explain the meaning of the Ramayana like you. Great is your guru who

\(^\text{427}\) Ibid
\(^\text{428}\) Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 98 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
\(^\text{429}\) Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer*, 129 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
has taught you so well. I have never heard the Hindus in Hindustan speak such fluid and properly pronounced words and give such splendid explanations, leave aside the Muslims.’ I sometimes thought about this.” The fact that Khan even thought about abandoning Islam for Hinduism reveals that his personal faith system must have included some Hindu elements, which is unsurprising given his level of exposure to Hinduism’s holy scriptures. Thus, Khan serves as an ideal example of the religious syncretism that often occurred as a result of religious intermingling within Suriname. However, it is important to note that Hinduism was not the only religion that Rahman Khan and other Muslims absorbed into their personal ideologies. Winti animism and other West African religious practices, which were imported by slaves from the Gulf of Guinea and the African Congo, were arguably the most influential religions within Suriname as far as assimilation into other faith systems was concerned. To this end, Munshi Khan and Suriname’s other Muslims were certainly vulnerable to the tidal pull of West African religions containing esoteric elements such as beliefs in witchcraft, black magic and sorcery.

**Maintenance of West African Religion: Voodoo, Witchcraft, Black Magic and Sorcery**

Beliefs in witchcraft, black magic, and sorcery were certainly well distributed throughout South America, particularly in Suriname’s Afro-Surinamese population. As a matter of fact, Suriname’s Maroon population was known to harbor a particular affinity for beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery, which their ancestors imported from West Africa. To this end, an anthology of oral histories from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries confirm Bush Negroes’ adherence to these West African cultural practices. Although some Maroons such as Alabi, who served as the leader of the Saramakas following abdication of that particular cadre’s fesi-ten leaders, converted to Christianity, they held on to deep-seated beliefs in religious practices that were evocative of

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430 Ibid
black magic. Despite his Moravian-aided conversion to Christianity, Alabi and other like-minded Saramakas continued to “believe fully and matter-of-factly in the reality of witchcraft-sorcery. In 1798, a missionary described how, “on the 20th [February] a strange negro, with several women, came hither from the upper country [i.e., from upstream]. While we were conversing with them, Arabini came running, and with great authority, without ceremony, drove them away from us and out of the village.”\textsuperscript{431} Ordinarily, the appearance of visitors in a Saramaka village would not serve as cause for alarm; however, the occupations of this particular group of individuals provided much cause for concern. Initially, the missionary who witnessed this spectacle was “quite astonished, and knew not what to think of such conduct, as visitors are always well-received. But he afterwards told us, that the above-mentioned negro professed the art of mixing poison [sorcery], and boasted that he had already destroyed many people by it, so that he was everywhere to be shunned” in order to secure this Maroon community’s safety.\textsuperscript{432}

Maroon beliefs in sorcerers portended beliefs in witchcraft rituals themselves, and Moravian missionaries were well positioned to observe such rituals by virtue of their residence near Saramaka villages. Of particular interest in this case is the kangaa ordeal, which was intended to out potential sorcerers from among the Maroon population. Brother Riemer, who served as a Moravian missionary to the Saramakas, provided an account of the kangaa ordeal, which occurred as follows: “If a crime has been committed…and there is a suspect, the person is taken to this type of Obia man for the Kangra ordeal to be administered. This is done as follows. The accused must kneel, and the sorcerer conjures him in the presence of the gods.”\textsuperscript{433} The conjuration of obias and other forest spirits was simply the first section of the West African kangaa ordeal as the accused had to pass a test if he hoped to stay alive. Following summons of

\textsuperscript{431} Price, Alabi’s World, 372-3 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at this juncture
\textsuperscript{432} Price, Alabi’s World, 373 contains the relevant section of information concerning Surinam and/or the Maroon population at this juncture
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid
the obia gods, the sorcerer “then takes several Taya [taro] leaves and burns them, reducing them to ashes. With these ashes, he coats the tongue of the suspect, and takes a feather, which is as thin as possible, from the outermost tip of a hen’s wing, and he thrusts it through the ashes-coated tongue.” Following attempted insertion of the hen’s feather into the suspect’s tongue, innocence and guilt were determined by a set of simple criteria: “If the feather passes through without difficulty and without crumpling, then the person is held to be fully innocent. But if the feather breaks, there is no doubt of his guilt. Despite the unpredictability of this type of ordeal, the negroes submit themselves to it readily and voluntarily. Indeed they go so far to submit themselves to the feather when a friend of theirs is a suspect” in the hopes of confirming said individual’s innocence. As a matter of fact, the kangra ordeal remains alive and well in Suriname to this day, as it “remains the ultimate arbiter of guilt or innocence in Saramaka [and] is in the sole hands of the Abiasa clan. Its techniques, including the thrusting of a ritually-prepared feather through the tongue of the accused, seems directly traceable to the eighteenth-century Kingdom of Benin,” which possessed a swath of territory on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa and was one of the major staging points throughout the Atlantic slave trading era.

Maroon beliefs in West African religious elements such as witchcraft and sorcery extended well beyond the kangra ordeal and other related rituals as sorcerers were often called upon to legislate cases of murder within the Saramaka Maroon community. “A person accused of manslaughter or poisoning, or suspected of murder, may be forced to drink the oath-poison. The witch doctor takes some water in which the body of the victim, or any other corpse, was washed, and mixes in a bit of earth from the grave of the deceased, as well as sundry herbs that

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434 Ibid
435 Price, Alabi’s World, 373-4 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at this juncture
436 Price, Alabi’s World, 374 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
are kept highly secret,” and the ritual commences soon thereafter. In order to determine the suspect’s guilt, a sorcerer proceeds to mix “a drink which the accused must then swallow, while the witch doctors conjure and pray with the most awesome and frightening oaths to their gods. If the suspect is really the murderer, then…he will immediately begin to swell up. However, if he is not guilty, the drink will have no harmful effects on him at all.” Even though Afro-Surinamese witch-doctor rituals harbored a seemingly arbitrary nature, they were usually conducted with prior knowledge of a person’s level of guilt as witch-doctors’ responsibilities extended beyond conduction of sorcery rituals into the realm of legalistic judgment of others.

“The conjuring of the witch doctors can lead to the conviction of an innocent man, since the torture itself is almost as bad as the death penalty, and the two men doing the whipping do not stop until the person has confessed.” Even though the potential for false convictions certainly existed, Maroon cultural norms mandated that witch doctors and sorcerers undertook steps designed to prevent condemnation of innocent individuals. “Fortunately, it is only rarely that an innocent man is convicted because the Obia man, insofar as he is not a scoundrel, has already gained exact knowledge of who is guilty through his own research, by means of private, secret investigations. He uses this knowledge plus his magical incantations to make a spectacle out of it.” Implementation of checks and balances on witchcraft rituals intended to determine potential criminals’ degree of guilt is one of the more interesting aspects of Afro-Surinamese and Maroon society. Furthermore, additional safeguards existed in order to ensure that justice was served in an appropriate manner. “Moreover, the supreme council goes about its work cautiously when dealing with the death sentence and never forgets the presence of the Obia man, for whoever has the misfortune to get to the stage of torture [to force a confession] will die either...

Ibid
Ibid
Price, Alabi’s World, 374-5 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at this juncture
Price, Alabi’s World, 375 contains the relevant section of information concerning Suriname and/or the Maroon population at that point in time
from the whippings or at the stake” at the behest of the witch-doctor, who was tasked with performing his pre-assigned duty as an agent of justice by members of the community.\textsuperscript{441}

Although beliefs in spiritual elements such as voodoo, witchcraft, sorcery and black magic were certainly imports from West Africa, Suriname’s eclectic mix of ethnic groups encouraged syncretism of religious beliefs. As a matter of fact, the colony’s Asian immigrants participated in this religious syncretism and Munshi Khan’s personal experiences illustrate the extent to which Asians absorbed West African beliefs into their personal ideologies. One of the incidents that Munshi Khan experienced during his years in Suriname, which involved an indentured servant who served as one of Khan’s closest confidants within Suriname, aptly illustrates Asian adoption of various Winti beliefs. Khan narrated, “One midnight, while on duty, Subhan noticed that a fire-like thing floating on the river was coming toward the plantation and the waterlevel rose tremendously. He thought it was a ship on which they had made a fire…. However, when the light approached him, he saw that it was not a ship. It was a boat with four rowers and a navigator who shone like fire. The boat also seemed to be alit.”\textsuperscript{442} Ordinarily, an incident of this caliber would be considered unexceptional, as Suriname’s great rivers were the primary means of transportation during its colonial period as a majority of great plantations were waterfront estates and major urban centers such as Paramaribo and Jodensavanne were optimally located on major waterways. However, the sight of a burning boat must have made quite an impact on the individuals who happened to be in position to witness its passage. “Subhan ran to the manager’s bungalow and said that something amazing was happening in the river. As soon as the manager opened his window to face the river and saw what lay ahead, he immediately shut it because he

\textsuperscript{441}Ibid
\textsuperscript{442}Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 115-6 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
belonged to the country and knew what it was. He then ordered Subhan to go and let it be… He passed the night in tension and the next morning narrated the whole incident to me.”

According to the belief systems present throughout Suriname’s colonial era, Subhan’s decision to discuss his experiences with the supernatural figure of the boat’s flaming navigator were grounds for punishment and Munshi Khan was quick to point out this particular aspect of his experience. “I scolded [Subhan] for disclosing the happenings he had perceived on the river because it was improper to do so… The evening following the incident, Subhan went to make his rounds as a watchman but came back at 8 p.m. with fever. It stayed with him throughout the night. The next morning he was hospitalized… After 3 days he began to bleed from his rectum.” A number of theories regarding the causes of Subhan’s ailments undoubtedly circulated throughout Skerpi’s plantation community, however, a number of individuals working on the plantation quickly came to the same conclusion. As it turns out, Munshi Khan was part of this consensus as he recalled, “I suspected some black magic and consulted a Negro named Bachau. During the time of slavery, men from Africa had been brought to the plantation and though slavery had been abolished now, these blacks still lived on, on the plantation. Bachau was one such person. He was an old man, skilled in his task” and qualified to treat Subhan.

Although Munshi Khan was a dedicated Muslim, he appears to grant incredible credence to Bachau’s opinion of Subhan’s fate, which was undoubtedly shaped by principles commonly found in West African religions. Bachau ultimately resorted to what appears to be a traditional West African method for divining the implications of supernatural events and when Khan completed his request for information about Subhan’s fate, Bachau “pulled out seven thin branches from the fence surrounding his hut and counted them thrice in different manners. He

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443 Ibid
444 Ibid
445 Ibid
446 Ibid
then said. ‘Basia, I cannot do anything for you because the thing your friend has seen was not evil and would even have been beneficial to him, provided he had not told anyone about it for at least one week following the incident.’ This particular apparition must have possessed a fairly peculiar nature within West African religious phenomena as it theoretically had the ability to impact individuals based on their actions following observation, and Bachau confirmed as such when he stated, ‘‘One is in real trouble and can even die if one opens one’s mouth before a week has passed’’. I was shocked at this revelation. He then told me to go to Subhan and ask him what to do because the day Subhan would dream of the same thing again, he would die. ‘I cannot tell you anything more than this,’ he said. I saluted the holy man and left.’ As it turns out, Bachau’s proclamations were accurate as Subhan died following a night during which he dreamed of the flaming boat and its navigator, thus confirming Khan’s evolving beliefs in traditional forms of West African spirituality, which involved elements such as black magic.

Subhan’s experience with the ghostly apparition of a boat engulfed in flame floating along the river next to Skerpi did not represent Munshi Khan’s only encounter with West African religious practices such as black magic, voodoo and sorcery as well as witch doctors. As a matter of fact, Munshi Khan had a rather unpleasant encounter with one of his close Hindostani female acquaintances while in Suriname. To this end, “I had no reason to suspect any foul play and she was the wife of my close friend. Yet one day this woman decided to destroy my wife’s pregnancy and implant her own womb by using black magic. For this purpose, she went to Lalkondre where her brother and sisters lived. In Lalkondre, she contacted a black man named Johnny who practiced voodoo. He was my friend and clever too.’ Note that Khan’s female acquaintance certainly did not make the final decision to approach an African voodoo priest in a

446 Ibid
447 Ibid
448 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 118-9 contains information regarding the circumstances surrounding Subhan’s death
449 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 143 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
vacuum. As a matter of fact, this individual’s choice to pursue a successful pregnancy through esoteric West African religious practices clearly illustrates the extent to which Suriname’s Hindostani population had absorbed beliefs originally imported from the Gulf of Guinea by the colony’s early slave population. According to Khan’s knowledge of the sequence of events involving his wife’s pregnancy, the female acquaintance in question told “[Johnny] about her desire for a child. She thought of terminating someone else’s pregnancy by black magic and becoming pregnant herself. The shaman [sorcerer] asked her who would be the victim. When he came to know it was my wife, the good man flatly refused. The woman did not give up, however, and coaxed her brother to take the man to a liquor shop and make him inebriated.”

Interestingly enough, all of the Hindostani parties involved in this particular escapade attest to the effectiveness of the voodoo priest’s methods for transplanting a pregnancy from one woman to another. As Khan recalled, his female acquaintance’s plan turned out to be effective as “Intoxicated, [Johnny] gave her the medication she wanted without him being aware of its use. Her brother… worked together with the black workers. Through him, she carried out her evil design…. The drug did its work, as the woman had desired. Next morning at 8 a.m. my wife asked me to take her to the hospital because she was bleeding and was afraid that she might have an abortion.” Fortunately for Munshi Khan and his family, their acquaintance’s rash decision to practice black magic in the hopes of becoming pregnant with a child had no instant impacts as Khan “tied a tabeez in Allah’s name around her waist. This greatly reduced the pain of her abdomen and the bleeding also decreased. Early next morning I took her to the hospital. Four weeks later my wife delivered Chote Khan by God’s grace but my wife remained ill and kept on having stomach problems” as a result of the acquaintance’s utilization of medication obtained

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450 Ibid
451 Ibid
from the Afro-Surinamese voodoo priest.\textsuperscript{452} Khan’s invocation of Allah’s name and his decision to utilize a Muslim \textit{tabeez} are especially significant because these actions prove that Khan along with other Hindostani Muslims held their original religion in high regard. However, subsequent statements reveal that beliefs in black magic and voodoo were also gaining credence within Suriname’s increasingly significant Asian population. Khan states, “With God’s will and the black magic, the vixen that poisoned us did become pregnant and she gave birth to a boy in a hospital…. My wife suffered for 3 years due to the effect of the poison, which however, did not kill her. After 3 years the poison had lost its efficacy. However, the woman who had caused our sufferings died just 6 days after delivering her child,” thanks the age-old principle of karma.\textsuperscript{453}

The death of the offending individual in this case did not end Khan’s dealings in black magic due to the continued suffering of his poor wife, who had done nothing to deserve such ill treatment. After a morning in the field, “I returned home with the manager at 11 a.m. and found Suleman crying. I asked him what it was that made him cry and the poor child cried: ‘Mother is rolling her eyes and talking all nonsense’. I thought her end had come and called the manager and showed him my wife. He recognised the plight and told me that it was the result of black magic and that he did not know a cure.”\textsuperscript{454} The manager’s inability to facilitate a cure for Khan’s wife is unsurprising since an European would likely possess very little insight into West African customs involving episodes of black magic, and Munshi Khan quickly rationalized the manager’s lack of power in this instance. While attempting to divine a solution for his wife’s pain and suffering, Munshi Khan experienced an epiphany. “All at once, Willem flashed in my mind. He is a black I thought, and maybe knows some way to help my wife…. I called him. He at once diagnosed the evil spirit and went home to fetch some medicine. After about half a hour

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid
\textsuperscript{453} Khan, \textit{Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, 145 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
\textsuperscript{454} Khan, \textit{Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, 148 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
he came back and smeared it on my wife’s forehead. No sooner had he done this, she got up and started talking loudly, which she had not been able to do earlier.”\textsuperscript{455} The resuscitation of Khan’s wife’s ability to communicate with others was vital as far as her recovery was concerned as she would be able to help Khan and his Afro-Surinamese companion divine the cause of her maladies. “With her eyes popping out she narrated the whole episode of mishappenings and diseases, which had plagued my family since the last 3 years and explained its cause in \textit{Negre} [Sranan Tongo]. At this, Willem asked the devil to leave my wife alone. The evil spirit, which had possessed my wife, replied: ‘I shall take this woman along with me when I go because only 3 days are left.’\textsuperscript{456} Despite the evil spirit’s captive power over Khan’s wife, Munshi Khan and Willem were undaunted and continued to explore ways in which they could exorcise the spirit from Khan’s wife’s consciousness and thus free her from her 3-year episode of continuous pain.

One of the key aspects of animistic African religions involves shamans’ ability to communicate directly with spirits that inhabit the natural world, and this particular capability becomes clear as Khan narrates his experiences with Willem and the spirit sent to torment his wife. “Willem asked: ‘Will you surely kill this woman’. The reply was: ‘Yes’. ‘Then why did you spare her child and why did you kill the woman and her son in Lalkondre who brought you’, Willem asked. The evil spirit laughed loudly and said: ‘Willem, why do you ask? You can do nothing to me. Nevertheless I will tell you the reason.’\textsuperscript{457} The reason the evil spirit provided Willem is fascinating as it perfectly illustrates syncretism of West African religious beliefs with Islam on the part of Munshi Khan and perhaps the witch doctor himself. It is in this regard that the Muslim \textit{tabeez} that Khan used to comfort his wife becomes enormously significant as the evil spirit directly mentions it in its discourse with Willem. As such, the spirit stated, ““after

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid
mixing the potion with the cacao I began to destroy this lady’s pregnancy but her husband tied a mantra written on paper around her waist and the spirit in it did not let me do my work. It was stronger than me and displaced me from my site. I tried to act from another place but could not succeed. Wherever I approached, this woman would tie the thing over the area and my attempts went in vain.”

Munshi Khan is clearly subject to competing ideologies originating in Islam and various West African religious practices as both religions have clearly achieved sufficient importance in Suriname’s developing culture to hold sway over the colonial population as a whole, regardless of the religious practices they followed prior to migration to South America.

Even though Munshi Khan and Willem had successfully divined the fact that Khan’s wife’s illness was the direct result of a evil spirit called up by an Afro-Surinamese voodoo priest, they still had to successfully rid the woman of her malady. In the context of West African religion, ridding a person of the pernicious influence of an evil spirit required the execution of one of two extremely specific actions. “Willem then asked me as to what would be our next step. He asked, ‘should I send this spirit back to the person from whom it came? Or should I throw it in the river? I pleaded that I did not want to take revenge since Allah had already done justice and I did not want to cause any misery to anyone. It could again cause troubles for me.”

Since Khan decided to adhere to the belief that Allah had provided him recourse through which his wife’s suffering could be justified, he and Willem were limited to the exorcism option that did not involve unleashing an vengeful spirit onto some poor Surinamese souls. As such, adherents of African religions generally looked down upon the pursuit of revenge though evil spirits and “Willem was very pleased with my reply and said: ‘Basia, very well said, anyone else would have opted for revenge but you are an exception. Now if you do not want to send this

458 Ibid
459 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 149 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
spirit to someone else you must yourself take it at night and throw it into the river when the water turns black. I cannot do this myself. I said: ‘Inshah Allah [with God’s will], I will do it with my own hands. God will help me.’ As Khan had chosen to rid his wife of the evil spirit via disposal in the river, time was of the utmost importance as far as this ritual was concerned.

As this particular spirit came about via African religious practices, the performance of specific rites was essential to its banishment, and both Willem and Munshi Khan were cognizant of this fact. As such, “at ten in the night Willem began his rituals and completed all his activities. By 11:30 p.m. he had put the evil spirit inside a big bottle and gave it to me saying: ‘Throw this into the river and do not look back on your return or else you will find no cure.’ I assured him to do as he had said and at midnight, when the water turned black, I took the bottle in my hands and went off to the river.” If Khan had any doubts as to the reality of the West African religious practices that he had taken part in up to this point, they were quickly erased by observations made while on the journey to the riverbank. Moreover, observations such as the ones Khan made likely occurred as a result of his need to confirm his belief in Willem’s religious practices, which were certainly alien to the Indian Subcontinent. As such, Khan noted, “the bottle was empty but weighed about 5 kilos. When I reached the riverside I threw away the bottle with all my strength. I then turned around and following Willem’s warning I did not look behind on my way home. My wife seemed better early next morning but weakness and abdominal pain remained,” as Willem and Khan were not yet done with the exorcism process, which was slated to take three days as per the spirit’s earlier comments. As a final act in the general effort to rid Khan’s wife’s constitution of the evil spirit’s influence, Willem employed traditional natural remedies and “undertook a long journey beyond Koffiedjompo in Para district

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460 Ibid
461 Ibid
462 Ibid
463 Ibid
to fetch some herbs, which were not found on the plantation and added those herbs that were readily available and made my wife drink it and take bath in water mixed with the potion. Khuda allowed my spouse to be cured after a week’s treatment” via West African remedies.\textsuperscript{463}

Alas, although Munshi Khan’s wife suffered an horrific encounter with an vengeful spirit brought about by Hindostani dabbling in West African spiritual practices, that did not mark the end of Khan’s personal experiences with black magic as he soon fell under the auspices of a different brand of Animistic African religion, which involved animals. Durga, an acquaintance of Khan’s came to Khan’s smallholding and requested permission to cut some grass, which would be used to feed livestock. “When returning with the bundle of grass on his head he encountered the python. He dropped the bundle and fled. Still panting he reached my house and said: “I will never again come to your field. There lives a big python in its vicinity. I believe it is the same snake that Dhuki had tried but failed to kill. Instead he lost his vision for about 6 months. He had to resort to black magic and dansi” in order to fully regain his sense of sight.\textsuperscript{464}

Munshi Khan initially did not grant Durga’s account of Dhuki’s struggles following his struggles with that particular python much credence and began to seek ways of ridding his land parcel of this snake. Khan’s ruminations eventually evolved into a plan to kill the python, and this plan succeeded as “after sowing the paddy, I met Durga and told him about the snake’s killing and that he now could come to cut grass from my field…. Only God knows what led to my sickness, which followed after this incident.”\textsuperscript{465} Khan’s illness following his decision to rid the neighborhood of the troublesome python followed the pattern established by his wife’s sickness, which had been caused by an vengeful spirit summoned by an voodoo priest. To this end, “the kafir [black] who later on cured me, told me that someone had done some black magic

\textsuperscript{463} Khan, \textit{Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, 149-50 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at this juncture
\textsuperscript{464} Khan, \textit{Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer}, 163 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
\textsuperscript{465} Ibid
and had transferred the plight of the cut one-third part of the snake, which I had thrown into the jungle, to me. It could have been avoided if I had buried it like its head, which had indeed been buried 3 days afterwards when my sons found it in the grove." As could be expected, Munshi Khan fell gravely ill shortly after his encounter with the aforementioned python and his family was soon consumed with thoughts of finding a cure. As Khan’s wife’s 3-year spell of suffering following the birth of one of her children had been swiftly ended following consultation with an Afro-Surinamese witch doctor, one of the avenues through which Khan’s family pursued a cure was an search for an competent West African witch doctor or shaman within Paramaribo.

Khan’s sons’ “search finally ended when they came across Belforos who was a black witchdoctor and lived in the city. He was a knowledgeable man…. He analysed the problem and told my sons to ask me what occurred during their absence from the hospital. This is because he used to predict my suffering beforehand. His prediction about my activities in absence of my sons was confirmed to be true." Even though Munshi Khan had some positive experiences with the work of witch doctors as far as his wife’s illness was concerned, he decided to pursue conventional treatment first. Unfortunately, Khan’s expectation of a cure via European medical methods were quickly dashed as Suriname’s existing medical infrastructure struggled to provide Khan with a respite from his suffering. “One and half day elapsed in the hospital but the doctor failed to cure me. However, the witch doctor could sense what was happening to me every moment without even seeing me. On the fourth night, I developed high fever and my urine became thick and white in color." Interestingly enough, the Afro-Surinamese witch doctor contracted by Khan’s family had managed to keep abreast of events within the hospital despite

466 Ibid
467 Khan, Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer, 166-7 contains the relevant section of information about Suriname at that point in time
468 Ibid
his inability to enter the premises, which, despite inconveniencing Belforos, did not serve as a severe obstacle to treatment as the witch doctor continued monitoring the situation from afar.

Belforos came to know of Khan’s deteriorating condition and “told my wife and children that if they wanted me alive, I should be taken out of the hospital the very next morning and by Allah’s grace, he could cure me…. He explained, ‘When the colour of the patient’s urine matches that of the snake’s stool, it means that the disease is stronger than the patient’s resistance and that the patient is now about to succumb to the disease.’” As the witch doctor felt Khan’s life was in immediate danger, Khan’s family quickly acted upon his recommendation and removed Rahman Khan from the hospital to a waiting car that would ostensibly chauffeur the occupants back to their place of residence. As Khan recalled, “inside the car I saw a Creole and thought him to be another passenger…. When I asked my sons about the black man they said he was just someone who had come for some work. He came home with us. I thought he had something to do with Karamat Khan, who sold milk” as Khan had no idea the man was a fully-fledged witch doctor with high levels of proficiency in traditional African religious rituals. Eventually, Khan became aware of Belforos’ true occupation and consented to undergo the witch doctor’s suggested rituals and treatments, which commenced that very night at Khan’s home.

After some cajoling, “at seven in the evening, the witch doctor asked for a tub filled with water and mixed several herbs and medicines in it. He then told me to stand naked in the tub and took out a small book from which he began to chant something and simultaneously washed me. After the bath, I was given clean clothes to wear and made to lie on the bed.” Despite the fact that a cure for Khan’s illness had eluded the best efforts of his hospital’s staffers, Belforos’ efforts, which were steeped in West African religious lore, proved far more effective as far as

\[469\] Ibid
\[470\] Ibid
\[471\] Ibid
providing respite for Khan’s maladies. As events unfolded following completion of the witch-doctor-recommended bath, Khan quickly regained his strength and remarked, “In one night a mere black had accomplished the healing, which had seemed impossible to all the doctors of repute, of high salary and high post, and who could influence the government. The Lord had allowed a Negro, hated by the Europeans, to free me from all five of my symptoms by 5 o’clock the best morning,” and Munshi Khan never again faced this particular malady, thus proving the effectiveness of traditional African shamanistic healing practices in his own consciousness.  

Munshi Khan’s experiences with West African religious practices during his time in Suriname are exceedingly important because they clearly demonstrate the process of cultural syncretism within Suriname. Note that even while Khan participates in or undergoes religious practices derived from traditional African beliefs, he continues to invoke Allah’s name. Khan’s continued invocation of Allah’s name indicates that he continued to maintain strong ties to Islam, which had been his religion of choice prior to his arrival in South America. However, one important thing to remember about Islam is that it tends to be a flexible religion in that it will often accommodate external beliefs in order to appear more palatable to a population of potential converts. Java actually provides an excellent example of this particular phenomenon in that Javanese Muslims continued to practice aspects of indigenous Indonesian faith systems that predated the arrival of Islam in that particular region of the world, and this particular instance of modified Islam is especially relevant since large numbers of Javanese immigrated to Suriname.  

While Muslims from the Punjab region of Asia, which is where Munshi Khan hailed from, usually tried to resist syncretism of Islam with other faith systems such as Hinduism, they operated in a polity possessing a limited number of ethnic groups. Thus, immigration to Suriname exposed Punjabis to a completely new array of belief systems and these individuals

472 Ibid
appear to have readily adopted elements from traditional West African religious practices into their personal ideologies. Note that Munshi Khan appears to actually believe in the effectiveness of witch doctors’ actions as he always followed their instructions and constantly gives credence to their statements regarding the cause of his family’s ailments and other related phenomena. Of particular importance is Khan’s observance that the empty bottle containing the spirit that tormented his wife weighed five kilograms. The sole reason for that particular observation on Khan’s part was to re-affirm his belief in the witch doctor’s ability to actually extricate such a being and confine it to said bottle. If Khan had possessed any doubts about the effectiveness of traditional West African religious practices, he would have observed that the bottle ‘felt light’ or was ‘not as heavy as expected’. Yet, Khan calls attention to the bottle’s unusually high mass and by doing so affirms his personal belief in elements of traditional African faiths such as black magic, voodoo, witchcraft and sorcery, which were foreign to a majority of the world’s Muslims.

Precedent for interaction between Islam and animistic African religions exists since Islam made significant inroads in Africa during its era of proselytization, particularly in locales such as North Africa, the Sahara and parts of the African Sahel, where great kingdoms such as Mansa Musa’s fantastically wealthy state of Mali resided. However, modification of Punjabi Islam via syncretism with African belief systems was unheard of outside of Suriname and this particular religious phenomenon perfectly illustrates the extent to which Suriname’s ethnic groups were capable of generating unique fusion cultures that could not be found anywhere else in the world. Note that creation of unique brands of Islam was not the only way in which Surinamese fusion cultures manifested themselves. Recall the development of Sranan Tongo, which serves as Suriname’s lingua franca and is composed of elements from European languages such as Dutch.
and English as well as elements from various African and Asian languages. Sranan Tongo serves as a useful supplement to religion while discussing Suriname’s fusion culture because formation of this particular language reveals the degree to which Suriname’s diverse ethnic groups contributed to elements of the colony’s society. To this end, the most important ingredients as far as creation of Suriname’s eclectic culture turned out to be the incredibly diverse collection of ethnic groups that the colony possessed via mass immigration from multiple geographical areas, all of which harbored very different ideas regarding sociocultural issues and employed vastly different methods of communicating and undergoing spiritual experiences.

\[473\] See Chapter 2 for further information about various elements that influenced Sranan Tongo’s composition and formation within Suriname
Conclusion
A Summary of the Development of Early Colonial Surinamese Society and Demographic Changes that Helped Spark Organic Development of Suriname’s Late Colonial Society

Significant debates regarding the true nature of the system of Asian indentured servitude took place throughout the Americas and elsewhere in the world. Those who were in favor of the importation of contract laborers from Asia to overseas colonies argued that the nascent system of indentured servitude was merely an experiment in free labor and that it was perfectly suitable for indigent people to sell their ability to work to the highest bidder. On the other hand, a substantial number of contemporary observers railed against indentured servitude because they saw it as a mere extension of the pernicious system of chattel slavery that had pervaded the early colonial period. Interestingly enough, the members of the anti-Asian contract labor camp had access to ample evidence that substantiated their claims that indentured servitude was a mere extension of chattel slavery rather than the realization of a wholly new system of free labor in the New World.

Note that estate owners and other government officials within Suriname and elsewhere in the Caribbean used terms/language and intentionally adhered to practices that were evocative of chattel slavery’s social norms. For instance, Suriname’s Asian laborers often referred to the agent-general as “coolie-papa,” which is an extremely patriarchal term that was unrelated to labor contracts. Furthermore, a European man known as Director Shedden, who was in charge of the NHM plantation at Marienburg, was called ‘Massa Cheddi” by his Asian charges, and the term “Massa,” which is translated as “owner,” is the same word that enslaved Africans used to refer to their European owners. Moreover, although plantation proprietors maintained ownership of labor contracts rather than the workers themselves, Munshi Khan and other Asian indentured laborers repeatedly refer to their “garamsara,” meaning “owner” when discussing the

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474 Page 94 of this particular paper contains references to the use of the term “coolie-papa” to refer to Suriname’s various agent-generals
475 Page 97 of this particular paper contains references to the fact that Director Shedden was called “massa Cheddi” by his Asian workers
The continuation of terms relating to ownership of laborers within Suriname is fascinating in and of itself because it reveals the fact that although the colony’s superiors undoubtedly believed that their system of Asian contract labor as distinct from the institution of slavery, they were unable to adapt their worldview to a world in which they did not personally possess large numbers of bound workers. Thus, it is extremely likely that the possessive mindset engendered by chattel slavery persisted even after the abolishment of Dutch association with the system of slavery and the introduction of Asian indentured servants.

As a general rule, the use of indentured laborers from various parts of Asia was a very common practice throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. For instance, large numbers of British Indian indentured laborers emigrated from India to various British Caribbean colonies such as Barbados, British Guiana, Saint Kitts and Trinidad in order to work on large agricultural estates in these locations. Note that British Guiana is usually considered a Caribbean colony even though it was located on the South American mainland. Furthermore, large numbers of Chinese contract laborers made their way from mainland China to colonies that emphasized large-scale agriculture including British Guiana, Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico, Suriname and Trinidad among others. Suriname’s use of contract laborers was very similar to other colonies in the Western Hemisphere, however, the methodology that the Dutch used to construct a large pool of capable agricultural workers varied from other European powers with significant Caribbean interests.

Suriname’s Dutch government as well as the Dutch central government in The Hague initially approached the importation of indentured servants to the Dutch Caribbean in a manner similar to practices within British Guiana in that the Dutch pursued the importation of large numbers of British Indians to their Caribbean landholdings. However, the Dutch eventually decided to exploit the large populations of the islands within the Netherlands East Indies and

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476 Page 142 of this paper contains references to the fact that Munshi Khan and other Asian contract laborers used the term “garamsara”
eventually began to import large numbers of Javanese contract laborers to Suriname as well as the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. The simultaneous importation of Asian indentured servants originating from two distinct ethnic groups rendered Dutch Caribbean holdings unique in a regional context because most other Caribbean colonies only imported agricultural laborers from one specific region of Asia. Note that the establishment of a stable pipeline of agricultural workers from Java to Suriname turned out to be immensely fortuitous as the British Raj moved to terminate the system of recruitment and exportation of British Indians to foreign colonies in 1917. Once the British unilaterally ended the exportation of indentured servants from India, a large number of Caribbean colonies had to end their dependence on this system of contract laborer. However, Suriname was well positioned as far as the maintenance of a bound labor force was concerned as the colony had previously established an alternate supply of contract laborers and simply needed to increase importation of agricultural workers from Java in order to maintain a sufficiently large labor force capable of supporting colonial plantations.

As a whole, Paramaribo’s decision to commence importation of significant numbers of indentured servants from British India and Java was intended to satisfy an important item on its political agenda, which was procurement of a huge agricultural labor source that was bound to certain estates for a significant time period as well as cost-controllable. The main motivating factor behind this particular line item on the Surinamese colonial government’s political agenda was ostensibly minimization of the fallout from the Hague’s decision to terminate all forms of Dutch participation in the social institution of chattel slavery, which was largely responsible for driving the Western Hemisphere’s colonial economies from Columbus’ arrival through the mid-to-late 19th century. Prior to the Dutch government’s 1863 decision to abolish slavery in all of its landholdings, Suriname’s demographics had consisted solely of Europeans originating chiefly
from Holland, England, France and Iberia, and the colony’s European populace coexisted with Afro-Surinamese individuals descended from slaves imported from various West African polities situated along the Gulf of Guinea and the Congo as well as a smattering of native Amerindians.

Note that in the era prior to Asian indentured servitude, slaves provided the main source of labor for Suriname’s collection of enormously profitable agricultural estates, and the owners of these huge landholdings owed a great degree of their financial success to their extremely low labor costs. However, these low labor costs had an expiration date, which came to pass in 1863 following The Hague’s executive decision to end its involvement in chattel slavery. However, there was a 10-year period of transition between official Dutch abolishment of slavery in 1863 and arrival of Asian contract laborers in 1873, and a large number of plantations undoubtedly filled their labor requirements by employing a large number of newly freed Afro-Surinamese, as that particular ethnic group was the only one within Suriname with any kind of work experience in agriculture. However, Afro-Surinamese workers, by virtue of their free status, were not as cheap as they had been under chattel slavery, thus they became unattractive from an economic point of view as plantation margins declined from the record levels seen during Suriname’s early colonial period, which extended from the 1600s to the halcyon days of the early 19th century.

Since employment of freedmen proved expensive as far as agricultural revenue margins were concerned, Paramaribo’s power brokers colluded with plantation proprietors to hatch a scheme centered around re-establishment of a bound, cost-controllable labor force that existed for the sole purpose of replicating the colony’s previous access to a enormous force of enslaved Africans. This particular episode of collusion among Suriname’s small cadre of power brokers produced a scheme to import Asian indentured servants to South America under the auspices of 5-year contracts that obligated the newly arrived immigrants to perform the agricultural labor
required to keep the colony’s plantations economically viable. Interestingly enough, Surinamese power brokers came to see Asians as mere replacements for the institution of slavery and soon implemented an intricate system of social checks and balances designed to maintain control over the colony’s economically vital labor force. This system of checks and balances included the infamous penal sanction, which was contractually mandated, as well as implementation of a pass system that restricted Asian mobility away from their assigned estates and institution of a flawed judicial system that was inherently anti-Asian by virtue of its deference to European interests.

Implementation of the Surinamese penal sanction as well as the pass system and a decidedly biased legal system colluded to place indentured servants in a state of virtual slavery and Surinamers as a whole started to view Asians as the ideal replacements for the bygone system of chattel slavery as they had very few rights within the colony while bound to their 5-year contracts. Although Asian indentured servitude possessed similarities to chattel slavery, it did not successfully replicate the cheap labor market that Suriname’s wealthy agricultural barons so desperately wanted to recover. The main reason why Surinamese dreams of resuscitating unsustainably low labor costs failed was because Asian contract laborers, particularly individuals who emigrated from British India, enjoyed political protections that were not provided to Afro-Surinamese individuals. The British Crown had a vested interest in preserving the welfare of its subjects due to its desire to maintain favorable popular opinion among Indian’s large Hindostani majority, and required the Dutch government to consent to the presence of an official British Consul in Paramaribo. The main purpose behind London’s installment of a government office in Paramaribo was not to maintain active diplomatic relations with Suriname but to actively police the way in which British subjects were treated while working on various Surinamese plantations.
Although Suriname’s Javanese contract laborers did not enjoy the protection of the British Consul like their Hindostani brethren, they remained Dutch subjects. As a general rule, the Netherlands tended to favor its hugely profitable East Indian [Indonesian] trading empire over its landholdings in the Western Hemisphere and wished to maintain positive relations with the locals in that part of the world. Given the relatively high levels of Javanese repatriation to Indonesia upon completion of their labor contracts, Dutch administrators ran the risk of Javanese insurrections based on negative reports generated by returnees from South America. As power brokers in the Netherlands wished to maintain stability throughout their vast colonial empire, Surinamese planters could not simply attempt to squeeze every last penny of productivity out of Javanese workers as such actions could severely threaten the Dutch empire as a whole. Since the potential for external interference in colonial affairs existed on two fronts originating in London and The Hague, Paramaribo had a vested interest in ensuring that plantation proprietors treated Asians decently lest it lose a significant degree of political efficacy to officials based in Europe.

External pressures from governments based in Europe colluded with the fact that Asian contract laborers provided a majority of Suriname’s economic productivity via their efforts on the colony’s plantations colluded to produce a rapidly changing political environment within the colony. Asians started occupying a huge amount of Paramaribo’s mental efforts as they entailed frequent interactions with powerful European polities as well as constant maintenance lest they ruin plantation profitability through sloth, incompetence, or a combination of the two. The most significant result of this increased focus on Suriname’s newly arrived Asian population was the increasing marginalization of the colony’s Afro-Surinamese population. As far as Paramaribo and the colony’s cadre of agricultural barons were concerned, Afro-Surinamers were no longer relevant since they were no longer relied upon to drive agricultural productivity and generally
did not merit any degree of attention from foreign powers. Interestingly enough, European Surinamers’ declining emphasis on controlling the colony’s African population was actually a positive development for that particular ethnic group as Paramaribo had decided to shift the focus of its limited resources toward maintenance of Asian contract laborers rather than overt repression of Afro-Surinamers, who could now do what they pleased without undue interference.

The general benefits derived from Afro-Surinamers’ increasing freedoms were not solely limited to individuals living within Paramaribo’s sphere of influence as Suriname’s huge Maroon community benefited from the colony’s emphasis on Asian indentured servants. While chattel slavery had been in effect, Paramaribo had actively persecuted Maroon communities as they provided a safe haven for most runaway slaves and posed a serious threat to the colony’s hugely profitable agricultural enterprises, going so far as to engage in open hostilities with various Bush Negro groups. However, once slavery was abolished in 1863 and importation of Asian contract laborers commenced in 1873, Paramaribo no longer had any viable reason to engender hostile encounters with Maroon polities located in the colony’s interior and these communities were now able to operate with an unprecedented degree of freedom now that they were immune to military incursions emanating from the coastal region. Furthermore, European Surinamers now had fewer reasons than ever to undermine Maroon independence as Asian indentured servants were less of a threat to abandon their estates given the fact that they were only bound for a finite period of time rather than their entire lifetimes, and Maroon communities were unlikely to take in a large number of Asians due to significant cultural differences between the two ethnic groups. Note that the terms of the peace treaties that Suriname’s government had signed with various Maroon groups at the close of the colony’s Maroon Wars still applied, thus Paramaribo was obligated to continue providing its Bush Negroes with modern goods and conveniences while
Maroons were no longer obligated to return runaways as slavery had ceased to exist. Thus, the colony’s Maroons enjoyed continued access to contemporary trade networks without having to engage in political maneuvering against European interests represented by the government in Paramaribo. The enhancement of Maroons’ political position essentially subjected Suriname’s entire interior to their rule and encouraged the independent development of a flourishing Maroon culture within the colony’s impenetrable Amazonian interior, and this particular region remained largely undisturbed until Suriname began moving toward independence from Holland in 1972.

Since importation of Hindostanis and Javanese introduced a completely new cultural influence to Suriname’s already eclectic mix of ethnic groups, the colony experienced cultural change almost immediately after the first shipment of British Indians arrived in 1873. In its initial state of existence, which is generally considered to be the time period before abolition of slavery in 1862, Suriname’s culture was dominated by social norms imported from Europe. However, over time, miscegenation within the colony’s population encouraged the increasing influence of cultural elements origination in various West African polities. This mélange of European and African societies persisted throughout the colony’s period of transition from an economic system predicated on chattel slavery to an economy driven by the blood and sweat of Asian contract laborers. Upon completion of this transition, which was marked by the arrival of the first shipload of British Indian indentured servants; Suriname’s colonial culture began to go through a period of dramatic change starting in 1873. As a general rule, the colony’s new Asian arrivals served as the primary agents of social change as they imparted some cultural practices to the colony as a whole while assimilating foreign elements such as African religious beliefs centered on black magic into their own social norms, and these changes to Suriname’s general culture marked the colony’s transition from its pre-modern state of being to the modern era.
The fact of the matter is that Suriname encouraged the interaction of ethnic groups that did not come into contact with one another anywhere else in the world, and the colony’s eclectic collection of Europeans, Afro-Surinamese, Punjabi Muslims, Indian Hindus, Javanese, and Amerindians ultimately produced a flourishing fusion culture that cannot be found in any other part of the world. However, it is extremely important to note that Paramaribo’s persistent habit of pursuing overtly laissez-faire policies of acculturation as far as its Afro-Surinamese and Asian constituents were concerned certainly encouraged the development of South America’s most interesting fusion culture as more restrictive policies may have limited transference of various cultural elements. Furthermore, examination of Suriname’s attempt to recreate the institution of chattel slavery via importation of a enormous collection of contract laborers from British India and Java, along with exponential population growth among these two ethnic groups following their arrival in the colony provides an explanation for why an Asian-majority country happens to rests on South America’s Caribbean coast, over half a world away from the Eurasian landmass.

In conclusion, the large-scale migration of contract laborers from British India and Java to Suriname held major implications for the country’s population as it moved into the modern era. The nineteenth and twentieth-century waves of migrants from British India and Java to Suriname produced a significant number of second and third-generation Asian Surinamers, and the presence of a large Asian majority has undoubtly played a significant role in the creation of Suriname’s national identity. Suriname gained full independence from the Netherlands in 1975 and the country had to produce a brand new national identity following its formal separation from The Hague. Given the fact that Suriname had such a large Asian population in 1975, the country’s national identity has naturally chosen to wholly embrace its Asian heritage, which is verified by the presence of large numbers of cultural homages to Indian and Javanese migrants.
For instance, one can find a significant number of Hindu temples and Islamic mosques within Paramaribo as well as elsewhere in Suriname. Furthermore, Indian and Javanese cuisine form the backbone of modern Surinamese cuisine, and the deliberate incorporation of various Asian cultural elements into everyday life within modern Suriname demonstrates the extent to which the country has embraced its unique Asian identity as well as the deep impact that the country’s original Asian migrants had on the sociocultural fabric in this part of the Western Hemisphere.
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