

GUYANA



1. Country Brief with reference with its people

Originally a Dutch colony in the 17th century, by 1815 Guyana had become a British possession. The abolition of slavery led to black settlement of urban areas and the importation of indentured servants from India to work in the sugar plantations. This ethno-cultural divide has persisted and has led to turbulent politics. Guyana achieved independence from the UK in 1966, and since then it has been ruled mostly by socialist-oriented governments. In 1992, Cheddi JAGAN was elected president in what is considered the country's first free and fair election since independence. After his death five years later, his wife, Jane JAGAN, became president but resigned in 1999 due to poor health. Her successor, Bharrat JAGDEO, was re-elected in 2001

Guyana totally has 214,970 sq km space with it out of which 196,850 sq km is land and 18,120 sq km of water. It has a total population of 767,245 out of which around 70 percent are in the working age group and 30 percent are

dependent population. The median age is 27.4 years. The population growth is estimated to be 0.25 percent in 2006. The net migration rate is estimated to be (-) 7.49 migrants per thousand population in the year 2006, which proves that the in-migration is much more than the out migration.

The ethnic composition of Guyana is constituted of 50 percent of East Indian, 36 percent of Black population, 7 percent of Amerindian, 7 percent of White, Chinese, and mixed population. The main languages spoken are English, Amerindian dialects, Creole, Hindi, Urdu.

2. Nature and Demographic Profile of Indian Diaspora

(As reported by guyanachronicle.com)

May 5th marks the arrival of East Indians to the shores of Guyana, known then as Demerara or Demara, a hundred and sixty-seven years ago. East Indians arrived in Guyana in response to a so-called labour vacuum caused by the gradual withdrawal of Africans from plantation agriculture, and failed experiments with various immigration schemes following final emancipation in 1838. Soon after emancipation, the sugar planters throughout most of the Caribbean, substituted slave labour with indentured labour contracts. For over three quarters of a century, about 240,000 East Indians were shipped over high-seas to labour on Guyana's sugar plantations as indentured servants under conditions reminiscent of slavery. The influx of East Indians into Guyana continued until 1917, when for reasons relating to the inequities in the recruitment system and mal-treatment of East Indians abroad, the Indian government deservedly handed down a death-blow to the system of indentured servitude. Of the 240,000 East Indians who were brought to Guyana, 70,000 would succumb to plantation life and returned to a familiar and settled life in their janmubhuni (motherland). The remainder would sever the umbilical chord and accept Guyana as their new found home in light of deplorable and adverse conditions in India.

A majority of East Indian emigrants who came to Guyana were single males in the prime age group of between 20 and 30 years old. Fewer families, children and single women came to Guyana. The emigrants who came alone

carried a low dependency burden with them since they had few dependents and were required to return home after completing their terms of contract, especially during the early phase of indentured emigration. East Indians were drawn principally from North and South India, and varied remarkably in caste and area of recruitment (districts) with the passing of time.

East Indians in large numbers embarked on the journey to Guyana for a variety of reasons. British colonialism in India strangled the local economy causing mass unemployment and displacement, and many East Indians salvaged themselves by accepting migration as a way out of economic hardship. The imposition of social oppression through semi-slavery and feudal relations also contributed to the number of migrants. The tide of emigration to Guyana was also buttressed by natural disasters in India, such as droughts, floods, and famines. Together, these calamities brought panic, despair, scarcity, starvation, death, broken village moral, disorganization and instability, leading to mass inland and overseas migration. Civil wars, like the great Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, also contributed to the pool of migrants who ventured to Guyana. There were, of course, East Indians who came to Guyana for eccentric and unusual reasons. There were those who became widowed, fleeing from family quarrels, while others left for sake of adventure, like the dancing girls who wound up in Suriname in 1870.

The manner by which these souls were recruited to labour in Guyana was, however, glaring, accompanied by grave irregularities, abuses and fraud that led some East Indian critics to label the indenture system, the Cooly Slave Trade. East Indians were rudely snatched from the jaws of their affectionate heartland as they went about doing their daily business. With tears streaming down from their eyes, they often would recall that unfortunate day when they were kidnapped, inveigled, and cozened by the wiles of unscrupulous recruiters into signing terms of contracts of which they had little knowledge. Political and economic instability in nineteenth century India permitted this fraudulent practice, aided by the work of local recruiters (Arkatis) - individuals of low moral standing - who roamed the countryside, hanging around famine stricken areas, roadsides,

shelters, where they picked up the desperate and needy and induced them with inflated and misleading promises and pictures of Guyana. Being innocent and uneducated, these poor souls would ignorantly and willingly proceed to do what was asked of them, only to find themselves waiting at the Calcutta depot to be shipped to some unknown destination.

The Indian government was partially to blame for this vile practice. For over three quarters of a century, the system of procuring labour for Guyana was carried out with mass deception, and yet the Indian government maintained its position of benevolent neutrality, one that echoed sentiments not to get mixed up in any bargains and transactions with the parties involved. It was only when the worst cases of abuse became evident would the Indian government from time to time intervene and introduce reforms, often superficially.

The depot where East Indians were hoarded prior to embarkation to Guyana was a world of its own, comprised of East Indians from various backgrounds speaking different dialects, which under normal circumstances, many would have avoided. Sanitation was poor, and diseases, such as cholera, were rampant. Having passed the medical inspection - a procedure which was marred with loopholes - East Indians were marched to the ship; women went first and were sent to the aft, then families followed, and finally single men who took their position in the anterior of the ship. As they floated away on the four-month journey into the vast and deep ocean to Guyana, with only the sky above and roaring waves below, many would die, while others would be born.

On landing in Guyana, they were dispatched in-groups of 30-40 individuals to various plantations, occupying barracks which African slaves had recently vacated. Under the contract system, East Indians were bound on plantation for five years on fixed daily wage. At the end of this time, and another five years of industrial residence in Guyana, the labourers were entitled to free repatriation. The plantations East Indians worked and lived on were like prisons without walls. They were governed by a series of elaborate labour ordinances that effectively put the power in the hands of the planters. East Indians were subjected to strict labour laws, long hours of arduous work, flogged, and above

all, they had to carry a pass. Failure to carry out these duties was met with the harshest punishment, fines, and imprisonment. But despite the authoritarian structure of the plantation system, East Indians continued to come to Guyana, averaging about 3,000 to 4,000 a year. Their presence revolutionized the sugar plantation, adding to the climax of prosperity so enjoyed by the planter class after decades of uncertainty.

In regards to those East Indians who renounced their rights to return passages in lieu of parcels of land to settle down, did so, in an atmosphere of unnecessary prejudice and hate. East Indians came to Guyana at a time when things were seen only through European lenses. Because they occupied ex-slave dwelling quarters and did jobs that Africans despised, East Indians were seen as inferior and were treated as such. Their religion and culture, being ancient and different, were often a sense of amusement and ridicule. The shallowness of Western culture to remotely acknowledge the “other” translated into stereotypes. East Indians were spoken of being more akin to monkey than man.

The Protector of Immigrants, the Stipendiary Magistrates, and Governors, who were entrusted to safeguard the rights of East Indians, were subservient to the views of the planters since both groups shared common interests. It was perhaps for this reason that East Indians relied on their own cultural resilience for survival. East Indians created semblance of lost India through religion, festivals, and feasts, to guide them. Close ties of Jahaja Bhai and Bahin (ship-brothers and sisters) developed and flourished regardless of caste, class or religion.

There were those, in the face of enormous adversity, who took militant actions only to be subdued by the more powerful colonial force through direct violence and the method of divide and rule. But not all had the tenacity to withstand the drudgery of plantation life, either passively or actively. Some East Indians, when goaded beyond what they could handle, turned to alcohol to mask the harsh reality of plantation life, while others, when losing the urge to go on, took their own lives, uttering words of despair.

But in spite of the dark chapters in East Indian history in Guyana, there are many bright pages to be recorded. East Indian agricultural skills have rescued Guyana from total disaster. Whether in the cane-fields under blazing tropical heat with half-protected bodies or in the rice fields in knee high water and mud, they have helped, in no small way, to build the economic structure of Guyana. East Indian agricultural skills still continue to feed Guyana and the Caribbean. Likewise, their persevering and thrifty habits have taught us how to save by example. In the words of George Lamming, “those Indian hands – whether in British Guiana or Trinidad – have fed us all. They are, perhaps, our only jewels of a true native thrift and industry. They have taught us by example the value of money; for they respect money as the only people with a high sense of communal responsibility can.”

In the view of social and political handicaps, East Indians accepted western forms of education, but never fully lost their cultural magnetism. Since this awakening to educational demands and necessities in the early part of the last century, East Indians have excelled in politics, law, literature, and medicine. East Indian communities are gratified to have produced the Jagans, the Luckhoos, and the Naipauls, to steer them, particularly in the period of turbulent post-independent Guyana. East Indians have shown that they have the capacity to respond appropriately to discrimination and difficulties like their forefathers under indenture.

The success of East Indians in business is equally pronounced. We can find them today as cattle rearers, land and shop owners, druggists, moneylenders, etc. East Indians can also be found in the civil service, of which two became Presidents of Guyana. East Indians' music, dance, and drama have charmed Guyana for years, and their foods, curry chicken and roti, have graced our homes and become national dishes.

Like everyone else's history, East Indians in Guyana had their doubts and hopes, their triumphs and tribulations, their tragedies and comedies. They have made significant contributions to Guyana in the fields of politics, economics and culture. Their love for the land has achieved results that constitute a sort of

romance with tropical life. East Indians have aided greatly in the building of Guyana. It is only fitting that we remember when they arrived to Guyana on May 5th, a 167 years ago.

3. Known distinguished Diaspora

- Dr. Cheddi B. Jagan, Late President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana
- H.E. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana
- Sir Lionel Luckhoo, named in the Guinness Book of Records for having won the largest number of murder cases.
- Dr. Mohamed Shahabudeen, became a Judge of the International Court of Justice.
- Dr. Harry Annanunthodo, a distinguished Surgeon.
- Sir Sridath Ramphal, served as the Secretary General of the Commonwealth for two terms.
- Rohan Babulal Kanhai, famous Guyanese cricketer who joined the West Indies team

4. Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora

Guyana, quit often faces ethnic violence. The episode of violence triggered by the infamous jailbreak of five members of *Blackie gang* on February 23, 2002 devastated the country and its people. The bandits or self-proclaimed freedom fighters of African Guyanese against Indian dominance claimed heavy causality. The results of this mindless orgy of violence are a totally devastated economy, increasing rate of unemployment, and poverty and worsening health standards. Both urban and rural Guyana is under grip of poverty. Outward migration has increased many folded in an under populated country like Guyana. Large majority of victims of this violence continues to be people of Indian origin.

It is pointed out that the overwhelming majority of violence perpetrated against Indians in Guyana have twin objective (as pointed out in www.indoguyanese.netfirms.com)

- *Firstly* to force them to migrate so that a demographic change may help the opposition party to assume power.
- *Secondly* under the garb of “rich Indian” mask millions of dollars have been criminally transferred.

5. Diaspora Associations

ENTERPRISE ARYA SAMAJ, ECD, GYANA

176 Church Street
Enterprise, ECD

GUYANA

GREEK INDIAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

16 Fihellinon Street
PIRACEUS , GREECE

POSTAL CODE: 18535

GUYANA MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

157 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
GEORGETOWN , GUYANA
EMAIL: nil@guyana.net.gy

GUYANA CENTRAL ARYA SAMAJ

78 Pramnlranjan Place
Prashad Nagar

GEORGETOWN , GUYANA

GUYANA CENTRAL ARYA VIR DAL

P O Box 101781
GEORGETOWN , GUYANA

LOT VEDIC MANDIR

Lot 17 A, Bush Lot Village
WEST BERBICE , GUYANA

6. Bilateral relation/agreements

A Commission of India was established in Georgetown in May 1965, just before the independence of Guyana on 26th May 1966. In 2001, despite poor economic conditions, Guyana contributed approximately US\$ 40,000 to Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (for Gujarat earthquake victims). The High Commission of Guyana re-opened in New Delhi in December, 2004 which was closed down in 1991. The first indentured labour from India came to Guyana in 1838. Indian origin people constitute over 50% of the population. The present generation do not speak Hindi, but they are fond of Hindi movies and songs. They celebrate Diwali, Holi and other religious festivals.

Important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements:

- MOU on mutual cooperation between Foreign Service Institutes (FSIs) of India and Guyana signed in New Delhi in November 2000
- MOU between Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) of India and Institute of Applied Science & Tech. (IAST) of Guyana signed in August 2002.
- Work Plan between Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) of Guyana signed in July 2003.
- Cultural Exchange Programme signed in New Delhi in August 2003
- Educational Exchange Programme signed in New Delhi August 2003
- On 6 November, 2003 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in Georgetown between India and Guyana for supply of Solar Photovoltaic Water Pumps which were supplied in August, 2004.
- A Joint Business Council was established on 25th August, 2003, in New Delhi between Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Georgetown Chamber of Commerce.

Agreements under consideration:

- Bilateral Investment Promotion & Protection Agreement (BIPPA)
- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)