

# The legacy of 135 years of Indian Immigration in Suriname Sandew Hira – The Hague, 05-06-2008

## Dia 1: welcome



- Mr. Ravi, The honourable minister of Overseas Indian Affairs of the government of India, the board of the Sarnami Institute of the Netherlands, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.
- You have heard the excellent speech by Professor Brij Lal, the editor of the magnificent Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora.
- In my contribution I will focus on the legacy of 135 years of Indian immigration to Suriname and the double migration of Surinamese Indians: one from India to Suriname and the other from Suriname to Holland.

## Dia 2: slavery and indenture ship

### Slavery and indenture ship

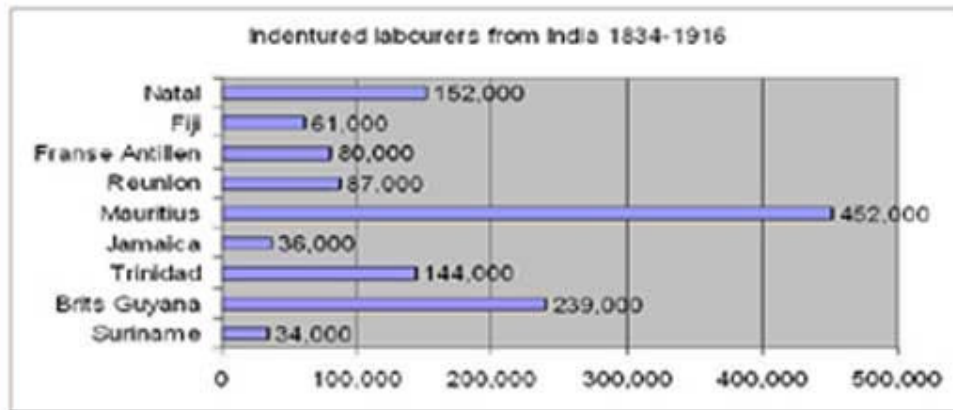
- Indians as slaves in Mauritius: (6.000 slaves) 10% of the population.
- Indians as indentured labourers: 1 million.



- Indian migration is closely linked to the system of slavery, which the United Nations recognized as a crime against humanity.
- Indian migration is linked to the system of indenture ship. But Indians have also been enslaved during colonialism, although in small numbers.
- One author, B. Benedicts, mentions that in Mauritius during the French colonization (1710-1810) there were more than 6.000 Indians who were enslaved and worked alongside African slaves. They constituted 10% of the slave population in Mauritius. Most of them were apparently South Indians from the French colonies in the sub-continent. They were favoured as domestic help, but some worked as free artisans, as masons, rattan weavers and plumbers.

### Dia 3: Indentured labour

## Indentured labour



- It is fair enough to say that most Indians left India as indentured labourers. Suriname had a small percentage (3%) of the one million indentured workers who left Indian during colonialism.

## Dia 4: Push migration and indentured labour

### Push migration and indentured labour

- Double migration: India → Suriname → Netherlands
- Difference:
  - Indenture ship: pull migration
  - Suriname migration: push migration
  - Turks and Marroccans: pull migration
  - Comparison: first and second migration

- Suriname Indians in Holland are here due to a double migration process: one from India to Suriname and the other from Suriname to Holland.
- However the nature of these migrations is fundamentally different.
- One marked difference is the fact that migration under indenture ship involved a massive organization to recruit people, bring them together in barracks in ports such as Calcutta, transporting them in an organized way overseas, keeping them in barracks in Suriname in order to distribute labourers to the plantations who ordered their transport. And although people were pushed into migration by poverty and hunger, the essence of migration under indenture ship was not the push factor, but the pull factor: the organized system of planters to pull labour power from India to Suriname.
- The migration from Suriname to Holland did not involve any organized system of recruitment of labour.
- There is also a big difference between the Surinamese migration in the seventies of the last century and migration workers from Morocco and Turkey. The Moroccans and Turks were brought to Holland to work as so called guest workers in an organized manner. Recruiters went to the villages of these countries to recruit workers, put them through medical tests and transported them to Holland, where they were housed in pensions paid for by their employers.
- I will discuss the differences and similarities between the first and second migration of Surinamese Indians. But first I will deal with a concept that is crucial in the research that we will be doing in the coming years through the webdatabase the Global Atlas of the Indian Diaspora.

## Dia 5: Social institution

### Social institution

- Entity that (re)produces and transmits norms and values
- Value: what is important.
- Norm: rule of behaviour
- Example
  - Organizations: mandirs, mosques, churches
  - Events: holi, divali, rituals of birth, marriage and burial



- That is the concept of a social institution. There is a relationship between the type of migration and the type of social institutions that develop in the new society.
- The concept of social institution helps us to understand one of the crucial questions of modern times: how do mechanisms of social cohesion, ethnic identity, ethnic binding, arise and develop?
- A social institution is an entity that produces, reproduces and transmits norms and values.
- Values are ideas which we consider to be important in our life. The idea of personal freedom, of social responsibility, of tolerance and respect are examples of values, of ideas that we value very high.
- Every community has such values.
- A norm is a rule that guides our individual and social behaviour. Take for example a value as respect. This value is expressed in a norm that we don't intentionally insult other people. Take the value of freedom of expression. One norm is that we want to hear different opinions, and not only one opinion, on matters that we care about. Another value is the idea that all human beings should have equal rights. No person is superior or inferior to another person as a human being. Of course there are social and other differences between persons, but the idea is that all persons should have equal right as human beings. A norm which we derive from this value is that we should not treat people differently because of the colour of their skin or their religion.
- Social institutions are entities that tell us what a community considers to be important ideas that guide their behaviour.
- Religious and social cultural organizations are such institutions. A mosque, church or mandir are examples of such organizations. They express what a community considers to be important ideas and how the behaviour of the members of such a community is regulated by norms.

## Dia 6: Migration and social institutions

### Migration and social institutions

- Pull migration = recruitment.
- Same sex migration, family life and social institutions.

- So what is the link between a certain type of migration and social institutions?
- The pull migration is characterized by recruitment. There is an organized attempt to recruit people to work abroad. Some of these migrations are single sex migration: mainly men are recruited to work in certain industries. Many construction workers in countries in the Middle East such as Dubai are Indians. The domestic servants were recruited from Muslim countries as Indonesia. They are mostly women.
- Once you have same sex migration there is a limitation on the type of social institution that can develop. For example marriage rituals, rituals in raising children, family life and communal life that involves families, even celebrations as divali or holi, all these events, all these social institutions demand a form of family life.
- In the early years of the migration of the so called guest workers – the Turks and Moroccans - most migrants were men.
- In the case of the Chinese immigrants in Suriname during indenture ship the number of women was very small. Chinese immigration of indentured labour was a same sex migration.
- In the early years of Indian indenture ship most migrants were also men.
- The need for a stable labour force led to a situation of chain migration: the men brought their wives and children to the new country. Women and children were not recruited by the employers as was the case with the guest workers.
- In the case of Indian indenture ship the employers did recruit women to ensure a stable labour force.

## Dia 7: Social institutions and the role of the family

### Social institutions and the role of the family

- Marriage, birth, death
- Student migration versus labour migration: student union as the social base, not the family.



- Many important social institutions are linked to the family as a social unit. This is clearly the case for a social institution such as marriage. Marriage is a social event that connects families.
- In the fifties and sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a small wave of migration from Suriname to Holland that consisted mainly of students who came to study at the institutions of higher education in Holland. There was a small number of Indians among these students. They even formed a union in The Hague, called Manan. Their aim was to study and return to Suriname. The nature of their migration was not labour migration, but student migration. They came for a limited period of time to Holland. The core social institution in the Surinamese student community was not the family, but the student union. The possibility to develop other social institutions was limited because of the temporary stay in Holland and the nature of their migration: student migration.

## Dia 8: Chain migration

### Chain migration: voluntary migration

- The first migrants brings his family and then his friends.
- Whole villages migrate
- New communities are planted in the new society.



- The most striking difference between the first and second migration is the role of chain migration.
- The migration from Suriname to Holland was of a specific type: it was chain migration. What is chain migration?
- Chain migration is the phenomenon by which the first migrant attract his family and friends from his village or neighbourhood in a city to join him or her in a new country. The social relations from their villages, often with their existing social institutions, are transferred or planted in the new society.
- Chain migration has led to a situation whereby big parts of the social structure from the district of Nickerie in Suriname have been transferred to the City of The Hague. Families, friends and their social relations have migrated to form little Nickerie in The Hague.
- In the same manner you have Little Guyana in New York or little Havana in Miami.



## Dia 9: Migration to Holland

### Migration to Holland

Migration from Suriname to Holland		
Period	Number	Average per month
1964-1971	62.000	7.750
1973-1975	100.000	33.333

- The student migration from Suriname to Holland lasted some thirty years, from the early fifties until the independence of Suriname in 1975.
- The first wave of mass migration that brought some 62.000 Surinamese to Holland started in the mid sixties when social and economic turmoil began.
- The second wave of migration was related to enormous political unrest as the date of independence – November 25<sup>th</sup> 1975 – drew closer and the political parties seemed unable to find a resolution for their differences in dealing with independence. The fear of ethnic violence was big. In a short period of three years 100.000 Surinamese left their country for Holland.

## Dia 10: Demography

### Demography 2008

- 350.000 Surinamese in the Netherlands
- 100.000 Surinamese Indians in the Netherlands
- 40.000 Surinamese Indians in The Hague
- 13.000 Non-resident Indians in the Netherlands

- Now in 2008 the Surinamese community has grown to 350.000 persons out of which 100.000 are Indians. The others are Afro-Surinamese, Javanese and smaller ethnic groups.
- The Hague is a city with a large concentration of Indians (40.000 persons).
- There are 13.000 Non-Resident Indians in Holland.

## Dia 11: No chain migration during indenture ship

### No chain migration during indenture ship

Villages with more than 2 emigrants

Villages	Police station	District	Max. number of persons
Pipra	Basti	Basti	7
Karmahia	Chapia	Basti	6
Pipra	Bansi	Basti	5
Hasni	Rudhouli	Basti	4
Mahso	Basti	Basti	3
Hasni	Gudhouli	Basti	3
Barsara	Dudhara	Basti	3
Ramwapur	Bansi	Basti	3
Number of villages			34
Total number of villages			19,867

- So our second migration, that is from Suriname to Holland, was chain migration. What about chain migration during indenture ship?
- The concept of chain migration shows that migration during indenture ship was not voluntary. There is a big debate going on in the historical literature on Indian indenture ship concerning the difference between slavery and indenture ship and the nature of indenture ship.
- In our new database – the Global Atlas of the Indian Diaspora – we have a sub database with the data of our ancestors. The GAID database shows that more than 34.000 Indian immigrants came from around 20.000 villages in India. There are only seven villages with more than two immigrants.
- What do these facts mean? It means that the arkatia's, the recruiters, did not dare to return to the village where they recruited their victims for indenture ship. If they could prove with the experience of other migrants that their families were better off, they could have persuaded them to follow their relatives. Instead they used stories with deception and lies to convince people to migrate. Of course people in the rural areas wanted a better life, but they had no idea that colonial system of indenture ship would bring them into a form of bonded labour.
- One third of the 34.000 Indian migrants in Suriname returned to India. In the system of chain migration they would have convinced their friends and family to join them in a remigration to Suriname.
- So the absence of chain migration proves that indenture ship was not voluntary migration.

## Dia 12: Characteristics indenture ship

### Characteristics of indenture ship

- Five years of bonded labour
- Imprisonment when refusing to work
- No freedom of movement
- The bullet at protest
- Racism

The characteristics of indenture ship are:

- The migrant was forced to work for five years for the same employer. He could not transfer to another employer.
- If he refused to work, he was arrested and sent to jail.
- The worker was not free in his movement. He was not allowed to leave the premise of the plantation even after working hours. He needed a pass and could be arrested if he did not have a permit from his boss to leave the plantation even after working hours.
- If the workers protested against their working conditions, they could face the bullet as has happened several times in the period of indenture ship.
- A crucial element in the colonial system was the ideology and practice of racism: the idea that the white man is superior to the coloured man and that this allows him to treat the coloured people as inferior human beings. An example is the practice that Indian workers should not look white bosses into their eyes.

## Dia 13: Resistance against colonialism

### Resistance against colonialism

- 1873, 1875, 1876, 1877, 1878, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1891 en 1902.
- Leaders: Jumba Rajgaroo, Ramdjaneer en Mathura.



- The colonial reports have documented ten cases of uprising of Indian workers against the planters between 1873 and 1902. These reports mention the name of some of the leaders: Jumba Rajgaroo, Ramdjaneer and Mathura.
- In some cases Indian women actively took part in these uprisings and consequently have also been killed in the act by colonial military.
- One of the largest uprisings in 1902 left 17 workers killed and 39 wounded.

## Dia 14: The first and second migration

### The first and second migration

- First migration: pull
- Second migration: push
- Both: establishment of the family as the basic social unit
- Both: development of an infrastructure of social institutions

- The main difference between the first and second migration is the fact that the first was based on the pull mechanism that recruited and drew our ancestors into bonded labour while the second was voluntary migration based on the push mechanism.
- Both migrations enabled the establishment of the family as the basic social unit in contrast to for example the Chinese migration during indenture ship of the first phase of the migration of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands.
- Both enabled the development of an infrastructure of social institutions.

## Dia 15: Development of social institutions

### Development scenarios of social institutions

- Preservation: marriage, religion
- Extinction; Kali Maj puja, Tadjia
- Blending: music, dance
- Extension: food



The development of social institutions can take place according to different scenarios:

- The first scenario is the preservation scenario; we keep our social institution in tact. Examples are religious institutions such as the mandirs and mosques, but also the marriage rituals or the burial rites. These institutions are very much alive both in Suriname and in Holland.
- The second scenario is the extinction scenario: the social institutions could not be preserved and have disappeared. Examples are the Kali Mai Puja and the Tadjia festival. Both institutions have disappeared in Suriname and in the Indian community in Holland, but are still alive in other Caribbean countries. In Guyana the Kali Mai puja is blended with old Africa Voodoo rituals. In Trinidad the Tadjia festival is known under the name of Hosay procession.
- The third scenario is that of blending: social institutions change in such a way that they are blended with elements of other cultures. For example music and dance festivals organized by Indians are now being blended with music from non-Indian origin, both in Suriname and in the Indian community in Holland.
- The last scenario that I want to mention is the extension scenario. The social institution is not confined anymore to the Indian community but find its way to other communities. Indian food is such an example. The preparation is done by Indian, but people from other ethnic groups consume this food both in Surinam and in Holland.

## Dia 16: The multicultural society

### The multicultural society

- Both migration resulted in multicultural society.
- Two approaches to multiculturalism: civilized and uncivilized.



- The first and second migration has resulted in the development of a multicultural society, the first one in Suriname and the second one in the Netherlands. But they differ in their approach of multiculturalism.
- There are two approaches in dealing with multiculturalism: the civilized and uncivilized approach.
- Suriname is a good example of the civilized approach: people from different ethnic groups should treat each other with respect and tolerance.

## Dia 17: The uncivilized approach

### The uncivilized approach

- Racism is on the rise in Europe
- Colonialism and uncivilized cultures
- G.O.A.T.
- Greatest Of All Times



- The uncivilized approach has become the mainstream in European intellectual thinking after September 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Its central tenet is the idea that European culture is superior to non-western cultures.
- Here we come across an ideology which is so familiar from colonialism: racism.
- Already during slavery and indenture ship the prevalent ideology of racism in Europe was an expression of an uncivilized culture: the practice whereby one human being degrades another human being intentionally and with the purpose of exploiting him or her is and should no be part of human civilization. It is part of the uncivilized culture of the survival of the fittest as we know it in the animal kingdom.
- Nowadays racism takes on a different form. I refer to it by a term used by the legendary boxer Mohammed Ali, who suffers from the disease of Parkinson. On the door of his room he has written the word GOAT. He refers to himself as a goat. The acronym stands for Greatest Of All Times. The way Mohammed Ali is using it is humorous: with his Parkinson disease he still considers himself to be a GOAT, which of course also refers to the animal.
- But in Europe the explicit reference to coloured people as inferior people – which was a common reference during colonialism - has disappeared. Now the general conception is that the Dutch of the European is not so much as a superior being, but he is a GOAT, the Greatest Of All Times.

## Dia 18: Examples of GOAT-ideas

### GOAT-ideas: words and deeds

- Freedom of press: Suriname versus Holland
- Freedom of expression: India versus Holland



- Let take a closer look at how this perception works and how it influences the position of Indians in Holland.
- If you are a GOAT it means that you are doing better in a specific field, such as Mohammed Ali in boxing.
- The funny thing about the European GOAT is that there is a stark difference between word and deed. In fact the deed is opposite to the word with the GOATS.
- Take the example of the freedom of press. In all civilized countries this means that a civilian should be able to take note of a wide variety of media with different points of views. In Suriname I can view the English version of the Arabic TV Channel Al Jazeera alongside CNN or BBC World. If I want to know the views of Israelis and Arab leaders I can turn to Al Jazeera in Suriname. In Holland the population is presented with only the western view of world events, that is CNN and BBC World. What kind of freedom of press is this? The GOAT kind.
- Take the example of the freedom of expression. In any civilized country freedom of expression means that a person is allowed to express his or her feelings, ideas and opinions in word and deed. A deed is for example the way you dress. In a country where freedom of expression is safeguarded you can dress as you wish. There are many countries in the world where this is possible, India included. But in Belgium you get a fine of 50 Euro's when you wear a burka on the street. You just might have taken a walk. You don't curse, you don't steal, you just take a walk, and still you might be fined with 50 euro's. In France it is forbidden for school children to express their feelings and opinions in the way they dress. The headscarf is forbidden in France. Freedom of expression is limited to the GOATS. Muslims – 20% of the Indians in Holland are muslim – don't have this freedom.
- I could extend this list with examples on the GOAT position on women or on democracy, where the deed is in opposition to the word.



## Dia 19: Understanding GOAT

### Understanding GOAT

- Racism: era of colonialism.
- GOAT: reaction to globalization
- Mahatma Gandhi: we have a choice
- Learning from Suriname and India



- How can we understand this GOAT-approach? It would be simple to just label it as racism from the colonial times. It is more subtle.
- Racism in the colonial times was the ideological expression of a real relationship between the white oppressor and the coloured people who were being oppressed. That relationship was maintained by military force in the colonies and by a network of social institutions.
- But that relationship has changed. One century ago the British had a saying that the sun never sets in the British Empire, because the empire was so big that there was always a country on the planet that had a rising sun.
- Today the British Empire consists of only one small island: England. On the internet you can find a table of the times when the sun rises and when it sets on this island. In the winter it rises at eight o'clock and sets at four in the afternoon.
- Indeed, the world has changed dramatically in the last few decades.
- Asia – with India and China in the forefront – is the rising superpower of the 21st century.
- Globalization is the key word for the future. India and China are influencing the world economically and culturally.
- The rise of India has a direct influence on the image of Indians in the world.
- It also brings a sense of uncertainty and uneasiness among some Europeans, which is being exploited by politicians who use the GOAT-ideas to organise these sentiments for political reasons.
- The future of Indians in Holland will be influenced by the way the GOAT-politicians will determine the political agenda, but also by the way India will develop its role as a global player in this era.
- But we are not passive spectators in this process. As Mahatma Gandhi said: you and I are the architects of what goes wrong and what goes right in our existence. In this respect Holland can learn much from Suriname and India on how to build a civilized multicultural society.