

# Colonial Expansion and Demographic Change: The British and Russian Experience\*

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## Abstract

The principal concern in this article is with the dispersal of peoples under colonial rule, primarily British colonial rule, and the contrast with the cognate process, the construction of the Russian Empire under the Tsars, and Stalin. The dispersal of communities under British colonial rule generally had an economic or social imperative, very seldom a political one, while political and strategic reasons were always features of Russian colonial expansion. This latter expansion, to the Baltic region, to Central Asia, and the Pacific, each involved a transfer of populations from which has emerged some of the difficult problems bequeathed to the world by the former Soviet Union. The article reviews the transfer of people from the territories the British ruled or controlled in the Indian subcontinent to British colonies in other parts of the world, a process governed entirely by economic considerations, a response to the operation of market forces. While the two processes, British and Russian, had many differences, they had some things in common as well. Post-colonial states face a common set of problems in fashioning policies to deal with immigrant minorities, introduced as in the British tradition, or imposed as in the Russian empire.

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## I Introduction

This article deals with one of the most complex and least researched aspects of colonial rule over the last three centuries, the transfer of populations, voluntarily and involuntarily, under colonial rule from one part of an empire—or indeed from outside the formal boundaries of an empire—to another. It seeks to identify some of the salient issues on the theme and, more important, to suggest areas within it that need further exploration. Those who engage in such a process of exploration will find a vast lode of material that researchers can mine well into the 21st century.

One field in the wider theme of the transfer of peoples shall not be dealt with at all. It has its dozens of histories and scores of historians—the transfer, generally voluntarily, of people from Europe, principally from the British isles and north-western Europe, and later on from Central and Eastern Europe, to North America, South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. This is one of the great historic processes of the three hundred years or more, beginning in the 17th century. The scale of this transfer of communities was enormous. Some aspects of it have been studied in depth, the movement of European peoples to North America and Brazil, to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. It would take a team of historians several decades to produce a composite picture of this great phenomenon, and to analyse its impact on the host societies. Perhaps it is something that will never be undertaken and not merely because of the massive costs of such an operation.

Another aspect of British colonial rule, the transfer of people of African origin under the most brutal conditions imaginable across the Atlantic and into slavery in North and South America and the Caribbean islands is more familiar than others.<sup>1</sup> It has also been studied in greater depth than most others by

British, American and Caribbean scholars, the most notable in that third category being, of course, C L R James and Eric Williams.<sup>2</sup> This appallingly violent process in which one saw the operation of economic pressures, market forces as we may call them rather than the purely political, was actually European rather than simply British, but the British were the most prominent in it. The dispersal of communities under British colonial rule generally had an economic or social imperative, very seldom a political one such as one saw in the compulsory transfer of populations for essentially political or strategic reasons which was always a feature of Russian expansion. The nearest one gets to an exception would be the filling of the huge empty spaces of the Australian continent by British peoples to prevent that vast island from becoming a French or German colony. But there again the social and economic factors were always important.

Nevertheless, exceptions and all, there were two distinct aspects in the dispersal of peoples under British rule. Generally it was governed by economic and social considerations. The transfer of African peoples across the Atlantic to plantation and domestic slavery could hardly be described as a voluntary process. On the other hand there was, throughout the mid-19th century as well into the 20th, a voluntary movement of population—the dispersal of people from India to perform plantation labour, to work on the construction of railroads, and generally to undertake the hard and grimy labour in dockyards, railway-sidings and workshops, and in sanitation and street-cleaning. Throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century the British *raj* in India, the territories over which the British had control, served as a vast reservoir of labour for the plantation economies of the Indian Ocean region, of the Caribbean and in parts of the Pacific—primarily the Fiji islands.<sup>3</sup> The demand for labour was so insatiable that British capitalists welcomed workers from other sources as well, people who lived beyond the formal British empire, the Chinese, especially from southern China, but their dispersal was more limited geographically than that of the Indian population, generally more conspicuous in South East Asia and the Pacific than elsewhere. Here we see a voluntary dispersal of communities and individuals driven by poverty and the quest if not for riches at least for a better life than was possible for them in their own countries. In the early stages it was life just above the poverty line.

Although it was governed primarily by economic factors, that is to say by market forces, this transfer of populations, did have its political dimensions. Certainly the British did not regard the Indian populations, who had moved to other colonies, as a political or strategic make-weight in the host territories. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there was a demographic transformation of sorts in many instances, and that disturbance of the demographic profile was to have very far-reaching political consequences for the future. Generally that happened after independence was conferred on the colonial territory in which the dispersed community settled, but quite often the conflict would occur at the time of the transfer of power and could affect the pattern of the transfer of power constitutional framework, or political settlement, quite profoundly.

In terms of the sheer extent of territory controlled, the largest European empire was—up till very recently—the Russian. For the most part an Asian empire it was also among the oldest, preceded only by those of Portugal and Spain and certainly much older than Britain's empire in Asia, if not the former British empire in other parts of the globe, North America and the Caribbean in particular. The Russian empire had four zones of expansion: into the Baltic regions; into and across the Caucasus; and across the Caucasus mountains to the borders of the Turkish and Persian empires and into Central Asia, the lands of the old silk route with its Islamic populations; and into the vast largely frozen Siberian territories. The process of expansion was slower than in other European imperialisms. There was also one other significant difference: the expansion was by land not sea. It moved relentlessly forward like some enormous glacier. Sometimes the heat of opposition from other colonial powers, Britain in particular and from Turkey or from the colonised, would check its progress, or divert it for a while, but, by and large, there was until the late 1980s, an air of permanence about Russian control over its Asian empire that was entirely lacking in regard to other European colonial empires in Asia. More pertinent for our purposes here is that the Russian expansion into Asia was accompanied by transfers of populations, generally more

involuntary than voluntary, and in the case of the involuntary transfers accompanied by a great deal of violence.

## II

### The Transfer of Peoples—The Soviet and Russian Experience

The principal difference in the transfer of peoples under the Russian and Soviet empires, on the one hand, and under the British colonial structures on the other, was that in the former case the processes of dispersal were governed by political and strategic considerations, rather than by economic and social factors. It is not that economic and social factors were entirely absent but that even when they were important they were subordinated to the political and strategic interests of the Russian or Soviet state. The dispersal of communities had two aspects, often interconnected. There was first the movement of Russian people, or politically acceptable minority communities, to recently conquered or absorbed territories with the clear intention of serving the state's political objective of a transformation of the demographic pattern in the region to which they were sent, and as facilitators of its expansionist policies.

Second, there was the ruthless expulsion of politically unreliable communities, often accompanied by considerable violence, away from their home territories to less desirable areas, generally locations in which they were likely to be small, dispersed and politically ineffective communities.

We live today in the shadow of one of the great turning points of world history, the end of the last of the European empires, the Russian empire of the Tsars, revived and strengthened by Stalin and protected and consolidated by his successors until it collapsed under its own weight. Through the last three centuries this empire had expanded by extending the land frontiers of that enormous country to absorb neighbouring territories, especially in Central Asia, the lands of the classical silk route. That process of expansion was altogether less obtrusive than the expansion of other European powers overseas in the Americas, in the Caribbean, in Asia and Africa, and the Pacific, but the acquisitions of the expanding power were as extensive as any gained by other imperial powers elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Each distinctive stage in that expansion is today a political fault-line in the Russian state from which one may expect tremors in the form of separatist agitation if not separatist movements.

This present article concentrates on three facets of this Russian imperial and colonial expansion; to the Baltic region; to the Islamic world of Central Asia; and to the Pacific. Each of these involved a transfer of communities; and from that historical transfer of communities has emerged some of the most difficult problems bequeathed to the world by the former Soviet Union.

In the eastward expansion of the Tsarist state and the Soviet Union lie the roots of the contemporary conflict between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. China's largest territorial concessions to Tsarist Russia had been made between 1858 and 1860 across the Amur-Ussuri frontier. Over the last 100 years or so this area has been a centre of a massive transfer of peoples, as the Russians moved in to develop the region. Today it contains the cities of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. Marx and Engels, commenting at that time on this Tsarist expansion into Chinese territory, described it as a dastardly despoliation of territory as large "as France and Germany put together."

Russia's expansion into the Pacific coast, taking advantage of the declining fortunes of the Chinese empire, brought her into conflict with Japan. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 and the destruction of the Russian fleet at that time stirred the peoples of Asia into a recognition that European imperialism was vulnerable. The conflict between Japan and the Soviet Union continued into the 1930s as Japan invaded China and was expanding her own sphere of influence in Manchuria. The Soviet Union saw Japan's expansion as a threat to her own interests in Mongolia. It inflicted a huge defeat on Japan's Kwantung army in the summer of 1939.<sup>5</sup> The Japanese threat to Mongolia ceased but not Japan's consolidation of her position in Manchuria and parts of China on the Pacific coast.

**Table I**  
Russian Population in Some Central Asian Republics in 1990

<b>Kazakhstan</b>	38% Russians, 40% Kazakhs At independence Russians were over 60% of the population of 1.1 million in the capital city Alma-Ata.
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	21.5% Russians, 52% Kyrgyzs Over 55% of the population in the capital city of Bishek was Russian at the time of independence.
<b>Tajikistan</b>	8% Russians, 62% Tajiks
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	9.5% Russians, 72% Turkmen
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	8% Russians, 71% Uzbeks

Source: Lee Schwartz, USSR Nationality Redistribution by Republic, 1979-1989; from "Published Results of the 1989 All-Union Census," *Soviet Geography*, April 1991, pp 209-248.

Note: The Koreans constitute 0.6% of the population in Kazakhstan and 0.9% in Uzbekistan. They are the descendants of deportees from the Far East under Stalin.

The next stage comes in the early 1940s and the Yalta conference. That conference was conducted, so far as the Pacific region was concerned, on a strict Russo-American basis by Stalin and Roosevelt. Churchill was left out of this part of the discussions because the US regarded the Pacific as its bailiwick. Anxious to humour Stalin in order to bring the Soviet Union into the United Nations, and into the war with Japan, Roosevelt was willing to pay a high price both in Europe and Asia. Our interest in this article is in Asia. In 1944 Stalin had indicated that the Soviet Union desired certain political concessions as the price of entering the war against Japan. At Yalta he made these demands explicit. Stalin wanted a free hand in outer Mongolia and Manchuria, in other words, a demand to replace a Japanese hegemony by a Russian hegemony in North China and Korea. The Soviet Union became a genuinely Pacific power only after 1941-45 and that too thanks to Roosevelt and the agreement reached between the USSR and the US as the condition for the Soviet Union entering the war against Japan. Japan's Kwantung army was eliminated by the lightning thrust of Soviet and Mongol forces in a two-week campaign in August 1945.<sup>6</sup>

There was now yet another movement of people—a transfer of Russian communities to the region, and along with it a harsh expulsion of others regarded as politically or ethnically unreliable or suspect. This latter process had actually started about a decade earlier but it was now accelerated. Among the communities thus displaced were Koreans who had settled or had been settled outside the Korean peninsula. Through their hard work they had converted the Ussuri-Khanka plain into fertile agricultural lands. As early as 1937 Stalin had ordered the deportation of 182,000 Koreans to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. They were transported in freight trains and thousands died in this process of relocation. The survivors account for the sizeable Korean minority in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan today.<sup>7</sup>

From the Pacific region we need to shift our focus to Central Asia and to the demography of the former Soviet Union's Islamic population. Here again the problems that have arisen are an inheritance from the days of the Tsars. The Mongol empire of the Golden Horde was dissolved during the late Middle Ages into the three Khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan and the Crimea. In the middle of the 16th century Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan and Astrakhan. In 1789 the Russian empire defeated the Ottoman protectors of the last Tatar Khanate and annexed the Crimea. So much for the territorial expansion. There are other aspects which need to be considered. By the end of the 13th century the Mongols had converted to Islam and all efforts on the part of the Tsars to destroy Islamic influence in these conquered territories did not succeed. In 1783, Catherine the Great, at last acknowledging this fact, published a decree guaranteeing religious freedom for her Islamic subjects.

In the 19th century, Russia conquered Transcaucasia and huge parts of Central Asia (Turkestan). The dual process of dispersal of communities continued apace. There was a prolonged resistance of the

indigenous populations against Russian rule, and several revolts. Most of them failed; many of them were ruthlessly crushed. The dispersal of communities began in earnest as sections of the Islamic population were pushed out, or moved out on their own, emigrating to parts of the Ottoman empire, to Iran (or Persia as it was then called) and into Afghanistan. A reverse process of dispersal of communities began, as a matter of state policy, both under the Tsars and in the period of Soviet rule, the movement of Russians into the Central Asian republics, an advance guard of colonial expansion. These Russian communities were strategic outposts, serving a political purpose. The size of the Russian component in the population of these republics varied, but it kept expanding right up to very recent times. It was largest in Kazakhstan. This is not to deny that there was an economic function in all this. There was. The Russians were often the elite shock troops of the process of industrialisation, holding almost all the managerial positions and providing the skilled labour in industry and holding most of the key positions in the Communist Party in these areas. Here, if anywhere, one finds a classic example of colonial exploitation, the transfer of resources from the periphery to the centre, the production of raw materials for processing elsewhere, and the development of a captive market for products channelled through the centre. One other feature of this process of colonial expansion needs specific mention: the introduction of Russian as an official language, the language of administration—in much the same way as English was the official language of the *raj* and the colonies—and with it the cyrillic script. This dispersal of communities—Russian communities—in the Soviet Union's Central Asian republics was regarded as essential to securing Russian dominance of these regions.

The story of the Russian penetration into Central Asia, the dispersal of Russian communities there, is rich in ironies, none more poignant than the example it provides of the revenge of the cradle. By the 1980s Soviet or, to be more accurate, Russian domination of Central Asia was beginning to confront an insuperable problem—the question of demography. Between 1926 and 1939, the Soviet population had risen by 42%: its Islamic section by 41% and the Great Russian 47%. Twenty years later, i.e. between 1959 and 1970, the picture changes dramatically. During this latter period the general population increased by 16%, but within this wider picture of demographic change, there was a stark contrast between the growth rates of the two sections, Islamic and Great Russian. While the increase in the latter was down to 13%, the former had increased by 45%. This pattern of growth persisted over the next decade: between 1970 and 1979 the general increase of population was a mere 8.4%, but it showed an increase of 23.3% in the Islamic population as against 6.5% in the Russian population.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Soviet control over the Islamic republics of Central Asia was being undermined by a major demographic change, a revolution in fact. With the collapse of the Soviet Union its Central Asian republics have all asserted their independence, and in each case to a greater or lesser degree they have asserted their distinctive Islamic identity.<sup>9</sup> In each of them, the Russian community, once a privileged elite and the vanguard of the Soviet control over these regions, is now a beleaguered minority confronting the harsh reality of their new reduction in status and facing one of two options. They could either accept the new situation with its implications of a subordinate status in an Islamic world, or they could return whence they or their parents came, one more example of a dispersal of communities, call it either a return to the roots of their own culture or a dispersal of communities as refugees, this time to homes which many of them had never seen.

We turn now to the Baltic states, the third facet in our review of the Russian experience in the dispersal of communities. For the sake of convenience it would be best to begin in March 1918 and the treaty of Brest-Litovsk at which Lenin agreed that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would be released from the Russian empire after 700 years of continuous occupation by the Tsars, the Swedes, the Germans and the Poles. If one turns to Latvia one sees in the period 1918 to 1939 the roots of the current problems in that country. Once it regained its independence after the first world war, Latvia became a prosperous, democratic country, more prosperous indeed than Finland or Sweden at that time and its peoples seemed well on the way to becoming almost as well off as the British. But this happy state of affairs did not last very long. For in 1939 came the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the secret pact between Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany which carved up the Baltic region and permitted the Soviet Union to incorporate these states within its own frontiers, in short to return to the *status quo ante* the treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Annexation to the Soviet Union came in 1940 and with it the great deportation of the Baltic populations in 1941,<sup>10</sup> the first phase in a grim exercise in the dispersal of communities under Soviet rule, the second of which came in 1944. In the meantime once Hitler embarked on his invasion of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states came under German control. After that venture had failed Latvia was "liberated" by the Red Army in 1944. Between 1944 and 1949 the Red Army and the KGB arrested tens of thousands of army officers, intellectuals, and farmers and deported them to Siberia. Others including women and children were executed in their homes. So many such episodes in ethnic cleansing are referred to these days as holocausts that the word itself has been drained of much of its special meaning. But Stalin's Baltic massacres were indeed a holocaust, although they did not register in the consciousness of the West because of their leaders' acquiescence in the political decisions which permitted a return of the Soviet Union to this region.<sup>11</sup>

The Baltic republics are now independent states, free of formal Russian domination. In all of them, but more particularly Estonia and Latvia, nationalism is a divisive force, undermining the possibility of a democratic consensus because they have to cope with the consequences of a massive dispersal of communities, the artificially stimulated mass migrations of Russians into the Baltic republics, and the expulsion of large numbers of the indigenous populations away from the Baltic states. Each of these states is multi-ethnic or multi-national, and in two of them the largest "minority" are ethnic Russians. Together with a few non-Russians who came from different parts of the Soviet Union during the Soviet occupation, the Russians are now widely regarded as "immigrants." As a recent writer puts it "Russian immigration has been perceived by the Baltic people as the principal threat (real in Estonia and Latvia and potential in Lithuania) to their national existence."<sup>12</sup> Independence, far from changing this perception, has made it even stronger. In 1989-90 the Russian population of the Baltic states ranged from 9% in Lithuania, to a much higher percentage in Estonia and Latvia where large numbers of Russians were sent to work in the new industrial complexes. As a result 30% of the population of Estonia was Russian; in Latvia only 53% of the population is ethnic Latvian, while 34% is Russian. These figures do not include Russian members of the former Soviet army then stationed in the Baltic states.<sup>13</sup>

**Table II**  
Ethnicity of the Baltic Republics

Year	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
1980	64.5% Estonians	53.3% Latvians	80.1% Lithuanians
1939 pre-war borders	88.2% Estonians	75.5% Latvians	80.6% Lithuanians
1939 post-war borders	92% Estonians	77% Latvians	76% Lithuanians

Source: Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990*, London, 1993 revised ed., pp 353-355.

While the governments of each of these Baltic republics seek to respond democratically and pragmatically to ethnic issues, problems and potential problems continue to surface. With the independence of the Baltic states, almost overnight, the status of Russians living in them was reduced from that of privileged citizens of a larger dominant state to a dispersed community of immigrants in much smaller independent states. Anxiety over their uncertain future is felt both by Russian immigrants in the Baltic states, and by their supporters in Moscow. Lithuania has another problem with roots in its own historic connection with Poland: a sizeable Polish minority which is beginning to voice its discontent. While both governments are officially committed to finding peaceful solutions to such problems it is clear that Lithuania's Polish population remains a potential source of international tension.

In turning from this discussion of the Russian experience in communities in dispersal to the former British empire, it is important to make one brief diversion to a historic change in attitudes to voluntary movements of population out of Russia and what is now called "the near abroad" to the immigrant receiving countries of the world, primarily the US, Canada and Australia. The newly established Soviet state generally sought to prevent such emigration, thus reversing an earlier trend that had taken people from Central and Eastern Europe to North America, to found communities of their own, as enclaves in cities generally, communities in dispersal surviving and thriving in a world of immigrants. After the second world war, particularly, there was no such escape route from the Soviet Union, and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe which formed part of the so-called Soviet bloc. Lenin, it was, who once described Tsarist Russia as a prison of the nationalities it had absorbed; in actual fact Tsarist Russia was much less of a prison of that sort than the Soviet Union became under Lenin's successors, and especially after world war two.

Dispersal of communities in the Soviet Union fitted a particular pattern. There was voluntary migration of Russians to the peripheral parts of that enormous state, for political and strategic purposes as the state saw it, but also for economic reasons as the migrants viewed it. There was also the brutal uprooting of communities and their dispersal, also for political and strategic reasons.

### III The British Colonial Experience

Our concern here is with one aspect of the dispersal of communities within the British colonial territories, the transfer of people, in the beginning almost entirely males, from the territories the British ruled or controlled in the Indian subcontinent, to British colonies in other parts of the world. The distances travelled were much longer than the cognate process of dispersal of communities within the expanding Russian empire. The process, as we have seen, was governed almost entirely by economic considerations, a response to the operation of market forces, the demand for a reliable supply of labour in British-owned plantations in the Caribbean in the wake of the abolition of slavery. It is likely that, faced with a severe labour shortage, the planters treated the Indian workers somewhat better than they did the African slaves, but Hugh Tinker the historian of the dispersal of Indian communities refers to this transfer of Indian workers to the Caribbean as a *New Form of Slavery*.<sup>14</sup> The push of poverty and the pull of opportunity resulted in a massive change in the ethnic composition of many of these receiving colonies. This same combination of forces, poverty at home and opportunity in the plantations overseas, converted what was intended to be no more than a temporary period of service into semi-permanent and, later on, permanent residence. The indenture<sup>15</sup> system, as this was called, lasted several decades and operated in every colonial territory to which Indian workers were sent, with the exception of Sri Lanka where the distances to be traversed were short enough for more informal methods of recruitment to be resorted to without the need for the indenture contract. The dispersal of communities under indenture was, in a technical sense, under the supervision of the English East India Company in the early stages, and subsequently under the British government of the *raj* and Whitehall itself. That supervision was more formal than truly effective, and all concerned, including the planters in the receiving colonies, had learned to avoid the adverse publicity likely to result from any repetition of the horrors of the middle passage in the transport of captured African slaves across the Atlantic.

There were, on the whole, two main regional centres of labour recruitment in India. One, and perhaps the bigger of the two, was the Madras Presidency;<sup>16</sup> and the other was present day Bihar. On the dispersal of Indian communities from this latter region we have the comments of V S Naipaul, in the foreword to his well-known essay, *India: A Wounded Civilisation*.

"My ancestors migrated from the Gangetic plain a hundred years ago, and the Indian community they and others established in Trinidad, on the other side of the world, the community in which I grew up, was more homogenous than the Indian community Gandhi met in South Africa in 1893, and more isolated from India."

This brief extract from Naipaul draws our attention to a historical and sociological fact of contemporary significance. A large number of Indians transferred overseas under the indenture system never went back. They had nothing to go back to. They settled down in the host territories and their isolation from the mother country—India—gave the dispersed communities a cohesiveness that exile, in hard conditions, often provides.

We need, at this point, to look at the various phases and aspects of the dispersal of Indian communities overseas. There are at least five phases and aspects beginning first of all with the transfer of indentured Indian labour to the Caribbean and Mauritius to satisfy an urgent demand for labour resulting from the dislocation in the labour market caused by the abolition of slavery. That was the first phase and the demonstration effect of its pronounced success led to the second, the use of the indenture system to provide labour for new plantation enterprises, sugar and tea in Natal in South Africa, the rubber plantations of modern Malaysia, and the sugar plantations of the Fiji islands. They were also used, without resort to indentures, in the coffee plantations in Sri Lanka from the 1830s till the collapse of the Sri Lankan coffee enterprise in the 1870s. This labour was generally seasonal, but the nature of the demand changed fundamentally with the opening and expansion of Sri Lanka's tea and rubber enterprises; these needed many more workers than the coffee plantations and they needed resident rather than mainly seasonal migrants. In Sri Lanka the need for Indian workers stemmed from the reluctance if not refusal of the indigenous population to put up with the rigours and discipline of plantation labour. There was some indigenous labour on the plantations no doubt, but the vast bulk of the workers on the plantations in Sri Lanka were Indians.

Third, there was a demand for Indian labour in fields other than plantation enterprise. There was the clearing of the bush for the construction of railways in British East Africa for which Indian labour was obtained. Skilled Indian labour was in great demand in the railway workshops in Colombo, Sri Lanka; and unskilled labour for the hard and grimy work on the dark, cavernous and dusty structures which stored coal for use of the railways. There was work, skilled and unskilled, but generally rigorous and disciplined, also in the dockyards in Colombo in Sri Lanka and in Yangon (Rangoon), Myanmar (Burma). And there was that other area of activity in which the native population generally refused to engage because it was regarded as low status work, the cleaning of the streets, and in sanitation work in the towns before modern toilets became a requirement of health authorities, and before the introduction of a modern sewage system in the city of Colombo. All this became the purview of scheduled caste Indians who settled down in the poorer working class suburbs and slums of Colombo and other towns. There was a similar pattern of settlement observed in British controlled Myanmar.

There was a fourth category as well, the growth of an Indian trading community in the Indian Ocean region, East Africa, the Gulf states, and in Sri Lanka. In the last named, Indian traders controlled the wholesale and retail distribution of food; and as in many other parts of the British colonies the Indian moneylender was ubiquitous and generally unpopular. To take Sri Lanka as an example, British banks which generally had a monopoly of banking business seldom, if ever, lent money directly to a Sri Lankan; an intermediary was required for this purpose, the shroffs, many of whom were Tamils and Indians. Using the security provided by the British empire, Indian merchant communities spread well beyond the Indian Ocean region into places as far away as Hong Kong.

And finally there was the fifth aspect, the dispersal of Indian communities to Myanmar, which in a sense was *sui generis*. Myanmar was ruled as part of the *raj* and its absorption in the *raj* permitted very easy entry to Indians as traders, labourers, technicians and moneylenders since they were merely moving from one part of the *raj* to another. The economic development of Myanmar became a process of exploitation of her resources for the benefit of British trading houses and Indian traders and moneylenders. Here was a

classic example of Indians acting as sub-contractors of imperialism, an enterprise in which the sub-contractors often made larger profits than the holders of the main contract. Indeed the imposition and consolidation of British rule in Myanmar was a joint-enterprise, an Anglo-Indian or British-Indian colonialism as the people of that country often saw it.

**Table III**  
Persons of South Asian Origin as a Percentage of Population of Receiving Countries  
Statistics from several official sources

<b>I</b>	
<b>The Caribbean Region</b>	
Trinidad and Tobago	42
Guyana	53
Surinam	35
<b>II</b>	
<b>East and South Africa</b>	
Kenya	0.4
South Africa	3.4
<b>III</b>	
<b>Indian Ocean Area and South Pacific Region</b>	
Fiji #	46.4
Malaysia	8.5
Mauritius	68
Sri Lanka	5.8
<b>IV</b>	
<b>West Asia - The Gulf States</b>	
Kuwait	15*
United Arab Emirates	50*

\* Long-term residents but not citizens

# This is the figure for 1989; at the 1986 census the Indo-Fijians were 48% of the population

This dispersal of Indian communities had far reaching consequences especially in changing the ethnic and often religious composition of the population of the host societies, the colonies that accommodated them. The change in the demographic profile of the host societies ranged from Mauritius at one end of the scale, to Sri Lanka and Myanmar at the other. In two or three generations from the first entry of Indian plantation workers, Mauritius was transformed to a society in which the Indian population was by far the dominant element. In other plantation communities in which the Indians had replaced the freed African slave labour, the Indians became a significant minority, as in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in the Dutch colony of Surinam, to a majority as in Guyana.

For Trinidad and Tobago we have the novels of V S Naipaul to give us an insight into the life of the Indian community in the processes of the social change it was subjected to and the upward mobility of many of the families. As far as the post-independence period was concerned, there was, needless to say, no problem of political adjustment in Mauritius, but the conflict between the African and Indian groups has disturbed the life of Guyana and distorted its politics. In Trinidad and Tobago where the Indians have recently overtaken the Africans as the largest ethnic group, the latter are apprehensive. Unfortunately we have no equivalent of V S Naipaul writing on the transformation of the Indian minority in East Africa from penury to conspicuous prosperity and economic dominance as in Uganda and Kenya. As we all know the tensions between the Indian minority and the African majority led to the expulsion of the Indian minority from Uganda, the uprooting and dispersal of a hardworking and prosperous group the bulk of whom preferred to begin life anew in Britain and Canada to going back to India.

Because of its association with the life of M K Gandhi the problems of the Indian minority in South Africa are better documented than, for instance, the problems that confronted the Indians in

Myanmar. In the case of the former the tensions, more often than not, were with the South African state and its racist political programme, but there were also tensions and occasional violence between the Indians and the African population. Myanmar was a special case.

In 1931 there were over a million Indians resident in that country. Until 1920 or so the presence of this large minority presented fewer problems than it did after 1920 when the spread of Indian landownership changed the picture completely. Once the Indians were seen to own more than half the rice lands of Myanmar, a good part of which had come their way through a process of foreclosing on mortgages, troubles began. Money lending had become the particular preserve of the Chettiers who first appeared in large numbers in Myanmar in the 1850s. They became so ubiquitous by the end of the 19th century that it was often said that "there was a Chettiar within a day's journey of each cultivator." It was estimated that in the 1930s 2/3rds of all the loans issued in lower Myanmar were provided by the Chettiar community. (In upper Myanmar, on the other hand, the leading role was taken by local moneylenders). As a result there was mounting friction between the Myanmar population and Indians brought to a head by the impact of the great depression of 1929-31 which had resulted in large-scale foreclosures of mortgages on land by the Indian Chettiar community and widespread unemployment.

The 1930s saw several anti-Indian riots especially, but not exclusively, in Yangon. The principal motivating factor in these riots was the economic one. But they did have political consequences in strengthening the desire of the people of Myanmar for separation from the *raj*. That separation came in 1937, a long forgotten but successful separatist pressure. It was forgotten because the demand was conceded before the movement took on a violent form. The bitterness that all this left behind in Myanmar lingers on. Thus, in an article two native scholars point out that

"Rangoon became an overseas suburb of Madras, and the average Burmese citizen no longer felt at home in his own home."<sup>17</sup>

This brief discussion of the problems of the Indian community in Myanmar opens the way for a review of the position in other societies in which an Indian community was introduced as a new element to the social system dominated at the outset by the indigenous population. Four such societies come to mind, Natal in South Africa, Sri Lanka, Malaya and Fiji. Only in Fiji did the Indian community grow so large in numbers as to become almost a numerical majority in the host society.<sup>18</sup> In all the others they were a substantial minority from 3.4% (in South Africa) to 8.5% (in Malaysia).

In all of them there was a problem of the political status of the immigrant community, especially at the time of the transfer of power and after the host colony became an independent state. In a sense this problem had emerged in South Africa first of all, when South Africa became a dominion in 1909-10, and began to assert its right to settle issues such as the status of its indigenous communities on its own terms, that is to say by its dominant white minorities. Thus the political status of the Indian community was submerged in the larger issue of the position of non-white people in what became the formal system of *apartheid*.<sup>19</sup>

The problem of the political status and voting rights of Indian communities overseas came to the fore first of all in Sri Lanka, and as long ago as 1928-31. Sri Lanka was the first colonial society outside the white dominions to enjoy the benefits of universal suffrage. This was introduced in 1931, 17 years before the country became independent. Except for a small left-wing minority, the vast majority of the Sri Lankan politicians refused to accept the position that *all* the Indians resident in the country were entitled to citizenship. By the early 1930s there were almost as many Indians resident in Sri Lanka as there were in Myanmar. The controversy over this issue which began in 1928 continued for two decades, throughout the transfer of power negotiations, during which the Sri Lankan politicians insisted upon and succeeded in getting Whitehall to accept the position that the independent government of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka as it later became, had the right to determine who its citizens were.

The situation is neatly summarised in a recent article by Myron Weiner:

When Sri Lanka became independent there was no clear notion as to what constituted Sri Lankan citizenship. In the 1949 (sic)<sup>20</sup> elections anyone who was a British subject in Sri Lanka including [the resident Indians] could vote. But the new government lost no time in introducing the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949. These Acts along with various agreements subsequently signed with the Indian government in 1964 and 1974, added up to a set of policies to end all further migration into Sri Lanka, to expatriate [sic]<sup>21</sup> as many of the Indian estate workers as Indians would accept ...

"The Sri Lankan government was hardly alone," Weiner adds,

"...in wanting the expatriation of migrants who had entered when the country was under colonial rule. Many post-colonial regimes regarded their migrants as an illegitimate presence if the migrants did not belong to the dominant indigenous ethnic community. Uganda and Burma expelled their Indian and Pakistani settlers and in Indonesia large numbers of Chinese were massacred or expelled. Sri Lanka, however, had a democratic government. It sought to remove the Indians through legitimate means, in accordance with the law and with due regard for its international obligations. However, one may fault successive Sri Lanka governments for their policies of seeking to expatriate the Indian community, one should note that the Sri Lanka government at no point engaged in the forcible expulsion or killing of estate workers. Its repatriation policies were constrained by whatever agreements were reached with India.<sup>22</sup>

The Sri Lankan experience was unique for another reason. India generally refused to accept repatriation of people of Indian origin from former colonial territories back to India. Only in the case of Indians in Sri Lanka was this accepted. Significantly this came in the early 1960s after Nehru's death, and the humiliation India had suffered at the hands of China in 1962.

In the wake of Myanmar's independence in 1947, its Indian community were compelled to leave the country. The scale of the operation was much larger than the one in Uganda for the simple reason that there were more Indians in Myanmar than there were in Uganda. As in Uganda, the business enterprises run by the Indians were nationalised, but in this instance the nationalisation took place in the general context of a wider policy of introducing a state-dominated socialist economy.

The British handled the transfer of negotiations in Malaya and Fiji differently from the Sri Lankan model, especially in regard to the question of the political status and citizenship rights of immigrant groups. Whether Whitehall thinking in this regard was affected by its experience in dealing with Sri Lanka is not known, but it seems likely that this was so. In brief, these issues were settled at the time of the transfer of power and before an independent government was established. In any event Malaya's principal issue was the relations between the Malays, the majority group, and the economically powerful Chinese minority. The Indians were largely a working class community, and in all they amounted to nearly 11% - 12% of the population. It is also likely that the Malays welcomed the presence of the Indians as a countervailing force, to help dilute the strength of the Chinese majority. The British territories in Malaya were unusual in accommodating *two* numerically significant immigrant minorities, Chinese and Indian.

The transfer of power negotiations on Malaya and Fiji had one common feature: in both a concerted effort was made to protect and consolidate the political dominance of the indigenous leadership as against immigrant minorities. It was easier to do this in Malaya because the Malay population was a clear majority in the country; in Fiji, the Indians were close to being a majority. Thus a complex electoral system was devised there to guarantee the political dominance of the Fijian leadership. As recent political crises have shown, that electoral engineering has not succeeded in establishing anything close to political stability. In Malaya the electoral system was much less complicated and far more effective.

#### IV Retrospect

This review of state policies on communities in dispersal in two distinct colonial settings has revealed a great many differences. But there are many things in common as well. In both settings post-colonial states face a common set of problems in fashioning policies to deal with immigrant minorities introduced, as in the British tradition, or imposed as in the Russian experience. To this extent the problems that confront the Baltic states and Kazakhstan in dealing with their Russian minorities are similar to those that confronted Sri Lanka, Burma or Fiji for that matter in dealing with their Indian minorities. But there is a significant difference: the Baltic states and others emerging to independence from the old Soviet Union have to keep a wary eye on the former colonial power; post-colonial states of the old British empire do not have the problem of the former metropolitan power intent on using these communities for its own political purposes.

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#### Notes

- \* This article is a revised and expanded version of a keynote lecture entitled "State Policies towards Communities in Dispersal" given at a Conference on the "Nature of Community and its Impact on Inter-state Relations at the End of the Twentieth Century." The conference was held at the Institute of International Relations, University of the West Indies, St Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago, 28 February - 4 March 1994. The article was subsequently discussed on two occasions.
  
- 1 Among the more important studies are: Philip D Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1850-1870*, London, 1965; Robert W Fogel and Stanley L Engerman, *Time on the Cross, The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 2 Vols, Boston and Toronto, 1974; Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilisation*, New York, 1956, 2nd revised edition and *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil*, New York, 1963; Eugene De Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, New York, 1965; D P Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, London, 1963; Herbert S Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge, 1999; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870*, New York, 1997. See also the popular works by James Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers*, London, 1968 and Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, Boston, 1980, a revised and expanded work first published in 1961 under the title *Black Mother*.
  
- 2 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, New York, 1961, and *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*, London, 1970; C L R James, *The Black Jacobins*, New York, 1963, 2nd revised edition.
  
- 3 On the dispersal of Indian communities overseas, see I J Bahadur Singh (ed), *Indians in South Asia*, Delhi, 1984; N R Chakravarthi, *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Fall of an Immigrant Community*, Oxford, 1971; Colin Clarke *et al.*, (eds), *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, Cambridge, 1990; V Mahajani, *The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya*, Bombay, 1960; J S Mangat, *A History of the Asians in East Africa 1886 to 1945*, Oxford, 1969; Ralph R Premdas, *Ethnic Conflict and Development: The Case of Guyana*, Avebury, Aldershot, 1995; K S Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspect of Their Immigration and Settlement*, Cambridge, 1969; Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920*, London, 1974; *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950*, London, 1976 and *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Oxford, 1977.

- 4 There is no single volume or a multi-volumed study of the construction of the Tsarist-Stalinist empire. For an understanding of the nature of Russian imperialism, and its expansion one has to turn to a large number of books, monographs and articles which deal with aspects of it. A cartographical study of the processes of expansion is available in Allen F Chew, *An Atlas of Russian History—Eleven Centuries of Changing Borders*, Yale University Press, revised edition, 1970.
- 5 The Kwantung Army was a semi-independent Japanese force. This had been established originally by international agreement in 1905 to protect Japanese interests, especially the South Manchuria railway. The officers of this army, acting on their own, took over Manchuria, and re-named it Manchukuo. The attack on the Japanese in 1939 was by a joint Soviet-Mongol force led by the celebrated Marshal Georgi Zhukov. See, *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopaedia of World War II*, Thomas Parish (ed), New York, 1978, pp 353, 592.
- 6 See Gerhard L Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, Cambridge, 1994, p 889. For details of the campaign, see, Brigadier Peter Young (ed), *The World Almanac of World War II*, New York, 1981, pp 352-353.
- 7 On this topic see, Youn-Cha Shin Chey, "Soviet Koreans and the Politics of Ethnic Education" in Zvi Gitelman (ed), *The Politics of Nationality and the Erosion of the USSR*, London, 1992, pp 125-139.
- 8 On these issues see, Amir Teheri, *Crescent in the Red Sky: The Future of Islam in the Soviet Union*, London, 1989. See also Alexandre Bennigsen and S Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*, London, C Hurst & Company, 1985; Marie Bennigsen Broxup (ed), *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World*, London, Hurst & Company, 1992; Dale F Eickelman, *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross Cultural Analysis*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993.
- 9 See, Muriel Aitkin, "Religious, National and other Identities in Central Asia" in Jo-Ann Gross (ed), *Muslims in Central Asia*, Durham N C and London, Duke University Press, 1992, pp 46-72. See also Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, particularly Part VI, pp 313-417; P Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*, London, Hurst & Company, 1995; Geoffrey Moorhouse, *On the Other Side: A Journey Through Soviet Central Asia*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1990.
- 10 Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990*, London, C Hurst, 1983, revised edition, 1993, pp 39-43.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp 70-75.
- 12 R J Misiunas, "The Baltic Republics: Stagnation and Strivings for Sovereignty" in L Hajda and M M Bessinger (eds), *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*, Boulder, Colorado, 1990, p 214.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 204-227: see also, Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, New Haven, Yale, 1993; and Czeslow Milosz, "Swing Shift in the Baltic," *New York Review of Books*, 4 November 1993, pp 12-16. See also Airat R Aklaev, *Democratisation and Ethnic Peace: Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in Post-Soviet Settings*, Aldershot, 1999.
- On the problems of the Ukraine, see Kathleen Mihalisko, "Security Issues in Ukraine and Belarus," Regina Cowen Karp (ed), *Central and Eastern Europe: The Challenge of Transition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp 225-257.
- 14 The reference is to his book, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, London, 1974.
- 15 An indenture was generally a contract in which the costs of transport to the colony requiring the services of the immigrant would be borne by a recruiting agent, in return for a specified term of service, generally two or three years, after which migrants could go back home on a passage provided by the contractor.
- 16 On this see, C Z Guilmoto, "The Tamil Migration Cycle, 1830-1950 in India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, (hereafter EPW), 16-23 January 1993, pp 111-120.

- 17 Maureen Aung-Thwin and Myint U Thant, "The Burmese Way to Socialism," *Third World Quarterly*, 1993, 13(1), pp 67-75. The quotation is from p 68.
- 18 On the Indians in Fiji see, K L Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920-1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977; Ralph R Premdas, *Ethnic Conflict and Development: The Case of Fiji*, Avebury, Aldershot, 1995; Stephanie Lawson, *The Failure of Democratic Politics in Fiji*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991; Michael C Howard, *Fiji: Race and Politics in an Island State*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1991.
- 19 See R A Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa: British Imperialism and the Indian Question*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1971.
- 20 These elections were held in 1947 and not in 1949.
- 21 The technical term used is repatriate.
- 22 Myron Weiner, "Rejected Peoples and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia," *EPW*, 21 August 1993, pp 1738-46: the extracts are from p 1739.