

THE ARRIVAL OF THE INDIANS IN JAMAICA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON JAMAICAN SOCIETY

Indian immigration commenced in Jamaica in 1845 with the arrival of 261 Indians in Old Harbour Bay. They arrived on the *Blundell Hunter*, after a 17-week voyage from Calcutta, India, to work as indentured labourers on the sugar estates, livestock farms, and banana plantations, following the emancipation of the enslaved Africans in 1838. They came mainly from the Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar provinces in northern India, with a ratio of Hindus to Muslims of 9:1. After the indentureship contract, they were promised repatriation to their homeland; however, not everyone returned.

Indian immigration continued until 1921. Most of the Indians in Jamaica today are descendants of the 36,412 immigrants brought to the island to work as indentured servants on the plantations during the post-emancipation era. Persons of Indian descent are mainly found in the old sugar estate parishes of Westmoreland, St. Mary, St. Thomas, and Clarendon as well as Kingston.

INDIAN INFLUENCE AND CULTURE

Indo-Jamaicans have made strides in every aspect of Jamaican life – cultural, professional, commercial, political, agricultural, sporting, and spiritual.

The Indian influence on the wider society is evident in the popularity of some Indian foods, such as curried goat and roti (a fried bread made of flour and water, similar to a tortilla). Indians are very skillful at currying foods – from chicken, fish, beef, to crabs - and especially, goat. Other foods which form part of the Indian cuisine in Jamaica are dahl (a mild split pea puree), dahl poori (a tortilla-like bread made with a pocket and filled with split peas and garlic) and powah (a flour and water pancake sweetened with sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and vanilla).



Curried goat, rice and roti

There are a variety of other ways in which the Indians have impacted Jamaican society. They are skilled jewellers and have encouraged a taste for jewellery among Jamaicans. Some Indian elements have also been absorbed into Jamaican folk consciousness, such as Indian spirits in Kumina and the concept of the 'coolie duppy', which is regarded as the strongest spirit. Additionally, it is widely felt that the cultivation of the Indian hemp or marijuana, for narcotic purposes, was brought to the island by the indentured Indians. The name 'ganja' is of Indian origin.

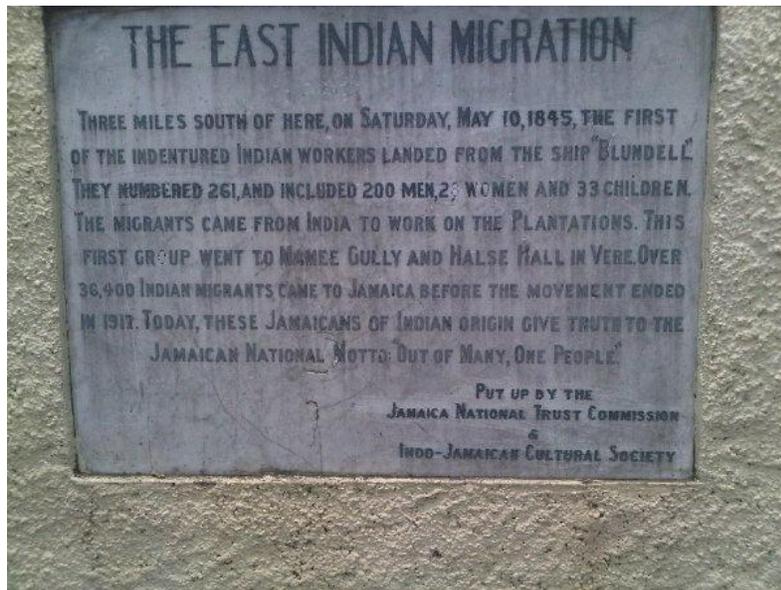
Indians in Jamaica also continue to celebrate some of their traditional festivities, especially Diwali or Festival of Lights in November, Phagua or Holi, and Hosay.



A Hosay parade in Clarendon

Today, the Indian population forms the largest ethnic minority in Jamaica. To commemorate the arrival of the first set of Indians in 1845 at Old Harbour Bay, a monument was unveiled in 1983 at the Old Harbour Square. It was erected under the auspices of the Indo-Jamaican Cultural Society and the Jamaica National Trust Commission.

In 1995, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Indians in Jamaica was celebrated in several parts of the island. Conferences, cultural programmes, and festivities were held to mark the anniversary. This culminated on May 10 with a staged re-enactment of the landing of the first indentured labourers at Old Harbour. May 10 has been officially declared Indian Heritage Day and is annually marked by a week of activities, including a festival and prayer services, produced by the National Council for Indian Culture in Jamaica.



East Indian migration monument in
Old Harbour Square