Between unfreedoms: the role of caste in decision to return among indentured workers

Article

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Between Unfreedoms: The Role of Caste in Decision to Return among Indentured Workers

Neha Hui and Uma Kambhampati

Abstract

Indian indentured labour migration followed slavery in providing cheap labour to British plantation colonies. To make this migration characteristically distinct from slavery, the workers were offered a free or subsidized trip back to their native country at the end of the indenture period. However, despite this guaranteed and subsidised return passage, only about a third of the workers returned to India. In this paper, we consider the role of caste in the decision to return home using data from ship registers for more than 16,000 Indian indentured workers in British Guiana between 1872 and 1911. Our results indicate that individuals from very low castes were significantly less likely to return home, in comparison to other caste groups. We argue that this was because while caste hierarchy played a very significant role in every aspect of the workers' lives back in India, their lives in the plantation economies did not allow the reproduction of caste hierarchies. Low caste workers who stayed on in British Guiana were therefore able to escape the unfreedom of caste. This trend is not robust for other caste groups. We find that the association of "higher caste" group and repatriation decisions is positive and significant in our base model, but the significance disappears when we include economic conditions. The results are robust when we include district level educational controls. We also find that women were less likely to return than men, once again because women's lives were more restricted in India than in British Guiana.

JEL Codes: N35, N36, J61, J70, J16

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Repatriation, Indentured Labour, British Guiana, Plantation colonies

1. INTRODUCTION

Post emancipation plantation colonies required cheap, reliable, and docile labour to be profitable. This was facilitated by the British Government through indentured labour migration from the Indian subcontinent to the plantation colonies. Between 1834 and the first world war, about 2 million workers travelled from the Indian sub-continent to the British colonies in Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, Natal and Fiji. The workers came from different religious and caste backgrounds mainly from the erstwhile United Provinces and lower Bengal but also other areas across the Indian subcontinent.

The facilitation of indentured labour, however, was contentious, with many fearing that it would be the "new slave trade"[1]. To ensure that it was "qualitatively different" from slave migration[2], indentured contracts had a fixed end date, with the workers being guaranteed a return trip home. This paper analyses the characteristics of migrants who took the return trip, a subject that has been relatively under-researched.

Our concern in this paper is not the identity of those who migrated as of those who returned after their contract was completed. During the 1840s and 1850s, Indian indentured labourers worked for at least five years and returned home. The exigencies of retaining a workforce in the Caribbean, while also avoiding the costs of the journey back to India led to attempts to loosen the arrangements for the return journey. To start with, workers were allowed to re-indenture for another five years without losing the right to a free return passage. Over time, more incentives were provided for Indians to settle on the islands, so that by the time, the indenture system ended in 1917, only a third of all the Indian indentured workers who were brought to British Guiana returned to India.[3]

Our analysis considers how the caste background of the indentured worker may have affected the decision to return. Caste is a form of social organisation, typical to South Asia, which positions individuals in a system of hierarchy according to inherited occupational status and class. As discussed in Section 2, this system builds on, and results in, strict endogamy and physical separation. The crucial aspect of this hierarchy is that while it existed in the workers' place of birth, it was not reproduced in the host countries. We might expect the caste system in India, which manifested itself in the discrimination and stigmatization of individuals, to influence both the decision to migrate as well as the decision to return. At one end, individuals belonging to 'untouchable' or Dalit[4] backgrounds faced considerable social and economic unfreedoms through caste-based discrimination in India. These unfreedoms included

[1] For example, British abolitionist newspaper the *British Emancipator* wrote in details about forced recruitment of indentured workers. Similarly, the *Manchester Times* referred to early indentured labour migration to West Indies as "A new slave trade… sanctioned by our professedly liberal ministry" (1st August 1838).
[2] Major 'Hill Coolies'
[3] Smith and Jayawardena 'Marriage and family'
[4] Dalit is a term used to refer to individuals of the lowest or untouchable caste groups who fall under the category of Scheduled Castes in current day India. This term was popularised by lawyer, anti-caste activist and constitutional politician BR Ambedkar and is used widely to identify the community in a positive, politically dignified manner.

restrictions on physical mobility as well as social and economic segregation of low caste groups. For these workers, travel and work to the plantation colonies as indentured workers might imply trading off an unfree social system with an unfree labour market. At the other end, individuals belonging to middle and higher caste backgrounds had more to lose because travel across the sea would result in caste expulsion, a process known as *kalapani.* This could only be removed through an expensive ceremonial process. These caste groups therefore were trading social privilege at home against labour market unfreedom in the colonies. Given that caste affects individuals differently depending on where they are located on the caste spectrum, we would expect it to have differential effects on the return decision. To our knowledge there is no quantitative analysis of return of Indian workers from the Caribbean.

Before we consider this, however, it is worth describing the context in which indentured labour developed. While there was a shift from indentured migration to free migration of unskilled workers from Europe to the Americas as the countries of origin in Europe became richer[5], such free migration at a mass scale from the Indian sub-continent was very unlikely, given the costs of the journey and wages at home. The per unit cost for indentured labour migration from the Indian subcontinent to the West Indies was calculated at about £20 and to Mauritius at £7 by Deer[6]. While there is limited information about wages in India, Gupta and Swamy[7] find that agricultural wages in the districts which provided labour for the Indian tea plantations were between Rs 3 and Rs 5 in 1880. Given an exchange rate of about 12 Rs per £ in 1880[8], a passage to the West Indies could translate to 80 months' salary. Persaud[9] also argues that the 'built-in stability offered by these contracts contrasted with economic uncertainty in India'. In the context of Mauritius, Bates and Carter[10] conclude that the system of indenture arose out of an attempt by the Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius to balance a range of factors. These included attempts by sirdari recruiters[11] to co-locate family members and friends, prevent new migrants from being coerced to remain on estates against their

[5] Galenson 'indentured servitude'
[6] Deer, *The History of SugarII*
[7] Gupta and Swamy 'Reputational consequences'
[8] *Statistical Abstract* 1875/6-1885/6
[9] Persaud 'Escaping local risks'
[10] Bates and Carter, *Sirdars as intermediaries*
[11] Sirdari recruiters (often termed as sardar in the literature) were labour agents in nineteenth century India and in plantation colonies where Indian workers worked. Sardars were involved both in recruitment of workers as well as in supervisory roles in plantations (as well as tea estates and mills the involved Indian workers).

wishes, but also to have a system within which the planter would obtain a return on his outlay for the worker's journey. The outcome was a system wherein contracts were signed in India before workers undertook the journey. This removed their right to 'choose' an employer once they knew the conditions in the colony.

Famines were a common push factor out of India during this period with at least 20 famines between 1860 and 1908[12]. Carter[13], in the context of the earlier slave trade from India, saw the push factors as being the 'confluence of food crisis and political instability'. Roopnarine[14] too saw natural disasters, especially famines and epidemics, as leading to emigration. Gupta and Swamy[15], in discussing indentured labour contracts within India, concentrate on economic push factors (a fall in money wage and a rise in the cost of living). These push factors would make it harder for individuals to afford the passage as free workers. Persaud[16] analyses this by considering volatility in the price of rice. He concludes that 'given India's poverty and fluctuating economic conditions, this may provide insight into why migration under informal bonded labour systems, such as kangani and maistry, occurred rather than self-funded, individual, free migration'.

While indenture implied contractual 'unfreedom', many studies have focussed on whether the migrants could be seen to have used the system proactively for their own objectives. Amrith[17] quotes Fischer who wrote to the authorities in Fort Saint George, Madras arguing that the workers were driven by 'debt, domestic discord, a transient discontent with his lot', and that they were an 'easy prey to an insidious recruiting agent'. These push factors might be seen as driving migrants and therefore leaving them no freedom. However, many authors contend that the migrants were not simply victims. Roopnarine[18]argues that indentured Indians used migration within the confines of the indenture system to improve their lives and turned situations and circumstances to their advantage. Kumar A[19] also argues that the migrating labourers were 'voluntary' and 'fully aware' migrants who were able to move out

[12] Srivastava
[13] Carter 'Slavery and unfreedom in the Indian Ocean'
[14] Roopnarine 'Indo-Carribian Social Identity'
[15] Gupta and Swamy 'Reputational consequences'
[16] Persaud 'Escaping local risks'
[17] Amrith 'Indians overseas'
[18] Roopnarine 'Indo-Caribbean Social Identity'
[19] Kumar A, *Coolies of the Empire*

of the bonds of caste, class and gender through their migration. In the context of women migrants, for instance, Pitcher and Grierson[20] find that in districts like Shahabad in Bihar, destitute widows proactively offered themselves to recruiters in order to escape difficult conditions. Similarly, Emmer[21] believes that indenture enabled women to 'emancipate themselves from an illiberal, inhibiting and very hierarchical social system in India', while Reddock[22] has argued that the plantations allowed women to live their life on their own terms. The colonial governments were also keen to establish 'some semblance of agency'[23] on the part of the migrants so as to avoid the label of slavery and to avoid responsibility for their welfare.

Our unique dataset, compiled from archival material from British Guiana, allows us to trace the caste background and place of birth of indentured workers, as well as their return decision. Our data combines individual information collected in the ship registers with information about home districts of the migrants in India. However, we have no individual information about local factors in British Guiana that may have 'pushed' the individual to return or 'pulled' them away from this decision. While we know that land grants were offered between 1880 and 1902 and that about 90% of Indian children in British Guiana attended an estimated 28 mission schools[24], we do not have this data for individuals. Having said this, we would not expect that these factors to affect workers differently. Since the caste hierarchy did not get reproduced in the colony, we would not expect the factors to be systematically different across castes.

Our paper therefore makes 3 main contributions to the literature. First, it analyses a unique dataset collected by one of the authors from archives. This is a very large dataset with over 16000 observations, manually digitalized and processed by the author. Most other studies in this area rely on much smaller datasets of a few hundred observations, with the possible

[20] Pitcher and Grierson *Enquiry into Emigration*
[21] Quoted in Carter 'Resistance and Women Migrants'
[22] Reddock 'Freedom denied'
[23] Amruth 'Indians Overseas'
[24] For instance, between 1880 and 1902, about 3000 Indians received a land grant in lieu of staying in British Guiana (Roopnarine 2011). However, we do not have data on this. Similarly, data on colonial expenditure on education for 1917 shows that about 90% of Indian children in British Guiana attended an estimated 28 mission schools (Roopnarine, 2011).

exception of Persaud[25]. Two empirical studies, Persaud[26] and Gupta and Swamy[27] both consider the initial migration decision rather than the decision to return home. Our second contribution, therefore, is to analyse the return decision, which has not often been studied in a systematic manner to date, using such a large dataset. Third, we analyse the impact of individual social characteristics on the decision to migrate, again an under-researched area.

One caveat to keep in mind is that our data relate to individuals who did return i.e. those who had both the intention and the capacity to return. We are unable to consider individuals who might have had the intention to return but not the capacity or vice versa. Additionally, we do not consider remigration to British Guiana after their return.

In section 2 we provide a background to Indian indentured labour migration and caste hierarchies in India and the Indian diaspora. In section 3 we set our hypothesis. In section 4 we describe the data and present our estimation strategy. Section 5 discusses the results of our empirical exercise. We conclude in section 6.

2. BACKGROUND

Indian Indenture Labour Migration in British Guiana

Between 1838 and 1917 about 238960 Indian Indentured workers travelled to work in the plantations of British Guiana, of whom only 75236 returned[28]. Approximately 80 percent were less than 30 years old at the time of embarking on the journey[29]. They came from across India, but the highest concentration was from United Provinces (70 percent) and Bihar (15.3 percent)[30].

The gender composition of this migration was, not surprisingly, very unbalanced. To start with, there were only about 3 women out of 100 migrants travelling to the Caribbean, but

[25] Persaud 'Escaping local risks'
[26] ibid
[27] Gupta and Swamy 'Reputational consequences'
[28] Smith and Jayawardena 'Marriage and family'
[29] Smith 'Characterisitcs of Indian immigrants'
[30] Ibid

this was soon increased by legislation to 40/100 on every ship. The Indian Emigration Act of 1864, for example, imposed a 40 per cent quota of women per ship sailing to the colonies.

The majority (83.6 percent) of these workers were Hindus[31], with 30.1% from agricultural castes, 8.7% from the artisanal castes and 31.1% from low castes. 13.6% of the workers were from higher caste groups [32]. Brij Lal and Carter and Bates argue that the social, caste-based, and demographic distribution of indentured labour recruits closely mirrored that of rural North Indian society as a whole[33]. In what follows, we will describe the caste structure in India in the 19th century before we analyse whether it had an impact on the probability of return of workers.

Caste in India and Indian Diaspora

Caste system in India:

The caste structure in India is a system of social organisation that is characteristic of Hinduism in South Asia, although it is not restricted to Hinduism or to south Asia. The system can be traced back to ancient Hinduism, but it has been reinforced and solidified over time and continues to exist in India and the Indian diaspora. 19th and 20th Century India under British administration had particularly rigid forms of casteism[34] which affected labour and production organisation and social interaction. In this section, we will look at the hierarchies that were (and continue to be) associated with this system and also note its transformation in the plantation colonies.

Tenets in ancient Hinduism dictate that society is divided into four *varnas.* At the top of the hierarchy are *Brahmins*, the category of priests and learned men, followed by *Kshatriyas* or warriors, the *vaisyas* or the merchants, traders, and land-owning agriculturists. At the bottom of the hierarchy are *shudras*, associated with menial labour and landless peasants. Beyond the varna system were individuals and groups known as *antyajas* who were deemed untouchable. These individuals have been collectively classified as Dalit.

[31] Jayawardena 'Religious beliefs'
[32] Moore ''Retention of Caste Notions'
[33] Quoted in Roopnarine 'Indo-Carribian Social Identity'
[34] Dirks *Castes of Mind*

While *varnas* were the broad, text based, categorisation on which the caste system was built, the observable composition of the caste structure constituted hundreds of *jatis which* denoted professional, linguistic, religious, geographical hierarchies[35]. There were hundreds of *jatis* within each *varna* and there were hierarchies within the varnas and between different jatis. Some features of the caste system were as follows[36].

Social hierarchy: The caste system privileged some varnas over others, with purity being associated with being born at the higher end of this hierarchy and pollution with the lower end. In this rigid system, even seeing, let alone touching those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy could 'pollute' those above them. This led to strict segregation of communities and rules as we will see below. Furthermore, within each varna, the *jatis* were also hierarchical, so that some 'untouchable' groups were more stigmatised than others[37] .

Physical Segregation and Endogamy: The notions of purity within the caste system led to rigid separation involving restrictions on intermarriage, inter-dining and cohabitation. The requirement of endogamy was strict and was at the heart of the caste order, restricting marriage between *varnas* and quite often between *jatis*. While in castes with fewer women, men were allowed wives of lower caste subject to some purificatory ceremonies or fines[38],the endogamy requirements were especially rigid for women. Chakravarti argues that the strict endogamy requirement especially for higher caste women were imperative for the maintenance of caste order[39].

Similarly, the caste system imposed rules on inter-dining. While individuals could eat food cooked by people from higher caste groups, they were restricted in eating food from lower

[35] Samarendra 'Birth of Caste'
[36] We note that many of the restrictions associated with a rigid caste system continue to be imposed even today.
[37] Nadkarni, 'Caste system intrinsic to hinduism'
[38] Davis 'Intermarriage'
[39] Women were considered the "gateways to the caste system" (Chakravarti, 'Brahminical patriarchy', p 579) and ensuring perpetuation of caste structure required restriction to movements of women and seclusion, leading to strongly patriarchal structures. The penalty for degression for women was particularly high. For example, Hutton suggests "If a Nambudri [a high caste group] woman commit adultery she is outcasted and a funeral ceremony is performed for her as if she were, dead, as, indeed, she is to her caste, but if a husband take back an erring wife or a father receive home an erring daughter, they, too, are liable to be outcasted (Hutton,*Caste in India* p 109).

castes. A common result of such segregation was the exclusion of Dalits from using common village resources and the segregation of neighbourhoods by caste groups[40].

Educational and Occupational Exclusion: In the rigid caste system, the varna categories were based on occupation and were hereditary, with mobility within varnas being strictly prohibited. This had, over centuries, ossified into a rigid division of labour with individuals from the lowest *varna* and dalit backgrounds being locked into manual, unskilled labour and excluded from mainstream educational institutions[41].

Material Privileges: Such social hierarchy also meant that historically individuals from Dalit backgrounds were deprived of ownership of productive resources and land. They often lived and worked under conditions of hereditary servitude and bondage to higher caste landowners[42]. Viswanath notes that the Dalit workers worked in conditions that were dubbed by British officials to be akin to slavery, noting that "pariahs [a Dalit group] in Madras, throughout the nineteenth century, were kept in miserable conditions, subject to violent physical discipline, often tied to particular plots of land and actively prevented from absconding or obtaining land of their own"[43].

Given these unfreedoms, it is not surprising that return to India varied both by caste and gender. For the lower castes and for women, the conditions in British Guiana might well have been an improvement on the conditions that they left behind in India.

Caste system in the plantation colonies

While Hinduism continued to play an important role in the organisation of life in the colonies, most of the prominent features of the caste system had to be dropped. All migrants to the

[40] Writing in 1944, Ambedkar gives an example of how physical segregation leads to material discrimination "Balais [A low caste group] were not allowed to get water from the village wells; they were not allowed to let go their cattle to graze. Balais were prohibited from passing through land owned by a Hindu, so that if the field of a Balai was surrounded by fields owned by Hindus, the Balai could have no access to his own field. The Hindus also let their cattle graze down the fields of Balais." (Ambedkar, *Writing and Speeches,* pp40)

[41] The system changed marginally from 1850s onwards when missionary education and Arya Samaj started providing education to Dalit converts. However, such education wasn't widespread and often replicated social conservatisms and pressures of the Hindu society (A. Kumar,'Untouchable school')

[42] Viswanath 'Spiritual slavery, material malaise'

[43] Ibid p. 128

plantation colonies were involved in similar, low skilled work and the European work routine did not allow workers to conform to the traditional caste-based organisation of labour. In addition, physical segregation and isolation were not possible either on the journey across the seas nor on the plantations themselves. Writing about the recruitment process, Bahadur[44] notes "When they first arrived [in recruitment depots], the emigrants were stripped of their clothes and given soap to wash in the Hooghly - again, side by side, the concerns of caste seemingly disappearing down the river, like the sacred thread that one migrant saw some high-caste Hindus discard as they bathed in 1898"[45].

Traditional norms regarding physical segregation, restrictions on caste mobility and control of sexuality were not a part of the lives of migrants in the plantation colonies. All Indian emigrants, regardless of caste, were huddled together in a small space and were forced to share food and intermix[46]. The workers were boarded in shared accommodation in the plantations where caste segregation was not maintained. Any spatial segregation that existed was on racial (rather than caste or religious) lines, between the white management and the workers of people of colour[47]. A report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the treatment of immigrants in British Guiana notes that "married and single alike have to use passages, sheds euphemistically termed kitchens, and other convenience common to many others differing in caste and sometimes in race"[48]. Bahadur wrote, describing the living conditions of her great grandmother, a single Brahmin indentured worker "Her (accommodation) was … where 2600 immigrants, including 800 children lived in "logies" previously occupied by slaves. The single-story barracks, barely raised from the ground on short stumps, were partitioned into small rooms. In each room lived one family, however large, or a group of single men. Because the partitions did not reach the roof, every sound was communal"[49]. Reports of the time also noted communal drinking water facilities that

[44] Bahadur. *Coolie Woman*

[45] The migrant that Bahadur mentions is Munshi Rahman Khan, a rare voice that documented the indentured experiences in his book the Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer.
Khan was particularly disturbed by the violation of caste and religious norms and regulations. He wrote "[I]n the depot, all ate together, and people slept with each other's wives… I don't like such behaviour… there is no caste or religion there" (quoted in Bahadur. *Coolie Woman'* p 45).

[46] Speckmann 'Marriage and Kinship'

[47] Hollup 'Disintegration of Caste'

[48] *Report on Treatment of Immigrants*, p 8

[49] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*. p 83

were shared by all castes. Not surprisingly, caste norms could not be maintained under these circumstances.

Similarly, traditional norms in relation to morality were flouted. As were constraints on inter-dining and religious restrictions on food and alcohol. Mr Geoghagen, an Undersecretary to the Government of India, wrote in his report regarding emigration from India that he feared that "the temptation of cheap rum and the obliteration of caste have developed the habit of drinking, even in labourers of classes abstinent from alcohol in India."[50]. He also noted that in plantation hospitals "East Indian immigrants, men and women, have been employed as cooks; … caste apparently, being entirely lost here. On one occasion, at Vriesland, we found a Mahomedan cooking the pork and dividing it out to his fellow-countrymen and co-religionists with great unction." Similarly, Grierson noted that there was a general belief that 'coolies in the colonies are made to eat beef and to become Christians, and that they will never be allowed to return'[51]. Jain[52] wrote that the indentured labour system "struck a deathblow to caste as a traditional functional system of social stratification in the new setting."

Traditional endogamy and gender norms were also not maintained, largely because of the skewed sex ratios on the plantations. Intermarriage and cohabitation were common. Sexual norms were far less rigid than in India. Geoghagen notes that in the Indian population "the men are to the women nearly as three to one, and where the restraints of caste and even of religion seem to be completely relaxed".

While caste did not disappear in the plantation colonies, it was not useful for governance and therefore there was no reason to perpetuate it[53]. In fact, plantation owners often preferred Dalit workers whom they saw as more docile. They also feared that the higher castes might want to hold on to their traditional hierarchy and thereby undermine the plantation hierarchy [54]. For example, in correspondence regarding an uprising by Indian workers against plantation

[50] Geoghagen report, 1874, p:117

[51] Pitcher wrote of his interview with Prag Singh in his diary for 15 March 1882. Prag Singh told him that there was a fear that emigrants were 'bedharam' because they were forced to eat out of one dish on board ship, along with people of other castes, and that on arrival at the colonies, they were forcibly converted to Christianity

[52] Jain 'Indian Diaspora' p180

[53] van der Veer & Vertovec 'Brahminism abroad'

[54] Moore, 'Retention of Caste Notions'

management on the Devonshire Castle Estate of Essequebo in 1873, the management expressed concerns about the ringleader who was a Brahmin[55]. Similarly, one author argued in 1893 that "as a general rule, in all strikes involving insubordination or threatened disturbances, the instigators are coolies of high caste who, however, do not appear prominently in the matter, other immigrants being put forward and made to figure as lead"[56]. Immigration agent Oliver William Werner who provided evidence for a report to the British Houses of Parliament noted "we preferred the low caste. The higher castes we did not care very much for, because there was always a trouble about their food."[57]. This preference for lower caste workers might also have translated into an inclination on their part to remain in the plantation colonies past the end of the contract.

3. HYPOTHESES

Based on the caste experiences in the two countries discussed above, we set up the following hypotheses that we will empirically test:

Hypothesis 1: The caste identity of the indentured workers influenced their return decision.
In particular, we argue that the unfreedoms associated with being a person of Dalit background in India would imply that such individuals were less likely to return vis-à-vis other caste groups. On the other hand, the loss of caste privileges on the plantation colonies meant that individuals of high caste groups were more likely to return.

Hypothesis 2: Gender of the individual plays a role in determining the decision to return.
Along similar lines to the caste hypothesis above, we would expect that women (who were highly restricted in colonial India) would also be less likely to return, especially if they had travelled alone. Many women who travelled alone were widows, destitute or runaways and,

[55] The governor J Scott described this worker as "Ooderman [the ring leader] is a Brahmin, but a good workman, capable of earning, and who has earned, excellent wages, but from his high caste he possesses great influence over the other immigrants on the estate, and, being a turbulent individual, exercises this power for wrong objects." (page 18).
[56] quoted in Moore, 'Retention of Caste Notions' p 100
[57] Minutes from Sanderson committee 1909: page 29

for such women, the working conditions and sex ratio of the plantation colonies would entail fewer restrictions than in India.

Hypothesis 3: Individual and regional prosperity factors may outweigh the effect of caste on the return decision of individuals of high caste background.

As Hypothesis 1 states, we might expect individuals from high castes to wish to return to India, all else being equal. However, their outward journey would have resulted in their caste expulsion because of the stigma of *kalapani.* This expulsion could be rectified through expensive purification ceremonies, which would either require them to be relatively prosperous or to be returning to prosperous conditions. We test this by using individual heights (which were recorded on the ship registers) as proxies for individual prosperity and consider whether the caste effect remains after its inclusion. To test the latter, we consider whether difficult economic circumstances in the region of origin of the indentured worker in the year when he or she emigrated (this being the year that the worker was most likely to remember) are likely to override the caste effect. Finally, a fourth economic factor that we consider is the increasing cost of the return to India that fell on individuals, rather than the plantations. We might expect that this would decrease the incentive to return and would, in particular, affect the decision of high caste individuals who would have to factor in the cost of the rituals to reinstate caste.

4. DATA SOURCE AND EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

Data source and caste categorization

Our data has been collected from the Walter Rodney Archives in Georgetown Guyana. These national archives hold ship registers that were compiled when indentured workers from the ports of Calcutta and Madras landed in British Guiana. The ship registers include information on sex, age, height, native place, caste, estate that they were allocated to and whether the individuals were re-indentured. For individuals who took the return trip back, the registers include the name of the ship which took them back to India and the year in which they did so. For those who did not take the return trip, the registers provide the number on the obituary register and the year. For the purposes of this paper, we digitalized a sample from each register corresponding to ships that set sail from 1874. While registers exist from 1844, in the

early years of indenture, the registers did not include the place of origin and caste of the workers. Additionally, some of the early registers are extremely weathered and the ink in the writing has faded making them too fragile and illegible to use.

Each register contains details of multiple ships that embarked from India. The indentured workers from each ship were sorted in the English alphabetical order of their names, and by gender, thereby randomizing the workers within the ship. So, while the individuals may have travelled in groups according to family or caste/village networks, the entry in the registers did not cluster individuals into such groups. We scanned approximately one out of every 10 pages[58] of all the registers between 1874 and 1917 (where they were legible) and later digitalized all the entries in these pages.

Using the strategy described in the Online Appendix, we categorize workers into 'Dalit', 'middle' and 'high' caste. This is our primary explanatory variable of interest. We also identify Muslim workers who would not have faced caste stigma. As a robustness check, therefore, we estimate the effect of being Muslim on returning to India. Table 1 compares the demographics of our sample to that of all Indian indentured workers in British Guiana. We note that the sex ratio and age demographics of our data are very similar to the population characteristics of all indentured labourers in British Guiana. The proportion of Dalits in our sample is similar to the population proportion, though we have a slightly higher (2.4%) representation of high caste.

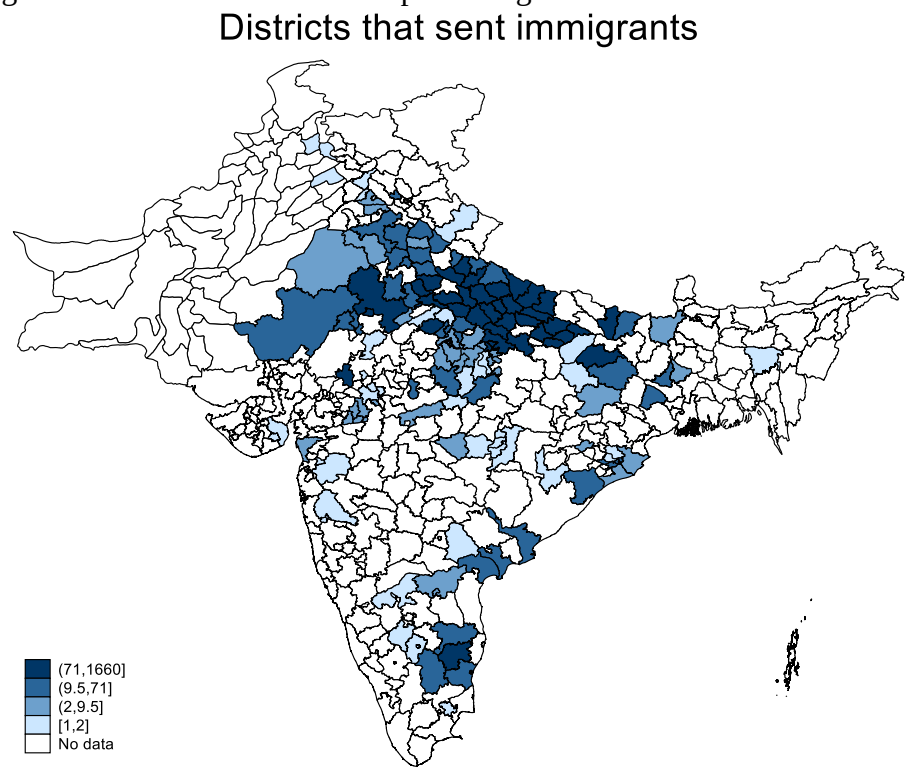
[58] The process of scanning and digitalising was extremely labour intensive and involved photographing hundreds of pages from the registers. We made the decision to scan approximately every 10th page because our resources didn't allow us to cover the whole population. We weren't allowed access to all the ship registers in the period of study because some registers were extremely brittle. Additionally, while the archival staff gave us access to all the ship registers that were usable, we were required to ensure that the indenture numbers and names of the workers couldn't be traced in any publication or data repository.

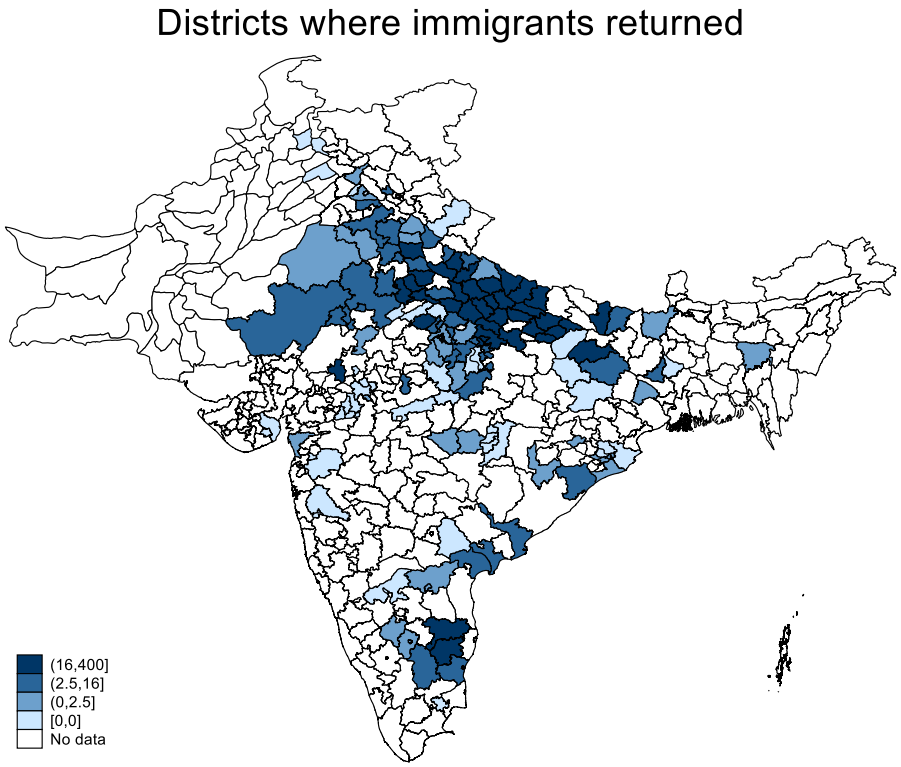
Table 1: Migration statistics of British Guiana as a whole and for the sample

	British Guiana	Sample
Period	1838-1917	1872-1911
Female[a]	30.1%	30.1%
Age below 10[a]	11.4%	10%
Age between 11 and 30[a]	83.8%	84.7%
Age greater than 30[a]	4.8%	4.9%
High Caste[b]	13.6%	16.02%
Middle Caste[b]	Agricultural caste (30.1%), artisan castes (8.7%)	53.54% (current day OBC and non-Hindu)
Low Caste (Dalit)[b]	31.1%	30.44% (Current Day SC/ST)
Place of Birth: United Provinces[a]	70.3%	73.40%
Place of Birth: Bihar and Bengal[a]	17%	10.21%
Madras Presidency	4.4%	4.16%
Source	a: Smith 'Characterisitcs of Indian immigrants' b: Moore ''Retention of Caste Notions'	Authors' calculation using own data

As seen from figure 1, most of the workers in our sample were from districts in current day Uttar Pradesh, with the largest number being from Basti district (1660 immigrants), followed by Azamgarh (1049 immigrants) and Gonda (1027 immigrants). Those were also the districts to which most workers returned: 400 workers returned to Basti, 261 to Azamgarh and 245 to Gonda.

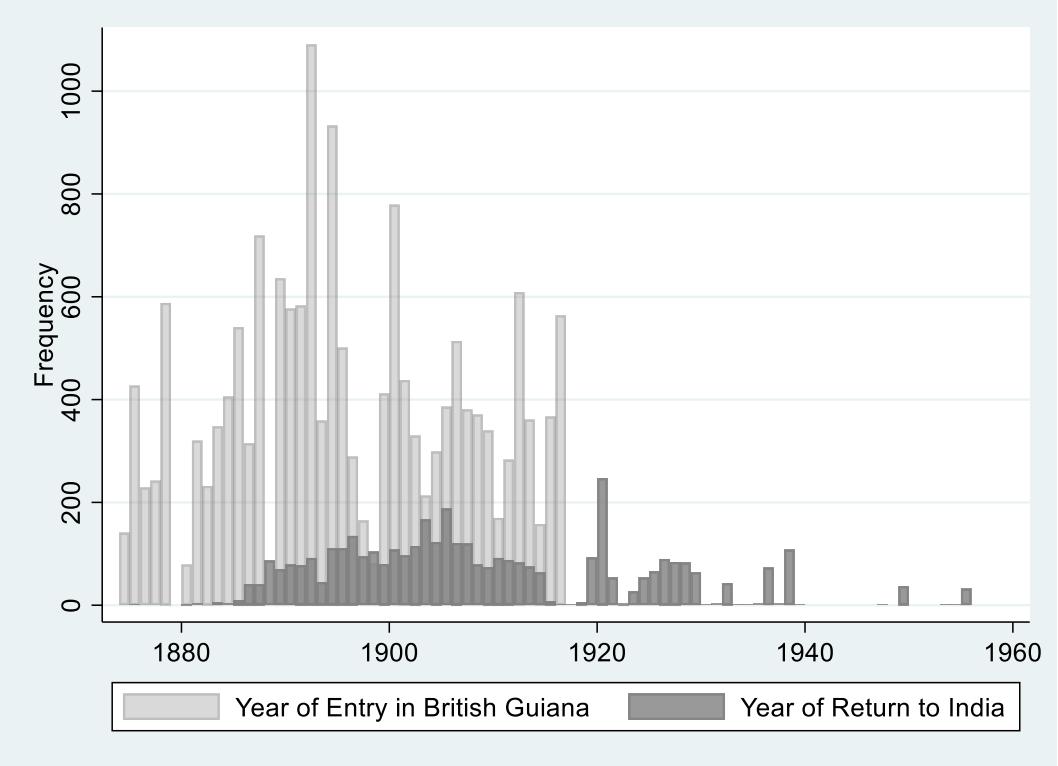
Figure 1: Districts where the sample immigrants came from and returned to.





The distribution of years of entry and return of the workers are represented in Figure 2. We were not able to access ship registers for 1880 and 1898 because of the fragile condition of the registers and have only 79 and 81 observations for those two years. We note that there is a dip in the number of workers returning in the years corresponding to World War I.

Figure 2: Years of entry and return for the sample immigrants.



Estimation strategy

We test our hypotheses by estimating the following model:

$$return_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Caste\_status_i + \delta X_i + \varepsilon_i \qquad (1)$$

where $return_i$ takes the value 1 if the ith individual has returned, and 0 otherwise. The variable $Caste\_status_i$ represents whether the individual is from the Dalit, middle caste or higher caste background. X_i represents other individual demographic characteristics (sex and age at arrival). β_0 and β_1 are coefficients of estimation and ε_i is the error term. Since an individual is born into their caste and sex, we do not expect to face a reverse causality in the analysis. However, we may be faced with omitted variable bias. In particular, we are unable to obtain direct data on individual income or wealth or their prospects in their home districts. To get around some of these problems, we include district level dummies to control for

unobserved factors in the worker's home district, and ship and year fixed effects to control for unobserved factors associated with the journey to British Guiana.

We extend the above model to test the other hypotheses. First, we include an interaction term between caste and gender to capture whether the decision of women to return might have varied by caste (Hypothesis 2). Second, we test for the impact that individual prosperity may have on the decision to return. This analysis is constrained by the paucity of data on individual economic conditions. In the absence of this data, we include individual height as a proxy for affluence (Hypothesis 3). Third, we consider two measures of regional prosperity – whether the individual's home district faced a natural disaster in the three years preceding their emigration and whether or not the home district was a landlord district (Hypothesis 3). Both these factors capture the economic conditions in the region and would therefore enable us to test for whether economic factors might constrain an individual's incentive to return. In what follows, we will discuss some of these variables in greater detail.

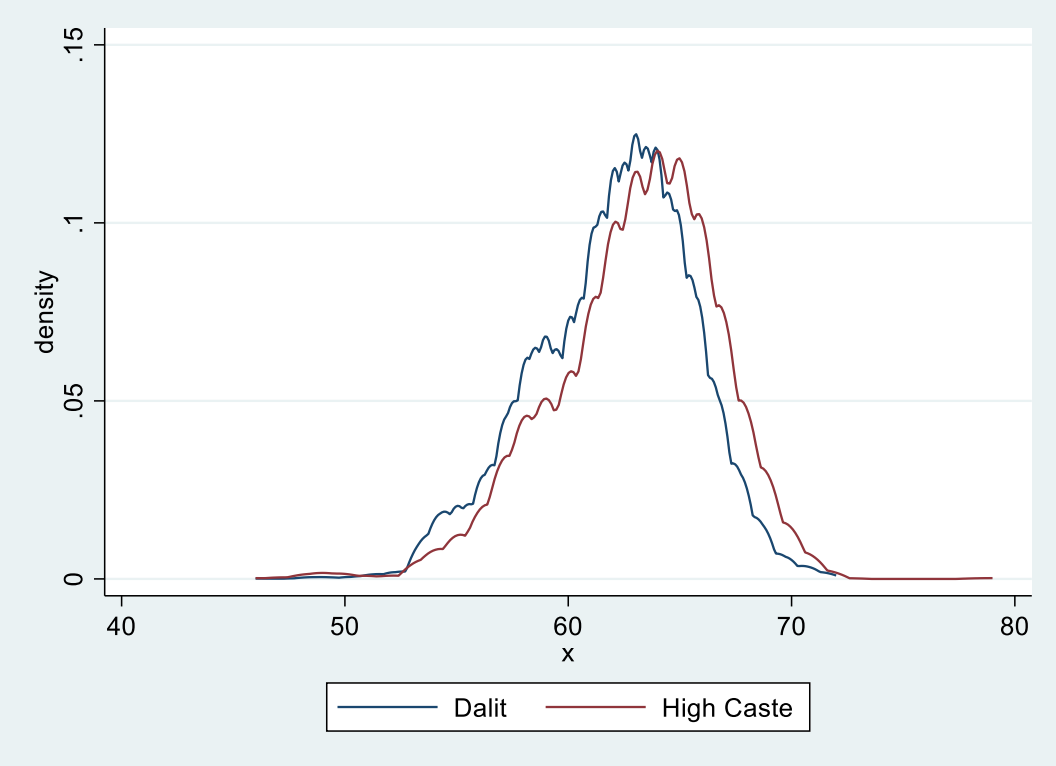
Variables of Interest

Height as proxy for individual affluence

Personal/ familial wealth is particularly relevant for the higher caste groups who would have incurred costs if they wished to undo their loss in caste position through ceremonial means. Since our archival material does not have any indication of income or wealth, we draw on the anthropology and economics literature[59] to use height as a proxy for personal affluence. Height is determined by nutritional intake and disease environment[60]. Inequality in food intake is correlated with social gaps in purchasing power. Figure 3 shows the distribution of height by caste group for our data. The distributions have similar spread (with an interquartile range of 22.5 inches for Dalit and 22 inches for high caste) but the high caste group was 0.95 inch taller, on average, than the Dalit group (p value of ttest=0.000). This is in line with findings from Brennan, McDonald, & Shlomowitz (2010) who observed increased height disparity between major castes in the period from the late 19th century until 1960s. It demonstrates the material hierarchy associated with a rigid caste system in India.

[59] Arunachalam & Watson 'Height, Income and Voting'
[60] Guntupalli & Baten, 'Inequality of Heights'

Figure 3: Height of the sample immigrants by caste groups



Regional Prosperity Factors

Natural Disasters

In some of our models, we include district fixed effects to capture the influence of conditions in the region of origin of the indentured workers. In addition, for a sub-sample of workers, we also collected data from the District Gazetteers on natural disasters (floods, famines, droughts) that might have occurred in the three years prior to their travel to British Guiana. This is especially important for the decision to return because these memories influence how individuals might have perceived their opportunities back home. For a largely agricultural community, memories of natural disasters are likely to have been crucial, as these have been identified as being important determinants of the out-migration[61]. We control for these disasters to see whether they make a difference to our results. We note here that the data was not available for all the districts in our sample and so the analysis is restricted to the subsample belonging to districts in United Provinces and Bengal Presidency.

Landlord Districts

[61] Carter 'Slavery and unfreedom in the Indian Ocean'; Roopnarine – Indo-Caribbean Social Identity

In a separate model we also include a control to capture whether the worker came from a landlord-based district or not. Three types of land revenue arrangements were possible in British India: a landlord-based system where a landlord was responsible for the revenue liability of a village or a group of villages, individual-based system where cultivators directly paid the land taxes and a village-based system where village bodies were responsible for land revenue. In the landlord-based system (common in our sample and in many parts of Bengal presidency, Central Provinces and Madras Presidency), landlords had effective property rights to the cultivator's land and had the right to set exploitative revenue terms for the cultivators. In comparison, systems with individual collection provided individual land deeds to cultivators. We use data made available by Banerjee and Iyer[62] who use historical material from the 1870s and 1880s to distinguish between landlord-controlled districts and others.

5. RESULTS

We report the results for estimation of Model 1 in this section. For 10,229 of the individuals who outlived the indenture period (5 years from when they arrived in British Guiana) we have information about whether the individual took the passage back to India, or if not, when he or she died in British Guiana. On average, individuals who did return, did so about 14 years after they arrived in British Guiana (that is, 9 years after the end of their initial indenture). The average time spent in British Guiana prior to return was the same across caste groups. Summary statistics for the variables of interest are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary statistics

	Not Returned			Returned			
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Diff in mean
Dalit	6,370	0.448	0.497	3,841	0.396	0.489	0.052***
High Caste	6,370	0.146	0.353	3,841	0.164	0.370	-0.018**
Age	6,475	21.847	6.272	3,637	21.801	6.210	0.045
Female	6,546	0. 293	0.455	3,682	0.270	0.444	0.023**
Height	5,331	62.386	3.561	3,285	62.673	3.403	-0.287***
Natural Disaster in the three previous years (District)	5,068	0.217	0.412	2,899	0.197	0.398	0.02**
Non Landlord District	5,227	0.569	0.495	3,072	0.597	0.490	-0.028**
level of illiteracy amongst men in the previous year (District)	4,450	0.944	0.016	2,567	0.946	0.015	-0.002***

[62] Banerjee and Iyer 'Legacy of colonial land tenure system'

Table 2 suggests that on average there were significantly more Dalits who did not return (with a significant average difference in mean of 0.052) and slightly more individuals of high castes who returned (significant difference in mean of -0.018). There were more women who did not return, and on average, more taller people returned. More of the individuals who did not return came from districts that faced some natural disaster in the three years just preceding their departure. On average, individuals who returned came from the less-exploitative non-landlord districts. Finally, on average, the district level of illiteracy amongst men in the year preceding their arrival was slightly higher for individuals who returned in comparison to those who did not.

Caste and Return

In Table 3 we test our hypothesis that caste influenced the decision to return of the individual (Hypothesis 1). Our reference categories are the middle castes and non-Hindu workers. We find that on average, Dalit workers were less likely to return by 5 percent. The result remains similar when we include district level fixed effects (of their native district in India). High caste individuals on average were about 3 percent more likely to return, though this is only significant at 10% when we include district fixed effects This indicates that, for Hindu high-caste groups, the effect of caste may not be as robust as for Dalit individuals.

Table 3: Effect of caste on decision to return. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VARIABLES	Coefficient	Marginal	Coefficient	Marginal
Dalit	-0.211***	-0.046***	-0.248***	-0.052***
	(0.058)	(0.012)	(0.062)	(0.013)
Hindu High Caste	0.149**	0.034**	0.123*	0.027*
	(0.060)	(0.014)	(0.070)	(0.016)
Constant	-1.532***		-1.376	
	(0.136)		(1.364)	
N	9,465	9,465	8,493	8,493
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	No	No	Yes	Yes

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. All estimations include year fixed effect, and ship fixed effect. Reference category includes middle castes and non Hindu (Muslim and Christian). Table presents coefficients and marginals of logit regression. The number of observations has dropped in the case of columns (3) and (4) because we don't have information of districts for all individuals.

In Table 4, we specifically consider the effect that being from a particular Dalit caste group (Chamar, who were historically considered to be leather workers) had on return. This group constituted the largest caste group in our sample and was highly stigmatised. We find that an individual who was Chamar was less likely to return by 5 percent not including district effects (with the value of marginal being -0.50) or 6 percent including district effects (value of marginal at -0.065) compared to people from other caste groups.

Table 4: Effect of being of Chamar caste on decision to return. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VARIABLES	Coefficient	Marginal	Coefficient	Marginal
chamar	-0.228***	-0.050***	-0.301***	-0.065***
	(0.071)	(0.016)	(0.080)	(0.017)
Constant	-1.448***		-0.868	
	(0.132)		(0.879)	
N	10,112	10,112	9,076	9,076
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effect	No	No	Yes	Yes

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. All estimations include year fixed effect, and ship fixed effect. Table presents coefficients and marginals of logit regression.

Gender and Return

Our second hypothesis suggests that caste and gender may have had intersectional effects on the return decision. This might have been because women faced additional restrictions to mobility and sexuality in India beyond the norms associated with caste. As discussed earlier, the literature suggests that many women who migrated were widowed or destitute and thereby already stigmatized in India[63]. Many authors therefore argue that indentured migration was a fresh start for such women when opportunities for survival were not available at home[64].

[63] Kumar A, *Coolies of the Empire*
[64] Reddock 'Freedom Denied'

Clearly, the marital status of women would have affected their decision to return. Unfortunately, for most workers, we do not have data on marital status. However, for about 20% of the workers in the sample (and 30% of women), the register provides a marriage registration number and date. It is worth noting that this does not mean that the rest of the workers were unmarried - it simply confirms that these women were definitely registered as married in British Guiana. We therefore control for them in our estimation. The date in the registry either coincides with the year of their arrival (indicating that they arrived with their spouses)[65] or is later than the date of their arrival (identifying individuals who got married in British Guiana). Once we have accounted for women who got married after arriving in British Guiana or those who were children (aged 13 or less) at the time of their arrival, we are left with 63% of the women in the sample whose marital status was not clear in the time of arrival. We expect that these women were widows or destitute. This is in line with literature from other countries. For example, Lal[66] finds that 63.9% of adult women who migrated to Fiji were single, and Reddock[67] suggests that two-thirds of women who went to Trinidad were single.

Table 5 reports the results for the model testing Hypothesis 2. It reports the coefficient of the interaction between caste and being female. Columns (1) and (2) in Table 5 report the effect of being women on return without controlling for caste. On average women were less likely to return than men. In columns (3) and (4), we additionally control for caste, and we interact this with being female. We find that while high caste men were more likely to return, women and Dalit men were less likely to return. However, the caste and gender interactions are not significant. This result is also illustrated in Figure 4A where we report the marginals of estimation for Dalit, middle castes and higher caste groups at different ages by sex and marital status. For the female migrants, the probability of return was higher for every age group and caste in the definitely married group relative to those for whom we do not have information on marital status (depicted in the right panels of Fig 4A). Equally, across age groups the probability of return was higher for men than for women. Finally, for both men and women

[65] The Immigration Agent-General was required to keep a register of couples who arrived and provide a certificate to each individual showing that they were legally married. This also applied if the husbands and wives arrived in different ships (Sanderson Committee report Part III: Appendix for British Guiana, p 13)
[66] Lal 'Kunti's cry"
[67] Reddock 'Freedom Denied'

the probability of returning was highest for high caste groups, followed by middle caste, followed by Dalit. For women (right panels) however, the difference between the different caste groups is smaller than for men.

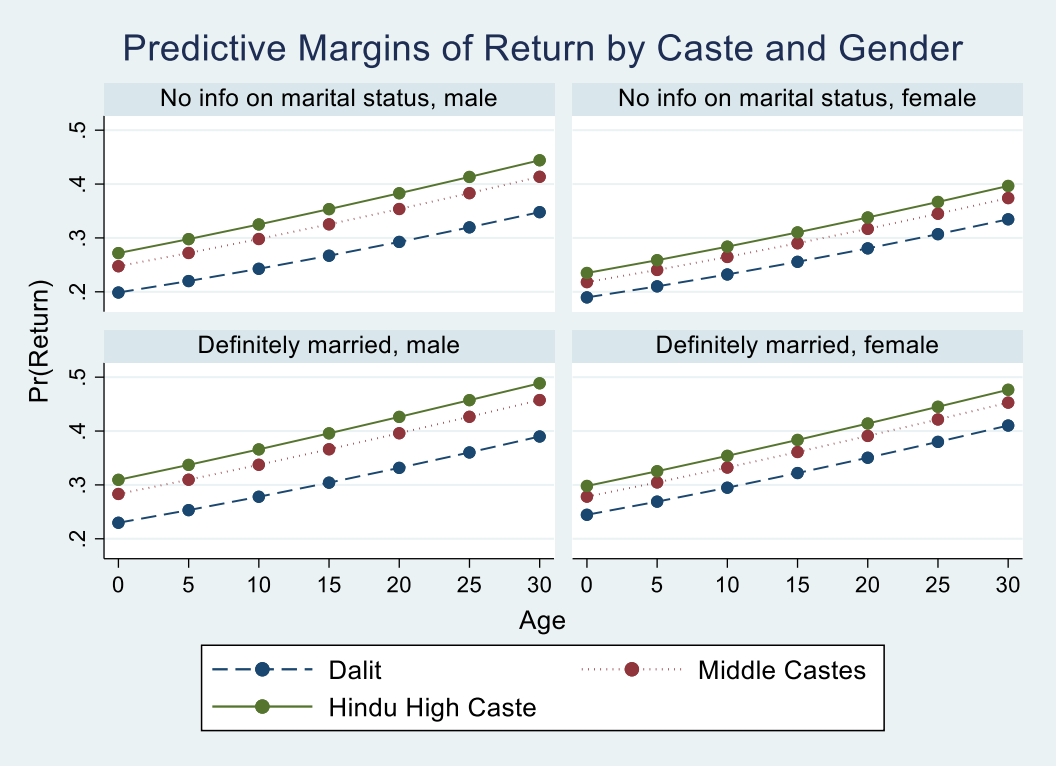
Table 5: Effect of the interaction between caste and gender on decision to return. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Female	-0.134***	-0.133***	-0.160**	-0.149**	-0.068	-0.065	-0.144***	-0.136**	-0.161***	-0.147***
	(0.045)	(0.050)	(0.066)	(0.069)	(0.050)	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.054)	(0.048)	(0.053)
Dalit			-0.282***	-0.298***						
			(0.066)	(0.070)						
Hindu High Caste			0.176**	0.134*						
			(0.070)	(0.078)						
Female X Dalit			0.169	0.113						
			(0.106)	(0.116)						
Female X Hindu High Caste			-0.108	-0.032						
			(0.139)	(0.145)						
Muslim					0.180**	0.256***				
					(0.085)	(0.089)				
Female X Muslim					-0.436***	-0.441**				
					(0.164)	(0.177)				
Ahir							0.064	0.093		
							(0.078)	(0.083)		
Female X Ahir							0.141	0.065		
							(0.170)	(0.180)		
Chamar									-0.315***	-0.358***
									(0.085)	(0.094)
Female X Chamar									0.205*	0.125
									(0.120)	(0.126)
Definitely Married	0.280***	0.293***	0.311***	0.322***	0.285***	0.302***	0.284***	0.296***	0.293***	0.305***
	(0.059)	(0.070)	(0.064)	(0.075)	(0.063)	(0.074)	(0.060)	(0.070)	(0.060)	(0.070)
Constant	-1.501***	-0.826	-1.518***	-1.316	-1.628***	-1.141	-1.493***	-0.815	-1.447***	-0.807
	(0.112)	(0.892)	(0.116)	(1.401)	(0.111)	(1.357)	(0.114)	(0.894)	(0.110)	(0.889)
10,112	9,076	9,465	8,493	9,818	8,817	10,112	9,076	10,112	9,076	10,112
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Additional individual controls included: age. All estimations include year fixed effect, and ship fixed effect. Table presents only coefficients of Logit estimation. Margin plots are presented in figures 4A and B.

(Figure 4A here)

Figure 4A



Note: Margin plots corresponding to column (4) in Table 5.

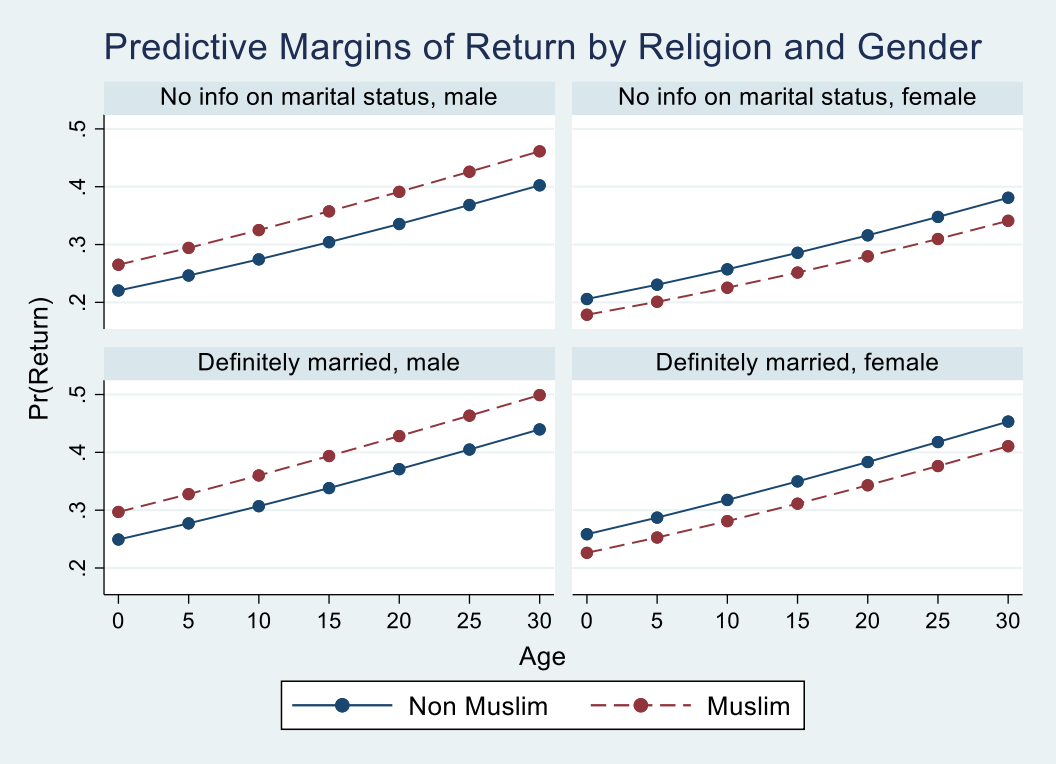
These results might reflect the fact that in colonial and precolonial India, while all women faced constraints, high caste women faced more stringent gender norms because of Brahminical gender codes. These gender norms were more flexible for women of lower and untouchable castes because of existential compulsions and labour market requirements (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). The colonial administration in India under the British brought about some significant changes in social mobility and caste relations which resulted in a tightening of gender norms in India. For example, Gupta[68] notes that early 19th century Hindi didactic literature directed high caste women to distinguish themselves from Dalit women by covering themselves up, not speaking too loudly, not conversing too much with other women. This would separate the "morally chaste, virtuous and ideal" upper caste women from "loud, raucous, unfeminine, uncouth, uncultured and shameless" Dalit working women. Thus, any high caste woman who travelled to British Guiana was stigmatised both for deviating from the rules of endogamy but also for living and working with people of other castes. This was worse for women who were not married, and was reflected in their decision not to return.

We also estimate the effect of gender on individuals of Muslim background. Muslim individuals faced fewer caste hierarchies than Hindus, but experienced similar gender norms.

[68] Gupta '(MIS)Representing the Dalit woman'

We find that Muslim women were less likely to return in comparison with non-Muslim women (columns 5 and 6 in table 4). These results are clearly illustrated in figure 4B where we map the marginals of our estimation for Muslim groups at different age groups by sex and marital status. Across age groups Muslim men were more likely to return in comparison to non-Muslim men (left panels). However, across all age groups Muslim women were *less* likely to return in comparison to non-Muslim women (right panels).

Figure 4B



Note: Margin plots corresponding to column(6) in Table 5.

Muslim and upper caste Hindu women faced an extra layer of spatial segregation beyond those associated with caste. For affluent households, the living arrangement of the house was divided into *sadar* (outer) and *andar* (inside). Respectability implied that women would be restricted to the *andarmahal* (inner chambers)[69]. Any woman who exited the *andarmahal*, whether for economic or other reasons, was deemed lacking virtue. Thus, for Muslim and high caste women who travelled to British Guiana as indentured workers, returning implied additional stigma beyond that associated with *kalapani.* This is because they had ventured

[69] Amin 'The world of Muslim women in colonial bengal'

out of the *andarmahal* and had interacted with lower castes in their travel and work in the plantation colonies.

Finally, we look at the results for some of the major caste groups in our sample. In columns 7 and 8 of Table 5 we look at the interaction between being female and belonging to the *Ahir* caste, which is a middle caste group. The female*Ahir term is not significant in the table. We also check the results for Chamar caste group (columns 9 and 10). The results for Chamar caste group are similar to other Dalit caste groups.

Caste, Prosperity and Return

We turn now to consider if the caste effect persists when we control for individual and regional economic factors. In Table 6, we combine economic factors with caste to see the effect on return. In Columns (1) and (2) we add height as a proxy control for familial affluence in addition to our main explanatory caste hierarchy variables. In columns (3) and (4) we include our non-landlord district dummies and in (5) and (6) we include our dummy for natural disaster in the three years preceding their arrival in British Guiana. Our results indicate that height was positively associated with return to India. On the other hand, individuals who experienced natural disasters in the years before leaving India were less likely to return. Being from a non-landlord district did not have an impact on return. However, even after controlling for these prosperity variables, we find that being Dalit had a negative and significant effect with the value of the marginal effect for Dalit consistently around -0.05. On the other hand, for high caste individuals the caste association is no longer significant once we bring in the economic factors. This confirms that for high caste individuals, economic factors overruled caste factors in the return decision. This might not be surprising given that, for high caste individuals, a return to India (and to their privileged caste position) required expensive rituals to be undertaken.

Table 6: Combined effect of caste and economic factors on decision to return. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

VARIABLES	(1) Coefficient	(2) Marginal	(3) Coefficient	(4) Marginal	(5) Coefficient	(6) Marginal
Dalit	-0.253***	-0.053***	-0.233***	-0.049***	-0.210***	-0.046***
	(0.066)	(0.014)	(0.063)	(0.013)	(0.061)	(0.013)
High Caste	0.074	0.016	0.100	0.022	0.041	0.009
	(0.071)	(0.016)	(0.077)	(0.017)	(0.072)	(0.016)
height	0.026***	0.006***				
	(0.010)	(0.002)				
Non-Landlord District			0.080	0.017		
			(0.766)	(0.164)		
Natural Disaster in the three previous years (District)					-0.123*	-0.027*
					(0.072)	(0.016)
Constant	-2.838*		-1.254		-0.881***	
	(1.702)		(1.508)		(0.257)	
Observations	7,036	7,036	7,486	7,486	7,254	7,254
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ship and Register fixed effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. Estimations include year fixed effect. The variable "Height" represents height of the worker as reported in the ship registers. Variable "Natural Disaster in the three previous years" represents whether or not the district that the worker comes from faced a natural disaster in 3 years preceding their arrival (only for United Provinces and Bengal Presidency). The variable "Non landlord district" represents whether or not the worker comes from a zamindar district worker. Table presents coefficients and marginals from logit estimation. The number of observations has dropped because information on height and districts is not available for all the individuals.

Cost of Return

In Table 7, we consider another economic factor: the cost of the return journey. While initially the return passage was completely free to the indentured workers, Law 12 of 1879 decreed that indentured workers arriving after 1895 were required to contribute a part (one fourth for men and one sixth for women) of the return passage. Those arriving before 1895 were still eligible to the free trip. The proportion that the workers were required to pay was further increased in 1899 with a subsequent amendment to the law: men were now required to pay half and women a third of their return trip[70]. Thus, after 1899, the return trip became substantially more expensive for the workers.

Columns (1) and (2) in Table 7 report the results for those arriving before 1899 while (3) and (4) report the same for after 1899. The results indicate that high caste individuals were significantly more likely (by about 5%) to return before 1899 but the coefficient loses significance for the post-1899 period. For Dalit workers, the results are negative and significant in both periods, but the value of marginal effect falls from -0.041 to -0.063. Thus, the cost of the return passage had a significant impact on both groups though for high caste Hindus the economic conditions were sufficient to offset the impact of caste; for Dalit, they do not do so[71].

[70] Roopnarine 'Indian migration during indentured servitude'

[71] The results are similar if we consider 1895- to include the first cohort that faced a cost of return- as the cut off year (results not included here). The magnitude of the coefficients in this case is slightly smaller than the case where 1899 is the cut-off, and the significance is similar.

Table 7: Effect of caste on decision to return before and after 1899. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

VARIABLES	(1) Coefficient before 1899	(2) Marginal before 1899	(3) Coefficient After 1899	(4) Marginal after 1899
Dalit	-0.187***	-0.041***	-0.319***	-0.063***
	(0.069)	(0.015)	(0.117)	(0.023)
Hindu High Caste	0.234***	0.054***	-0.039	-0.008
	(0.083)	(0.019)	(0.116)	(0.024)
Constant	-1.591		-1.227**	
	(1.372)		(0.495)	
Observations	4,897	4,897	3,526	3,526
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. Estimations include year fixed effect, and ship fixed effect. Table presents coefficients and marginals of logit regression. Columns (1) and (2) report estimation results for subsample that arrived before or in 1899, columns (3) and (4) report results for subsample arriving after 1899.

Our results indicate that high caste men were more likely to return than those from Dalit backgrounds, though the results are less significant when we include district fixed effects. Furthermore, for these castes, when economic conditions in their province of origin (Table 6) or the costs of return (Table 7) are taken into account, we find that the probability of their return is no longer significant. These results might be driven by the costs of correcting for kalapani. As discussed earlier, Hindus of high caste were restricted from travelling abroad and faced ex-communication if they failed to comply. Famously, MK Gandhi was ex-communicated from his caste following his return from the United Kingdom[72]. However, during the British administration, foreign travel was reasonably frequent, and individuals could be recommunicated following a purification ceremony that included a payment of fees to administering Brahmins[73]. This was understood by the workers, administration and management in plantation colonies. Geoghagan wrote about Brahmins - "by crossing the sea, caste is lost by all those who have any caste to lose. This loss, however, can be easily repaired on returning to India, by performing the prescribed penance."[74]. The expense associated with caste recommunication was often quoted as being exorbitant. For example, William

[72] Gandhi, *Experiments with truth*8
[73] Hutton, *Caste in India*
[74] Geoghegan's report on Coolie Emigration

Middleton Campbell a sugar merchant and plantation owner noted that on return to India workers would "have to pay very heavily to priests for having broken their caste by crossing the sea"[75]. Similarly, emigration agent Oliver William Warner noted that when the worker returned "his relations, if he has plenty of money, will make him welcome; if he has none, he has lost his caste as a rule, they are not very kind to him" (page 20). Given the costs of this ceremony, it is perhaps not surprising that economic conditions in the province overshadowed the impact of caste for the higher caste groups.

Extensions

The marital status of the worker may have affected the worker's return decision. As a robustness test, we run our models for a subsample of the workers (both women and men) who were definitely married in British Guiana. Echoing our earlier results, we find that caste effects continued to remain significant for Dalit, while they were no longer significant for high caste individuals (Table 8). This also indicates that while marital status may have had an impact on the return decision for individuals belonging to a high caste, it did not matter for Dalit.

Table 8: Effect of caste on decision to return for definitely married individuals. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

VARIABLES	(1) Coefficient	(2) Marginal
Dalit	-0.450***	-0.092***
	(0.164)	(0.033)
Hindu High Caste	-0.136	-0.028
	(0.221)	(0.046)
Constant	-4.448*	
	(2.478)	
Observations	1,473	1,473
Individual controls	Yes	Yes
District fixed effect	Yes	Yes

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. Estimations include year and ship fixed effects. Table presents coefficients and marginals of logit regression.

Finally, in Table 9 we include a control for the level of male illiteracy in the district that the worker came from in the year prior to his/her departure to British Guiana. We expect that the

[75] Sanderson committee minutes: page 231

level of literacy in the district that the migrants came from would have an impact on opportunities available for their children if they returned. For districts in United Provinces and Bengal, we have included an additional control for the percentage of illiteracy in the district that the worker came from in the year preceding their travel to British Guiana. Data for this variable was compiled using Census Reports for 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911. We computed the projected level of illiteracy for the remaining years. Our results (Table 8) indicate that including this control does not affect the influence that being Dalit had on return. This is for both our entire sample, as well as our sub-sample of definitely married individuals. However, the results for high caste are not significant.

Table 9: Combined effect of caste and level of illiteracy in home district on decision to return. Dependent Variable: "Individual returned to India"

	(1)	(2)	(3) Coefficient	(4) Marginal
VARIABLES	Coefficient	Marginal	Definitely married	Definitely married
Dalit	-0.208***	-0.044***	-0.372**	-0.080**
	(0.065)	(0.014)	(0.167)	(0.035)
Hindu High Caste	0.123	0.027	-0.129	-0.028
	(0.093)	(0.021)	(0.240)	(0.052)
Male illiteracy in the native district	3.903	0.840	4.542	0.978
	(2.407)	(0.517)	(4.508)	(0.968)
Constant	-5.029**		-6.418	
	(2.560)		(4.503)	
Observations	5,215	5,215	1,210	1,210
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effect	No	No	No	No

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors clustered by register and ship. Individual controls included: sex, age and age square. Estimations include year and ship fixed effects. The variable "Male illiteracy in the native district" measures the percentage male illiteracy in the individual's home district in the year preceding the individual's arrival to British Guiana. Table presents coefficients and marginals of logit regression.

Conclusion

In this paper we look at the effect of social identity on the return decision of indentured workers from British Guiana. Economic theory predicts economic, demographic, and human capital factors will affect a migration decision. For Indian migrant workers in the 19th and 20th centuries too, these factors mattered. However, even after controlling for these factors, workers from socially marginalised castes were less likely to go back to India. For such

individuals, caste prevailed as a highly significant factor determining return. Not surprisingly, given the limitations placed on women, the gender of the individual also played a role in their return decision.

Our results indicate that high caste men were more likely to return than those from Dalit backgrounds. However, when we control for district fixed effects and economic conditions in their place of origin, the probability of return for these castes was no longer significant. On the other hand, for those who had 'no caste to lose' or for women who faced significant restrictions in India, leaving British Guiana was not so attractive. The colony offered them greater freedom than they had at home, especially once their tenure as indentured labourers was over.

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Online Appendix

Caste categorisation

In the dataset of 16811 individuals, we are able to identify caste names for 16230 individuals based on the column "Caste" in the ship register. In most cases the caste name constituted names of *jatis* (or subcaste/sub clans within the varna system). However, in some cases the categorisation was broad (examples include "oriya", "zamindar", "Musalman") or would specify occupation (fisherman or washerman).

Table A1 reports the division of the sample according to religion. We built the category "Muslim" to include individuals whose caste corresponded to the following: "musalman", "nau muslim", "sheikh", "pathan". Note, it was not possible to categorize individuals who belonged to the different *jati* categories but may have converted to Islam. The category Christian corresponds to individuals who were categorised as Christians in the caste column.

(Table A1 here)

There were about 500 unique caste names in the sample. The caste groups with most members from the sample are as follows: "Chamar" (15.29%), "Ahir" (9.71%), "Kurmi"(5.25%), "Kori"(3.9%), "Kahar" (3.9%), "Thakur" (3.56%),"Rajput" (2.85%), "Chattri" (2.58%).

To see whether caste influenced the individual's decision to return, we have categorized caste groups according to various segments depending on whether they were high, middle or stigmatized castes. For the purpose of this paper we used three sources of information to categorize caste hierarchies 1) Texts on caste that were written in British India[76] 2) the list of contemporary Scheduled caste (SC)/scheduled tribe(ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC) and 3) the list of castes that fell under the Criminal Tribes Act (and were categorized as Denotified Tribes Act after Independence).

The texts of caste that were written in British India specified the traditional occupation of the caste group. In some cases, they gave indication of whether the caste was stigmatized. The

[76] These texts include: W Crooke (1896) *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh;* H H Risley(1891) *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal;* Edgar Thurston (1909), *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*

category of Hindu High Caste in this paper was generated using these texts. In terms of the varna system, this category constituted individuals who belong to Brahmin and Kshatriya groups. In addition, the High Caste group also includes non-Hindu high caste groups the "Pathans" and "Sheiks", and was used as robustness test (not presented in this paper).

We also tried categorizing the "middle" castes using these texts. The categories "Agricultural Caste" and "Artisanal/Trader Caste" were created for this purpose. However, there was not enough information on all the caste groups to be able to create a complete categorization. Furthermore, even within these castes, some groups were more stigmatized than others. For examples, artisans and traders who worked with raw hide or blood were stigmatised compared to other traders. Similarly, agricultural castes also had hierarchies. Lower end agricultural castes did not own land and were often forced to being bonded labourers with higher caste groups.

To get around the problem of incomplete information from the texts, we used contemporary caste categorisation within Independent India to categorize the caste groups. The category of Other Backward Class constitutes caste groups that fall amongst the middle caste groups but have been historically financially backward.

The stigmatized castes have been categorized using three sources. The first source is again the texts on castes, which was used to build the category "Low/Stigmatized Caste". Some low castes fell under the "Notified/Criminal Tribe" Act of British India, which effectively criminalized individuals of some caste groups. The categorization "Under Notified/Criminal Tribe" constitutes individuals who fell in this caste. Finally, we also use the contemporary SC/ST list. The current day SC/ST list is with the view of providing positive discrimination to oppressed castes. Since it is a category based on historic classification, we expect individuals currently in the SC/ST groups to have been stigmatized in British India. Note that while in most cases the three categories "Low/Stigmatized Caste", "Current Day SC/ST" and "Under Notified/Criminal Tribe Act" coincide, the caste "Ahir" which was under the Criminal Tribe Act does not fall under the current day SC/ST category. In the paper we define Dalit as being from "Current Day SC/ST". We have also run our estimations for the other definitions of stigmatized castes. The results are similar and can be made available on request.

Appendix Tables

Table A 1: Sample by religion

Religion	Observation	Percentage
Hindu	13,877	85.50
Muslim	2,330	14.36
Christian	23	0.14
Total	16230	100