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MARGARET MISHRA

ABSTRACT

When the second indenture ship, *Berar*, arrived in Fiji on 29 June 1882, the names and particulars of the Indians on board were recorded in the *General Register of Indian Immigrants*. The ‘Indian Indentured Labour Series List’ in the National Archives of Fiji and later historical accounts conclude the head count of immigrants on the *Berar* with E-Pass number 887. Curiously, these records have omitted a minute historical detail captured in the *General Register* – the scrawled entry relating to an Indian woman called Montowinie hastily appended at the end of the records, after the infants. Although she was not assigned an Emigration Pass at the point of departure from Garden Reach in Calcutta, Montowinie was allocated a most unusual pass number, 887½. This historical account sets out to rescue this pass-less indentured woman from the margins and reclaim her as a missing body from Fiji’s indenture history.

Key words: indenture, women, Fiji

INTRODUCTION

Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history.¹

On 31 March 1882 twenty-two-year-old Montowinie tiptoed into Fiji’s indenture history. It seems like she slipped past the manager of the depot, the ship’s surgeon and other officials to board the *Berar* in Garden Reach, Calcutta. This could explain why she was not issued an Emigration Pass (E-Pass) at the point of departure. When the *Berar* arrived in Fiji on 29 June 1882, Montowinie, despite her pass-less state, was counted as a ‘soul’ on this ship.² It was at this point that she was assigned

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² *General Register of Indian Immigrants*, Book 1, Entry on the *Berar*, National Archives of Fiji.
a most unusual E-Pass number, 887½. What did the fraction ½ signify? How should we read her appendage to 887, the number assigned to a five-month-old infant, Changgoor? And why was Montowinie only bestowed half the numerical standing of the potential indentured subject? Was this deliberate or an error? What were the implications of this elusive ½ on indenture history? This paper grapples with these questions as it attempts to recover a marginally positioned female body for history by navigating its way around two curious anomalies: a most peculiar E-Pass number and a non-existent one-page pass document. Here the historian, who is limited by the gaps in the colonizer’s paper empire, sets out to liberate this female spectre quarantined at the threshold of history by retrieving and assembling four fragments from the National Archives of Fiji: a brief entry in the General Register of Indian Immigrants; an excerpt from the Colonial Secretary’s Office Minute Paper (CSOMP) 668/1884; a list of rejected immigrants in CSOMP 997/1886; and the Repatriation Records for 1886. When these fragments are situated within an appropriate context, it is hoped that this disremembered woman with the only E-Pass number affixed with ½ in Fiji’s indenture history (and possibly in indenture history more generally) may be rescued from the margins and permitted to take the centre stage. To awaken her and claim her as a body lost within Fiji’s indenture history, we need to draw on a range of intersecting disciplines.

FROM MINOR FRAGMENTS TO ‘SMALL’ HISTORIES ABOUT WOMEN

Sudesh Mishra’s conception of ‘minor history’ is a fitting starting point because it implores the historian to inspect a fragment and restore it to its rightful place in history. He defines ‘minor history’ as ‘small dramas that inhabit the lower depths in the guise of footnotes, fragments, anecdotes, digressions, fleeting testimonies, parenthesis, curious asides, affective depositions and the like’. Mishra likens these ‘small dramas’ to ‘quasi-events’ – ‘events whose eventful status is in dispute inside the theatre of major history’. He goes on to illustrate the underpinnings of this theory in several journal articles, including his brilliant recovery of a passing comment in Kenneth Gillion’s Fiji’s Indian Migrants about the five Fijians who travelled to Fiji with the first batch of indentured labourers on the Leonidas in 1879.

Indeed, the colonial archive is filled with many seemingly ‘uneventful’ fragments yearning to enter history, for example, a puzzling footnote, a handwritten comment on an official record, or the addition of ½ to an existing E-Pass number. But how does the historian rousing the fragment wrestle with the ‘phenomenon of

3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
fragmentation’.\textsuperscript{7} Ranajit Guha suggests establishing ‘more and more linkages to work into the torn fabric of the past’ to restore it ‘to an ideal called the full story’.\textsuperscript{8} Even with the biases, silences, inconsistencies and errors within the colonial archive, it is possible to ‘read along the archival grain’\textsuperscript{9} to recreate the ‘small voice’ of an Indian indentured woman. ‘If this small voice of history gets a hearing at all […] it will do so only by interrupting the telling in the dominant version, breaking up its storyline and making a mess of its plot’.\textsuperscript{10} The discipline of ‘history from below’ shares feminist history’s contestation of ‘mainstream’ accounts. Berteke Waaldijk argues that

feminist historians realised that writing history is not so much the collection of objective facts as the construction of historical meaning and significance. The processes that determine whether something ends up in a history book or whether a person or event acquires historical significance prove to be connected to gender at many levels.\textsuperscript{11}

Thus framed within the intersecting trajectories of feminist history, women’s history, subaltern studies, anthropology, postcolonial studies, indenture history and minor history, it is hoped that this ‘archival story’\textsuperscript{12} contributes to the process of correcting ‘the erasures and misunderstandings of hegemonic, masculine history’\textsuperscript{13} by ‘restoring women to history and restoring our history to women’.\textsuperscript{14} More specifically, ‘The Curious Case of Montowinie’ makes a contribution to the growing body of writing on indentured women in Fiji by women.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{10} Guha, ‘Chandra’s Death’, 316.


\textsuperscript{12} Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives’, 87.


\textsuperscript{14} Waaldijk, ‘Of Stories’, 14.

The system of indentured labour was introduced in Fiji in 1879 by the governor of the British colonial government, Sir Arthur Gordon. After Fiji’s cession to Britain on 10 October 1874, Gordon sought a cheap external source of labour to protect and perpetuate the indigenous Fijian way of life in the villages. Between the years 1879–1919, some 60,538 Indian indentured labourers migrated to Fiji. They were recruited for a period of five years under the indenture agreement they called ‘girmit’. At the end of the term, they could either return to India at their own expense or renew their contracts for an additional five years. Upon the completion of a ten-year term, indentured labourers were entitled to repatriation at the expense of the government or they could choose to reside permanently in Fiji. John Kelly argues that ‘the girmit or agreement binding the Indian to five years of labour was not a simple contract between formally equal parties’. Sudesh Mishra goes on to dismantle the common association between ‘girmit’ and ‘agreement’ as he argues: ‘There is a measure of translatable discontinuity between agreement and girmit inasmuch as what is transferred across from the first term is not carried over into signification’. Girmit then is ‘not agreement’ as ‘it has little to do with a contract based on mutual understanding of the terms of its enactment’. The lived reality of the girmit’s non-agreement is highlighted in the paragraphs that follow.

Indian men migrated from India to Fiji to earn a living and remove themselves and their families from situations of extreme poverty and famine as this was their expected gender role at the time. They were sometimes accompanied by their wives and children. What is surprising, however, is the high incidence of women who migrated as individuals, unaccompanied by any relatives. Brij Lal contends that 86.8 per cent of the adult males who went to Fiji were ‘single’ and 63.9 per cent of the adult women were ‘single’. The intriguing question is why did ‘single’ women migrate from India to Fiji? Lal suggests that Indian women ‘migrated to escape from domestic quarrels, economic hardships, the social stigma attached to young widows and brides who had bought inadequate dowry and the general dreariness of rural Indian life’. Others were
bribed or lured from their villages by unscrupulous recruiters (arkatis). Shireen Lateef confirms the trickery of some recruiters as she relates how her grandmother came to Fiji:

While my grandmother was getting water from a well, a recruiter approached her and asked her whether she would like to go to Fiji, a faraway place where there was good weather, picturesque surroundings, easy work and plenty of food. Without telling anyone, she left with him immediately.

There were also accounts of Indian women who were rejected at the depot but managed to board departing ships on their own accord.

If approved for emigration, recruits were sent to the accommodation depot where they had to wait for at least a week before embarkation. After the final medical examination they were awarded an Emigration Pass and a ‘tin ticket’ or ship number that allowed them to be identified during the journey. They were inspected by the Emigration Agent and the ship’s surgeon at the time of embarkation. Upon arrival in the colony to which they were assigned, the names of the passengers were recorded in an Indian Immigrants Register or in the context of Fiji the General Register of Indian Immigrants (hereafter referred to as the General Register). Thembisa Waetjen and Goolam Vahed describe the general process practised across the colonies:

The immigration agent shall keep a register, in which shall be inserted the names of all Coolie immigrants who may be hereafter introduced into this Colony at the public expense, and shall number each of such immigrants by a particular number, commencing with the number one, and proceeding by numerical progression, and shall distinguish therein, under different heads, the number, name, age, and sex of every such immigrant, and the time when, and the place from which, and the vessel in which, such immigrants shall have arrived.

A ratio of 40 adult women to one hundred adult men was adhered to during the recruitment process, as per the requirement of the Emigration laws and regulations of India. In their 1916 ‘Report on Indentured Labour’, Charles Andrews and William Pearson argued that the disproportion between the sexes was ‘mostly

28 Ibid., 62.
responsible for the abnormal number of murders and kindred crimes among Indians.\textsuperscript{30} The official term used to describe the motive for many of these murders was ‘sexual jealousy’.\textsuperscript{31} Between 1885 and 1920, 96 indentured immigrants in Fiji were murdered of whom 68 were women and only 28 men.\textsuperscript{32} In ‘Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations’,\textsuperscript{33} Lal argues that ‘sexual jealousy’ was only one of many interlocking factors that contributed to Indian murders and suicides during the indenture period.\textsuperscript{34} He contends:

There is no reason to doubt that sexual jealousy, arising out of a disproportionate sex ratio, did play a part. But the uncritical application of a blanket generalization, created and sustained by men, has led to the neglect of material that suggests other causes and motives for suicide – factors which point to the dislocation caused by emigration and to the structure of the plantation system itself.\textsuperscript{35}

The overall conditions for Indians throughout the colonies were appalling, and Fiji was no exception. Here the discontinuity between agreement and girmit that Sudesh Mishra writes about is most jarring. Girmitiya women agreed to sell their labour for a wage. They did not ‘agree’ to some of the other conditions or experiences they may have been subjected to, for example, rape, assault or long hours of work on the plantations during sickness and pregnancy.\textsuperscript{36} Marina Carter argues further that women who were deemed troublesome or a health risk, or who caught the eye of an estate manager or an overseer, or who simply could not earn enough to support themselves had little security in a sugar economy which under-valued their labour and thereby problematised the sexual and family relations of women under indenture.\textsuperscript{37}

In addition to the poor living and working conditions, the wage earned by women was lower than the amount earned by men – five pennies a day for task-work in 1902 for women and eight pennies a day for men.\textsuperscript{38} The task system was a major factor that

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Naidu, \textit{Violence of Indenture}, 61.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 138.
\textsuperscript{36} Brij Lal, \textit{Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji} (Suva: Fiji Museum; Canberra: Division of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2000).
contributed to the exploitation of indentured labourers. ‘A task was defined as the amount of work which an ordinary able-bodied adult immigrant could do in six hours’ steady work (a woman’s task being three-fourths of a man’s task)’. 39 ‘It involved disagreement about what was a fair task, and the remuneration of incomplete tasks’. 40 It is therefore no surprise that Indians likened this dehumanizing system to ‘narak’ or hell; consequently, girmitiya women engaged in various forms of retaliation including feigning ignorance, refusing or neglecting to do stipulated work, refusing to obey orders, misconduct and prostitution.42

THE NON-EXISTENT E-PASS

The General Register comprises nine books that are housed in the National Archives of Fiji. This register offers a summary of demographic and other information relating to Indians who were indentured to Fiji. The entries for men, women, children and infants were presented in ascending order and corresponded with the E-Pass numbers. They were ‘assigned cumulatively from one register to the next’ and captured the following information: ship number, E-Pass number, name of immigrant, father’s name, age, sex, vessel, date of arrival, cost of passage, employer or plantation assigned to, and remarks. The remarks section included the date of return to India or the date of death (if the death occurred in Fiji). Other comments relating to the labourer such as ‘leper’, ‘rejected’, ‘passport number’ or ‘executed for murder’ were also entered in this section. When the first ship carrying indentured labourers from Calcutta, Leondias, arrived in Fiji on 15 May 1879, the E-pass numbers from 1 to 463 were assigned to the immigrants. The first immigrant on the second ship, Berar, was then assigned the number 464 and the last number allocated was 887½.44 E-Pass 887 belonged to a five-month-old infant, Changoor, the son of one Kassee.45 The first passenger on the third indenture ship, Poonah, which arrived in Fiji on 17 September 1882, was a man named Onrao Singh, E-Pass number 888.46

44 General Register, Book 1.
45 Emigration Pass 887, Changoor, National Archives of Fiji.
46 Emigration Pass 887, Onrao Singh, National Archives of Fiji.
The E-Pass, completed in India and issued in the place of a passport, contained full information about the personal and social details of each emigrant who embarked for the colonies (sex, age, marital status), place of origin and registration in India, date of migration, name of ship and the depot number of the emigrant beside the certification of appropriate authorities about the voluntary nature of the transaction.47

Brij Lal contends:

The passes were constructed on the basis of information in the Emigration Registers in the district depots, duplicate copies of which were forwarded to Calcutta (or Madras). From there they were sent along with the emigrants to the colonies where, after appropriate examination, they were filed alphabetically year by year and subsequently deposited with the Department of Labour.48

While E-Passes 887 and 888 are accessible, staff in the National Archives of Fiji have confirmed that 887½ does not exist among the full set of E-Passes preserved in Fiji, including those on microfilm.49 Its absence from history is noteworthy. Without the evidence of the E-Pass that certifies the voluntary nature of the ‘transaction’, it may be argued that Montowinie was not obligated to engage in plantation work as she did not consent to the terms of the contract. In other words, even though she boarded the Berar and was assigned a pass number, she did not place her mark in the form of a thumbprint on the document that permitted the sale of her labour power.

Figure 1 extracted from the General Register (Book 1) is the only confirmation we have that 22-year-old Montowinie, daughter of one Sewnath, travelled on the Berar from Calcutta to Fiji in 1882. The usual details on the E-Pass, for example, caste, marital status, height, bodily marks and demographic details remain unknown for Montowinie.

Despite her inclusion in the head count of females on the Berar (115 females) and in the total tally of immigrants on this ship (425 people) in the General Register in 1882, she is subsequently excluded as a ‘body’ on the Berar in historical records after 1886 (Figure 2).

Table 1 cites 424 arrivals on the Berar and concludes the head count at E-Pass number 887.50

An obvious reason for her omission could be the dismissal of number 887½ as an outright error. When the fraction ½ is affixed to an existing E-Pass number, it

48 Ibid., 102.
49 Losena Tudru, pers. comm., 18 December 2018, National Archives of Fiji.
50 Indian Indenture Ship List, National Archives of Fiji.
signals a deviation from the norm, a numerical abnormality that the historian re-examining the records may interpret as ‘incorrect’. However, the paragraphs that follow attempt to undo this assertion by arguing that the colonial record-keeper deliberately added the fraction \( \frac{1}{2} \) to the number 887. The critical question is ‘why’?

**TABLE 1:** Indenture Ship List Summary, National Archives of Fiji

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of ship</th>
<th>Date of arrival</th>
<th>Registered no.</th>
<th>No. of arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berar</td>
<td>June 29, 1882</td>
<td>464–887</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonah</td>
<td>September 17, 1882</td>
<td>888–1364</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ON THE THRESHOLD OF HISTORY: ‘REJECTED’, ‘INSANE’ AND SEXUALLY DEVIANT

The General Register is a critical text for scholars studying Fiji’s indenture history. The entries within the register present personal information about the girmitiyas who came to Fiji. They also offer a glimpse into the power dynamics surrounding the record-keeping process during the colonial period. If the entry on the Berar in 1882 is accepted as a text of history, then the E-Pass number 887½ (and what it could signify) may be explained in terms of Montowinie’s paratextual positioning in the General Register. In his ‘Introduction to the Paratext’, Gérard Genette defines the ‘paratext’ as ‘the undecided zone between the inside and the outside’.\(^{31}\) One does not know if one should consider that they [the paratext] belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to represent it.\(^{32}\) For Philippe Lejeune, the paratext is ‘the fringe of the printed text which, in reality controls the whole reading’.\(^{33}\) In light of these definitions, we could argue that Montowinie sits on the ‘undecided zone’ between the labourers on the Berar’s ship list and the abyss beyond. The blank row separating entry 887 from 887½, and 887½ from all the other immigrants on the Berar, is methodical, not accidental. Following Barbara Hernstein Smith, texts, ‘like all the other objects we engage with, bear the marks and signs of their prior valuing and evaluation by our fellow creatures and are thus, we might say, always to some extent pre-evaluated for us’.\(^{34}\) When this quotation is placed within the context of indenture, the way the marginalized, female subject is valued becomes a critical issue for contention. Smith’s contention triggers two questions: Was the half mark bestowed upon Montowinie an indicator of the way the colonial record-keeper/s pre-evaluated her, or more specifically, her labour power? Or was it simply a tactic employed to camouflage an earlier oversight? It is to the latter question that I first turn.

Gaiutra Bahadur recounts the remarkable story of how a determined single mother in her late twenties boarded an indenture ship bound for British Guiana:

Shortly after The Lena sailed in 1899, its surgeon superintendent discovered a stowaway. Munia was a single mother in her late twenties, possibly a widow […] The doctor at Garden Reach turned Munia down because she had venereal disease, but she ignored the rejection, nonchalantly boarding the ship with everyone else.\(^{55}\)

Munia was discovered by the ship’s surgeon after she presented a ticket borrowed from a legitimately registered labourer and an Emigration Pass belonging to an

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{55}\) Bahadur, Coolie Woman, 68.
epileptic woman\textsuperscript{56} that resulted in the exposure of her double identity. With Munia’s story as a precedent, one could propose that Montowinie (who was already in the depot) somehow boarded the Berar without the knowledge of the relevant authorities. By the time she was discovered, the E-Pass number 888 was already allocated to one Onrao Singh on the Poonah, which departed Garden Reach, Calcutta, on 19 June 1882.\textsuperscript{57} Instead of leaving her ‘numberless’, the colonial official filling out the record after the Berar’s arrival on 29 June 1882, gave her the number 887½. The positioning of her entry after an infant (and not with the women) reinforces the claim that she was hurriedly appended to the list when the anomaly was discovered.

The entry in the \textit{General Register} draws attention to another category of marginalization – the red ‘R’ or ‘Rejected’ group characterized by a red line scoring through the labourer’s name. Indians who were classified as ‘Rejected’ included those who were deemed ‘insane’ or physically ‘incapable’ but managed to pass the medical examinations in India prior to departure; those who developed a mental illness or another condition during the journey to Fiji; and those who could not meet the productivity threshold upon arrival in Fiji due to mental or physical illness or a deliberate unwillingness to work. Sometimes there was an overlap between these ways of classifying labourers. Montowinie was rejected because she was declared ‘insane upon arrival’. Like Munia, she may have been rejected in the depot in Garden Reach, Calcutta, but was still physically present at the time of embarkation and somehow wandered onto the ship. When Montowinie arrived in Fiji (by which time she was deemed ‘insane’), the comment ‘Not indentured’ was scrawled in the column that should have carried the details of the labourer’s place of indenture and the name of the employer. This label could also signify the absence of the indenture contract. However, it was later crossed out in the \textit{General Register}, thus temporarily removing the mark of rejection etched alongside Montowinie’s name.

Although there were seven other ‘Rejected’ immigrants on the Berar – Fuji (E-Pass 487), Janki (E-Pass 621), Kallay Khan (E-Pass 627), Bayrani Singh (E-Pass 639), Ram Singh (E-Pass 677), Narpati (E-Pass 794) and Muthuria (E-Pass 663)\textsuperscript{58} – they all held E-Passes and none were assigned unusual numbers. Some, like Janki, were admitted to the Public Lunatic Asylum in Suva. In 1884, Fiji’s Colonial Secretary and Chief Medical Officer, Dr William MacGregor, played a critical role in introducing lunacy legislation in Fiji and establishing the Public Lunatic Asylum in Suva.\textsuperscript{59} Although the records do not show that Montowinie was admitted to the asylum between the years 1884 and 1886, it is important to point out that the tag of ‘insanity’ during the colonial period was indeed very murky. Those who rejected plantation labour or feigned madness by engaging in acts of everyday resistance were also categorized as ‘lunatics’. In his book on India’s native-only lunatic asylums from 1857 to 1900, \textit{Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism}, James Mills contends that colonial asylums were created to impose control over dangerous Indians and

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{General Register}, Book 1.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{General Register}, Book 1.

\textsuperscript{59} Leckie, ‘Lost Souls’, 125.
to remove ‘the troublesome and the unproductive’. Those who disrupted ‘the regimes and disciplines of work’ were sent to asylums ‘where their perceived aversion to labour would be further observed, recorded and utilized to reinforce the diagnosis of sanity’. For example, indentured woman Dharma (E-Pass 2012) was initially ‘Rejected’, then sent to the Public Lunatic Asylum for a period of time. After a ‘re-examination’, she was assigned to the Vucimaca Plantation in Nausori where she completed the five-year term of her indenture.

One and a half years after her arrival in Fiji, Montowinie was sent to work as a ‘house servant’ for Mssrs Wilson and Murchie in Deuba from 18 December 1883 until 26 April 1884. As she was rejected for field work because she was deemed ‘insane upon arrival’, it seems that an attempt was made by the colonial government to offer her employment to dissuade her from begging or prostituting herself. However, this attempt was unsuccessful. Some four months later, she was terminated from the position of house servant. It is unclear why. In a letter to the emigration agent in Calcutta in May 1885, the agent general in Fiji complains about ‘the inability to procure skilled house servants’. After some discussion on the topic, he writes:

This supports itself to me however as a suitable opportunity for expressing my regret that on one or two occasions complaints have been received here from Calcutta, of a quality totally unfitted for service or labour of any kind, and who become a burden on the colony and on their friends and compatriots.

The agent general goes on to list eleven examples of such persons, including one ‘Montowinie’ E-Pass 887½. His final statement on the category of persons identified above is:

You will by reading perceive the expediency of eliminating such people as them from the colony, especially inasmuch as Indian immigration has not existed long enough here to enable us to return them to India under proper medical charge. They are therefore remaining detained here much against their own inclination and my will, and have to remain in a country where no person can earn his sustenance by begging, as was probably their work in India.

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63 *Plantation Register* 1883, National Archives of Fiji.
64 CSOMP 1423/1885, National Archives of Fiji.
65 CSOMP 997/1886, National Archives of Fiji.
66 CSOMP 241/1886, National Archives of Fiji.
67 CSOMP 241/1886, National Archives of Fiji.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Fiji’s governor from 1880 to 1885, William Des Voeux, endorsed this view as he concluded in his exchange with the secretary to the Government of India in 1885 that these ‘lunatics’ should be returned to India because ‘for India the cost of taking proper care of such patients would probably be much less than here, while residence in their own country would in such cases increase the probability of a restoration to health’ (Table 2).70

In light of the colonial position on ‘insanity’, Montowinie was sent back to India on the Boyne on 8 May 1886 with the ‘8 Decrepit and Insane Indian Immigrants’ (Table 3).71

The Repatriation Records for 1886 further reinforce the association between (the now 26-year-old) Montowinie and the E-Pass number 887½. They also confirm that Montowinie went back to India without a husband or any children.72 It may be possible that she had a husband and children in Fiji but this information is not evident in any of the records.

To further evaluate Montowinie’s status as ‘insane’, ‘unsound’ or a ‘lunatic’, it is useful to refer to The English Lunacy Act of 1858. The Act states: “The word ‘lunatic’, as used in this Act shall mean every person found by due course of law to be of unsound mind and incapable of managing his affairs”.73 In other words, ‘a person who is suffering from lunatic symptoms who is still capable of “managing his
“own affairs” would still have rights. It is only when he is unable to prove his “social usefulness” that he is labelled a “lunatic”. The category of ‘social usefulness’ is not explained in the Act, however, in the colonizer’s mind, it seemed to overlap with economic usefulness and labour productivity. Jacqueline Leckie’s contention that ‘work was a dominant trope within discourse concerning women’s insanity’ strengthens the colonizer’s correlation between economic productivity (work) and insanity. Montowinie’s gross earnings as a ‘house servant’ in Deuba totalled a miniscule £2.17.9. However, the revelation in Table 2 that she ‘earns over £30 by prostitution in Suva’ is worth discussing. The sum of £30 is significant in the context of indenture yet the inclusion of the preposition ‘over’ seems to imply that this figure may be exaggerated. Furthermore, the timeframe for this income is unclear. Did Montowinie earn £30 in a month, six months or two years? How is the record-keeper able to know or track her earnings? If she is deemed ‘insane’ how would Montowinie herself record her earnings? Who were her ‘clients’ – indentured Indians or the colonial record-keepers? The authority with which the record-keeper writes is disconcerting. Moreover, the revelation that Montowinie ‘travelled to Suva’ from Deuba in the 1880s to sell her sexual labour involved making travel arrangements that may have been logistically quite difficult at the time. It also implies that she made a conscious choice to prostitute herself. Thus it would be difficult to argue that she was ‘incapable of managing her affairs’.77

74 Ibid., 36.
76 CSOMP 1423/1885, National Archives of Fiji.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regn No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Father’s Name</th>
<th>Ship &amp; Ships No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>268</td>
<td>Jassaie</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Jindhoos</td>
<td>Konidas 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8878</td>
<td>Monteenie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Junaiah</td>
<td>Berar 228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>621</td>
<td>Sandhi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mahadin</td>
<td>Nanak 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>905</td>
<td>Ramathan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gulzar</td>
<td>Nanak 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1517</td>
<td>Bhagwan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bohorin</td>
<td>Nanak 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2729</td>
<td>Sudhan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bundhoos</td>
<td>Ysia 474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2695</td>
<td>Vugari</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Debordin</td>
<td>Navah 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4957</td>
<td>Saita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ori</td>
<td>Main 290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Montowinie’s exhibition of ‘sexual excess’ may have prompted an overstated reaction from the authorities who were anxious about the eroding moral status of the so-called ‘simple, ignorant coolie woman.’

During indenture, the ‘coolie woman’ was juxtaposed against the ‘contemporary Victorian ideal’ of the ‘angel in the house’ as well as the middle-class Indian woman who was associated with virtues of chastity, honour (izzat), discipline and devotion. Sumita Chatterjee explains how the British imperial view

objectified and codified ‘Indian reality’ and her ‘subject natives’ in the framework of ‘traditionalism’, by the privileging of ‘scriptural’ interpretations of social law at the expense of the fluidity of local community practices. Such strict codification and categorisation of Britain’s view of India, reinforced a certain narrow Brahmanical and Victorian view of women, leveling out in British colonial perception at least, the variety of transgressions of priestly Hindu scriptures that existed in the differing practices of customary laws and social conduct.

According to the colonizer’s moralized and rigid perception of women, descriptions of indentured women pivoted around vices like promiscuity and shame. In this sense, Victorian and middle-class Indian women were the benchmark for assessing morality among indentured women in Fiji. Montowinie deviated from this benchmark because she displayed traits of sexual deviance. The colonizer’s response, to borrow the words of Denise Russell, was to use medicine to appropriate ‘the social right to pass judgement about sexuality’. Russell contends further: ‘It was women more than men who were associated with sexuality, embodying it, having too much of it […] rebelling against it, or disturbing men with it’. By establishing a connection between morality, deviance and disease, the colonial record-keepers managed to contain, socially control and eventually repatriate indentured women like Montowinie who transgressed the boundaries of patriarchal morality.

Finally, the curious case of Montowinie could be read as an internal prank by the colonial record-keeper. Sometimes brief, personal and offensive comments made their way into the records to sum up the record-keeper’s perception of a

82 Ibid.
83 Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives’, 87.
labourer. Such comments reflected ‘prior valuing and evaluation’\textsuperscript{84} of Indian immigrants, particularly in relation to their labour power. They also captured the colonizer’s biased and stereotypical assessment of indentured women. This is illustrated in the example of an indentured woman called Jaita (E-Pass 4957) who came to Fiji on the ship \textit{Main} in 1885.\textsuperscript{85} Like Montowinie, Jaita was classified as ‘insane’ and sent back to India on the \textit{Boyne} in 1886.\textsuperscript{86} During her time in Fiji she was admitted to the Public Lunatic Asylum in Suva and was diagnosed with ‘chronic dementia’.\textsuperscript{87} The following entry appeared alongside her name in the minutes of the Public Lunatic Asylum in 1885: ‘Jaita. Female. Indian. Admitted under an order of B. G. Corney Esquire Acting Agent General for Immigration. Medical Certificate B. G. Corney Esq. M.R.G.S. W. M. Gregor Esquire. M. D. Admitted 21st August, 1885’.\textsuperscript{88} In a similar way to Montowinie, Jaita exhibited ‘sexual excess’. To demonstrate this, the record-keeper pencilled in alongside the category in the E-Pass ‘If married, to whom’, the pronoun ‘everybody’.\textsuperscript{89} Derogatory comments such as ‘idiot’\textsuperscript{90} and ‘imbecile’\textsuperscript{91} also appeared as belated paratexts on indentured women’s Emigration Passes to mock them and warn the authorities of their alleged economic ‘uselessness’.

On \textit{The Bann}’s journey from Calcutta to Demerara in 1893, the surgeon noted in his diary: ‘Discovered an idiot woman on board, Radhia No. 237’.\textsuperscript{92} Assuming that Montowinie’s alleged ‘insanity’ was discovered in a similar way and that the colonial record-keeper who compiled the list of passengers on the \textit{Berar} after the ship arrived in Fiji on 29 June 1882 had full knowledge of her disordered state of mind either because he witnessed this himself or the information was conveyed to him by the ship’s surgeon or another official, then perhaps the number 887½ was mockingly imposed to insult her mental faculties and mark her off as a person who would become an expense to the state. She was presented as the point equidistant between 887 and 888. The half mark, signifying a deficiency or lack, could reflect the colonizer’s deduction that Montowinie would not be able to meet the productivity expectation of the indentured female labourer. To draw attention to this ‘lack’ and issue a warning internally, the record-keeper simply inserted the fraction $\frac{1}{2}$ to the last E-Pass number on the \textit{Berar}. The implication behind this was that the woman was not quite ‘all there’ and was only deemed worthy of half the status of ‘personhood’ (a category that was already questionable within the context of indenture). In order to survive in a country where she was deemed unemployable, Montowinie turned to sexual labour as a means of survival until she was finally sent back to India in 1886.

\textsuperscript{84} Smith, ‘Value/Evaluation’, 183.
\textsuperscript{85} Emigration Pass 4957, Jaita, National Archives of Fiji.
\textsuperscript{86} CSOMP 1423/1885, National Archives of Fiji.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} CSOMP 2600/1885, National Archives of Fiji.
\textsuperscript{89} Emigration Pass 4957.
\textsuperscript{90} CSOMP 1432/1884, National Archives of Fiji.
\textsuperscript{91} Emigration Pass 4957.
\textsuperscript{92} Bahadur, \textit{Coolie Woman}, 65.
RESTORING MONTOWINIE’S ½ PASS NUMBER TO HISTORY

This minor historical account has attempted to rescue a multiply ‘rejected’ indentured woman from the threshold of colonial and indenture history. Through the act of listening closely to Montowinie’s ‘small voice’, a voice that has been dismissed on the basis of markers like ‘insanity’, sexuality, gender and ethnicity, I have tried to recover a handful of forgotten fragments and restore them to history. Indeed, we can only speculate whether the allocation of a most unusual Emigration Pass number, 887½, was an error, a prank or a deliberate exclusion based on the colonizer’s pre-evaluation of an indentured woman because the colonial archive does not give us enough threads to weave together a full narrative with definite conclusions. What it does allow us to do is to recount and reclaim a woman who existed in our indenture history but who was later dismissed in the official records owing to her very unusual E-Pass number. We can verify that there were 425 passengers on the Berar in 1882 with the E-Pass numbers 464–887½, including one Montowinie. She may have been ‘demented’, ‘useless’, ‘rejected’, a prostitute, or a stowaway, but she was still a potential indentured subject, a ‘soul’ on the Berar in 1882. On account of the curious anomaly surrounding her in the colonial archives, it is hoped that Montowinie now stands out as the only girmitiya woman in Fiji’s history with ½ affixed to the E-Pass number assigned to her. She will no longer be ‘lost for history’.