

Email address: [guyanainstituteofhistoricalresearch@hotmail.com](mailto:guyanainstituteofhistoricalresearch@hotmail.com)/[hazelwoolford@gmail.com](mailto:hazelwoolford@gmail.com)

<https://issuu.com/hazelwoolford/docs/gihr-online-news-august-2019>

## Happy Emancipation day 2019



**Registration for 2019/20 students for Online History courses has started. Request your course outlines.**

## Table of Contents

1. Letter to the Editor.
4. Oil and gas.
7. Guyanese Chef Kashif Browne  
...creating a stir at The White House.
10. Quotes of the President of Guyana.
12. Guyana Politics: Claudette Singh  
appointed new GECOM Chairperson.
13. Georgetown Guyana: African Mall  
takes over Main Street.
14. Guyana Institute of Historical  
Research establishes link with  
Guyana Cultural Association of USA
17. Jazz and soul concert.
18. Living Legends.
21. Scenes of the 2019 KIDS History  
Vacation School.
22. Speech by Professor emeritus Clem  
Seecharan at the 250 anniversary of  
the 1763 slave rebellion.



## Acknowledgements

Eric Phillips  
 Ministry of the Presidency  
 Stabroek News  
 Guyanese Online  
 Kaieteur News  
 Demerara waves  
 Guyana Chronicle  
 Guyana Times  
 Caribbean News  
 Guyana Broadcasting Corporation.  
 Ministry of the Presidency.  
 News source  
 The West Indian . 18 July, 2019 . Page 32  
 www.thewestindianonline.com  
 PROFILE of The Week By Dr. DHANPAUL  
 Wesley Kirton

## Editorial Committee

Deon Abrams  
 Paul Moore  
 Tota Mangar  
 Nigel Westmaas  
 Timothy Crichlow  
 Fitz Gladstone Alert  
 David Hinds  
 Thomas Singh  
 Hazel Woolford

### Videographers/Photographers

Lawrence Gaskin  
 Natasha Azeez  
 Walter George  
 Contributors  
 Kumar Mahabir  
 Dhanpal Narine

**Face to face meeting for all students is on 12 September.**

**Venue: 106 Atlantic Gardens.**

## Letter to the Editor



July 14, 2019

Dear Editor,

### **People who claim to be academics and political scientists**

Last Friday (July 12), the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) ordered President David Granger and his Cabinet in Guyana to resign immediately from Government and call elections within three (3) months.

This now seven-month elections' delay has clearly brought out the political and ethnic biases of academics in Guyana such as Dr. David Hinds who is also a member of the ruling coalition Government. It seems that the two Davids think alike in their insistence that the illegal government should remain in power.

At a history conference in Guyana two weeks ago which I attended, Hinds again showed his ethnic biases. He gave the feature address on the topic of Dr. Walter Rodney, whom he described glowingly as a "black nationalist" and "a Pan Africanist."

Hinds pointed out the marginalization of certain groups such as Rastafarians in the Caribbean but did not utter a word about the alienation or tokenism of (East) Indians in regional institutions like the very CCJ, CARICOM, the Caribbean Reparations Commission, etc.

During the Questions and Answers (Q and A) session, I asked Hinds why he spoke about trade union leaders such as Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler and not mention even once the name of Bhadase Sagan Maraj, Adrian Kola Rienzi (Krishna Deonarine) or Basdeo Panday.

I also asked Hinds why he spoke about Guyanese and Trinidadian icons such as CLR James, Makandal Dagga, Eusi Kwayana and George Padmore and not even once mentioned the name of Cheddi Jagan or VS Naipaul, the only Nobel Prize laureate from Trinidad and Tobago.

I also asked Hinds why did he talk about cultural creations in the Caribbean such as calypso, steelpan and ska, and made no reference to chutney music as well as "doubles" street food or the curried "sour" sauce and "puri" roti from Guyana.

Hinds replied about not having enough time to mention everybody [Indians particularly] in his hour-long address. Pity these people who claim to be objective academics and political scientists in the Caribbean.

Dr. Kumar Mahabir

San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago



Save the children. Enroll

them in the Queens Daycare and, Child development center. Call Sister Elvira 2275093



The West Indian . July 13, 2019 . Page 32 [www.thewestindianonline.com](http://www.thewestindianonline.com)

The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the position or policy of the THE WEST INDIAN.

COMMENTARY By Dr. DHANPAUL NARINE

Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

### Oil and Gas:

Oil and Gas: We must use oil to help the people, says Dr. Mangal

By: Dhanpaul Narine

First Oil will find a Guyana that is divided right down the middle. After 53 years of independence, and various governments, the country is no closer to unity as many would like. The mere mention of the words



‘general elections’ is good enough to harden attitudes and to send the racial groups into their respective camps to widen the divisions. Guyana is a country in which racism continues to cast its pernicious shadow over the body politic and no amount of sweet-talk from the politicians can paper over the deep divide.

Professor Tarron Khemraj spoke at the oil and gas meeting (OGGN) in New York. He makes the point that Guyana needs to find a ‘new set of arrangements so that there is co-operation in big decision making. As far as oil and gas is concerned, there has to be joint ownership of the project.’ The point is that a united country stands a better chance in the negotiations and the management of its resources.



Dr. Jan Mangal also presented at the OGGN meeting. He is Guyanese and he studied at the University of Edinburgh, and later at Oxford University, from whence he earned his doctorate. Dr. Mangal has extensive knowledge in oil and gas and was an advisor to Guyana's President, David Granger. He sees oil and gas as a marriage between Guyana 'that has its problems and its history, and oil that comes with its own unique set of problems.'

He looks at the risk factors that Guyana is bringing to the marriage. According to Dr. Mangal, Guyana's economic performance since 1966 has been disappointing. This should not have been the case when one considers the wealth that the country possesses. There are issues in politics that are mainly driven by race. He said that there is a trust deficit in Guyana; the races do not trust each other and there is also a leadership problem. 'We do not have a situation in which there is a leader that has come along

and tried to push the country toward unity and development,' he said.

Dr. Mangal said that over the years Guyana has suffered from dictatorships and corruption. He stated that in any analysis of oil and gas in Guyana one has to look at the brain drain. In the past 53 years, many of the top skills have left the country, the effects of which would be difficult to reverse. Guyana does not have a good track record in managing its resources and gold is an example. But it's not all doom and gloom; Dr. Mangal points out that Guyana has managed to maintain its green potential.

What does the oil industry bring to Guyana, given the situation in the country? In other words, what are some of the risk factors that oil will bring to Guyana? Oil has the potential to be hugely transformative, says Dr. Mangal. But in many cases, oil has failed to transform economies. In fact, the situation can become worse, especially in countries that have weak or fragile institutions and with internal divisions such as Guyana. According to Dr. Mangal, 'Guyana is a perfect example of a country that can become undermined by oil and that is why Guyana has to work even harder to make the new found oil positively transformative.'

Oil has corruption scandals around it to the tune of billions of dollars. The big oil companies such as Exxon and Chevron or BP are powerful internationally. Dr. Mangal says that if a government takes on Exxon, for instance, that government is taking on 'a part of the United States as they have powerful sovereign backers.' Then there are other factors that have a bearing on oil such as climate change and a rise in the sea level.

There is documented history of the mistakes that other countries have made in relation to their experiences with oil. The argument that Dr. Mangal proposes is that Guyana should learn from those mistakes. He said that, 'Guyana should be a test case to the world that we can do oil to help the people, that we could do oil in a way that benefits the country. We can do oil in a way that positively transforms the country.'

Dr. Mangal believes that we are already seeing some negative results in Guyana. He argues that we are not doing our best to ensure that Guyana is positively transformed and that we are not learning from the mistakes of others. He posits that there are two aspects on which the planners should focus. The first is to maximize the revenue, to get the most out of the contracts. Secondly, once the money is earned we have to make sure that there is accountability and that we don't waste it.

Dr. Mangal said that Guyana has a long history of 'white elephant' projects. He proceeded to discuss the location and structure of the oil. He said that since the oil is found in one huge block this poses problems. The contract is written for this block. It follows that renegotiation of the contract has to be for the oil in this block. Once the oil starts flowing, a great deal of the money will be used to pay off the expenses of the oil companies. This is known as cost recovery.

The contract for the Stabroek Block was examined in some detail. He said that Guyana is only getting 52 per cent of the revenue in the Stabroek Block. But if one looks at other countries where oil was discovered, similar to Guyana, they are getting between 63 and 72 per cent. Dr. Mangal says that is not acceptable and therefore Guyana needs to renegotiate the contract. He said that Exxon knows that Guyana will ask for more money as this part of their business practice.

In a recent release on social media, Dr. Mangal states that no Guyanese has the assets or expertise to pump 100,000 barrels of oil per day. He argues that, 'no Guyanese should try to get any of these deep water blocks, or any blocks.' Dr. Mangal asks a series of questions that need answers.

He says, 'Is it not a theft of our oil patrimony when you see companies and individuals like Mid-Atlantic (Dookie), Catelaya (Pereira) getting blocks? Is it not a theft of our oil patrimony when you see companies like JHI, Ratio, etc. getting blocks? Is it not a theft of our oil patrimony if individuals like Philips and Ceres are allowed to get blocks? How will President Granger prove to Guyanese that he has their interests at heart? Will he rescind the Canje and Kaieteur blocks?'

These are serious questions with the specter of elections in Guyana and the dark undercurrent of racial disunity that they bring. Dr. Mangal should be commended for a well thought out presentation. The authorities in Guyana should pay attention to his insights.

**Shop at the online GHR store**



## Guyanese Chef Kashif Browne ...creating a stir at The White House



Life is sweet for **Guyanese Chef Kashif Browne**. At age 29, he is creating a stir and living his dream at The White House, the official residence of the President of the United States.

**Kashif is the Executive Sous Chef at The White House.** He completed his secondary education at The Bishops' High School and started a career in banking, but left all of that behind when he migrated to the United States just after completing a semester at the University of Guyana.

Kashif comes from a family of Chefs and developed a love for the culinary arts from an early age. He has great memories of his mother being in the kitchen whipping up dishes for him and his siblings. His interest in food blossomed after he moved to the United States and got accepted into the International Culinary School at The Art Institute of Washington. While there, he was recognized as a "genius in the kitchen" with "gifted hands" for any dish that he cooked. When Kashif completed his training, he added more flavour to his credentials following a stint of work and study in Italy. He embellished his culinary skills at The Zeppelin Ristorante in Orvieto and was also a member of the Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society before graduating from the Culinary School of the Art Institute. Within seven years, Kashif traveled and worked at different corners of America, gradually becoming a culinary savant. Some of his notable portfolio entries include Las Vegas, New York, the French Ambassador's Residence, Sheryl Crow and Kid Rock concerts and the Grammy Award Ceremony. Kashif says he has become increasingly grateful to the "erudite chefs" who taught him along the way, sharing their techniques, recipes and some of the great

# Subscribe Today

1. Women's History magazine- \$1,500 per annum
2. Lessons in Guyanese History -\$1,600
3. Guyana Institute of Historical Research Journal- \$1,600.
4. Outline in Guyanese History-\$500.
5. GIHR Book marks \$40.



Figure 1 Iron Chef, Masaharu Morimoto and Chef Browne

secrets of cooking. He offers high praise for Christophe Tanneau-Kervran, Stephan Carter, Angelo Sosa, Lorenzo Polegri, Chris Beischer, Alicia Stewart, Cristeta Comerford, and Robert Gatsby.

He said his extensive knowledge of various cuisines would not be possible without their instrumental efforts.

While Kashif raves over his French and Asian Cuisine, he said he also always ensure he delivers Caribbean, and more so, Guyanese flavour in all of his dishes.

Over the span of his slice and dice career, he has moved from being a Saucier to a Sous Chef, to Executive Sous Chef and now has a full-time job at the residence of the White House, where he caters to the First Family of the United States of America.

Kashif remembers his roots and often recalls growing up with his family in Carmichael Street, Georgetown, attending the St. Margaret's Primary School and his enjoyable years at The Bishops' High.

He is married to Guyanese Dental Surgeon and his high school sweetheart, Dr. Sulan Fung and together they have two sons.

With an eye for detail and quality, Kashif has also been climbing the ladder to greater success, while building a family of his own.

Over the years, he said he has lived his life through the philosophical words of Albert Einstein, who once said, "try not to become a man of success, but rather a man of value.'



Meet The Brownes





**S.A.M.**  
**VIDEO RECORDING STUDIO**  
Advertisement, Birthday Party, Wedding, Funeral,  
and Conferences, etc.  
*Digital Editing & Graphic Designs*  
Tel: (592) 616-9318 / 218-3623 Shawn

The advertisement features a large, detailed image of a professional video camera in the background. The text is overlaid on the camera and the background.

1. Cleaning.
2. Employment
3. Event planning

Like and share Yahweh services Guyana on face book

## Quotes of the President of Guyana



1. "Emancipation Day is a most auspicious event in Guyana's history which should be observed by all. It was, indeed, the start of the process by which the plantations became the foundation of one nation and through which the various peoples began to live and work together in pursuit of a common destiny," President David Granger.
2. "I have plans for the profits which will come from oil and gas. It is not going to enrich a few, it is going to educate many. Every child must be in school. Every village must have a school. This decade of development means that in every single village, every child must have access to go to school...I want this church, Glory Light Tabernacle to ensure there are no more street children."
3. The Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana [at Article 161(1)], provides for the establishment of an Elections Commission. It states:  
There shall be an Elections Commission for Guyana consisting of a Chairman, who shall be a full-time Chairman and shall not engage in any other form of employment, and such other members as may be appointed in accordance with the provisions of this article.
4. These are exacting duties and responsibilities. Free, fair, credible and timely elections are essential elements of a democratic state. The Elections Commission is not a plaything. Its independence is a condition for engendering confidence and ensuring public trust in the electoral system and for the efficient execution of elections.
5. As far as I am concerned, the CCJ was quite clear and it means that the President must have a role; must have a role. That is the word the CCJ used "must" have a role and I would resist any attempt to prevent me from exercising the function that has been given to me by the CCJ. The role of the President in the crafting and hammering out of the list must be respected,"
6. Justice Singh is such a person. She was called to the Bar in London in 1973 and admitted to the Bar in Guyana in 1976. She served as the Deputy Solicitor General and as a Puisne Judge and a



Justice of Appeal. She led the way for the Modernisation of the Justice Reform Project during her tenure at the Attorney General's Chambers.



7. "Cooperation and collaboration will help better deliver these services. People are paramount. This improvement in citizens' wellbeing therefore should not become a source of partisan division. There should be no room for partisanship when it comes to the welfare of our citizens. We have to work together, across the

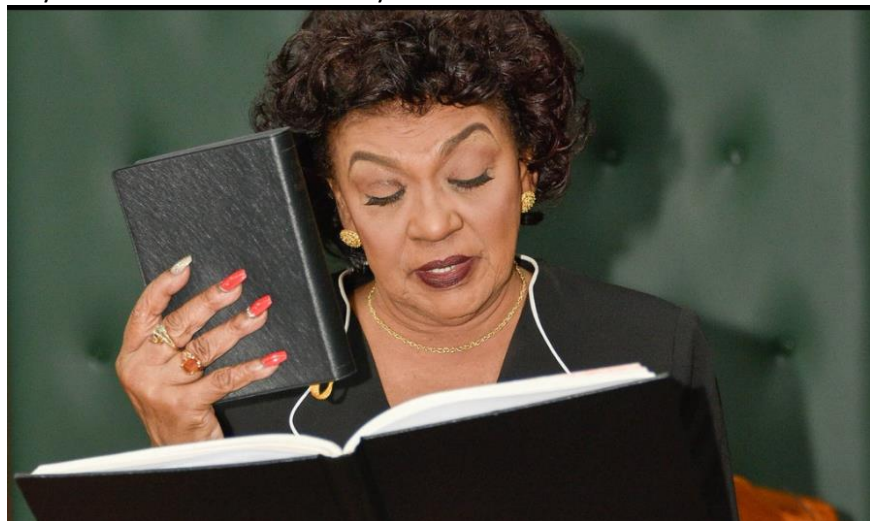
divides of class, geography, politics and race to bring improvements to our people. It is regrettable that for the second time, that this forum, intended to promote cooperate and coordination for the common good, has become a victim of a partisan boycott. Who gains? The people lose when their officials boycott, whether it is the National Assembly or a forum organised by the Minister of Communities,"



**Guyana Politics: Claudette Singh appointed new GECOM Chairperson**



Guyana: Stabroek News- 26 July 2019.



President David Granger presenting retired judge Claudette Singh with her Commission of Appointment as Senior Counsel in 2017. (Ministry of the Presidency photo)

Following a meeting with **Opposition Leader Bharrat Jagdeo**, **President David Granger** has appointed retired judge Claudette Singh as the new Chairperson of the **Guyana Elections**

#### **Commission (GECOM).**

In a brief statement, the Ministry of the Presidency said Granger met Jagdeo at the ministry, where they continued a series of meetings aimed at ‘hammering out’ a list of nominees “not unacceptable” to the president.

The statement added that the president received and reviewed the list of nominees later this afternoon in an effort to bring the selection process to a speedy and favourable conclusion. “This was aimed at ensuring that the Elections Commission could resume its normal functions with the aim of conducting General and Regional Elections in the shortest possible time,” it added.

According to the statement, the president “swiftly made a selection from the list of nominees” and approved Justice Singh, who satisfies the criteria for the appointment and also satisfies the ruling of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) for a consensual appointment supported by both the President and the

Leader of the Opposition.



Singh, who was called to the Bar in London in 1973 and admitted to the Bar in Guyana in 1976, was one of three women appointed Senior

Counsel in 2017 for her service as the Deputy Solicitor General and as a Puisne Judge and a Justice of Appeal and her leadership in spearheading the Modernisation of the Justice Reform Project, and as the Guyana Police Force’s Legal Advisor.

## Georgetown Guyana: African Mall takes over Main Street

In the few days leading up to **Emancipation Day**, local crafters, jewellery makers and clothes vendors paved the Main Street Avenue between Quamina and Church Streets, Georgetown to display their products for the holiday.



*Ms. Nona sharing details about her crafts*



*Much on sale at the mall*



*A display of a clothing stall*

Many stopped by to flock the clothing and accessories stalls to identify their picks with which to adorn themselves.

Bright colours flash before the eyes as you make your way through the stalls widely known around this time of the year as the **African Mall**.

According to Nona Khan, from Nona Fabric Creative Designs, she had set up her stall since Monday July 22, displaying her hammocks, which were sold out, pillowcases, shirts and knittings. She also does customised work for her customers.

In her stall, she hung up shirts on which she has painted the national flag, the map of Guyana, and cartoon characters.

Khan said, "I like being out here; this is my third year and this is not just an emancipation thing, I appreciate the fact it allows others to come out and showcase their work for sale too."

Moving down the line, Kaieteur News was able to meet with

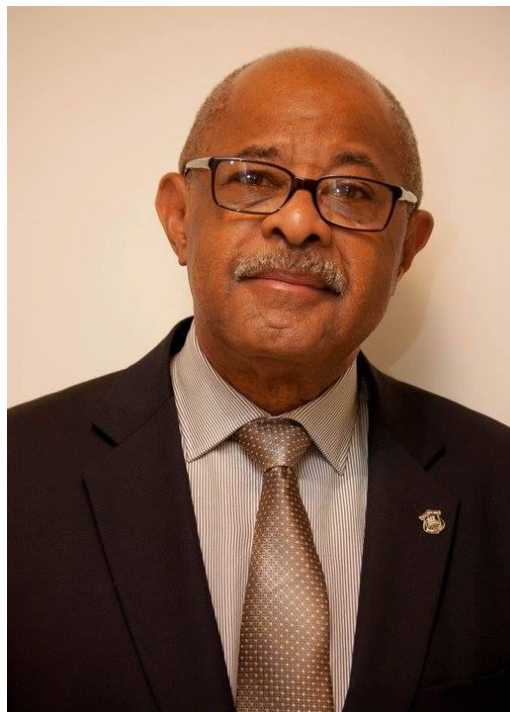
'Junior' who does a variety of creative works. His pieces are made up of copper, bronze, stones, leather and beads.

According to the crafter, "Most of the articles I use to make up my products are bought from right here in Guyana although some inputs are from overseas. What I expect from this season is for everyone to look cultured, beautiful and nice."

Another participant at the African Mall, Natasha David, who is the owner of David Creative Designs, has been gracing the event with her presence for the past five years.

David said, "I have been in the craft industry for the past 11 years. I would use seeds, coconuts, leather and fabric so as to create my items. This year, I tried to bring out mostly leather in my designs."

## **Guyana Institute of Historical Research establishes link with Guyana Cultural Association of USA**



**Professor Vibert Cambridge**



**Professor Aubrey Thompson**

The Guyana Institute of Historical Research has established linkage with the Guyana Cultural Association of USA. The Permanent representative of the GIHR to the Guyana Cultural Association of the USA, is Professor Dr. Aubrey Thompson. Below is an extract of Professor Vibert Cambridge's feature address, at the Welcome reception, of the twelfth Guyana Institute of Historical Research Conference.

### **Extract**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I bring you greetings from the Guyana Cultural Association of New York, Inc., the organizers of the annual Guyana Folk Festival in Brooklyn, New York. We applaud the Guyana Institute for Historical Research on this your 12th annual conference and the timeliness of this year's theme – "Labor, Military, and Migration."

#### **SIMILARITY OF MISSION**

Our two organizations have similar missions. We both seek to mobilize robust historical information about the Guyana experience and make it accessible--to inform citizen engagement and public policy. We are aware of the growing body of new scholarship on the Guyanese experience that needs to be shared with the wider community. We are both engaged in an emancipatory praxis. We should think about working together to generate more inclusive histories. Our two organizations have similar missions regarding historical information. We encourage bottom up histories.

Over the past 18 years, GCA's mission has been to examine, document, showcase and celebrate the multiple roots and manifestations of Guyanese folk heritage and creativity. At GCA we organize around significant anniversaries or other aspects of our cultural heritage. Through our annual Literary Hang and



Symposium series, GCA has facilitated day-long multidisciplinary reflections on topics such as Guyanese dance, masquerade, language, music, and more complex terrains such as creolization, imagining Guyana beyond the politics of race, and finding solidarity—*ma'iupe* -- in our festival arts tradition.

For the past twelve years, the Guyana Institute for Historical Research has organized conferences that have focused on the anniversaries of pivotal Guyanese and regional events. One of the things you do well is to bring together an intergenerational audience. As Hazel Woolford stated, the audiences for our annual conferences include “university students, prospective graduates, lecturers as well as teachers, and researchers.” In addition, these conferences not only share new knowledge, they serve to reinforce the point that history is relevant and “still marketable” as a career. Further, they encourage doctoral work and interactions with regional and international counterparts.” Clearly, this conference will do the same and in addition help to revitalize the training of the next generation of Guyanese historians. Maybe, the joint GCA and GIHR project could be about developing an infrastructure to support a new curriculum for the study of history at the University of Guyana.

#### New writings about Guyana

Since World War II, there has been an acceleration in the published writings on the Guyanese experience. Around the world, Guyanese academics and other public intellectuals are locating new sources, using interdisciplinary frameworks and participatory methods in the study of the Guyanese experience and its regional and global connections. My books *Immigration, Diversity and Broadcasting* (2005) and *Musical Life in Guyana* (2015) along with my current research on the social history of “sweet drink” are in this vein. The substance of the new scholarship is rich and of value to the fledgling democracy where politicians play loose with our people’s history and try to manipulate it for sectoral interests. It is a scholarship for the public sphere—academic and formal and community and informal. It is of value for the wider society. It is essential for active citizens. This calls for innovations in studying and dissemination of the new knowledge of the Guyanese experience that is emerging from UG’s campuses and in other academic and scholarly institutions around the world.

The theme for this conference offers an opportunity to engage this opportunity to bring complex historical information to the public discourse.

#### A RECEE OF THE TERRAIN

Here I draw upon family history and autobiography to explore the theme of this year’s conference--Labor, Military, and Diaspora. Here I offer a survey of this terrain in the long Guyanese experience. This is complex terrain. All Guyanese have been influenced in some form or fashion by the dynamics at the intersection of these “big three”--Military, Labor, and Migration--in the Guyanese experience. Let start by considering the Simmons and Cambridge families.

#### The Simmons and Cambridge families

The military was always in the family discourse growing up. Among my maternal grandfather’s friends was a “shell shocked” victim from World War I. My grandfather, a Barbadian immigrant came to British Guiana in the late 19th century. He served in the para-military police forces of two British colonies, British Guiana in South America and the Gold Coast, West Africa between the late 1800s to around 1922. My grandfather lived to his 90s; and his home in Thomas Street, Cummingsburg, Georgetown was a venue where there were constant visits from relatives, “country men,” old policemen, lodge brothers, other retirees, the occasional civic official, aspiring politicians, and the shell-shocked veteran.

“Mr. C” as I call him was one of the 700 British Guianese who served in World War I and suffered a life-long disability as a result. Cedric Joseph’s *The British West Indies Regiment 1914 – 1918*, published by Guyana’s Free Press in 2008 is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the intersection. It is a work which chronicles the abuse and discrimination experienced by these primarily male volunteers from the British West Indies. The publication proposes that region’s participation in World War I had transforming consequence for the region’s social and political order. There were few women in that war.

As mentioned recently, my maternal grandparents were immigrants. Grandfather, William Henry Simmons came from Barbados. My maternal grandmother came from the island of Dominica. My mother was born in the Gold Coast, now Ghana. On my father's side—the Cambridges—there are solid Guyanese East Coast Demerara rural village roots and labour union activism. From early o'clock I realized the Guyanese experience was bigger than British Guiana.

My interest in Guyanese experience was "formalized" at my alma mater—Queen's College—celebrating its 175th anniversary this year. Among my teachers were Clement Yansen, Mervin Claxton, Pat Dial, and Robert Moore. These masters taught us to be proud of our creole experience. They introduced me to "bottom up history." Yansen's *Random Remarks on Creole* was published in 1966 to coincide with Guyana's independence. My first history teacher at QC was a Trinidadian, the late Mervyn Claxton. He was one of the first Elsa Gouveia-trained historians from the University College of the West Indies. Claxton brought West Indian history to the curriculum. It was from him we heard about Toussaint L'Ouverture and the place of West Indian histories in the global context. He was followed by British-trained Pat Dial whose course in British medieval history introduced archeology as tool. Then there was Bobby Moore, another Elsa Gouveia-trained historian, who as teacher and broadcaster, promoted an eloquent historiography. These men stressed the importance of evidence and the excitement of finding sources – the historian as detective.

I attended Queen's College from 1955 to 1961. The school, like the nation, was in transition. The colony was moving into independence. During my stay at QC I met several students who went on to become influential historians of the Guyanese experience. These included Walter Rodney, Winston McGowan, Alvin Thompson, Frank Birbalsingh, Tommy Payne, Rupert Roopnaraine, Brian Moore, Ian Robertson, and Joel Benjamin. Joel played an important role in the development of the Caribbean Research Library at the University of Guyana—an under-resourced national treasure.





SSIGNAL PRODUCTION PRESENTS

7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EMANCIPATION

*Jazz & Soul*

**Concert**

TICKETS \$2500

UMANA YANA | 4TH AUGUST | 5:00PM

QUICK PICK BAND - TREVOR JOHN, MICHAEL SMITH AND PETER CALLENDER



COLOURS BOUTIQUE SANDY'S FUNERAL HOME OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER SANKARS AUTOWORKS MINISTRY OF THE PRESIDENCY Department of Cohesion, Culture, Youth & Sport, M PS A.W. Enterprise P

## Jazz and soul concert

SSignal Productions under the leadership of Mr. Bonny Alves and Mrs. Charmaine Blackman Alves began this annual Emancipation Jazz and Soul Concert in 2013 with the aim of resuscitating and keeping the Genre alive in Guyana.

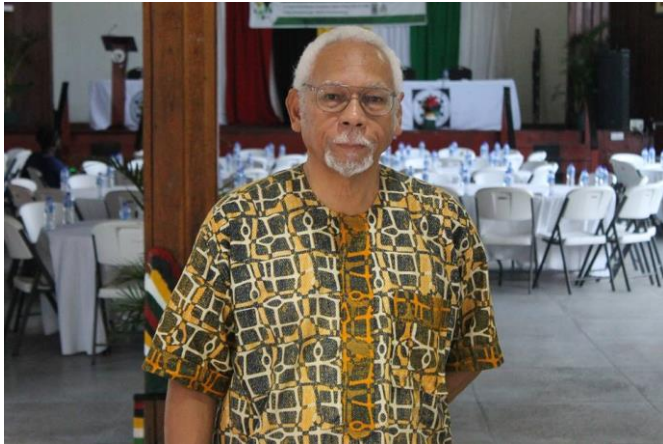




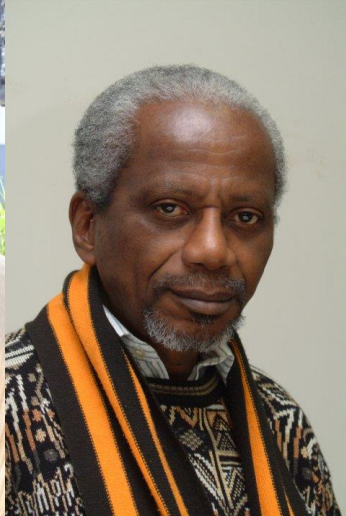
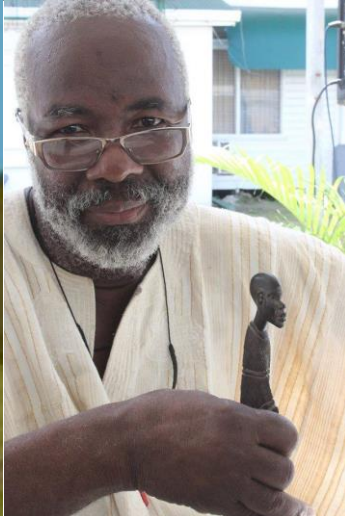
# Living Legends of Guyana









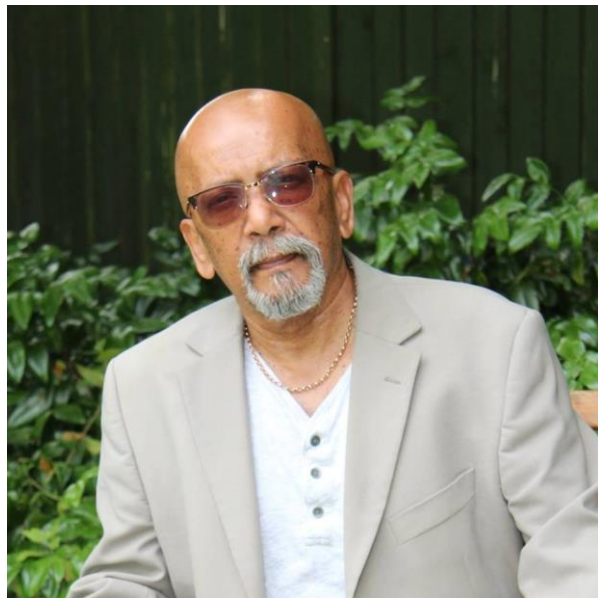




### Scenes of the 2019 KIDS History Vacation School



## SPEECH BY PROFESSOR EMERITUS CLEM SEECHARAN AT THE 250 ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1763 SLAVE REBELLION



1. Guyana has always been a land of fantasy. It was the land of El Dorado.

2. Guyana, for all its independence and its symbols of nationhood, has never been a closely-knit society. The ethnic divide made this almost impossible. There is hatred between the various ethnic groups with the darkest of the races being reserved for the greatest hatred. We know that what is psychologically significant is not what has happened to us but what we Believe occurred.

3. The fictions we tell ourselves about our past and our lives are indispensable to keep at bay the truth that may shock us out of our ever-precarious sense of well-being and self-worth. Narratives (usually imaginary, didactic tales: proverbs, myths, legends) are at the heart of the shaping of identity. Fact,

Fiction and Fantasy are at the core of the identity project.

4. Narratives of India have been the most instrumental factor in the shaping of Indian identity in British Guiana (Guyana since 26 May 1966). From the beginning of indentureship to the present, diverse conceptions of homeland many Indias' – have been central to redefinition of self. It seems that however strong the sense of belonging to the new land has become, the necessity to look back, to create Indias of the mind, is inescapable. Becoming Indo-Guyanese, therefore, required the embracing simultaneously of multiple, often imaginary and contradictory, constructions of that homeland. Fact, fiction and fantasy are, indeed, interlaced in the reclaiming and reshaping of identity.

5. These 'Indians of the mind' are likely to be totally unrecognizable to Indians in India; in fact, they may evoke incomprehension, even ridicule, if presented to them, but their validity, indeed centrality, to Indians in the diaspora is not lessened. For the imagined Indians are not meant for the consumption, and do not necessarily require the empathy (however desired), of those in the homeland; they are, paradoxically, the foundation of the adaptation of Indians overseas to their new space.

6. Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, the source of about 85% of the Indian migrants to British Guiana – in terms of the mythical past juxtaposed with a collective amnesia enveloping that real India whence the 'bound coolies', the indentured labourers, originated.

7. It is my contention that because the latter was constructed to conceal the unimaginably harrowing context of the flight of desperate men and women, their 'real' India had to be silenced, if not erased, and reimagined to fortify them psychologically – to ignite and reconstruct personas of hope in the new land, however trying or supposedly transitory the indentureship interlude.

8. Forgetting is a vital ingredient in narratives that help to make new identities; so, too, a mythologised past that speaks of ancient glory, preferably a golden age – contriving an El Dorado of the past, so to speak, that came to fruition.

9. The absence of poverty and pain, petty jealousies, disease, hunger and death was the antithesis of life in 19<sup>th</sup> century eastern UP and western Bihar.

10. Besides it was safer: it absolved women of revisiting their provenance in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, with its potential for releasing many silenced narratives of despair, separation, rupture, shame and guilt. The Sita persona helped them to close the book. It is generally not known, but significant,

that about two-thirds of the female indentured labourers went to Caribbean plantations on their own, unaccompanied by any relatives; 82% were aged between 10 and 30.

11. Amnesia and fantasy are at the fount of the construction of Indo-Guyanese identity. This was an imperative of self-preservation and the regeneration of self in the new land. Individually and collectively, not to forget the agonising reality of lives in India, blighted by famines and the loss of child-wives and child-husbands; child-wives marooned in the homes of oppressive in-laws, having been deserted by husbands who had escaped, internally or overseas, to greener pastures; consequent 'infidelity' actuated by chronic poverty and sexual deprivation; the placelessness of widows in Hindu society – indeed, the 'immemorial poverty' (Naipaul) of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar – was to self-destruct.

12. They kept that past submerged: nothing would detach them from their cultivated amnesia. They had come to believe their silent reworking of the truth – and so have their descendants. They could absolve themselves of any responsibility for their flight, attributing total agency to the infamous arkati, the legendary, shadowy anti-hero, an unexamined folk figure of unmitigable infamy, who supposedly duped all into 'a new slavery' and lured women in particular into a veritable narak (hell) – a constructed universe of moral depravity, rampant debauchery and unexampled degradation, on the plantations of the sugar colonies.

13. The counter resilient African antipathy to indentured migrants (whose introduction they were made to partially subsidise), perceived as subverting their enhanced bargaining position with their former owners, the sugar planters. Having received no compensation for their enslavement over more than two centuries, freed Africans experienced the rapid erosion of their embryonic bargaining advantage of the 1840s, with the accelerated importation of indentured labourers throughout the latter half of the 19th century. By the 1890s they saw Indians as the greatest threat to their future in the colony – as the numerically and economically ascendant group, pampered by planters, while they languished in penury as a result: the 'alien coolie' was here to stay, with potential to dominate.

14. This was exacerbated by fears that prominent Indians, such as J.A. Luckhoo and Dr William Hewley Wharton, were committed to creating an 'Indian Colony', with the possible renewal of immigration from India, after the end of indentureship in 1920. African apprehensions were sustained in the 1930s, when prominent Indians, such as Peter Ruhomon and C.R. Jacob, advocated building of a 'greater India' in Guyana. This imbedded a resilient fear among African Guyanese that they would lose everything to the Indian juggernaut. Moreover, the notion that British Guiana is an El Dorado, with stupendous resources, has fed continual apprehension between Africans and Indians that whoever inherits the kingdom is on the royal road to a Golden Age. This bred fantasy into the psyche of its peoples, with a penchant for grandiloquence: its rivers big enough to swallow Barbados at their mouths; these rivers so long they must run to the moon; the mountains in the interior (totally inaccessible) must be pregnant with gold, diamonds – wealth of unimaginable vastness. This vision of El Dorado is alive today, with the promise of an impending oil boom and massive mineral wealth awaiting exploration in the interior.

15. Occupied by the Dutch in the late 16th/early 17th centuries, Guyana (British Guiana until May 1966) required monumental effort to achieve a modicum of colonisation along its narrow coastal belt. They had tried to circumvent the necessity for onerous hydraulic works by establishing the early settlements upriver, away from the flat coastland, the mangrove swamps below sea-level. That soon proved futile because the fertility of the soil diminishes rapidly away from the alluvial coast, in the hilly sand and clay belt. However, only the Dutch, with access to enslaved African labour and their peerless mastery of 'empoldering' – the reclaiming of land through a complex drainage and irrigation system – could have constructed and maintained the astounding, labyrinthine system of dams, embankments, canals, drains, ditches, 'kokers' or sluices, without which the narrow coastland is uninhabitable. From this inauspicious beginning, Guyana never did manage to become a mature slave colony, like Jamaica, Barbados or the



Leeward Islands; yet it engendered a potent rebellious spirit among enslaved Africans fed by the inhospitable environment.

In 1842, in the counties of Demerara and Essequibo, the freed people went on strike when the planters reduced wages unilaterally. There was division in the ranks of the latter; the labour supply was eclectic; many small plantations could not compete in a free labour environment. The workers were therefore able to force a reversal of the wage-slash. In 1848, however, when these African workers took similar action against another wage-slash, the planters resisted their demands successfully. They had been fortifying themselves since 1845, having introduced over 11,000 indentured labourers from India and more than 10,000 from the Portuguese island of Madeira. The plantocracy were resolved to halt the demonstrated capacity of Africans to negotiate wage rates on their own terms, as they combined farming their own land with strategic seasonal labour on the estates. Indian indentureship, therefore, was introduced specifically to enable sugar plantations to retain a body of contract labour ('bound coolies'), in a colony where the freed African people were erroneously perceived to have abundant options for independent livelihood.

16. Moreover, the fact that one-third of the funding of indentureship originated from general revenue, to which Africans contributed inordinately through high indirect taxation on items of popular consumption, meant that they were, in reality, subsidising a system designed to curb their fledgling assertion of rights. This was the context of African rejection of Indian indentureship as necessarily subversive of their welfare. It was aggravated by the perennial hydrological hazards on the coastland of Guyana. Floods and alternating droughts in conjunction with chronic malaria, in an environment dominated by the order, size and power of the drained and irrigated sugar plantations, were detrimental to agricultural initiative in the aftermath of slavery and imbedded in Africans inconsolable hurts- colonial oppression, then 'Indian racism', as they perceived it.

17. Immeasurably more than in environmentally gentler Trinidad (another major destination of indentured labourers from India), every perceptible advance by Indians would evoke and reinforce aggrieved sentiments among African Guyanese. A sense of victimhood was magnified, internalised and perpetuated by this hard land. In the graphic imagery of the historian, James Rodway (1848-1927): 'Every acre at present in cultivation has been the scene of the struggle with the sea in front and the flood behind. As a result of this arduous labour [of Africans] during two centuries [of slavery], a narrow strip of land along the coast has been rescued from the mangrove swamp and kept under cultivation by an elaborate system of dams and dykes. Scattered along the rivers and creeks lie a thousand abandoned plantations, most of them indistinguishable from the surrounding forest; these represent the failures of the early [Dutch] settlers. At first sight the narrow line of sugar estates seems but a very poor show for such a long struggle with nature, but when all the circumstances are taken into consideration it is almost a wonder that ...[British Guiana] has not been abandoned altogether [emphasis added].

18. Rodway's discerning assessment has stood the test of time. In 1943 Dr F.C. Benham calculated that the cost of maintaining the hydraulic systems on the plantations that year alone was \$459,000 or \$2.79 per ton of sugar produced. He conveyed in bewildering detail the Byzantine geometric patterns etched on this reclaimed land: 'Each square mile of cane cultivation involves the provision of 49 miles of drainage canals and ditches and 16 miles of high level waterways. If these figures are raised to cover the whole area under cane the sum total approaches 5,000 miles. Some estates do, in fact, have more than 300 miles of waterways to maintain.' This is incomprehensible to outsiders, while Guyanese are inclined to take it for granted – at their peril, periodically. Walter Rodney dramatized the Herculean effort extracted from Africans in the making of this unlikely colony, on the periphery of the Amazon basin: 'This meant that slaves moved 100 million tons of heavy water -logged clay with shovel in hand, while enduring conditions of perpetual mud and water.'

19. The bitterness engendered among African Guyanese found violent release in the Berbice Rebellion of 1763 and the Demerara Rebellion of 1823. The brutal suppression of these legendary quests for freedom is deeply lodged in their consciousness and was perpetuated by Guyana's unconquerable hydrological

challenges and malarial scourge – as well as the scale of Indian indentureship in the latter half of the 19th century. It required coerced labour to maintain plantation agriculture; but it was also necessary to create El Dorado to sustain effort.

20. Guyana needed (it still needs) myth to provoke initiative. Fantasy is endemic to its psyche. It breeds inexhaustible visions of riches in the bush. The inaccessibility of the interior of the colony, to most Guyanese, deepened the myth and lent plausibility to its most surreal representations. Ever since Sir Walter Raleigh's delusional quest for El Dorado, towards the end of the 16th century, Guyana's 'maidenhead' is ever on the verge of being penetrated.

21. Fantasy found a hospitable space, too, in the imagination of the colony's indentured labourers from India; it would vacillate between the exuberant and the melancholy. Escapism has always been instrumental in coping with the harsh Guyanese reality.

22. It had ideological reverberations, with a delusional strand.

By the 1890s, an element of Aryanism had seeped into the seminal thoughts of Joseph Ruhomon (1873-1942); it spoke of a supposed racial affinity between Indians and Europeans. In the 1920s-30s J.A. Luckhoo's (1887-1949) advocacy of an Indian colony in British Guiana, as well as the idea of a 'greater India' in the colony of Peter Ruhomon and C.R. Jacob, were permeated by the grandiloquent. These were accompanied in the mid-1930s by the fantastic ideals of governance of the foremost Indian trade unionist in the colony, Ayube Edun (1893-1957), enunciated in his book, *London's Heart - Probe and Britain's Destiny*. After the Second World War, Indians would place their faith in the greatest dreamer of them all – the irrepressible Marxist, Cheddi Jagan (1918-97).

23. Of the 238,909 Indian labourers taken to British Guiana between 1838 and 1917

- 193,154 or 81 per cent arrived between 1851 and 1900;
- 75,808 or 31.7 per cent were repatriated between 1843 and 1955;

Only 9,668 or 12.7 per cent returned after 1917, when the last batch of indentured labourers left India.

- Of those who went to Guyana, approximately 85 per cent originated in the same region – eastern United Provinces (contemporary Uttar Pradesh [UP]) and western Bihar.

- The impoverished eastern districts of UP alone contributed 70.3 per cent

- While 15.3 per cent were from the contiguous, equally poor, western districts of Bihar; only 5 or 6 per cent were south Indians, Tamils from Madras Presidency (primarily contemporary Tamil Nadu). Most

24. 'Madrasis' had arrived before 1863, when attitudes rooted in slavery still lingered. But a majority of the 'bound coolies' found British Guiana a place of infinitely greater hope, in which they could own a piece of land, even thrive and become individuals released from the shackles of caste and the 'immemorial poverty' of this still notoriously brutal region of India. Guyana would become home for nearly 70 per cent of those who fled India.

25. Yet because of African repugnance to indentureship, it was difficult for Indians in the colony to erase the stubborn lore that they 'took bread out of the mouths' of Africans. Consequently, probably defensively, they would continually deny agency for their migration to the colony, attributing it to kidnapping, trickery, to being duped into journeying to distant lands. The blame would fall on the evil *arkati*, the recruiter who allegedly stole them all from their villages. They would appropriate and cultivate the notion that indentureship was a 'new system of slavery'.

26. However, it is inaccurate to label indentureship 'new slavery', however oppressive the conditions on the plantations in the aftermath of emancipation in 1838. A definitive instrument for rejecting this common characterization was the contract, the 'conditions of service and terms of agreement' all indentured labourers were required to assent to in India, before embarkation for the plantation colonies. It is arguable that those terms were often honoured more in the breach, as it took decades for the contract, in its more enlightened version, to evolve. However, implicit in the signing of a contract was the notion of Indian indentured labourers as free agents with rights. Enslaved Africans had no such concession

to their humanity: they were property – deprived of the fruits of their labour and autonomy as individuals, for life, with no recourse to law or any statutory ‘protector’.

27. However, it is inaccurate to label indentureship ‘new slavery’, however oppressive the conditions on the plantations in the aftermath of emancipation in 1838. A definitive instrument for rejecting this common characterization was the contract, the ‘conditions of service and terms of agreement’ all indentured labourers were required to assent to in India, before embarkation for the plantation colonies. It is arguable that those terms were often honoured more in the breach, as it took decades for the contract, in its more enlightened version, to evolve. However, implicit in the signing of a contract was the notion of Indian indentured labourers as free agents with rights. Enslaved Africans had no such concession to their humanity: they were property – deprived of the fruits of their labour and autonomy as individuals, for life, with no recourse to law or any statutory ‘protector’.

28. This was inherited by their offspring. The basic terms of the indentured contract were established by the 1870s. After completing five years of indentureship with a registered employer – and a total of ten years of continuous residence in the colony – and having procured a ‘certificate of exemption from labour’, Indians were entitled to a ‘free return passage’. The immigrant had to work every day except Sundays or authorised holidays: either seven hours in the field or 10 hours in the factory. Able-bodied males, 16 years and over, were paid 1/- per day; adult males not able-bodied, minors of and above 10 years of age but under 16 and female adults were paid 8 pence per day, but they were entitled to extra pay when working beyond the stipulated hours.

29. Therefore the contract legitimised child labour. Indentured labourers also had the option of task-work, with its ostensibly higher remuneration computed on the basis of wage rates obtained by unindentured workers. This was one of the most contentious issues, as workers continually contested the basis on which earnings from task-work were calculated. The recurring grievance was that the vagaries of tasks, occasioned by unseasonal rains or differential soil types, were frequently not given due consideration. But, unlike enslaved Africans, Indians had recourse to the Immigration Agent General or his district agents, authorized to visit plantations and investigate specific grievances.

30. Indentured labourers were, from 1876, entitled to visit the office of the ‘protector’ to register a complaint against their employer, even if the latter had refused them a pass to leave their plantation. This, however, often resulted in labourers being prosecuted for breach of contract. In fact, in comparison with the rights of employers, those of Indian labourers were breached consistently, even within the judicial system. Between 1874 and 1895, only 208 employers were prosecuted successfully; on the other hand, 65,084 indentured labourers were convicted. Indentureship was riddled with injustices, but assertions that it was a continuation of slavery, or a new system of slavery, were fundamentally flawed.

31. Moreover, it did not conciliate African conviction that ‘coolies’ were pampered usurpers of material benefits that were rightfully theirs: the legacy of their enslavement, the failure to compensate them at Emancipation and their prior residence in the colony of over two centuries. This, then, was the context in which, self-defensively, Indians were unremitting in emphasising their lack of agency for migrating to British Guiana, stressing their innocence in the process: victims of imperial exploitation not ‘economic migrants’, as we would say today.

32. Raymond Smith, the distinguished English anthropologist, states that the high caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas formed 13.6 per cent of Guyanese indentured immigrants from India; middling agricultural and artisan castes accounted for 38.8 per cent; low castes and outcastes were 31.1 per cent; Muslims 16.3 per cent. Outcaste Chamars (untouchables) constituted the largest single component, 12.9 per cent.

33. Migration to the plantation colonies was another aspect of this established culture of migration. It was a desperate quest, by a risk-taking minority, to escape perennial landlessness, indebtedness, famine, disease, the curse of early widowhood and the stultifying ascription of caste. Land-hunger in India was chronic: the best agricultural castes, Kurmis, Koeris and Ahirs [Yadavs today], owned very little. The best land was monopolised by the high caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas. By the late 1880s they owned



79.8 per cent of the land in Basti (eastern Uttar Pradesh), the district of origin of the highest number of indentureds to Guyana; Brahmins alone owned 19.3 per cent of the cultivated area, although they were deemed 'inferior agriculturalists because of their prejudice against handling a plough.'

34. The best farmers, consequently, were often irredeemably indebted to high caste landlords and moneylenders. Among the lowest castes, their indebtedness was so entrenched that some families existed in a state of virtual slavery. In Ghazipur district, in 1906, the upper castes owned 82 per cent of the land; Ahirs, considered 'the backbone of the cultivating community', owned just 2,283 acres although they cultivated 14.3 per cent of the land. They were also among the best farmers in neighbouring Azamgahr, but there, too, they owned very little land.

35. Chronic debts (passed on from one generation to the next) perpetuated penury and killed ambition among large sections of a potentially enterprising people. Weakened bodies were a ready haven of recurring epidemics, such as cholera and smallpox. In Gonda, for instance, the source of many migrants to Guyana (including my maternal great-grandmother), cholera accounted for 11.5 per cent of deaths between 1872 and 1881. There were devastating outbreaks in 1873, 1876, 1877, 1878, 1881, 1886 and 1888 – 10,000 died in this last year. In 1893, 16,000 died from cholera. Smallpox visitations, too, were not uncommon in Gonda: epidemics of great intensity occurred in 1876 and 1880. Famine struck in 1874, 1877 and 1897. An early grave was taken for granted in the districts of eastern UP in the late 19th century. Indian indentureship to Guyana lasted over 75 years, but despite the environmental difficulties and the harsh reality on the plantations, the colony was a cradle of ambition and possibilities compared to caste-ridden, impoverished eastern UP and western Bihar. Genuine social and economic reasons, therefore, impelled a minority of enterprising men and women to flee this cemetery of hope where, as V.S. Naipaul puts it, his ancestors were 'immemorially poor'.

37. Most were not kidnapped or tricked by the infamous recruiters, the arkatis, into bondage. But these were people on the edge; they must have been seduced by the blandishment of recruiters, so a pervasive strand of deception, of exaggerated promises of mobility, cannot be discounted. Young men seeking escape from the perennial yoke of acquired family debts, or the macabre spectre of an early grave because of famine and disease, were especially vulnerable. Many, unable to keep their noses above the waterline, must have left behind wives and children whom they would never see again. Many girls and young women were in the same boat

38. About 82 per cent of the women taken to Guyana were between 10 and 30 years, with 30 per cent between 10 and 20 and 52.6 per cent between 20 and 30. Of the male immigrants 85.6 per cent were in the 10-30 age-group. This is entirely corroborative of what Brij Lal unearthed on Fiji; therefore, his findings with regard to the marital status of the indentureds are arguably applicable to Guyana. He found that 86.8 per cent of the adult male immigrants to Fiji were reportedly single; and, surprisingly, 63.9 per cent of the adult females were reportedly 'single. Moreover, of the 36.1 per cent of the women not reportedly single, only 73 per cent were accompanied by their husbands. These were people on the move, largely unencumbered by spouses, children or other relatives. They were, indeed, seeking a new beginning. They were desperate but they were probably among the most enterprising people in eastern UP and western Bihar – with nothing to lose, they were prepared to take risks.

39. This was a great attribute in the new land. Because 90 per cent of girls between 10 and 14 were married, according to the UP census of 1891, it is likely that most of the women indentured labourers who declared themselves 'single' were, in fact, widowed because of the high mortality of child-husbands in the late 19th century. Some must have been deserted by their husbands, many of whom had found employment in Assam and Bengal and never kept in touch. Some women, driven by hunger or sexual deprivation, succumbed to sexual advances by villagers; others had probably sought refuge in prostitution in provincial towns. There was no future for such women in India. Even in her parents' village, a widowed girl was socially dead. Many women succumbed to despair. A minority did not – flight resurrected hope. These were endowed with abundant imagination, courage and drive. Men and women therefore had a

lot to hide. The guilt festered. But because that recent past evoked pain and concealed much that would necessarily have jeopardized the assumption of a new persona, a reflexive collective amnesia cohered quickly – a water-tight instinct to forget. People have a remarkable capacity to unlearn. Their past in India had to be forgotten and re-imagined in Guyana.

40. It took me years before I could reflect on what this would have meant to a woman who was an ‘untouchable’, probably married at ten and widowed soon thereafter (away from her village, Bhagwanpur) – therefore a virtual slave in her home country henceforth. She may even have been driven into flight by a hopeless child-marriage and oppressive in-laws. Her life must have promised nothing but eternal darkness: her black skin an inexpiable sin. I read recently that the Pasis in Uttar Pradesh (India’s most populous state) ‘still suffer the effects of the caste system leaving them despised and rejected’. They still experience considerable illiteracy, lack of medical facilities and basic amenities such as drinking water and sanitation. With what I know today, I consider it difficult not to see Kaila’s indentureship was an escape to freedom.

41. I suppose, as Naipaul says, we were all claimed by the collective amnesia: we could ‘live easily with that darkness’. Kaila’s unknowable India was interred with her on 6 December 1956. But, as I grew older, my childhood curiosity became more defined – and gnawing. It was prompted by my liberal education and refined by my emerging historical temperament, tormented by a wider historical darkness. The comprehensive void that shrouded Kaila, whose quiet consistency of purpose must have lodged in my imagination, fed my more mature curiosity. My intellectual *raison d’être* was animated by this gaping void in self-knowledge, a strangled sensibility a fault-line in my identity.

42. Whether Naipaul realised it or not, it infused him a Hindu-grounded sense of hierarchy, along with its prejudice against blackness and an instinctual, negative perception of Africans. Brahmins were superior but they did not have the freedom, the easy access to excess of the lower castes. This fused them into certain attitudes in the Caribbean. Their superiority complex transmuted their fear of contamination by dark, lower caste people onto black people, Africans. In the Brahmin’s imagination, beef-eating, black Africans were relegated beyond the pale, to the profane space formerly reserved for Chamars, Doms, Dusads, Dhobis and Bhangis – the untouchables in North Indian villages. Colonial society’s own obeisance to white or light skin reinforced this Brahminic obsession. Although most Indians in the Caribbean tended to be perceptibly darker than their Brahmin compatriots or other north Indian upper castes, the general Indian partiality for light skin has not diminished. The Brahmin’s fear of pollution by the ‘negro’ became universal, a reflex among most Indians, including Muslims and converts to Christianity.

43. It is arguable that there is a residual caste-based foundation to it. As the late Guyanese historian, Dale Bisnauth (1936-2013), observes: ‘[A]t the core of Indian attitudes to the Afro-Guyanese were the malign vestiges of caste thinking. The Afro-Guyanese was said to belong to the Kale (black) caste, and were consequently of very low (caste) ranking, or of no ranking at all [outcaste]. They were identified as Rawan, the arch-enemy of the Indian god-hero, Rama [from the great Hindu text, the Ramayana], and with the Rakshasa, a demon figure described in the Mahabharata as ‘fierce, tawny in hue, terrible, with adamant teeth’. As either Rawan or Rakshasa, the Afro-Guyanese was to be feared and his company shunned’: the ultimate outcaste – a veritable untouchable. Did the admission of former Indian pariahs (Chamars, Doms, Dusads, Bhangis, etc) into Brahmanic Hinduism in Guyana and the entry of Muslims, however incongruously, into the reshaped Indian identity require the African for its coherence? In his study of Hindu-Muslim riots in Hyderabad, India, *The Colours of Violence* (1996), Sudhir Kakar observes that one of the Hindu groups, the Pardis, a former nomadic, hunting group of low ritual status, seem to need Muslims as ‘the other’ before they can arrive at ‘self identification’ as Hindus. Moreover, he adds: ‘It seems a Hindu is born only when a Muslim enters. Hindus cannot think of themselves as such without a simultaneous awareness of the Muslim’s presence’.

44. There is a strong element of ‘untouchability’, suggestive of a virulent component in the construction of Indo-Guyanese identity, susceptible of ready appropriation in the perception of Africans. We are poles



away from comprehending the resilient Indian-African incomprehension in Guyana. It is so sensitive that it may never receive intellectual scrutiny.

45. Lightness is highly prized in the Indian tradition; even the lower caste, black Indians, have internalised this partiality for white skin. Kakar illuminates the continuing glorification of lightness in contemporary India: The equation of dirt with dark colour is well known to any upper caste Indian child, especially a girl, who has been told by her mother to rub her skin every day with a mixture of dough and cream and who is convinced that the thin dark slivers sloughing off her face or arms are concrete proof of her skin becoming lighter. Evidence of the pan-Indian preference for fair skin and a denigration bordering on scorn for the dark-skinned is all around us...In India products that promise a whitening of the skin chalk up record profits. Television commercials...[and] the natural equation of light skin with nobility, beauty and high birth in proverbs, tales and legends; matrimonials in newspapers and on internet websites specifying 'fair' brides – all these are accepted in the natural order of things. 'Black is beautiful' is not a slogan that will catch on in India anytime in the near future. Fair skin, then, is eminently touchable, desirable, whereas dark skin is an outer manifestation of inner dirtiness and remains 'untouchable'...A dark -skinned African...will often be an object of condescension, even ridicule...[but] many a gora [white person] leading an anonymous, run-of-the-mill life in his own country feels like a special 'somebody' in India, the admiring gazes and flattering tones of voice constantly feeding his self-esteem, his narcissism [emphasis added].

46. My own experience of most Indo-Guyanese, including highly educated ones, is that these negative perceptions of blackness and Africans as a whole (rooted in Mother India), however submerged, need no revision when applied to them, although most Indo-Guyanese are much darker than upper caste North Indians. Because of Guyanese inability to address deep racial insecurities – the source of the political intractability over many decades – it is arguable that the country is sitting on a volcano, however dormant it may appear at the present time.

47. My own experience of most Indo-Guyanese, including highly educated ones, is that these negative perceptions of blackness and Africans as a whole (rooted in Mother India), however submerged, need no revision when applied to them, although most Indo-Guyanese are much darker than upper caste North Indians. Because of Guyanese inability to address deep racial insecurities – the source of the political intractability over many decades – it is arguable that the country is sitting on a volcano, however dormant it may appear at the present time.

48. The El Dorado complex which was so crucial to the colonising of an inhospitable Guyana is as vibrant as ever, now that it seems as if the country will be producing oil. This breeds envy and invidious comparisons between ethnic groups as to who will be the beneficiary of this impending wealth. The largely unknown hinterland has played a similar role historically, deepening mutual ethnic suspicions. Consequently, enhanced national wealth could well be a source not of optimism for the future, but a big bone of contention with serious implications for the political trajectory of the country.

49. Indo-Guyanese, constituting the majority group and deemed to be monopolising political and economic power, therefore, have to be seen to be making overtures to others, in order to build a more inclusive social and political order. The Indo-Guyanese achievement, after 175 years, here and in the wide diaspora, is an astounding one. Nothing encapsulates the scale of this than the role played by women in this narrative of progress. Therefore, I wish to draw your attention again to Professor Brij Lal's assessment of the women's strength of character and their capacity for hard work, self-restraint and enduring endeavour to guide their menfolk away from the excesses of plantation life.

50. The fact that women were prepared to part with a life of drudgery and unhappiness for the largely unknown would seem to me to suggest that many of them must have been individuals of remarkable independence, enterprise and self-respect. These were certainly the values they nurtured and lived by in the colonies. Kaila and her fellow 'bound coolies' shaped a solid foundation for Indo-Guyanese to build a culturally vibrant, economically viable and educationally vigorous community. But it must not be forgotten that several generations of African Guyanese school-teachers contribute immeasurably to the accelerated

advancement of Indo-Guyanese in the sphere of education and the professions. Yet we are still imprisoned by a lack of mutual magnanimity. Guyana will progress only when all its peoples are engaged in the process of building a nation, all its people feel that they belong and are inspired to work towards the shaping of this elusive nation. But this is a process; it will take time, patience and mutual recognition of each other's aspirations, shortcomings and fears. I believe that Indo-Guyanese, as I argue in my book *Mother India's Shadow over El Dorado* (2011), have benefited enormously from an enduring engagement with their ancestral land, however imagined their conceptualisation of that land and its legacy.

51. African Guyanese, like those in other parts of the region, have sought continually to engage with an imagined Africa in building self-esteem. However, that link has been less vigorous for a number of reasons, but that does not invalidate the endeavour, as I argue in my book of 2007, *Muscular Learning*. That process must be encouraged and accelerated, by the Guyanese state, because Guyana's long-term security and prosperity is predicated on its diverse peoples building self-confidence within their groups, if they are to have the courage and resolve to collaborate in building a nation. In August 1936 the Indo-Guyanese intellectual, J.I. Ramphal (1903-66), commented on the notion of a Guyanese identity. He did not subscribe to 'sectarianism' or 'sectionalism'; he wanted 'Guianese first, Indian after'; but he recognised that it would be idealistic to elude references to 'racial problems...for a while yet' in British Guiana.

52. He was very aware that building a nation was an aspiration; it would be a protracted process with many potential pitfalls. He elaborated: We want the Negroes of the country to have a real Negro consciousness until they find their footing. After that they will be qualified for a real Guianese consciousness...[But] we want Negro-controlled organisations to work for the benefit of British Guiana, giving expression to the peculiar contribution which that race is endowed to give to the world. We want Indians and other races to give their peculiar contribution also.

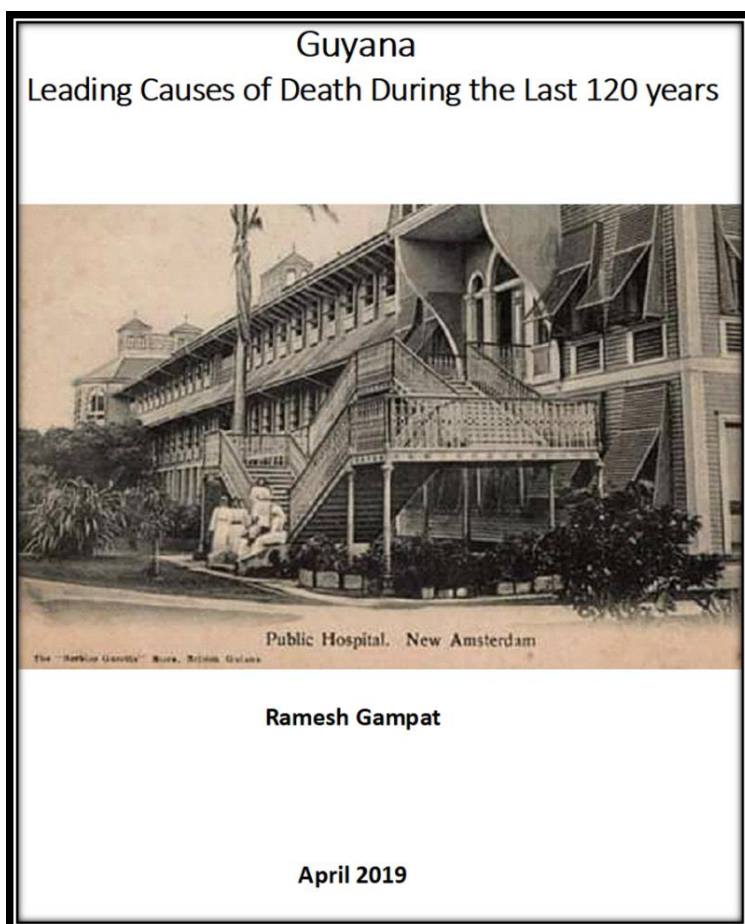
53. In a mixed community like this...the process of county consciousness is necessarily slow, and in our opinion has to pass through the stage of section-consciousness to country-consciousness. What we can do is to minimise as much as possible the time at the sectarian stage, and proceed quickly to the greater and better stage. It is only then that British Guiana can come into its own, only then mutual respect and mutual love will follow. Then there will be a Guyanese consciousness. Until then the term Guyanese is only a wish [emphasis added].

54. Over seven decades since J.I. Ramphal penned those profound thoughts, Guyana, unfortunately, has not moved beyond the 'sectarian stage', our Marxist experiments notwithstanding, our endeavour to prioritise class over ethnicity. The term Guyanese remains 'only a wish'.

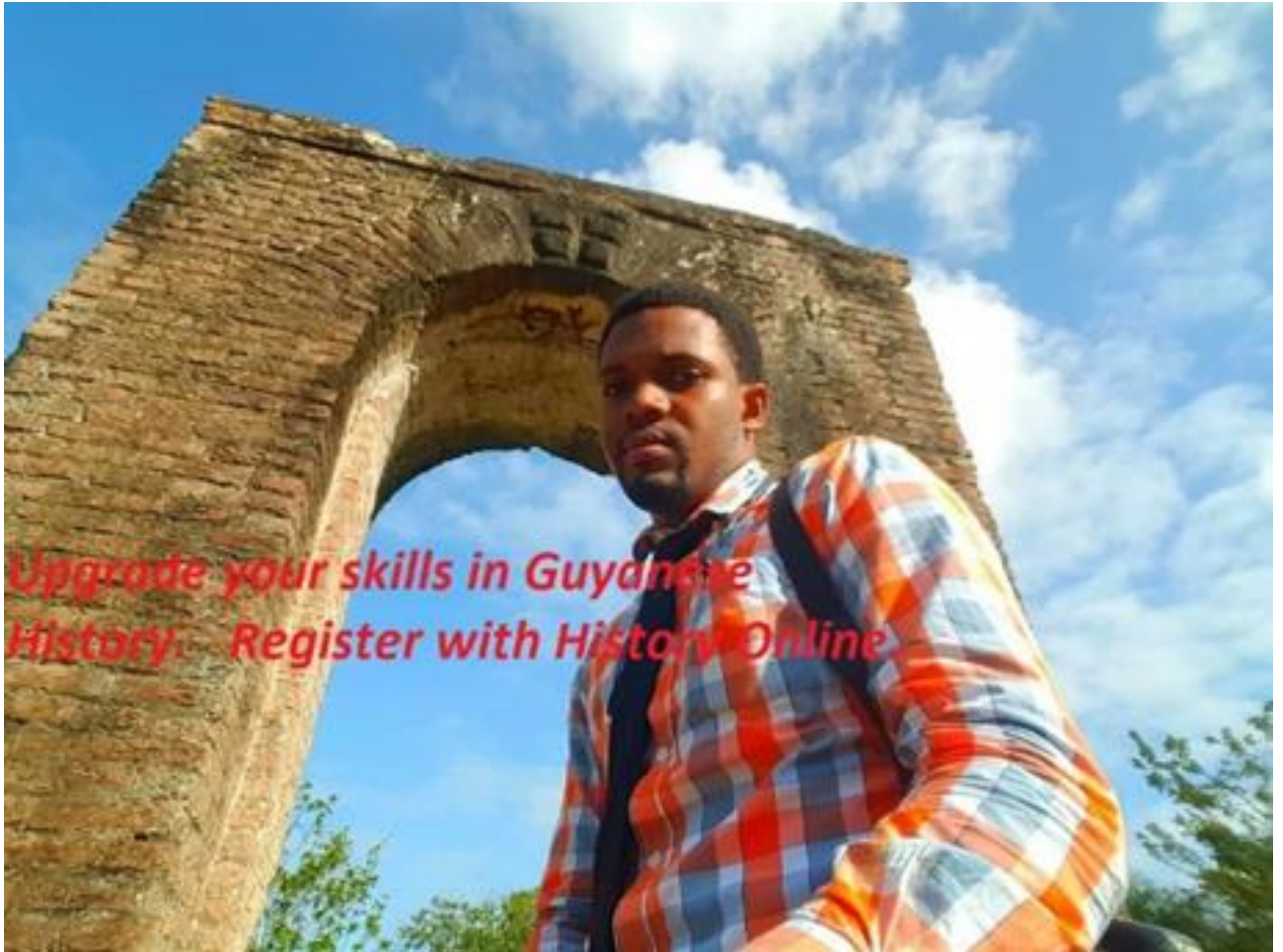
55. A few years ago Professor Clive Thomas spoke of 'the importance of the promotion of our [African] culture in enhancing self-identity, group cohesiveness and non-conflictual modes of behaviour among African Guyanese and between African Guyanese and other groups'. That remains a valid imperative. Therefore, the biggest challenge for Indian Guyanese, on the 175th anniversary of their arrival in Guyana and as we approach the 50th anniversary of Guyana's independence in 2016, must be to explore and accelerate areas of cultural and political co-operation with Africans to forge mutual ethnic comprehension and security and to reduce fear and mistrust – to begin to shape the rudiments of a nation; to collaborate, in the pressing context of climate change, in a long-term programme for the conservation of a fragile ecosystem and the rehabilitation and expansion of a crucial, but delicate, hydraulic system; and to promote an anti-corruption culture that engenders respect for law and order and legitimate economic activities that open up possibilities for all-round development for all ethnic groups. With respect to the latter, it is important to recall that in October 1992 Cheddi Jagan, a man with impeccable credentials of incorruptibility, told the people of Guyana that 'corruption is a cancer which my Government is determined to eradicate'. On this auspicious occasion, all Guyanese could do well to ponder – and act – on these words of that great Guyanese.



## Order your copy of the GIHR Twelfth Conference Book of Abstracts Today







The following GIHR courses run from September to July. They are available online, as well as in packages, for home study:

1. M.A. Historical studies.
2. Diploma in Historical studies
3. Certificate in Historical studies
4. Certificate in African-Guyanese history.

Cost: \$16,000 for 16 weeks; \$10,000.00 per unit/\$40,000. 00 per trimester/\$100.00 per year

Click, like and, share GIHR Face book, Guyana Institute of Historical Research Diploma in historical studies, History Online, and GIHR Montrose Academy pages.

