

## Indian's Melancholy Conditions and their Resistance under Indenture

Pummy Yadav

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Kalindi College, Delhi University, New Delhi, India

### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the process of Indian labour migration and regulation of labour who have migrated to Malaya, British Guiana and Suriname during the period 1840-1940 under different recruitment systems. And how the recruitment process itself has inspired the reconstruction of social institutions and communities within a specific labour relationship among the labourers. This paper also talks about the racial discrimination among workers, gender relations as well as the pathetic condition of women on plantations. Here I have also discussed about the ways planters adopted to maintain discipline on the plantation and to which laborer's showed their resistance in many different forms. The study of indentured resistance is important because it will provide an alternative interpretation to their resistance that how Indian laborers fared during indenture.

**How to cite this paper:** Pummy Yadav "Indian's Melancholy Conditions and their Resistance under Indenture" Published in International

Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-3 | Issue-6, October 2019, pp.63-69, URL:

<https://www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd28047.pdf>



Copyright © 2019 by author(s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution

License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



### Migration and Recruitment

In case of Tamil Nadu, the position regarding recruitment and migration of labours has a crucial linkage between the respective caste affiliation the landholder's and agricultural laborer's on the one hand and the customary patterns of the landownership and the attached labour on the other hand, e.g. In Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu the Kallar caste comprised the dominant small landholders and also became head kanganyes and kanganyes which were sent for the purpose of caste specific gangs recruitment from Malaya to the villages of Tamil Nadu. The period from mid 1840 to 1910 is characterized by the indentured immigration of Indian labour recruited to work on Malayan plantation, where the Indenture system literally meant a legally enforced debt bondage. A system of voluntary debt-bondage was already prevalent amongst agricultural labourers and lower peasantry in Tamil Nadu, when members began signing contracts for Indentured labour in Malaya. From 1910 to 1938 Kangany recruitment become dominant form of labour recruitment on Malaya. The kangany was acting as agent to control Tamil labours both in 'on' and 'off' work situation. All kanganyes, belonging to non-Brahmin cast and have dual role to play first as, a kind of a native boss, as well as he was kept directly subservient to the European employers. Subservience was considered as an essential attribute in the labour force, including kangany. Later, the kanganyes as local recruiter-cum-foreman-supervisor become the part of labour bureaucracy.

In 1868 in Suriname, a total of more than five hundred thirty thousand British Indians migrated to Caribbean under indenture contract. Where the contract have obligation for five year on a plantation, labor contract and additional local ordinances specified the rights and duties of the indentured workers and forced them to commit their labor power to the unspecified demands of their employers at specified times. Fundamental to the system was the penal sanction, which gave employees the right to press criminal charges against indentured worker, who, according to them, neglected their duty or refused to work. Thus penal sanction allowed planters to impose their own conception of work discipline. For British Guiana case it begin with an introduction to the post emancipated labor market realities of British Guiana that birthed the indentured movement from Asia to the Caribbean. The colonial presence in India and British Guiana together with a number of socio- economic, and political factors lead to the immigration from India to British Guiana. That is, many Indian nationals unable to pay the British land tax migrated; others signed the indentured hoping for a better future. Tales of an affluent life in British Guiana combined with Indian recruiters strategies of kidnapping and coercion, enticed and beguiled nearly half a million, Indian nationals to sign indentures that contracted them on British Guiana's plantation.

### Reconstruction of Social Institutions and Community

Migration and indenture, of course had a profound impact on the cultural life of the migrants, including kinship structures and social networks, the role of women, religion and languages. While coming to plantations indenture workers were housed in depots, called "holding depots" which influenced social interaction among individuals and groups. Thus those spaces became sites, where by new forms of social intercourse, social institutions and group identity among the indentured labours mainly evolved and new Socio-cultural and political boundaries emerged. These formation of social institutions in Suriname led to renewal and adaptation on the one hand whereas isolation and cultural conservatism on the other. The adjustment to a new environment, the unequal sex ratio, the relative youth of most immigrants, and the different organizational structure on the estates – including plantation hierarchy, division of labour and racism – disrupted traditional forms of social and cultural organization.

Many indentured workers, arrived at holding depots in India without family member as a result they engaged in new social interaction that gave birth to new social institution beginning with inter-caste relationships that facilitated the breakdown of traditional caste and gender barriers. Moreover, at the holding depots, due to disproportionate number of women to men (1:4) women were forced to seek protection from unwanted male advances. Woman in need of protection, regardless of class or caste consideration formed "social union" with men, which frequently led to "depot marriages". Thus, it was in holding depots, new social unions were constructed. In addition the 3-4 months voyage from India to British Guiana lead a some practices such as "marriages of convenience" continued as a new social practices, processes and institutions, appeared, namely the Jahaji family. Jahaji was a kinship type of family institution, the first social institution constructed on voyages by indentured labourers. Where men, women and children, so as to collectively overcome and survive many of the oppressive circumstances that they encountered on the voyage and all become members of Jahaji family. Although gender inequality was embedded in and reproduced, there were religious Brahmanical teachings that informed the consciousness of both men and women, religion emerged as a necessary institution of community reconstruction. But despite the internal loosening of caste hierarchy, a caste system was preserved in its application to the British Guiana as well as in Tamil Nadu social order. Indeed religion was used to foster the psychological belief that they were superior to other groups in the colony.

Yet there has been evidences that migration and indenture also steered the Asian towards maintaining their original custom and traditions. Their unique legal status, sense of displacement, social marginalization, low standard of living, geographic isolation, ethnic distinctiveness and common negative attitude towards other population group encouraged them to hold onto their social and cultural practices. However, planter's with their political power decisively manipulated the reconstruction of indentured labour, social institutions and community forming on the plantations. Planters always tried to divide the labour market and exploit that division through legal mechanism as the indenture contract:

Due to the reservoir of contracted labour workers bargaining power was always lower. Planters wanting to prevent labour unity exploited and encourage racial boundaries on the plantation based on the color hierarchy that exist in Indian

society. As by creating differences between blacks and Indians they become successful in dividing the labour and with the help of indentured contract created tension that fuelled labour discontent.

Planters with other members of the plantation society structured social relationship that ostracized indentured worker as a group. Cultural differences such as language, clothing and religion were used to further divide the laboring and other groups. Feeling of separateness as well as self constructed social and political boundaries between member of British Guiana and labour population changed the relations completely which were earlier existing on the plantation.

### Racial Relations and Gender Relations

Racial differences between the indentured workers, has been seen on the Suriname plantation, there were creoles and British Indians, the Creoles denigrated Asians with the term "Coolie". The Hindustani for their part regarded the Creoles as uncivilized, and pretentious creatures, most contemporaries agreed that Indians found African revolting, may be due to their kinky, hair, black complexion, features such as ungodliness and pollution whereas, they characterized the Hindustani as "bloodthirsty" querulous, "cantankerous" "exacting", "revengeful" and so excessively frugal as to be able "to kill somebody for a dime." The creoles called the Javanese (idiot Javanese) or saka- saka Japanese whereas Javanese compared the Creoles with monsters because of their perceived physical, ugliness and coarse and rough behavior, including their lust, anger, and greed for food and drink.

As we know from our earlier studies that there was always shortage of women on plantations, indentured men's endogamous practice of changing their mates frequently has been observed. Specifically that scarcity of women, lack of control over women's sexuality and breakdown of marriage as a social institution directly assaulted the traditional patriarchal. However in British Guiana, Indenture women has freedom to leave that male and cohabited with another, several social boundaries became fluid. Thus with the nurturing of the kinship Jahaji family system, the consanguineous family resurfaced. Role of Indenture women were as a worker as well as wives, sexual partners, mothers, and single women. Women, worked on estates as well as performed household task, which shows how they experienced a double day existence. In Suriname, the percentage of recruited adult woman was between 28-31%. The shortage of women and the resulting system of informal polyandry challenged traditional values and the competition for women was strong. Thus it is not surprising that marital fidelity on wife's part was imperative to her husband. If a wife was suspected of adultery it could have brutal consequences. Such as "wife chopping" as the one proof of the barbarous and blood thirsty nature of men working on plantations. At a broad level we can say that women were victims of the indenture system, as they suffered 'multiple oppression' and were subject to 'sex exploitation and ultra exploitation and 'freedom denied'. Plantations structural conditions made women dependent on men as they were paid lower wages and received less food rations. The proportion of women was an issue, because planters were mainly looking for physically strong workers, and considered woman a bad risk, because of pregnancy and child bearing would make them less productive. On the other hand, woman were needed to 'stabilise' the labour force. Besides women who were tricked

into migrating, there were also those who were forced by socio-economic circumstance to cut all their ties, become independent and start a new life. Women who did not stay at home were readily called prostitutes and labeled 'indecent' and 'immoral'.

Under indenture women workers were facing very hard times as they were exploited by the planters, they have not been given proper places to live, and low wages, no kind of leave during pregnancy, they have to in men's sheds or change their living partners. In many cases they have been thought of as reproduction units. There have been cases in Fiji, Suriname etc., where sexual jealousy among workers have been explored and shown how that resulted in murders, wife chopping and suicide done by the workers. In some of the studies the rate of suicide among British Indians population in several countries correlated inversely with the number of women amongst them, whereas planters never accepted the fact that there was a lot of rape going on as well as other form of sexual coercion has been used. In the colonial imagination, intimidation was one only effective vehicle, because the coolies were creature of their passions, violent, jealous, and vicious and these features of men, made women exciting. But no one was made conscious about the systematic sexual exploitation of women by the Europeans and planters.

### **Plantation Discipline and Control of Labour**

In the case of Tamil Nadu, under the Kangany system the power of labour control lies in the hands of Kangany in most cases rather than the employer. Family, kin and caste ties were preserved and respected much more in kangany system than under Indenture where the jobbers were responsible for his recruits and could use the threat of separation from this labour group, and especially forced return to India, as a means of labour discipline.

Use of fraudulent methods by the planters such as charging high interest rate, wages lower than minimum wage, wrong exchange rates in calculation for their debts and they were not allowed to leave the plantations, until they don't clear their debts. Planters hired supervisor also to check for desertions. Under Kangany once labourers accepted an advance, for all practical purposes they become permanently tied to the recruiting estate and they could not leave the estate till the advance was fully repaid. The near universal practices of paying wages through Kanganies and withholding wage payment, were particularly the effective methods of intensifying dependence as well as disciplining labour. we have seen the hierarchy that helped in maintaining the discipline and control on the plantation where Managers→Associate→Head Foreman→Foreman→Coolie e.g., foreman were responsible for the output which the worker under him has to produce and foreman's compensation depends on the output, this itself act as an incentive for the foreman to control the workers and get the work done on time(J. Breman Ch.5).

To the Indians, the magistrates and the protector (in Fiji, the Agent-General of Immigration) stood as guardians against the unbridled power of the planters(Kelly 1992). On the other hand, the European establishment was not always happy about the justice as she was extended to the Coolie. But the fact was that clearly, these courts worked against the Indians. In Suriname to protect contract worker against abuse of power, the government has established the office of Agent

General for Immigration. Agent General task was to supervise and protect contract labourers. He needs to register changes in the social life of immigrants and inquire about complaint regarding labor and living conditions on the plantations. But the fact was that the Agent General rarely found time to make adequate inspection tours.

Whereas the immigration Department proved to be inefficient because Indentured labourers did not receive registration certificates or documents listing the terms of their contract. Consequently it was difficult for them to exercise their rights and to check whether employer fulfilled their commitments or not. In many instances there were also frequent discrepancies between an estates officials files and workers records, which further weakened the position of the indentured labourers. The immigration department simply seems not in favor of the contract labors as it could not comply with regulation and hence could not offer the contract labourers adequate protection.

There was also a second protector in the person of the British counsel. The consul had the right to communicate with the indentured labour, before the distribution in the colony. The British-Dutch agreement on contract migration also granted British Indians the right to claims consular assistance and stipulated that communication with the counsel should be free and without restriction. There were officials who were most in touch with the Asian labourers were the district commissioner's as executive officers who was in charge of administration and routine supervision. The DC's were, in fact, the "district governors" and this function made it hard for them to spend enough time on the indentured workers and to be impartial. The DC's simply did not have much time for the immigrants, as he was involved in all kinds of administrative duties, such as gathering of taxes, compilation of statistics, registration of Birth, marriage, deaths and importantly had to perform a number of judicial, task and many immigrants viewed the DC as a foe rather than a friend.

In the plantation system, white superiority encountered the structure and culture of Asian workers as inferior. According to the planters, workers possessed no characteristics that would make him into person, and according to this line of thought, the coolies has childish behavior which is somewhat, stupid, naïve and feeble – minded and to control them they used penal sanction as an instrument of control(Breman 1990). In case of absence from work, refusal of work or delaying the task or not completing the task on time were subject to criminal offence. The breach of contracts leads to punishment such as beating, flogging, sentence to jail etc. and most obvious way of dominating and controlling the indentured workers, was the threat of prosecution under the penal sanction. The labor, ordinances provided penalties for damaging, breaking, or through carelessness losing any tool, machinery, or others, objects belonging to the estates, and behavior such as drunkenness; laziness, unwillingness to work, abusive language or opposition by words or gesture to anyone in authority, absence without permissions, and desertion were subject to severe punishment. The contract also bound indentured workers to a specific plantation thus denying them the right to switch employers and the arbitrary authority of planters was an addition to the plantation system. This arbitrariness was clearly demonstrated in establishing task and wages, however it has been seen that on many plantation wages were paid not by day but by task and the task was



chosen by the planters as a result many labourers did not earn the fixed daily wage. And crucial matter such as assignment of workload and payment of wages allowed management to reward, punish and thus control their workers. Any immigrant, found beyond two miles of his or her plantation without permission from the plantation overseer would be liable for fines and criminal charges.

Another means of control was the isolation of workers on plantation through a pass system. After the expiration of their contract, they need pass to leave plantation and without pass they were not allowed to leave. A worker could leave the plantation only with the approval of the director, who issued the pass. Planters thus limited both their social and geographic mobility of contract workers in order to control their labour force both on and off the job. Social provision such as housing, the estate hospital, and the plantation ration shops also enhanced planter's control over contract labourers. Europeans sometimes seen encouraging labour competition between free and contract labourers by emphasizing religious and ethical differences or by employing psychological tactics such as cooperation and preferential treatment. Overseers and drivers – the management personnel in the field – were the key to labour control. The task of the overseer was to allot task and to supervise work, the drivers checked that labour was present and overseer recorded the wages earned. The labour control system made it easy to manipulate data to punish a trouble maker or reward favourite.

**Courtroom Injustice:** As the magistrates often belonged to the same social class as planters and shared their prejudices against the Asians. Courts enforce the rules of the plantation owners, frequently, ignoring the native customs and traditions of the immigrants. Major difficulty which the immigrants faced was their language because of which they could not always trust court interpreters. The pro-planter bias of the court was one of the grievances emphasized by the anti-emigration movement in India.

The court usually sentenced those convicted either to hard labour or gave them choice between fine or jail sentence. Whereas Indentured workers also had the right to take their employers to court when they thought of being treated unfairly, the most common charges brought against employers were for withheld pay, unduly heavy work loads, and physical violence but the irony is that many indentured workers could not read and thus understand the contract that gave them the right to sue their employers. And for workers to testify against their superiors will put them in vulnerable position. Whereas as it was also doubtful whether the court interested in taking cases against the management or whether they were willing to prosecute offending planters, but this seems that the court could fine planters but not sentence them to jail for sure. The percentage of contract labourers in Suriname who officially complained about their employers dropped from 2.4% to almost zero over the period of indenture. The plantation labour control system described here was similar to system in other countries employing indentured labour.

### **Resistance within the Confines of the Indentured Contract**

The mobilization of a largely migrant labour force that facilitated the use of economic and extra economic measure to maintain low wage bills; and the ethnic (and gender) differentiation of the labour force that enabled the

manipulation of both workers and wages whereas collectively, indentured labourers defiance involved acts of labour withdrawals, group mediation, general strikes and work stoppage.

In British Guiana, collective resistance like riots were also common. Indentured labourers in British Guiana used two broad techniques, overt and covert. The former was more direct and observable, while the latter was hidden but equally effective in challenging plantation domination and helping labourers to cope with it. To deal with the paternal structure of the plantation system, indentured Indians used moderate and militant forms of resistance. The moderate form of resistance was of the form like lodging their complaints and grievances and used their rights to bring employers to court for justice. They however used militant action because the labourers felt that the judicial system was not in their favour labour strikes and disturbances occurred on almost every plantation. Some of the high-caste leaders were returnee who were familiar with the condition on the plantation. They used this experience to confront the managers of the plantation system.

The covert or hidden form of resistance was to confront and reduce rather than to accept the burden of indenture without placing themselves in jeopardy. And hence this type of resistance might not have appeared to be resistance at all to the planters, since laborer's objectives were not always clear to the planters. Desertion was a legal offence despite this, desertion was a regular feature of indenture until the end desertion was most likely among the newly arrived Indians and those who had served out their first term of Indenture. Another covert form of resistance the labourers used was self-inflicted injury, ranging from mild to severe. Some indentured Indians used their machetes to cut off a finger or inflict a wound on their arm or leg. This was used as a way to decrease the plantation efficiency as well as to collect compensation for being hurt at work. Some indentured labourers took drastic steps such as committing suicide by drinking, hanging, or drowning. It could be argued that there was an element of pride and resistance in ending one's life on the plantation. Indentured labours also used their own cultural resilience such as storytelling and folk fare to deal with plantation oppression. This strengthens group cohesion and solidarity and helped them to caped with the hardships of losing their identity.

There were cases of Female indentured resistance also as they were subjects both Indian male and European plantation dominance. Conditions such as gender disparities abnormal living conditions, Indians male preferences for a limited number of women, the breakdown of Indian traditions and even women of questionable characters, exacerbated violence among Indian immigrants in British Guiana. A significant number of indentured women were viewed with distaste mainly from the planter viewpoint. Women under the male dominated structure felt powerless and given these situations, some women kept themselves in a poor state to appear unattractive to male predators, and consequently, might have prevented sexual abuse, as well as to safeguarded themselves against any form of exploitation There were also some occasions when women were not totally powerless and formed unions with men and resisted plantation conditions. The "black female spitfire" was a plague in the life of drivers, overseers, and managers who were often nearly driven to

distraction by the quarrelsomeness of such women. They used indecent, scandalous, insulting and threatening languages precipitated many other attacks on Europeans.

The stringent disciplinary and social control exercised by the contract and the abusive use of power by the planters invited resistance. The workers on the plantation frequently expressed their opposition to the regime through acts of non-cooperation such as "neglect of duty" or illegal absence. Resistance took various forms from indirect and non-violent to open defiance and from individual act of resistance to collective defiance, employed by the workers to protest the plantation regime and to fulfill their demands. Indirect and non-violent resistance could take innumerable forms, from foot dragging to labor withdrawal, group mediation, general strikes and work stoppage. Whereas as these kind of behavior infuriated plantation. Management and gave rise to the stereotype of the indolent Asian. Other typical forms of protest include theatrical satire in Suriname the Javanese especially resorted to such forms of resistance as flight and messianic movements. The worker protested in ways like, silence during the work, reluctance to answer questions, and general rudeness and recalcitrance. Some time mass protest resulted in number of workers death and dozen of casualties. The most obvious form of avoidance protest is running away or flight.

The most serious form of avoidance protest was suicide, which was traditionally considered as a typical British Indian action. According to the reports of agent General officially registered forty-seven cases of suicides by poisoning, hanging and self-inflicted wounds and thirty-two instances, he recorded the nationality of the deceased twenty-two British Indian and ten Javanese during 1886 to 1920. The Suriname planters complained that the Hindustani engaged in one of the classic forms of non-cooperation – the feigning of illness or injury and other everyday resistance include, "foot-dragging, pilfering and grousing behind the back of the local landlords. These were perceptions that the Javanese were more "docile" and "submissive" than the British Indians. Another form of resistance was individual acts of violence, such as the destructions of crops, obstruction of trains on the plantation, theft, arson any physical attacks on supervisory personnel physical attacks were directed against those members of the plantation hierarchy-primarily overseers and drivers who were closest supervisory contact with labourers and such incidence were often labeled acts of personal revenge or political act of surgency. One of the indentured women claimed that the terrible medical conditions at the plantation were the cause of the first rebellions and conflicts.

Once the workers entered into indentured contract to work on plantation, it was next to impossible for them to escape and in that case coolie did not suffer their exploitation and subjugation passively but took actions whether individually or collectively. There has been instances where according to the official version, the passive resistance against the authorities ceased as the British Indians began to throw objects at the attorney general. In Suriname many indentured worker feared the worst and took flight with their families to the surrounding forest. Only when the director guaranteed their safety only then were willing to return to the plantations.

The managers of plantation Marienburg listed a number of crimes perpetrated by British Indian under the heading

"coolie murder mania" to illustrate their fear of the plantation labourers on the plantation, gangs of cave cutters refused to do their task because they considered their pay inadequate. Many times the resistance took forms of riots and violence and take steps such as cut down the telephone poles to disrupt communication with the outside world and looted the office and the plantation shops. They killed many of the officials in the factory. According to British official records, the start of the resistance was related to the wages as workers shown their disappointment related to low wages and all the attempts by the state officials to raise the daily payment had proven futile. Later there authorities discovered that other problems such as the preferential treatment given to some immigrant families, bad choices of overseers, and inadequate control over the drivers had aggravated the unsatisfactory wage situation. This proved to be a remarkable admission of maltreatment on some estates. The consul also reported that there has been cases of "much ill feeling on account of the interference with the coolie women by the manager."

The strikes frequently got out of control resulting in confrontation between workers on the one side of the fence and management, state officials, army and police on the other. Furthermore, the changing political situation in India was thought to be making newly arrived immigrants unruly as these newcomers, has incited the old hand to mutiny. Not surprisingly, in all colonies nationalism was seen as a major threat. There were several obstacles to open collective resistance. The first and the most was the fear of repression, not only in the form of bullets but also through vindictive action by supervisory personnel. Similar to this the second obstacle was the economic dependencies, because material benefits such as plantation housing, medical care, garden plots, and use of the plantation shop which compounded their dependency on the estates. And these dependent relations were anchored in the strategy of labour control. The third obstacle was the risk of losing wages. Indentured workers where as did not have many viable options except flight. There were people who did not accepted the life on plantation and escaped where as some of the indentured labour choose suicide rather than surviving on the hell like situation created by the planter on the plantation.

Apart from open forms of resistance, they choose hidden or disguised forms of resistance or everyday form of resistance as these forms could not always be recognized as resistance and the labourers could not be punished. And it is likely that some labourers feigned illness in order to get leave of absence. And to counter this the planter gave them task work, so that in case of incompleteness of the task they can make deductions from their wages and this was the main reason they impose task work instead of day work. There was also another form of resistance i.e. doing things wrong or working. Slowly, there were some cases where the labourers damaged plants and trees before putting them in soil. Arson was also a weapon of resistance and an instrument to harm the proprietor.

Cultural resistance was also seen on the plantation means after a day of hard labour, they read holy books and other stories, which soften their pain and suffering. The Ramayana was very popular in all the migrants communities, just as Rama, they were also in exile, and they had to fight against injustice and in the end they would gain victory as when their indenture came to an end. Whereas Muharram was also popular in all indentured labour countries. The Taziya festival

can be seen as an expression of power by the powerless masses. Women's infidelities largely stemmed from desperate socio-economic conditions and resistance to this cannot be attributed to women's immoral character.

Finally resistance should not be viewed separately from accommodation because of majority of the indentured the objective was to survive five or three years on plantation as best as they could and make a new life. The indentured workers coped with indentured system lived their lives and in the process avoided the power of whites as best they could.

### Conclusion

Here I would like to draw out implications on the account of migration, recruitment, reconstruction of social institution and communities, plantation control on the labour and resistance by the workers. The Tamilian Labor moved from agrestic serfdom in Tamil Nadu to indenture bounded and Kangani debt-bondage system in Malaya and Ceylon. The 'lived-in' experience of Indian labour from Tamil Nadu migrating and reproducing on Malayan plantation belongs to this socio-historical framework. Plantation owners always encouraged recruitment of labour of various races, not just one, so that they can have divide and rule situation, controlling of labour become easy as well as they can protect any kind of labour union formation or discourage unity among labours. For this to happen they always gave preferential treatment to some of the labours and unruly behavior with others. Planters aim was always extraction of profit using indenture contracts and as the system benefitted them and to keep worker tied with them they offered 3 options to worker in British Guiana, i.e. upon serving their indentureship term were entitled to free return passage to India, which further planters negotiated with government and agreed to pay only half of their return passage, whereas, the other half return cost was too expensive for the Indentured labour, and thus this induced to re-indenture themselves to the same or another plantation, with small plot of land to grow their own food crops. But the reality was that the given plots of land was not easily cultivated and irrigated.

Planters hoped for an increase in demand for sugar and so sought to retain their indentured labor force by giving permanent residency of indentured labour in British Guiana, that offer included time expired indentured labourers. But clearly all these schemes were only to control the worker and aimed at maximizing profit by obtaining cheap labour. Now what was unique to indentured labourers as a group is the socio-historical period, indentured contract and social context of their reconstruction. There was construction of new communities going on such as Jahaji system, panchayat – where community disputes were settled by a system called panchayat, that institutionalized system of dispensing justice had its roots in India. It was reconstructed on plantation and become an internal community mechanism for settling disputes whereas due to shortage of females, the practice of Indian women moving from one mate to another surfaced but was not institutionalized. But one important thing to mention is that it would be a mistake to suggest the lack of women as a major reason for suicide.

Indeed religion was used to foster the psychological belief that they were superior to the other groups in the colony often the social characters ties used by the indentured labourers to reconstruct identity and community are used to separate

immigrants groups. Such as Indian, Chinese, German and Russian, Jews maintained social boundaries among themselves based on their countries of origin. In addition to the cultural and political differences, the excessive use of penal sanction under indentured contract, only increased planter's problems. The planters attempted to counter possible organized action by increasing division among their subordinates. They encouraged labour competition between free and contract labours, emphasized on religious differences; established separate housing division for the different ethnic groups, and used other tactics. As a result the organization of indentured plantation workers, proved to be very difficult.

It has been seen that it was the low wages that triggered the protest by the workers, which took several forms in the coming year, strikes and open rioting, with their mortal risks, was the norm of the day, but planters never accepted their own responsibility in labour problems rather, besides, blamed the outside forces such as "malevolent coolies" or "nationalist troublemakers from India". The role of the state was seen as ambivalent. It supported indentured labour in order to save sugar industry and, rules in court. At the same time agent general has to protect the rights of the indentured workers. Despite the ambivalent position of the estate, the authorities usually took harsh measure in support of the planters. Avoidance protest and everyday resistance, more than open defiance were the methods of protest on plantation s during the period of indentureship. All these forms of resistance – foot dragging, arson simulation of illness, sabotage, desertion, feigned ignorance, gesture of contempt, suicide and many more were used by Asian. Javanese also defied the system but the sources that the two groups employed were different. The Javanese relied on form, such as avoidance protest and cultural resistance as messianic and flight, which they had used in their home country, whereas Hindustani used avoidance and hidden resistance, and more likely to demonstrate collective and open defiance.

This may be partly explained by the cultural background of the Hindustani. And the other reason for the difference in reaction was the nationality, as the Hindustani remained British subject and enjoyed the protection of British Consul and which provided one of the reason why they felt superior to the Javanese. There were problems revolving around gender-specific roles, prostitution, venereal diseases, sodomy, illegitimate offspring, brittle marriage ties, a scarcity of women and families, all in one form or the other were social 'disorders' tied to the estates and plantations efforts to impose their control and authority over the intimate life of men and women.

It has been observed that in case of full repayment of the advances taken from the planters, the indentured workers could not leave the estates in a context of intense misery and persistent and substantial unemployment they remained under the control of Kanganies and could not withdraw from plantation work or even move from one estate to another. The hold on workers was also maintained through various devices resorted to by Kanganies with the support of planters. In fact an interplay of indebtedness, caste hierarchy, personal dependency relations helped to keep the indentured workers under the permanent control and significantly to restrict the operation of the labour market.



Somewhere, revisionist have argued that the workers have migrated in the hope of better living condition than those prevailing in the home country and prompted by hopes of bettering their future, an 'escape hatch' from social and economic oppression at home. But this conclusion by the revisionist is not all true. Because there are evidence from Fiji and other plantations that the workers have been kidnapped and brought on the plantation through illegal system to which the Asian showed their resistance also. The contract labours avoided confrontation as much as possible and most often used avoidance to express dissatisfaction. Their protest were always responsive and had short-range goals, such as immediate amelioration of material conditions or winning redress and fair treatment.

Throughout the indentureship period, the Indian indentured labourers were engaged in deliberate acts to undermine authority. The pattern of resistance by Indian indentured laborer, varied according to location, individuals and leadership amongst other factor. Here, there is no doubt that workers showed their resistance in many form, but it was all due to conditions prevailing on the plantation and some of the situation, planters, themselves created, and should have taken the responsibility, such as unfair treatment by Sirdar's, overseers, managers, assaulted them on field when there was no body around.

In those cases there were no witnesses and it was difficult to get the perpetrators convicted.

Many of the workers seen indenture migration as source to improve their life and to build a new and better future. But after arriving on the plantation, the situation were totally different from what they expected and due to which disputes started occurring and various forms of resistance on plantations have been observed.

#### References

- [1] Rosemarijin Hoefte. : "A Passage to Suriname? The Migration Of Modes of Resistance by Asian Contract Laborers". International Labor and Working-Class History, No. 54, Migration, Labor Movements, and the Working Class (Fall, 1998), pp. 19-31.
- [2] Ravindra K Jain. : "Tamilian Labour and Malayan Plantations, 1840-1938". In Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 43 (Oct. 23, 1993), pp. 2363-2370.
- [3] Parbattie Ramsarran. : "The Indentured contract and its Impact on Labor Relationship and Community Reconstruction in British Guiana". in International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 2008, 177-188.
- [4] Maurits S. Hassankhan, Brij V.Lal and Doug Munro. : "Resistance and Indian Indenture Experience :comparative perspectives"
- [5] Breman, J.:"Taming the coolie Beast" Ch. 5.

