Comparative Cultural Rights in Select Texts on Indo-Guyanese Plantation Diaspora

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by

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under the Supervision of Prof. Sucheta Bhattacharya

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Comparative Cultural Rights in Select Texts on Indo-Guyanese Plantation Diaspora

submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of ----------

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And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere / elsewhere.

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Dedicated

To

the Fond Memory of

Two of My Professors

Prof. Swapan Kumar Chakraborty (Swapan Da)

&

Prof. Samantak Das (Samantak Da)

Who Had Been at the Beginning.

But Could not See the End

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a grateful mind

By owing, owes not, but still pays, at once

Indebted and discharged…

Synopsis
Comparative Cultural Rights in Select Texts
on Indo Guyanese Plantation Diaspora

Chapter I

Introduction

Implicit in an ending is a beginning—destination rendered futile. In any case, as the saying goes, wherever you go, there you are. There you are".

[Shani Mootoo, *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), p. 363]

General Background

I. From British Guiana to Guyana: Legacy of Indenture and Colonial Exploitation

Indentured labour migration from India to British plantation colonies began "as a quick-fix solution for the abolition of Slavery in the 1830s(Munos 2016, 2)" During the period from 1934 to 1917 when the Indian indentured labour migration was officially discontinued over one million Indians indentured themselves(Lal 2006) by signing agreements or *girmits* to work in different European plantation colonies for a fixed period of five years. The Indian indentured labour migration to British Guiana began in 1838. Between 1838 and 1917 a total of "239,939 indentured immigrants … arrived in British Guiana(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 33)".

The history of Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana is fraught with colonial betrayal on multiple fronts. Though the empire of sugar was sustained in several parts of the globe by the colonial projection of "the saga, travails and 'fortunes' of the girmityas of the Ganges Valley(Kumar 2017, 71); (Sven Beckert 2014)" the saccharin empire was not so sweet for the Indian indentured labouers, if the colonial archives are read from the Indian perspective and the imaginative recreations of the early indentured Indian life in the plantations are to be believed. From 1854, the Indian indentured labour immigration to British Guiana "moved from private to state controlled largely to meet the interests of the planter class(Lomarsh Roopnarine

2022, 34)". The fixed wages which largely remained the same throughout the entire period of indenture (men received one shilling and women 10 pence) without taking into account the rising inflation and the cost of living in the plantation colonies betray the blindness of the British colonial plantation masters towards the socio-political condition of the indentured labourers as they were too busy measuring the thickness of their purse.

The provision of free return passage along with moderate housing facility, limited ration and free medical care; and by the 1860s, a bounty of $50.00 to the indentured Indians to re-indenture for another five years without losing the right to their return passages- present the tempting picture of the Indian indentured labourers in the British Guiana. No doubt, "the bounty system benefitted the re-indentured Indians, [but] it was not based on humanitarian-sentimental values. The planters wanted to retain a seasonal and cheap labour force on the plantations to prune costs(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 35)".

The history of the enactments of the laws regulating indenture is particularly important to understand how it prioritized and safe-guarded the interests of the British plantocracy. In 1864, the Colonial Government in India "systematized the emigration of indentured labourers from India to the colonies(Kumar 2017, 59)". A new section (Section 44) was inserted into the final draft of Section XLIV to address issues of indenture recruits refusing to embark the ships bound for different sugar plantation colonies. The crime thus committed by refusing to embark indenture ships without sufficient cause was brought for the first time under the ambit of Indian Penal Code, and the punishment was recommended under section 492[1862] of the IPC. The Emigration Act of 1883 contained two specific sections- 93(1) and 94(1) - which provided for the recovery of the cost incurred in making an indentured emigrant "enter into an agreement

with, registering and conveying him to the depot, and maintaining him therein(quoted in Kumar 2017, 69)". The regular amendments of the Emigration Act bear testimony to the agency of the indentured emigrants who "pursue[d] their own agendas within the interstices of the colonial system [by]…exploiting the legal loopholes in existing legislation(Kumar 2017, 70)".

During the mid-1870s many changes were made in the policy regulating the indentured labour in British Guiana. At first, colonial administration abolished the option of re-indenture. Lomarsh Roopnarine writes:

> Re-indenture was abolished because of the abuse of the immigrants, arising from the desire to retain them through inducement rather than obtaining their goodwill and the planters' delaying tactics to avoid the financial responsibility of sending back time-expired Indians. The colonial administration gave time-expired Indians the option to exchange their return passage for ten acres of land, later reduced to five acres. The rational was to avoid the expense of return passages and to have Indians use their savings to invest in and build British Guiana rather than them sending remittances to India(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 33).

The indentured Indians in British Guiana, inexperienced as they were in owning and managing infertile swampy lands, could not make much use of the policy of land for relinquishing right to return passage and ultimately abandoned it. Another significant change was that by 1879 the returning indentured Indians had to pay from one third (for women) to half (for men) of the cost of return to India. This definitely discouraged the return migration of the Indian indentured labourers and encouraged their settlement in the British Guiana where "upward social mobility was possible, irrespective of one's station in life(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 36)".

Indentured had reaches a crucial stage at the turn of the twentieth century when cane-sugar faced formidable challenge from beat-sugar produced at a much lower rate. The global capital meltdown in the first decade of the twentieth century raised concern whether indenture

should continue or end. The Sanderson Commission in 1910 “provided a positive narrative of indenture being beneficial to Indians in British Guiana and recommended its continuation(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 37)”. But the exposure of the exploitation of the indentured Indian women in the hands of the white supervisors and a pan-Indian nationalist grievance against “tainting all Indians with the tainted brush of coolitude” made the colonial Indian officials abolish indenture labour migration in 1917. However, the legacy of indenture continued in the lives of the descendents of the indentured labourers in more ways than one.

The post-indenture period witnessed extraordinary improvement in the condition of the Indian community in British Guiana. Though the underbelly of the Indian community in British Guiana was “made worse by the reality that it was situated on the unenviable side of the insular plantation system where resources were limited(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022,41-42)”, they decided to settle down and began to the transform economic and cultural landscape of the colony by dint of their hard labour and enterprise. Though a large number of these people continued to live in the plantation estates they moved from subsistence farming to small business enterprises like opening shops and fishing. “The weekly Indian Opinion newspaper provided cramped evidence of the rapid development of the Indians in British Guiana, giving the impression that the Indians were taking over the colony(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 38)”. During the 1930s the Indians in British Guiana became the ethnic majority and secured their position through the reconstruction of their homeland culture and rural lifestyle.

Indians in British Guiana began to leave their mark on the turbulent political turf of the colony. Leaders like Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham lobbied with the international power-centers to bring about an end to the British rule in the colony. It gained independence on 26 May,

1966 and was proclaimed a cooperartive republic on 23 February, 1970. The birth of a new nation with the new name of Guyana had its own ramifications. One immediate fall out was the racialization of the national imaginary. With dictatorship gripping Guyana from1968 to 1982, it became a country without legitimate democracy as the Indo-Guyanese community was not yet comprehended as an integral part of the Guyanese national imaginary. Thus, the superimposition of indentured labour diaspora particularly from India on the existent creole populations of African heritage "introduced substantial demographic and cultural elements to insular and littoral Caribbean populations; these, in turn, have generated specific consequences"(Kabir 2020, 178) in the cultural landscape of both British Guiana and independent Guyana as various communities wrestle for cultural rights specific to their ethnic and racial identity mediated by the realities of the everyday.

II. Cultural Rights: A Brief Overview

Any discussion of the rather less-prioritized category of cultural rights (vis-à-vis political and economic rights) must, at first, grapple with the term 'culture' itself. Commenting on the complexity of the term 'culture', Raymond Williams has written: it is "one of the two or three most complicated words in English language(Raymond Williams 1983, 87)". Cultural rights, in their narrow sense includes the following elements:

> [T]he right to take part in cultural life; the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications; the right of everyone to the benefits emanating from the protection of the moral and material interests deriving from any scientific, literary, or artistic production of which he/she is the author; and finally, the right to the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity(Yupsanis 2018, 6).

Another important dimension which offers a different perspective on cultural rights is contained in article 27 of the ICCPR:

> "In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their culture, to profess and practice their religion, or to use their own language(United Nations 2010, 15)".

Yupsanin says that:

> The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, considered a right of cultural character in much the same way as language, in the sense that there is a close connection between culture and religion. Moreover, it is for this reason that the religions of minorities and of indigenous peoples found themselves, like in the case of the languages, at the focus of aggressive national assimilationist policies, an approach that, in many cases, still prevails(Yupsanis 2018, 7).

In his essay 'On Minorities: Cultural rights' Bhabha assterts the importance of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as "it protects 'the right of minorities, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. As such Article 27 is the most significant international instrument for the protection and implementation of 'cultural rights'(Bhabha 2000, 3)". The insistence in Article 27 on the preservation of minority cultural identity instead of new formations of minoritization, or 'partial cultural milieux', stresses the point that

> minorities, amongst others, are regulated and administered into a position of having an excess of 'identity', which can then be assimilated and regulated into the state's conception of 'the common good'. [Refering to] Seyla Benhabib [Bhabha] has pointed out, 'historically the strong pursuit of collective goals or "goods," commonly referred to as nationalism, has usually been at the cost of minorities – sexual, cultural or ethnic.' Minorities – both national and 'migrant or diasporic' – are too frequently imaged as the abject 'subjects' of their cultures of origin huddled in the gazebo of group rights, preserving the orthodoxy of their distinctive cultures in the midst of the great storm of Western progress(Bhabha 2000, 4).

In his book titled Homi K. Bhabha, David Huddart comments that " In the essay 'On Minorities: Cultural Rights' Bhabha begins with two terms from philosopher Charles Taylor, who writes in terms of the whole society being achieved through the exclusion of the partial milieu(David Huddart 2007, 130)". Following this viewpoint one can argue that "a whole society is essentially a national society, achieved through the assimilation of minority identities, thought of as partial milieux(David Huddart 2007, 130)". Similarly, Artcle 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Bhabha argues, aims at assimilating the 'excess' identity of the minority groups to preserve the majoritarian identities.

Culture manifests itself in different forms and is lodged in the everyday practices and knowledge systems of minorities and indigenous peoples. It includes the responsibilities and obligations that are required for social life to carry on with and is elemental to the collective identity and the uniqueness of the group. "Because of this relationship between culture and collective and individual identity, social cohesion and daily life, cultural rights are particularly important guarantees for indigenous peoples and minorities. They cumulatively protect the survival and continued development of indigenous and minority collectivities(MacKay 2005, 83)".

III. Cultural Ecology of Plantation

Plantation is a frontier institution with large land areas which the planters 'put to higher use' by producing world market staples. The plantation system of agriculture has in fact been the classical form of capitalist exploitation in tropical areas where it developed as a political and social as well as economic institution. A punitive colonial ambience was imposed on all of the people who worked on plantations. The planters used strict vigilance and coercion as strategy to maximize their production. In this sense, plantation acted like a whole system with rank

hierarchies. Being a totalitarian system of power relations between the planters and the workers the institution of plantation did not provide any room for the workers to assert themselves.

The clash between the cultures of the planters and the plantation workers is evident in the cultural economy of the plantation. “Culture is not only the problem; it is also the solution(Gowricharn 2022, 70)”. The culture of the planters is solidified in the institution of plantation which is geared at eradicating the social problems of the plantation workers- problems like unemployment, improving health condition, maintaining family cohesion, etc. As a result, the marginalized peasants from rural India were lured by colonial agents to seize the opportunity to indenture themselves to “win riches and a glorious return home(Mishra 2007)”. But the attainment of the promised wages and other basic facilities in the plantation colonies demanded absolute subjugation of these already marginalized peoples.

As their culture travelled with them, the indentured labourers tried to find solace amidst the revolting tropical condition of the plantations. But it is their culture that made them subjected to the constant vigil and censor of the colonial plantocracy. The culture of the indentured Indians seemed to be a threat to the apparent peace and prosperity of the plantation. Since plantation acted as a whole system the planters were always anxious to strategically control any kind of deviating tendency among the plantation workers. Hence, the colonial British plantocracy wanted the indentured labourers to subject themselves to an obligation to assimilate.

Colonial socio-economic imperatives resulted in the use of coercive forms of control and employment of women in primarily unskilled jobs like weeding, manuring and working as a

khelauni. "In the plantation both the value and fact of women's productive and reproductive work are largely mediated by institutionalized patterns of male authority and domination(Shobhita Jain and Rhoda Reddock 1998)". Gaiutra Bahadur also mentions the bitter truth about the position of the indentured Indian women in the eyes of the planters. She writes:

> No doubt indentured women realized that planters wanted them not for their wombs , but their backs- to raise and bend them, whacking at weeds in indenture service, and to lie flat on them, in sexual service(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 113).

In the plantations women's subversive and aggressive strategy was directed against the might of the plantation. The dynamics of female responses to plantation control demonstrates the extent to which a labour system aspiring to be 'a total social system' could reinforce the powerful male control of the colonial capitalistic enterprise.The paucity of women in plantation was one of the primary social concerns among the indentured labourers. The peculiar existential circumstances of indenture predicated that indentured women should serve two contradictory functions: to leave one man for another and to comply with the standards of a good, chaste wife. Reddock stated that the plantation life allowed women more control over their life, as "… women could now, on their own accord, leave one husband for another or have a parallel relationship with more than one man(Reddock 1985, 42)" and that, "…many Indian women, probably for the first time in their lives, got an opportunity to exercise a degree of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before… To them migration was an attempt at improving their economic…status(Reddock 1985, 41)". Though the skewed sex ration provided women with some sexual leverage, it was precisely this "sexual liberation…[that] caused uncountable sexual assaults against women, including brutal murders(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 66)". C. F. Andrews who was one of the avid supporters of the movement against indenture labour migration reported on the appalling condition of coolie women in Fiji: "The

Hindu woman in this country is alike a rudderless vessel with its mast broken drifting onto the rocks; or like a canoe being whiled down the rapids of a great river without any controlling hand. She passé from one man to another, and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so(C. F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson 1916)". Similarly, Jeffrey Beall contends that women did not really "flourish as autonomous social and sexual beings(Jeffrey Beall 1990, 73)" as they became objectified as models of sexual desire at the hands of both the overseers and their own countrymen.

One may now question the moral standpoint that Andrews adopted to express the condition of women in plantations in Fiji, and by analogy, in general. Other writers, like Ahmed Ali in *Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians* and Vijay Naidu in *The Violence of Indenture in Fiji*, have stated that women on plantation work took advantage of their scarcity value and bartered their bodies to whoever paid the highest price(Ahmed Ali 1980); (Vijay Naidu 1980). But these female plantation workers were not from the prostitute class in India as Andrews had maintained in his reports.

Literature Review

In his essay 'Culture, State, and Rediscovery of Indian Politics' Ashis Nandy talks about two types of approaches to state in the modern societies. According to him:

> In most modern societies, among people who work with the older concept of the state and not with the modern concept of the nation-state, the culture-oriented approach to state is seen as natural and the state-oriented approach as an imposition. Likewise, in modern societies the nation-state-oriented approach seems natural and rational, and the culture-oriented one looks unnatural, irrational, or primitive. The choice, therefore, boils down to one between the culture-oriented and nation-state-oriented(Ashis Nandy 1984).

It is perhaps important to mention here that the early Indian indentured labourers who went to the plantation colony of British Guiana privileged cultural identity the state identity. They carried along with their little belongings their savoiur texts like *Ramcharitmanas* or *Hanuman Chalisa* or *Quran* to distinguish them from others(Mishra 2007). Perhaps this 'Tool Kit' that they carried had something to do with the notion of belonging to a great civilization of unbroken cultural lineage.

Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* writes: "Civilization and culture both refer to the overall way of life of a people and a civilization is a culture writ large. They both involve the values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance(Samuel P. Huntington 1996, 41)". For the first group of indentured Indians, home meant another undifferentiated landmass that was part of the enormous colonial terra firma. They were unable to feel a sense of selfhood against the eyewash of the colonial culture because of the idea of their state, which was bound and defeated.

Geoffrey Hartman in his book *The Fateful Question of Culture* contends that: "Homelessness is always a curse(Geoffrey H. Hartman 1997, 158)". The dilemma that comes with identifying as a diaspora exists even when it is a practical need. It would have probably been considerably harder for the initial wave of the culture-focused diaspora to adopt the statist and regimented practices of the western nation state. Yet, it might have become easier for the subsequent generations of the Indian indentured diaspora as many of them might have hybridized. Nonetheless, the diaspora is ever ready to establish an "elsewhere" as a strategy for opposing the dominance of the host culture.

Paul Gilroy in his revision of Benedict Anderson sees the diaspora framework as "an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in racial, ethnic or national essences(Paul Gilroy 1987, 154)". If nations could be created by imagining a community bound by certain ideology(Anderson 2006), there can always be an 'elsewhere' in the counter imagination of the diaspora. This counter-imagination is a combination of understanding one's own position, imagining alternatives, and seeking to actualize them. The diaspora can envision a perfect homeland that, if not better, will be just as prosperous and powerful as the host nation in an active effort to make it a reality. This brings up the subject of the diaspora's divided loyalties once more, but the issue of allegiance is scarcely one that can be handled by social policing.

The cultural rights of the Indian indentured labourers in the plantation colonies have not gained much traction in any discussion of their quotidian life. Asutosh Kumar writes:

> "Culture is lived and reproduced in communities, but is crucially linked to place and he exigencies of work and labour. As the process of production and time is central to the reproduction of culture, by analyzing culture we can understand the continuity and change in the process of indenture(Kumar 2017, 125)".

The colonial government in India was somewhat disinterested in documenting the everyday life of the indentured labourers in the plantation colonies. Kumar mentions this double standard in the act of colonial archiving. He observes:

> "While the colonial government in India was keenly collecting information on Indian peasant life, in the sugar colonies, there was no analogous collection of material related to culture, religion and quotidian life of indentured labourers. The sugar colonial archive is

> thin on the popular religion and culture of *Girmitya/ Kontraki /Kalkatiya / Madrasi*. This does not mean that there was no religio-socio-cultural life on the plantations, and the non-official writings… confirm that Indentured Indians maintained their popular religion, beliefs and other social norms and rituals in their new locations, albeit with some modifications(Kumar 2017, 136)".

Historians of Indian indenture are divided on the issue of preservation and perpetuation of Indian cultural norms. Brij Lal comments:

> "Migration and indenture disrupted the *girmityas'* religious and cultural life. There were few shrines and sacred places, few *murties*, few learned men, *pundits*, *sadhus* or *maulvis*, versed in the scriptures to impart moral and spiritual instruction. Their absence facilitated an essentially emotional, egalitarian and non-intellectual moral order among the *girmityas*(Lal 2004, 17)".

On the other hand, Ahmed Ali contends:

> "Girmityas, whether Hindu or Muslim, possessed sufficient cultural resources of their own...all the evils of plantation capitalism and colonial racism could not destroy the indomitable spirit of Hinduism and Islam(Ahmed Ali 2004, 74-75)".

Refering to Toataram Sanadhya Ashutosh Kumar impresses upon the reader that "cast adrift from their familiar culture moorings, trapped in indenture, the illiterate and poor struggled against great odds to preserve fragments of their ancestral culture in alien surroundings for reassurance, comfort, security and memory(Kumar 2017, 185)".

Ranajit Guha noted that "peasants and their culture appear in the colonial record only when they become a problem of law and order(Ranajit Guha 1983)". "In India everyday peasant culture is based on agriculture producing a range of crop… On the plantations there was no agricultural calendar, rather labourers had to work completely for a monoculture of sugar

production(Kumar 2017, 155-156)". Thus, focus had been primarily on the strict work culture under plantation regime rather than on the cultures of the indentured immigrants.

While on the one hand the British colonial officials did not show any eagerness to document the cultural life in the plantations, on the other, wherever they have mentioned the cultural life of the Indian indentured labourers it has always been a negative portrayal of them as culturally heathen. The projection of cultural inferiority on the Indian indentured labourers by the British colonial officials elevated them to the powerful position of creating and attributing certain "cultural norm images(Gowricharn 2022, 67)". It has been observed that the cultural norm images of a male Indian indentured labourer as "a dangerous malcontent(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)", of a female Indian indentured labourer as "prostitute(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013)", and of a whole nation [Indian] as "uneducated, wrapped up in tradition' [and] 'intensely jealous people(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 135)" – all bear negative connotation.

Research Gap

The review of the recent relevant literature, thus, reveals that homeland culture played an important role in the everyday life of the Indian indentured labourers by providing them with a cushion to sustain their emotional and psychological coherence. Since culture is lived and practiced in the quotidian it certainly played an important role in the determination of Indian indentured labourers' and the subsequent indentured Indian diaspora's individual or group rights which were [and are] necessary to enable them to better negotiate the systems under which they found themselves. But it does not explain how their collective similarity of behaviour posed challenge [if not threat] to the all too authoritarian institutions like indenture labour system, British colonial plantocracy, patriarchal inviolability and the 'illegitimate democracy' in independent Guyana .

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to find out how the Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana and the subsequent Indo-Guyanese diaspora in independent Guyana claim cultural rights in negotiating agency to better adapt to the systems that tried to assimilate them as disenfranchised community devoid of any voice to protest. In this thesis I have tried to analyze selected texts written on the Indo-Guyanese plantation diaspora which are both archival resurrection and imaginative representation of the lived experiences of the early Indian immigrants and their descendents in and of the plantation colony of British Guiana and the post-independence Co-operative Republic of Guyana in order to find out the palimpsests of cultural identities and belonging. Attention has also been paid to literary representation of the historical phenomenon of twice migration of the Indo-Guyanese population to England and North America to understand its implication in my study of comparative cultural rights.

Research Questions

The research questions that I have tried to answer are: How did British plantation system maintained its hold for so long a time in different plantation colonies? How did this colonial dominance subjected the culture of the indentured Indian labourers to close surveillance and controlled any deviance? How did the silencing or exclusion of these indentured Indians in the plantation colony of British Guyana enable them to become aware of their marginalized condition? How did the different marginalized communities within the umbrella of indenture labour diaspora claim agency and assert cultural rights to negotiate terms in their interactions with colonial hierarchy and patriarchal inviolability?

Research Argument

The principal argument that I want to make is that British plantocracy in British Guiana and elsewhere sustained itself through institutionalizing certain social structures as whole systems which operated on the binary logic profit and loss. This binary of profit and loss is supplemented by an imperial rhetoric of cultural superiority which assumes authority to provide solution to all the problems of the marginalized communities through the process of integration which most often boils down to a cultural transition of these minority categories. But this rhetoric is ruptured by the occasional assertion of cultural rights in the realm of the everyday by different marginalized categories within these social structures.

Theoretical Framework

In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) Karl Marks and Friedrich Engels posits their classic position which stated that "the ruling ideas of an epoch are the ideas of the ruling elite"(Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 1967). This fundamental proposition that the structure of a society begets the dominant ideology was elaborated further by Peter Burger and Thomas Luckman in their *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966). They argue that since man has 'internalized society' although incompletely, society is already there in man(Luckmann 1966). This incomplete internalizatig of the societal structures endows man with some degree of agency to change society. In attempting to change society man has to be in society and externalize himself. This leads to another classical statement by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) where he states that "man makes his own history but in specific inherited circumstances(Karl Marx 1852)".

The journey of an indentured labour passes through distinct phases of strict control and regimentation. From indentured recruit in coolie depots and indenture ships, to 'bound coolie' in

the plantations to ‘unbound labour’ after the abolition of indenture in 1917 to citizenship in a postcolonial independent nation- the *girmit yatra* of the indentured labourers and their descendents is fraught with stories of discrimination, conflict and violence perpetrated against them by colonial and patriarchal regimes. There is a striking similarity among indenture, plantation economy, patriarchy and the ‘illegitimate democracy’ of Afro-Guyanese ruling natives in independent Guyana, as all are institutions which “exist by the grace of regular collective behaviour(Gowricharn 2022, 70)”. Thus, all these institutions aspire after the perpetuations of their totalitarian ethos by the judicious application of strategies.

A strategy, according to Michel de Carteau, is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power…can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats…can be managed(Michel de Carteau 1988, 35-36). The manipulation of power relation in all these institutions of indenture, plantation economy, patriarchy and the Afro-Guyanese ‘illegitimate democracy’ is marked by an effort “to delimit the one’s own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the other(Michel de Carteau 1988, 36)”. In the case of the institution of indenture the British colonial officials and their recruiting agents assume the position of self while the vulnerable peasants from rural India constitute the other. In the plantation colony the plantation owners, managers and overseers wielded authority to administer the indentured Indian labourers. The plantation authority was sometimes backed by some Indian nationalists who held androcentric assumptions about the moral degeneration of coolie women in the plantations. The binary power realation in the case of independent Guyana was between culture-centric native rulers of Afro-Guyanese descent who have excluded the Indo-Guyanese diaspora from the national imaginary of independent Guyana.

"The division of space between the self and the other makes possible a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured and thus control and "include" them within its scope of vision(Michel de Carteau 1988, 36)". In the present discussion the 'foreign objects' are the minority categories of indenture recruits, indentured labourers, the women in plantation and Indo-Guyanese diaspora who are to be controlled and 'included' within the scope of vision of the dominant categories of British colonial officials and their recruiting agents, plantation owners, managers and overseers often supported by Indian nationalists having androcentric bias, and the native rulers of Afro-Guyanese descent in independent Guyana respectively.

As has already been mentioned, since "the whole society [is] achieved through the exclusion of the partial milieux… [it] is essentially a national society, achieved through the assimilation of minority identities(David Huddart 2007, 130)". The dominant categories try to colonize the minority categories through the creation and attribution negative of "cultural norm images(Gowricharn 2022, 68)", by "fantasiz[ing] endless monstrous stereotypes that can only lead to anxiety rather than desired certainty(David Huddart 2007, 61)". Thus, we see that the authority of the dominant category is never as complete as it seems, because it is always marked by anxiety, something that enables the dominated to fight back(David Huddart 2007, 1)". This fighting back becomes possible by resorting to a tactic which is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus(Michel de Carteau 1988, 36). Tactics play an important role in the realm of the everyday. As tactics is "an art of the week functioning in the space of the other, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power(Michel de Carteau 1988, 37)". Since a tactic is

> a maneuver …within enemy territory …It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them, being without any base where it

> could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position and plan raids. What it wins cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers(Michel de Carteau 1988, 37).

Since culture is lived and practiced in everyday life, the Indian indentured labourers and their descendents used tactics in claiming agency to claim cultural rights in conditions which otherwise would have assimilated them into the colonial logic of monoculture. The postcolonial parallax position, as defined by Huddart in his commentary on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural rights, is "an apparent change in the position of an object when the person looking at the object changes position(David Huddart 2007, 124)". In my study of the comparative cultural rights in select texts on Indo-Guyanese plantation diaspora I have observed that the postcolonial parallax position is an enabling condition for the minority categories to continuously dodge the imperial logic of assimilation.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study consists of the close thematic analysis of the primary sources. I have also used biographical and historical materials in order to understand the social and political milieu in which the novelists wrote. I have supported my findings with a significant number of critical essays on Edward Jenkins, Moses Nagamootoo, and Gaiutra Bahadur, which deal specifically with the subject of racial discrimination, gendered oppression, indenture labour system, British colonial plantocracy, patriarchal inviolability and liberal democracy, and cultural rights with special reference to British Guiana and later independent Guyana.

Introducing the Texts

Published in 1877, Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* is a romantic novel about indenture published during indenture. The edition that I have used for my study of the novel is the Kindle edition of 2011 when the book was digitized. It recounts the sorrows of Lutchmee and Dilloo under the system of indenture in British Guiana because of racial, ethnic and cultural stereotyping. While, on the on hand, the novel depicts the application of tactics as a means to achieve upward mobility in the plantation estates, on the other it recounts violent anti-colonial resistance to British plantocracy. The claiming of public space within the regimented landscape of the plantation through the recreation of religio-cultural festival of 'Tazda' or Muharram which had its root in India makes the novel particularly important as a study in the assertion of cultural rights of the Indian indentured labourers in British Guyana. The credulous portrayal of the everyday coolie life throws into sharp relief the rhetoric of the Empire as a welfare state.

Moses Nagamootoo's *Hendree's Cure*, published in 2000, chronicles the post-passage life of the 'marginalized' Madrasi community in the sugar plantations of politically turbulent British Guiana. Instead of the idea of returning home the chief operational idea in this novel is what Avtar Brah has called "homing desire(Avtar Brah 1996, 181)". The novel also records the problem of identification. There is a creative tension between an urge to connect to the country of origin and an opposing urge to creolization. The necessity to connect to the coolie ancestors through hard labor, the *girmit*-descendant's necessity to fossilizing the self in the primal act of *girmit*, is seen in the quest for upward social mobility in the coolie descendants. The ethical responsibility of writing one's own past creatively disrupts the 'official' colonial historiographic record of indenture labour migration by the foundational insertion of the subaltern agency in asserting cultural rights by negotiating alternatives.

Published in 2013, Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* is the recreation of the life and times of Sujaria and other coolie women who indentured themselves to work as labourers in the plantation colony of British Guyana. Bahadur meticulously resurrected from archival records the repressed memories of her great grandmother, Sujaria who ventured into the unfamiliar and the unknown as a pregnant woman travelling alone in 1903. The book excavates an imperial history of colonial and patriarchal hegemony which tried to control and censor any deviant tendency among the coolie women by creating cultural hoops through which they should pass in order to be accepted as unproblematic for the perpetuation of institutions based on violence and discrimination.

Rational for Selection of Texts

I have selected three texts on Indo-Guyanese plantation diaspora to build up my argument. The first one, *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, written in 1877 by Edward Jenkins, has been selected as it is a novel on indenture written during indenture. It recounts the everyday lives of the early Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana recounting the story of how a handful of colonial officials and plantation masters managed to regulate and administer the daily lives of the indentured labourers both on and off the plantations by casting them into different stereotypical images, all having negative connotations. The second text, again a novel, titled *Hendree's Cure* by Moses Nagamootoo, was published in 2000. It is the story of cultural self-assertion of the second and third generations of the minority Madrasi community, within the Indo-Guyanese population, through claiming cultural rights to negotiate alternatives by characters like Naga, Hendree, Chunoo, and others. The third one, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* by Gaiutra Bahadur, is an/a (auto)biographical account of the traumatic experience especially faced by the

indentured women in both British Guiana and independent Guyana because of the prevalence of colonial and patriarchal hegemony both during and after the indenture period. Published in 2013, the text is complex narrative of uprooting first from British India to the plantation colony of British Guiana and later from independent Guyana to North America. While the cultural ramifications *of kala pani* crossing is writ large in the epic journey of Sujaria and other coolie women in the text at the turn of the twentieth century, the second migration is that of their third and fourth generations to a first world country in order to evade racial discrimination and violence perpetrated by Afro-centric ruling natives against the Indo-Guyanese diaspora. I have selected *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* because, unlike the previous two texts which are the imaginative recreations of indenture and its legacy, it is a product of meticulous archival research. Besides, Gaiutra Bahadur's text talks about the historical phenomena of second migration.

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Chapter II

Countering Colonial Stereotyping: Analyzing the Use of Tactics to Resist Cultural Integration in Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo*

"Out of one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, it was a pleasant illusion of these gentlemen to think that a few hundred Whites constituted "The People!" Blacks, Madeirans, Coolies, all swarming in tens of thousands, what were they? Why, they were machines to make money for the people of Demerara — provide cheap sugar to the world in general, and plenty of profit to speculating Britons in particular".

[Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III]

As has already been mentioned in Chapter I, Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* is a romantic novel about indenture published during indenture. It recounts the sorrows of the indentured labourers under the system of indenture in British Guiana with its mixed population of Blacks, Indians, Chinese, Portuguese, and Whites, because of racial, ethnic and cultural stereotyping of the Indian indentured labourers in the domains of their social behaviour, sexual preference and religious choices. The Blacks, Chinese and Portuguese communities are also cast in the colonial mould as culturally inferior to their White masters. While, on the one hand, the novel depicts the application of tactics as a means to achieve upward mobility in the plantation estates, on the other it recounts violent anti-colonial resistance to British plantocracy. The choices exercised

particularly by women in the field of their sexual life, seems to be the vindication of the personal over the collective choices. The claiming of public space within the regimented landscape of the plantation through the recreation of religio-cultural festival having its root in India makes the novel particularly important as a study in the assertion of cultural rights of the Indian indentured labourers in British Guyana. The credulous portrayal of the everyday coolie life throws into sharp relief the rhetoric of the Empire as a welfare state. In his review of Alison Klein's book *Anglophone Literature of Caribbean Indenture: The Seductive Hierarchies of Empire* Lomarsh Roopnarine comments: "Klein argues that these authors revealed the abuses of indenture but rarely deviated from upholding the status quo of the plantation hierarchy of race, class, and gender. They depicted the Indian characters as villains and victims and the European characters as victorious. The "idealization of empire" (p. 80) permeated the novels, motivating Klein to declare that the authors were trying to promote the colonial rhetoric of the indenture system(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2020, 353-354)". Let us now look into three different types of colonial stereotyping.

Socio-Cultural Stereotyping

In the 'Preface' to *Lutchmee and Dilloo,* Edward Jenkins makes his authorial intention clear in writing this novel. Since the results of the Commission of Inquiry in British Guiana of which he was a part, published by him under the title *The Coolie: His Rights and Wrongs* received lukewarm response and the British readership cared little to read it, Jenkins attempted to "disinter the real wrongs and difficulties, and to present them in an appreciable form to …the British people(Edward Jenkins 2011, Preface)" and "to reproduce with exact fidelity the picture of a coolie's life… [and] show what are the difficulties and perils of the system of indentureship of Indian and Chinese immigrants in English colonies(Edward Jenkins 2011, Preface". Jenkins

seems to be taking the side of a group of British merchants who most powerfully defended their mercantile interests in the British plantations. He eulogizes the indenture labour as "a system of incalculable benefit to Asiatics … [if it is put under] proper supervision and restraint(Edward Jenkins 2011, Preface)**"** and sets the condition for its continuation in the British dominions if the British Government "shall exercise over it, in its inception and continuance, ceaseless watchfulness and most rigid control(Edward Jenkins 2011, Preface)**".**

The first four chapters of the novel depicts the life of Lutchmee and Dilloo in India. Dilloo and his wife Lutchmee, belonged to a Bengali village in Bihar. Dilloo, a man of low caste, was moderately fortunate in leading a peaceful and contented peasant life which was occasionally disturbed by "the occasional unpleasantness to which the young wife's attractive beauty exposed her, from Europeans and from men of her own race(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". The British officials in colonial India appointed their agents to recruit labourers for their sugar plantations worldwide as the abolition of slavery created a huge demand for cheap labour force in those plantation colonies. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Dost Mhomed, the *arkati* (recruiting agent) presented an alluring picture of the benefits of indenture: "inestimable benefits, boundless riches, and unalloyed happiness(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)" in the form of free housing, free ration, free medical facility, and a handsome bounty money of fifty dollars. The romantic halo of the dazzling promise quickly excited the imagination of the unassuming peasants and, "[l]ike most impetuous men, too readily satisfied with temporary solutions" they decided to venture into an uncertain experiment of indenturing themselves to the British plantations in the West Indies.

It is important to note the *arkati'*s attempted glorification of the Empire: "This is the *command of the great Queen* (italics mine) to me, Dost Mahomed, *one of the meanest of her servants*(italics mine), to travel about and inform my countrymen of inestimable benefits, boundless riches, and unalloyed happiness which await them, if they like to seek them, in other parts of her wide dominions(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". The narrator of the novel seems to be in cahoots in the eulogizing of the British: "The great sahib at Calcutta loomed before their excited vision as a kind of divinity, proffering to unworthy wretches entrance into a paradise of labour(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". But the narrator ruthlessly satirizes the manner and tone of Dost Mahomed. According to the narrator the *arkati* "spoke with extreme hyperbolism even for an Asiatic(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". The Eurocentric bias is blatant in the theory that the system of indenture, a colonial invention, was 'a paradise of labour' which opened the gates of unbounded happiness for the Asiatics who were collectively called 'the unworthy wretches'. Besides this, to essentialize that all Asiatics use 'extreme hyperbolism' reflects the bias of racial superiority.

That even Dost Mahomed, who is licensed by the British Government to recruit indentured labourers for colonial sugar plantations, does not know the actual reality of the plantation colonies is extremely striking. The narrator says:

> He said nothing--- indeed probably had not himself been told--- of fever-swamps, of liabilities, under rigid laws, to fines and imprisonments for breaches of the proposed contract, of labour in crop-time for as long as twenty, twenty five or thirty hours at a

> stretch, and sometimes without extra pay--- a not universal, but frequent incident of a Coolie's life in the West Indies(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

The fact that the recruiting agent did not know the hidden conditions of labour in the West Indian plantations makes the plight of these unassuming indenture recruits who belonged to the most vulnerable sections of the society all the more pitiable. This clearly suggests that the British Government used these agents who were mostly Indian to recruit indentured labourers for a small amount of commission.

Dilloo had enmity with Hunoomaun, a *chowkidar* in an adjoining village. Hunoomaun had a particular fancy for Lutchmee and he used to trick Dilloo for gaining intimacy with Lutchmee. By the time Dilloo decided to go to British Guiana as an indentured labourer there was a rumour regarding a projected rise in Muslim population in rural India. This rumour alarmed the English residents who appointed several night guards to fend their family and property against any possible Muslim uprising. Hunoomaun managed to win the confidence of the local magistrate Mr. Wood to get into the service of guarding his house at night. Dilloo trusted Lutchmee to the custody of Mrs. Wood with the injunction that "[i]f Hunoomaun tries any more tricks with you, go at once to her and ask her to protect you. These English are sometimes cruel and harsh themselves, but they won't allow Hindoos to commit injustice(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

Lutchmee was one of the four hundred and thirty four passengers of diverse age, sex, origin and caste who boarded the indenture ship of 'Sunda' for the port of Georgetown. The

indentured labourers that the Sunda brought to British Guiana was mostly unfit for plantation work. But "there is such a demand for labour" says the Agent General Mr. Goodeve, "that the planters can't afford to send them back and so, they must make what they can out of them(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". The recruiting agents in India get commission for the number of coolies recruited, the officers on board the indenture ships get commission for the number of coolies transported to the plantation colonies. Since everyone is busy calculating the commission earned, the narrator says, "responsibility floats in nubibus, while the realities of wrong and sorrow come cruelly home to the victims of a complicated system of shifted obligations(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

The colonial British officials always wanted to project the brighter side of the plantation. The higher authorities knew little about the horrible realities of the plantation life as they had limited connection to these realities. The narrator says:

> The Governor had hardly ever been on an estate in his life. He was personally incurious. Faith, to an official who must write home long dispatches about his proconsulate, is superior to sight. He could affirm that the general condition of the immigrants was satisfactory, and the Coolie system a great success, if he only came in contact with the subject in letters, minutes, or dispatches, or only saw the people in holiday attire in the course of his afternoon drives(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

But all the colonial officials in British Guiana were not like the Governor. Mr. Goodeve, the Coolie protector, discharged his duty with open eyes. He took Lutchmee's illness rather

distrustfully but he was not willing to trust Lutchmee to the custody of Mr. Drummond, the manager of the plantation of Belle Susanne. The Coolie protector was in divided minds: “Were her story untrue, even his mind was not able to overcome the natural race indifference to what became of her(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”. Commenting on the special interest that Mr Goodeve felt for the fate of Lutchmee who was quite unlike other coolie women in British Guiana, the narrator says: “Subtle, indeed, but powerful are the influences upon the calmest and most honest mind, in those peculiar relations of a superior to an inferior race, of which terms of bondage or terms akin to bondage form a part(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”.

The Whites in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* did not direct their race repugnance against the Asiatics alone. The blacks were also stereotyped. When Simon Pety, a black horse-cart driver of Mr. Drummond was taking his master in his horse carriage in full speed through a crowd of enthusiasts who were watching the first meeting of Lutchmee and Dilloo, raised a whip on the English sailor who was among the crowd, the narrator associates Pety’s individual action of raising a whip on an English as the collective behaviour of the black community. The narrator says that Pety was “glad like all his race to domineer when well supported(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”. The English sailor’s physical retaliation was accompanied with racial slur: "There! you wretched black-skin… that will teach you to keep your fins off an English tar if ever you're tempted to try it again ! (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”

Drummond’s hardness towards the dark races had sprung out of the nature of his master-slave relations with them. Drummond was convinced that their interests were not compatible and that whenever a conflict of interest arose the dark races had to concede surrender. The inevitable outcome of these relations where the master wants to control and regulate the servants in the

name of maintaining the prevailing peace in the plantations is reflected in his relationship with Dilloo who was one the best of his labourers but one of his worst servants. Commenting on the productive capability and potential threat ingrained in Dilloo, the narrator said:

> He did his work rapidly and well, but his independence, energy, and capacity gave him great influence among the estate's people. Instead of using this in the ordinary Indian manner, to curry favour with his master and advance himself, he rather employed it in organising and aiding the Coolies, against any wrong on the part of their superiors. Upon an estate worked by indentured labourers … such a man would be likely to become an intolerable nuisance to the manager(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

But the white man's revulsion of the dark races was not universal. The English sailor who was Lutchmee's friend in the indenture ship of Sunda was extremely soft-hearted. Holding out a silver coin to Drummond, under whose custody Lutchmee was to be engaged work in Belle Susanne plantation, and requesting him to give it to Lutchmee the English sailor said: "Will you kindly take keer 'o this, and mebbe 'twill get her some extra stores and better handling, and I couldn't do no more for my own sister?(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

Drummond's relationship with Missa Nina, his Creole house keeper of about thirty years of age is an interesting case study in how the master exerts and holds power over the servant through the creation of stereotypes. Drummond casts Nina in the image of all those niggers who are jealous and conceited. But this act of Drummond's stereotyping of Nina had in it the anxiety a colonizer always feels. Uneasy on his bed Drummond would admit:

> This creature, whom he had taken as a young girl from her mother's house, had ministered with the fidelity of an animal to his weaknesses, his appetites, his passions. She had nursed him through a dangerous illness; and her devoted attention to his comfort, and patient obedience to his slightest command, had made her a necessity to what he called his home(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Nina, on the other hand, idolized Mr. Drummond whose great and glorious personality seemed god-like to her. But Nina had internalized the impossibility of her 'proper relationship' with Drummond as she was "conscious he regarded her rather as he regarded his dog and his horse, as a part of his establishment(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

Drummond felt a particular liking for Lutchmee for which Nina became jealous of her. He accused Nina of instigating Lutchmee against him:

> Nina, what have you been doing? Setting this girl against me, eh? Now look here, I have a good mind to horse whip you. You're the most ungrateful vixen I ever knew. You have everything a nigger like you could wish, and you're as well off as any woman of your sort in British Guiana, and yet you must strike in with your infernal jealousy between me and my servants, and try to set them against me(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Drummond aborted the idea of forcing his wishes on Lutchmee. The narrator says: “As soon as he saw that Lutchmee showed a determination to be true to her husband, one which he knew an Indian woman rarely affects unless it is real and earnest, he good-naturedly acquiesced(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”.

Drummond’s notion of white supremacy did not differentiate between the blacks and the coloured people. This created the possibility of a coalition between Lutchmee and Nina both of whom had common experience of racial marginalization:

> Lutchmee softly touched the other's cheek, and then gently leaning over, after a moment's hesitation, kissed her on the forehead. Nina's eyes suddenly filled—it was the first pathetic chord that had been touched in her heart for many a year. Often had she wept the tears of passion and grief, but that was the malign tempest: this was the soft and blessed April rain. She held Lutchmee's hand in her own, and silently let the showers come. The Indian, with her delicate, child-like courtesy, took the end of her muslin scarf, and gently wiped away the trickling drops(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Health hazard in the tropical areas was huge due to the micro-climate of the plantations. The indentured labourers, lacking social capital, were the most vulnerable. Hence, there was the compulsion of the plantation authority to ensure proper health condition to all the labourers through providing free treatment in plantation hospitals. As the health culture of the indentured labourers was looked at as less developed by the colonial regime, the narrator says, “Constant must be the vigilance, and heroic the sanitary zeal of the manager who would attempt to enforce on his ignorant people the simplest health laws(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”. But the poor

medical facility and scarcity of essential medical supplies in the plantation hospitals present a contrary picture of the philanthropy of the planters and managers whose primary concern was to make more money by cheating the indentured labourers of their promised health rights.

Sexual Stereotyping

Labour intensive economy of the colonial sugar plantations were primarily not fit place for work for women as plantation managers required strong hands of the sturdy coolies to maximize their profit. “Act XXI of 1844 allowed labour migration to Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana from Calcutta and Madras. It was made mandatory that on each ship 12 percent of emigrants to the sugar colonies should consist of women(Kumar 2017, 59)”. Initially very few women were contracted as indentured labourers because “Known prostitutes or those who came from lower castes were declined(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 64);(Reddock 1985, 29)” and “[I]ntensive medical check-ups often scared potential female labourers away(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 65);(Clare Anderson 2009, 96-98)”. Kanchan Dhar talks about British officials like Grierson who defended the rights of women to cross the *kala pani*. According to her these British officials “argued like faux feminists”... “Truth being the strict recruitment practices made it difficult for the British officials to secure enough women for indenture ships. The men highly outnumbered women, and the 100:40 ratio requirement made it even more difficult. They might have sounded like they spoke in favour of women, but their intention was primarily to satisfy the British Government’s personal/ economic interests(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 65)”.

Totaram and Ramchandra's account depicts that the position of female Indian labourers was more vulnerable compared to their male counterparts, because they were subjected to sexual explitation at the hands of both Indian men and white overseers and agents on the plantation. Ramchandra writes:

> "Beautiful women are given work at secluded places and both blacks and the whites sexually exploit their seclusion. Pregnant women are made to work till full term. If they refuse they are tortured so much that it leads to abortion"(Baba Ramchandra, n.d., 10)

Taking advantage of his superior class position Martinho, the hospital overseer of Belle Susanne plantation, tried to get close to Lutchmee who strongly resisted his advances saying "Massa no put hand on Coolie woman: Dilloo wife! (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". But the Indian marriages meant nothing to them, as these marriages did not have any legitimacy in the eyes of the British law in the plantations. Besides, the plantation life allowed women more control over their life, as "… women could now, on their own accord, leave one husband for another or have a parallel relationship with more than one man(Reddock 1985, 42)" and that, "…many Indian women, probably for the first time in their lives, got an opportunity to exercise a degree of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before… To them migration was an attempt at improving their economic…status(Reddock 1985, 41)". As the narrator says, "a husband, among Coolie women in British Guiana, is a varying factor(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)", Loseby, the only English overseer in Belle Susanne, cynically proclaims: "Virtue is not an Indian woman's best reward in these regions(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

As I have already mentioned Ranajit Guha states that “peasants and their culture appear in the colonial record only when they become a problem of law and order(Ranajit Guha 1983)”. Similarly, women and family structure of indentured Indians make their appearances in the sugar colonies’ records only when the cases of murders and suicides affected law and order on plantations(Kumar 2017, 138)”. Basudeo Mangru “accepts the official premise that the unequal sex ratio and sexual jealousy accounted for the murders while Brij Lal emphasized the structure of the labour regime(Kumar 2017, 138)”. “After long discussions, the colonial government after 1850s decided to send forty women per hundred men to the plantation so that the family life could continue in the colonies. To fulfill this quota, emigration agents began giving more commission to *arkatis* for women recruits. Out of greed many *arkatis* adopted fraudulent means to recruit women(Kumar 2017, 172)”.

The urgent need to fill the mandatory quota of forty percent women among the indentured recruits made the norms for the recruitment of female indentured labourers a little relaxed thereby creating ways for the recruitment of prostitutes who could successfully hide their past. In Lutchmee and Dilloo, Ramdoolah who came to British Guiana as an indentured labourer, was a prostitute in Benares where she was born. Ramdoolah says: “It [was] very hard living in great bazaars, so I was glad of the chance of coming here as a respectable woman … when I fell in with a recruiter [he] offered me bounty money and so many good things(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Indentured labour migration provided women with the opportunity to “emancipate themselves from an illiberal, inhibiting and very hierarchical social system in India(Pieter C. Emmer 1985, 247). In the new social set up of British Guiana Ramdoolah “soon

found [she] could have my pick of a husband, and plenty of money besides(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

Commenting on the pervasive reality of polyandry practiced by Indian indentured women in the British Guiana the narrator of the novel says:

> There is not one woman on this estate who came of a respectable stock. They were poor creatures from great cities, like Lucknow, Benares, or Calcutta. We should think of them pitifully. I should say they are better here than they were there. They get married, some of them many times over; and a few happily forget their old condition and become better women(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Ramdoolah in Lutchmee and Dilloo forgot her old condition and employed tactics to improve her economic condition. She saw in the Madrasi businessman Achattu a potential wife-buyer. Achattu, a free coolie, could not marry till an advanced age because of the paucity of women on the plantation and his singular preoccupation with money-making. Achhatu gave Ramdoolah a necklet and a cow as a bride price and "paid her existent husband another cow and thirty dollars to purchase a voluntary divorce, a mensa et thoro, and took Ramdoolah to his heart and home…Ramdoolah soon carried about on her person, in the shape of armlets, necklets, and bangles, most of his secret hoards. The big chest yielded up its deposits, and became an insolvent bank(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". When Achattu's fortune dried up Ramdoolah found Hunoomaun. She asked him to pay her present husband Achattu to buy her as his wife. She, in a rather business-like manner, said to Hunoomaun: "It is a bargain, my friend. Give me ten dollars

as the earnest of it, and then I shall be yours(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". In her very first meeting with Lutchmee Ramdoolah rather casually mentioned about per particular regard for Dilloo. This irked Lutchmee and she ran after Ramdoolah with a cutlass in her hand. According to Ramdoolah Lutchmee was "as proud as a bird of paradise, and as haughty as the highest Brahminee(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)", who regarded her as filthy as street dust.

It is interesting to note here that women of other races also used their influence on men for social mobility. Simon Pety's friend Rosalind Dallas went to the Obe man to seek redress to her betrayal by Pety. In order to avenge Pety she consulted the African mystic with who she started living in hid secret sanctuary. When everyone else was in mortal fear of the Obe man "she was able to have pretty much her own way with him. Her chief ambition was to learn the secrets of his wicked craft, in order that she might succeed to his influence and power(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)"s

Religious Stereotyping

Historians of indenture are divided among themselves regarding the importance of religion in the plantation colonies. According to Brij V. Lal:"Migration and indenture disrupted the *girmityas'* religious and cultural life. There were few shrines and sacred places, few *murties,* few learned men, *pundits, sadhus* or *maulvis,* versed in the scriptures to impart moral and spiritual instruction. Their absence facilitated an essentially emotional, egalitarian and non-intellectual moral order among the *girmityas*(Lal 2004, 17)". Ahmed Ali, on the contrary, contends that: "Girmityas, whether Hindu or Muslim, possessed sufficient cultural resources of their own...all the evils of plantation capitalism and colonial racism could not destroy the indomitable spirit of Hinduism and Islam(Ahmed Ali 2004, 74-75)".

After the English occupation of British Guiana was complete in 1831, the British colony was divided into parishes. The parishioners of each parish had the freedom to practice any parochial form of religion. In Jenkins' novel *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Mr. Adolphus Telfer is a clergyman at the local parish church near the plantation estate of Belle Susanne. He had a particular zeal for converting the believers of others faiths to Christianity which, according to him, is based on the rationality of justice and compassion. He was particularly keen on converting the Asiatics. But his attempt at the religious conversion of the Asiatics had oftentimes met with failure. Seeing Lutchmee at Drummond's residence when he came to sermon Craig who was gradually recovering from an attack by Ching-a-lung, Telfer comments: "All I have seen of these people convinces me that attempts to convert them are mere loss of time(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.I)".

In the novel, the character of Rambux No. 2 is particularly important from the point of view of Indian indigenous religious practice in British Guiana. Rambux was a dark hill Koord who practiced idolatry in the most hideous manner performing curious rites with the blood of a kid that he had killed in front of his baked clay idol. Simon Pety who had strong belief in the hristian God of his own idea could not conceal his disgust and made a cut over the naked thighs of Rambux with the same hide with which he flocked the mule and said: "Get you up, Satan! Get away, you 'bandoned sinna! Dat am committin' de sin 'gainst de Holy Ghos'. You'm sartin to be damned(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.II)". When Pety threw away the idol of Rambux's indigenous god, Dilloo and a few of his mates rescued Rambux and beat Pety thoroughly. This incident is a clear indicator of the fact that freedom to practice one's own religion was not allowed to the indentured labourers in British Guiana sugar plantations. The coercion directed

towards Rambux for practicing his indigenous religion was part of the larger attempt for the religious integration of the coolies into Christianity.

Though the emergence of Arya Samaj in north India and the activities of its ambassadors to various plantation colonies during the late nineteenth century “created discontent” among the indentured Indians along religious lines(Kumar 2017, 137); (Baba Ramchandra, n.d.).In the plantation colonies “both Hindus and Muslims participated in common festivals” like on Tazia “people of both communities shared equal grief and beat their chest in front of the *Tazia* and headed to *Karbala*(Kumar 2017, 149)”. “Holi, Ramlila and Muharram were the most popular festivals amongst indentured Indians(Kumar 2017, 148)”.

As has been noted earlier, the British officers in India were alarmed at the projected up-rise of Muslim population and appointed night guards to protect their houses in anticipation of an attack. The neurosis of the British officers with the Muslim population is continued in the plantation estate of Belle Susanne. Drummond, the estate manager is particularly apprehensive of this coolie religious festival and he had ordered for the heavy deployment of police on the streets and the overseers must maintain constant vigil on any deviant activity. The narrator gives a neat account of the festival: "In this singular holiday the Coolies of all religions indifferently join. The West Indian Tadja is said to be nothing more or less than the Mohammedan feast of the Mohurrum, adapted to a new country and to novel circumstances. In those circumstances it apparently ceases to have any religious meaning, and becomes, like the Christian's Christmas, an excuse for a holiday, a carouse, and even a half-Carnival rout(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.III)”.

But the element of secrecy involved in the preparation and practice of this festival raises apprehension in the minds of the plantation owners and British officers. The narrator says: “Yet the Coolies are very jealous of allowing white people to witness its ceremonies or to inquire into their meaning. Hence they arise early in the morning and begin the chief rites before daylight, rites which probably vary on different estates(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.III)”. “In an important article Prabhu Mohapatra has argued that the *Tazia* procession was seen as a big problem for the administration because it was enacting automatic rights in public places and therefore powerfully articulated community aspirations and religious beliefs so as to challenge the spatial immobility engendered by the indenture system(Kumar 2017); (Prabhu P. Mohapatra 2006)”. It is also noteworthy that the disturbances in the colonies often took place during *Tazia* celebrations and not during the Hindu festivals. Prabhu Mohapatra argues that the *Tazia* procession was a direct expression of the laboring identity of the indentured immigrant workers. It denied the ‘coolie’ identity of the workers and represented a full-fledged moral and cultural community. Muharram was an occasion through which workers conveyed their daily condition of labour to the public(Kumar 2017, 150); (Prabhu P. Mohapatra 2006, 186-187).

Performing sorcery on enemies had not been common among the indentured immigrants in various plantation colonies. Instances of East Indians, like that of Busoon, an Ahir from UP, performing Obeah on his enemies are few and far between. Commenting on Busoon’s case D. W. D. Comins writes:

> “Busson Ahir of Jaunpur is one of those convicted of working ‘Obeah’, *that is of trying to do injury to an enemy by the use of magic*. Working ‘Obeah’ is extremely common among the Negros, who have the profoundest respect for its powers, and cannot be got to

talk of them without bated breath, but it is new to me to find East Indians taking to this strange God(D.W.D. Comins 1893, 8)".

In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Rosalind Dallas, a Black African, goes to the Obe man to take her revenge of her erstwhile friend Simon Pety. Chester, the overseer at Belle Susanne estate, was a Barbadian of creole descent. Once he wielded his authority on Dilloo who was haranguing a group of his fellow labourers leaving plantation work aside. But Dilloo quickly took him under his grasp and released Chester only when he promised to keep silence about the incident. Chester was "too great a coward to face the horrible prospect of assassination, or the chances of an application to the Obe man to poison him; and had held his tongue about the affair, — not only because he knew that it would lower him in the estimation of the manager and overseers, but for the sake of his life (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.III)". That Rosalind Dallas would go to Obe man to seek revenge on Simon Pety and that Chester would be fearful of the Obe Man is natural because both of them belong to the Black African descent. But the novel raises the question but does not answer why Ramasammy took mortally wounded Dilloo in the final section of the novel to be treated in the hands of the Obe man.

Reverend Adolphus Telfer accompanied Lutchmee to her final meeting with her dying husband under the medical care of the Obe man. Performing his service as a religious missionary he told the dying Dilloo "of a long life, an endless and possibly blest hereafter; of forgiveness of sin done here; of a balm for the sorrows, weaknesses and agonies of time, a rescue from the bondage of evil, a lasting freedom of joy—a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who had opened the gates from death into life, from pain to bliss". But Dilloo was impassive and silent. In his final attempt, with redoubled zeal to convert the Hindu to Christianity, the missionary exhorted: "See, Dilloo!

... There is good and life ready for you even now. Believe in Jesus Christ—trust your soul to Him". The fierce negation with which Dilloo foiled the missionary's attempted religious integration of himself into the fold of Christianity had in it a pointed satire: "No! No! Jesu Kriss Massa Drummond's God—Massa Marston's God— all Inglees God. No God for Coolie!" Thus Dilloo ameliorates his own position from a dangerous malcontent in the plantation estate to the missionary of humanity by his successful upholding of his cultural right to practice his own religion in the presence of the Blacks (Rosalind Dallas and Obe Man), the Browns (Ramasammy and Lutchmee) and the White (Reverend Telfer).

The Injustices of Indenture System

Of the seven overseers at Belle Susanne the most powerful was the youngest. His name was Craig. Though his ability and spirit at the beginning had gained for him the manager's favourable response, he was not uncritical of the ruling community in Belle Susanne. The narrator aptly describes the intersectionality of Craig's position:

> In a community where everything is done for one race and class, and where, with slavery disowned, the relation of the larger portion of the community is that of contemptuous patronage on the one hand, and of sullen self-defence on the other; where the morality of the superior race is, except in a very select portion of the community, unfettered even by the ordinary restraints of civilised societies; and where, among the inferior races animal instinct is too much the overmastering power,—the first sensation of a pure minded man, in Craig's situation, is one of repulsion from the tone and manners of his associates. They were of that low type of Briton and half-breed, common in tropical latitudes: their

> morality was only restrained by the capacity of their desires, or by considerations of opportunity and safety. Craig, with a large-hearted wish to be on good terms with every one, could scarcely govern his repugnance to the language, ideas and acts of his fellow overseers(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Dilloo shares with Lutchmee that “this is not the kind of place I had hoped to find when I listened to that cursed recruiter, and came away herein search of riches I shall never win(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”.The belated dawning of the realization that Dost Mahommed had tricked them to indenture themselves and the apparent irreversibility of his present condition had made Dilloo look older and sterner. Lutchmee noticed an uncanny reserve in her husband.

Dilloo expresses his helplessness in the Belle Susanne estate: "You must work every day in the megass-yard, carrying your burden swiftly, under a Negro-driver, and for very poor wages. And you are pretty, you are graceful and sweet as ever, my own Lutchmee,"—with softening eyes he drew her to his bosom, — "and scoundrels of every race will have opportunities of tempting you and threatening you, and even me(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Dilloo’s assessment of his own situation is supported by the general practice prevalent in the plantations: “Scarcely any Negro would work more than two days a week, at most three, while Dilloo's indenture, spite of the law, was held by manager and magistrate to bind him to at least five days' labour, and he often was obliged to work six. In fact, by the system in vogue, the more a Coolie did the more he was compelled to do(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)”.

The arbitrariness of the indenture system is exposed in the discrepancy of what was promised in India and what was practiced in the plantations:

> Though they were after the time when these events occurred, by the law and by its administration kept strictly to their part of the contract, made in India, and forced to work at least five days a week, the corresponding promise of ten annas to two rupees a day, offered by authority of the Governor and Court of Policy of British Guiana, was not recognized as a contract in the colony, and could not be enforced". A more singular instance of Christian and official easiness of conscience could scarcely be cited than this fact. The legislature of British Guiana, with the connivance and sanction of Her Majesty's representative, passed resolutions affirming a statement of current rates of wages, at a time when it was well known that scarcely an immigrant in the colony was earning anything of the kind. Nay, the recurring injustice of enforcing one side of a contract and overlooking the other was alike disregarded by Governor, legislators, and administrators of the law, so that, as a fact, Coolies who, disheartened by the fraud, failed or refused to work for the indifferent wages available to them, were again and again brought before the magistrates to be fined and imprisoned(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I).

Mr. Gonzales, a Portuguese businessman and friend to the magistrate at Belle Susanne, takes a good-humoured jibe at the protection provided by the British laws to the non-British population: "the protection of English law is a very fine thing, eh—eh? This planters' government swindles me at every turn! I am obliged to hide my money to save it from them,—in America, you know(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". He tactically deals with the exorbitant excise duty of five thousand dollars and twelve hundred dollars for his spirit license in Georgetown and Berbice respectively. He is left with no other option but "to put twice as much water in the rum since they passed the new ordinance(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". When Mr. Marston, the magistrate accuses Mr. Gonzales of cheating the excise and the public alike because the British Government must raise a revenue, Mr. Gonzales retorts with a befitting counter-attack exposing the façade of impartiality in British legislation: "Planters' goods, machines, guano, hogsheads, all come in for nothing; but Coolie rice, ghee, salt-fish, American pork, rum, everything we eat and

drink, heavy duty. Ah, you precious English: your protection is expensive, my friend (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)"!

Gonzales exposes another bitter side of the colonial plantation system in British Guiana: "Overseers interfere with wives, drivers beat Coolies, swindle in hospital, cheat at pay-table (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Gonzales claims that Mr. Drummond, the manager of Belle Susanne is complicit with the colonial officials in their act of swindle because he also gets his share in it. Gonzales informs that the general situation is bleak, the coolies are highly unsatisfied, and there is a possibility of an imminent coolie uprising. With an undertone of apprehension Gonzales says: "If these people rise nothing will be safe. All our property and lives go (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Mr. Marston thinks of a possible coalition of twenty thousand Portuguese, all the Blacks and the Whites against any possible coolie uprising. But the Portuguese rips the fallacy of the magistrate: "No, Sir. Portugee will not fight against the Coolies for you English. We have some spite for you. You are a magistrate and my friend. Let me tell you not to trust that. No Portugee, no black men will help you (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

One of the problems of the indenture system is rank inequity. Mr. Drummond thought of Dilloo as a firebrand because he always took sides with his fellow labourers and raised their demands to the institutional locations of power. This besides, Dilloo was held in a very high esteem by his mates. His sturdy physic, quickness and agility had made him one of the best workers in Belle Susanne. He used to do the task of trench digging, the highest paid task in any plantation, mostly trusted to the African labourers for their greater physical prowess. All these added to the inflated self-image that Dilloo had held for himself. When Hunoomaun was made a

driver, Drummond thought of deflating the ego of Dilloo by putting him under Hunoomaun and giving him the task of bush-cutting which gave him "only two-thirds of the weekly profit he could have secured at trench-digging(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)". The narrator very aptly describes the agony razing in Dilloo's heart as "he found himself degraded in the eyes of his countrymen, subjected to the surveillance and orders of a man whom he not only hated but despised, and obliged to walk nearly seven miles a day to and from his work(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)". But Dilloo had to silently submit to his master's whim as he knew that "[f]or such methods of punishment and actual injustice as these no law does or can provide a remedy. It is necessarily inherent in any system of bond-service that the sole discretion as to the nature of the work to be done by his servants must be vested in the master(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".

Akaloo, the free coolie in the British Guiana, who jointly hatched a plot with Ramasammy, Dilloo and others to counter the plantation regime head on talks about the avaricious plantation owners and colonial officials who want to get their work completed at the cheapest possible expenditure. Akaloo very elaborately enumerates the injustices perpetrated against the indentured workforce:

> [t]he overseers and drivers cheat them in taking down their work, and get up disputes at the pay-table on Saturday about the way in which the work was done, when of course it is too late to have it examined. On some estates there are fines and stoppages of money every week, though that is against the law. If they go to Goody office to complain, they are arrested on the way by the police, and sometimes punished as deserters; at all events are locked up in one of those filthy police stations till the magistrate comes round. Even if they do get to Goody office, and Massa Goody makes inquiry, the sub-agents will believe the manager and overseers before the Indians. The managers pocket the money they cheat the people out of, and they do not give half the hospital supplies. Medicines, food, sheets, beds, they cheat in everything(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II).

To increase their hold on the indentured labouers the British legislators left no lacunae in the exact phrasing of the laws. It was “so worded as to afford an excuse for a gross injustice. Though the law was clearly intended to permit an emigrant to perform, in succession, the whole of the maximum number of tasks of labour that could be exacted in a week, and then for the remaining days to be at liberty to dispose of his time as he pleased, the magistrates held that he was bound to perform a certain number of tasks on a certain number of succeeding days in the week; and hence a man, who had by the Wednesday really performed his legal week's work, was, if he absented himself on the Thursday, brought up and punished with imprisonment(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)”. Dilloo was a victim of this injustice. He had completed the assigned tasks for the week in the first five days of the week and absented himself from the plantation work for the remaining. He was brought up before the court of Mr. Marston and was sentenced to three months of imprisonment.

Another instance when Mr. Drummond could exert any legal hold on Dilloo was when he was arrested along with his fellow labourers for allegedly beating up Simon Pety who actually wielded his hide on Rambux and gave deep cut on his thighs when he was performing some occult rites before the clay idol of his indigenous god. Dilloo became a victim of intentional misinterpretation as the interpreter discretely suppressed the true incident and made a false representation before the jury. Again, he was punished for three months of imprisonment because “[t]he practical rule of some magistrates in British Guiana, the result of sad experience, is that one Negro or white man is to be believed before twenty Coolies(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)”. Dilloo had the keenness to understand that “they are all alike. The Mahitee and the Manahee pull together. They pretend to give us justice in their courts, and go through the form,

but never give us the reality(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)". The lopsided vision of the law-giver is betrayed in his own words: "you need not waste your sympathies on them. They are a cunning, weak, treacherous lot (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".

The dispensation of justice in a plantation colony like British Guiana was put under constant vigil by the colonial authorities in whose estimation "[e]very indication of mercy or even of impartiality to the coloured parties to a suit is stamped as a reflection upon the character of the planter suitor on the other side, or a concession dangerous to discipline, and therefore impolitic (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".Inherent in this attitude was the colonial pragmatics of perpetuating its authority on the Indian nationals by making them feel so powerless and marginalized that they would accept the colonial regime as natural. Thus, "[t]o allow East Indians to think that it is possible that the courts may err is deemed unwise, by men who, like the late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, affirm that as India must be despotically governed, the more absolute you make the despotism the better(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".But the narrator of the novel does not seem to accept this policy of governance: "But we, the English people, can never consent to hold an empire, or any scrap of empire, on terms repugnant to all our ideas of natural right, of civil liberty, and of human justice (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".That is why some concession is granted to people of all colours in the form of right to appeal for justice in the inferior courts particularly "when life and liberty as well as property are at stake (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".But the fact that this right appeal for justice can only be enforced in the inferior courts again leaves lacunae in the British legal system. The inherent inequity in the British legal system comes to the fore when it did not provide any consular access to Dilloo when he had finished the assigned duty of five tasks in the first few days of a week he was

entitled to desert the plantation work for the rest. “Thus”, as the narrator says, “an innocent man had been swept into the sewer of justice—the victim of an unintentional, insensible partiality, resulting from a variety of complicated and protracted influences, and of habits of judicial administration which left no margin for equity and little room for mercy(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)”.

The majority of the indentured Indians and ethno-racial communities which have had similar experience of White atrocity “have awakened to their wrongs, and mean in one way or another to have them remedied(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)”. The carnival of Tadja provided the fitting outlet of the pent up energy of these large and restive people. The festival of Tadja, says the narrator, “[i]n the quietest times [has awakened] the anxiety of the Executive and of the Estate Managers; because on that day feuds that have arisen at former periods between the Coolies of different estates are apt to be fought out, and not infrequently to fatal extremities(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)”. Thus to Drummond’s agitated imagination when the colony of British Guiana seemed to be on the brink of a rebellion he most unabashedly proclaimed that “there was no room for the play either of justice or generosity(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)” as “kindness is weakness(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)”.

British officials were drawing their cord more tightly around the indentured labourers by enacting a law that mandated that any indentured labourer, even after he has served the compulsory five years of contract will have to carry with him “a magistrate's pass and a photograph of himself,—the price of which together was fixed by the ordinance at six dollars, —

"without running the risk of being seized, locked up, and if the precious documents were lost, committed to prison for a month(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)". The English Government exorbitantly priced the evidence of one's freedom to curb the indentured Indian's right to visibility and the cultural reclaiming of the public space. Certainly, the new regulation would make the lives of the unbound coolies more uncomfortable and "would drive them to seek indenture as an improvement upon freedom(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)".

There was a subterranean current of rebellion in almost all the plantations. The conversation between the Wahabee and Dilloo is a proof to it:

> I have vowed' the Wahabee went on to Dilloo, 'before I die to dip this blade in the living blood of that accursed manager Sahib. He is worse than your manager. He once struck me: the Negro dog! He is not an Inglees." "And I, for my part" said Dilloo, "made a vow while I was in prison, that if ever the chance is given to me, I will take the life of that magistrate who sent me wrongfully to gaol(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III).

When Dilloo was navigating the way to overpower the British on the sheer force of human capital as they were twenty to one, the Governor of British Guiana, Mr. Walkingham regarded the reserve of the twenty thousand Portuguese with suspicious alarm. Mr. Gonzales, the Portuguese businessman was severely hit by a planter named Mr. Harris and, according to the Bishop of Roman Catholic Church, the Governor had not taken any step to punish so great a crime which the Governor disregarded as a mere street fracas. In a rather threatening tone for such a person as he was, the Bishop warned the Governor: "This man, Gonzales, for instance, has before this time been punished with severity for alleged breaking of excise laws; but when a

planter has done an outrage most grave, so as nearly to destroy a man's life, there is no regard. Behold, your Excellency, from this, there naturally results discontent and irascibility(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)"! As the Governor requested the Bishop to relent on account of the peace and prosperity of the colony being at stake, the Bishop quite rightly poses the question: "What is the peace and prosperity of the colony excepting supreme and undisturbed rule of the planters (Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)"? The observation of the Bishop in this regard is extremely apt: "in a close community like that of a Crown Colony, where the interests of officials and planters are so mixed up, you cannot always ensure, even with Her Majesty's representatives looking on, an honest discharge of public duty(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)".

The Counter Imagination of the Coolie

It is evident from the analysis of the novel so far that the colonial British administration attempted to integrate the Indian indentured labourers and other ethno-racial communities first by casting them in the negative mould and marginalizing them so much so that they themselves would seek the assistance of the British institutions and thereby collude in their assimilation as a partial cultural milieu. But the postcolonial parallax position of the culture of these communities and their adoption of different tactics help them evade and finally foil any attempt of their cultural assimilation. Though the novel foregrounds violent resurgence as an option to topple the colonial bias ingrained in the hierarchical social structures built and fostered by British colonizers, it is the tactical management of their affairs which makes the British officials anxious and apprehensive of their next move to outmaneuver the colonizers in their own game. Thus Hunoomaun wins the confidence of Mr. Wood to get into his service as a night guard to gain easy access to Lutchmee and later beguiles Achattu to steal his wife Ramdoolah who would prove to be a formidable partner in all his plots. Thus Achattu "kept silver dollars in a large chest

in his room carefully locked, and secretly disposed of some of his specie in unfrequented parts of the estate; he did not care to let the officials know how rich he was, by depositing it all in the Savings' Bank(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Likewise Ramdoolah raises her capital gains by selling and reselling herself in the marriage economy of the plantation. Likewise Gonzales cheats the English excise and people by adding twice as much water to the spirit he sells to recover more than the extra dollars that the British Government swindles from him by exorbitantly hiking the license fees through a new regulation.

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Chapter: III

Negotiating Alternatives: Mapping the Assertion of Cultural Rights of the Minority Madrasi Community in Moses Nagamootoo's *Hendree's Cure*

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the simple and unassuming persons from colonial Bengal and the United Provinces were allured by the *arkati* to indenture themselves to the British owned Guianese sugar plantation thousands of miles away from the place they had so far known as their motherland. The initial homeland nostalgia of the newly arrived Indian indentured labourers in the plantation colony of British Guiana became strong with the gradual disillusionment of all the promises made by the *arkati* before recruiting the coolies for the far away plantation. With the eventual waning of this initial homeland nostalgia new problems cropped up, the problem of assimilation in the host country. The indentured labourers faced resistance both from mostly white colonial sugar barons and the natives and other ethnic communities primarily because of their ethno-cultural difference. Even though the Indian indentured labourers formed the single largest ethnic community in British Guiana they were treated as minorities by the British and the blacks alike.

The different ethnic and cultural traditions of the places of origin that travelled with the indentured labourers provided emotional and psychological sustenance to them in the host society fraught with antagonism and hostility. We shall now examine a narrative that attempts to map how this newly formed Indian indenture diaspora negotiated alternatives to find better avenues of prospect and emancipation in their quotidian existence in the plantation colony of

Guiana, where the immigrants attempted to begin new lives and recreate their old memories, mostly cultural, in an alien space, constantly looking back to the lost homeland.

Recalling homelands from other spatio-temporal locations is common to writers of the diaspora. From the space of the new state, memory captures the experience of displacement as the migrant subject remembers a past, a history, continuity from which he/she has been wrenched. Moses Nagamootoo's *Hendree's Cure* is an attempt to 'recreate' the 'past' by a Guiana born writer whose parents were the first generation offspring of Indian emigrants. Even as Nagamootoo becomes "nostalgic" recalling that past life on the Corentyne mudflats where he was born, he makes his intention clear in the 'Foreword' of the novel itself: "It was as a result of my son's inquiry that I have attempted to recreate the life, aspirations and oral traditions of the early Tamils or Dravidians from South India" (1) who boarded ships for the then British Guiana as indentured laborers. In order to recreate these, he invents a fictional narrative. His rationale for blending the fictional and the documentary or historiographic styles of writing is based on his conviction that "'history' needs to be recovered not only by scholarship, but also by acts of the imagination" (2). This is evidenced from his citing from Tony Morrison's award-winning novel *The Beloved*: "when all that remains of peoples history are bits of information and incomplete data, the writers business is to "give intelligence to such scraps---and a heartbeat" by imagining the lives of the people" (3). The imagination embodies history, helping to remember a disremembered past. Constituting a minority within an Indo-Caribbean Hindu majority in pre-independence Guyana, 'Madrasi' Indians were relegated to the very fringes of cultural and religious marginality by Hindu high-mindedness and colonial racism. Confined to the limited paradigms of representation in terms of demography and cultural alterity, Madrasis were thereby

subjected to the dual hegemony of racialized and ethnic difference that reinforced their minority status whereby, "of the 239,000 Indian immigrants to British-Guyana, less than five percent were considered Madrasis" (4). Inscribed within the colonial paradigm of difference due to the North-South divide in India itself, Madrasis were reduced to an ethnic sub caste even before the *Kala Pani* voyage on the treacherous waters of the Atlantic. Discriminatory practices based on skin coloring and the inherent Aryan belief in the primitiveness and cultural inferiority of non-Aryan social systems depicted Madrasis as cultural anomalies who were less Indian, and therefore, less Hindu than the fair-skinned northerners from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, thereby justifying their marginalization within their larger Indo-Caribbean community in British-Guyana. Emigration records from Madras and Calcutta reveal additionally that most of the South Indians who emigrated were from the lower castes, particularly the pariah out/castes.

While recreating certain aspects of early Madrasi village life based on semi-autobiographical segments of memory, the author's intentionality focuses on the ways in which the Madrasi community finds its spiritual and cultural connection with the local Afro-Guyanese population of Whim rather than with their other Indian immigrants due to certain commonality of experiences shared by blacks and Madrasis based on social ostracism and denigration. The early Madrasis had three things in common with the Africans: "they ate pork, loved loud elaborate ceremonies with loud drumming and held no great antipathy towards Christianity. The first and last of these predispositions were certainly not shared by the majority of Indian immigrants from the central provinces and the north" (5). Normative patterns of acceptability/unacceptability situated Madrasis as undesirable outcasts [they were "the least desirable immigrants of all" (6)] in the same way that social prejudice against blacks stereotyped Afro-Guyanese as barbarians

and cultural heathens. Blacks and Madrasis found common cause in the universal language of exclusion by transforming the swampy, mosquito-infested area of Whim into an experimental model of peaceful coexistence through the process of cultural syncretism.

Regarding this recreation of the homeland through approximation of ritual and space usage, Vijay Mishra, in his seminal essay 'New Lamps for the Old: Diasporas Migrancy Border' states that even though "the establishment of homeland is not essential to 'the cultural logic' of these diaspora…it must be conceded that homeland figures prominently in the psychic imaginary of diaspora" (7).In the case of diaspora the fantasy of the diaspora is linked to the recollected trauma that stands for the sign of having been wrenched from one's mother/ [father] land. The sign of trauma may be the '[middle] passage' of slave trade or Indian indenture. In subsequent years many immigrants would look back at the passage itself as the most traumatic moment of their lives; it was during the passage that they thought about their home lands most intensely, and many of the fantasies of the homeland were probably created there and then since "no place ever vanishes utterly" (8), the ship was a space that outlived its original design. But return was never out of their minds, and the idea of return was to become one of the frames of their narrative of endurance on the plantation and, subsequently, in the land of their adoption.

In Hendree's Cure, Naga's parents arrived in Guyana at the turn of the century. Naga's father told him how, with other members of his family, he had endured that uncertain sixty days Atlantic crossing. The author provides a description of "how with Koolain there had been no romance, just hard work" (9). The drudgery in the cane fields drained all the energy of the indentured laborers. A common form of escape from the drudgery and daily humiliations of life

in the coolie lives was through addiction to rum and narcotics. Rum culture, a defining feature of plantation life generally, whether Creole or Indian, grew to become a very special feature of indenture society. "A race that had no history of drinking became one of the larger per-capita consumers in the world" (10). Rum was a lucrative by-product of sugar estates, and its consumption was all too often facilitated by sugar planters looking to recoup wages paid through purchases of alcohol made in the estate shop. This was an example of the short-term profiteering which characterized some plantation owners, and which was to aggravate the depressed socio-economic condition of the late nineteenth century sugar colonies. In the novel the mention of 'Chandan's rum shop' providing among other things high wine and first-proof unadulterated 'cane rum evidences the prevalence of rum culture among the Madrasi Indian community in British-Guiana in the early twentieth century .There were regular drinking sessions at Naga's house. Sometimes the drinking continued to the night. Alice, the wife of the established Kali priest Gunraj had taken lesson from Chunoo and before her from the ferocious Aplamma. "Madrasi women were the most liberate in the village. They would bring their men to book even if they had to invade the rum shop to pull them out." (p40)

The desire to get back to the (mother) land engulfed the indentured Indians in the early years of their indenture. "At first all [Koolain and Aplamma] had thought about was how to save for their return to India. [Koolain] remembered how at night their bodies, tired human machines, fueled by two-bit liquor lay pinned to the cold clay floor of their *logie*, but their spirits would soar beyond the boundyard" (11). But linked with their memory of their motherland was a promise made by agents and recruiters, a promise about riches and indenture, and through the promise of riches the promise of a glorious homecoming. While largely the promise remained

unfulfilled, the depression in the sugar trade towards the end of the nineteenth century forced the colonial sugar barons to accommodate the Madrasis on freehold land away from the estates in lieu of repatriation. In the novel "towards the end of their second five years turn on the estate, Naga learnt that his parents had been faced with the choice of repatriating to India or owning their own homestead and plot of rice land in the colony" (12). Afraid again of the unknown, 'afraid to leave the familiar temporariness' (13) they refused to return. By creating an imagined India in the experimental ethnic village of Whim, a fertile oasis, at the rim of the plantation desert Naga's parents learnt to live in displacement. Whim seemed to be the 'Promised Land'. As the place was already settled by bound coolies, out of which some were Madrasis, what they underwent was "a process of social semiosis whereby the tribes from a particular 'homeland' interact with other cultures over a long period of time and produce diaspora" (14). Set against the fictions of a heroic past and remote land, the real history of diaspora is always sullied by the social process that governs their lives.

Indo-Guianese writing is characterized by a principal tension, that between the desire for cultural separation and the contending urge toward creolization, both of which form different psychosocial responses to the similar historical event; the loss of India and, consequently, the absence of home. The displaced Indians - insecure, confused, disoriented and hysterical from the time of their arrival in the host country - considered as fragmented personality oscillating between home sickness and a 'homing desire' (15). Even though migration entailed a temporary release from traditional sanctions and disciplines that were exercised back 'home' in India through certain customary structures such as the village *panchayat*, or the meetings of community elders, in the overseas setting indentured Indians found themselves subject to new

pressures. The colonial sugar barons sought to thrust servility upon the cane-cutters even off the cane fields. That immigrants resented the status of 'coolie' is indicated by the anti-colonialist Madrasis--- like Peters, Victrin, Naga and his brother David--- detesting the British ownership of the sugar estates and their rule over the colony. They particularly hated those British overseers who contemptuously referred to them all as "Sammy", an alternative version of the derisive appellation, "coolie", which was used to describe all Indian indentured persons. For some Madrasis, though, the hurt and anger became the cause of self-contempt. Naga's two younger brothers, Ramasammy and Chinasammy, for example, gave their children new, more English-sounding surnames: Whitlingum and Arnasalam, respectively. Dumping their Madrasi names and embracing Christianity they tried to escape their origins, declaring their independence from the family compound. Hendree was intrigued by the melody of Aydoo's adopted Christian name. "Aydolene" sounded English. He confessed that "the name had the ring of culture and class, not like Jasso's, which was cheap like kakka-belly fish". (p119)

Of all the Indians in Guyana, the minority community of the Madrasis was probably the most open to interculturation with their local African neighbours, whilst remaining all the while true to their Madrasi faithfulness to Kali spiritual practices. (p7) Thus, when after Naga's birth, Buscutt, the Sanatan Dharma convert, advised Naga's father Koolain to give offerings to Lord Shiva, Koolain did not find any problem in it as Shiva was "one and the same as Madriveeren, the god of his father and his father's father". Koolain now came to recognize that "Naga would inherit the gods of both the North Indian Hindus and the Mdrasis". (p13) When Hendree visited the old Hindu couple with whom Aydoo lived they had little contact with the Madrasi villagers, and in this respect, Hendree was culturally a stranger to them.(p73) On the night they

consummated their marriage Aydoo touched Hendree's feet, and prayed to make her happy. Hendree recognized that the words Aydoo had spoken had been taken from a Hindu holy book, symbolizing the devotion of a married Hindu woman to her choosen man. But failing to match Aydoo's lofty response, all Hendree could find was his usual playfulness and mock arrogance throwing into sharp relief the serious undertone of the over-valued practice. (p74)

Relations between the Africans and Indians, as the novel indicates, "were frequently stressful and sometimes overtly antagonistic in the century after slavery was abolished and indentureship was introduced into the colony" (16). The Indian indentured laborers were viewed as the usurper of the indigenous workers' rightful, negotiated place in the socio-economic hierarchy. The real object for which most of the Indians has been indentured to the colonies had been to lower the price of wages, compelling the emancipated Blacks to accept such terms as their masters chose to give them. This planted the roots of African distrust for Indians. But in villages where both the races cohabited, they learnt to coexist and cooperate. Naga and his African friend Gunn found a shared political identity as both of them supported the same party, Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), in protest against the Backra rule, and were full of anti-colonialist rage when the British removed their elected government in 1953.

The economic condition of the early Madrasi immigrants and their descendants predicated that children could not continue with their studies for long as there was little support from government scholarship. Naga's parents moved in the hut in Whim village with all their worldly possessions: "arrival certificates, a small heap of silver jewellery which they had been

buying with their savings over the past nine years, and a small assortment of English notes and coins… a South Indian *massala* brick, a *belna* and *chowkie*, and other cooking utensils". (p15) But the size of the family made this modest resource all the more inadequate for Naga to continue with his studies. At an early age of thirteen he had to quit Auchlyne Scots School to support his family income. But the real reason for his quitting studies in the fourth standard was religious discrimination in the employment market. "Not being a Christian", Naga knew, "he couldn't become a teacher or policeman, though he had shown his ability by becoming an avid reader and speaking English fluently". (p17)

The Madrasis who were stereotyped as "lazy, aggressive and rebellious…least keen of all the migrants, for estate work" (17), preferred to make their living away from the estates in rice farming and fishing. For example, Naga learnt "pillikin, the name for self-employment at sea which was done by kicking a catmaran on sling mud, and catching leftover fish in the seine" (18). Naga's aspiration for financial independence led him to try his hand in various business ventures. "At one time, Naga was a fisherman, trader, burnt-earth contractor, cook-shop owner, butcher, ceremonial barber/priest and turfite" (19). Even though Naga was behaving, in his wife Chunoo's words, "like pot-salt; that he wanted to be in everything" (20) his wider ambitions served his wide range of interests. He assiduously drew information about the law from his high –profile customers such as magistrates, lawyers and policeman; and so gained a reputation in the village wielding 'judicial' influence. Both Naga and his friend Gunn appropriated the attire of the colonizer---the ceremonial tie and suit, two-toned shoes and Wilson hats--- in their own advantage to rub shoulders with the elite be it in the high-class 'English' wedding or in the club of the new racehorse petty-bourgeoisie. Naga was very passionate about horses from his early

youth. Horse-racing was the big-time sport at D'Urban Park in Georgetown. In his middle age, with a substantial amount of fortune at his disposal Naga became one of the most popular figures on the tracks. The Rahmans and Lakhoos, who dominated the racing, had found a competitor in Naga's young pasture horse Bright Steel. Naga employed an unknown cowboy named Booney Persaud as jockey. Booney flaunted the gold shirt with red sash. The strong Tamil red and gold colours were patterned after Aplamma's Madras rhumal. They were later to become Naga's racing colours. Politics also spilled over even onto the racing track. Village horses like Bright Steel stood for the underdogs challenging the colonial establishment. "When Naga whispered in bright Steel's ears before a race, "We go beat dey rass today", "dey" were the fat colonial cats" (21). This hitherto unknown Madrasi fisherman, from a small, obscure village on the Corentyne, had humbled the mighty racing lords like Lionel Luckhoo. Unlike his two younger brothers, Naga showed that "you did not have to abandon yourself or your culture to be successful" (22).

Gradually, as people began to rebuild their lives, life became valuable, not to be wasted by men, either as mere machines of an oppressive empire, nor wasted by an old-style Madrasi recklessness. The preoccupation with making money and saving it is a common and persistent feature of the [Indian] diaspora. This is not unique to it, for every community that migrates for economic reasons seeks in wealth both a vindication of its decision to migrate and a compensation for the humiliations and privations suffered in the process. Whim saw immense transformation between the years 1953 and 1959. A large Hindu petty-bourgeois class flourished on rice growing and cattle rearing, while the Madrasis expanded their fishing enterprises. Several local capitalists had emerged in wholesaling, trucking and building contracting. Another avenue of mobility was seen to be through the acquisition of knowledge. The importance of education as

an avenue of socio-economic mobility for the indentured laborers is seen in the novel in Naga's aspiration for his third son, Abel. Abel, who had a good head for education, as Naga thought, was going to be a horse-race radio announcer, "like Lloyd Luckhoo" (23). The village was producing its first new intelligentsia from high school graduates, some of whom gravitated to the civil service.

Faced with early experiences of cultural and economic glass ceilings, immigrants sought to climb off the bottom of the heap through acquisition of colonial language. Indentured workers quickly internalized that acquisition of the colonial language was a precondition for socio-economic mobility. The importance of comprehending the language of the colonialist is addressed in the novel by Naga coaxing his third boy, Abel to entertain his friends by announcing the Krack-O-Jack race:

> "Abel, who was sixteen, without further prompting, launched into his imitation of Lloyd Luckhoo, the popular racing commentator:
>
> "The horses are now at the far corner…And they're off! I see Bright Steel taking the lead…but wait: I see a horse running in the opposite direction. My gord, it's Krack-O-Jack, the favourite. Krack-O-Jack has bolted; he's running the wrong way…but back to the main event…"
>
> By this time Abel had cocked his arse in the air like a jockey on horseback, with left hand in front holding imaginary reins, and his right hand lashing out behind with a whip .

> "Now they swing into the Money Turn, and it is still Bright steel in the lead … And with a fur-long to go it is Bright Still all way…And bright Steel wins!"
>
> He threw his hands up in the air with finality, and proclaimed, as Luckhoo would do after every great race, "Oh, what a race, what a horse!" " (24).

The marriage ceremony of Naga's daughter Marie with a Muslin boy named Noor is marked by a shift in the traditional practices. Though on the Friday before the wedding Hendree was allowed to play drums for the traditional Hindu *matticore* ceremony as a reflection of the interaction of Hindu and Madrasi customs Naga decided to organize a prestigious English wedding. His desire to keep up with the times is informed with his desire to rub soldiers with the elite.

Diasporic identities are inherently unstable and complex entities, in which allegiances to contemporary and ancestral homelands are variously reconciled, weighted, or compartmentalized. These antipodal orientations are themselves asymmetrical and qualitatively distinct, involving, on the one hand, the immediate, engulfing presence of the new environment and, on the other, the generally indirect and mediated images of a lost motherland. In the new and largely inhospitable homeland, music came to play a particularly important role in sustaining Indian culture and ties to India itself. Even though by the mid-twentieth century, the significance of music as a cultural icon was being further heightened by the decline of other traditional emblems of Indianness, such as caste consciousness and the use of Hindi as a spoken language, amateur song sessions, whether in the form of women's informal singing, congregational Hindu bhajans or antiphonal male chowtals associated with the vernal 'Phagwa'(Holi) festival, became focal events in the reaffirmation of Indian culture during the indenture period. In Hendree's Cure

the thundering peal of “bramku-nakku, bramku-nakku” (32) or the joyous note of “prax, prax, prax; prakadang, prakadang” (33) was heard at all kinds of village functions---“ninth day ceremonies for babies, seaside pujas, traditional weddings and pujas” (34). Changanna was a past-master in making his versatile hands do the talking by playing drums, all drums, but making ‘tappu’ talk and ‘brukking tahl’ on hand drums. “Before long, under Changanna’s guidance, Hendree had developed into a master drummer. He joined Changanna and Winkayah as regular tappu players at Sunday Madras services, and became a live-in devotee-player during the three-day annual Kalimai puja at Whim” (35). At hand drumming, Hendree was unbeatable, and he was lead drummer at Chowtal sessions for “Pagwah” observances. As success in life became the desired aim for most of the individuals of Indenture diaspora Hendree’s wife Aydoo associates drumming with the ambition that: “A good drummer could dream of being called to play in Georgetown at the radio station, and perhaps could end up with a scholarship to India” (36). Aydoo’s education in St James Lutheran Church taught her that “there is humility in work; labor is dignity” (37). From both her Hindu upbringing and her Christian education she had learnt that work was a blessing. Work for Hendree was a burden, a curse. “Nat me rass! No man get fu slave in cane field” (38), Hendree vowed to his friend Tilokie. Hendree was always on the lookout for bigger space both in his professional and personal life. On the professional sphere he wanted to make himself more independent of Naga. In his personal life his nomadism became a nuisance as Aydoo was jealous over his sexual escapades. While Aydoo wanted her man to have steady work, not to become a wandering drummer, Hendree had other intentions. When Aydoo left him for good for the “smelling” Frenchie, Hendree felt independent and free. Tappu was his first love. “Dis hey, is my wife and my picknie”, (39) he said. Tappu gave him the kind of freedom for self- indulgence which neither Chunoo’s motherly affection, nor Aydoo’s civilizing

mission could match. If ‘tappu’ provided Hendree with the metaphoric medium to negotiate his personal life in all its happy-go-lucky ways, on the public sphere it provided Hendree with the recognition of good-for-[something]. While Aydoo considered him as “good-fu-nothing” and Naga called him a “corkman” as he was too short and light to fix the pin-seines firmly on the mud, playing tappu gave him the recognition of the “unbeatable…lead drummer” (40).

Bilingualism became a key advantage for those Indians who settled overseas during the indenture period. In alien societies the continuing use of Indian languages, both orally and scripturally, came to represent a cultural bulwark, as means of retrenchment, of self-justification and an important marker of identity. Communicating in a language that could not be understood employers of Creole or European origin had distinct advantages. In the eleventh chapter of the novel the eponymous hero Hendree used certain “words [which] were not anything the man sitting before him had heard before; they were certainly not English or creolese, and [it] was not sure if they were Hindi either. All [that was] heard distinctly at the end of every line was “am-ma” ” (25). The use of readily understandable ‘desi’ words like “*dhaaru*”, “*pani*” and “*murgi*” by Hendree during the spiritual session amazed Joe-Joe and made him believe the different tricks that Hendree used to achieve his purpose with professional ease. The bizarre story of “Do[ing]” (26), that is, the practice of invoking a spirit and sending it to haunt and even destroy its intended victim is a deliberate debunking of the accepted theory of Western medicine. The use of ‘obeah’ for healing purpose subverted the established, rational, Western medicine practice by undercutting the very foundation on which it is based and represented the alternative practices that were often borrowed by Indians and Africans from each other. There was a wide spread belief in the existence and power of spirits, good and bad. To prescribe a ‘cure’, the doctor had to have something more powerful than the inflicting spirit. That something was generally a good

spirit fighting the bad spirit. There were plenty enough spirits around to keep all religions busy. Addee's case may be mentioned in this context. In Addee's case an entire team was attacking simultaneously. But just as there were many such maladies afflicting folks in the village, there were also many doctors prescribing different cures. The existence of nonwestern languages enabled the persistence of these alternative epistemes and knowledges among the coloured immigrant population.

The group who met regularly at Naga's mostly comprised of Madrasi worshippers. They sincerely believed in the power of their gods, their *deutas*. Shunning their narrow religious orthodoxy they were rather accommodative of other people's beliefs: Hindus, Muslims and Christians. There was space enough in their respective religions for the practice of magical arts to combat evil spirits. Brother Dash was the one who introduced Christian healing sermons to cast out demons at the Royal Cinema. Many people from all over the Corentyne Coast walked to the impoverished "clap-hand church" to seek spiritual cure to their ailments. As Dash exhorted, "In the name of Jesus, I say leave!" there would be loud choruses of "Hallelullah"; "Praise de Lord". (p97) They were tolerant of varying levels of roguishness that they felt, in no way, were offensive to their gods. Their means might be questionable, but they did not feel like compromising the integrity of their religion as such acts were used mostly for good purposes.

While the Madrsi community in Corentyne was known for their skill in catching sea fish Hendree was, quite unusually, not right for sea-work. Though he did not attach importance to the general belief inspirits and spiritual powers, he started to think about these things more

purposefully. (p94) Hendree decoded the healing business and came to know that the previous knowledge of the potential healing seekers is extremely important in healing business. As an apprentice under an accomplished healer Brother Victrin, a Catholic convert, Hendree understood the importance of truth and confession in spiritual healing as, for most of the people, the real reason for their sickness is the feeling of guilt which should be confronted with willpower to effect their own cure and rehabilitation. (p128) What is important to note is that Hendree improvised upon his training. When all the tricks of the trade failed him Hendree took recourse to sacrool, a pain killer liquid which he had bought from Frenchie "as a fast-relief, back-up medicine to give earthly support to his divine efforts". Combining the strength of Masta, the Madrasi god, and comfort of massage, effecting a curious concoction of spirit and science, the erstwhile lead drummer in the *mattiekore* fun, now establishes himself as an accomplished spiritual healer.

Hendree's ready intelligence assessed the importance of information as a potential avenue for making money. In his delightful musings Hendree felt vindicated as self-reliant. His new-found confidence made him feel that now he could quite dexterously deal with those who believed they were victims of obeah. Unlike the difficult tasks of catching sea fish under bossy and cuss-ogling Naga spiritual healing seemed to be rather cool living to Hendree. He now felt independent and free without "Naga to terrorise him, Aydoo to shame him, or Victrin to use him. Now he was boss; he was his own master. Now he could make life different: he would make money, marry a good woman and make some children".

Another kind of homeland trauma may be discussed with reference to the lives of the members of the Indian diaspora who saw themselves as twice-displaced. *Hendree's Cure* traces the intergenerational lives of the migrants, who after three generations again become restless for

better economic opportunities. Thus, there is the second move, again across the Atlantic, but this time from the Indian settlements of Guyana to the First World, to England. Movement from one locale to another, from an earlier space where foundational narratives are constructed, where the metaphors of 'living' have their origins, where information and experience are packaged and bottled to be sent across the seas - in short, movement from one country to another –creates a consciousness about one's past and produces the dilemma of unfixed selves. Once overseas, the Indian indentured laborer plunged ever further into diaspora, wandering further afield. In the Novel, Hendree's boyhood friend Tilokie left Whim for England at the age of eighteen to study engineering. He shifted from his own tiny, cramped, apartment to Battersea Fairground when he found better- paid work than the job in the warehouse of a Punjabi businessman, packing sacks of potatoes and bags of split-peas. At Battersea, he always looked out for folks from British-Guiana, in particular his villagers, Aunt Gussy's son, Abel, and Chinapa's boy, Narine. They had left for England just after the war, but the village heard nothing from them. He met other Guianese, most of them getting by quite well, who actually liked England. Many had started careers and would probably make England their home. But Tilokie was out of place in London. The real picture of the city did not match with his imaginatively painted fantasy of the place being beautiful like heaven. Tilokie's bitterness stemmed from extreme loneliness and his unpreparedness for life in London. "Here, in London, I feel nothing; smell nothing. I am nothing," (27) he added despondently. Tilokie could not find the words to express his alienation. He felt that he was one big contradiction ready to explode. Like other transnational diasporic individuals, Tilokie experienced what may be called the enigma of belonging. Being asked to say something about the life in ['his'] great country, India, Tilokie said, commanding his best

English accent: “We are British” (28). Later he clarified that he was both British and Indian simultaneously as his grandparents went to the colony of British Guyana from India.

In a nation-state ‘citizenship’ is offered as being generically pure, and thus always unhyphenated, if we are to believe what our passports have to say about us. In actual practice the pure, unhyphenated generic category is only applicable to those citizens whose bodies signify an unproblematic identity of selves with nations. For those of us who are outside this form of ‘universal’ identity politics, whose corporealities fissure the logic of unproblematic identification, plural/multicultural societies have constructed, for their inassimilable others, the impure genre of the hyphenated subject. But the politics of the hyphen itself is hyphenated because, in the name of empowering people, the classification indeed disempowers them; it makes them, to use a hyphenated term, ‘empoweringly-disempowered’ (29). Although the hyphen makes rebirthing and coalitional politics (seemingly) possible, the words around the hyphen claim otherwise. Having spent time in UK, in the novel, “By 1953, Tilokie could no longer suppress his desire to return home, could no longer deal with his restlessness” (30). He came to feel that England owed him an easy life in exchange for the three century long exploitation carried out by expatriate colonial sugar barons in the sugar estates. He found further justification for his anger after hearing the news that the British had landed troops in Guiana, and removed the elected government of Cheddi Jagan. He quickly personalized his revulsion for the British in Maria, the freckle-faced young English girl, whom he had courted at Battersea. “For days when he looked at her he would grumble, “Blasted Limeys!” (31).

Tilokie's mind hovered during work on the weddings, the *matteikore* fun and, above all, the sound of his tassa drums. (p80) He improvised his small kaharee by taking out its handles and converting it into a tassa drum. His passion for the tassa drums forced him to negotiate alternative food preferences. He had started to "eat hot dogs and other quick-serve foods, drinking coffee from paper cups, in the Battersea fun park". (p81) Tilokie at times started to bark at Maria in unprovoked hostility. This made Maria understand that she would probably have to leave. But she had decided to make one final attempt at reconciliation. With the hope that the priest could, perhaps, help him change his ways, Maria would take Tilokie to the local church. But Tilokie slipped out of the church to join the tassa gang. That day, playing with a vengeance, he made the tassa talk: "He peeled off his English jacket, wrapped around his waist, knotting its arms. He pulled his tie halfway down his chest, and bent his head low over the tassa that was strapped on his body." (p90) He felt that he had gained liberty; and he tried to piece back the life that he knew, that he had lived with any amount of involvement. His passion for tassa drums never dwindled, but his exposure to a different type of life in London prompted him to introduce, for the very first time, the sweet sonority of another type of music-a diesel-driven, Delco plant. It established Tilokie's status as a small- scale power supplier and helped him make some money out of this power project. He now came to be recognized as a man of technology. The man who once could not continue with his studies in London, who worked as a cleanliness manager in the Battersea fun park had returned from England "to shine light on a village that had long been gripped in the backward throes of superstition and cockishness." (p91)

Ancestral affiliations with the homeland provide necessary spiritual bonds to establish a sense of historicity in the adopted land to demonstrate the degree to which Indo-Caribbean identity is firmly rooted in diasporic earthly connections. Nagamootoo's narrative sets up a

diasporic connection between the Tamil guerillas in the ancestral land and their female counterparts in Guyana to highlight the primacy of cultural continuity as a strategy to maintain ethnic wholeness. Lizzy takes pride in her Tamil cultural heritage that affords her a sense of place in the community. As the novel indicates: "She was proud to claim herself as a first generation Drepaul, having married into that large and prosperous peasant family in Kilmanock. But she would also say that while her navel string was buried in India, her roots were planted in Whim" (41). The novel highlights the significance of water as a symbol of new life and a renewal of the spirit in the ceremonial last rites performed for the character Uncle Busscutt: "*Pani*. That was all he had wished to take with him when the time came—a mouthful of water. That for him was the ultimate elixir on Earth. It was the final symbolic taste of sacred waters from the holy rivers in the distant land of his birth. He had always that one day his soul would flow to eternity on the currents of the Ganges and the Jamuna" (42). Water represents an important rite of passage to provide the necessary connection between the ancestral past, the present and the indeterminate future as the soul travels to embrace the timelessness of eternity.

Vijay Mishra, in his recent book, The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing The Diasporic Imaginary (2007), writes that in the case of the old Indian diaspora "imagination was triggered by the contents in gunny sacks: a Ganesha icon, a dog-eared copy of the Ramayana or the Qur'an, an old sari or other deshi outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage, and so on" (43). Tilokie's passion for the tassa drum provided him with a tool by which he tried to access the memories of an otherwise inaccessible motherland across the seas. Tilokie addresses the issue of an expatriate feeling a sense of solidarity with the land of his origin: "The drum carries the

memory of a thousand generations, and I can relate to it" (44). When nostalgic Tilokie states that his tassa drum is "part of [his] country, its sound, its soul" (45) and retrospectively adds that "Everything in Guiana happens much the same way as in India" (46), he actually tries to redress the trauma of his expatriation by imaginatively accessing the fond memories of his home/original land. He recalls: "When I was learning mechanics at home, I used to strike at the iron to see if it could talk back to me. It was English or foreign metal. It never responded when I wanted it to echo 'Tilokie'. But my drum, my tassa, can speak back to me. I ask questions and I get answers. I ask it, 'say Tilokie', and it says 'Tilokie'" (47). Tilokie's playing tassa; a form of non-Western musical instrument, in the then metropolitan centre of England is an act of symbolic protest against the English exploitation of British-Guiana for centuries. The positive appropriation of his alien status in England is marked in his courting a British girl, Maria, and thereafter dumping her. When Maria called 'Tiloookiee' in her melodious English accent he put the drum to talk "Tilokie na want am, Tilokie na want am, Tilokie na want am" (48). When Maria called again the drum replied "Lowraw Tilokie, lowraw Tilokie" (49). The word "lowra", as the text shows, "had been coined by English overseers, and hurled as an insult against estate workers. The Madrasis had on occasions nearly rioted over that word, as no one, no one, should ever call them a "prick" (50). Tilokie used the word to dramatize his rejection of this foreign, English woman---hurling back the word at her, with disdain.

As has already been noted, Blacks and Madrasis found common cause in the universal language of exclusion by transforming the village of Whim into an experimental model of peaceful coexistence through the process of cultural syncretism that laid the foundation for a particular "dougla space" (51) as the site of a metaphoric dialogue between an Indian and

African poetics of life. The creation of a symbolic dougla space through cultural fusion has politicized the thematics of liminal subjectivity through a cultural claiming of space by working-class Indians and Africans. This reclaiming gives new agency to disenfranchised constituencies through the commonality of struggle. The reciprocal nature of this form of interculturation, the douglarization of culture, according to Shalini Puri, becomes a means "for releasing progressive cultural identities that are delegitimized by dominant culture" (52).

Constituting a space of information, dougla space, as a site of cultural convergence, provides the necessary common ground for economically-disenfranchised Africans and culturally—and religiously-marginalized Indians in colonial Guiana, with Madrasi women situated at the lowest rung of the social ladder. "Advocating the need for intercultural plurality, dougla space calls for a certain blurring of racialisms that privilege the binary distinctiveness of Indian-ness or African-ness by situating itself within a hybridized space of 'racelessness'" (53). The foundational insertion of dougla space has had particular implications for Indian-origin women's gender ideologies in the Caribbean. The conjunction between dougla space and an Indo-Caribbean feminist poetics of life that establishes the primacy of Madrasi women marginalized by the intersectional positionality of race, gender and class is suggested by Puri when she claims: ". . . because constructions of race are gendered in very particular ways, the dougla's potential disruption of dominant racial stereotypes could provide an opportunity for specifically feminist contestations of dominant gender and race imagery" (54). The interstitial positioning of race and gender through binary disruptions of categorized absolutes permits a certain remapping of race and gender ideologies that are more complexly textured in their scope. Douglarized re-workings deliminalize subaltern subjectivities to provide more affirming

representations of marginalized groups through the creation of a neutralized common ground that provides the necessary blank page for subjective self-inscriptions. The transformation of Hindu-centric cultural euphoria into a more progressive gendered engagement with Indo-Caribbean identity in Hendree's Cure is initiated by the spatial fragmentations of dougla space that effectuate a particular politics of affiliation and inclusion within national schemes of exclusion and expropriation. The women in Nagamootoo's novel engineer the disruption of the status quo as a strategy of survival and empowerment through the redefinition of communal space as the necessary stepping stone to a larger existential reclaiming of the female self.

Khal Torabully emphasizes the preeminence of the land in the construction of Indian diasporic identity because the first indentured immigrants were an agricultural labor force that toiled the land to make its first impression on non-native ground (55). The Indian identification with the land was two-fold, symbolizing a metaphysical umbilical affiliation with the rural lands of India as well as a politicized inscription of memory on the land. For indentured laborers, the earth represented a historical palimpsest that inscribed the multi-layered complexities of the immigrant's existence. In addition, the "earthly" traces of women's existence were crucial to maintain the visibility of their experience. In this way, Lizzy's close connection with the land locates women's expressive agency and resistance in the soil as a means of safeguarding and sustaining the integrity of Madrasi women's cultural memory in Guyana.

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Naga's wife Chunoo was generous and helpful. This gave her moral influence over many families in their village. But Chunoo herself who was later to become the undisputed matriarch of her family was subjected to tyranny by her mother-in-law Aplamma who carried the old land

custom of torturing the daughter-in-law beyond the *kala pani* to the Guianese plantation at the turn of the twentieth century. Chunoo found a sympathizer in the Sanatan Dharma convert Buscutt who, rather meekly, confronts Aplamma: "I understand that once a girl take husband in the village, she mother-in-law must take control of her life. He cannot escape that fate. But this here girl Chunoo is different. She comes from a good home in Bath to this Whim mudflat and you turn she estate slave and fisherwoman! You turn she to estate mule!" What is interesting to note here is that Buscutt does not raise objection to the custom of mother-in-laws torturing the daughter-in-law as, for him, it is a kind of violence which is socially accepted and naturalized. Buscutt only mildly protests against Aplamma's over-doing, citing Chunoo's good parentage.

But Chunoo's distinction within the family and the community is ensured by her religious open-mindedness that illuminates her position as a religious visionary. She embraces a syncretic douglarized religious perspective that highlights the inevitable "color blindness" of religion as a key to divine and communal agency. As the novel states: "Chunoo's father, Badriveeren, and mother, Rajama, were Madrasis but they partook in Hindu functions. For their daughter there was no contradiction between Madrasi and Hindu worship. Madriveeren, for her, was Lord Shiva; Mother Kali was goddess Sita" (56). By (dis)/placing the Madrasi gods on the same level as the Hindu gods through a process of divine fusion, Chunoo reverses the secondary position to which gods such as Madriveeren and Kali are relegated in dominant Vedic-Hindu ideology by reinstating their value in the Hindu pantheon. The fair-complexioned Sita merges with the dark-skinned Kali as the result of a certain "aquatic fluidity of thought" (57) to resurrect the liminal gray spaces of interstitial subjectivity for marginalized groups in the face of colonial domination in Guyana. The shift from racialized hegemonic stereotype to subjective prototype signals a significant movement from subaltern victim-hood to creative self-positioning in which

Indian-ness presents a unified front to disenfranchisement through a syncretized religious positioning.

The idea of motion has been central to the Indo-Caribbean experience in general and, to the specific experiences of women in particular. From the first merchant ships that brought them to the islands to their mobilization as workers and as domestic partners in the new lands, women have always had to negotiate their access to space through creative reconfigurations. These spatial recreations have led to the formation of a particular "fissured" reality for women wherein their individual and collective histories have been lodged within the fault lines of Caribbean memory in a particular space of in-betweenness or intermediary affiliation. The in-between location has favored an interstitial subject position that resists spatial enclosure in confining paradigms. One method of circumventing confinement was to cross the *kala pani* where transgressive boundary crossings on the Atlantic enabled Indian women to escape from Hindu patriarchal structures in India that made them victims of abusive family and communal traditions. Enduring the hardships of the Indian Middle Passage was a worthwhile risk to take as it offered the potential for renegotiations of gendered identity within the parameters of the structural dissolutions of caste, class and religion that occurred during the trans-Atlantic displacements. The turbulent waters of the 'kala pani' constitute an eruptive force that breaks new ground to articulate a more dynamic expression of the female subaltern. Chunoo's own life becomes a mirror of multiple diasporic crossings that reinforce the link between women, water and a revised Caribbean female self. As the novel indicates: "She remembered how as a young bride she had left Bath and made her first crossing over the Berbice river. She imagined herself as a bridge linking the worlds of her parents and of Naga's" (58). Even a *triply marginalized* [my

emphasis] (59) female subaltern like Chunoo can provide the essential link in the cycle of cultural continuity by spanning many timelines in their efforts to preserve the social integrity of their communities in the face of colonial effacement. Like Eamdoolah in the *Lutchmee and Dilloo,* and Sujaria in Gaiutra Bahadoor's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, Chunoo too shows unexpected agency as an independent thinker and conscious carrier of her multiple cultural heritages.

Notes

1 Nagamootoo, Moses. Foreword. Hendree's Cure. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2000. p 5.

2 Nagamootoo, p 7.

3 Same as the above.

4 Nagamootoo, p 6.

5 See reference no. 2.

6 See reference no. 4.

7 Mishra, Vijay. "New Lamps for the Old: Diasporas Migrancy Border" in Interrogating Post-Colonialism. Eds. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996.p 70.

8 Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Sr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. Quoted in Mishra, Vijay. The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary. Oxon: Routledge, 2007. p 78.

9 Nagamootoo, p 10.

10 Mishra, Vijay. The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary. Oxon: Routledge, 2007.p 89.

11 See reference no. 9.

12 Nagamootoo, p 14.

13 Naipaul, V.S. A House for Mr. Biswas. London: Andre Deutsch, 1961. p 174, quoted in Mishra, Vijay. The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary. Oxon: Routledge, 2007. p 71.

14 Mishra, Vijay. "New Lamps for the Old: Diasporas Migrancy Border" in Interrogating Post-Colonialism. eds. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996. p 72.

15 Brah, Avtar. Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities .London and New York: Routledge. Brah, Avtar. 1996. p 180.

16 Nagamootoo, p 21.

17 See reference no. 4.

18 Nagamootoo, p 17.

19 Nagamootoo, p 24.

20 Same as the above.

21 Nagamootoo, p 46.

22 Nagamootoo, p 25.

23 Nagamootoo, p 57.

24 Nagamootoo, p 59.

25 Nagamootoo, p 134.

26 Nagamootoo, p 95.

27 Nagamootoo, p 84.

28 Nagamootoo, p 85.

29 Mishra, Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary, p. 184.

30 Nagamootoo, p 89.

31 Same as the above.

32 Nagamootoo, p 34.

33 Nagamootoo, p 68.

34 Nagamootoo, p 54.

35 Same as the above.

36 Nagamootoo, p 75.

37 Nagamootoo, p 104.

38 Nagamootoo, p 52.

39 Nagamootoo, p 110.

40 See reference no. 34.

41 Nagamootoo, p 116.

42 Nagamootoo, Hendree's Cure, 32.

43 Mishra, Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary, p. 4.

44 See reference no. 27.

45 Same as the above.

46 See reference no. 28.

47 See reference no. 27.

48 Nagamootoo, p 90.

49 Nagamootoo, p 91.

50 Same as the above.

51 The term "dougla", according to Brinda J Mehta's essay 'Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure refers to "the offspring of an Indian and African sexual union. Characterized as outcasts and ethnic bastards, douglas have been excluded from the national imagination due to their "natural" refusal to conform to racial, social and

ethnic absolutes".

See Mehta, Brinda. J. "Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure". (2004) pp 542-560. Project Muse. 10 Nov 2008<http://muse.jhu.edn/journals/collaloo/V027/27.2 mehta.html>

52 Puri, Shalini. "Canonized Hybridities, Resistant Hybridities: Chutney Soca, Carnival and the Politics of Nationalism." In Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation. Ed. Belinda Edmondson. Virginia: UP of Virginia. 1999: 12–38: p. 32.

53 Mehta, Brinda. J. "Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure". (2004) pp 542-560. Project Muse. 10 Nov 2008<http://muse.jhu.edn/journals/collaloo/V027/27.2 mehta.html>

54 Shalini Puri's Ph.D. thesis, Nation and Hybridization: Caribbean Cartographies. Cornell University (1994): p. 144.quoted in "Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure". (2004) pp 542-560. Project Muse. 10 Nov 2008<http://muse.jhu.edn/journals/collaloo/V027/27.2 mehta.html>

55 Torabully, Khal. "Coolitude: Prémisses historiques d'une non-parole." *Notre Librairie* 128 (oct– déc): 1996: 59–71: p. 63 quoted in "Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure". (2004) pp 542-560. Project Muse. 10 Nov 2008<http://muse.jhu.edn/journals/collaloo/V027/27.2 mehta.html>

56 Nagamootoo, p 100.

57 quoted in "Kali, Gangamai and Dougla Consciousness in Moses Nagamootoo's Hendree's Cure". (2004) (pp 542-560). p 553. Project Muse. 10 Nov 2008<http://muse.jhu.edn/journals/collaloo/V027/27.2 mehta.html>

58 Nagamootoo, p 32.

59 In Nagamootoo's novel Chunoo represents the status of a triply marginalized subaltern heroine first, because she is of a coolie descent; second, because she is a Madrasi in a Hindu majority community of indenture laborers; and third and but most important, because she is a woman in a phallocentric society.

Chapter IV

Cartographies of Resistance: Examining the Pragmatic Assertion of Female Self in Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*

"The young woman had rejected the rule of her father. She had literally rejected patriarchy-only to be confronted with the higher paternalism of the state, which had long argued that it kept immigrants confined to their plantations as any father figure would, for their own protection(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 132)".

In the 'Preface' to her path-breaking book *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, Gaiutra Bahadur talks about the complexities of affiliating with the word "Coolie" as it depends on who is using the word and in what context. Her great-grandmother Sujaria was a high-caste Hindu and a coolie who migrated to the plantation colony of British Guiana in 1903. Bahadur says: "She was one individual swept up in a particular mass movement of people, and the perceptions of those who control that process determined her identity at least as much as she did. The power

of her colonizers to name and misname her formed a key part of her story. To them, she was a coolie woman, a stock character, possessing stereotyped qualities, which shaped who she was by limiting who she could ever be(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, Preface, xxii)".

As I have already mentioned in Chapter I, Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* excavates an imperial history of colonial and patriarchal hegemony which tried to control and censor any deviant tendency among the coolie women by creating cultural hoops through which they should pass in order to be accepted as unproblematic for the perpetuation of institutions based on violence and discrimination. But before examining the limiting effect of the colonial stereotypes of coolie women and how coolie women resist both colonialism and patriarchy by pragmatic self-assertion, it will be helpful to understand the cultural ramifications of *Kala Pani* crossing and look at the androcentric bias inherent in indenture.

Cultural Ramifications of *Kala Pani* Crossing

In his book chapter titled 'Berbice and Beyond: My Improbable Journey, Lomarsh Roopnarine talks about the importance of memory rooted in the imaginative recreation of India for those people of Indian origin who have never visited India: He says:

> I am convinced that without the imaginative constructions of India, most Indians like myself in Guyana would have little understanding of our roots. These thoughts have provided a platform and, later, a deep anchorage, for Indians to conceptualize their distant past. This is the reason that even though most Indians in Guyana and perhaps the wider Indo-phone Caribbean have never visited India, their memories of India have been ironically rooted in the very existence of their imaginations. The genetic strings might

have been ruptured but the cultural and emotional strings have remained intact(Lomarsh Roopnarine 2022, 33).

Commenting on the role of memory in the imaginative reconstruction of the past Nandini Dhar says: "[M]emories, like all other forms of narratives, in order to be interesting, must possess an identifiable narrative arc. They must tell stories which move beyond the temporal textures of contemporary every day(Nandini Dhar 2022, 38)". According to her, "The phenomenon of proliferation of memories [in our times] , then, is not just about narrating any memory, but specifically those memories which have previously been excluded from the dominant institutional histories. The indenture, then, …happens to be only the site of one such excluded memories(Nandini Dhar 2022, 38)". Ashutosh Kumar has also remarked that "there was 'a curious lacuna regarding indenture as far as nineteenth-century mainstream Indian political and politico-economic discourse [was] concerned', such an important historical moment hardly featured anywhere in historical discourse in 19th century India(Ashutosh Bharadwaj and Judith Misrahi-Barak 2022, 4);(Kumar 2017, 4)".

Indenture labour migration to various colonial sugar plantations involved long sea journey which in nineteenth century India was popularly known as the crossing of *Kala Pani*. Recent scholarship on the historical phenomenon of indenture focuses on the cultural ramification of *Kala Pani* crossing as it involved a rupture in the continuity of the coolie's cultural memory of the motherland. Vijay Mishra says: "For the peasants from the Indo-Gangetic Plain (and even for indentured labourers from Southern India), *kala pani* carried the sense of a break from an orderly social world. Whether this sense or knowledge was part of a Hindu's phylogenetic inheritance is a moot point for, it may be argued, and powerfully I think, that it was

used by colonial masters and their second order mediators… as a structure of feeling to reinforce the hopelessness of their situation as bonded coolies once they had left their homeland(Mishra 2022, 20)".

For Vijay Mishra the *Kala Pani* reminded the indentured labourers of their wretched conditions: "As an existential absolute- and this is its theoretical value- in the *girmit* imaginary (*imaginaire*), it acquired considerable ideological traction as transgressive act, a kind of threshold that one never crossed or entered into, even though in its Hindu '*sastric*' definition it applied narrowly only to the 'twice born' caste or *varna*(Mishra 2022, 20)". Mishra further adds: "The transgressive moment as a *girmit* cultural dominant, which may have even implied a life after death, acquired cultural capital of an unusual kind as it affected, in particular, attitudes towards the unchanging definition of caste itself(Mishra 2022, 20)".

Corssing of *Kala Pani*, thus, involved the complete proletarization of the indentured labourer who is often represented as wordless. "The unsaid… the idea that the coolie is wordless… must find literal and figurative representation. In these instances and in the brilliant work by Gaiutra Bahadur, the silenced coolie is situated within 'cultural' as opposed to 'archival' memory. This then is the new historiography that goes by the name of 'coolitude' which forcefully foregrounds that fact that post-indenture cultures should be read 'intersectionally', that is, with class and gender in mind, and through a 'disidentificatory resistance' that is not simply locked into the idea of a lost nation to be forever mourned(Mishra 2022, 27)".

Androcentric Bias Inherent in Indenture

Rural India saw an epic uprooting of its peasants due to frequent floods and famines. Women, more than men, were severely hit by these calamities as they financially depended on the male members of their families. The role of the male members of the family as the providers and protectors of the females had immense cultural significance as it subjugated women to patriarchy. Patriarchy exercised its hold on women through certain social structures. Since "culture refers to a collective similarity of behaviour(Gowricharn 2022, 70)", these institutions were built and fostered on the patriarchal logic of eliciting certain pre-determined effect on females who would concede to accept these institutions, and thereby patriarchy, as natural. The institution of family, kinship, marriage, etc., thus, played a major role in the subjugation of women.

With the introduction of indenture labour system after the abolition of slavery in 1834 by the British Government the peasants were provided with an employment opportunity. The economy of rural India in the nineteenth century was primarily based on agriculture which was frequently disrupted by the vagaries of South-West monsoon. The uncertainty of traditional livelihood coupled with certain socio-cultural constraints like the menace of casteism, child marriage, the stigma attached to young widows, etc. made many men and women to indenture themselves to different far flung plantation colonies of the British Empire. Since culture travels with the travelling person, these Indian immigrants to different plantation colonies took their savour texts like *Ramayan, Hanuman Chalisa, Quran,* etc. with them. Since the injunctions of these saviour texts were to be practiced in society the indentured labourers replicated the homeland social structures which so long thrived on the logic of subjugating and marginalizing women.

But the replication of Indian social structures in the plantation colonies was not always successful in maintaining its hold on women as they felt liberated from the constrictions of homeland culture in their new places of adoption. It is evident that indentured labour migration provided women with the opportunity to "emancipate themselves from an illiberal, inhibiting and very hierarchical social system in India(Pieter C. Emmer 1985, 247). Besides, the relatively fewer number of coolie women in the plantations provided them with some sexual leverage which they could use to better their financial condition. Reddock stated that the plantation life allowed women more control over their life, as "… women could now, on their own accord, leave one husband for another or have a parallel relationship with more than one man(Reddock 1985, 42)" and that, "…many Indian women, probably for the first time in their lives, got an opportunity to exercise a degree of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before… To them migration was an attempt at improving their economic…status(Reddock 1985, 41)".

Though the skewed sex ration provided women with some sexual leverage, it was precisely this "sexual liberation…[that] caused uncountable sexual assaults against women, including brutal murders(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 66)". In the plantation colony of British Guiana, there were many reported cases of violence against women. The andocentric assumptions inherent in the attempts to justify violence against women by pointing to the loss of male honour caused by women's immorality are obvious. Brij V. Lal suggests that the reason behind sexual jealousy and suicide on Fiji plantations was due to the collapse of integral institutions of society such as family, kinship, marriage, caste and religion(Lal 1985, 135-155). But Lal himself falls into the trap of andocentrism when he fails to see that the 'integrative institutions' themselves

may be detrimental to the well-being of women. His interpretation also does not explain why the failure of these institutions should result in men and not women committing suicide. Surely women were not immune to the alienation caused by the collapse of culture during indenture.

There is no doubt that the brutality women experienced was caused by men's refusal to let them control their sexual lives. This was the case, not only in relation to Indian men, but white men also forced their attentions upon 'coolie' women, and those who resisted found that they would be given harder tasks the following day. The resistance of women, both to capitalist exploitation and to male dominance, is evidence of the fact that women cannot be seen as passive victims, but as living, struggling beings, capable of marking their own identity.

Gaiutra Bahadur and her family left Guyana when she was "almost seven, old enough to have memories of Guyana and young enough to be severed into two by the act of leaving it"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 4). The act of leaving has never been complete as Henri Lefebvre says, "Nothing disappears completely ... In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows"(Henri Lefebvre 1991). Gaiutra's mother carried her personal pantheon to their new address in America and performed her worship on every Sunday. Though she knew very little Hindi and had never visited India, she used to sing *bhajans*, Hindu devotional songs. Bahadur says, "there was always in her cadence—in that lovely, high voice—a crack of sadness seducing me into false belief. It led me to believe that she had occupied the insides of every last syllable of song"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 6). Set against the "Proper English" spoken in the public space in America is the "cracked English" of the private sphere of the Bahadurs along with "the hidden gods, the dal and roti on Sunday morning and the lachrymose lyrics of Lata

Mangeshkar"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 6). Bollywood songs and the *bhajans* gave Bahadur an uncanny sense of belonging through the naval string of culture as she feels linguistic empowerment through the shards of Hindi words spoken in the rarefied landscape of their private space. As Frantz Fanon has put it: "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language"(Frantz Fannon 1967, 18) Bahadur internalizes her Indian ethnicity in the multicultural milieu of America. In 1987 when bigotry got strong hold in Jersey City their ethnic identity become problematic as it exposed them to the violence of the so called 'Dot Busters', the bigots who were after the Hindus in an attempt to oust them altogether from the city. Bahadur says that they "made Indians in Jersey City fear for their lives, and they made us, Indians nearly a century out of India, feel just as menaced"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 9).

While the Guyana of Gaiutra's first childhood was "an area of mystery and longing, a place of imagined wholeness"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 11) it later on became "a country without legitimate democracy"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 11). In the name of confronting neo-colonialism the Linden government banned wheat flour which is an essential ingredient for staples like bread and roti. In the highly racialized socio-political milieu the Indo-Guyanese had little opportunity for equal rights to higher education and civil services. The over-representation of the Indo-Guyanese diaspora in the underclass by the African-dominated ruling majority has resulted from labour market selection. Ruben Gowricharn talks about a similar situation "when migrants and Dutch competed for the same jobs and had identical credentials, the migrants were rejected most of the time. Networks, looks, moral and social credit and familiarity were to blame for this preference for [White] candidates"(Gowricharn 2022, 67).

It was during the summer of 1997 when Gauitra's father took her to Guyana sixteen years after migrating that she asks about the more epic journey of her ancestors from India to British Guiana. She comes to know that her great grandmother Sujaria climbed the Clyde, the ship that carried indentured labourers from Garden Reach to the colony of British Guiana in 1903. Sujaria who was a pregnant woman travelling alone while embarking The Clyde had give birth to a child whom she named Lalbahadur. But Gaiutra was intrigued by the story of Lalbahadur's birth possibly out of wedlock. The story raised more questions about her identity than answering.
Gaiutra acknowledges the precarity of her situation when she says "Even if I didn't know precisely where I belonged, or how Guyanese I was or could ever be, I did believe that I knew, at the very least, what it meant to be Guyanese"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 13).

The summer of 1997 was particularly important because it was the immediate aftermath of the demise of the famed leader Cheddi Jagan. Jagan's rise to presidency seven years after Burnham's death in 1992 made him a national hero at least to the Indo-Guyanese population. Naturally a month-long eulogy of Jagan by half of the country reopened racial wounds as for the Indians "long out of India, the sense of being Indian was fierce and instinctual, born in a great part of a century-and-a-half old competition with the half of the country that wasn't Indian"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 14). But Gaiutra Bahadur could not locate herself in her country's history of hate nor did she want to as she says "I was the product of a multicultural education in post-Civil Rights Act America. I had grown up a minority in a city of minorities, subject to racism that connected me to black skins, rather than pitting me against them"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013,14).

Searching the archives Bahadur traced the root of Sujaria to a village named Bhurahupur in the Indian state of Bihar. As she "wanted to experience what it felt like to be in the matrix of the culture that had shaped [her] from a distance, through Hindu gods and Hindi love songs" (Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 17) Gaiutra visited Bhurahupur only to be disappointed by the deeply entrenched patriarchal mindset still prevalent among the village elders. The elderly school teacher who was the keeper of local memory began judging Gaiutra from her dress and demeanour. Gaiutra's mentioning of Sujaria who left the familiar temporariness of Bhurahupur, daring the *Kala Pani*, embittered the situation. As Himadri Lahiri says, Gaiutra was "like a prodigal daughter who returned carrying the sin of her female ancestor's desertion of the village"(Himadri Lahiri 2018). The stern judgement of previous generations was channelized on her when she was rather impolitely rebuked by the school teacher : "YOU should be living here"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 25). Himadri Lahiri elsewhere says that the dress and untied hair of Bahadur "semiotically served to caution [the school teacher, the conscience-keeper of the community still rooted in rural India] about the return of the defiant, a repetition that could not be tolerated"(Himadri Lahiri 2022, 168). Bahadur delves deep into the primal act of Sujaria's defiance of patriarchy in moving beyond the boundaries of Bhurahupur. Though this visit has only widened the rift between her and the village of Bhurahupur, her euphoria in recognizing Sujaria's agency is captured in the celebratory rhetoric thus:

> It is pleasing to think the *Bahadur*—the hero—of this story could have been Sujaria herself. She did, after all, leave a village in the most conservative corner of India. At the time, she was twenty-seven, middle-aged by the standards of the day and the dateline. As a member of Hinduism's highest caste, Sujaria had the most to lose by crossing the

> Indian Ocean. This was a forbidden passage, especially for a woman, especially for a Brahmin, and most especially for a Brahmin woman travelling without a male relative. I like to think she claimed the decidedly masculine title of Bahadur for women, too—and for acts of valour that have more to do with crossing boundaries that with killing anyone in battle(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 27).

Rural United Province which provided the maximum number of indentured labourers had been the scene of epic uprooting during the entire nineteenth and early twentieth century. “Large-scale indentured migrations, including destitute women’s diasporic movements, were caused by the imperial penetration in colonised India, entrenched social injustice and agrarian hardships following frequent [floods and] famines”(Prasad and Jha 2016, 231) The gendered nature of this large-scale migration has been discussed by Brij V. Lal : “Women made up 56 percent of migrants in Bengal from the eastern United Provinces, according to the 1901 Census of India”(Lal 1985, 140). Sujaria, according to the elders of Bhurahupur, had broken the ancient, unspoken pact with her village by deserting it. But her desertion of her village, like that of many other coolie women, was the natural response to the socio-economic depravity and “the cultural barriers against Indian women crossing the threshold of home, into the world”(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 34). The fossilized religious rituals like sati and the sexual exploitation of the widows clearly suggest that “they had more reasons to flee, grater oppression to escape”(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 32).

It is interesting to note the predominance of Vaishnavism in the united provinces of Oudh and Agra which supplied the highest number of coolies to the plantation colonies. Vaishnavism,

being an inclusive brand of Hinduism, immediately appealed to the emotions of oppressed subalterns like low-caste women and widows. They thronged the Vaishnav temples and ashrams in the hope to attain spiritual liberation. The heterodox Sahajiya offshoot of Vaishnavism secretly promoted the practice of ritual sex as a kind of extramarital yoga. This ethos of clandestine sexual ritual had in it all the perverse possibility to make it an ongoing sexual servitude of these marginalised women in a highly exploitative environment. Bahadur says: "A complex mix of victimization and Vaishnavite devotion brought them –and other ostracised women- to holy sites where recruiters for indenture often found them"(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 39). It is ironical on the part of these women who thronged the sacred places for salvation only to be plunged further deep into uncertainty and exploitation.

Gaiutra Bahadur explores how colonialism and migration have been 'inextricably joined' in her family's history and how multiple migrations 'caused' uprootedness in their lives involving 'resistance against the loss of culture, of memory, of dialect(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 187); (Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 8)'. Bahadur tries to 'imagine the alternate reality' of the collective voice of the indentured women's 'buried narrative' recuperating 'their reinvention and struggle in a new world…as solace against silence wrought by history and its asymmetries - between men and women, colonizer and colonized(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 230)'. "Subjugated by reductionist discrimination and victimization at home socially ostracized women become easy targets for colonial agents to recruit them for indentured labour and dispatch them across the *kala pani* into a new kind of bondage where their movement was once again subjected to double bind [of] gendered exploitation under constant supervision and surveillance of the colonial managers/

overseers in the cane fields, which emerge as alien enclosures of spatial confinement(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 189)".

"The exilic pilgrimage of these 'ostracised women' was ambiguously viewed by the 'civilizing' empire as their liberation from oppressive and 'the most barbaric elements of a heathen culture in India'. The coolie woman was a colonial construction whose voice was missing: no archival records, no diaries and no letters because majority of them were illiterate without any language, Indian or English(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 189)". Gaiutra Bahadur writes: "The relative silence of coolie women in the sum total of history reflects their lack of power… It is possible that, on some level, each individual silence was a plan? Could they have harboured ambivalence in their hearts, an ambivalence to account for their actions…?(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 40-41)"

Veronique Bragard talks about the ambivalent choice of the coolie women divided between nostalgic affiliation to Indianness and adaptability to a new locale connecting their newly found emancipation with hybridity: "Coolitude needs to be read in these in-between spaces of ambivalence where nostalgia is melted with the willingness to celebrate hybrid forms of culture(Veronique Bragard 2008, 132)". *Kala pani* crossing unleashed the subversive potential of the coolie women in exercising their choices in new unexpected ways for it "threatened to upset the male-centred (im)balance of power maintained in India by creating the possibility of alternative social structures in the new territory(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 190); (Mehta 2004, 33)". The coolie women were confined to victimhood because of their "subservience to cultural dictates(Mehta 2004, 6)". But on the ships bound for plantation colonies they exercised their power to choose as "power was being renegotiated between men and women in the 'tween decks.

What had seemed unthinkable in India was becoming conceivable as the seas were crossed[…] women discovered a whole new ability to set terms and boundaries(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 93)".

Although the plantations "flattened the purses of Europe(Ramabai Espinet 2003, 117)", they "emerged as sites of crime where mostly a coolie woman was transformed into a corporeal receptive agency of violence [who] …had to bear the brunt of all the evil effects of gender violence, exploitation and mistreatment inflicted on them on account of an imbalanced sex-ratio(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 191-192)". The plantation regime made the coolie women concede "[t]o not only be powerless, but made to *feel* just how powerless(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 91)" they were.

With feminism in Guyana "still an emerging value, often discredited as a foreign influence(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 253)" the private life-spaces of the Indo-Guyanese women were menaced by intimate partner crimes ranging from sexual infidelity, physical dismemberment, suicide and even wife murder. "Bahadur wants to know whether such socio-cultural criminalising and violence was a re-enactment of Surpanakha's mutilation in *The Ramayan* to reinscribe the male-constructed , mythological inscriptions of female honour in their indentured exile(Praveen Mirdha 2022, 192)". Bahadur questions: "Were the attacks a reaction to the power and value the women had gained…? Did the violence, along with the laws developed to deal with it, end up curtailing the independence of coolie women?(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 161)"

The reimagining of the cultural paradigm of patriarchal inviolability inscribed in the Indian mythological tradition from the diasporic dislocation of the sugarcane plantation the indentured Indians glorified female chastity, purity and honour, thereby limiting "them to socially confined roles whose boundaries were fixed and well defined, eliminating the

possibilities of transgression or cultural errancy(Mehta 2004, 32)". With the mythical examples of a stigmatised Sita or a dismembered Surpanakha right in front of them and the vow "to preserve family in a form of self-sacrifice" "written on their very bodies" these coolie women had all exercised a choice to say yes- or, in more cases than acknowledged, to say no(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 155)".

A punitive colonial ambience prevailed in the plantations. While coolie men were convicted on the slightest pretext often on unjust allegations made by exploitative plantation managers and overseers for labour violations, coolie women were imagined as being morally loose, and therefore, can be approached for the gratification of their libido besides performing the assigned plantation works. While during the early years of indenture, the indenture recruiters "assumed that decent women would not go without their husband and that decent men would not take their wives(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 41)", in indenture's final years, [the] two British envoys sent to investigate alleged abuses against coolies in the West Indies and Fiji concluded that only a small percentage of the women were professional prostitutes: "[T]he great majority are not, as they are frequently represented to be, shamelessly immoral(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 44)". No matter how the coolie women were viewed in the colonial mindset, in the plantations the coolie women were subjected to the triple burden of plantation work, household chores and sexual service to both the men of her own clan and the plantation officials. This made their condition pitiable. Having hardly any time left for them, the coolie women were pressed by the double grind of colonialism and patriarchy.

The relative scarcity of women in the plantations caused sexual jealousy among the indentured men as they were all vying for the limited option available to them. Besides, the coolie men had to embark in an unequal competition with the plantation officers whose superior

class position and power in the plantation system made them more attractive to the coolie women. The reasons for this scarcity lie in the colonial policy of recruiting women as indentured labourers. “Known prostitutes or those who came from lower castes were declined(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 64);(Reddock 1985, 29)”. Besides, “intensive medical check-ups often scared potential female labourers away(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 65);(Clare Anderson 2009, 96-98)”. The gradual rise in the cases of violence associated with sexual jealousy among the coolies and the role played by the European plantaion officers in it attracted the attention of the British Government which after some deliberation fixed the ratio of female recruits at forty percent of the total immigrants. This initiated a change in the colonial policy of female indentured labourer recruitment as it was mandated that no ship carrying coolies to British plantations could set sail without fulfilling this mandatory quota. Gaiutra Bahadur says: “There was particular incentive for recruiters to ensnare women, because the emigration agencies paid higher bounties for female recruits(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 48)”. Kanchan Dhar talks about the British officials like Grierson who defended the rights of women to cross the *kala pani*. According to her these British officials “argued like faux feminists... Truth being the strict recruitment practices made it difficult for the British officials to secure enough women for indenture ships. The men highly outnumbered women, and the 100:40 ratio requirements made it even more difficult. They might have sounded like they spoke in favour of women, but their intention was primarily to satisfy the British Government’s personal/ economic interests(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 65)”.

Referring to John Kelly, Gaiutra Bahadur writes: “One scholar of idenure has remarked that the British didn’t recruit “coolies” for their sugar cane fields. Rather they *made* coolies(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 55);(John Kelly 1991, 29)”. This process of coolie–making

started in the indenture depots in Garden Reach where Brahmins discarded their *janews* to hide their identity in order to get into indenture because the planters did not want their soft hands which was not suitable hard works in the plantation. Moreover, they were seen "as a potential threat to their authority(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 56)". That the planters wanted to enforce uniformity among the coolies is reflected in the fact that the coolies of a particular group were assigned identical clothes. Any deviation in the behaviour among the coolies was seen as an aberration.

Many incidents of sexual abuse of coolie women took place in the indenture ships as the British officers "characterized the women abroad indenture ships as sluts(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 78)". But in most of the cases the abuser went unpunished either because the abused women did not want to disclose it and thereby risk disgrace or when it was disclosed it was discredited as a fabricated story. The case of Habibulla, who was groped by an English sailor, changed her statement: "Ashamed to admit that she was groped, she would insist that he only grabbed her by the hand(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 70)". Gaiutra bahadur talks about the strategic use silence by coolie women: "It may be that the circumstances were too traumatic to remember, much less proclaim. It may be that their emotions were too conflicted to convey(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 62)". Bahadur comments on the marginalization of coolie women on board by citing the example of another coolie woman on board who was violated by a white sailor in front of her husband. Though Rohimon, the coolie woman concerned, complained to the surgeon Henry Cecil on board the Foyle in 1899, the white sailor was acquitted with a warning to be more careful on the premise that the charge appeared to be doubtful. Bahadur says: "Her encounters with white men onboard—the one who wronged her and the one who failed to punish that wrong—doubtless

made Rohimon feel impotent. I imagine that feeling took root in many a coolie woman's soul, as stoutly as the paragrass that they would have to weed in cane fields t come. Was that what it would mean to be a "coolie woman": to be disgraced—and powerless to do anything about it(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 91)"? Thus colonialism construed with patriarchy to make coolie women feel powerless.

Though the coolies and the blacks lived in their separate houses not far away from each other "mutual distrust kept blacks and Indians, for the most part sexually separate(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 117)" . The scarcity of Indian women in the plantations resulted in the practice of polyandry. The colonial administration forwarded the logic that indentured proved helpful for the coolie women she received her own earning at the pay table. This might have to some extent reduced the financial dependence of coolie women on men but "the subsistence pay, which was frozen at the same rate for indenture's entire span: eight decades of spiralling costs of living(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 113)" predicated that she would need a partner "in order to survive on her female wage rate(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 119)". This evidences that coolie women continued to depend on men for financial reasons "but had their pick of which men to depend on(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 119)".

Kala Pani crossing enabled women to overcome two regressive systems practiced in India. Caste system, so deeply entrenched in rural India, lost its vogue in the colonial plantations as coolie women put more premium on the class position of their potential partners. They would go for those men who could buy their freedom or save them from the rigours of plantation work. A driver or foreman of lower caste was thus preferred to a coolie of higher caste because a driver

wields some sort of authority in the hierarchical structure of a plantation. The crossing of the seas proved to be beneficial to women in another way. It overthrew the dowry system religiously practiced in rural India. Bahadur says: “Dowries gave way to bride price as girls, once considered an economic burden, gained economic value in the sugar colonies. The old-country practice of offering the groom and his family gifts and money to accept a bride collapsed, and instead the groom had to pay out. If the bride received the gifts, as sometimes she did, she clearly benefitted financially(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 120-121)”.

In the coercive setting of the plantation coolie women wanted to ensure their financial security but not at the cost of their dignity. But patriarchy denied them what they wanted. “Their own men got in their way, but so did the white men in charge, who made decisions and enforced laws that curbed their freedom as labourers and as women(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 131)”. The large number of intimate partner crimes in the plantations was conveniently attributed to the imagined ‘national’ character of Indians as being possessive and promiscuous in order to deflect the actual responsibility of the colonial administration which brought less number of coolie women to the plantations. Gaiutra Bahadur says: “the plantocracy did not address the underlying causes of the violence: the shortage of women, the deprivations and dislocation of indenture and the psychological effects of both(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 259)”.While Jeffrey Beall contends that women under indenture labour system did not really “flourish as autonomous social and sexual beings(Jeffrey Beall 1990, 73)” Kanchan Dhar looks at the colonizers’ perspective on Indian women indentured labourers as “distorting and misleading and not only utilizes the Indian woman’s social situation for gain but also debases her character and reduces her story to insignificance(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 71)”.

The turn of the century marked a shift in the role of women as the colonial government of British Guiana changed its policy from bringing indentured labourers from India to the creation of a sustainable supply of workforce by encouraging the birth of the future generations of workers. This necessitated the return of the women from the paid work of plantation to the unpaid domestic chores. This economic proleterization of the coolie women made them vulnerable, once again, to the patriarchal institutions which she had so long successfully evaded by the strategic assertion of her worth amidst the complex network of colonialism and patriarchy. Bahadur writes: “The patriarchal institutions restored with the shift from the plantation included child and arranged marriages; the joint family, with daughters-in-law the lowest in the hierarchy of extended relatives living together; temples and mosques; and the panchayat or council of (male) village elders(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 265)”. Patricia Mohammed, on similar context of Indo-Trinidadian women’s acceptance of the re-establishment of the old-country institutions writes about “the collusions of women with Indian tradition to ensure the survival of the community(Patricia Mohammed 2002, 167)”. Gaiutra Bahadur on the same line talks about “a disfigurement of indenture: the complicity of women in their own fates, the tortured attachment—the tenderness— they felt and continue to feel in the cave of their hearts for their own men, who had also been disfigured by planters and the colonial state(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 268)”.

Indo-Guyanese community, by 1940s, became the single largest ethnic community in the country comprising about forty percent of the total Guyanese population. After the abolition of slavery in 1917, mostly the Indian community lived in or near the plantation estates and invested

themselves to agriculture and farming. Later on they moved out of the estates to build houses modeled on their idea of Indian residences. Through labour and entrepreneurship within a short time they became a thriving community of shop-owners and businessmen. The hastily wrought Guyanese independence in 1966 brought in difficulties for the Indo-Guyanese community as independent Guyana became ‘a country without legitimate democracy’ under the political dictatorship of the Afro-Guyanese leader Forbes Burnham who strongly resisted the integration of the Indian community into the Guyanese national imaginary. By 1970s many of the Indo-Guyanese community left Guyana either for England or for America due to wide-spread racial violence against the Indo-Guyanese community.

This second diasporaization of the Indo-Guyanese community leads Bahadur to imagine an alternate reality of herself as “a Guyanese woman, pure and simple, no hyphens(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 249)” in the real society of independent Guyana which gives more value to family obligations than individual rights, where patriarchy still flexes its muscle on the streets and feminism is “discredited as a foreign influence(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 249)”. The legacy of plantation in the form of rum culture continued in Guyana. The multigenerational addiction to cheap and potent rum made the Indo-Guyanese men poor and aggressive. The family which the Indo-Guyanese women so carefully build on the pillars of continuous self extinction had to bear the brunt of this poverty and aggression.

Gaiutra Bahadur resists herself from romanticizing emigration to a first world country. “I would be false to assert that violence against women ceases with emigration. It doesn’t. It hasn’t. Indo-Caribbean women in Canada, the United States and Britain continue to be victims of

domestic abuse; the stresses of reinvention in first world addresses sometimes increase the odds". She mentions a few cases of intimate partner crime in twenty first century New York as a proof to her point. But she accepts that leaving for countries with better rooted traditions of feminism and greater opportunities for education and economic independence has meant that women in the second diaspora, [like herself] are transcending their history.

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Chapter V

Conclusion

Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter focuses on the legacy of indenture in Brtish Guiana and independent Guyana, and later goes on the briefly discuss cultural rights and the cultural ecology of the plantation. Indenture labour migration to the plantation colony of British Guiana started in 1838 and continued till its abolition in 1917. During this period approximately a quarter of a million indentured Indians arrived in British Guiana. Though indentured labour system is often eulogized in the British official records as being beneficial to the Indian peasants, in reality they were subjugated to a system of coercive labour relations with little agency to voice their grievance at the institutional locations of power.

The history of Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana is fraught with colonial betrayal on multiple fronts. The fixed wage rates for the indentured labourers throughout the eighty year long period of indenture in British Guiana remained unaltered. The promises of free transportation, free ration, free housing, free medical facility and a free passage home after the expiry of the initial term of five years as bound coolie were not all met according to the terms and conditions agreed upon in India.

This besides, the colonial officials and plantation owners interfered in the private lives of the bound coolies. As plantation was a ‘whole system’ created and fostered primarily to safeguard the commercial interests of the Empire, the indentured labourers were put to constant surveillance and any deviation from the law enacted and exacted to maintain the peaceful status quo met with immediate arrest and imprisonment. Under this carceral condition the cultural practices of the bound coolies made them a potential threat in the eyes of the colonizers.

As Ashutosh kumar has said: “Culture is lived and reproduced in communities, but is crucially linked to place and he exigencies of work and labour. As the process of production and time is central to the reproduction of culture, by analyzing culture we can understand the continuity and change in the process of indenture(Kumar 2017, 125). The clash between the cultures of the planters and the plantation workers is evident in the cultural economy of the plantation. “Culture is not only the problem; it is also the solution(Gowricharn 2022, 70)”. The culture of the planters is solidified in the institution of plantation which is geared at eradicating the social problems of the plantation workers- problems like unemployment, improving health condition, maintaining family cohesion, etc. Thus, the colonial British plantocracy wanted the indentured labourers to subject themselves to an obligation to assimilate.

The intersectional position of a female indentured labourer is fraught with multiple marginalizations, for being a bound coolie, for being a woman and for being a woman of colour. “In the plantation both the value and fact of women’s productive and reproductive work are largely mediated by institutionalized patterns of male authority and domination(Shobhita Jain

and Rhoda Reddock 1998)". Gaiutra Bahadur also mentions the bitter truth about the position of the indentured Indian women in the eyes of the planters. She writes: "No doubt indentured women realized that planters wanted them not for their wombs , but their backs- to raise and bend them, whacking at weeds in indenture service, and to lie flat on them, in sexual service(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 113)".

The relative paucity of women in the plantations gave them some liberty to break themselves free from the constrictions of patriarchy and put premium on the assertion of her own self through the exercise of sexual choices. Reddock stated that the plantation life allowed women more control over their life, as "… women could now, on their own accord, leave one husband for another or have a parallel relationship with more than one man(Reddock 1985, 42)" and that, "…many Indian women, probably for the first time in their lives, got an opportunity to exercise a degree of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before… To them migration was an attempt at improving their economic…status(Reddock 1985, 41)". Though the skewed sex ration provided women with some sexual leverage, it was precisely this "sexual liberation…[that] caused uncountable sexual assaults against women, including brutal murders(Kanchan Dhar 2022, 66)". C. F. Andrews who was one of the avid supporters of the movement against indenture labour migration reported on the appalling condition of coolie women in Fiji: "The Hindu woman in this country is alike a rudderless vessel with its mast broken drifting onto the rocks; or like a canoe being whiled down the rapids of a great river without any controlling hand. She passé from one man to another, and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so(C. F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson 1916)". Similarly, Jeffrey Beall contends that women did not really "flourish as autonomous social and sexual beings(Jeffrey Beall 1990,

73)" as they became objectified as models of sexual desire at the hands of both the overseers and their own countrymen.

The projection of cultural inferiority on the Indian indentured labourers by the British colonial officials elevated them to the powerful position of creating and attributing certain "cultural norm images(Gowricharn 2022, 67)". The colonizer's compulsion to ceaselessly invent and attribute negative cultural norm images on the colonized stems from the inherent anxiety that an uneven power relation engenders as the colonizer's authority over the colonized is never complete. The occasional points of disjunction in the colonizer's narrative of authority over the colonized, the moments when the colonizer is less powerful than is apparent, are actually the sites where the agency of the colonized is realized.

As has already been mentioned, since "the whole society [is] achieved through the exclusion of the partial milieux… [it] is essentially a national society, achieved through the assimilation of minority identities(David Huddart 2007, 130)". This fighting back becomes possible by resorting to a tactic which is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus(Michel de Carteau 1988, 36). Tactics play an important role in the realm of the everyday. As tactics is "an art of the week functioning in the space of the other, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power(Michel de Carteau 1988, 37)".

Since culture is lived and practiced in everyday life, the Indian indentured labourers and their descendents used tactics in claiming agency to claim cultural rights in conditions which otherwise would have assimilated them into the colonial logic of monoculture. The postcolonial

parallax position, as defined by Huddart in his commentary on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural rights, is "an apparent change in the position of an object when the person looking at the object changes position(David Huddart 2007, 124)". In my study of the comparative cultural rights in select texts on Indo-Guyanese plantation diaspora I have observed that the postcolonial parallax position is an enabling condition for the minority categories to continuously dodge the imperial logic of assimilation.

The second chapter of the thesis titled 'Countering Colonial Stereotyping: Analyzing the Use of Tactics to Resist Cultural Integration in Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo'*, discusses, in some length, three different types of colonial stereotyping of the Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana namely socio-cultural stereotyping, sexual stereotyping and religious stereotyping. The injustices inherent in the indenture system are exposed by those who are subjected to its cruel clutch. Dilloo expresses his helplessness in the Belle Susanne estate: "You must work every day in the megass-yard, carrying your burden swiftly, under a Negro-driver, and for very poor wages. And you are pretty, you are graceful and sweet as ever, my own Lutchmee,"—with softening eyes he drew her to his bosom, — "and scoundrels of every race will have opportunities of tempting you and threatening you, and even me(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

While the arbitrariness of the indenture system is exposed in the discrepancy of what was promised in India and what was practiced in the plantations, Mr. Gonzales, a Portuguese businessman and friend to the magistrate at Belle Susanne, takes a good-humoured jibe at the protection provided by the British laws to the non-British population. Gonzales also exposes another bitter side of the colonial plantation system in British Guiana: "Overseers interfere with

wives, drivers beat Coolies, swindle in hospital, cheat at pay-table(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". He claims that Mr. Drummond, the manager of Belle Susanne is complicit with the colonial officials in their act of swindle because he also gets his share in it. To increase their hold on the indentured labouers the British legislators left no lacunae in the exact phrasing of the laws. It was "so worded as to afford an excuse for a gross injustice(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)".

The majority of the indentured Indians and ethno-racial communities which have had similar experience of White atrocity "have awakened to their wrongs, and mean in one way or another to have them remedied(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)". The carnival of Tadja provided the fitting outlet of the pent up energy of these large and restive people. Thus to Drummond's agitated imagination when the colony of British Guiana seemed to be on the brink of a rebellion he most unabashedly proclaimed that "there was no room for the play either of justice or generosity(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol.II)" as "kindness is weakness(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. II)".

British officials were drawing their cord more tightly around the indentured labourers by enacting a law that mandated that any indentured labourer, even after he has served the compulsory five years of contract will have to carry with him "a magistrate's pass and a photograph of himself,—the price of which together was fixed by the ordinance at six dollars, —"without running the risk of being seized, locked up, and if the precious documents were lost, committed to prison for a month(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)". The English Government exorbitantly priced the evidence of one's freedom to curb the indentured Indian's right to visibility and the cultural reclaiming of the public space. Certainly, the new regulation would

make the lives of the unbound coolies more uncomfortable and "would drive them to seek indenture as an improvement upon freedom(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. III)".

Thus, it becomes evident that in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* the colonial British administration attempted to integrate the Indian indentured labourers and other ethno-racial communities first by casting them in the negative mould and marginalizing them so much so that they themselves would seek the assistance of the British institutions and thereby collude in their assimilation as a partial cultural milieu. But the postcolonial parallax position of the culture of these communities and their adoption of different tactics help them evade and finally foil any attempt of their cultural assimilation. Though the novel foregrounds violent resurgence as an option to topple the colonial bias ingrained in the hierarchical social structures built and fostered by British colonizers, it is the tactical management of their affairs which makes the British officials anxious and apprehensive of their next move to outmaneuver the colonizers in their own game. Thus Hunoomaun wins the confidence of Mr. Wood to get into his service as a night guard to gain easy access to Lutchmee and later beguiles Achattu to steal his wife Ramdoolah who would prove to be a formidable partner in all his plots. Thus Achattu "kept silver dollars in a large chest in his room carefully locked, and secretly disposed of some of his specie in unfrequented parts of the estate; he did not care to let the officials know how rich he was, by depositing it all in the Savings' Bank(Edward Jenkins 2011, Vol. I)". Likewise Ramdoolah raises her capital gains by selling and reselling herself in the marriage economy of the plantation. Likewise Gonzales cheats the English excise and people by adding twice as much water to the spirit he sells to recover more than the extra dollars that the British Government swindles from him by exorbitantly hiking the license fees through a new regulation.

The chapter III of the thesis titled, 'Negotiating Alternatives: Mapping the Assertion of Cultural Rights of the Minority Madrasi Community in Moses Nagamootoo's *Hendree's Cure*' discusses the pitfalls of cultural assimilation in the host country. The indentured labourers faced resistance both from mostly white colonial sugar barons and the natives and other ethnic communities primarily because of their ethno-cultural difference. Even though the Indian indentured labourers formed the single largest ethnic community in British Guiana they were treated as minorities by the British and the blacks alike. The chapter also explains how this newly formed Indian indenture diaspora negotiated alternatives to find better avenues of prospect and emancipation in their quotidian existence in the plantation colony of Guiana, where the immigrants attempted to begin new lives and recreate their old memories, mostly cultural, in an alien space, constantly looking back to the lost homeland.

The chapter shows how as a minority community within an Indo-Caribbean Hindu majority in pre-independence Guiana, 'Madrasi' Indians were relegated to the very fringes of cultural and religious marginality by Hindu high-mindedness and colonial racism. Confined to the limited paradigms of representation in terms of demography and cultural alterity, Madrasis were thereby subjected to the dual hegemony of racialized and ethnic difference that reinforced their minority status. Inscribed within the colonial paradigm of difference due to the North-South divide in India itself, Madrasis were reduced to an ethnic sub caste even before the *Kala Pani* voyage on the treacherous waters of the Atlantic. Discriminatory practices based on skin coloring and the inherent Aryan belief in the primitiveness and cultural inferiority of non-Aryan social systems depicted Madrasis as cultural anomalies who were less Indian, and therefore, less Hindu

than the fair-skinned northerners from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, thereby justifying their marginalization within their larger Indo-Caribbean community in British-Guyana.

The early Madrasi community of British Guiana in Nagamootoo's novel tried to counter the tyranny of the majority by creating an imagined India in the experimental ethnic village of Whim, and learnt to live in displacement. Although, of all the Indians in Guyana, the minority community of the Madrasis was probably the most open to inter-culturation with their local African neighbours, they remained all the while true to their Madrasi faithfulness to Kali spiritual practices. The trajectory of Naga's rise from rags to riches clearly drives the point home that "you did not have to abandon yourself or your culture to be successful(Nagamootoo 2000, 25)".

The novel brings to the fore how Hendree improvised upon his training in healing business under an accomplished healer Brother Victrin, a Catholic convert. He decoded the healing business and came to know that the previous knowledge of the potential healing seekers is extremely important in healing business. Combining the strength of Masta, the Madrasi god, and comfort of massage, effecting a curious concoction of spirit and science, the erstwhile lead drummer in the *mattiekore* fun, now establishes himself as an accomplished spiritual healer.

Hendree was, quite unusually, not right for sea-work. Though he did not attach importance to the general belief inspirits and spiritual powers, he started to think about these things more purposefully(Nagamootoo 2000, 94). Hendree decoded the healing business and came to know that the previous knowledge of the potential healing seekers is extremely important in healing business. As an apprentice under an accomplished healer Brother Victrin, a Catholic convert, Hendree understood the importance of truth and confession in spiritual healing

as, for most of the people, the real reason for their sickness is the feeling of guilt which should be confronted with willpower to effect their own cure and rehabilitation(Nagamootoo 2000, 128). What is important to note is that Hendree improvised upon his training. When all the tricks of the trade failed him Hendree took recourse to sacrool, a pain killer liquid which he had bought from Frenchie "as a fast-relief, back-up medicine to give earthly support to his divine efforts". Combining the strength of Masta, the Madrasi god, and comfort of massage, effecting a curious concoction of spirit and science, the erstwhile lead drummer in the *mattiekore* fun, now establishes himself as an accomplished spiritual healer.

The novel also sheds some light on the double diaspora. Hendree's friend Tilokie went to England to study engineering. But amid the alien surrounding of his first world address he could feel nothing. Tilokie could not find the words to express his alienation. He felt that he was one big contradiction ready to explode. Like other transnational diasporic individuals, Tilokie experienced what may be called the enigma of belonging.

The turbulent waters of the 'Kala Pani' constitute an eruptive force that breaks new ground to articulate a more dynamic expression of the female subaltern. Chunoo's own life becomes a mirror of multiple diasporic crossings that reinforce the link between women, water and a revised Caribbean female self. As the novel indicates: "She remembered how as a young bride she had left Bath and made her first crossing over the Berbice river. She imagined herself as a bridge linking the worlds of her parents and of Naga's(Nagamootoo 2000, 32)". Even a *triply marginalized* [my emphasis] (See Note) female subaltern like Chunoo can provide the essential link in the cycle of cultural continuity by spanning many timelines in their efforts to preserve the social integrity of their communities in the face of colonial effacement. Like Ramdoolah in the *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, and Sujaria in Gaiutra Bahadoor's *Coolie Woman: The*

Odyssey of Indenture, Chunoo, too, shows unexpected agency as an independent thinker and conscious carrier of her multiple cultural belongings.

The Chapter IV of the thesis titled 'Cartographies of Resistance: Examining the Pragmatic Assertion of Female Self in Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*' discusses the themes of cultural ramifications of *Kala Pani* crossing and the androcentric bias inherent in indenture labour system. The chapter excavates an imperial history of colonial and patriarchal hegemony which tried to control and censor any deviant tendency among the coolie women by creating cultural hoops through which they should pass in order to be accepted as unproblematic for the perpetuation of institutions based on violence and discrimination.

Building upon recent researches on *Kala Pani* crossings, the chapter expresses the centrality of the act of crossing a long tract of water over a period of few months as a violent break from the past traditions of the homeland. As homeland plays a prominent role in the cultural imaginary of the diaspora, the act of *Kala Pani* crossing has thus gained significant cultural capital in the diasporic imaginary. As a primal act of breach with a long tradition, *Kala Pani* still haunts indenture labour diaspora worldwide who have internalized what Vijay Mishra calls '*girmit* ideology'.

With the introduction of indenture labour system after the abolition of slavery in 1834 by the British Government the old-country institutions and social structures like family, marriage, religion, etc. started disintegrating. This resulted in a departure from the familiar cultural moorings. In the liberating atmosphere of the plantations women especially found a new type of freedom and self worth. They used their relative paucity in the plantations to advance their

economic condition by exercising her agency in the choice of her sexual partner. This immediately infuriated the men of her own clan often resulting in intimate partner violence like suicide, physical dismemberment and wife killing, while the British officials and plantation masters created and fostered this gender imbalance in order to keep the coolie busy in affairs other than involving wage disputes, fines, etc.

After the hastily wrought Guyanese independence in 1966 the erstwhile British colony became ‘a country without legitimate democracy’ under the political dictatorship of the Afro-Guyanese leader Forbes Burnham who strongly resisted the integration of the Indian community into the Guyanese national imaginary. By 1970s many of the Indo-Guyanese community left Guyana either for England or for America due to wide-spread racial violence against the Indo-Guyanese community. This second diasporaization of the Indo-Guyanese community leads Bahadur to imagine an alternate reality of herself as “a Guyanese woman, pure and simple, no hyphens(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 249)” in the real society of independent Guyana which gives more value to family obligations than individual rights, where patriarchy still flexes its muscle on the streets and feminism is “discredited as a foreign influence(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 249)”. The legacy of plantation in the form of rum culture continued in Guyana. The multigenerational addiction to cheap and potent rum made the Indo-Guyanese men poor and aggressive. The family which the Indo-Guyanese women so carefully build on the pillars of continuous self extinction had to bear the brunt of this poverty and aggression.

Gaiutra Bahadur resists herself from romanticizing emigration to a first world country. “I would be false to assert that violence against women ceases with emigration. It doesn’t. It hasn’t. Indo-Caribbean women in Canada, the United States and Britain continue to be victims of domestic abuse; the stresses of reinvention in first world addresses sometimes increase the odds”.

She mentions a few cases of intimate partner crime in twenty first century New York as a proof to her point. But she accepts that “leaving for countries with better rooted traditions of feminism and greater opportunities for education and economic independence has meant that women in the second diaspora, [like herself] are transcending their history(Gaiutra Bahadur 2013, 274)”.

Research Contribution

The principal contribution that this thesis makes is that British plantocracy in British Guiana and elsewhere sustained itself through institutionalizing certain social structures as whole systems which operated on the binary logic profit and loss. This binary of profit and loss is supplemented by an imperial rhetoric of cultural superiority which assumes authority to provide solution to all the problems of the marginalized communities through the process of integration which most often boils down to a cultural transition of these minority categories. But this rhetoric is ruptured by the occasional assertion of cultural rights in the realm of the everyday by different marginalized categories within these social structures. Besides, it also explains how the system of indenture labour in British Guiana sustained itself for almost eighty years in British Guiana by constantly devising new strategies which the coolies always try to topple by using tactics in the realm of the everyday plantation life.

Limitations and Scopes for Future Research

Keeping in mind the economy of time I have limited my research to the study of comparative cultural rights in select texts on Indo-Guyanese plantation diaspora. Future researchers may carry this research forward by conducting similar researches on any other plantation colony or may conduct a comparative study on the same topic taking texts on two or more plantation diaspora.

Similar research work may also be conducted by taking other forms of literature like poetry, drama, memoirs, etc.

Note

In Nagamootoo's novel Chunoo represents the status of a triply marginalized subaltern heroine first, because she is of a coolie descent; second, because she is a Madrasi in a Hindu majority community of indenture laborers; and third and but most important, because she is a woman in a phallocentric society.

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Appendix I

Statement of Purpose for Doctoral Research Programme in the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University Kolkata-32

Tentative Title:
A Comparative Study of the Struggle for Rights of Minority and Majority Diasporic Communities in select novels written on Plantation Diasporas

Research Problem:

One of the contributions of recent literary scholarship has been to question the absence of authorial representation of minority diasporic voices from the widely acknowledged canon of plantation diasporic literature. This canon has been established and upheld by substantial and well known critical studies which focus on the colonial andocentric modes of representation. The implication is that the 'classic' fiction writers of the plantation diaspora barely resist the charms of Euro centrism, and essentialism. In this thesis, I will analyze selected novels written on plantation diaspora which are the imaginative representation of the lived experiences of the early Indian migrants and their descendents in and of the plantations overseas .The chief questions I will investigate are: Why have caste, class and racial minorities, the women and the children been excluded from the canon of plantation diasporic literature? What contributions has each minority group in this investigation made to the thriving culture of plantation diaspora? How did their silencing or exclusion enable them to become aware of their marginalised condition, and to claim agency and negotiate terms in their interactions with colonial hierarchy and patriarchal inviolability?

The Background:

Human migrations are a significant force in historical change. Large scale migration was central in fashioning the world of the nineteenth-century, its world-wide empires and the establishment of global economic and political dominance by people of Indian origin. The indentured laborers and their descendents formed the old or indenture diaspora in various former colonial sugar plantations.

Since cultural situations are not fixed but mobile, since cultures travel and become contaminated in the process, a unilateral nativist discourse must be rewritten through a theoretically aware and critically self-reflexive diasporic discourse. The ground of that self-reflexivity and the historical weight of the diasporic allegories are to be located in indenture, out of which grew a 'girmit' ideology.

. In exchange for their continuous working in the plantations for a certain period of time these people were promised riches and a glorious return home. But in most of the cases these promises remained largely unfulfilled. Girmit ideology grows out of the denials of this millenarian quest in the very place and time of its anticipated fruition. This necessitates an illusive investment into one's own unhappiness. In the case of the indenture diaspora this illusion grew out of a communal memory of an ancient land that had been lost. The memory remained primarily 'oral', existing as it did initially through a form of epic rememoration of one's past on the part of the first indentured labourers. Thus the 'girmit' ideology designates a form of consciousness, a system of imaginary beliefs, and defines 'a subaltern knowledge category' that grew out of the collective indenture ethos.

The girmit ideology may be productively read as a ‘sign’ which gives the experience of the ‘old’ Indian indenture diaspora a theoretical template. The violation, the failed millenarian quest, required transcendence of the originary indenture experience, but it was an impossible transcendence because it required the ‘experience’ to be materially completed, it required a cure in the form of a postcolonial nation state where the pain of indenture may be transformed into a triumphalism of sorts and the experience itself recognized in the full sense.

The betrayed intentionality of a failed millenarian quest, so deeply ingrained in the indenture ethos, had to be transformed into the present, into a political will for justice in the nation state itself. Promise now gets linked to a very real mode of political empowerment. There seems to be a critical threshold above which one moves from an Indian solidarity into a series of ethnic particularities. Many of the rivalries from the subcontinent have been transplanted into the societies and the political issues which excite passion are often those of the homeland rather than those of the new home. Not unnaturally, the ‘girmit’ diaspora mimicked the home-land’s own struggle for political self-determination. In this respect in all the plantation diasporas politics became very much a replication of the rhetoric of a nationalism that repeated a prior elitist/metropolitan reading of the nation through its Indian mediation. Presented in this fashion, the replication also meant a failure to theorize those rights that could not be contained within the narrative of nationalism, rights such as those of the women, the children, of native peoples or other racial groups such as the Afro-West Indians in Trinidad and Guyana, and Creoles in Mauritius.

The barely concealed anxieties, the ‘automatic’ attitude of racism towards the other, so deeply ingrained in the majoritarian culture reveals that the nation and diaspora are in constant

interaction, where diaspora rather than nationality is located as the site of individual and communal identity. The divide now is not between a subject position and a transcendental or absolute signified but between the particularism of the multicultural Other versus the implied universalism of the Self.

I propose to carry out a comparative study of the struggle for the rights of the majority and minority diasporic communities in select novels written on plantation diasporas in the light of the argument that majority liberal cultures might learn valuable lessons from the minority cultural emphasis on the processual, on the sense of politics as a matter of ongoing negotiation.

Research Methods:

My research methods will consist of interpreting and comparing/contrasting primary sources. I will also use biographical and historical materials in order to understand the social and political climate in which the novelists wrote. I will support my findings with a significant number of critical essays on Moses Nagamootoo, Ramabai Espinet, Amitav Ghosh, Shani Mootoo, Mrinal Haratwala and Gaiutra Bahadur, which deal specifically with the subject of racial discrimination, gendered oppression, class conflict and political struggle for self- determination.

Research Limitations:

The major limitation of this thesis is the necessity of restricting the number of works selected for this investigation. There are many additional stories written during the indenture era which all these writers left behind, and these might also have been included. In order to examine an individual work more closely, I have selected to focus on those where the trauma of indenture is written large. A second limitation is the need to restrict the number of authors represented. Any attempt to argue for the inclusion of writers on plantation diaspora canon places one in the

happy predicament of discovering too many worthy candidates like Harold Sonny Ladoo, David Dabydeen, Arnold Itwaru, V.S. Naipaul, M.G. Vassanji, Brij V. Lal, etc.

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