MATERIALITY AND CULTURAL PRAXIS: RETHINKING AGENCY OF INDIAN INDENTURED LABOURERS AND THE INDO-CARIBBEAN DIASPORA

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF
THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (ARTS)
AT JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

SUPERVISOR:
DR. NILANJANA DEB

SHEHNAZ KABIR

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF ARTS
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY
KOLKATA 700032
2024

Certified that the Thesis entitled

"Materiality and Cultural Praxis: Rethinking Agency of Indian Indentured Labourers and the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora" submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts in Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Dr. Nilanjana Deb, Associate Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Dr. Nilanjana Deb
Countersigned by the
Supervisor
Dated:

Shehnaz Kabir
Candidate
Dated:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research journey at Jadavpur University has been a defining one where the unlearning was more metronomic and apposite than the learning process. The support and warmth from numerous people I met during this journey compel me to write this section of the thesis from my heart and is dedicated to them.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Nilanjana *di* (Dr. Nilanjana Deb), whose expertise guided my academic growth. She has given me complete freedom to intellectually savour and stroll through the research avenues, occasionally tugging me back to business. Her door is always open for the feline scholars, canine comrades, distressed students, and scholars of the department of English. I am fortunate to have had a dedicated mentor who provided constructive feedback for my professional development, tea to calm my anxious nerves, and a listening ear for my inane mumblings. Her guidance will continue to inspire me in my personal and professional endeavours.

The generous support from University Grants Commission for Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Fellowship for Research in Social Sciences (UGC-SVSGC) financially assisted me to pursue my doctoral research. Their funding also enabled me to attend conferences and achieve invaluable opportunities for networking. I am deeply obliged for their investment and support in my academic aspirations.

I am thankful to the National Library of India, Kolkata, and the Ramkrishna Mission Library Golpark, Kolkata for allowing me to access their books. The countless number of hours spent in their reading rooms have been invaluable to my research and general growth as a person. The books have been my most patient companions.

The enriching environment that I experienced at the English Department of Jadavpur University in the last six years has been unparalleled. I was surrounded and supported by passionate, knowledgeable, and engaged faculty members — Amlan Dasgupta, Abhijit Gupta, Nilanjana Gupta, Santanu Biswas, Nandini Saha, Paramita Chakravarti, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Manojit Mandal, Saswati Halder, Sonia Sahoo, Sutanuka Ghosh, Rafat Ali, Abhishek Sarkar, Kaustav Bakshi, Ramit Samaddar, Doyeeta Majumder, and Ishan Chakraborty. Each one has contributed in creating a

collegial atmosphere which is vital to research collaborations and building a vibrant academic community. The space of the university — the department corridors and the ledge, *jheel* side, Milan *da*'s canteen, and worldview — deserve special mention because I am as attached to places as to people. The university will always remain a sanctuary to me and I hope I can return when I am looking for tea, company, or support. The unwavering mentorship and critical insights of Dr Debashree Dattaray enhanced the quality of my research work. Her guidance helped me navigate the challenges of research and approach academic complexities with fresh perspective.

I feel greatly honoured and humbled for the opportunity to personally engage with Peggy Mohan, Ramabai Espinet, and Shani Mootoo, three authors of my primary texts. Their literary oeuvre is pivotal to indentured literature and they have carved an intellectual niche with the rigorous research carried by them. My conversations with them following the COVID-19 lockdown was a productive push for my thesis and I am indebted to them for answering my interview questions which proved extremely valuable. My email to Richard Fung (director of *Dal Puri Diaspora*) received a prompt response with the link and passcode to access the crucial documentary. I feel grateful for their intellectual input to my doctoral thesis.

The road to accomplish a doctoral degree in humanities and social sciences is rather solitary and full of self-doubt. I feel fortunate to have found a number of people who have been a source of reassurance and calm like an eye within a storm. My appreciation for Shahnawaz is so boundless that it is difficult to express it in words. He has been my most avid cheerleader and I would be grumpier without his sunny optimism. Sarbajaya *di*, Sulagna *di*, and Jitamanyu understood the travails of a research scholar and matched my procrastination levels with equal vigour. They have unfailingly provided me reassurance, sound advice, and delectable food. The endless hours at campus canteens, tea stalls, and numerous cafes spent with the four made me feel content about being miserable and middling.

I have been blessed with the most encouraging parents who went beyond their means to support all my choices in life. This thesis has been possible only for the unceasing love and care they provided me. My family has been excessively proud of my academic journey and showered me with constant affection. My primary inspiration and reason for the love of literature began under the tutelage of

Steve Sir during my school years. He believed and instilled that studying literature is not merely an education but a way of life and I only hope to live by this ideology.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the indentured labourers who have been anonymous rebels in the history of the modern age. These phenomenal people imparted invaluable lessons by capsizing the powerful and tyrannical. Their sacrifices, grit, and contributions despite antagonistic forces is a story that needs to be recognised and explored across disciplines. I owe it to these distanced, disenfranchised, and undefeated individuals to continue questioning the dominant discourse and the realities of forced labour and migration.

Contents

Introduction

Enslavement has received much attention in imperial expansion in comparison to indentureship which was the principal reason for temporary or permanent displacement of people to European colonies. Indentured labour worked as the chief workforce across colonial plantations that significantly altered colonial history, dramatically changed the ethnic constitution of the Caribbean, and transformed the cultural norms of the immigrants yet it received minimal attention in socio-political discussions, literary theory, and literature. The glaring and gruesome impacts of slavery rendered the effects of indentureship insubstantial in several ways. This gave rise to many false assumptions like the Caribbean being largely populated by people of African descent, whereas, the Indo-Caribbeans constitute the largest ethnic community. Moreover, apologists put forth the argument of a scope of improvement for the inferior races through indentureship by exposing Chinese and Asian labourers to medical facilities, enhanced lifestyle, better opportunities with access to Christian missionaries, and technological advancements in the West. These fabrications were instantly shattered as the labourers stepped onto the shores of the Caribbean and realised that they were deceived to merely extend the existence of plantation economy that was directly related to slavery. British imperialists tried to justify the differences between chattel slavery and indentureship by developing a teleological understanding of labour in association with race and hierarchical conception of human civilization. The linear evolution of human existence and cultures has been postulated by Hegel and profitably administered by imperial forces by disseminating African, Asian, and European civilization as the chronological progression of human civilization. In keeping with this hierarchy, enslavement, indentureship, and wage labour depicted necessary progressive steps in the imperial civilizing mission. While the stagist perspective has been challenged and dismantled, the exploitative nature of various labour systems — indenture labour, penal labour, wage labour, peonage, and modern peasantry — derive inspiration and share similarities with slavery[1]. Moreover, such systems of labour have been in practice coterminously and mass labour migration has inadvertently resulted in human trafficking.

Literature on indentured labour acts as a window into the systems of domination and exploitation alongside the exposition of societal prejudices that have shaped and sustained the prevailing norms and traditions of people. The oeuvre on indenture system is gradually expanding and these novels and poetry highlight the inimical hierarchies of race and labour perpetuated by indentureship. Much of the novels explore the causes and consequences of migration of their ancestors from the Indian subcontinent to the Caribbean islands. Many Caribbean-centered publishing houses like Peepal Tree Press have fueled the rise of indenture literature and further expanded interest and opportunities in other publishing houses. Unfortunately, narratives by indentured labourers themselves are rare for they lacked education, time, and opportunity required to record their experiences, so we have to rely on testimonials from later generations or third-person narratives to draw attention to these underrepresented experiences and accounts. The Caribbean islands have always been a dynamic but underrepresented space within the postcolonial field of studies since scholarship majorly focuses on Africa and Southeast Asia, and their role in mass overseas migration of labour. In addition, indenture narratives rarely feature as a prominent aspect of the Caribbean body of literature. On the other hand, most of the work on indenture is based on history, hence, a literary analysis that provides insights into the history, reasons, and daily life of Indians in the Caribbean islands fundamental to cross-disciplinary research and awareness.

Post abolition, Britain utilised its colonies as the source and destination for indentured labour. Territorial expansion by the Britain included the acquisition of Jamaica and Trinidad from Spain in 1707 and 1797, respectively, and British Guyana from Holland in 1814 while the Indian subcontinent became a Crown colony from 1858. Thus, Britain sourced labour in an indentured capacity from one of her largest colony and sent them to the plantation colonies across the Caribbean islands. The indenture system played a crucial role in creating the identity of an Indian and a close examination will evidence an Indian nationalism that was forged overnight. Imperialism necessitated the project of constituting a subject to fulfil its social purpose and expand its territorial domain. Identity is always envisaged as the “other” — as what an individual is not — and always conceived through difference. Consequently, the labour force extracted from the Indian subcontinent was identified as an “Indian” in relation to their difference from, both, the European settlers, and

the African people. Displacement and deterritorialization accompany the processes that materialize identities. The Indian subcontinent was a multicultural, a multi-religious, and a multi-linguistic space during the pre-colonial time without any unitary authoritarian governance that naturally resulted in a synthesis of identities despite regional, religious, caste, and linguistic differences. Colonial indenture system administered a similar regime whereby the Indian labourers from heterogenous background were planted in a foreign space where diverse Indian workers were identified as the "other". Institutional practices under imperialism embodied heterogeneity as linearity. Regional, religious, and linguistic differences were presented as inconsequential as compared to the propitious opulent life awaiting them across the *kala pani*[2]. A collective identity was forged with the British authorities downplaying the cultural singularities and the overwhelming apprehensions of the emigrating Indians. Thus the Indian identity coalesced over a shared experience of obfuscating cultural diversity after colonial discursive practices deracinated Indian workers. After migrating, Indian indentured labourers re-negotiated their identity to fit into the new culture and maximize their anticipated futures.

The national and ethnic identity of Indian indentees and later generations was crucial for the acculturation process, eventually promoting a sense of value and belonging among individuals and the community. Ostensibly, ethnic identity plays a significant role during acculturation, especially in the Caribbean context where the diverse culture and history of people led to its nation-building. Imageries of national and cultural narratives, nostalgia, myth, and yearning are the closest companions of migrants when they encounter unknown cultures. The identities become fluid when they overlap with multiple frontiers which results in the development of bicultural identity through the acculturation process. This bicultural identity can be defined as a local identity that is rooted in the immigrants' native culture, moreover, there is a global appeal that is derived from the multicultural conditions. Hence, an immigrant's bicultural status emerges from their grounded ethnic identity as they embrace the culture of the host nation. Consequently, this dual status indicates an "in-betweeness" where the immigrants' lives are tied to multiple places and they tend to inhabit them simultaneously. This state of being corresponds with Turner's concept of "liminal identity" where an individual is "betwixt and between" (Turner

1967). The ebb and flow of indenture system facilitated a constructive as well as contradictory identity of the Indian labourer. With increased communication channels, immigrants live synchronously with their past and present rather than amputating emotional ties with their past world. This synchronicity is achieved by continuing rituals, preserving or creating objects of attachment, and leading a life that encompasses both worlds. The English planters made efforts to construct the identity of Indian indentured labourers by appointing royal commissions to evaluate the plantation economy and produce fabricated reports to the British parliament that would sanction their requirements.

The transition from slavocracy to post-emancipation sugar industry raises questions related to imperial discourses on nation, race, and class. Once the slaves were emancipated, the empire needed a reformation to keep the monopolistic Caribbean plantations operational and lucrative. The introduction of a fresh labour force from overseas colonies including India and China served a dual purpose; firstly, indentured workers saved the Caribbean sugar industry from demobilisation and the second involved the recalibration of hierarchy which naturalised and sustained cultural hegemony. The construction of African and Indian identities was vital to formalise Indian indentureship. Unfavourable representation of the Afro-Caribbean workers was crucial in creating a binary identity of the "meek Hindu [as] a ready substitution for the Negro slave" (Emmer 1986, 187). Ex-African slaves were characterised by a volatile disposition and unstable relationship with the planters. As a result, Indian indentees received acclaim for their obedience, industriousness, virtuousness, agricultural background, and subservient nature. However, Indians received none of these previous extolling once they started working on the plantations and began resisting abusive practices. When the plantation owners realised the strong self-preservation strategies and sanctified way of living among the Indian migrants, the praises turned into dissatisfaction. Planters found the Indian workers to be more steadfast but also avaricious, envious, idolatrous, and less robust compared to the Africans. Growing dissatisfaction prompted plantation owners to look further east and recruit Chinese indentured labourers. Imperialist categorisation and grading of non-western people is a known phenomenon and it was no different in the New World, as Mona strongly expresses feeling "otherised" and degraded: "However protected we had been in our little

Presbyterian world in San Fernando, on shove into the bustle of Port of Spain would put us squarely back into out places as country Indians, nothing more. All it took then in Trinidad was looking Indian; all it took now in Canada was skin colour. We had not moved one inch" (Espinet 2007, 81). Imperial ideologies continue to poison and promote race hierarchies that view Europeans to be superior to Asians and Asians above African races leading to conflicts. Clashes between Indo-Caribbeans and Afro-Caribbeans took place perpetually and the last known major conflict happened in Guyana in 1998 due to tensions between political parties representing different ethnic groups.

Studies have shown that Indo-Caribbeans do not lose ties with home communities or their families back home, further creating community organizations as well as extending political support. The diaspora makes optimum use of inexpensive telecommunications to create a 'home away from home' through the strengthened transnational connection. Under the looming shadow of institutionalised racism, Indo-Caribbeans experience a severe loss resulting in psychological imbalance combined with grief, guilt, and inadequacy. The loss or gap experienced by the migrants is similar to an infant's initial feeling after the severance of the umbilical cord that is eventually filled by creating a symbolic connection that bridges the process of cultural mourning. Immigrant groups like Indo-Trinidadians live in a belligerent environment where they are labelled as an inassimilable 'other' by the dominant white and ex-African slaves. Immigrants are, at once, faced with the loss of loved ones as well as cultural enclosures that nurture their emotional and psychological experiences. The first and second generation immigrants are often seen attending churches for specific ethnic communities or organise specific cultural events that allow them to fill the emotional gap with objects, artifacts, or activities. Symbolic replications in the form of observing traditions, having comfort food, listening to chutney music, and reciting Indian myths, and folklore can help reconcile their grief and find the capacity to assimilate.

Historical archive shows ample evidence of the ways in which coolies were misled into signing the indenture contracts and documented proof supports the argument that the companies like Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. who managed the registration and exportation of *girmits* from the ports of Calcutta had minimal moral

responsibility and acknowledgment of the agency of Indians, hence they felt no need to explain what the contract, journey, and indentureship entailed[3]. Most of the fictional works on indentureship depict the appalling economic condition in India and the one that awaits the indentees in the plantation colonies, exploitation of Asians and Indian migrants, and racial confrontation among the various ethnic groups in the islands. The internal plantation processes of marginalization and ethnoclass hierarchy are still functional in the New World system of the West Indies as a residue of slavery and indenture. The narratives of my primary texts demonstrate that indentured labourers were seen as bare life on the fringes of legal society; despite the provision of a return passage to India, a handful indentees returned because the economic system was prejudiced, resulting in re-indenture and permanent settlement. The texts are successful in representing the situation of the indentured labourers through biopolitical mechanisms that construct a fundamental literary discourse in a pan-Caribbean space; an investigation focused on the migratory flow and material conditions in Indo-Caribbean indentureship. Historical and archival reference to Indian immigration to British sugar plantations lacks the representation of coolie experience that characterizes systematic dehumanization through capitalist exploitation, disintegration of human identity, and reducing female body to their reproductive and/or sexual capacity. Approaching literature on Indian indentureship substantiates non-white body treated as automaton in this transnational globalized operation.

Research Question

When people migrate, they carry their own systems of beliefs, traditions, and practices which are crucial signifiers of their identity, both individually and as a community. Indian immigrants in Caribbean islands were continually compelled to adapt to the new space with the help of their belongings and, on account of this adaption process, the space is also transformed in a way to accommodate their lifeways. The study of migrant communities such as the Indian indentured labourers and the subsequent Indo-Caribbean diaspora requires critical reconsideration from the focal point of materiality. People, in themselves, constitute slices of cultural capital and displacing them to an unknown space, involuntarily transports the native

culture. Moreover, the people, by themselves, adapt to the culture of the new space creating a circulation of commodities and culture. The second part of the title of this thesis is "Rethinking Agency of Indian Indentured Labourers and the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora" and it emphasises on the application of agency by the immigrants and diaspora with the help of material and immaterial heritage. The significance of the belongings of the Indian workers can be understood by considering the struggle of the migrants to carry and hold on to the objects as well as the impact of the objects on the lives of the Indians and others in an unfamiliar space. Contemporary migratory events are easily interpreted since the migrants have a host of identification markers attached to them, making the migrant the central discourse in social, political, and economic studies. Modern democracies monitor and keep detailed records of identities, movements, and activities of the citizens but past migrations leave transient traces of the migrants that makes it open to multiple interpretations. The ephemeral vestiges of earlier migrants are usually not linear and involved complex negotiations between the migrants' former lives and their endeavour to adapt themselves to their host land.

Most colonial migrations were not voluntary, hence, migrants were unable to carry any possession at all due to their forced and abrupt passage. Although the indentured trade was officially a voluntary migration, the widespread abduction and deceit involved in recruiting the indentees, seized their opportunity from taking treasured belongings. Most indentured labourers made the transatlantic voyage without a single belonging and only a few, who voluntarily enlisted, carried utilitarian commodities. However, what is considered utilitarian and essential differed from person to person and this is another intriguing facet that helps us in determining several aspects — class, gender, mental faculty, and the intention of making a return passage — about the indentees. Moreover, the limited time and circumstance of the Indians before leaving their homes to travel to the British indenture bureau or the dockyard gives us an insight into their personhood by examining the material objects they sought and chose to carry with them. These elementary items helped them survive the Middle Passage, maintain continuum in the host country, and transmute their life in their new homeland. Material belongings take on additional meaning for Indian indentured workers since they were a time-bound labouring force, majority of them arrived with an objective to work for five to

ten years and return to their home in India. Consequently, the Indians had no reason to discard their old ways of living and amend themselves according to host culture. British planters also created a larger trade network to sustain the indentees by supplying goods required to replenish their material dispossession and social deprivation. The larger circulation of humans and objects in demand draws our attention towards the significance of Indians within the global network. Although most indentees were coerced or deceived into migrating, they reclaim the driving force with the agency and resilience.

Research Methodology

I have followed the guidelines of the seventeenth edition of the Chicago Manual Handbook. The methodology that I have used for the thesis is 'cultural analysis' that motivates the study of cultural phenomenon within broader historical, social, and political contexts. A global lockdown for the prevention of the contagious virus COVID-19 from early 2020. The next two years witnessed travel restrictions and home quarantine. The literary oeuvre became my primary data to look for the social, symbolic, and ideological meanings, identity, and power dynamics. The primary novels enable the understanding of how cultural practices are produced, shaped, and received among a large labouring migrant community and the following diaspora. The selected primary texts by authors who come from indentured ancestry does not provide absolute facts but gives us a sense of how later generations of Indo-Caribbeans perceived, produced, and consumed culture. Several of the texts are fictionalised accounts of their ancestors and shows the process of unearthing their life stories. Such matrix of metadata also shows how the information was passed down after navigating unmitigated experiences, distorted memory, or language barriers. Hence, the primary texts are significant method to addressing the central research question.

Material culture study involves the examination of a wide range of objects such as artefacts, houses, spaces, and even intangible heritage. Multiple dimensions including clothing, accessories, and cuisines along with landscapes and infrastructural entities are also straddled within the methodological question of

materiality which contributes to the complex and expanding field of scholarly study. While theorising how material culture confers agency and affective bearing upon Indian indentured people and the diaspora population, I have claimed the plethora of critical material culture discussions as a method of analysis. I will outline the major works in contemporary material culture study that promoted and challenged my understanding of the production, distribution, and consumption of material and immaterial entities by indentured workers and the Indo-Caribbean people. As a student of literature, the explicit adoption of material culture theory to examine the social life of the substantial number of indenture migrants and the vast diaspora, is an easily accessible method of analysis that emerged from anthropological field of research practice and greatly helpful in qualitative research. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennett discusses larger entities such as landscape and architecture which are extended components of the study of material culture and discloses the power dynamics involved. Concepts of buildings, homes, and wider landscape are essentially interdisciplinary and it facilitates the private and public life of the inhabitants. The *Handbook of Material Culture* (Christopher Tilley et al., 2006) is a formative contemporary study of material culture and 'practice theories'. This extensive volume posits that the production, consumption, and usage of commodities constitute practices, identities, and cultures. The concept of Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour 2005) comprehends the role of objects in the social life of people. Latour advocates an inherent agency within objects and elucidates the collaboration between humans and non-humans. This creates a network that drives meaning-making and circulation of objects on a local and global level. To understand the role of material things, cultural objects, and practices in stabilising and/or destabilising identity and social arrangements has been the central idea of my doctoral thesis. By analysing the literary texts through the lens of material culture we can see how Indian in the Caribbean negotiate power relationship.

No Pain Like this Body (1987) is a tour de force by the pioneering West Indian author, Harold Sonny Ladoo. The novel is set against the backdrop of rice fields and focuses on the early Indian indentured immigrants trying to adapt to the West Indian life and exhaust themselves for the vestiges of imperialism. The outlandish language and rancid humour compliments that harsh landscape, ruthless climatic conditions, and appalling poverty that makes this text unique work of

postcolonial fiction. Ismith Khan situates *The Jumbie Bird* (1961) between the Great Depression in 1930s and the pre-independence period when the Indian indentees and their descendants were abandoned by the British planters after the sugar plantocracy went bankrupt. This semi-autobiographical novel explores the circumstances of one such destitute Indo-Trinidadian family who deals with increasing conflicts — political and ethnic, returning and staying, and the past and the present. The history of West Indies is celebrated in the writings of Samuel Selvon which is characterised by the violation inflicted by colonisation and the trauma of the culture of latifundia. *A Brighter Sun* (1985) is set in post-emancipated Trinidad and essentially a bildungsroman with the perpetual struggle to reconcile his identity with the notions of gender, nation, culture, and society. The recently published novel of David Dabydeen, *The Counting House* (2005), also shows post-emancipated Guiana and explores the nuances of racialization and forms a fictionalised archival document on indentureship. It deals with the racial tension as well as the poignant moments of empathy among them despite separatist colonial policies.

Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman* (2015) reinforced the significance of women within the indentured system as she traverses the journey of her grandmother, Sujaria, through the government documentation. By recounting her grandmother's experiences in a fictionalised manner, Bahadur reconsiders the impact of indentureship on women who voluntarily migrated and found empowerment to rebuild new identity and independence in an unknown land. Gainder's story is also unearthed and narrated by Mona in Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2007) that enabled a profound understanding of the historical and geographical intersections. Both Bahadur and Espinet interweave generational crossings through fiction to reimagine their ancestors and reconstruct their present. Peggy Mohan's *Jahajin* (2007) is another work of indentured fiction that derives from the author's great-grandmother and the texts explores indentured migration from a gendered perspective. These novels on indenture history is written with the phenomenon of "postmemory" (Hirsh 2012) that characterises the relationship between the personal and collective trauma of former generations with the later generation through oral, visual, or behavioural modes.

Lakshmi Persaud's novels including *Raise the Lanterns High* (2004), *Butterfly in the Wind* (1996), *Daughters of the Empire* (2012), and *Sastra* (2006) has captured the image of "little Indias" (Mishra 1996) that exemplify the imaginary of the "old diaspora" which consciously or subconsciously formed ethnic enclave to ensure cultural survival. The families and patterns laid out by Persaud fall under the auspices of a transplanted and segregated community who staunchly preserve the social and religious arrangements of India in the Caribbean. The prevalence of Hinduism underscores the Indianness within the Indo-Caribbean experiences and the characters are make continuous attempts at building a historical, cultural, and ethnic fraternity. The constant struggle to resist the accelerated process of syncretism and acculturation characterises the indentured people and the diaspora of the indentureds. The glorious works of Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2017), and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2009) disrupts the concepts of "natural", in context of sexuality and inter-personal relationships, suggesting the readers to deviate from Eurocentric ideologies. While the characters in her novels try to dig deeper into their own minds and bodies, we also unearth closeted skeletons of sexuality, family, community, and nationality. The composition of the places and people are fraught with complexities that helps in critically unravelling the gender norms, transcultural spaces, negotiating food and fashion choices, and rehabilitation process. Shiva Naipaul's *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* (2012) and Aliyah Eniath's *The Yard* (2016) are set within a family holding and the protagonists are faced with dissolution and predestination. The authors portray a world of childhood dreams, shattered aspirations, and rivalry of a reticent bunch of people with intermittent twists of fate.

Joy Mahabir's *Jouvert* (2006) and Niala Maharaj's *Like Heaven* (2007) are a powerful manifestation of the Carnival culture in the Caribbean and sublimates the phenomenon of self-discovery for the protagonists. There is an interplay of race, politics, and kinship in both the novels written from an autodiegetic perspective. The protagonists are deeply inspired and share a profound bond with an Afro-Caribbean who act as spiritual guardians and help them negotiate the contemporary Caribbean society. The authors seamlessly weave histories of biological and pumpkin-vine family with the Indian and African cultures to create significant carnivalesque narratives. The 80-minute documentary, *Dal Puri Diaspora* (2012), by Richard

Fung, a video artist, ventures on finding the origins of *dalpuri*. This stuffed roti envelops the history of colonialism, slavery, indentureship, and culinary miscegenation, documented by Fung across Toronto, Trinidad, India, and Mauritius.

Literature Review

Since my doctoral thesis predominantly deals with the indentured trade between India and the British Caribbean sugar colonies, I have drawn from the existing research works which focus on the differences between slave-based Caribbean plantations and post-emancipation indentured plantations[4]. The following scholarly writings helped me recognise the deep-rooted enslavement culture in the British Caribbean sugar colonies and understand the similarities and gradual digression throughout the system of indentured trade. These authors have dealt with the indentured lacuna and provides a theoretical groundwork to analyse the primary literary texts. I will provide a brief survey on the contemporary writings on Indian indentured trade that has formed my secondary material for this thesis which helped contextualise the ongoing debates and developments in indentured scholarship. Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery*, first published in 1974, formed a pivotal work on indentured migration during British colonialism that presents a detailed analysis of the socio-economic condition of the Indian indentees. His arguments have been heavily influenced by anti-slavery assertions and proved foundational to anti-indenture legacy. David Northrup, Madhavi Kale, and Ashutosh Kumar, among others, produced scholarly writings that deal with specific strand of the indentured system or labour migration within colonial structure. These authors explored indentureship as a substratum of imperialism as well as examined the numerous aspects of indentured experienced in various geographic locations. They contended that indentureship shared more similarities with "bonded" labour than with "free" labour regimes by elaborating the fraudulent recruitment process, the atrocious conditions and mortality rate during the *kala pani* journey, and the housing and ration provision which was continuum of the slave regime. Inhuman working conditions, poor remuneration, and severe disciplining were legally upheld and commonly practiced.

Kumar Mahabir, Maurits S. Hassankhan, and Lomarsh Roopnarine delineate comprehensive studies to locate Indians within the Caribbean. They examine the terminologies and explain the process of "creolisation", "douglarisation", and "assimilation" within the framework of indentured labourers and the consequent diaspora in the West Indies. Brij V. Lal brought new dimensions to the forefront and effectively shattered several Tinkerian notions about indentureship. He convincingly postulated that not all recruiters or *arkatis* were delinquents nor were the indentees of economically underprivileged background. In fact Lal found ample government records showing that majority indentees were from upper class/caste including numerous female indentees, puncturing stereotypical ideas of ignominious women. Lal's scholarship on indenture vastly digressed from Tinker's humanitarian calls and the former influenced the recent indenture writings of Madhavi Kale, Basdeo Mangru, Crispin Bates, and Marina Carter. The works by Carter emphasise the ordeal and experience of the indentured labourers who successfully made a return passage after their tenure primarily in Mauritius.

Rhoda Reddock, Rosanne Kanhai, Brinda Mehta, and Prabhu Mohaptra have contributed to the emerging trend of feminist historiography. Their exemplary writings, firstly, approach the 'question of women' within the indentured system as a subject of exploitation and oppression, and more importantly, highlight the agency of the female indentees and Indo-Caribbean diasporic women who created myriad possibilities by resisting and reforming the patriarchal regime. Another pivotal work that has been cardinal to my doctoral dissertation is Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1986). This well-structured and detailed work discusses the history and impact of sugar on the socio-economic structures. Mintz closely studies the changed from colonialism to capitalism that was intimately associated with cane sugar. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies 1838-1918* (1993) by Walton Look Lai is another important work of scholarship that provides a concise and holistic study of the transatlantic odyssey, plantation work, industrial residence, and experiences of indentured populations in British Caribbean plantocracy. The rapidly growing field of indenture studies enabled an enriched perspective of this seminal labour migration that involves intensive reading of colonial capitalism, bonded and free labour, and cultural and demographic transformations.

Chapters

The epiphenomemon of the free trade and a global market dynamics created seductive forces and the colonial capitalist market relationships produced the possibility of commodification of numerous participants. Indians were readily available to commoditise their labour for fixed time period and wages for the global commodity of sugar with the help of rapidly progressing commercial maritime activities. Chapter 1 discusses the mega-commodities and includes three sections — human body and labour, sugar, and ship. Indentureship ensured the nominal investment, maximised production, and prosperous distribution, enabling the commodification of these mega-commodities. The human, the sugar, and the ship were intimately connected and instrumental to the colonial trading system so I have taken into account the exploitation of humans, the history, realism, and metaphor of cane sugar, and the indentured experiences on board the coolie ships in three sections to avoid incoherence. Sidney Mintz has delineated the progress of the world market by analysing the relationship between the producer and the consumer by means of commodities and his arguments help me reach a better understanding of the production pattern of commodity in the forms like "coolie labour", "non-white body", "cane sugar", and "ship".

British expansion gained major Caribbean sugar plantation islands from the Spanish and Dutch forces, who had already recognised the convenient position of the archipelago in triangulated trading system between Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. The Caribbean had been transformed into an entrepôt and plantocracy with suitable climatic condition and regular supply of slaves. On the other side of the Empire, colonial restructuring had incapacitated Indian economy and driven the colonial subjects out of their livelihood, forcing them to opt for overseas labour migration. As colonialism paves way for capitalist forces post-Enlightenment reforms that imposed abolishment of slavery in 1833 and enforced free trade since the 1840s. Coolie bodies became preeminent appendages of imperial hegemony which aligned itself with the colonial capitalist forces manifest in Mohan's *Jahajin*, Ismith's Khan's *Jumbie Bird*, Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation,* and Dabydeen's *The Counting House* and *The Intended*. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's

theoretical concept of "inclusive exclusion", I have shown how the indentured labourers were reduced to bare life through political structures that deliberately dismissed them yet played a decisive role in keeping them in the fringes of society. Textual analysis shows concrete instances where the indentees were systematically changed into transportable and transactional commodities that naturally deprives them of basic rights whilst being a part of the social order. Despite toiling to produce cane sugar, they embodied a subordinate status within the plantation regime that quantified their labour, commoditised their body, and undermined their mental faculty.

The metaphor of "King Sugar" acts as an anthropomorphic model in West Indian literature exemplifying the British planters' loyalty to this king and the preamble of indentureship served as a final attempt to prevent its denouement. Mintz recognises the colonial exploitation, racial stratification, mass migration and deprivation necessitated by this labour-intensive crop. Ortiz's haunting phrase, "favoured child of capitalism", manifest the schadenfreude nature of cane sugar and has helped me traverse the journey of this commodity. The second section of my preliminary chapter navigates the changes in the cultivation, production, distribution, and consumption of cane sugar that questions the capitalistic system of plantation economy. The exponential growth in the world sugar market compelled colonial planters to find alternative sources of politically accessible and cheap cache of labourforce. My discussion has also paid attention to the merits of cane sugar to gauge colonial inflictions, both physical and psychological. Despite the unavoidable and oppressive cane cultivar exhausting the soil and the labourers, Indians maneuvered their identity, their personal and political transformation, and their autonomy by expediently dealing with the 'sugar question'.

The slave ships were repurposed as coolie ships which get invested with new symbolic meanings and remade it into a vehicle of transformation from which new selves and new identities emerged. The third section of Chapter 1 focuses on these vessels which were the first step towards indentured servitude and gives us the entire import of the concept of "coolitude" proposed in unprecedented work of Khal Torabully and Marina Carter[5]. The experiences of the indentured labourers on board the ship include abuse, disease, death, and sporadic mutiny that echo of slaves but

over time, indenture ordinances provided protections and allowances that made the coolie odyssey bearable and reduced the number of causalities and crimes. The ports and ships not only acted as a space for intermixing of various caste, creeds, and communities, but life-long friendships referred as *jahaji bhai* or *jahaji behen* were also formed. I have highlighted the life in the dockyards prior to boarding and after reaching the Caribbean shores which acted as border zones and saw complete collapse of social norms; I have discussed the horrific conditions on ships predominantly through the works of Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman*, Munshi Rahman Khan's autobiography, Peggy Mohan's *Jahajin*, and documentary texts such as *Handbook for Surgeons Superintendent in the Coolie Emigration Service* (1889), and *Maharani's Misery* (2002).

The belongings of migrants act as a powerful capital to adapt and create meaning in a foreign land. These objects of memory form a discourse on the cultural survival, reconfiguration of identity, and the formation of community. Through my analysis of the material culture of the Indian indentees and the later Indo-Caribbean diaspora, we are able to identify the social practices. The objects imbricated with memory, emotions, and history reflect the cultural knowledge and psychological welfare of the Indians in the Caribbean. The significance and impact of the micro-commodities require a succinct prologue before formally introducing the two chapters that study the micro-commodities impinged upon the primary novels and paraliterary texts. I consider the meaning behind the domestic space and objects, clothing, jewellery, and related accessories, and the context of food and culinary practice in the fictional works that helps us contextualise the lives of the Indo-Caribbean people. The commodities help them cope with the profound loss and degeneration by acting as transmutable objects of their past lives and their homeland.

The first section of Chapter 2 delves into the home spaces of the indentured workers and the later Indo-Caribbean diaspora. Material life of the Indian migrants and Indo-Caribbean diaspora can be recognised by considering the way commodities were moved and carried to new homes, objects that were repurposed or locally produced, and how they made them feel 'homely' or 'unhomely'. To create a home in an unfamiliar terrain requires reproduction of objects and patterns from their

former homes and combining them with adopted structures. The landscape of the Caribbean remarkably differed from India. Indentees belonged largely to rural backgrounds and were abruptly inducted into an industrial arrangement. The first housing facility of the indentees were industrial residences which were essentially slave barracks and they lived in squalor. The cultural ways and homely habits of especially Indian women helped transform the barracks into a better space to reside with traditional practices. Female indentees and the later diaspora women conjured a home space for their families with a hybrid modus operandi that helped in retaining the heritage of their former homes as well as adapting to the multicultural Caribbean society, former Empire, or the embracing Canadian civilisation. Material objects and practices take on a very different meaning within the space of the home as compared to their utility and significance outside. Indo-Caribbean people continued traditional practices at home to remain rooted yet gradual and inconspicuous changes penetrated over time. The presence and absence of certain objects in their households indicate the process of assimilation and the socio-economic status of the individuals and families. Domestic space and household commodities of Indian indentured labourers and later Indo-Caribbean diaspora embodied a greater significance and a nuanced textual analysis enunciates the connection between family and memory, replication of home and culture, and the experience of trauma and acclimatization.

In the second section of Chapter 2, I have also discussed how jewellery and clothing systems can effectively communicate individuality, ethnicity, conformity, and agency. The representation of jewellery in close association with the way women's body was manipulated to the Empire's advantage and utilised to create deliberate racial binarism. The assemblage of jewellery revealed a feminist assertion as the Indian women subverted the unfavourable commodity into an expedient object. Indian female indentees designed and employed their jewellery as an alternate form of deposit that made them vital to the economy of the British Caribbean island nations. Jewellery also acted as a formidable form of agency for Indo-Caribbean women who found a strong sense of proprietorship and financial independence by commissioning jewellery. Indian men also demonstrated exceptional craftsmanship that helped them transcend their indentured identity and establish the Indians as a socially and economically indispensable ethnic group in the West Indies. Adornments and accessories including overgrown beard, turban, *bindi*,

bangles, toe rings, and hennaed hands were ways of communicating their heritage and anchoring themselves in a foreign land. Clothes act as an indicator of ethnic identity which makes them one of the most meaningful material objects for migrants and diaspora communities. Clothing patterns and related practices represent a group rather than an individual, giving additional significance. Everyday interaction with the host culture had an active impact on the clothing and related accessories of the Indians in the Caribbean. The earlier indentured workers arrived in their traditional clothes and maintained, somewhat, similar clothing practices. Changes in the clothing of the indentees were mainly functional and limited to make the gruelling plantation work more congenial. Despite wearing work clothes during their plantation work, most of the indentees preferred wearing clothes similar to the Indian style. Abiding to their clothing practices emphasised cultural belonging since religious ceremonies, festivals, and rituals were swathed with specific dressing styles and sacred accessories. Digression in individual clothing choices was visible from the second or third-generation diasporic Indians who were greatly acclimatised and their bond with their ancestral culture had significantly deteriorated. While garments can be a potent reminder of their shared ethnic heritage, they can also prompt disparaging emotions emerging from the taxonomic principle of the clothing regime. Textiles and adornments are key modes for examining the social positioning of Indian indentured labourers and the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. This section describes bodily presentation and communication in relation to jewellery and clothes by tracing the continuities and transitions. People wearing cultural attire outside their native or ancestral land often envisage a "glocal" version of their garments and ornaments. The concept of amalgamating the 'local' and the 'global' is key to understanding the multiplicity in the identity of Indo-Caribbean people and the dynamic social association. Ornaments and attires are defining factors in cultural affinity as well as individual expression. It becomes especially significant for the indentured labourers since they took control over their bodies which were, otherwise, dehumanised, objectified, and commodified.

Food is another important micro-commodity and Chapter 3 discusses the interaction between materiality, colonial maritime trade, and culinary practices. Material culture is integral to consumption patterns and the objects define how food is served, consumed, presented, and perceived. Systems of eating also express

cultural association and sacredness at an individual and collective level. Human identity is never static so their foodways are also dynamic and is constantly produced and re-produced through social interface. Colonisation activities such as the indentured labour trade had a long-term impact on the foodscape of the Caribbean islands as well as on the lives of the people (re)moved by it. When the Indian indentees arrived on the shores of the British Caribbean colonies to work in the sugar plantations, among the many material and cultural belongings, they also carried culinary knowledge, gastronomic habits, and a number of food and food-related objects. The *jahaji*-bundle included various food items such as fruit seeds, roots of vegetables, spices, utensils, and portable kitchen objects, ferried across the *kala pani*. These commodities were a potent expression of eating customs and culinary patterns articulated through material culture. It also demonstrates the acute emotional and cultural value imbued with the gastronomic habits of the Indian migrants. The foodstuffs and culinary items played a crucial role in stabilising the huge Indian indentured population in the Caribbean plantocracy. The immense fragmentation of identity and disruption of lifestyle could be partially alleviated through culinary practices. Cooking and consumption of similar foodways evoked a sense of belonging and helped the migrants cope with the profound loss and estrangement. Indian indentured labourers and subsequent diaspora exercised their culinary capital to cook their way through the alienation that transformed food into a vehicle for cultural expression. They employed their agricultural background and industrious approach to cultivate familiar produce in-between the rows of sugarcane or in the backyard of their estate barracks. Indian women established their agency through culinary skills and overcame the varied impediments such as social and religious restrictions, lack of proper culinary paraphernalia, and the availability of fresh produce and proper spices. With the gradual passage of time, Indian migrants and diasporic families experienced cultural miscegenation that was conspicuously manifested in their foodways. While Indian indentees and former migrants try to maintain continuity in their eating system, traces of hybridisation permeate that changing traditional preparatory methods and flavour, and unwittingly assimilate the Indian and Caribbean. The contemporary foodscape of the West Indies reflects the social changes brought about by colonisation. Domestic food habits and the ritualistic gastronomic patterns among Indo-Caribbeans are an exposition of identity construction and community formation through the mechanisms of acculturation.

Preservation and transformation of food practices reflect decades of history, protocols, struggles, and symbology of the Indo-Caribbean community.

The preceding chapters of commodity culture have established an obvious and resounding trope of women's contribution to the institution and preservation of the Indo-Caribbean community from the early days of indentureship to the contemporary multiracial West Indian society. Fictional works from authors with indentured legacy or belonging to the Indo-Caribbean diaspora is a suitable strategy to gauge the volition, voice, struggles, and agency of the "other", who formed one-fourth of the mass immigrant workers. Chapter 4 elaborates on different forms of female agency in light of the transatlantic and transcultural contingencies by exercising alternate forms of resistance — madness, mutedness, misanthropy, or complete withdrawal from society — against numerous authoritarian forces. The ratio of the number of female indentees to males on board the ships kept changing due to the increasing gendered violence in the Caribbean plantations and it ultimately settled upon 1:4. This shortage of female labourers and the reluctance of Indian women to indenture resulted in double the rate of remuneration for recruiting women as compared to men. Ironically, female indentees were paid half or two-thirds of the wages of men for plantation work. This shows the paradoxical status of women throughout indentureship which they navigated by continuing and infringing upon traditional knowledge systems. I also discuss how undertaking the coolie odyssey and settling in an unknown land without kin or male supervision shatters stereotypical notions of female subordination by portraying transgressive female characters who defied social, cultural, ethnic, and gender boundaries. Despite the policing of their body, the female indentured labourers deftly subvert and demystify the stereotypical outlook by working through the patriarchal system that naturalises gendered binary and criminalises female agency. The *jahaji* sisterhood developed to form a "pumpkin-vine family" that provided a sense of feminist solidarity, cultural fraternity, and relief from their exilic trauma. Apart from the psychological recuperation, these *jahaji* sisters also gave financial aid through means of barter system where they exchanged home-grown vegetables, milk, or poultry to buy other commodities like soap, spices, and other items. Furthermore, the women discussed each other's special skills like preparing traditional curry or other natural abilities such as healing, sewing, livestock rearing, babysitting, and midwifery. They found

ways to exchange these natural talents for things needed by the other. The wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, and grandmothers created a unique Indo-Caribbean culture rooted in feminist ideologies. These women reinscribed the construct of femininity and mediated female agency to, not only survive but also thrive in the New World.

The concluding chapter gives me an opportunity to justify the reasons behind the selection of the Caribbean as the geographical focus in the indentured trade system. In elucidating the motive behind the geographical location also gives me scope to explain the literary production on indentured history in various indentured plantocracies across the globe namely, Mauritius and Fiji. I have briefly discussed a few crucial aspects of the indentured system which could not be elaborated in my thesis. The absence of study on the zones of recruitment leaves room for future research endeavours to understand socio-economic susceptibility of specific regions. Cultural, religious, and lingual markers are inadvertently replanted and adapted which has long-term overseas reconstruction of a distinctly “Indian” identity. Various strategic or incidental forces preventing post-indentured Indians from accomplishing socio-economic development and gaining advanced skillset. My final attention is on the major formal and informal meetings of government officials deliberating the continuation or termination of indentureship and impactful reports which resulted in the eventual dissolution of the indentured trade system between the British Caribbean and British Indian government in 1917.

Notes

[1] There is a residue of prior labour practices in the next one. Hence, slavery is succeeded by indentureship, aspects of slavery lingers in indentured labour practice.

[2] The *kala pani*, meaning dark waters, was forbidden for Hindus resulting in the expulsion from caste and society. The specific geographical location of the dark waters is the water body surrounding the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that served as a prison or exilic site for perpetrators. Since the people condemned to this prison never returned, a general air of mystery and sinister portent pervaded the minds of Indians. When I mention the *kala pani* throughout the thesis, I collectively refer to the larger and adjacent water bodies including the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. The idea of cross large water bodies was a menacing and inauspicious belief among most Indians.

[3] Throughout the thesis, I have interchangeably used the words indentured labourers, coolies, and *girmits*.

[4] The research works that I have referred and drawn from focus on other British plantations such as the Mauritius and Fiji. The similarity in pattern and mechanism allows space for comparison and application of conceptual theories among colonial plantations during the indentured trade system.

[5] The notable work by Khal Torabully and Marina Carter, *Coolitude: An Anthology of Indian Labour Diaspora*, expounds the concept of "coolitude". Indentured workers are seen as "coral identities" and attempts to poetize the suffering of coolies in the plantocracy through positively adapting themselves and asserting their agency. Torabully and Carter also try to expand the indenture imaginary by investing the coolie experience as a fluid and deconstructive identity.

Chapter 1

Examining the Mega-Commodities of the Indentured Trade System

1.1 The Problematic of Labour, Body, and Identity

1.1.1 Introduction

Powerful elites of society exercise self-serving ideologies to employ forms of personal and public domination. These principles help in formation of institutions which appropriate the labour of marginalised people. The first section of the chapter interprets this appropriation of Indian indentured workers and show how they were pushed to a vulnerable condition that enabled discreet and exploitative practices that facilitated subordination, devaluation, and commodification. The experiences of Indian indentees illustrate the forms of domination and violence engaged in convincing the workers to undertake the labour and internalise subjugation. Indentureship had the Indians indoctrinated with their powerlessness and unalterable conditions with the help of strategic structures. The powerless groups also created numerous alternate strategies of resistance, identities, and autonomous schemes and sites to challenge the ideological and physical domination. While their labour was in the grip of the plantations owners and officials, this study also looks into the relentless assaults on their body and agency. As exploitative institutions degraded and exploited the indentured workers, this study eliminated the differentiation between the ‘labour’ and ‘body’. The conspicuous subjugation and exploitation of the indentees from their embarkment legislates an overlapping and holistic study of the indentured labour and their physical and psychological fundamentality. This study argues that we do not necessarily have to correspond to the prior economic and political discourses on labour, capital, and commoditization. It is possible to consider the Indian indentured worker with multiple revised discourses on ‘commodities’, ‘race’, and ‘labour’ to examine the cultural, political, and economic life of Indians in the Caribbean. The first section begins with a history of the Caribbean followed by the introduction of the colony of the Indian subcontinent into the world market which proceeds to discuss the process of commoditization of indentured labour, the non-white body, and agency.

The distinction between labour and labour power is best understood through Marxist concept that points out that the worker sells 'labour power' rather than a measure of time and labour. This labour power is the commodity that gets exchanged in the marketplace and employed in the process of production. Colonial labour practices were considered "unfree" because the labour was dissociated from the means of production, as demonstrated in slavery, however, indentured servitude was an intermediate position. Capitalist coloniality was the transitional phase when 'free labour' was brokered by mercantilists and anti-monarchists within a colonial framework. Accumulation and dispossession resulted in 'unfree' labour during pre-capitalist era. Dispossession also created possibilities of capitalism with the formation of available labour force ready to work for fixed terms and wages. The fundamental differences between slavery and indentureship were the terms of labour that prohibited child labour, ownership, transferrable rights, endowment of return passage, and freedom of religious practices. While these conditions made the new labour category comparatively favourable to slavery, several other stipulations such as restriction on movement and penalty and punishment for absenteeism, negligence, and vagabonding obscured the difference between 'free' and 'unfree' labour. Capitalism also seems to prefer aspects of coercion, compulsion, and powerlessness among free workers that enables assaults and exploitation. Indian workers were partially free because, while they were free to choose whom to sell their labour power to, they were devoid of any other commodity to sell.

The phenomenon of indentured labour was possible through the structural scaffolding during European colonial expansion. One primary device is deprivation closely followed by accumulation which, incidentally, is also a blueprint of capitalism, an emerging international system that restructured subservient colony economy, formulated colonial legal policies, contrived differential sovereignty, and implemented these in the world labour market. The foundation of the relationship between capitalism and labour is the accumulation of capital and its asymmetrical distribution. One prerequisite to capital accumulation is possible through forcibly appropriating value to free labour during the incipient stage of capitalism. Coercion plays a formative role in the embryonic stage of capitalism and "free markets" obtain "free labour" who have no alternative means of livelihood and find themselves available and/or saleable. The colonial expansion made the use of coercion and

plunder to force the labourers into wage labour after driving them out of their sustainable living and, simultaneously, rewriting international laws with the mercantile Europeans to fill their coffers and generate financial resources to operate free markets globally, ensuring profit maximization. However, a lucrative market cannot function solely depending upon a skewed capital-labour relationship. There is a need for supplementary mode of governance and reproduction which requires repressive state regulation. This proposition is substantiated by the indentured labour trade pivoting colonial India. Colonialism has clinically destroyed subsistence economies, estranged labourers, producers, and creators from their produce, and dispossessed traditional settlers. Subsequently, a minuscule number of them are engaged in the new production established by the colonial authorities and the substantial native labour, tactically disbanded from their non-capitalist work and alienated from the productive domain of wage labour, get deployed as cheap surplus labour in international markets. This surplus labour remains suspended between a declining traditional economy and the protean world colonial market; with increasing number and time, the "free labour" keeps losing their prospects, their bargaining power, and their agency. Colonial reformation left the Indian economy completely mutilated that furnished a huge army of surplus labour and generated a push factor resulting in the export of indentured labour. Intersection of colonial and capitalist structures was possible since the free world markets integrate numerous modes of production to operate simultaneously. A modern international legal framework and rapid industrialisation enabled this nineteenth century labour trafficking. Scripting the terms for incorporating and maximizing the employment of colonised bodies and spaces is the principal constitutive premise of modern law. British colonial laws congealed physical violence and epistemic discipline envisaged to make the colonised body "more obedient as it becomes more useful" (Foucault 1977, 138) since capitalist colonial disciplining aimed at the complete utility of the oppressed/powerless and ultimate usefulness for the oppressors/powerful.

1.1.2 Colonial Projects in the Caribbean and Indian Subcontinent

The colonial project required the entrenchment of an intricate legal system where violence was imperative to keep the (im)balance of power intact. Once a

colony is implanted into a global legal order that unambiguously follows sovereign hierarchy, a metropolitan law accompanied by a hegemonic state of exception is enforced. The malleable norms in the colony are curtailed and reformed as new prevailing law. The Caribbean archipelagic time, space, and body seem to be trapped in their repeated colonised past that renders them psychologically incapable of overcoming their symptomatic anxiety and skepticism. The space and lives in an impasse make them ambivalent and vulnerable. Moreover, attempts at quasi-modernisation of any colony try to synthesize traditional lineaments which engender multiple fractured normative customs rather than a homogenous profile, with the doctrines of the West. This multiplicity makes the Caribbean vulnerable to uneven development that inevitably prompts an asymmetrical global exchange relation instrumented by capitalist coloniality. The link between coloniality and capitalism is intricate; capitalist economy has fostered colonial relations but coloniality is not fundamental to capitalist agendas. Capitalism can advocate decolonising measures like abolition of slavery, to perpetuate its interests (Williams, 1994). Moreover, the concept of 'coloniality' is not specific to a particular historical time, rather understood as a complex system that traverses time and space, superseding politics, economics, and epistemology. As an entrepôt, Caribbean archipelago experienced a long and vital commercial activity, either capitalist or socialist, including the function of duty-free transhipment harbour, import and export site, warehouse dock, storage facility, and/or place for rest, refreshment, and harbour during tedious transatlantic voyages. European expansion relied on stable interconnection of commerce that was made attainable through the island without which colonial progress would be demanding, if not unfathomable. However, being an entrepôt has not been only utility of the Caribbean archipelago; it has also performed the role of a laboratory for individual and international research related to development of cultural and socio-economic policies, bureaucratic structures, bio-weaponry, sampling and monitoring marine ecosystem, climate change, physiology, and an observatory for racial and cultural assimilation. Since prehistoric times, entrepôts created an extensive network in maritime trading and the Caribbean was conveniently triangulated by Europe, Africa, and America. In fact, the triangular trading relations between the three continents proved to be a precursor to modern capitalism. This connectivity, can be argued, was also the primary reason for interest of European mercantile class. The Dutch were the foremost in recognising the

island's susceptibility to accumulating profits through strong trading and contraband organisation, ultimately transforming it into a colonial crucible for experiment. The prolonged war between the British Empire and Spain during the sixteenth century brought some English privateers to the shores of Lesser Antilles which was colonised by Spain following the advent of Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century. British privateers arrived in the Caribbean to plunder Spanish possessions and found a convenient harbour to rest and refurbish their supplies before sailing away. The clearing of land across the Atlantic island body solely to make it fit for plantation economy is myopic; European aesthetics have associated 'improvement' and 'beauty' with clearing of land for a long time. Europeans also described the Atlantic islanders as savages and regarded the tropical forests discharging harmful vapours and germinating agues and ailments, resulting in the clearing of the disease-ridden woodlands.

Most islands in the Pacific and Atlantic acted as trading posts and promoted maritime empires. Island insularity was intricately bound to the obdurate conviction and practice of fierce monoculture. The Caribbean islands offered both tempting aspects, firstly, it had the evident economic forces for transactions and distribution through seaway, and more notably, it was the ideal site for suppressing multiplicity, enforcing monoculture, and establishing absolute reign. The irony lay in the introduction of labour bodies from outside— following the native populations and metropolis labourers like convicts, and political prisoners eradicated through labourious work, illness, or simply discarded for being unprofitable— for capitalist coloniality to contrive religious and metaphysical diktat over the multitude. By initially importing African enslaved labourers followed by Indian and Chinese indentured labourers, Europeans formed a multiplicity which succeeded in advancing English enterprise by funding the growing industrial revolution and sustained the submissive anxiety of losing work to other ethnic groups on the island. The violent monoculture in the Caribbean sugar islands perpetuated capitalist modes to produce sugar, molasses, bagasse, sucrose, and rum. As Mintz foregrounds, the plantations were fundamentally operated with the tools of industrial capitalism— structured labour force, discipline, time management, machinery-dependent, and production-consumption detachment— simultaneously employing characteristics of perishing mercantilist capitalism— chattel slaves or indentured labourers and a combination of

agricultural and mechanised enterprise (Mintz 1986, 50-52). Besides production process, the consumption of sugar itself was also turning capitalistic, further discussed under “King Sugar” section 1.2. One important consequence of the asymmetrical development and administration of diverse production modes under capitalism was the expedited displacement of subordinate bodies. The phenomenon of migration accelerated through legal orchestration and deployment of diverse modes of labour, to and from colonies. Colonial laws were tailored for better colonial domination that shaped the norms, legalities, and institutions. During various unfree labour systems and land tenure regimes, the penal code was the institutional apparatus of the society. Management of unfree labour under colonialism was reinforced in various forms, concerns, and enactments of abolition carried out ambiguously.

In 1617 the British East India Company acquired trading concession with India followed by gaining political authority over Bengal’s fertile delta region in 1757 initiating the colonising process in the Indian subcontinent. The region under colonial India kept expanding to the western region for a century, till 1850, which remained a British colony until 1947. India engaged in intercontinental trade and conflicts, mandated and adapted by the requirements, across the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and the Mediterranean for centuries. Hence, the engagement between and the world continued under colonial rule, albeit with different terms and consequences. Colonial rule dictated who, how, and when will India engage with in great detail alongside siphoning off the benefits accrued through the trading. Legal regimes were especially formed and enforced for an efficient and maximum depletion of all British colonies. The two hundred years mediating trading relations with the British East India Company and independence from British imperialism, colonial rule completely desecrated the agricultural economy and changed the traditional manufacturing apparatus of India to promote the interests of the colonisers. Once colonialism began intersecting with capitalism, before being overtaken, the relationship between Indian and the rest of world was radically transformed owing to the grafting of commodified goods and labour onto strictly regulated modes of ownership, production, and distribution. Existing landholding system underwent a foundational restructuring, simultaneously, monopolising agricultural land and farmers with a deceitful credit scheme. Indian textile industry

witnessed the most devastating colonial restructuring, resulting in exporting textiles from Britain and exporting raw cotton from being the biggest exporter of textile. Moreover, creditors and colonial government seized many lands as cash crops, primarily cotton, took precedence over staples that led to a steady decline in gain output. Displaced peasants quickly became a large labour force available for sundry work. This army of unemployed workers either migrated to the eastern jute mills in the Bengal Presidency or to the tea plantations in north-east colonial India. Internal saturation of workers gradually led the dispossessed peasants and rural population getting drawn into the indentured trade system overseas.[1]

1.1.3 Gladstone Demands 'Labour Units'

The institution of indentureship functioned as a prototype for modern contract labour system that acted as a bridge between free and unfree labour, slavery and contract labour, and forced and bonded labour. The shift from slavery to contract labour impelled European colonialism to acquire labourers from the age-old African reserve to the fresh Asian arsenal. Procuring labour supply from the Asian continent, hitherto only been a trade ally, now firmly incorporated in the global circuit. Emancipation of slaves in 1833 adversely affected the planters because plantation agriculture was labour-intensive and the imperial economy was enormously contingent upon the British Caribbean plantation, predominantly sugar production. The success of the Caribbean sugar plantocracy was founded on the steady availability of cheap labour and abundant land. The planters continued employing the emancipated slaves under apprenticeship for the first twelve years. Post-emancipation slavery English planters introduced "a new system of slavery" to replenish deficit labour supply in the Caribbean plantation. Colonial India was introduced into the global market with a renewed purpose of supplying cheap and controllable labour force accustomed to agricultural work in tropical climate. Indentureship was licensed once existing workforce was portrayed unreliable alongside pressing exigency in the Caribbean sugar colonies. Tinker recounts the deployment of Indian labour to Burma towards the end of the eighteenth century followed by the export of Indian bonded labour to the Malacca Strait settlements and the penultimate transport of indentured labourers to Mauritius and Réunion Islands

from the 1820s. When John Gladstone heard of Arbuthnot's success with Indian indentees who cost "one-half that of a slave" (Checkland 1971, 318), he established trading contact with an English recruiting company based in Calcutta to obtain workforce in the Caribbean sugar islands. The English firm gave an affirmative response to Gladstone, who acted as the spokesperson for the Caribbean planters. Thus the Caribbean sugar plantations became the leading importer of Indian indentured labourers who performed a dual role for the planters; firstly, they were the largest source of cheap labour post-emancipation, and secondly, they instrumented a way to reassert discipline and authority over the free African and Creole workers. Furthermore, English merchants and planters claimed that Afro-Caribbean workers were unreliable, dishonest, lazy, and unwilling to follow contract rules which allowed them to legally recruit indentured labour from colonial India. Since Indians were naturally more suitable for agricultural labour, British plantation owners started permanently importing Indians for their plantocracy[2].

Most recruits were individuals, hence dealt as socially detached and mobile 'labour units' in the indentured arrangement. The social and political identity of these Indians were fomally reconstructed when they entered the legal agreement called *girmit*. The lines of fresh recruits were promptly registered and processed at the magistrate's office, temporarily binding them to the *girmit,* transfiguring them into *girmitiyas,* and fundamentally changing them. The labour of the labourer was then owned by the 'master' of the plantation who gained legal control over time and movements. Once the indentured contract expired, the Indian worker was "free", with potent implications. These 'labour units' were not paid for their duration of work, rather by the quantity of task completed because it provided incentives to the labourers and suitable for maximisation of production. John D. Kelly has extensively researched the Fijian indentureship case study and concluded that, "the 'coolie' in the colonial imagination was different from a 'labourer' in political-economic theory. The 'coolie' was suited to a particular type of labour and life by race … the indenture contract, while contract, was informed by this colonial imagination" (1992b, 253-254). He also mentions each 'labour unit' was invested with a threat to profit that entailed a certain risk factor to the invester. These observations on Fijian indentureship stands to reason for the Caribbean indentureship as well since the authority and motive shared the same provenance. This industrial-plantation labourer

continued to be a labour commodity for almost a century that facilitated a thriving industrial Europe with colonial capitalist system of production in the Caribbean plantocracy. The collapse of this production system for numerous reasons including the poor disguise of the intrinsic exploitation.

Initially, the entire process of indentureship — recruitment, transportation, and employment — was unregulated and highly unscrupulous until Act V of 1837 that laid down ground rules and a rudimentary administrative framework. The system of indentured labour was institutionalised alongside receiving political supervision and developing into a contract-based free labour employment. However, indentured labourers were different from "free" workers, firstly, because the terms and conditions incorporated in the contract was non-negotiable by the worker, and more importantly, any breach of terms ordained penal reform instead of civil action. Extensive regulations were set forth to determine the rights and duties of the workers as well as the terms of being tied to a particular estate, periodic pay, allowances, residential conditions, and the return passage. Labour power was further alienated from standard liberal contract by the absence of legal prerogatives that prevented the potential recruits to change the clauses of employment. Colonial infiltration and distortion of the Indian landscape and the inception of tropical plantation economy accounted for the 'push' and 'pull' factors which eventually left a long-lasting impact on both India and the Caribbean islands. Recruiters began the search across the Indian subcontinent through emigration agencies which were authorised by the Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta and Madras for various 'push' and 'pull' factors influencing labour migration. Socio-economic assessment of India during the British rule shows that the commodification of Indians was a direct consequence of colonial entrenchment. The 'push' factors were contrived by the British government since the 'pull' factors were unpromising leading to a mass transportation of Indians. British forces had penetrated the social, political, and economic fabric of the Indian society and the natives were faced with unpropitious conditions in the homeland; peasants faced deprivations owing to export-based agriculture and grave interruption in livelihoods due to high evictions, disruption in local economies, total collapse of traditional industries, unnatural migration to urban localities, and rampant unemployment.

Indentureship turned out to be an ‘exile into bondage’ rather than an opportunity to prosper as many lost their life to illness, poverty, or misery[3]. Existing people in the Caribbean islands certainly resented the induction of Indian indentees but since they had no leverage over the governance and estate administration, they shared a strained inter-ethnic relation with the Asian indentured labourers. Despite regular complaints and legal diktats, indentureship shared countless similarities with enslavement because colonial authorities took every possible measure to repress the workers to maximise production. The entire repressive apparatus— police, prison, and court— contravened every legal ordinance and capitulated to the preconditions of the plantation owners. Like slavery, indentureship was initially premised on the act of coercion; firstly, labourers were denied free movement beyond their estates, and secondly, activities within the estates were also restricted and closely monitored. At the beginning of indentureship in the British Caribbean sugar islands, plantation owners deployed numerous formal and informal ways to confine the labourers to their estates as well as have them re-indentured. Mauritius levied an annual tax that forced the Indians to re-indenture; moreover, penal charges, vagrancy laws, and medical dues resulted in terminating the return passage. Despite stipulated guidelines existed for work, pay, medical, ration, and housing facilities, conditions greatly varied and was contingent on the estate managers and overseers. The reality for the indentees was marked by low wages, gruelling overwork, persistent illness, poor housing, and malnourishment accompanied by frequent beatings, fines, incarceration, and premature deportation. Colonial administration in the Caribbean islands functioned as an instrument to promote the interests of the British planters, privateers, and merchants rather than providing necessary protection to the indentured labourers. Furthermore, the administration colluded with the planters in keeping the ground reality obscured and cloak the malpractices. Legislations dedicated to improving workers’ conditions was largely ineffectual and investigations into labour abuse was neither assessed fairly nor made unfavourable recommendations to the planters. The large number of suicides among indentured Indians substantiate the harsh conditions but the system was corrupted because the Immigrants Protectors officers were either acquaintances of the estate managers who shared common interests and class background or received hefty bribes to overlook the cruel practices.

Numerous active and passive acts through formal and informal ways manifested into persistent abuse, hostile working conditions, and adverse structural administration. The systematic exploitation was defied with resistance on a daily basis that included idleness, absenteeism, damaging estate property, drunkenness, and petty larceny. Free Indians also harboured fugitives and established self-help community that extended several forms of aid to recently freed indentees, deserters, workers in need of medical assistance, and other monetary support to pay fine. Nonetheless, the governance stifled all resistance with stringent measures directed towards curbing collective opposition and marked potential leaders who were publicly punished and/or deported. Despite government constraints, labour resistance grew stronger with the increasing number of indentured labourers in the Caribbean who eventually settled and adapted well in the new environment. Indentured labourers were not the only unstable factor for the trading system, Indian colonial authorities were also facing protests from various local reformers and additionally, the British colonial offices had displayed susceptibility to agitation by "unfree" labour movements across colonies. Due to the constant scrutiny of the Indian communities regarding the indenture migration since its inception, the indenture trade was abruptly terminated in 1839 after an investigating Committee of 1838 prohibited the overseas emigration of Indian labour and any individual or organisation conducting such emigration would be subject to a fine or imprisonment. Over the following years, British merchants and planters contested to win back the favour of the British legislators and indenture emigration to the Caribbean sugar plantations was legalised resulting in the prohibition getting repealed in 1844. A five-year contract for indentureship was determined that was extendable to ten years and the Governor-General was empowered to suspend indentureship in any estate providing unsatisfactory working and housing conditions.

When the colonial empire in Natal decided to impose tax on the indentured Indians deciding to settle in South Africa after completing indentureship, Indian political leaders, spearheaded by M.K. Gandhi, protested against this maltreatment. As a result, the British government in Natal decided to terminate the emigration of Indians in 1910. Continued overseas migration to British plantation colonies drove Indian nationalists to intensify anti-indenture campaign that forced the Indian Legislative Council to entirely abolish indentureship in 1916 under the condition that

the colonies involved in the indenture trade must be allowed to gradually dissolve the system with precautionary measures, provision of safe passage to the indentees, and suitably adapt to the change. The indentured labour system was legally abolished in India in 1920. Claims suggest that the termination of indentureship precipitated from a global economic crisis due to the evolution in sugar production. While it is one of the prominent reasons for phasing out indentureship, the volte-face of British Indian government caused by a newly attained strength by Indian nationalists post World War I was a significant pressure point. Simultaneously, industrialists and landowners in India developed into a thriving national sector, absorbing large number of the surplus labour. Post-colonial globalization theorized African slaves and Asian manual labourers as the cornerstone for the development and consolidation of capitalist production and accumulation.

The 1833 Abolition Act was implemented across the British Caribbean holdings from 1st August 1834 while the French Caribbean, including Guadeloupe and Martinique, implemented it not before May 1848, precipitated by increasing slave revolts in the islands. Post the abolition, European empires were faced with severe labour shortages in the Caribbean plantocracy, prompting them to induct workers from their eastern colonial estates. The number of Indians that migrated to the British Caribbean between 1838 and 1917 can be estimated to be almost 500,000 within a century and the Trinidad, Jamaica, and British Guiana received the largest number of Indian indentees. General statistics suggest that the French Caribbean, including Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana, imported almost 75,000 indentured labourers from India. The term ‘coolie’ has been used to designate indentured labourers who migrated to the British plantation colonies for work. The term has inherent connotations of transnationalism and racialism, the latter being a product of imperial imagination post-slavery abolition. It can be concluded that the groups of Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Malaysian labourers migrating to the Americas and Caribbean islands from 1840 to 1920 were primarily known as ‘coolies’. It can also be argued that the importation of coolies disrupts the emancipatory intention spearheaded by the British Empire. Moreover, the introduction of Asian and Chinese labourers in the Francophone Caribbean completely alienated the Africans who were faced with extreme survival conditions post-emancipation. It can be surmised that indentureship was formulated and

practiced for strictly economic purposes since there was a crisis for both counterparts; the empire was in desperate need of cheap labour while unemployed Indians in a famine-ridden land were pushed to find employment outside their country after the local economies started getting relocated alongside the collapse of traditional industries.

1.1.4 Commodification of Body and (De)Valuing Labour

In the essay "The Commodification of the Body and its Parts", Lesley Sharp has exemplified ways of dehumanisation which obscures the boundaries of human and inhuman. This obfuscation allows the commodification of humans and enables hegemonic forces to undermine the faculties of non-White people, exploit their labour, and fragment their identities. The human body — in parts and as a whole — has been a nucleus in the process of commodification in numerous cultural frameworks such as internal migration with Europe, Asia, and Africa during the Middle ages, European settlement in America, Australia, and New Zealand, slave trade, indentured labour trade, and migration to the New World. The analysis of a commodified or objectified body has long been a focal point of human study, given that the human body has always been an object of social, symbolic, and economic utility in myriad societies. Slavery and other dehumanizing labour practices including indentureship are a part of the well-documented forms of commodification. Within anthropology, principal theoretical methodologies towards commodification demonstrate that the body is repeatedly valued principally for its labour power and, historically, develops as a site of production. Several emergent biotechnologies, concerned with medical, clinical, reproductive, genetics, and cyborgs, indicate an exemplary move within an anthropological exploration of the commodified body. Body fragmentation and exploitation are crucial to the process of commodification and each challenge to undermine, relocate, or transform a body is confronted with resistance to protect and defend body boundaries and integrity. A human body can be literally moulded, hence, transformed with the help of several processes. Anthropological approaches suggest that human activity is essential to bring about a transformation in nature which, in turn, eventually modifies the human body. This forms a cycle of life. Humans routinely infringe upon ecological terrains,

enhancing or mutilating, intrinsically mapping the body upon the world that leads to a convergence of culture and nature. Therefore, the human body can be understood as a culturally malleable and flawed space that is driven by ethnocentric definitions of size, shape, appearance, faculty, etc. The body is not a static figure and resists all attempts of universalization made by the commercial world. Social, cultural, political, and economic frameworks produce diverse readings — complementary or contradictory — which eventually expose varying images of the body, possible fragmentation, and ultimate commodification. Diverse texts and contexts including myth, folklore, colonial, nation-state, military, scientific, and biomedical knowledge governed by gender, faith, class, and age offer potential links that integrate the human body, nature, and world economy. Commodification can expose the covert association between desire, demand, and consumption within certain realms (Appadurai 1986) that result in temporary or permanent ownership of the body. Dehumanization is an elemental part of enslavement that is characterized by an acute sense of "social death" (Patterson 1982). Very often, the labour process dissociates the body from the mind; the nature of labour also fragments different body parts which makes the body a prime target for trafficking. Colonised bodies have historically been regulated by colonial power in cooperation with medical practices. Colonial subjects are disciplined in a way that helped colonial forces to commodify their desires as well as their suffering; images of disenfranchised and debilitated bodies are easily turned into objects of exploitation. Objectification is a vital stratagem of commodification because the body must be disengaged from the human category and assigned a commercial value. Objectification insists on the potential of subjecting the colonised body to the coloniser's imagination. Certain colonised body parts or specific categories of people like children, fertile women, robust brown men, and others are considered more profitable and prized in particular societies. As a result, colonisation and ownership of body have emerged as the principal metaphor for myriad exploitative practices.

Western society possesses a deeply engraved set of predispositions towards the segregation of humans and objects manifested in its treatment of the non-Western population. It is usually defined under the umbrella term of 'slavery'. Postcolonial studies have exposed the real agendas of Enlightenment that were activated with the 'discovery' of the archipelagic islands of the Caribbean by Columbus. This proved to

be a watershed moment for the human race; the enlightened class strengthened their economy and privilege by means of exploitation and embezzlement, whereas the 'primitive' mass faced a severe dehumanising process for centuries that left a permanent mark of marginality. The claim over land and human lives went hand-in-hand throughout the process of imperialism. Aimé Césaire has found the accurate equation, "colonisation = 'thing-ification'" (Césaire, 1972). Burgeoning business spurred the slave trade till a moral awakening at the end of the 1700s and the turn of the century saw rampant campaigns to abolish slavery. However, the 1833 Act could not prevent human trafficking that continued under rhetorical terms such as 'manumitted labour', 'hired labour', 'indenture labour', etc. The British Empire had recognised non-western human bodies as not only essential instruments in the production of tropical and sub-tropical products, but, also a valuable product itself. For this reason, post-abolition, British imperialists started shipping in paid labourers, mostly from British India, who kept the British mercantilists well-satiated. The comparatively shorter time span of indentureship makes it historically inconsequential and disregarded but the crucial role of Indian indentees can be verified with Mintz's polemic on enslaved Africans:

> The important feature of these triangles is that human cargoes figured vitally in their operation, It was not just sugar, rum, and molasses were not being traded directly for European finished goods; in both transatlantic triangles the only "false commodity" — yet absolutely essential to the system — was human beings. Slaves were a "false commodity" because a human being is not an object, even when treated as one. In this instance, millions of human beings were treated as commodities. To obtain them, products were shipped to Africa; by their labor power, wealth was created in the Americas. The wealth they created mostly returned to Britain; the products they made were consumed in Britain; and the products made by Britons — cloth, tools, torture instruments — were consumed by slaves who were themselves consumed in the creation of wealth (Mintz, 43).

In 1834, the chief magistrate in Calcutta wrote to acquaint the Secretary to Government about an agreement, whereby, a group of thirty-six hill coolies were

indentured to work on a Mauritian sugar estate for a period of five years, a safe passage to and from Mauritius, a six-month advance pay of five rupees for men and four rupees for women along with a fixed ratio and clothing on embarkation. Encouraged by positive reviews of the Mauritian indentureship, British Guiana permitted the enrolment of Indian labourers followed by the other British colonies. The indenture contract governed the relation between Indian labourers and the planters and extolled the subordination of Indian immigrants in the larger Caribbean society in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This master contract was inscribed with explicit subordination of Indians and allowed the Indian body to be exploited as cheap and efficient labour. As a legally-binding contract, the *girmit* not only trussed the labourer to the planter, but also ensured unbridled access to the labourer's body. In order to steer clear of the accusations from the Anti-Slavery Societies due to the escalating number of abuses and abductions, a government notice specified a preceding relation between the immigrant and *arkati* or local intermediary. As futile as this preventive measure proved to be, it acted as an alibi against the unfair methods of human trafficking frequently resorted to by *sirdars, arkatis,* and recruiters. The effect of indenture emigration was quite negligible compared to the slave trade as a large number of the indentees returned to the homeland after completing their contractual period with a substantial amount of money. One of the most significant clauses of appeal in the indenture system was a return passage after a stipulated number of years. There have also been thousands of ex-indentees who returned with a substantial amount of savings from the sugar colonies that helped them pick up the thread the way they left it. Although the *kala pani* crossing made them outcasts, many regained their caste and social standing just the way it was left behind by simply paying a price for it: "Gobardhan Pathak – returned from Demerara after ten years with Rs. 1,500. He spent Rs. 300-Rs. 400 on 'getting back into his caste' by giving away gifts and throwing a feast for those belonging to the same caste, bought a house with a garden, and became a successful sugar-cane grower with the help of his large family" (Kumar 2017, 47). Stories of the success of indentured labourers in the Caribbean islands were sparse and would be advertised as a victory for the English merchants, planters, and government who provided opportunities, agency, and prosperity to colonised Indians. Aliyah Eniath depicts one such story of indentured Indians who not only managed to succeed post-indenture, but also paved the way for their later generations to thrive. Maya narrates

that her great grandparents, “East Indian Muslims from the town of Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh, had come to Trinidad in the 1900s, brought by the British to work as indentured labourers on sugar plantations. They had worked as willing slaves on Brechin Castle Estate for five years, and when their bondage was over, were ‘gifted’ ten acres of Crown land” (2016, 5). Indentured labourers were given an option of exchanging their opportunity to re-indenture for five acres of land (Roopnarine 2016). Land ownership by ex-indentees allowed internal migration to nearby village estates, which were abandoned by white plantation owners that presented a lifestyle that was similar to their lives led in the homeland. The emancipated Indians were able to restore and recreate similar aspects of their ancestral culture whilst assimilating into the Caribbean society by owning land in village settlements. The narrator’s ancestor in David Dabydeen’s *The Intended*, “came to cut cane and was bound for five years to plantation Canje … By the time his indenture had expired he had amassed enough money by mysterious processes to buy … fifty acres of land on the east side of Albion Village on which he kept cows and traded in meat” (51). The internal migration of the *jahajis* represented progress and the Indians utilised the land for cattle rearing or rice cultivation, making them wealthy. Post 1916, Indians were responsible for growing more than half the sugar and rice exported from Guyana and Surinam and it is also argued that an early emancipation and better provision for Indians to settle in the Caribbean could have saved several jettisoned plantations (Speckmann 1965). Nonetheless, the land given to the ex-indentees was barren and poor in quality which impeded development and made it difficult for them to survive in the foreign nation. Colonial policies for the village settlements were deliberately retarded to keep the free indentured labour force dependent on the sugar plantocracy that resulted in Indians getting re-employed as full/part-time workers.

Following the abolition, the labour movements in India were severely restricted and bifurcated to the Assam tea plantations and the jute mills of Bengal. This created a huge push in the homeland to stabilise the scales of demand and supply of labourers in the homeland. The British Indian government saw this as an opportune moment to pass the law for indentured labourers to be immigrated to the British Caribbean islands by preposterously ignoring the fraudulent acts surrounding the indentureship. The rising demand for sugar in the markets of Europe

and the New World prompted a labour-intensive colony in the Caribbean that provided an expedient atmosphere in terms of the tropical climate, soil texture, and political environment. Sidney Mintz explains the triangulated trade between Europe, the Caribbean islands, and the Indian subcontinent and states that the human cargoes were an essential feature of the trading operation (Mintz 1986). Mintz classifies human beings as "false commodities" because humans are not objects per se but are treated as such. Kale Khan and other ex-indentured labourers gather in the Square every evening to smoke pipes and reminisce over their past life. They would often make impassioned confessions of betrayal, since, "how we could ever know that when we come here they would give we cutlass and hoe to work in this hot sun? First day Mongroo get so much big, big blisters in his hands, he couldn't even hold the hoe the next mornin'" (Jumbie Bird, 25). Nonetheless, the increasing demand for Indian labourers from the Caribbean plantations and the fairly positive outcome for all involved parties steamrolled the migration of indentured labourers from India to the Caribbean plantocracy. Beneath the guise of a respectable and profitable labour trade, the coolies were *indented* or separated from their autochthonous culture, human identification, and spatial and temporal continuity. Ultimately, all that was left of a century of *girmits* was a pile of annals that encapsulated over 2 million *girmitiyas* in numbers, timelines, and transactions.

1.1.5 Treacherous Recruitment for Dehumanising Conditions

The process of indenture begins with the intending migrant being approached by an *arkati* who usually functions as an informant or provincial recruiter and works as a link between potential *girmits* and official recruiters, although, the terms *arkatis* and recruiters are frequently considered synonymous[4]. The entire immigration agency relied on the recruiters to convince and assemble consenting Indians to undertake the *kala pani* journey and work as a *girmit* for a fixed number of years. As a result, the recruiters were the preliminary and principal factors of the indenture infrastructure. With time, the colonial government ordained *arkatis* to get a license to conduct recruitments in specified districts/areas. Any form of malpractice could lead to the cancellation of the license. The *arkatis* were perpetually on the outlook for people "in trouble, who had fallen out with his family, who was in disgrace, who

was wild or wanton" (Tinker 1993, 122). In the novel *Counting House*, the female protagonist, Rohini tries to manipulate her husband, Vidia to migrate to British Guyana with the promises made to her by the recruiter who beguiled her: "Recruiter say Guiana have plenty land, you can turn man and own so much you can't see the fencing how it is so far in front. And if you kick topsoil and one-two stones, gold greet your eye" (52). Indentees came from unusual professional backgrounds — barbers, cooks, shopkeepers, dancers, writers, artists, gardeners, priests, soldiers, poultry and dairy farmers, blacksmith, etc. — in the early years of indentureship reveal the deceitful actions of the *arkatis* and complete disregard of the British officials for the colonial subjects as a utility component. Gaiutra Bahadur makes a strong statement in *Coolie Woman*: "the British didn't recruit 'coolies' for their sugar cane fields. Rather, they made 'coolies'" (43). In *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* David Northrup relates a similar account of an indentured labourer named Mahamed Sheriff, recruited in 1870, "who was not a farmer, a characteristic he shared with many of his fellow recruits from Lucknow, whom he described as 'not all cultivators – some barbers, coachmen, porters, and other followings" (1995, 2). To my question related to the connotation of the term "coolie", Ramabai Espinet says, "My own experience of the term "coolie" began in my earliest years in Trinidad and Tobago. It was a racial taunt, exactly analogous to the term "nigger"". Both Peggy Mohan and Shani Mootoo share the same antipathy to such racial expressions and make conscious efforts to replace them with factual terms including *jahajis* and "labour immigrants"[5].

Growing agitation among the Indians and regular complaints from the overseers and managers against the substandard workforce dispatched to their estate saw a drastic change in the entire operation of the system. From the 1880s onwards, a vast number of agriculture-based people were being recruited and a more stringent screening process was put in place. With the passing years, the norms of indenture became more transparent. Agencies facing frequent warnings from the government against their recruiters began hiring returned emigrants as recruiters who were trustworthy to their fellow countrymen as they became a microcosmic representation of a prosperous migrant community. Female ex-indentees were, particularly, induced to work as *arkatis* to encourage Indian women to work on Caribbean estates as there was a need to maintain a gendered ratio of emigrants. Gradually, the returned coolies

were not only the best advocates for indentureship but also registered to be re-indentured and became diaspora Indians in the Indies. In fact, re-indentured coolies became poster boys, first of all, because they acted as a manifestation of the success of the indenture project initiated by the British government against numerous odds, and secondly, they were enormously productive for the estate managers due to their experience and finally, the coolies were able to earn a small fortune and live generously upon their return to India. Several ex-indentees were able to acquire a small portion of land, usually a small section of infertile land, and settle in their adopted nation. Peggy Mohan's *Jahajin* provides a comprehensive picture of the initial procedure of indentureship — the recruitment, undertaking, embarkation, the *kala pani* odyssey, and the final assignment — that shows the inhumane treatment of indentees as a mere commodity. When Deeda, the protagonist was surviving on the last few handfuls of rice grains with no hope of promising produce or the return of her husband she came across an '*arkatiniya*' and "[s]he told me they were looking for women to go, and she promised me an extra advance if I signed up. Only one year there, she said, and then they bring you back. Plenty of money" (Jahajin, 18). The potential recruits, mostly people wandering in search of work and shelter, were housed in a sub-depot by the recruiter. During their stay in the sub-depot, they had to go through a health inspection and interview before being registered by the local magistrate. The consignment of indentees are were brought to the Calcutta depot from various parts of the country where they are made aware of the terms and consequences of their undertaking by the Protector of Emigrants. The depot period proved to be decisive since many unsure indentees were swayed to journey on while many others withdrew or absconded. Agencies took up a more active role to persuade them and keep the indentees in good health till embarkation. In the novel, Deeda relates that as soon as they reached the Khidderpore depot, each person was provided fresh clothing, a thin shawl, and a hot meal. While they are stationed at the depot, they undergo a final medical examination before being loaded on the ships. These despairing souls are acquainted with their new identity as a *girmitiya*. When Deeda overhears a strange word *girmit* and enquired asks the *arkataniya* about it, she says, "[w]e would have to go in front of the magistrate and he would ask us if we understood what we would be signing up to do in Chini-dad and if we agreed to keep our side of the bargain" (Jahajin, 20). However, the prolonged waiting period in the docks of Calcutta posed an issue for the recruiting agencies as many eloped as the

consequences of crossing the *kala pani* dawned upon them while many more succumbed to the fatal blows of malaria, dengue, and cholera during their stay near the ghats.

Despite recent scholarship upholding pro-indenture dialectics, the indenture system had petty positives in comparison to the slave trade. Following the seminal 1833 Act, the imperial government simply shifted its radar from African colonies to Asian colonies to meet their labour demands that will keep their despotic machinery operative. The treatment of the colonial subjects as an exploitable workforce ready to be shipped off to places where they are needed. The abolition act was undeniably revolutionary for the subaltern, but the aftermath had little effect on the chronic commodification of the colonised people. The labourers were one of the many commodities being transported by ships across the globe:

> It was monsoon, and the river was full of water, deeper. It was the best time to leave, they said. How every day they would bring more things to carry on the boat. Heaps of coal. Barrels of grease for the boat engines. Big, big barrels of water. All the things we would be eating: rice, dal, white flour and dried saltfish. All in barrels, so that rats couldn't get at them. Potatoes, onions, pumpkin. Dried peas in jute sacks. Sugar and salt and masalas in jute sacks. Big, big pots to cook food for all the migrants, pots the size of barrels. Jute that they were carrying to sell in Trinidad. Buffaloes, goats. Fodder for the animals. Medicines. And new people had come, people who would go with us on the boat; bandhaaris, who would be the cooks, and masaalchis, cooks' assistants, bhangis to keep the boat clean. And laskars: stokers to shovel the coal for the boat engines and greasers to keep the engines covered with grease (Jahajin, 27).

Peggy Mohan's literary account is isomorphic to the reality of the indenture system and the dehumanised condition of the Indian labourers. Such acts of human objectification are a reflection of pre-existing social groups. Perhaps the ultimate practice of imperialism can be seen in the distribution of labour that promotes the Cartesian duality of the mind and the body. The study of the conjoined relationship between the subject and the object is the primary concern of material culture.

Therefore, the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised becomes a predominant issue. The entire process of indenture was a discursive practice of pre-existing social distinctions and legitimized the commodification of the colonised people. Indenture scholarship has established clear differences between indentureship and slavery including temporary servitude, methods of recruitment, fixed wages, provision of running their household and following ancestral tradition, internal mobility, and a free return passage.

Indentureship forbade child slavery which was a key aspect of chattel slavery and provided a constant supply of slaves to owners. While child slavery was unheard of under indentureship, in *Counting House,* when Vidia's fellow indentee, Kampta's parents died of malaria during their indentureship, "the plantation owner still laid claim to his labour in lieu of the loss of his parents and the money he had laid out to secure their passage from India" (82). The plantation owners were desperate to import Indian labourers but they were sceptical of investing a significant fortune since the entire system was initially a novel experiment, fraught with risks at each step. During their journey, the labourers were made to walk on the decks with the animals, since they all needed fresh air and movement to remain healthy. Labourers who were caught in mischief or theft or contracted infectious diseases and/or died were fastened to weight and disposed of by throwing them into the waters. In *Jahajin,* once Deeda's ship docked at Nelson Island, they were given jute sacks to sit in while they waited to be examined and fumigated. When the estate people arrived to inspect, Deeda's group was instantly selected, bought, and carried off to the estate. Upon their arrival at the estate, they were cautioned by the existing labourers to be careful of their overseers because "[s]ometimes they had trouble remembering that we were not their slaves" (Jahajin, 117). Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation* remains true to its title and demonstrates the 1950s Guiana which is nothing different from the early plantation years. While June, the protagonist, cycles to her new Anglican secondary school early in the morning on her first day, she witnesses the workers of the New Dam plantation waiting for instructions for the day's work from their foreman, an Indian, since, "overseers did not speak directly with a worker. They turned their backs on them and spoke amongst themselves, pausing only to deal with a foreman" (Shinebourne, 44). This fleeting vision seen by June is an everyday exercise that has been conducted throughout the entire duration

of indenture and prior to that, in several draconian forms. This exposes the binary idealism of privileging the mind over the body which was an interminable phenomenon in the indenture system. Once again, the power play is strongly evident in the hierarchy of the overseers, foremen, and workers which evokes a Prospero-Ariel-Caliban relationship. This deeply entrenched socio-cultural hierarchy is inculcated from an impressionable age when Mrs. Farley, the eldest teacher at New Amsterdam School, liberally canes the coloured children from the plantation but never dares to raise her voice on the children coming from privileged families and whose parents are socially superior to her (Shinebourne, 100).

1.1.6 Infringing Penal and Moral Codes

Indentured labour laws stipulated severe penalization for breaching plantation regulations with corporal punishment, imprisonment, fine, wage cut or/and longer working hours. The regulations for the labourers varied from plantation to plantation, which was largely pro-planters instead of being labour-friendly, and most of the rules were devised to either withhold wages or extort additional work. When the *girmits* were provided rations during the first year of indentureship, "sharing food [was] an offence punishable by imprisonment" because they would only receive rations once a week. The estate managers discouraged sharing or bartering of the ration since the paltry amount had to last the whole week and provide enough strength to carry out the debilitating tasks (Lal 2012, 263). Unauthorised absence or absconding were considered grave offenses liable to punishment. Indenture ordinances approved a pass system that required indentees to obtain passes or a ticket to leave their estate from the manager. If any indentee was found without a pass, they could be arrested for vagrancy, absenteeism, or desertion. But rules were frequently flouted in the pass system as well. In *Coolie Woman*, Bahadur narrates the story of Baby, an indentured woman, who was arrested "when she travelled from the sugar estate to the capital, although she had an official pass for a week's leave, and sent her back to her plantation, with orders that she never be allowed to leave again" (99).

Kampta, a Madrasi coolie, was noted for frequently shouting expletives and threatening to burn the manager, Gladstone's house if he denies an increase in labour wage. Since Kampta was born and bred on Plantation Albion, the manager and estate staff ignored his drunken threats, accustomed to them, and rarely punished him for the same. However, Gladstone lodged an official complaint against Kampta and took him to the district magistrate for stealing rice, flour, brandy, and dried fish from the manager's repository to share them at a "nigger bacchanal". Gladstone had already flagellated him at the estate for theft but falsely accused him of several misdemeanours by citing personal character traits:

> He is indolent, thievish and cunning, and seeks the company of lewd and faithless Creole women in preference to the sobriety of a settled relationship. He has no sense of the rights of ownership and in stealing from his fellow coolie - a crime to which he is habituated - he creates a web of accusation and counter-accusation among them, which is detrimental to the welfare of the Plantation. The loss of his property causes acute distress to a coolie. It will provoke the most docile of them to the kind of barbarism that breaks out in India randomly and for no apparent reason other than the conditioning of centuries which no English effort can reverse (Counting House, 75).

The entire speech made by Gladstone at the magistrate's office had less to do with petty theft and principally a tactic to arrest further unrest. Gladstone's accusations and the magistrate's sentence of three months of work without pay and fourteen whippings every Sunday indicate clear racist allegations. The plantation system was designed to keep the indentees like prisoners when they were not on duty. Physical punishment was a frequent practice and tools such as cattle whip were used in the West Indies, cane in Malaya, and sjambok or leather lash in Natal (Tinker 1993, 192).

Indentureship was fraught with cases of systematic dehumanisation, penalization, and animalization implicit in the treatment of the indentees as well as in the very terms like 'coolie' or *girmit* in close association with the globally proliferating financial establishment which resulted in the transportation of thousands of indentured workers. This financial organization invites a biopolitical

understanding of the Indian indentured workers. Biopolitics has allowed us an understanding of this complex and interlinked world through new ideologies centered upon cultural identity (re)formed by the politics of migration. The island nations of the West Indies were treated as a biopolitical laboratory since the 16th century whereby, not only were the natural resources and the natives exploited and decimated by the Spanish, French, and British forces, but they also introduced foreign populations to experiment and maximise the natural wealth of the Caribbean. Giorgio Agamben, Italian philosopher, discussed the significant concept of 'inclusive exclusion' that addresses *how* and *why* specific bodies are deprived and reduced to a corporeal existence that was always exposed to potential state killing. Caribbean islands have always been identified as a *chronotope* where biopolitical devices such as reification, torture, animalization, and ethnic rape have been explicitly utilised. Biopolitics offers the paradigm for evaluating a person or group of people positioned on the fringes of mainstream society and their existence is a labyrinth of degradation; while they remain on the periphery of prosperity and materialism, they are active participants in the process of production. Agamben focused on the excluded people in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and the *homo sacer* or the figure of sacred man is a representation of an archaic legal practice from Rome that allowed the killing of a person with impunity. This was possible because the *homo sacer* was located outside the legal and political structure of society and was reduced to a mere physical body. This figure of isolated 'bare life' or *zoē* is differentiated from the figure of *bios* that constitutes political existence, resulting in Agamben's *homo sacer* who is stripped of all legal rights and privileges, practiced upon the Holocaust victims, slaves, and modern political refugees. Agamben also discusses 'the state of exception' which was practiced within 'the camp' and can be extended to the Caribbean islands which were transformed into a modern biopolitical camp. The marginalised subject creates a triad matrix— association, exclusion, and subordination— but ceases to exist outside their political engulfment. Once these bodies are entirely engulfed in the power operations, they can be easily positioned outside the universal scope of justice. The "other" is brought into existence only through a forged engagement within a circuit of power, excluded from exercising power despite being "discovered" by and for operations of power. This "other" participates in the operations of generating capital in "zones of exception", and occupies a subordinate state of existence. Agamben's

concepts of ‘bare life’ and the general paradigm of biopolitics offer a crucial understanding of the intricacies and interconnections of race and brutality in historical, anthropological, and fictional works on coolies. Biopolitics implements patterns of dehumanization at the global level in addition to the strategic formation of ethnoclass hierarchy within the plantation colonies. Using the tools of biopolitics, plantocracy regimes emphasizes *how* and *why* bodies were manipulated, transported, exploited, forced to reproduce, and eventually discarded.

The plantation enclave was easily able to regulate the workers with the help of the effectively structured class system and centralized operation. One of the most striking points of difference between the old and new plantation systems is the transformation of the estate into a modern housing system in the latter. Although the indentured labourers had the right to free movement with a valid pass, they were restricted within their respective estates because “[t]he estate manager provided an estate grocery shop and/or a weekly market, creche, place of worship, toddy shop” (Reddock 1998, 9). These provisions were presented as ‘welfare’ ventures; they created a “psychological dependence” of the workers towards the estate owners and managers while the latter were able to form a stable workforce and establish a more intense vigilance. Despite reformative changes and strict regulatory laws implemented to facilitate better working conditions for the indentured labourers, most indentees experienced an acute degradation and frequently rose in rebellions against “British men who fought in the second world war… they still behaved as if they were in prison camps, only this time they were the ruling army and the sugar workers were the prisoners, that there was some kind of revenge or sickness in the way they overseered the plantation” (Shinebourne, 79). With the British government exercising severe torment on colonized India, registering as an indentured labourer further validated their sub-human status as, from that moment onwards, they were completely at the mercy of their British masters. The illiterate and vulnerable people had no knowledge of the *girmit* they were legally bound by, the destination they were taken to, or the kind of labour they would have to perform; they had no psychological or corporeal grasp over their future. During her time on the upper deck, Deeda often found herself outside the wheelhouse of the vessel fascinated to watch a white man steering the large wooden wheel and “think about how the whole boat and all of us were in that man’s hands” (Jahajin, 55).

1.1.7 Caliban Shall Conquer

Shinebourne is able to give voice to the displaced community through the introspective dialogues of the feisty protagonist who becomes a spirited campaigner for the rights of coolies. On her first day at school, the headmaster's morning speech turns out to be coloured with colonial prejudice against African and Indian labourers, the mentally challenged, and people in correction homes. Though the headmaster, Mr. Singh, is of Indian origin, he considers the Indians belonging from an inferior social order as the wretched creatures who deserve strict governing and completely dissociates himself from them. Mr. Singh's belief is centred on Fanonian mimicry that enables his ambivalent nature which June is quick is recognize and condemn: "He spoke as if labourers did not work hard, were labourers because they were laggards and idlers" (Shinebourne, 58). He bespeaks the internalization of the stereotypical ideology of biological inferiority of the colonized and naturally requires enlightening from the White man (Mehta 2004, 53). The hybrid environment of the Caribbean is rife with layers of ambivalence and 'otherization'. The most disfigured embodiment of cultural imperialism in *The Last English Plantation* is June's mother, Lucille. She is, now, a devout Anglican and feels a sense of estrangement from her neighbours as well as her husband and daughter, who do not identify with Christianity. These mimic characters epitomize centuries of colonialism and the imposition of a prejudiced hierarchy resulting in a hybrid nature. What they fail to realize is that mimicry will remain a duplicate that will never earn acceptance in the world they aspire to be a part of. Lucille symbolizes perverse conditioning and enforces it upon her husband and June, who is able to eschew the cultural cleansing. She goes to great lengths to purge the coolie temperament and village upbringing of June by trying to transform her into a town girl. She constantly badgers her husband to renovate their house and install a chamber pot in their lavatory which is beyond their financial means. The unquestioning allegiance to an adopted Western culture prevents her from realizing the doomed attempt of lampooning Western materialism. Ultimately, she is alienated from the colonized people as well as the colonizer. The most striking demonstration of her mimicry is evident in her compulsion to speak

"proper English" and her usage of anglicised names which shall be discussed in a later chapter.

David Dabydeen exposes layers of ethnic and racialized inferiority complex in *The Intended*. The novel builds on the idea put forward by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* indicating a permanent rupture in social relationships ensuing from colonialism. Apart from the demeaning relationship with the whites, Indians also had to endure the hatred of the Africans on the island. Firstly, the blacks were jealous of the Indian labour groups because they seemed to possess a more attractive physical appearance which, naturally, piqued a racist response from the black people. In addition to this racist tension, the newly emancipated black community across the Caribbean deemed the Indian indentees supporting the British Empire in sustaining the status quo of the capitalist plantation system in the post-abolition society. In London, the narrator's school friends are considered a "regrouping of the Asian diaspora in a South London schoolyard", but share no resemblance, other than the "brownness" of their skin (Intended, 8). In his initial years, the anonymous protagonist used to travel back and forth from school with Nasim, who was of Pakistani origin. When Nasim was attacked by a group of European boys from school, the narrator felt humiliated to be associated with him "because he reminded us of our own weakness, our own fear" (Intended, 15) and he wished to become invisible in the presence of his Asian friends. However, later, while traveling with a group of African youths on a bus, he wants to align with his Indian heritage, as he ponders: "No wonder they're treated like animals, I heard myself thinking, distancing myself from all this noisy West Indian-ness, and feeling sympathy for the outnumbered whites. They should send them back home. All they do is dance and breed" (Intended, 125). The narrator conveniently chooses to concede or divorce himself from his native culture, considering the surrounding milieu, under the influence of his Euro-centric education and aspiration. Through the course of the novel, which is a *bildungsroman*, the narrator gradually comes to realise that race is nothing more than an imperialist construct, which is a fluid phenomenon, as understood by his own shifting diasporic status; from being threatened by Afro-Guyanese violence to being marginalised by the British population, yet cast on a higher position as an Asian over Africans in the social hierarchy. The explicit focus is on the narrator's attempt to assimilate the two diverse cultures, in order to secure a

scholarship in Oxford, become a famous writer, and marry a respectable white woman. However, this theme undermines the irony and politicization of the protagonist's desire to become "somebody" by revealing the racial discourse in the White Man's institution which gives access to only token members of the colonized minority. The narrator's attempt to jettison his indentured history is reconstructed by his retrospective visitations to his shameful past in the village of Guyana and the slums of Balham he currently resides in. Hence, the novel posits itself as a postcolonial text rather than a postulant of the British canon, as it gradually shows the indentured immigrant's struggle to reject the imperialist norms. This subversion is adopted through the education acquired in the Empire's premier institution, Oxford University. A similar desire for invisibility was felt by him around Joseph, a Rastafarian. Unlike their other friends, Shaz and Patel, who were making a living from ignoble means, the narrator and Joseph wanted to become "somebody". Though, the means to become "somebody" (Intended, 141) differed; the narrator opted for the British literary canon, following Auntie Clarice's advice to "tek education… and pass plenty exam and work hard and get good job" (31), while Joseph chooses a stolen video camera, which is a different form of a book for him. However, both of them chose to strive for intellectual and artistic forms of power, Joseph intends to shoot a film based on Africa by re-creating Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Inevitably, his artistic expression to find a place in the cultural space of the Eurocentric world is suppressed. The imperialistic society has an ingenious way of pigeonholing the Black man in an established framework that will safeguard the norms and conventions of the imperialistic world order.

The other two Asian friends, Patel and Shaz, choose to walk down the path of illicit trade and capitalize on the subversive outlet of the so-called superior civilisation, dealing in drugs, pornography, and prostitution. They chose a form of survival based on materialistic power, instead of symbolic power and refused to cater to the strict framework provided by the British power structure. Ultimately, all of them were a form of Caliban trying to repossess Prospero's books in order to regain power. The non-British characters are characteristically deformed due to the discrimination and marginalization that they are subjected to. Hence, no matter how much Joseph tries to integrate with his Asian friends or works to carve out a place for himself among the whites, eventually, he is faced with the fact that he belongs to

the "other" exploitable and subaltern mass of people. Trapped in an adverse existence, he sets himself on fire in order to release himself from the abominable condition:

> "He stopped being a coon when he poured oil over himself and set light to the wick of himself, the flames letting me see how he was purifying himself of all the shame and desire by burning off his black skin, once and for all cracking and peeling it off, so that when the fire died there was mostly molten flesh, meat that could have been that of a white man, or an animal" (Intended, 140).

Colonial stratification devised a method of ascribing the lower ethnoclass communities, namely, blacks and Asians, with animal etymology; calling groups of people with animal names is another biopolitical device of reducing the status of these people, both legally and psychologically. Europeans have shown a fetish for minimizing non-white populations by naming or categorizing them as non-human entities, creating a power structure in which non-white groups are constantly reminded of their subaltern position. The disparity between the white people and the growing number of non-white workers in the plantation society calls for a way to psychologically control the latter group by inferiorizing their agency which makes the white population the dominant group. The manner of dying by burning, instead of cremation, reflects his final attempt to show the narrator, Shaz, and Patel that he was one of them, and once again echoing Auntie Clarice's words, "you is we" (Intended, 32). Joseph finds a self-immolating liberation by following an end like Conrad's Kurtz who becomes nothing more than a black man, a mere remnant of "atoms". The *bios* naturally form a community based on common social qualities but Agamben states that the 'bare life' has a greater potential of belonging and forming a community because they are stripped of all the social and political properties that emerge as a stronger collective quality. There is no monopoly on the trauma of transatlantic crossing and this shared suffering by the non-white groups of people demonstrates shared victimization within the transatlantic capitalist system that challenges the attempt of reducing human life and bond to mere monetary value. Joseph manifests the pure potential of belonging to an imagined community including his Asian friends, firstly, by immolating his corporeal body, thereby

purifying his soul as believed by Hindu Indians, and secondly, his dying is a form of resisting centuries of colonial killing by relinquishing his clothes, skin, and his will to survive, similar to the death of Jews in concentration camps. The narrator's repulsion towards Joseph after his death is rendered by his Oxford education and poses the danger of forgetting his history, his people, and belonging. He does not want to remain an "eternal, indefinite immigrant" and believes that the key to success is "to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status, to shape them into craftsmanship of English china … English anything" (Intended, 141). The narrator is determined to leave behind all remnants of his nativity in the Asian slums of London suburbs, thinking, "I will grow strong in this library, this cocoon, I will absorb its nutrients of quiet scholarship, I will emerge from it and be somebody, some recognisable shape, not a lump of aborted, anonymous flesh" (Intended, 141). However, educational institutions have their own methods of accepting or disowning minority bodies and destroying alternate ways of thinking. Consequently, these institutions function as a microcosm of the British Empire in a postmodern era and act as a flag-bearer of a neoliberal institution; one that promotes and fortifies the social binaries and maintains the politics of access, inclusion, and social mobility. Dabydeen recognizes the recent practice of decolonizing the education system with the help of inclusive pedagogy and the study of Commonwealth literature. Nonetheless, the violence and isolation encountered by members of coloured communities, in order to gain a rite of passage into the elite institutions, cannot be discounted by the token offerings. These mimic characters reveal signs of "epidermalization of inferiority" (Fanon 1967) due to the pre-existing codes of civilization and an imposed refashioning according to imperial subjectivities. They hold on to a future that may somehow stabilize the scales of sacrifices made in order to gain inclusion and recognition of being a civilized human. In fact, the glorification ascribed to the process of assimilation is often acutely rendered. The consequences of colonialism and imperial capitalism have pushed the abject populations to an ingratiating position.

1.2 King Sugar

1.2.1 Genesis of Cane Sugar

> It seemed strange to me that our village was known as a sugar cane village because the fields of cane were on the periphery, across from the main road. The village itself had turned it back on the cane, choosing to face the bamboo forest and the winding Solitude River (Jouvert, 28).

Indians in the Caribbean islands have always been associated with sugarcane because their presence is bound to cane cultivation. The genesis and growth of Indians are intimately connected with the cultivation of sugarcane, extraction of cane juice, production of sugar granules, and the rise of sugar agronomy. Despite the declining significance of Caribbean sugar industry and the active efforts of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora to obliterate or move beyond their sugarcane heritage, cane cultivation cannot be disassociated from the Indian legacy. The dehumanization and deprivation of African, West Indian, Chinese, and Indian populations are chained to the predominance of sugar throughout European imperialism. Sugarcane was mainly driven by high monetary yield across the European market. Sugar cultivation required new land and labour so the plantation economies imported Chinese and South Asian labourers that allowed European autocracy to thrive until they realized "Sugar King has become pauper" (Jumbie Bird, 29). The British Empire was built on the backs of tropical goods cultivation that included cotton, cocoa, rubber, tobacco, tea, and sugar. The history of cultivation and importation of sugar is directly connected with the colonial economic and political structure. Sugar had been cultivated in the Mediterranean for centuries and was only known to Palestine before finding a place on the tables of upper-class English society. The introduction of sugar to the British bourgeoisie society created a 'first world' tradition of tea consumption by depleting the 'third world' resources that created nefarious power dynamics. Europe amassed enormous wealth through the monoculture of sugar in the Caribbean islands and changed the course of the world economy which reflects a strong link between sugar and mercantilism. British government lured Indian and Chinese labouring forces towards the Caribbean sugar islands with better economic prospects while the profits were unilaterally directed towards the European

bourgeoisie. Once the English nobility and wealthy class developed a habitual obsession with sugar since the mid-1600s, we find sugar being featured in their diet as well as medicine and controlling ranks and status. Sugar remained inaccessible to the less privileged people for centuries since it had been particularly associated with the upper echelons of English society. Before sugar became a part of the daily diet of every working-class family around the globe in 1900, Great Britain consumed sugar exclusively in their tea, sweets, biscuits, and jam. Since 1900, non-Western people have consumed sugar in large quantities as sugar is a great source of energy required for laborious tasks.

Nutritionists and cultural studies agree that the dietary preferences of human groups have been socially driven, rather than biologically because humans are essentially "social beings". Therefore, any non-toxic edible food can become a part of the human diet if it is thought to be "good". Most sedentary civilisations throughout history have domestically cultivated and developed around a specific complex carbohydrate including wheat, potato, rice, whole grains, and legumes. Starch-based agricultural civilisations followed a calendar year in alignment with the agri-temporality and have always found ways to convert complex carbohydrates into sugars that provide the required nourishment to their bodies. This dependence on domestic starch naturally makes it a primary element of their diet, shoving other nutritive essentials and flavouring supplements into secondary status. The rise in sugar intake is also an "unnatural" process because sugar was not native to Western nations, yet the consumption pattern forced sugarcane to get supplanted and domesticated to the Caribbean islands. This purposeful cultivation further increased the appetite, demand, and supply of sugar to the European population. Several carbohydrate and sugar research have also concluded that humans have an in-built preference for sweetness. This inborn predisposition for sucrose certainly resulted in agro-colonialism and it will not be entirely incorrect to use the term "agro-terrorism" to describe the experiences of non-Western people. Groups or communities of people with no sugar-eating tradition have been noted to incorporate sugar in their diet in a short passage of time, possibly due to the diffusion of stimulants. This argument can be further substantiated with the help of our primate fruit-eating ancestors and an infant's sine qua non of human milk or glucose. Our arboreal ancestors and early humans derived sweetness from fruits and honey followed by cane sugar that

enriched Western palettes and coffers for over the last five hundred years. The temperate crop, sugar beet, challenged the primacy of cane sugar and eventually lost the battle to high-fructose corn sweeteners.

Cane sugar originated in Southeast Asia where the sugarcane was domesticated and the juice was extracted during the 4,000 BC, while many research suggests 8,000 BC, and the process of turning cane juice into sugar granules dates back to almost 2,000 years. Sidney Mintz claims that sugar references are found in ancient Sanskrit Indian literature dating back to the second century BC, in *Sweetness and Power,* which mentions sugary food items like rice pudding and fermented drinks. Sugar is easily one of the oldest commodities that has been meticulously documented. Unlike beetroot plants, this tropical grass perennially grows 10 to 12 feet above ground, i.e. it does not require annual replanting. The sugarcane stalk, that holds the juice, is simply cut above its root which grows new sprouts every 10 or 12 months. While sweetness was derived from chewing the cane, in Polynesia and Micronesia, for a long time, Europeans acquired this "white gold" from the eleventh century Crusaders who brought back sugar from the Holy Land. The Arab expansion towards the West brought the Europeans in close proximity to sugar during the Abbasid Caliphate and the advanced Arab technology augmented the process of sugar-making. However, cane cultivation encountered several practical hindrances in the Mediterranean— tropical and subtropical climatic conditions, proper irrigation, adequate rain, swift and skilled cutting and crushing— Europeans were able to overcome, both, the labour and agri-environmental factors. Mintz also suggests that the employment of enslaved and waged labourers proved to be the trick to achieving success:

> The sugar industries in the Spanish and Portugese Atlantic islands were characterized by slave labor, a tradition supposedly transferred from the Mediterranean sugar plantation of the Arabs and Crusaders. But the Spanish scholar Fernández-Armesto tells us that the striking feature of the Canarian industry was its use of both free and enslaved labor, a combination that resembled more the pioneering mixed-labor systems of a later era: the seventeenth-century British and French Caribbean plantations, on which enslaved and indentured laborers

> would work alongside one another. Slaves were decidedly important, perhaps crucial; but a substantial amount of the labor was actually done by free wage earners paid partly in kind — some of them specialists, others temporary laborers. This system was probably not quite so atypical as it seems. But it is true that free wage earners hardly figure in sugar's history between the Atlantic island phase and the epoch of revolution and emancipation in the New World, from the start of the Haitian Revolution until emancipation in Brazil (Mintz, 32).

The earliest recipe including sugar dates back to 1069 in a book found in London when sugar was scarce and was not locally consumed. Since sweetness was not characteristic in European cuisine, it is easily assumable that the English did not possess a "sweet tooth" until recently as opposed to Southeast Asian palettes that were more mature with a larger taste taxonomy including bitterness, saltiness, sourness, sweetness, and piquancy. This tropical grass could only be enjoyed by the elite classes in Western nations and was predominantly used to heal wounds and treat stomach ailments. The barbaric events that ensued from the clamorous demand, astronomical production, and mass commodification of sugar could not be foreseen even after Christopher Columbus brought sugarcane stalks from the Spanish Canary, some of them specialists, others temporary lab Islands to Haiti during his second voyage in 1493. Refined sugar was called "white gold" and rightly so, since it was a luxury commodity, largely exchanged as a gift among the wealthy or a bribe for trade relations. Sugar production involved insurmountable barriers including backbreaking labour, dangerous tasks, continuous water supply, humid weather conditions, and overseas transportation services. Sugarcane is a cumbersome crop and since time immemorial, it had to be cultivated manually; sowing, cutting, and instantaneously crushed to release maximum juice. Any delay in extracting the juice will result in desiccation or decaying of the cane. As a result, Europeans planted enslaved labourers for this unsparing toil with no choice of opting out. Before industrialisation, labourers worked continuously with minimal breaks because harvest time called for chopping hoards of wood to boil the cane juice, reducing the molasses, and eventually granulating the sugar syrup. For thousands of years, this labour-intensive product was accessible only to the elite as a sweetener and

medicinal glaze. The fascination and demand for sugar among Western nations introduced slavery on an enormous scale and began a chain-reaction that changed the world in that no empire, ruler, war, or watershed event could imagine or effectuate.

Columbus carried sugarcane plants to the Dominican Republic during his second expedition to find gold, therefore, the "white gold" remained neglected for the next three hundred years. He simply wanted to experiment with the cultivation of this exotic plant in a tropical condition and failed to recognise the demand and value of cane sugar. However, others transplanted sugarcane in the mid-1500s popularised and relatively made sugar affordable to Europeans in the mid-1700s. Jesuit priests were the first to plant cane stalks in the colonies in around 1751 with little imagination that cane cultivation would escalate into a multi-billion dollar industry for Europeans, an exilic condition for Indians, and a malediction for Africans. The British, in particular, abutted their finances in the North American colonies which first started in the 1720s when the port of New York received and dispatched periodic consignments of enslaved people, sugar, shipbuilding supplies, and numerous other provisions. The Trinity Church, a five-storied sugar warehouse, and a thronging slave market are evidence of the successful triangular trade among Europe, America, and Africa. Imperial laws were created that reinforced trading regulations and relentless acquisition of Caribbean land increased the demand and supply flow of sugar from the Caribbean sugar cultivar. Sugar ceased to be a luxury product accessible only to wealthy English people. More importantly, Englishmen discovered the tantalising effect of adding sugar to daily meals rather than just a deluxe gift, glaze, ritualistic delicacy, and medicinal substance. The plethora of relished modern-day English desserts is evidence of the tremendous ingestion and complete subsuming of sugar by English people. One of the most damaging consequences of the triangular trading relation between England, Africa, and the New World was the (mal)treatment of non-Western bodies as commodities. Commodification and dehumanisation of humans were instrumental to the production of sugar because they not only helped in the creation of wealth but were also vital commodities of value themselves. Soon, the Caribbean sugar plantation exploded under the technical proficiency of the Spanish and French planters and the wringing exploitation of enslaved labourers. In *The Last English Plantation*, June is enraged when Indians are ridiculed and she strongly feels that "people who mocked

the poor in this country should remember that they made it prosper through their labour; no one would be interested in British Guiana if it did not produce sugar" (Shinebourne, 71). The growing racial and political unrest across the West Indies as beet sugar started gaining prominence over cane sugar, the Indians felt trapped and forgotten by the former European masters and disparaged by the African and Creole population. But the Indian indentured labourers were brought in to save the global significance of the Caribbean sugar industry and their contribution remained grossly undermined. Once the Caribbean was established to be more suitable for cane cultivation and a newfound trading hub, more French merchants, planters, and investors streaming into Louisiana that supplied a staggering twenty-five percent of the world's cane sugar over a span of five decades. Louisiana became the second-wealthiest state and owned the largest population of enslaved people during the antebellum years which led to King Sugar surpassing King Cotton. However, the round-the-clock work and grueling task induced a higher death rate than the birth rate. The increased number of incoming European planters took no rectification measures, but rather brought in more enslaved people. British-controlled world market, international sugar treaties, quotas, and Sugar Protocols of the Lomé Convention were vital in keeping the Caribbean sugar industry extant despite the grim future. With a gradual shortage of labourers during the World War II, plantation owners entreated mechanisation to sustain the status of King Sugar, especially when they started facing stiff competition from beet sugar. Successively, both, cane sugar and beet sugar were elbowed from the sweetener market by high-fructose corn syrup that gained quick popularity. Despite other sources of sweeteners, cane sugar remains the most efficient and economically advantageous cultivar in the modern world. Sugarcane produces enormous quantities of ingestible sugar per unit of land in appropriate climatic zones and the refused cane or bagasse is repurposed as fuel, furfural (colourless liquid to manufacture resin and nylon), and raw material for construction and paper products. Calculations show the remarkable calorie suffused in sugarcane that is not only a necessity but a strong hominid predisposition. The peculiar versatility of sucrose has sustained the Caribbean sugar bowl since European mercantile colonialism to the present day.

Although the Spaniards were the first to kill, conquer, enslave, and establish plantation estates in various Caribbean islands, the English surpassed all other

colonial forces, both, in numbers and character. British Empire traded coffee, cacao, cotton, and nutmeg but sugar proved to be force majeure. This intractable journey of sugar at the production stage thrived with astonishing strides because Englishmen had conveniently received a handbook enumerating cultivation and production methods from the Arabs, Dutch, and Spanish. In due course, English mercantilist propaganda drove out all competitors, monopolising the production wing in the Caribbean sugar bowl as well as the distribution end across the European markets. The British government provided necessary support and protection to the sugar mercantilism in the British West Indies which is verily demonstrated in the rising consumption and demand to the point when the Caribbean plantocracy was unable to keep up with the demand of the mother country. Henceforth, mercantilism took a new direction away from serving solely the interests of the planters and mass-producing and distributing sugar to the working class of central Europe. The disciplined and mega-scale cultivation, granulation, and shipment of cane sugar were also immensely boosted by growing industrialism. While cultivation work was manually executed, factories employed a combined approach. The planters faced a major setback in the form of the abolition of slavery that inadvertently signaled the end of planters' protection and the beginning of free trading circuits. A total capsizal of trading routes and contenders, coupled with the emergence of beet sugar curtailed the significance of the Caribbean sugar bowl. Sugar was almost a mono-crop and the biggest export-income for the Caribbean islands till the early 1950s which witnessed a complete reversal by the 1970s. Thereafter the income value of sugar declined and it ceased to be a substantial economic figure. Despite the slump in export earnings, the production of sugar increased manifold in the Caribbean, and in a few islands, the tonnage production almost doubled. One major reason for this anomalous agro-economic pattern is that a sizeable land was still being utilised for sugarcane cultivation alongside a large number of the Caribbean labour force being directly employed in the existing sugar industry. As a result, there was barely any change in the domestic significance of sugar due to the prevalent cultivar and employment pattern despite the collapse of King Sugar which acted as a bulwark to the gross domestic income of the Caribbean. Although the sugar industry rapidly plummeted in the 1950s, leaving Caribbean sugar in a wretched condition, British-associated producers acquired privileges from the system of base price and the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement[6].

1.2.2 Multi-faceted Metaphor of Sugar

Sugar has brought unfathomable changes to geographical, ecological, and cultural terrains. With the transplantation of creole sugarcane, the European empires planted several non-native elements including colonial seeds in the New World that sprouted oppressive institutional offshoots. Mahabir characterises the unrestrained importation of exotic components in the Caribbean islands while depicting the former plantation town of Morne Solitude:

> At the turn of the eighteenth century some French planters fleeing the Haitian revolution came to Morne Solitude with their slaves. It was one of these planters who probably imported the ylang-ylang tree since it was the norm in Trinidad to unusual elements transplanted from different places and cultures. There were uprisings in Morne Solitude and the French planters disappeared. Morne Solitude then became a maroon village, a free space for where runaways and ex-slaves lived. Then, during indentureship, some British planters came to live in the abandoned plantation houses and the name of the village was changed to Mt. Stewart. Soon these British planters also disappeared, and the old name, Morne Solitude, lingered as did the maroon ambience of the village. In the way of marronage things were hidden, invisible. Histories preserved from the times of slavery and indentureship unfolded slowly, obliquely, in whispers (Jouvert, 28).

Sugar was used as a metaphor by Caribbean writers who wanted to unwrap the dark histories of sugar colonialism. It has significantly reshaped the literary landscape by evoking writers to conjure historical, social, and ancestral trauma of slavery and indentureship. Anti-colonial and postcolonial literature concerned with the metaphor of sugar, either as a backdrop or a foreground, reproduces the barbarity unleashed on the Caribbean topography by importing sugarcane, slaves, and indentured labourers. Fictional narratives are usually embedded in everyday life describing imaginative proceedings and acts as a stimulus to realise the reality beneath the fanciful narrative. Even the surrealist literary depiction cannot be

discarded as “escapist literature” because it is, both, grounded and emerges from iniquitous human operation. The metaphor of sugar is overarching and inevitable in anglophone, francophone, and Indo-Caribbean literature due to the genocidal agro-economy of the Caribbean. Novelistic representations of the significance of sugar instrumentalise the history and social milieu of the Caribbean that was created and operated with an autarkic vision. Indenture-related literature is mostly written by writers of Indo-Caribbean origin and many of these writers undertook a second migration to Canada or the UK. The multiple displacements of the writers are characteristic of the trading system during European colonialism when “migrant labour moved within the bounds of empire. A portion of the contracted Indian labor in the French West Indies, for instance, came from French India, a portion of the contracted Indian labor in the British West Indies came from British India, and so on” (Mintz, 71). Sugar metaphor lends itself to Caribbean literature as an agency to confront the modes and consequences of imperial exploitation perpetuated through Euro-American colonial control and capitalization of the Caribbean. Most indenture-related texts employ sugar imagery and express an anti-sugar stance because cane cultivation is considered as the original sin; sugarcane mutilated the West Indian culture, geopolitics, and flora and flora; enabled enslavement of Africans and prompted displacement and social degradation of the vast number of Asian people. Authors, historians, and scholars have concurred that sugar symbology presage colonial exploitation, mass victimisation, racial hierarchies, and engendered the impounding capitalist phenomenon.

> Sugar is a multi-faceted metaphor that expresses natural surroundings, fear of a human-created ‘nature’, historical memory, the island persona and an elemental force within its existence, human degradation and mystery, environmental despoliation, colonialism and its exploitations, property relations, market structures, access to the means of production, labor conditions, communal unity, potential for radical political change, and other features of Caribbean life not addresses here. The sugar metaphor even acts, inevitably, to condemn the meanings inherent in the existence of sugar itself (Lockard 1995, 97).

Sugar has been traditionally associated with sweetness, luxury, and energy but postcolonial understanding also conjures experiences of hegemony and suffering. Production and widespread circulation of sugar in various forms brought unimaginable changes in human culture, geographical spaces, and the global economy. Images of canefields evoke a sense of dread and pain engendered by the hierarchical system of plantation work. Horizon of canefield recaptures the trauma of middle passage and coolie history. The omnipresent nature of the fields of sugarcane in most of the narratives provides a physical and metaphorical environment that is constantly looming large over the human lives subsumed within it. The prevalence of the native triumphed despite the canefields getting pushed to the margins of settlements, villages, and towns. During times of upheaval and resistance, the narratives utilise the canefields as the epicentre of action that surrounds and the rising cane stalks engulfs the place and its inhabitants. Most writers come from a legacy that is characterised by the experience of cane-cutting and plantation life which compels them to emphasize the trope of bodily pain that, eventually, brings a sense of ownership over the land. Fields of sugarcane cause polarised reactions; on one hand, indentured people and others marked by indentured history find a direct and close relationship with the land they toiled on for years, and on the other hand, they feel deeply mortified by their coolie history and desperately try to sever all ties with the land. Images of the back-burning sun, the cane slashing their hands and foot, and the brittle stalks piercing through the skin can be perceived as the disembodiment of the labourers. Plantation work has visibly displaced and dismembered bodies as well as mutilated cultural values of Indian indentees and their descendants.

1.2.3 Image and Impact of Women within a Canefield

Female suffering is a recurring theme in the *kala pani* discourse because Caribbean women share a history of transatlantic journey to the colonial plantation and transform the Caribbean space through their labour and identity. The *kala pani* imaginary defines the feminist engagement with the Atlantic littorals and the centrality of history and socio-political issues in the representation of Caribbean society. The *kala pani* imaginary also explores the politics and interconnectedness of

labour and gender in an oppressive colonial system. The social relations and consequences explain the visual representation of the female labourer implanted in the cane field. Images of female workers cutting, tying, and carrying the cane relate to the struggles, and simultaneously, subvert gender roles. At the La Pastora High School, a popular dancer and choreographer, La Rosette was called from the Port of Spain to prepare a performance for Independence Day. The choreographer tried to present a stereotyped performance by making the girls

> "Cut Cane! Like this! Now bend, now walk with a bucket of water in your head, walk with a bundle on your back, a child, a bag of cocoa, walk with your heads up, proudly, proudly, peasant women, country women, cut cane! But the cane-cutter image did not work at all; we were stiff and unresponsive and all her appeals to ancestral pride ("This is you, my darlings! The Indian South!) met with nothing. Obviously we at La Pastora were done with cane cutting (Swinging Bridge, 68).

The Indian middle class was formed after the arrival of Presbyterian missionaries who alienated them from the indentured background through Christianisation and quasi-privileges. Literary and artistic representations of indentured women embedded in the cane fields yet excluded from the circuits of global economy assert the eminence of independent identities. Women's plantation experiences are deeply embedded in the global rise of Caribbean sugar and manifestly recognised through the female body. Female indentees suffered from deep cuts, scratches, and scars from cutting, tying, and carrying the cane stalks. Years after their indenture period, ex-women indentees still endured back aches while some endured permanent disfigurements like arched-back, bent hips, and deformed limbs. In most Caribbean literature, sugar is represented in its primal form with the presence of sharp edges and the heavy weight of the cane. Daily work in the canefields is closely supervised by the overseers and, although the whiplash was prohibited under indenture laws, the frequent ration and pay cuts along with elemental oppressive forces including, the sun, rain, and wind acted as supplements to the oppressors' power. Most of the migrant female indentees had no experience in cane-cutting while some belonged from a non-agricultural background, even upper class and caste belonging, similar to

"[t]he great-grandmother of the Guyanese poet Rajkumari Singh … Phuljharee was a woman of high status, the widow of a wealthy landowner and the daughter of a Brahmin priest. A recruiter promised to help her locate her relatives. Days later, she found herself in an emigration depot in Calcutta" (Coolie Woman, 38). Hence, female indentured workers had a more difficult experience in the canefields than their male counterparts. It can also be argued that female labour cannot be accurately assessed by capitalist yardsticks of investment, productivity, and profit since cane-cultivation involves physical, psychological, and sexual exploitation.

The White occupation not only exploited female labour, but deprecated the entire Indian labour in the Caribbean canefields. The Presbyterian missionaries re-appropriated the hymns to send a subliminal message to the Indian converts who attended Sunday sermons where "[t]he Canadian missionaries and their wives sat in special pews at the front … Our hearts flew up to heaven, and all the soot and flying dust of burning cane vanished into the smoke fires of hell while we ascended skywards, washed in the blood of lamb" (Swinging Bridge, 30). The sermons indoctrinate Indo-Caribbeans about their subordinate eternal place in "the smoke fires of hell" and simultaneously, devalue the indentured experience claiming they will find heavenly abode after the "soot and flying dust of burning cane vanished". The canefield epitomises the intimate relationship between the coolies and the soil, simultaneously, necessitating the desperate distancing because it also embodies the subaltern position of the labourers. Time and again, Indians settle away from the canefields and former indentees and their lineage try to move away from cane work because of the shame and exploitation attached to it. Indo-Caribbean people are seen sharing communal shame related to cane labour over generations is enunciated by Nayan Prakash, in *Valmiki's Daughter*, who has recently returned to Trinidad from Canada after completing his university education. Nayan claims that Canadians, Americans, and Europeans do not have regard for Indo-Caribbeans:

> we the sugar-cane and cacao Indians, those of us from Trinidad, Guyana … we are poor, poor, poor copies of an original that no longer exists … We have nothing of our making — no style, no art or culture — to show for ourselves … after losing the language, after watering down the culture, the religion, we're groping, still shy of becoming

> Trinidadian … We are not properly Indian, and don't know how to be Trinidadian. We are nothing (Valmiki, 307).

This fragile and self-deracinating identity of the Indo-Caribbeans explicitly shows the disintegration of cultural, ethnic, and national identification. When the protagonist of *The Intended*, Shakti in *The Worlds Within Her*, Kamla in *Butterfly in the Wind*, and Mona in *The Swinging Bridge* make a conscious move to distance themselves from their cane ancestry and undertake a second migration to the UK, US, or Canada which calls out attention to their latent desire to flee their relationship with sugar and soil. The community wish to divorce their cane history primarily because, other than sugar and other by-products, cane also produced xenophobia, trauma, and displacement anxiety. The corporeal and psychological scars left by plantation work are so deep that they are embedded in the diasporic psyche. The canefields also act as a site of rebellion on numerous occasions taking on several symbolic meanings. Sookdeo takes revenge for his fiancée's molestation by Overseer Johnson by setting fire to his house and the plantation in *The Last English Plantation*. Shinebourne symbolically inscribes rebellion on the canefield and re-appropriates this geographical site as a postcolonial space of resistance.

The imagery of miles of sugarcane fields stretching beyond the horizon in Caribbean literature carries a sense of endlessness on a spatio-temporal domain. Several of the novels have a common theme of sugar where the backdrop of the sugarcane fields predominates the characters throughout the narrative. Persaud's *Raise the Lanterns High* is set in 1960s Trinidad but Vasti's life is driven by the horrific rape she witnessed in the cane fields when she was a twelve-year-old. As Vasti cycles through the cane field on her way home from school on a scorching afternoon, Persaud orchestrates the seminal incident from a bottom-up frame, very close to the ground that gives a claustrophobic feeling. Moreover, Vasti witnesses the crime through her binoculars that give her and the readers a close-up, creating a stifling image amid the long stalks of cane: "A lizard rushed past. A crapaud with throbbing throat sheltered in the long grass. I quickly raised my skirt before him, cooled my thighs, flapping this contrived cloth fan. Then I looked around, sitting as quietly as I could under an overhanging branch. For a while I enjoyed the solitude, listening to the buzzing of tiny wings and leaves falling behind me. Then I heard a

sound … Focusing my new binoculars, I saw a young girl, my own age … His ringed finger pressed against her breast. The reddish gold sparkled intermittently with the swaying sugar-cane stems" (Lanterns, 7-8). The rape of another schoolgirl in the fields of sugarcane, by the man she was to marry later, became an omnipresent event in her life, looming large, both physically and metaphorically. By making the canefields a significant mise-en-place, the cane stalks simulate a penitentiary that situated cultural and sexual violence against Indo-Caribbean women. The canefields, simultaneously, witness and hide the ritualised violence to the extent that the canefields are identified as an embodiment of systemic abuse and female sufferance. Contemporary feminists and female Caribbean writers have emphatically documented the despoilment, silencing, and suicides of women amid the cane stalks that, both, imprison and debar them from the outside world. Vasti expresses relief at not seeing the face of the girl signifies silent inaction and willing blindness. She makes an excuse that "[her] witness to her undoing would be a shame too great for her to bear. A thought jolted me: She may see suicide as a necessary escape from my knowing" (Lanterns, 8). The onus of all violations is eventually borne by the women whereas, the witnesses and the "sugared stems" conveniently feign ignorance or conceal it within the (agri)cultural ambit. The canefields play an active role in the life of the plantation settlers which, incidentally, may or may not be positive. While some plantation settlers experience severe abuse and trauma in the canefields, most others find a sense of solace. The canefields act as a congregational ground for the *jahajis* where estate villagers assemble to discuss important issues, address community affairs, or have clandestine meetings. When villagers face disputes, "She [Nurse Nathaniel] and Nani Dharmadai were always called upon to help settle family crises in Canefields" (Shinebourne 1988, 37).

1.2.4 A Diabolic Aftertaste

Sugar was an elemental and incomprehensible force that governed the Caribbean sugar-growing districts. Sugar acted as a brutal parental control that produced, sustained as well as ended lives. The monocropping of sugarcane eradicated indigenous populations and changed the land properties and the environment in the West Indies. Human appearances were also transformed and left

incapacitated much like Kale Khan's hands "that gripped the hoe and swung the cutlass on the sugar-cane plantations and had come to look like the earth itself" (Jumbie Bird, 43). In order to avoid or abate lacerations, an old-timer, Beharry, made the new indentees bake their hands near a small wood fire after applying some salt and *karwa teil* (mustard oil). Such homely precautions were taken to toughen the skin and protect their hands from blisters and getting cut during crop time. The relationship of the indentured labourers and their descendants with the land also kept changing over time. While the rural peasantry nurtured an obsession with sugar-growing land that divulges an attachment to the crop cultivated by generations of ancestors, the Indian diaspora mindfully kept their "evolved selves light years away from the sugar estates" (Jahajin, 95). There were also others who celebrated with their indentured ancestors and advocated the Caribbean sugar industry without which "no one would be interested in British Guiana if it did not produce sugar" (Shinebourne, 71). The canefields are emblematic of a site of resistance and postcolonial expression of rebellion. In *The Last English Plantation*, Sookdeo avenges the sexual abuse of his fiancée at the hands of Overseer Johnson by setting fire to his house and the largest sugarcane field in the village. The fields are symbolic of the close association between the coolies and the land that allowed the indentured labourers to re-write their history but also make desperate efforts to dissociate from the debasing subaltern position. The dethroning of "King Sugar" created new problems regarding the future of the role of sugar and the workers. June started questioning her identity after her school friend, Merle, told her that her father "used to own a sugar plantation but he gave it up. He says Europe will grow their sugar from beet and will have no use for West Indian sugar. He says we have to learn to do other things, not just grow sugar" (Shinebourne, 45). Quite suddenly June felt that her existence held no value as her resistance and acrimony towards the estate owners, managers, and overseers were rendered invalid. Only unravelling the ancestral connections allows the diaspora to see them beyond sugarcane labourers with real experiences rather than people without any agency. This further helps them recognize that the barriers between them and their ancestors were not entirely dismantled. The cane fields conceal several of the bigotries and oppressions still in practice in differing forms just the way it hid Vasti's secret knowledge of the rape. The impenetrable sugarcane fields are imbued with a sense of fear and mystery that pervades the sugar-growing littorals. Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*

also sketches the threatening fields that seem to be impregnated with a fear of the unknown, the wilderness, and the supernatural. The field regurgitates the corpse of a villager and "when he came out of the grave he knew that the birds were jumbies who were going to eat him inside the sugarcane fields, so he came out of the cane fields" (113). The image of the sugarcane fields that have been a source of sweetness to Europe contrasts sharply with the dark secrets, shameful acts, and centuries of colonial violence spanning Africa, the West Indies, China, and Southeast Asia.

Apart from the transgressive acts, the sugarcane fields have also produced large quantities of sugar, molasses, and rum since the pre-industrial times. Ironically, the sugarcane can be processed to make sugar as well as rum that is consumed, largely, by the labourers to overlook or endure the harsh conditions of the plantation work and the stark bleakness of their migrant life. A few estates gave sugar, molasses as well as rum to the indentured labourers as part of their rations. Sugar had ossified colonial exploitation and racial hierarchies that resulted in an unredeemable social degradation of the West Indian, Indian, Chinese, and African people. The study of sugar will take us far back into the history of human consumption and power dynamics, and provide answers to questions related to the rapid and continuous rise in demand over several centuries. The emergence of sugar as an important and later, as an essential commodity, will help us learn more about the relationships between colonies, planters, entrepreneurs, European consumers, hydrocolonialism, metropolitanism, and consumerism. The tardy prevalence of sugar and the reason behind it seems obscure due to the irregularities and lack of sufficient evidence in a historical context but the human preference for sweetness certainly reinforced the growing economy and military might of the Empire. The desire for sweetness increased the significance of sugarcane cultivation in the West Indies and fattened the English nobility, benefactors, entrepreneurs, and government. The entire cycle of sugarcane cultivation was homologous to the operation of the shipping industry and the movement of indentured workers, to and fro that Caribbean sugar industry:

> The soil was manured, the cane was planted, the fields were weeded, the cane was harvested, and then the cycle of nurturing and killing began again. The factory's machinery was never idle, crushing,

> boiling, fermenting, distilling, making sugar and rum, molasses, and bagasse. Boat-loads of new coolies arrived to clear new field or to replace those who succumbed to diseases. Many of them died rapidly of the same epidemics, but there was no shortage of ships from India to replenish the work gangs (Counting House, 65).

Sugar was, distinctly, the central figure of the entire trade system that governed the passage of humans and ships according to the need to maximise production with nominal investment value. Changes in global demand for sugar and the cultivation and industrial pattern of producing it dictated the requirement and replacement of instruments, both human workers and the machinery. Naturally, the means of transport also depended on the production pattern of sugar. Moreover, the shipping industry also experienced massive transformation during Industrial Revolution which affected the cargo aboard and the global enterprise.

1.3 Ships and Ports

1.3.1 Slave Ships versus Indenture Ships

British commercial agencies and planters took the initiative to import shipments of labourers from India. This large-scale routine shipment was organised and aided by the British colonial offices in India to ensure the steady supply of new breed of workers in the Caribbean sugar plantations. Planters and colonial administration suitably replaced the rebellious slave population with a ‘free’ but a more docile and dependent labour force in the island plantations. Thus, this labour trade between British colonies, India and Caribbean islands, materialised across the open waters from 1848 to 1917. From the nineteenth century, the cost of sea voyages started reducing and the speed started increasing which made it easier for European forces to tap into the resources of distant parts of the world. The increase in labour migration and world trade grew exponentially in the nineteenth century primarily due to advanced maritime trade. Maritime transportation underwent rapid transformation in the nineteenth century that further strengthened hydro-colonialism which was the cornerstone of European imperialism for centuries. The vessels increased in number, speed, and size. The former timber-made ships were quickly

replaced by all-iron vessels and made a huge impact on human trade and travel. Ships were a key piece in the entire mechanism of human trafficking, both slavery and indenture. Critics of indenture strengthened their arguments against the system by putting forth arguments regarding the abhorrent conditions on the ships during the long voyages. Indentured ships also transformed the political, economic, and social dimensions and exposed the power dynamics between the colonizer authorities and colonial subjects which made the ship an intensely charged space. Furthermore, the ships highlight a new form of colonial labour migration that discloses, both, colonial custody and care. Along with improvements in the shipping sector, food materials, and other provisions were also paid close attention and subject to frequent modifications. In relation to commodity culture and indentured ships, in her article, "(Re)moving Bodies: People, Ships and Other Commodities in the Coolie Trade from Calcutta", Nilanjana Deb asserts that "[t]he ship itself was the 'mega-commodity' essential for this trade, which in turn transported not only labourers but a wide range of goods needed to sustain coolies on the outward journeys and on the overseas plantation" (Deb 2018, 116). The planters grew desperate after their former chattels became reluctant to return to the plantations after the termination of the Apprenticeship in 1838 and they started importing East Indian labourers who worked for low wages. As Yasmin admires and romanticizes the Caribbean islands, Cyril in *The Worlds Within Her* explains the desperation and self-centredness of the Empire which not only decimated the Caribbean but turned it into a prototype of imperial brutality by saying, "'[t]hey say that from here you could o' watch the whole history of the island,' Cyril continues. 'Five hundred years ago you would o' seen Columbus sail across the bay. Then the Spanish treasure galleons goin' to and from South America. The raiders of one kind or another. French, Dutch, English. The traders. And the slaveships. For a very long time, the slaveships. And when the slavers stopped comin', other ships came, first with the Chinese and when they didn't work out, with our people'" (Bissoondath, 69). Yasmin's privileged position as a double diaspora is unsettled by her family members living in West Indies who are more closely connected to their indentured past and who still experience racial discrimination. Her understanding of her indentured past is based on the dominant discourse carefully studied from the vantage point of a First World citizen. Her deracination is exposed as she feels obfuscated on being countered by a more grounded and personal narrative of the quiet Indian boy, Ash, who lives with her

uncle, Cyril, and aunt, "I know where I belong, I know my people, I know my history. Our history. All the years of oppression … All that humiliatin' history. We have to get rid of it, you know. We still in chain … 'But as I understand it Indians were never slaves (Yasmin retorts) … Slaves. Indentured labourers. Is jus' a name, man" (Bissoondath, 236). The arrival of cheap time-bound labourers from the Indian subcontinent enabled the plantation owners to establish the monoculture of sugar and gain huge profits for a long time despite paying low wages for a large supply of indentured labourers that was replenished. Hence, immigration became crucial to curb the dramatically decreasing number of workers from 1838 till the late 1840s.

Admittedly, technological advancements in the shipping sector promoted better conditions than the slavers and in *Coolie Woman,* Bahadur affirms that "Indenture ships were not slave ships, of course. Coolie vessels were four to five times larger than slavers …. Indentured emigrants had to contend with the conditions aboard for far longer … between 1854 and 1864, the death rate on ships to Guiana was 8.54 percent, equal to that on slave ships in the final decades of the eighteenth century. But by the time my great-grandmother sailed, the mortality rate on most indenture ships had fallen to between 1 and 2 percent" (62). The coolie trade emerged as a huge success mainly because of the progressive changes in the ship-building industry that made the ships with better sails and lines that resulted in greater speed. The use of the prevalent clipper ships was terminated because it took almost six months to make a trip from the Indian subcontinent to Europe during the early 18th century. However, sailing ships made such trips with Indian coolies within a span of three months and from the 1870s, a voyage from China to Cuba through India was made in 125 to 110 days. This was a radical change in the indenture trade that managed to transport the coolies safely by reducing the sea journey and increasing the number of vessels travelling back and forth, "to clear new fields or to replace those who succumbed to diseases … but there was no shortage of ships from India to replenish the work gangs" (Counting House, 65). Government regulations also made maritime travel more bearable as compared to the slave trade. In the early period of indentured trade, each passenger had an average of 15 square feet and the decks had a space of approximately 5 feet divided in two-tiered berths. The rules for the indenture ships were made more thorough, looking into every minute detail, from

the 1870s. The space for the *jahajis* was less cramped with more space allotted to each passenger.

1.3.2 Colonial Maritime Industry

Ships were chartered in London or India every shipping season during the early phase of Indian emigration but with passing years, an increasing number was being chartered in London. There was a rule of ships being chartered separately during each season till the early 1870s, however, several British colonies including Trinidad and Guiana, and the Emigration of Commissioners started making short-term contracts with one shipping company after the sharp increase in the freight charges in 1874. The Liverpool firm named Sandbach Tinne and Company was awarded the contract from 1875 to 1878 and was succeeded by G.D. Tyser and Company for the following five years. There was intense competition between Sandbach Tinne and Company, James Nourse, and G.D. Tyser Company till 1888 to obtain the shipping contract. There was a complete turn of events as the contract was perpetually awarded to James Nourse since 1888 and the competition gradually disappeared as a number of their ships were employed by Nourse later. The Gladstone Experiment was launched with the Hesperus and the Whitby — the first two ships that sailed from Calcutta and arrived on fifth of May 1838. The next ship, Lord Hungerford, also left Calcutta and arrived in the Caribbean seven years later on fourth May 1845. Nestor was the first ship that left Madras and arrived on twenty-sixth December 1845. Martin Luther was the only ship in the early decades that made two consecutive voyages from Calcutta and Madras each in 1846. During the early years of indenture, the sailing ships that were employed were wooden vessels commonly made of teak. Soon James Nourse started building iron ships in 1861 which forced their rival company, Sandbach Tinne and Company, to follow suit and by 1880 the wooden vessels had been entirely replaced by iron sailing ships. Along with the phasing out of the wooden sail ships, there was a simultaneous changeover from sail to steamships. Despite suggestions of employing steamships in the 1860s for transporting coolies since it would be cost-efficient and significantly reduce the mortality rates, very few steamships crossed the *kala pani* with indentees until the development of high-efficient boilers that could compete with the fast clippers. Over

time, the size of the ships also increased since shipping firms realised that building larger ships was more economical. Thereafter, sailing ships carried 300 to 400 emigrants during the mid-nineteenth century and from the 1870s onwards, it was customary to transport 400 to 500 persons on the 1000 tons vessels. By the late 1880s, the heavier ships started carrying 500 to 600 emigrants and from the 1900s, over 600 persons were routinely transported in the 1400-1750 tons vessels and the number gradually touched 1000 emigrants after 1908. The indenture trade witnessed fewer yet heavier and larger vessels transporting a similar number of emigrants from India.

However, imperial governments provided subsidies to Europeans while non-Europeans were required to pay for their passage across the *kala pani*. For instance, the Portuguese were exempted from paying indenture costs to enter British Guiana unlike the Chinese and Indian migrants for the official reason that the Portuguese were not compelled into indentureship, revealing racial discrimination. Back in the homeland, caste was the pillar of the Indian social system, and "[i]t was a crime to cross the black water, the *kala pani*" (Swinging Bridge, 90). The point of departure, Garden Reach, was itself imbued with a history of mercantile colonialism that transformed the rich and luscious gardens which hosted decadent parties for the last Muslim emperors, into jute factories and dockyards, and eventually created a strong foothold for the British East India Company, succeeded by the transportation site for the largest human trafficking after the slave trade. The violation and disintegration of caste began at Garden Reach where the emigrants were sheltered together and the long and arduous stay in the docks before departure was itself a degrading and disparaging of Indian ways of life and sentiments:

> When they first arrived, the emigrants were stripped of their own clothes and given soap to wash in the Hooghly — again, side by side, the concerns of caste seemingly disappearing down the river, like the sacred thread that one migrant saw some high-caste Hindus discard the thread, called the *janew* … Brahmins probably knew they were unwanted. The word had gotten out: planters saw them as unfit for hard labour in the fields and, moreover, as a potential threat to their authority. Those bound for the West Indies were given new and

> unfamiliar clothes … One emigrant — who spent his final years back in India, in an ashram with Mahatma Gandhi, campaigning against indenture — remembered it this way: 'We were given prisoners' shirts, caps and pants to wear'" (Coolie Woman, 43-44)

The stationed emigrants in the dockyards can then be categorized as "border zone" which is used by Christopher Steiner to define "the liminal zone where everyone is status-less" (Steiner 2001, 209) and signifies "a sense of negotiation, arbitrariness, and liminality" (Steiner 209). The Chenab made voyages from Calcutta and Madras separately, and on one specific voyage carried immigrants from both Calcutta and Madras. During one such voyage, "*The Chenab,* was anchored in the Hooghly, another ship pulled in, bringing home Indians who had finished their indentures … From a distance, the repatriates shook their hands, gesturing for the emigrants not to go" (Coolie Woman, 49). This poignant incident manifests the "border zone" which is a "deterritorialized space, pregnant with possibilities, situated between two different cultural systems, where values and meanings are negotiated, transformed, and rearranged" (Steiner 2001, 209).

1.3.3 Hydro-politics

Most of the recruits belonged to the hinterlands of India, hence were largely land-locked people who had never seen the sea before. They experienced enforced interaction that broke down food and caste-based taboos simultaneously performing various menial tasks like cooking, pumping water, or cleaning decks. The umbilical cord between India and the *jahajis* was severed while the ship sailed away from the land and there have been accounts where "they conjured a scene of breast-beating and wailing as the ship embarked" (Coolie Woman, 49). In the *Jahajin,* the indentees resort to woeful singing of "Beeraha! The lament of the gareriya, the shepherd, migrating to look for work, leaving his family behind" (Jahajin, 63). This decisive moment of parting with Mother India has been narrated and documented in several forms by people experiencing it directly or indirectly and Deeda also "stifled a panic rising inside [her]" (Jahajin, 33) as she comes to realise that she "would live and die across the kala pani" (Jahajin, 33) because she is now an outcaste. There were

frequent incidents of mutiny on board the ships that led to violence and disruption in the pre-determined course of the journey. The merchant ship named Kate Hooper, travelling from Hong Kong to Cuba in the summer of 1857 saw the death of the captain and several crew members due to numerous revolts by the cargo that included over 600 indentured Chinese labourers because they were suspected of being taken to San Francisco instead of Havana, Cuba. The journey ended after the ship was set on fire and most of the remaining crew members became prisoners in Cuban jail. Bahadur also depicts another such incident that resulted in The Main deviating off course for five days by making an unexpected stop in the Mauritian islands while carrying Indian coolies to British Guiana. Ships carrying Chinese coolies witnessed regular and more violent revolts than the Indian indentured ships possibly because they were more submissive. Despite recurring measures to ensure a peaceful journey that would bring the *jahajis* safely to the sugar colonies, frequent interruptions occurred that led to the loss of life and property.

Spatial politics in the ship was rigid and determined the allocation of living quarters among the passengers. Indentured labourers occupied the ship's hold which was a cargo compartment because they were considered and treated as "cargo". The hold was the middle part of the vessel that suggests the tightly-corked space bound to be stuffy and unventilated. The crew members lived near the equipment zone before the mast, whereas, the Captain and his officers lodged in the poop deck that was the largest and most open space of the vessel. Movements within the space of the space were also racially determined as the movement of indentured labourers and all non-white bodies were severely restricted and acutely supervised. On the other hand, the White passengers enjoyed a relatively free and unsupervised voyage. In *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from Indian to the Caribbean*, Shepherd mentions that "repeats" — indentured labourers who re-indentured for a second or third term — were allowed more authority and access by the Captain and other special officers, possibly, because they could speak English and had better knowledge of the rules aboard and abroad. The indentured labourers were a part of the shipment on board and the living quarters on these cargo ships were intolerable for people who were unacquainted with extended sea journeys. The ships commonly transported rice and salt that made the decks sweat and stuffy when it was turned into sleeping decks in another voyage. One of the lower decks were partitioned with

iron net or bars into three compartments — “The single men’s quarters were in the front of the boat, under the main deck, the married couples’ quarters were behind that, and the single women’s quarters were in the back, below the poop deck and the main deck” (Jahajin, 53). The emigrants were afflicted the most by seasickness and the majority aboard were stricken with fever, dysentery, measles, mumps, or hookworm. James M. Laing’s *Handbook for Surgeons Superintendent in the Coolie Emigration Service* illustrates the significance of colonial medical personnel who supervised the well-being and health of the coolies throughout the journey since they were the high-priced cargo that facilitated the entire trade system. The government feared that the planters would refuse to accept or pay for the substandard *girmits* who became frail and waxen on arriving at Caribbean markets. One cargo of coolie that arrived in The Main looked so anaemic that they were kept hidden for almost 10 days during which time they were put on a cod liver oil, iron, and fatty diet that was detrimental to their health. Despite the gustemic efforts to beef up the emigrants, a hundred of them had to be taken to the nearest town for proper treatment and the remaining two hundred able-bodied *girmits* were sent to their allotted plantocracy but later discovered suffering from inflammation of spleens. Laing also speaks about emotional disorders and depression after the realisation of their future dawned upon them. Literature and historical interpretation describing the transoceanic crossings, firstly include the Indian Ocean followed by the Atlantic Ocean which is known as the Middle Passage, and the inhumane conditions aboard figure as a prime collective memory of modern migration. It can be easily assumed that once the slaves and *girmits* undertook the infamous transatlantic odyssey, they chose permanent exile over a return journey because of the horrific experiences left by the enforced transportation.

1.3.4 Medical Provisions

Surgeons aboard repeatedly suggested that indentured vessels should be exempted from transporting salt “but the practice persisted and emigrants continued to succumb to fever. And their stomachs often churned from unfamiliar, religiously forbidden, or spoiled food. The ship reports refer to putrefying pumpkins, potatoes past their prime, milk that had curdled, tins of mutton gone bad, dal infiltrated by dirt

and drinking water laced with rust and cement" (Coolie Woman, 62). The regular incursion of diseases was directly linked with dietary practices and provisions on board that compelled the Indian government to suspend emigration programs to the Mauritian island, at first. Later, the emigration to Trinidad was strictly regulated and subject to recurrent inquiry due to alarmingly high mortality rates. Records disclose that every inquiry and report showed a lack of awareness or cavalier disregard for the regular diets of the indentees. The Emigration Act V of 1837 provided a list of rations for the Indian labourers shipped out to curb the number of deaths while crossing the *kala pani*. This dietary scheme was revised in the following years of 1842 and 1843 to provide a better daily diet based on the demographics of the indentured labourers registered who predominantly belonged from the rural North Indian belt, especially Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Due to the periodic complaints from the plantation owners, who refused to buy or pay the full amount for the poor quality of *girmits* that arrived at Caribbean ports, colonial authorities were forced to pay more attention to the habitual diet patterns of the people. Accordingly, *choorah/chura* (parched rice) and *sattu/sattoo* (gram) were two of the most important additions to the ration list of ready-made food which were popular among the mobile peasants and people of Indo-Gangetic plains. *Sattu/sattoo* was especially essential for these people since it was heavy that put off hunger for longer hours and it was ready-made, requiring only plain water. Additionally, it was cheap and healthy. Since the indentees were accustomed to this food, the colonial authorities refrained from adding any new food to the diet provision list aboard as soon as they acknowledged that a habitual gastronomic pattern will inevitably result in better digestion and health. Moreover, the mental agony and melancholic state of leaving their family and home for a foreign land could be dispelled by maintaining similar culinary habits that would make them feel at home rather than just another commodity aboard. Consequently, several other provisions like "a pint of preserved milk was allowed daily, over and above the ordinary dietary allowance for every 'native mother' with a child at the breast … a stock of *suji* (cream of wheat), oatmeal, and arrowroot was added. Dr Moutat recommended that flour be added to the rations since he believed chapatis to be central to the diet of Bihar and Gorakhpur" (Kumar, 43). The ships also boarded live buffaloes and their milk was used to prepare tea. Although the registered indentees became quite diverse towards the later period of indenture, there was a predominance of North Indians that

eventually led to the inclusion of different kinds of *dhal/daal* or pulses including *urhur* (yellow pigeon peas), *moong* (split green gram), *urad* (split black gram), and various other kinds of peas, lentils or beans. According to the surgeons' orders they were sometimes given small treats of "imli, tamarind, or khataai, fried mango, in the dal, and given [them] raw onions and dried salt-fish with the food" (Jahajin, 54) to keep them in better physical and mental health.

The ship doctors also made suggestions of adding mutton to the provision list at least once a week but Munshi Rahman Khan writes in his autobiography, "[e]very fifteenth day, fresh sheep meat and rotis were given to [them]" (Khan, 83). He also emphasizes on the dizziness that made them vomit because of the tossing movement of the vessels during the beginning of the journey. However, the mutton led to occasional disputes between the indentees and the crew members because the Muslim labourers were doubtful regarding the process of butchering while the Hindus suspected the tinned mutton to be beef. Earlier, such resistance was thwarted by starving them but they soon relented when they realised that each coolie was worth more alive and healthy. Ultimately, the authorities started carrying live goats and animals on board to resolve the problem for the Hindus. The Muslim emigrants were also appeased as the goats were butchered in a halal way in their presence on the ships. This brought some amount of 'agency' with eating habits and food to the otherwise commodified subjects and the culinary practice of the indentured labourers is discussed in the latter part of this chapter where I have analysed the material culture of food in the context of the Indian coolies and their descendants in the Caribbean. The drinking water aboard was germ-laden and the sanitary conditions on the ships were abysmal. The jahajis were given a bar of soap and bathed once every week. The bathrooms, floors, and decks would be cleaned by *bhangis* (sweepers) every day and it was disinfected at intervals. They were made to exercise, run, and stretch on the deck from sunrise to sunset as well as the "animals were supposed to walk on the deck just like us, so that they wouldn't get sick without fresh air and exercise down below in the hold" (Jahajin, 54-55). Munshi Rahman Khan also emphasizes the complete collapse of caste on board which is mainly associated with intermingling during dining which was unavoidable. His description of the indenture system transforms the dockyard and ships into a 'casteless space' that reiterates Steiner's "border zone": "Till we reached at the depot, we had been allowed to cook

our own meals … everyone followed his own rituals and systems. One would wear the *janau* (sacred thread), a second *tikka* (sign on the forehead) and a third the *kanthi mala* made out of flowers ... They told us that after return in the depot we had to wear the government uniform and enter the camp … The b*rahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas* and others laughingly began to throw off their threads and necklaces into the river" (Khan, 77-78). Similarly, Mukoon Singh also took off his *pagri* (turban) as they lined up for inspection at the Trinidadian depot because he did not want to appear to be a "misfit".

Indian indentured labourers soon resigned and embraced their ambivalent position. The hazardous and alien atmosphere throughout the *coolie odyssey* distorted caste distinctions. New relationships were forged in the confined space of the ships and they called each other *jahaji-bhai* (ship brother) and *jahaji-behen* (ship sister): "Now we were looking at everybody else on the boat with us as our family, apan palwar [family members]. And we started calling each other something new: jahaji bhai and jahaji bahin, ship-brother and ship-sister, and speaking of each other as jahajis, shipmates" (Jahajin, 82). This relationship replaced the past relationship they had left behind on the other side of the *kala pani* and acted as their aegis in the *New World*. Much like Deeda and her jahaji family, most of the other indentees chose to work and stay together in the same plantation state. Thus, in the plantocracy, began a new chapter of their life. While thousands of them made their passage back to India, most knew they would live and die across the *kala pani* the instant they reached the colonies of 'king sugar'.

Notes

[1] It is important to understand the systematic demolition of Indian economic structure to realise the severity and dire conditions of Indians under the British rule. Indians were desperate for livelihood and basic needs and this created the push factor for indentured immigration.

[2] The British authorities made such assumptions regarding the colonial subjects. In fact, most Indians failed to adapt to the weather conditions and plantation regime. They lacked the understanding of non-European people, culture, and conditions which led them to assume the similarities or differences to fulfil their requirements.

[3] I use the term 'exile' because most Indians were forcibly recruited and transported. Additionally, most indentured workers nurtured a desire and hope to return to their homeland after the completion of their tenure.

[4] Terms such as *arkatis* and *arkataniyas* have been used interchangeably since various spellings are seen in government reports and literary Shani Mootoo and Peggy Mohan texts.

[5] Refer to the interviews with Peggy Mohan and Shani Mootoo in Appendices 1 and 3.

[6] An overview of the history, evolution, and consumption pattern of various forms of sugar and sweeteners gives us better understanding of the enterprises undertaken for sugar production and consumption. The growing attraction and addiction of sugar left mass destruction sites wherever sugar travelled.

Chapter 2

A Study of the Indentured World through Micro-Commodities

2.1 Domestic Space and Household Commodities

2.1.1 Significance of Migrant Belongings

Material objects bind communities together and when people migrate or travel, they are accompanied by objects which find themselves transplanted in new contexts with the formation of diasporic communities. The fundamental materiality in migration questions its own function in the community that is migrated, exiled, missionized, or acculturated. Materialities have a crucial role in sustaining diasporic communities and recent studies have explored the material landscapes, domestic spaces, and commodities accompanied and encountered by migrants. Materiality allows us to understand the dynamics of presence and absence that define dispersed communities, since, things can operate across scales of time and space. In this chapter, I will consider and discuss the way commodities were moved, collected, and preserved; recognize the way commodities became transmitters of emotions and memories (Hoskins 2006); trace the formation of identities, experiences, and affiliation through assemblages of material (Bennett 2009; Brown 2001); and perceive the way commodities embody the empirical and tangible knowledge (Appadurai 1986; Robbins 2005). The scholarship on indenture has exposed stark discrepancy between the state-regulated official records and the unconventional alternative accounts that emerge out of oral and visual histories, otherwise disregarded, erased, or discounted by hegemonic forces. These non-standard texts about the Indo-Caribbean population can be easily found in the mutiny, music, art, architecture, food, garments, adornments, festivals, and funerals. Unlike official archives which are usually curtailed to maintain power over a colonial state, alternative texts are democratic and personal which makes them prone to dissipation. Hence, scholars and artists are trying to capture and materialize the rare transient texts available. I will delineate the commodity culture of the three fundamental necessities for human survival— home, food, and clothing. Domestic materiality

unearths a productive field in understanding the constitutive activity of the migrants and the subsequent, diaspora through dynamic participation in the re-construction of the domain of 'home'. The domestic milieu unfolds the determining relationship between macro-conditions and micro-practices, cultural praxis, and socio-political institutions[1].

In the exploration of the intersectionality between migration and materiality, home and home-making feature as crucial signifiers of the social and cultural process of the re-production of identity. The results drawn from the ethnography in the British West Indies show an interrelationship of life histories and material goods and the influence of things in the lived reality of the migrants and more importantly, a component of their experiences. Material objects have the power to promote individual ambitions as well as hold them back in toxic conditions. Since, home is the only space that provides a sense of liberation, authority, and belonging to displaced people, in a culturally diverse metropolis, migrant communities and the things they brought along are re-habilitated without any encroachment to their private space. The election of home as a key research site for the contemporary material culture and pattern of consumption goes to show the importance of the location and the prominence of the domestic objects in the process of re-instating in a multicultural metropolis. Indo-Caribbean people imbibe multicultural values and Western religion and education but their ancestral culture seeps through the aperture of acculturation: "It was a time when newly educated people would throw out almost everything Indian at first, and would slowly gather back into their lives only those relics that were essential for survival. Eating sada roti and tomato chokha, wearing gold churias [bangles] at weddings, drying mangoes for achar and kuchela [pickle], treating nara with a special massage, rubbing down the limbs of babies with coconut oil: all seeping gradually back into Indian life in the towns and all well hidden except at home" (Swinging Bridge, 29). A home is at once, a re-creation of the past and a re-building of the future. It is a safe haven from the panopticon (Foucault 1977) structure of the estate and the infringing ethnic tussle. Contemporary social sciences have laid emphasis on the materiality of the domestic space that acts as resource for the migrants and a point of concern for re-contextualising the usefulness and routines after being uprooted and re-instated. The increasing valorisation of private spaces, practices, and schedules creates an equivalent position of the domestic and the

public, since, the home is in constant correspondence with the social world. The pliability of distance and porosity of borders strengthens the interplay of private/public, inside/outside, and home/world. The idiosyncrasies and complementarity of the commodities and members of a home create a balance with the pastiche of the Caribbean population. For indentured families, homes required a restructuring for self-expression, communal solidarity, and social orientation. Eventually, the framework of the domestic unit alters and integrate the cultural materials available in the public domain through quotidian habits and practices.

2.1.2 Writing Home

Most of Naipaul's "idea of ruin and dereliction, of out-of-placeness" (Naipaul 1987) autobiographically permeates into his writing, much the same way ethnographic accounts disclose the all-important influence of domestic materiality. Before the titular event of 'arrival' in London, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, is a long, strenuous passage from the Port of Spain. His first experience of a journey by air gives him an exclusive and unusual opportunity to get a bird's-eye-view of his childhood island-nation. The vantage position inside the aircraft had illuminated, "a landscape of clear pattern and contours, absorbing all the roadside messiness, a pattern of dark green and dark brown, like camouflage, like a landscape in a book, like the landscape of a real country" (Naipaul 1987). It reveals a confluence of emotion between Naipaul's bird's eye view of his autochthonous land and Michel de Certeau panopticon view of the city of Manhattan (Certeau 1984). As a local inhabitant, Naipaul finds his *firstspace* (Soja 1996) to be convoluted and revolting but zooming out displays a distinct pattern of the landscape, which makes him feel as if it is an alien space. The topography of his homeland, which has always appeared to him as a ghettoized topoi, now seems to be carefully designed, organized, and somewhat, appealing to his ambition. The sugar plantations appear as expensive rugs laid out below him over extensive chunks of land, the residential houses occupy very little space, the vegetation on swamplands seems to be casting a shadow over the water bodies, providing relief from the tropical heat and the various natural landscapes spread out bestow a cityscape conforming more to that land for which he opts to be a double diasporic. The multiple significations of "home" create

ambivalence and a division of loyalty and adherence to traditions, community, and nationality. The Indian coolies were psychologically broken owing to the debasing religious notion of losing one's caste and by extension, their soul, for crossing the *kala pani*. At the heart of Port of Spain lies the legendary Woodford Square where we find the statue of an aged Sir Ralph Woodford standing erect as "he kept a constant vigil over the Square, looking out into nothing. It was he who had suggested bringing Indians to Trinidad after slavery was abolished, and they had started coming in 1845" (Jumbie Bird, 21). Woodford Square has been witness to slave hangings and uprisings, riots and union meetings, and public and political assemblies. We find Kale Khan and other ex-indentees and Indians gathering every evening or taking permanent shelter under the watchful eye of Sir Woodford since the Square was reclaimed by the emigrants. A similar erosion of affiliation is found in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* where Antoinette is disavowed by native creoles as a "white cockroach" and as a "white nigger" by Europeans (Callaghan 2004). The Caribbean has a pre-scripted notion of being dangerously exotic with an anthropomorphic depiction of a predator. Terminal diseases are a common phenomenon and the Caribbean climate has always been portrayed as fatal. A quintessential Caribbean island is largely centred on the antipodal images of infernal and paradisal. With the Columbian advent, the tropical fecundity of the West Indies was treated as a consumable resource with a naturally endowed landscape, rapidly commoditized by following Europeans until the mid-nineteenth century.

The Indo-Caribbean writers chose to "write home" from their diasporic homes that help them explore the trauma and tribulation of the Indian *girmitiyas* and their descendants claiming habitable location in a culturally polyglot society. The authors explore the quest of (re)discovering viable identities and building a sustainable foundation in the migratory, natal, or ancestral land. Mahabir's *Jouvert*, Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* and Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her* finds the protagonists tracing back their roots/routes from a place of double diaspora or "twice banished" (Lal 2012) in order to claim stake in their natal land. Deep-seated nostalgia and suffering in the foreign land of the Caribbean often prompted aspirations of "homecoming" among the migrants. In reality, a return passage was non-viable for the migrants who conjured a faux India by living together and forming small village communities where they replicated the names of the streets,

housing structures, rituals, activities, and lifestyle. One such migrant was Krishna, Black Maharajin's lover, who chose to live in "St. James, where the streets carry the place-names of India: Benaras St., Bengal St., Calcutta St., Agra St., Delhi St., Patna St., and so on. These streets brought Krishna very close to his precious dream of seeing India, as close as turning a corner. Not only keeping alive the dream of returning but, these streets, fulfilled the desire to stay connected to their native land in some form or the other. Hosay night in St. James, people dancing to the tassa drums as the splendid blue and silver tadjahs were paraded through the crowds. When the drummers stopped to hear the drums, the small fires that they made transformed urban St. James into the ancient peasant village of Krishna's longing" (Jouvert, 24). Annaise's great-grandfather, Rajendra, was a resonating success story of an ex-indentured labourer, who converted to Presbyterianism from Hinduism, quickly investing his wealth to purchase a former plantation estate from the British-Caribbean government. Rajendra made fruitful choices to give a sophisticated and comfortable life to his children in the old plantation house where Annaise felt "absolutely rooted, as if [she] were sitting in the best space in the world" (Jouvert, 30).

2.1.3 Hierarchy of Homes

The potentialities and perils of returning home to claim their rights after their secondary migration precipitates into facing family secrets and their own questions relating to home, nation, and belonging. Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* and Dabydeen's *The Intended* witness the protagonists grappling to determine and claim their identity and build a permanent home in the world instead of living as mere tourists or transient citizens. Often the conflicting interests of co-habiting individuals make homes a space of contestation where they clash and struggle to establish their ideologies. Geography has massively faltered in keeping with the social movements and settlements in the post-war era creating a *terra infirma* (Rogoff 2000) that interrogates the positioning of spectatorship while describing spaces and the epistemology of migration. The formation of a *terra infirma* begins when large communities are displaced from their national, cultural, and racial domain to an unknown space which creates a sense of un-belonging and challenges the expected

allegiances of the individual. In such hybrid societies, topography plays a key motif. Clear cartography based on social strata is visible as Mootoo takes us on a tour through San Fernando which lacks a homogeneity, moving from the poverty-stricken ghettos to "a sea of green — the fronds of palm and coconut tress mixed with sampan, flamboyant, Pride of Barbados, mango trees — dotted with a confetti of colourful roofs — reds, greens, silvers, blues. These mark the residential neighbourhood of Luminada Heights. It is here you find the residences of the city's more prosperous citizens" (Valmiki, 13). This segregation is the very crux of postmodern geography which carefully suppresses a racialized segregation behind the façade of class division. This struggle of personal interests does not question the validity of the importance of the domestic unit, rather establishes the home as a space of individual and collective expression. Nonetheless, the practice of separatist living was strictly adhered to in the plantation estate. In *The Last English* Plantation, Janice Lowe Shinebourne elaborates on the housing compound around an estate which is neatly compartmentalized:

> The part of the plantation was divided into senior and junior staff compounds large enough to hold four of the worker's villages. The manager, Bill Smith, had the largest house, which stood on fenced land large enough to take one village. He lived there with his wife and several servants. Their children were at school in England. Overseer Beardsley was the second deputy manager. His house, his land and trees were half the size of the manager's … The junior staff were local people, workers who were at a level between the overseers and the labourers … All this was separated from New Dam village by the sideline canals and shrubby wasteland where a few coconut trees grew. In the middle of this space stood the Anglican church and the cemetery. Canals and drains separated the living quarters. Often, the overseers could be seen on their verandahs surveying the flat land around their compound with binoculars. No one could enter without a security check (Shinebourne, 14).

When June visits overseer Beardsley's home for the first time, she is rapt with the privileges experienced by him and his family. She notices the gravel path gradually

becoming concrete, as she approaches the senior staff compound, a number of sparsely located streetlamps, and a few security guards. Upon entering, she makes a mental note of the well-maintained garden with unfamiliar breeds of flowers. She notices a servant quarter at the back of the lavish house and several servants dressed in identical uniforms, hustling through their errands. However, they were not permitted to use the front entrance to the house. Fascinating artworks, immaculate furniture, and imported electronics occupy the house. Nevertheless, June was visibly irate over the excessive availability of "facilities" including drinking water, drainage, and electricity. When the elder daughter of Beardsley disparages the Indian coolies on their way of living, June schools her in Indian customs and culture. She provides the reason for preferring coconut oil which is believed to be a sign of good fortune. She also scientifically counters the criticism against the use of cow dung by stating that the cow and everything related to it is considered sacred and the cakes of cow dung prevent the mud house and ground from cracking under the scorching heat of the Caribbean.

Estate housing facilities, the very first home of the Indian migrants, during indentureship were basically slave barracks which were re-purposed for indentured labourers. Evidently, the living conditions in the erstwhile slave lodgings were deplorable:

> It was single room in a sequence of rooms, and she could barely rest: the walls were so thin she could hear every grunt and scratch. When rain fell it dripped through holes in the troolie roof, so they had to huddle for days in one small corner, sharing it with ant and cockroach and centipede. The rain swelled the trough outside the logie which served as an open toilet and refuse dump for everyone; it overflowed, flooding the yards with worms fat and pink as prawns (Counting House, 66).

These plantation barracks further alienated the immigrants who could never feel 'at home' in such dire conditions. The gross contrast between the barrack lodging and house occupied by the White people in the plantocracy draws questions regarding the differences between the conditions of the chattel slaves and the indentured labourers. Despite the pro-abolition movement, there was no real effort to improve the

conditions of the displaced non-western labourforce which is evident in the pervading sense of hopelessness and continued exilic consciousness among the Indian indentured workforce. Indian indentees certainly found a desperate source of income, exempt from the shackles of caste, and the injustices inflicted by the British India Government but they could not attain complete freedom or happiness. Colonial planters, White officials, and missionary people simply kept them allured to their ways of living, sophisticated abode, elegant clothing, refined food, and genteel language. When Chandin started living at Reverend Thoroughly's house after being adopted, he temporarily found some sense of rootedness and felt a part of the family when he occupied an upholstered chair when they sat together in the living room every evening. As a young innocent child, he feels immense pride at being a part of the Thoroughly family, feeling embarrassed by his indentured background, and he wished to show his wretched parents and barrack dwellers

> the fine cabinets, carved chairs and side tables and lamps with fancy shades. At first the labourers to see it all because everything was new and exciting. The he desperately wanted them to see the inside of the reverend's house so they could embrace not just the reverend's faith but his taste. In his innocence he felt that his people's lack of these things was a result of apathy and a poverty of ambition. He thought of his parents' mud house and the things there, the peerahs they used for sitting on, the rough planks of wood used as shelves, the cattiyas [cots with bamboo ropes] instead of mattresses on high wood frames, the enamel wares, the paltry pitch-oil lamps, and most saddening of all, the latrine with particular odour that etches itself on one's brain. He felt immense distaste for his background and the people in it. Gazing awestruck at the chandelier, he would daily renew his promise to be the first brown-skinned person in Lantanacamara to own one just like it (Cereus, 31-32).

While June felt a great resentment against the Beardsleys prodigious house and living, Chandin was beguiled by the Thoroughlys and desperately wanted to attain their lifestyle. His young mind concluded that by embracing Thoroughly's faith, he would be embraced by the White society.

Chandin's journey shows the trials and travails of an Indian immigrant subjected to corporeal exile due to the transoceanic journey undertaken by his parents to work on the Caribbean plantations and a psychological exile experienced after being adopted by the Thoroughlys which severs him from his family and culture. As a young boy, he is suddenly given access to the very same milieu which oppressed him and his ancestors for centuries, giving him a false sense of superiority over his own family and fellow indentees. Though there was an eagerness shown by Mrs. Thoroughly and Chandin to change his name to a more anglicized one, Reverend Thoroughly "suggested that Chandin Ramchandin would one day be a Christian teacher, theologian, and missionary whose success in the field would be due, certainly to the blessings of God, but also to the novel idea that people were most likely to be swayed by one of their own kind" (Cereus, 30) and inadvertently reveals Chandin to be a missionary project and would never be fully embraced as one of their "kind" (Cereus, 30)[2]. As a shrewd missionary, Reverend Thoroughly decides against the changing of the name of his adopted son as a means to use his indigenous identity to persuade others of his "kind" (Cereus, 30) to embrace Christianity which shall elevate his position as an ecclesiastic. Chandin, being a descendant of a *girmit*, his identity is intrinsically linked to his name and would be seen as an exemplar to the others. Post-adoption, Chandin reluctantly visits his parents' house which reduces with each passing week and he becomes furious to see that his parents do not observe Christianity despite conversion. His mother refuses to showcase the crucifix inside the house and, much to Chandin's anger and disapproval, "he noticed that the number of statues of Hindu gods and goddesses lining the walls had increased since his move to the reverend's house" (Cereus, 30). His mother certainly converts for Chandin's worldly prospect, away from the indenture legacy, but she quietly performs absolution for his spiritual being. Chandin equates a higher social status with the possession of ornate material objects. His obsession over expensive domestic adornments begins with the chandelier hung in the living room of the Thoroughlys. As a result, the news of Lavinia's visit to their house on returning to Lantanacamara after a few years makes Chandin hopeful of winning over her love that was rejected before she left and the first thing he does the next day is purchasing and installing a "modest chandelier". For Chandin, a chandelier becomes synonymous with the upper-class which he desperately aspires to achieve.

2.1.4 (Un)Heimlich Spaces

Spatial configurations are conceptualized following female subjectivity since the domestic space is polarized— "common" exterior and "private" interior, the material and the spiritual, and the visible male space and the invisible feminine corners. This segregation and access to spaces is based on gendered dichotomies dictated by Indian traditions. Patriarchal discourses segregated the domestic space and cultural tradition relegated women to the inner quarters, kitchens, and courtyards. Ironically, this confinement provided the women with an oppositional opportunity to assert themselves within a safe space. Indian indentured women renegotiated the spatial disjunction since their position at home and outside underwent a significant transformation, exposing the interstitial cracks in the binary structures. Migrant women initiated a favourable cultural revisioning of home that was necessary to dissociate female subjectivity from the concept of spatial exclusion. Indo-Caribbean novels reimagine alternative meanings by splintering the essentialized paradigm of domestic space as the female characters reform spatial integrations. Moreover, the renegotiation of Indo-Caribbean households by Indian women is an attempt to regulate cultural authority by creating active subjects who construct alternative spaces for female representation. The inner spaces of the household in the Caribbean islands provided a political site to reclaim individual and collective female agency that enabled the Indian women to circumvent the multi-layered patriarchal dichotomy. Freud's concept of "unheimlich" or "unhomely" refers to a sense of estrangement amid encountering a familiarity (Freud 2003). Furthermore, this "unhomely" or "uncanny" sense is related to a possibility of threat existing within the perimeters of the intimate. Bhabha reconceptualises Freud's concept of "unhomely" to describe the dismal sense of belongingness and "home" in a post-colonial state. He perceives "home" as a stable place that bestows identity and comfort, especially under the oppressive colonial rule, home was associated with favourable conditions that provided refuge.

According to Bhabha, this "unhomely" place is not due to the absence of a home rather the opposite; it is a place between the homely (heimlich) and the unhomely (unheimlich) that is defined as the post-colonial place. In the unheimlich, the identity of a person is also in-between what is familiar and what is foreign. When

the home space is invaded by the outside world, making it unstable and insecure, the "homely" is transformed into the "unhomely" and the individual identities residing in that space becomes volatile. Bhabha also suggests this uncanny moment presents an opportunity to explore and re-create one's identity that is evoked by the migrant experience. The ambivalences and uncertainties imbued with the colonial migratory experience is characteristic of the "uncanny" concept that influenced Bhabha's post-colonial perspective. A diasporic home is, simultaneously, familiar and foreign that redefines it as a third space, mourning the past, synchronizing the present, and celebrating a liberated future. This newly formed space intimately binds the past with the present, the private with the public, and the social with the psyche. This intimacy challenges the binary structures and disrupts the hetero-patriarchal dissymmetry paving way for multiple heterogeneity. The notion of the "other" is eliminated in favour of internal plurality that, eventually, permeates the fabric of society and dissolves culturally enforced boundaries. Bhabha also explains that culture has a duality; on one hand, culture provides a homely feeling owing to its stable and realistic aspect and on the other hand, it can also be "unhomely" because it is always determined by others and continuously changes. Using Bhabha's theoretical strategies of the "unhomely" precisely defines the home space of migrants during colonial era and this equivocal space makes it possible for women's liberation through contestation of male strictures which finds itself in a state of suspension.

2.1.5 Outdoor Domesticity: Yards, Lawns, and Gardens

A courtyard is a partially or fully open space mainly seen in Indian rural areas that allowed members of a family or a neighbourhood to socialize and utilise the space for various purposes including cooking, sleeping, harvesting rainwater, rearing livestock, drying clothes, hay, and dung cake, others. Although the open space gives an impression of being outside, it remains a part of a household without an open rooftop, making it an outdoor domestic space. Climatic conditions along with cultural practices are the primary cause for this architectural design and the tropical climate of the Indian subcontinent resulted in courtyards as an ideal domestic space; firstly, because the open space allowed some respite in the humid

weather and secondly, the traditional joint family structure necessitated a larger space where the men and extended kin could sleep. Eniath's title of the novel, *The Yard*, manifests the spatial arrangement for the family to live together for generations and harmoniously engage in family activities like religious celebrations, weddings, and social gatherings in the common space of courtyard yet maintain their privacy in their separated homes:

> The Yard, their family compound, was located off the Central Range in the village of Freeport … Their estate imposed on the surrounding rural landscape, with its high fence wall — the only one in the area — with post lights. It comprised six bleach-white houses arranged in a semicircle around a spacious courtyard where family gatherings were held; an orchard on the extreme left of the houses slanted towards a steep ravine. Maya's immediate family lived in one of the houses, with each of the others owned and occupied by one of her father's four siblings and their respective spouses and children. Her paternal grandparents, Latif and Sakina Ali, had worked hard to build The Yard … Grandfather Latif became an upholsterer; he earned enough money to make his family comfortable. Before he died, he oversaw the construction of The Yard, contented that he had secured his children's futures, and more importantly, kept his family together. (Eniath, 5)

Women in colonial India were excluded from the local village governance known as *sabha* or *khap panchayat*, which was a fellowship of rich, upper-caste men, dealt with the larger socio-economic issues of the village[3]. The women countered the male-dominant self-governance body by creating their own *mahilasabha* that assembled in the yard of one of their homes. The yard hosted female communal assemblies and activities like policy-making, entertainment and counselling sessions, storytelling, and sharing domestic guidance. Hence, the yard space equalized the chauvinist scales that governed the ownership of space and counterbalanced the patriarchal tutelage existing within traditional Indian households. The houseyard establishes feminist agency and enables a sense of belongingness in the Caribbean islands where the allies of patriarchy are desperately

trying to capture religious and cultural evocations through clichéd expression suggesting ‘a house becomes a home for the woman’. The barrackyard was visibly a feminine space where the women did do their household chores, children could be seen playing, and men with free time or no unemployment would linger around. It was devoid of pedantic people performing pseudo-incumbent activities. Due to reduced domestic space, migrants in the Caribbean shared a common yard and built small huts around it, resulting in shared open space: “The barrackyard was buzzing with female life. Men who had no work lounged on the steps or under trees, watching their women work … The women were washing or cooking or sewing … Little naked children screamed and jumped about, playing in the earth with stones, scraps of wood, bits of paper” (Brighter Sun, 22). After settling in the Caribbean, the women gained a certain entitlement absent in the male-driven Indian cultural and national imaginary that debarred women. The yard was politicized by these Indo-Caribbean women who symbolically ‘sexed’ the yard and effectively reclaimed the domestic space. The yardspace is an important meeting place for women, hence, it goes beyond architectural construction pattern to facilitate interpersonal exchange transcending ethnic and class differences. The yard occupies an in-between positionality which incidentally favours female agency and negates traditional male-dominant exterior spaces. The intersectional yardspace gives rise to the question as to how do Indo-Caribbean women reconstruct the home by gradually transforming the domestic space into an accommodating space. Female authority combats the inner machinations of domesticity within the yardspace that permits symbolic transgression of boundaries. Women can more easily contest the social, political, and economic parameters due to the dynamism of the yard that acts as a microcosm of an external global exchange platform. While the exchange of information, storytelling, and sharing among women is often dismissed as ‘gossip’, feminist scholarship has posited the political significance of female bonding as crucial alternative histories. The role of the yard has been vital in providing a safe and supportive space for such forbidden and neglected histories to thrive. Safe female spaces liberate repressed self-expression and allows linguistic repossession that has been stifled for centuries; women recount quotidian emotions and experiences in safe female spaces that offers a sense of validation and solidarity. This communal sharing of personal stories and hearing individual narratives creates a storehouse of ancestral knowledge that is steep in valuable histories of women. In addition, the articulation of female stories

ensures oral documentation and preservation of women's collective histories. The women generally narrated and shared these stories in the yard or *angan* at twilight or after sunset when the day's work is completed, the children are off to play, and the men are either resting or out socializing. There is a sacred energy when the tired women congregate in the yard, revealing the plurivocality of perspectives and experiences, inflaming a quiet revolution, alternative consciousness, and a dynamic counterculture.

Domestic spaces are rarely considered safe by the second sex in patriarchal cultures and Indian women have suffered gross abuses from family members inside the space of their own homes. Constant mistreatment that women endure or have witnessed their mothers and grandmothers weathering for years, makes them feel confined or bitter to the inner spaces of the homes and pushes them to make that yardspace safer. Lavinia and Sarah connect and strengthen their illicit relationship in process of making a garden that provides a safe ground for their bond to grow. Lavinia starts frequenting and spending long hours with Sarah which they spent gardening as Lavinia "brought clippings and whole plants ripped … She brought flame ixoras for Sarah, and one memorable day she arrived with cactus plants. One each for Pohpoh and Asha, Cereus, she called them" (Cereus, 53-54). The titular flower of the novel, cereus, reflects the fragmentary life of the novel's characters as we find the flower being transplanted several times during the course of Mala's life; it was first brought to Trinidad by the Thoroughlys, plucked by Lavinia from her mother's well-kept garden and presented as a token of love to Sarah, later planted in the Paradise Alms House by Otoh when they come to visit Mala. This exotic night-blooming flower blossoms once a year for a short time, "trembling… against the wall, a choreography of petal and sepal opening together, sending dizzying scent high and wide into the air" (Cereus, 198). The fragrance from the cereus pervades throughout the village of Lantanacamara, permeating the neighbouring households that ostracized Mala's existence for no fault of her own. As an act of rebellion, Mala also rejects conventional ways of living and takes permanent shelter in the wild garden of the house which was made by Sarah which symbolizes natural fecundity as opposed to the colonial patriarchal patterns of Ramchandin household. As Lavinia and Sarah's forbidden relationship blossoms in the garden followed by Mala's strong nostalgia for happy childhood days, eventually abandons her house and permanently

takes shelter in the garden. This journey of the garden from a safe spot of the household for the women to a buffer zone between Chandin's dictatorial site and the outside world and the final categorisation of a cabalistic premise in the midst of a town. The garden can be identified as a "heterotopy" that refers to an ambiguous space that is excluded and, at the same time, interconnected. Lefebvre's concept of "heterotopy" defines an ambivalent space that fosters a possibility of something different that becomes foundational to the revolutionary trajectory of that space. Hence, the space of the garden becomes a "heterotopy" evoking an emotion of delight, similarly, Mala's garden is reminiscent of her blissful days spent with her mother, sister, and Aunt Lavinia while inside the premises of the house they lived in constant fear of Chandin's abuse. A sharp contrast is drawn by Mootoo while projecting the unorthodox happy family of Sarah, Lavinia, and the two daughters creating a garden space of "freedom and wildness" (Cereus, 53) against the miserable heteronormative family of Chandin inhabiting the house and deftly dismantles the notion of ideal heteronormative structures resulting in healthy relationships and emotionally secured individuals. After killing her father in self-defense, Mala abandons his house, taking shelter in the garden and gradually becomes a part of it, resembling the garden not just in appearance but also in its sound and smell. She emanated an earthly scent and her way of expression were sounds resembling the rare insects and birds which bred in the middle of Lantanacamara, subverting the concept of a domesticate garden. Belonging from the Indian indentured ancestry, Mala naturally forges a strange communion with the land which has been a prime factor throughout the Caribbean history of dispossession, torture, slavery, indentureship, and capitalist agendas. But for Mala the land is symbol of love that transpired between her sister, mother, and Lavinia, of hopes of being reunited with them in the future, of freedom from the oppressions of her father, and of resistance against the norms of society. Mala's garden makes a sensory assault on Otoh when he encroaches the garden one sultry afternoon:

> Otoh marveled at the sight of the magnificent mudra, knowing that such a specimen might be seen only in the heart of an old-growth forest on the other side of the island. With its yard-long, bean-like purple pods, the mudra had taken over the side of the yard, completely blocking out the road beyond and glimpses of the town.

> It took generations for a mudra tree to grow so large. The peekoplats hopped to the edges of the branches and their whistling subsided as though in curious and worried anticipation… Otoh was astonished that in his neighbourhood, unknown to catchers and gamblers, there existed a tress laden with hundreds of peekoplats (Cereus, 154-55).

Since the Indian migrants and diasporic people could not afford to purchase enough land to build their houses, both, the inner space and yardspace eventually end up becoming small spaces. Ex-indentees allotted a small space for the actual house, since they prepared and cooked their meals and reared domestic animals like cows and poultry, even s most of the evening or nighttime in the yard during summertime. The later diasporic people enlarged their houses, leaving little space for the courtyard that is often turned into a garden, as they transitioned from mudhouses to brickhouses that also included a kitchen and a porch. When Mona dreams of being back in their old Trinidadian home, years after her father sold it to shift to North America, she could only recall precisely and feel safe in their "little garden, Muddie's creation, was in full bloom: a riot of multicoloured zinnias and sunflowers, and at one end an array of crotons edged by white tuberoses. I walked to the side and discovered a fresh bed of anthuriums in full bloom underneath the black stars; she had planted those just before Da-Da decided tos ell the house and I had never seen them flower" (Swinging Bridge, 126-127). The fact that Mona was able to clearly re-vision the flowers planted by her mother shows her adoration and sense of security and happiness in the garden during her childhood and adolescent years. As Mona keeps dreaming of the other spaces of house including the bedrooms, kitchen, and bathroom, she is filled with anxiety and fear stemming from various traumatic incidents experienced in the house.

The architecture and maintenance of the yard varied in different nations and cultures, and was often a marker of class and hierarchy. Since the space inside the house among Indians was smaller, there was an increased utilization of the yardspace, making it more cluttered and unkempt as compared to the yards in European households that are visibly sparse and empty, hence, more tidy. However, Indian women took great pains to keep their yard well-organised, spending hours not

only cleaning but decorating it, since it was not only used for daily chores and recreational purposes but also for religious activities. It was a rule to have a *tulsi* or basil plant and *rangoli* or intricate designs with dry colours or flowers in the yard because they were considered auspicious among Hindus. Shinebourne depicts the character of Nani Dharmadai as the keeper of Indian woman-centered traditions in the Caribbean. Although June is raised by both her mother, Lucille, and her grandmother, Dharmadai, she recognised the misleading colonial identification imposed upon her by Lucille and inclines towards her Nani's Hinduness: "Nani kept a lawn which was as good as the overseers'; there were covered water barrels in each corner of her yard … the yard was always richly perfumed with the scents of the lime and hibiscus trees along the fence; this was Hindu's cottage and there was nothing wrong with it, nothing dirty or backward" (Shinebourne, 115). June feels more at home in Dharmadai's primitive home and finds a sense of groundedness in the Hindu rituals and prayers observed by her grandmother. Nani's use of coconut oil inscribes traditional earthly consciousness that identifies and validates the importance of natural products in our daily life. Coconuts are noted to be versatile since every component has a life-sustaining quality; coconut bark is used to make rafts in coastal regions; coconut leaves are used as for thatching roofs and has a cooling effect; coconut shells are used as containers; coconut oil is used for cooking, giving therapeutic massages, and lighting lamps or ceremonial *diyas* or mud lamps; coconut water and cream are known provide nutritious and remedial value; and the fruit is presented as a religious offering in Hindu rituals. Nani used coconut therapy to soothe June's fragmented sense of culture and identity prompted from her mixed heritage of Indian and Chinese, augmented by her Christian indoctrination at school. June runs away from her mother's imposition of Englishness and seeks comfort at her Nani's house where she receives a coconut therapy:

> Nani took her to the bedroom and laid her on the coconut sacking there. She covered her in a blanket and sheet. The room smelt of camphor and coconut oil … She fetched a large drink of fresh coconut water from the kitchen which she made her drink, a bottle of coconut oil. She helped June take off the uniform then bathed her hair in the oil. She laid her on her stomach and massaged her, then on her back

> and massaged her again, praying in Hindi all the while (Shinebourne, 116).

The healing coconut ingredients and the curative home space eases the vicious self-fragmentation impact suffered by June in her own house. The transformative value of spatial negotiations are not only related to the utilisation of space but also its impact on people. Women renegotiated Indo-Caribbean spaces in a collective and positive way that helped the Indian community thrive despite the disenfranchising migration, sexism, racism, and class detriments.

The yardspace is politicised owing to corrective revisioning by the women that provide a counterscript of self-assurance despite the lack of literacy and social authority. Women not only design and superintend the yardspace but also derive their sense of "self" by inscribing their identity in the yardspace. The narrator of *The Intended* is unable to recall his mother's face after leaving his home in Guyana for England six years ago. In the absence of photography devices and proper recollection, the narrator is only able to recollect his mother's presence, activities, and faint silhouette in the yard of their house in a village in Guyana: "All I can remember is the tall star-apple tree in the front yard which I climbed up every afternoon when it was bearing … She stood with a stick in hand, waving it and threatening me if I didn't come down that minute … In the backyard was our foul-pen. I can recall her with grains of rice in her hand, flinging them at the hens, or carrying bunches of vegetables indoors, or a broom which she gripped and swept the steps and the floor with, always sweeping, sweeping, even when no dust was in sight" (Intended, 152). The identity of the woman of the house is so inextricably linked with the space of the yard that her corporal form seems dissolved within the yardspace and, at the same time, the yardspace provides her with a counter-consciousness. The difference in a domestic space that is male-controlled rather than female-supervised is apparent in Egbert Ramsaran's large open field adjacent to the main house, together it formed the dismal Ramsaran estate. The open space around the house had tall iron fence on three sides while the Victoria River bordered the estate at the backside, making it difficult for outsiders to trespass and the residents to depart. A huge open field around the house is usually a playground for children of the house and the neighbourhood but Ramsaran's field "was a fertile source of

nightmare for his young son" (Naipaul, 6). The bleak field was sinister to Wilbert and he had a premonition that the bull might launch a sudden attack. Unlike the women, Ramsaran had put up a warning board to discourage intruders and if trespassers and cattle gained entry into his estate, he would hurl stones, sticks, and abuses; such intolerant behaviour and parochial mindset made his home and field devoid of communal warmth. Although Ramsaran fondly called the field, "the garden", merely because a few weeds and succulent plants grew wild and his own cows along with a bull grazed around. The "Hindu" home of June's grandmother is antipodal to the home of the Pakistani family in *The Intended*. When the narrator visits Nasim's house, he finds "[t]he whole sitting-room, so green and alien, green sofas, green map on the wall, the colour of Pakistan, the Eastern vases, the model of Kaaba, the sticks of incense" (Intended, 151). Despite the stark religious differences, the narrator feels "at home" in Nasim's house and feels a responsibility towards the Pakistani family. This affinity among Asian communities, despite religious differences, confirms the proximity between them as they have lived together peacefully for centuries, and their children have grown up together in the same neighbourhood.

2.1.6 The Curious Case of Attachment and Alienation

Domestic layout plays a formative role in shaping family lifestyle and individual personalities, simultaneously the configuration of home spaces are transformed by the occupants' quotidian life and dispositions. The Saran house in the middle of a bustling fictional town in Trinidad is a literal and metaphorical structure that encapsulates the journey of the protagonist, Ved Saran, his family, and the Saran enterprise. When Ved's mother conceives him, she decides to leave her in-laws house in Dorado beach and live permanently in town where they build a house above the shop in a commercial property gifted by her father as a "belated dowry" (Like Heaven, 18). This is the beginning of the journey of Ved as well as the Saran house and as the Ved grows, the house is constantly under construction with various sections and features getting added and amended. We see Ved wanted to leave his family and step outside the house to live his life independently since his adolescent years but he is repeatedly prevented by different circumstances. However, when the

construction of the house is finally completed, the Saran family is pushed to the edge of falling apart, and Ved loses his wife, control over the business, his identity, and his emotional and psychological stability, Ved finds the willpower to cross the threshold of the Saran household. Annaise develops the strong desire of being an artist and derives all her artistic inspirations from her home itself which was a former plantation residence:

> The house was one of those colonial relics with a spacious, wraparound gallery and large shadowed rooms of dark wood. The part of the house that I loved most was the section of the gallery painted deep blue. This was the Blue Gallery. It held the art tables as well as shelves for books, canvases, and art supplies. All the books were arranged in sections, and we had a huge Caribbean section that, according to my mother, was larger than the San Fernando Library's West Indian Collection. The Blue Gallery was in front of the kitchen, and I always heard my mother's activities in there. On Saturdays when she chonkhayed dhal, the smell of roasted geera and garlic filled the Blue Gallery and made me feel absolutely rooted, as if I were sitting in the best space in the world (Jouvert, 30).

This ex-plantation abode had a characteristic tropical structural design that was possibly built and inhabited by French planters followed by British planters and eventually bought by Annaise's great-grandfather, Rajendra, from the British-Caribbean government. This colonial edifice is paradigmatic of the Caribbean history that witnessed European invasion, exploitation, abandonment, and re-formation by the disavowed non-western people. Annaise and her family occupied and adapted themselves and the house according to an Indo-Caribbean way of living. The house itself is an expression of the Indo-Caribbean history and culture that has migrant Indians settled in a dying colonial institution who reform and acculturate the jettisoned house. When Ved's wife, Anji, wants to live in a separate house away from her in-laws, Ved "briefly summons up an image of [himself] living with Anji at Mr D's old house in Santa Cruz. But what instantly came to mind was the twist of her mouth at the thought of living in an old slave-plantation estate house. She would sneer at the nouveau-riche aspirations" (Like Heaven, 523). Ironically, indentured

labourers were strictly prohibited from entering estate residences housing owners, managers, or overseers but numerous former indentees and Indian diasporic people acquired estate land and houses, making it their own.

Persaud's *Daughters of Empire*, opens with Ishani musing over her new house and realizing "Santosh knows nothing about houses, except that a house is where he expects to find a warm meal and a comfortable bed" (Daughters, 9). The courtyard and kitchen may be exclusively female spaces owing to the increased usage of these spaces by the women but the onus of maintaining and making the house "homely" also inevitably falls on the women:

> Our culture traps women. When a family emigrates, as soon as the man gets a reasonable job, he has nothing more to think about. But the wife is expected to create the same home life for the family, the same foods, the same assurances and loving care they had in the old country. This is crazy. I wouldn't be surprised if many of us suffered mental breakdowns … Now I'm here, where no one knows me, I intend to create my own individual culture, one that suits my temperament and my present situation. It's so easy to be imprisoned by cultural iron bars closing in on you (Daughters, 36).

2.1.7 Indian Household Paraphernalia

For immigrants, a home is a place that requires no interpretation or translation, since, people happily share language, feelings, food, and warmth with each other. After the end of the indentured period, when an Indian migrant decided to permanently settle in the Caribbean and build a house of their own, they used mud and grass that keeps the house cool and brisk. They also built inconspicuous nooks for jewellery, money, and other important objects. Indian migrants made full use of their home space for various purposes that eventually helped the Indo-Caribbean diaspora to evolve from the periphery to the core and emerge as a success story. They planted and grew dense hedgerows of hibiscus as a barricade around the yard. This open enclosure was then utilised to plant neat rows of vegetables and make vines for climbing vegetables which provided food and a cooling effect in the

scorching tropical climate. They made *machan* for climbing vegetables like peas, tomatoes, squash, various kinds of beans, okra, bitter melons, and others that grow vertically: "The *machan* was a high platform made of bamboo on which a variety of vines were encouraged to curl themselves and run miles and miles on one spot, so enabling cucumbers, *kareila*, and a wide variety of beans to flourish. It was a practical and clever way of making maximum use of limited space" (Butterfly, 83). Indian indentees reluctantly boarded the ships with the hope of better life, economic opportunities, civic equality, and a few household necessities — holy books, brassware, utensils — an entire range of Indian household paraphernalia. The authors highlight the usage of the commodities and the way they are carelessly strewn around as a crucial member of the household, building, participating, and effecting the essence of the house and the living members. The narratives act as a critique of the gradually fading indigenous culture— mosquito nets to keep out mosquitoes, poisonous insects and evil spirits; *peerha* (tool) usually personalized according to the preference of mostly the women to comfortably sit and cook or rewind; neem *datun* (brush) for stronger teeth and immunity; stone mortar and pestle for blending spices for the classic Indian flavours; *ghotni* (churner) to churn lentils, leafy vegetables, buttermilk, curd; earthenware or brassware *handi* (large pot) deliberately simmering Indian curry that preserves their heritage under the cloche and shared by everyone enjoying the meal; *paan dan* (betel box) including nutcracker, betel leaves, *zarda* (tobacco), *supari* (betel nut), *chuna* (slaked lime), clove, and cardamom; iron *tawa* (skillet or pan) for preparing chapattis, roasting spices and vegetables; *chakhla belan* (rolling pin) to stretch out flatbreads, beat mischievous children or drive away strangers and swindlers. *Chulha* (clay stove) is a prerequisite in every Indian kitchen that emits clouds of soot, nostalgic incense, and the overpowering savour of their lost homeland and kin.

In *Butterfly in the Wind*, Kamla recounts their home where she describes the importance and idiosyncrasies of a clay oven: "The villagers made their own fireside or *chulha* for cooking. Each *chulha* had characteristics that were tailored to the individual home. We had two: one just outside the kitchen steps in the yard, used in the dry season, and the other inside" (83). A *chulha* is structured from clay and regularly plastered with a coating of cow dung that strengthens it. This traditional cooking stove had an apron space that held the fuel including wood, *upla* or cow

dung patties, crop waste, straw, corn husks, and coconut shells. Each *chulha* was custom-made according to the preference of the women who usually cooked, hence, spent several hours near it. The clay stoves differed in dimension according to the utensils owned by the women. Several *chulhas* could accommodate multiple pots of different sizes at the same time. Since these clay stoves were made of mud, they were adjacent to the ground that required the cook to squat or sit haunched on the floor which led to regular back pains. In order to avoid physical strain, many women in privileged homes, like Kamla's mother "first constructed a raised platform in the kitchen and then built on it her *chulha* … Because it had been built in this way, she did not have to stoop or bend when cooking" (Butterfly, 83). The painstaking descriptions of these commodities identify the continuity of cultural lifeways and withstand the ravaging effects of the multi-ethnic industrial nation. Though the middle passage stripped the surviving indentured labourers of their material possessions, the few remaining objects actively contributed to reshaping their cultural life and re-making their consciousness in a wildly different socio-political milieu. The paroxysm of translocation is resisted by the materiality of the commodities shepherded by the coolies across the *kala pani* and sustain an Indian symbology.

2.2 Jewellery, Clothing, and Accessories

2.2.1 Walking Banks

The principal function of jewellery as objects of adornment for women in India underwent a drastic change once Indian women landed in the Caribbean as indentees. Without the facility of a safe depository, the presence of a family or husband, since most women were absconders, or any reliable relation, the coolie women, like Deeda in *Jahajin*, bought "silver beras, the bracelets [she] had bought with [her] advance on the way to the station, for safekeeping" (Jahajin, 21). The jewellery, which functioned as a means of investment predominantly, for the wealthy, became a deposit box for the coolie women as well. Rohini and Vidia also hid "crude bracelets and coins" in the hem of his dhoti or inside blankets wrapped around his waist (Counting House, 67). Rohini could also tell which *jahaji* had swallowed their coins because "when the sea was distressed they clenched their

mouths" (Counting House, 67). Since, the women adorned their assets most of the time to keep it close to their bosom, quite literally, the pattern and design were crucial. Moreover, jewellery was their substitute money which was wrapped in "handkerchief tucked inside [their] bra like those old Indian women who sold vegetables in the Princes Town market" (Jouvert, 35). We must keep in mind, these women were not home-bound, rather working women, hence, preferred light-weight jewellery with simple patterns that would not become an impediment to their means of survival. Since Vasti has completed her education from a university in London and aspires to educate young girls in her elementary school in Trinidad, she feels encumbered when her mother adorns her with heavy ancestral jewellery. Therefore, she insists on making a lighter version of her grandmother's necklace for her wedding:

> I was copying from a necklace of intricate filigree-work linking gold pendants on a gold chain. Each pendant was a lotus flower progressively unfolding itself, so that perfect open blooms, with petals in dispositions to delight, circled the front of the wearer's neck, while the tiniest of opening buds embraced the nape at the back (Lanterns, 62).

Interestingly, though, Vasti wants a diluted form of the ancestral jewellery, she chooses to retain the design on the necklace— the motif of the lotus. As well-known, the lotus is imbued with religio-cultural implications— references found in the Bhagavad Gita, the holy text of the Hindus, as a symbol of purity, superiority, enlightenment, and re-awakening— and was later chosen as the national flower of independent India. At the same time, the lotus carries profusely latent sexual connotations and the motif of the blooming lotus on Vasti's wedding necklace suggests the body of a maiden or the vaginal opening for intercourse after marriage. The gradual adaptation prompted many women to opt for local Caribbean motifs to be embossed in their jewellery. Despite the syncretized designs of jewellery, Indian-Caribbean women desired or subconsciously preferred aesthetically Indian styles, similar to their culinary predilections. In most cases, inheritances in the form of jewellery move them beyond the expanse of a commodity by virtue of migrating through generations and imbibing the essence of those eras. It is impregnated with

idiosyncrasies that speak for itself and endows the owner with value. Such potent cultural metaphors seem to lose their meaning in a foreign land, yet, with the process of assimilation, they act as a bridge between two distinct cultural spaces that create an oligoptica that focuses on the minute details fraught with powerful meanings and the vital link to facilitate the interaction between the 'local' and the 'global'. The global network operates through the interstitial points of local and we also find this Latourian concept potently present in the micro-commodity of food and gastronomy as it allows us to understand the entanglements of material life.

Joy Mahabir has written extensively on the textualization of jewellery among Indo-Caribbean women in 'Alternate Texts: Indo-Caribbean Women's Jewelry'. She has delineated the perversion in archiving photographic representation of Indo-Caribbean women's jewellery to regulate the subject-object stability in a colonial establishment and the destabilizing functionality of the jewellery. Initially, heavily adorned African women were photographed with the backdrop of tropical landscape that appeared in postcards for the purpose of encouraging tourism. However, the landscape is removed in favour of a photographic portrait of Indian women in excessive ornaments who symbolize and endorse the exotic and subdued, by themselves. The Caribbean island states have maintained their tourist sector under coercion as world economies have exploited their tourist services. The larger portion of the capital earned from tourism gets drawn outside the Caribbean itself through overseas goods and services. The European colonial and capitalist authorities have continuously accrued profits from both the plantation system and the tourist industry[4]. The explorers, merchants, planters, armed forces, and tourists have made the Caribbean island a global model of distorted relationship of production, consumption, and proprietorship, and privilege. By creating a chasm between labour and product, land and entitlement, and producer and profit, the Caribbean environment became a consumable commodity. Nonetheless, the adorned Indian woman occupied a central contributing figure in bringing about an economic and social change in the Caribbean with overt implications of an independent being. The figure of Gainder in *The Swinging Bridge* manages to find a husband and arrange her own wedding, despite being a *rand* (widow), with the help of her jewellery that bankroll the arrangements and act as a dowry: "Her earnings are worn on her person … She refuses to pawn her jewellery for a wedding. This is the dowry she brings to

her husband and to her new life" (Swinging Bridge, 249). Turning their life's savings into jewellery, which was repurposed into dowry, mortgage, investment, or inheritance, gave a sense of independence and resistance to Indo-Caribbean women. The widows who escaped to an unknown world with the hope of finding freedom and reinventing their identities, found way of shattering the age-old oppression meted out to them in their homeland by adorning themselves with their earnings, proudly and unabashedly. Jewellery was also, morphed into a personalized form of banking for the Indians. In a postcolonial narrative, the bejewelled Indian woman is an embodiment of the subversive strategy to the dominant cultures in the Caribbean, including Africans and Creolites. The Divali night in *The Swinging Bridge* creates a strong visual impact to silence and undermined Indo-Caribbean culture by putting Bess's jewellery on display:

> There were *nakphuls* [nose rings], *chakapajee* [bangles for married Hindu women] and *chandahar* [pearl] necklaces, *beras* [waist chain], *churias* [bangles], armbands, and ankle bracelets— ornately worked pieces that had to be priceless, now that they had disappeared from modern life. All in silver, all made by the hands of artisans who had melted down silver shillings given to indentured workers on payday into these filigreed works of art. Women's bodies, covered with thick silver from wrist to elbow, ankle to mid-calf, would become walking banks, repositories of their families' wealth. The metal carapace served another purpose too, that of a weapon that could crush the head of an unwary attacker when wielded by an arm unafraid of the swing of its power. The arm of a rand maybe (Swinging Bridge, 299).

2.2.2 A Woman's Armour

Money which signifies material and depersonalized economies in most proletariat societies have been transformed into an artefact with sentimental attachment and greatly attuned to positive memory and social status. Albeit, the excessive jewellery would appear to be a sort of hindrance and attract unwanted attention, it created a visual difference and inspiration for women of other races

owing to the versatility of the commodity, as succinctly captured by Espinet in the above extract. The *arkatis* recruited all sorts of men and women, including men who were excellent craftsmen and ended up following the same profession in the Caribbean islands as well. Jewellery making became a family profession and the business passed on from one generation to another as the narrator's grandfather and his brothers in *Jahajin* were trained by their father to roll silver sheets, emboss designs, solder edges, coating with chemical solution and skilfully use the *phunkee* (blowpipe): "Nana would sometimes get a faraway smile and conjure for me vignettes of afternoons after school, in Dow Village, of his father busy at home melting gold coins in a crucible to make jewellery, while he and his brothers were busy with silver, learning to make *taabeej* [amulet worn around the neck] used by Muslims and Hindus alike" (Jahajin, 191). We find Kale Khan's son, Rahim owning a jewellery shop in *The Jumbie Bird*, Janaki didi's son working as a craftsman in estate in *Jahajin* followed by his sons and Mr Singh's jewellery establishment in *Raise the Lantern High* where Vasti is, once again, faced with the dreaded eagle-shaped ring. During her childhood Vasti had witnessed the rape of her school friend in the wheat fields that hid the face of the rapist and only revealed the ring on his finger with the wings of an eagle spread out in flight, only to realize that it belonged to Dr Karan Walli, to whom she is engaged to be married the very next day. This piece of personalized jewellery with a motif of an eagle in hunt, resembling Karan Walli's act and nature, has its allure and liability, as it reveals his identity to Vasti. But then again, not only the jewellery but jewellers also reveal their caste by nature being a *sonar*, who occupied a more respectable position in the social hierarchy observed by the Hindus in India as the caste system was "not just something that defined what we did, but something that assigned us a lower position" (Jahajin, 74). Therefore, the act of making jewellery and the possession of jewellery can pigeonhole an individual into specific social or/and economic class. When Sunnariya is endowed with Janaki didi's marriage jewellery, carried over the *kala pani* for her future daughter-in-law and fraught with cultural nostalgia, Sunnariya leaves behind her father's ignoble reputation and acquires a new identity of a middle-class, married woman of dignity. Moving beyond the adorning characteristic of jewellery, Indian women dissect wear jewellery as way of examining their strength and tenacity.

As Kamla frequents her grandmother's house, she is besotted by her massive pieces of jewellery which appears to be shield-like and somewhat antique to her during her growing years. However, Kamla notices a strange phenomenon in each of her visit as her grandmother wore fewer bracelets and armbands and when she enquires about it, her grandmother replies, "[y]ou need strength to wear bracelets" (Butterfly, 21). It almost seems like strength of bearing the burden of patriarchy, societal norms and crude labour by grandmother and all women, in general, diminishes with the passing years. Jewellery is a personal statement for women and can never be defined in terms of value, quality or quantity. Sushila is certainly a rebellious figure to enter and disturb the patriarchal settlement of Ramsaran with her uninhibited behaviour and brazen appearance about which she was remorseless as she was for abandoning her daughter: "Sushila was infatuated to the point of obsessions with adornments … To adorn was not merely to improve and make more palatable. It was to make real … She had developed unconventional ideas of value. For example, her jewellery, though for the most part cheap and tawdry stuff, was appreciated and treasured the more for being inlaid with coloured stones, immediately strikin to the eye and of a bewildering variety meant nothing at all to her" (Naipaul, 151). The significance of the inexpensive and gaudy pieces of adornment owned by Sushila is a stark contrast to the indifference shown towards her own daughter.

The signature Indian style of ornamentation was quickly taken up and followed by men and women of other races and adapted in their personalized way. Annaise frequents a restaurant in an alleyway in Montreal that plays Chutney music, serves Caribbean food and run by a Trinidadian woman, Rachel, who "dressed up in gold jewelry and shimmering clothes under her plain apron" (Jouvert, 102). Similar to food, jewellery also reveals the abstract exchanges in the 'plurigenetic' milieu of the Caribbean. Thus, jewellery became a way of expression and by extension, a material manifestation of their daily chores and frame of mind, much in the lines of clothing. When Draupadi teaches the art of cooking, she communicates not only through the ratio and proportions of ingredients but her entire being, including her clothes and jewellery, which were mostly heirlooms: "On days she was teaching something she considered very important, she would be all in white wearing an

elegantly simple, silver bracelet; on the days she taught me kheer, gulab jamun, and rasmelai, she wore sunny, smiling yellow" (Sastra, 98).

2.2.3 Weaving Loss and Suffering

Elaborating on material culture, clothing covers an extensive special domain, in relation to the length and breadth of cloth produced by hand or manufactories, and temporal domain that requires countless hours of labour to meet the demands of the evolutionary sartorial process. This module will provide literary insight into the immigrant undertaking production and consumption of clothing, the facet of labour history often undervalued but elaborated here as in a consolidation. The spirit of productivism in a capitalist structure is stimulated by technological advances, cheap labour, and the mobilization of raw materials through imperial exploitation. Cloth and clothing are edified products which proliferate numerous moral, spiritual, and cultural meaning without undermining the materiality of the commodity like the saturation of hues, meticulous designs, tensile strength, and intricate weaving. Yet the productivist process is primarily, steamrolled by the demands of community aesthetics and a degree of competition within and across communities. The trajectory of immigrant attire traces the development of capitalism through the materiality of global migration. Cotton was one of the most viable raw material and the imperial forces bedazzled the colonies with swift exportation of tonnage of cotton to the industries of metropolitan England. Wholesome economies were destroyed, cottage industry ruined, raw materials looted, and millions unemployed, incapacitated, slaughtered, enslaved, and displaced for the cultivation and export of cotton. The processed and industrialized product of the cotton became a visual form of hegemony and perpetuated Western supremacy. Appropriate and mechanized forms of cutting and sewing, along with Western and evangelized concepts of attire stylized utility clothes for men and women, work and leisure, formal and casual, school and informal, youthful and adult, summer and winter, festive and religious. Cultivators and artisans who lost their work due to imperial expropriation and forced to provide free labour in the cultivation and textile sectors under imperial restraints. As we now trace the re-fashioning of Indian attire of the coolies in the Caribbean plantocracy, we can notice the adaptations made to be able to cut the huge canes, tie

cutlasses, and carry out heavy labour work in the sweltering sugarcane fields: “Most of us had stopped wearing saris. What we wore now were ghangris, long skirts, jhoolas, long blouses, and orhnis. We would tie one end of the orhni around our waists, and throw the other end over our heads. It didn’t look too different from the saris we had on before” (Jahajin, 146). Oral histories of migrant experiences commonly agree on the fact that the signs of acculturation, invariably, begins with purchasing off-the-rack and wearing clothes that makes them fit in and conform to the place and its people. The men also discarded their dhoti and kurta for short pants or trousers, reluctantly.

Colonial intervention engaged the Indian subcontinent in the global economy without any authority to control it but the Indian migrants and subsequent diaspora enacted authority and power through their clothing apparatus. Cloth has the capacity to subsume archival information as well as perform the role of a knowledge transporter. Textiles have an inviolable quality of retaining and transmitting memory that helps us explore the themes of ‘materialising’ and ‘archiving’ memory, both publicly and personally. This also leaves us with questions regarding the value of clothing and its role in the process of remembering that may reveal private, historical, and cultural data through unforeseen encounters. Writers have used textiles and clothing practices as a strategic mnemonic in different facades and various contexts. Derrida provides a modus operandi to preserve memory through textiles with the concept of ‘archivisation’ which elucidates that the formation of memory and history is contingent on the existing structure of archive (Derrida 1998). According to him the archive is not simply a stack of tattered documents shelved within a building, rather, the process of ‘archivisation’ primarily entails following a trail to an external location. The capacity of an archive to record and preserve information is the central idea of *Archive Fever*, in which Derrida examines the role of exterior inscription. He states that ‘archivisation’ is possible only through the technical methods available for the process of preservation alongside the receptive substrate that signifies the ability of the existing structure to receive and store the accumulated information. Hence, it can be argued that memory and history can either be saved or be inscribed in tangible or intangible ways. Within the context of the material culture of Indian indentured labourers and Indo-Caribbean diaspora, cloth is a pertinent substrate of their memory and history.

Cloth can be explored, firstly, as a natural preserver of human imprints that transforms it into a memory (Stallybrass 1996) and secondly, the impressionable structure of textiles makes it susceptive to inscription, deliberate or otherwise and encourages an object to record and confine information. Hence, the textiles require a vital representation owing to their properties to create and transform memory through the artificial and natural imprint. Stallybrass identifies the utility and proximity with the human body as crucial aspects over the technological production of it (1999, 29). Cloth has the capacity to retain information and enable memory of the deceased and dispossessed to endure through re-contextualisation. Clothes left behind by people embodies a floating memory of absence and an uncanny silhouette in-absentia; they are imbued with the smell and shape of the wearer, ergo clothing becomes the site of loss and mourning. The emotional and visual affectivity of textile objects are vital commodities of memory because they remind the outsider of the wearer's presence and the absent person along with the bygone time momentarily comes alive. The Indian attire was cast aside upon touching the Caribbean shores because they acted as reminders of their vulnerability and servile condition; their Indian cultural clothes were inscribed with a sense of exile, bondage, and disillusionment. Everyday use of clothes is a vast repository of memory, impregnated with stains and spots of daily life. Moreover, our existence is marked by ceremonial textiles which act as signifiers of transition including baby blanket, educational and professional uniforms, wedding ensemble, and funeral shroud. Our clothes are also a way to simultaneously express and disguise our identities and help us perform various roles to negotiate the shifting relationship between ourselves and the society we inhabit. This confers textiles with cultural significance and a social mnemonic power.

2.2.4 Conformism and Escapism

In *Jumbie Bird,* we see Kale Khan possessively latching on to his crimson turban which is a sole reminder of his *pathan* heritage and a motivation to fight for the rights of Indian in the Caribbean[5]. We also find contrasting instances where Mukoon Singh takes off his turban and others discard their religious attires and accessories to fit in and assume the newly assigned role of indentured labourers.

Religious clothing, discerned by colour, fabric, or pattern, have a symbolic meaning attached to the religious community. Such clothing accessories come into play when there is an assault on religious sentiments. When Sunnariya was sexually assaulted by one of the overseers, her father, Mukoon Singh, vouches to avenge the attack on her daughter's honour by assassinating the overseer. Before he elopes, "[h]e slowly took off the pagri [turban] from his head and gently put it down next to Sunnariya. I will take this back from you … when I bring back your honour" (Jahajin, 154). South Asian diaspora assume a visual political act through their clothing choices that distinctly embody or disrupt the categories of nation, race, and culture. The 'Indian' is constructed as an oriental subject with visible aid of religious and caste emblems. Both ceremonial and everyday garments constitute symbols of power. The preponderance of hennaed hands, *bindis*, and kohl-rimmed eyes among Indian diasporic women is a reminder of cultural capital derived from the ethnic garb worn by brown bodies.

The jewellery and clothes of the *girmitiyas* substantiate the Marxist concept of the fetishism of commodities that camouflage the labour input and diverts the project of labour rights. The widespread commercial commodities is embedded in conformism and escapism experienced by the working class people in a capitalist society and by colonial subjects under imperial oppression. The arrival of missionaries and dissemination of Western education, large number of *girmitiyas* adopted Christian ways of living and clothing. Under the supervision of mission schools, young girls were taught sewing, knitting, and embroidery of industrialized products that challenged indigenous forms of art and weaving patterns. On the one hand, the missionaries and colonial agents ridiculed the colonial subjects for imitating Western habits and customs, on another, they imposed Western lifestyle to drive a wedge between their indigenous values and newly assumed proselytization. The Fanonian pathology of self-contempt can be easily observed throughout Selvon's bildungsroman treatment of Tiger's character in *A Brighter Sun* and Dabydeen's narrator in *The Intended*. After the betrayal from his foster family and wife, Chandin Ramchandin discards his Western lifestyles by rejecting Western clothes, Protestant practices and resorting back to living like a coolie descendant in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. As an act of rejection and defiance, Chandin subverts the Fanonian concept of adopting the clothing style of the oppressor that reveals the

extent of inferiority complex suffered by the oppressed, since, he feels a deep sense of inadequacy and "otherness". We can examine the discursive essentialization of ethnic identity based on native clothing that reaffirms biologically inscribed cultural identity, enacted through clothes.

Mona's new shift dress for school bazaar night was meticulously tailored that reached just above her knees and invited stares and murmurs from everyone: "Now in the taxi, with this man staring sideways at me, his malevolent disapproval almost palpable between us while he raged against the fallen state of young Indian girls and the resulting deprivation of Indian boys, I felt almost naked in the shift dress" (Swinging Bridge, 172). Dresses commonly worn by all young girls on bazaar nights summoned disparaging behaviour and derogatory comments from strangers as well as her father as well by calling Mona a whore and burning the dress one night in a drunken stupor. Such extreme abuse ensued from a covert loathing for African and creole culture and a fear of long one's own cultural understanding by adopting an assimilationist approach in clothing, eating and living styles. In an apparent contradiction, when Kamla was invited to study geography at The British Council in Belfast, she wore a pink satin dress made by her seamstress with a pair of new heeled shoes during her departure. Her mother and sister had made all the arrangements and the general consensus is that Kamla must look the part as she makes the giant cross cultural leap into a First World nation: "The clothes I was wearing for this journey were more suitable for a cocktail party than travel, but to most people going abroad was like going to a very special party. But there was a built-in assumption, never questioned, that going abroad by its very nature meant a transformation of self, a dramatic improvement of one's status" (Butterfly, 192). Gaining entry into a premier English institution conveniently casts Kamla as an inspiration for the other Hindu girls, deflecting attention from her Westernized wardrobe that would stir a storm in the neighbourhood, if not the entire village, under usual circumstances. As such, clothing practices need not always be acts of rebellion, rather can operate as regimes of social Darwinism and multiculturism which prevents the moral, corporeal, and sexual policing of Indian women. Clothes imbricate with the political as well as aesthetic value in various colonial economies where the second-class citizens try to syncretize culturally conflicting motifs of identity. Diasporic dressing is largely enacted within hegemonic scaffolding,

generated from capitalist aesthetic and denotes disruptive colonial practices alongside postcolonial attempts to represent national uniformity. Resonating the idea of interplay between clothes and socio-economic and cultural framework, similar to jewellery presented to young brides. It is also a result of the compulsion to re-form the self by accessing and owning the hallmarks of consumer society. The 'consumer culture' begins with a bombardment of advertisements that subconsciously influence a non-consumer to cultivate their bodies in accordance with the projected image. It is disappointing to realise the impossibility of freedom from the consumerism. Yet, young Kamla is enamoured by the sophistication in her elementary teacher's way of clothing: "Despite the dust, heat and humidity, everything about Miss Mills was clean. She changed her frocks daily and wore petticoats of white stain, lace and ribbons" (Butterfly, 50). Mother figures are elemental to the easing of the transition and personally supervise the making and maintaining of wardrobes for makeovers. Dissemination of industrialized commodities created a new hierarchies and occupations in an acculturated Caribbean. While hiring a new Creole washerwoman, Kamla's mother specifies that she wants the clothes to be washed twice, bleached, rubbed and rinsed before drying, ironing and folding: "Renee worked very hard and ironed all our visible clothes from handkerchiefs to my father's trousers … Next came 'wrapping up'" (Butterfly, 32). As payment for her services, Renee is paid $15, two packets of cigarettes, breakfast and lunch. Thus, we find Kamla's susceptibility to Western styles of clothing impressed upon her through a visual modality of her surroundings since childhood days.

Along with an amalgamation of numerous culture and races, the Caribbean is also a combination of the old and the modern. Annaise's favourite aunt, Nalini was educated, well-travelled, and radiated an innate Indiannes in her clothing: "She wore silk saris all the time, long before ancestral clothing became vogue in Trinidad. There was one sari that I loved, a purple one with a white paisley pattern, and she made a dress for me out of it for my sixteenth birthday, she was generous like that … all her jewelry was modern, made of amethysts, opals and emeralds that her children sent to her from London and Paris" (Jouvert, 45). With a flair for ushering a new world, consumer culture has, in fact, provided freedom from binary systems of clothing that attempts to harness sexuality into conventional and expected roles. Viveka has been rebellious against her mother, Devika's constant policing her

activities, friends, clothing as well as her sexual orientation. In the aforementioned party organized by Devika, Viveka wore a *kurta* [loose collarless shirt] that was originally "a present to Valmiki from one of his patients who had visited India. The first time Valmiki tried it on, Vashti and Viveka thought it made him look like a movie star. He quite liked it, too. But Devika had pursed her lips and showed no interest in it. He knew she thought it looked like a dress on him. Later he took it to Viveka and asked if she wanted to have it, explaining that as much as he liked it, he knew he would never actually wear it. It had to be altered to fit her, but it became her favourite outfit immediately" (Valmiki, 192). Here, the kurta becomes a mantle of subversive sexuality that has been handed over by the closeted father to his rebellious daughter. Devika's party is a manifestation of an orthodox binary program and though, Viveka claims that the kurta hides her "muscular" arms, it is an assertion of her homosexuality that receives a silent approval from Valmiki and a sporting solidarity from Vashti who suggests that Viveka might be more comfortable in one of their father's old shirts. The kurta is a way of 'coming out' for Viveka, much like Chandin comes out when he decides to discard western clothing and re-adopt Indian clothing choices; Viveka attempts to express her gender fluidity while Chandin rebels against Western ideals through his clothes. David Eng suggested that diaspora and queerness share an intimate relationship since the concept of queerness cannot be restricted to sexual practices and identity (Eng 1997). Queerness is, in fact, found in local and global expression formed through multiple dovetailing of cultural, racial, characteristic differences. Hence, queering one's clothing practices denote a method of re-territorialisation permitted by the re-inscription of cultural identity that mystifies racial taxonomy encompassing a multicultural state. Clothing is, simultaneously, public in presentation and an intimate choice which reflects the self in the most transparent manner. After Tyler completes his nursing training from Shivering Northern Wetlands, an imaginary counterpart of Scotland, and returns to work in Paradise Alms House in his village Lantanacamara, he gains a new-found confidence and sexual liberation. Tyler is constantly aware of the probing eyes of his fellow nurses and the snide comments on his clothing and the judgmental attitude towards his profession. He feels free only in the presence of Mala, who has an uncanny understanding of the eccentricities present in people around her as we find her stealing clothes of another female nurse for Tyler to put them on. When Tyler wears those clothes he feels a sense of freedom and realizes that, "[s]he was not the

one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom" (Cereus, 155). Mootoo's homosexual characters come alive through a process of bricolage, re-constructing the self by experiencing a diverse range of emotions—quiet solidarity, strict policing, self-doubt, sexual awakening and emancipation. Very often, the places, people and comfort clothing fosters a social skin that precipitate the process of self-awakening. Nonetheless, Mootoo also provides a dismal and unforgiving reaction of society towards deviant sexuality through the character of Merle Bedi, Viveka's former school friend who has been ostracized by her family and society for expressing her love for a female teacher publicly. Merle Bedi is a casualty of the Indo-Caribbean dogmatic practices and her tattered clothes are a literal representation of homophobic persecution: "She wears what was once a white shirt, a school shirt from not too long ago, but it is yellowed and soiled, and the trousers she wears, men's trousers, are covered in dirt, dust, urine. They are several sizes too big for her, held high above her waist with a belt, as if that were not enough, a length of heavy rope. She is barefoot" (Valmiki, 22). By spiritual and scientific faith, dirty clothes and unkempt appearance is synonymous with poverty, impurity and unhygienic. Annaise finds her paint stained school uniform artistic and an expression of her passion for art itself but to her mother was appalled and thought "it indicated that [Annaise] had poverty-stricken parents who could not afford to dress [her] in clean, crisp white shirts" (Jouvert, 72).

Mootoo's queer characters resonate on a personal level probably owing to her autobiographical insights as we find Sidney Mahale, a transgender man, shed all his pretences and express himself openly after he migrates to Canada. Sid's way of clothing shows a shift cross-dressing to a proliferating market of queer consumerism that moves away from an option-less, uncomfortable clothing to a proliferating market for queer culture. Sidney goes through a sex reassignment surgery and counselling and there on, seen dressing like a dignified man: "Neither the men nor the women were flamboyant like cross-dressers and transsexuals, but they moved about, at least in our sessions together, with a quiet confidence I admired" (Moving Forward Sideways, 118). When Sidney flies back to Trinidad to attend the funeral of the woman he loved, Zain, his mother's first concern is if he has proper clothes to attend the funeral. Funerals in every civilization and religion are a matter of grave importance and cloth functions as an important bridge between the living and the

dead. The never-ending circle of death, cremation and re-birth is a common belief in all cultures and the farewell to the dead in good fabric to ensure an undisturbed continuance in their after-life is collectively evident in all ethnographies. Some religious communities clothed the dead in their usual attire while others wrapped them in pristine white shroud, but bathing the lifeless body is customary to all and one. In her essay 'Cloth and Clothing', Jane Schneider posits, "Cloth intensifies sociality in rituals of birth, initiation, and curing" (Schneider 2006). In every community, marriage, funerals, and childbirth call for members of the community to come together and merge their spirits and blessings for the concerned individuals. In all the Indian marriage ceremonies — Vasti, Chandin, Sastra, Sunnariya, Tiger, and Ved — the bride and groom are tied in holy matrimony by their wedding attire that is sanctified by the priests to tighten the knot of their lifelong bond. Similarly, a celebration is usually a gathering of family and friends belonging from similar socio-economic backgrounds and a perfect occasion to demonstrate personal prosperity and opulence through their garments, jewellery, perfume, and accessories:

> Gold dangled from the ears and necks of the meagre women, and their wrists held bangles, the jewellery studded not so discreetly with diamonds and sapphires and rubies. Talk of karats and sizes, hands held up and fingers splayed to display all, was had and got out of the way early. There were dresses in fine linen, and pantsuits in silk. And all women wore open-toed, high-heeled, patent leather sandals. The men were more casually dressed. Several wore light slacks and all wore white shirts, as if in uniform, and very shiny dress shoes. Their large gold Rolexes and Pateks glistened against their dark, hairy wrists, and strong scents of the latest, most expensive colognes did good battle with the catered food and with the cacao roasting in neighbouring properties (Valmiki, 347).

2.2.5 Cultural Investiture

Clothes are an investiture of individual economic condition and help us navigate shifting identifications based on nationality, class, gender, race, and age.

Marcel Mauss believes in the enormous potential of fabric to avert evil eye, stall problems or initiate warfare (Mauss 1954, 10). Religious celebrations witness a number of exchanges; (i) *prasadam* offered to God for their benevolence (ii) clothes offered to the priest for enabling the rituals (iii) food served to the guests for their presence and empathy (iv) tangible gifts given by the guests to the host for their invitation and hospitality. Gifts are customarily given in to evoke an obligation to return the favour and no form of gift is discrete or terminal (Appadurai 1986, 64). In one of the *kathas*, Kamla's parents offered a length of white fabric for dhoti to the poor and a silver coin to the more close neighbours and relatives. The pundit was offered an immaculate dhoti, *phagree* (turban), golden embroidered satin kurta, and tasselled *angochar* (shawl). Apart from the type of fabric, style, and design, the inherent colour symbolism is fundamental to the entire biography of textile[6]. Coloured flags have a wide-ranging connotations— nationality, community, group, religion, rank, etc. The narrator In *The Intended* reminisces his village in Trinidad and recalls the way "[c]oloured flags fluttered from those on bamboo poles, distinguishing the Hindu houses from those of the Muslims and black people" (The Intended, 31). Gender revelation is celebrated with pink and blue for girls and boys, respectively, only to find the LGBTQ spectrum engulf an entire array of colours to shatter the normative gender coding since infancy.

Every culture has appropriated colours in accordance to their history and faith. The influences of multiculturism in the Caribbean generates unique myths, traditions and beliefs. Contrary to the Eurocentric notions, Milly tells Sastra an entirely black cat brings good luck to its owner. Milly's superstitious belief is a close testimony of the racial prejudice perpetrated on every non-Eurocentric ethnicity and subverts the prevalent conception instead of internalizing the hegemonic impression. Speaking of the principle religions and traditions, marriages are associated with either red, the colour of love, passion, sanguineous, or white, symbolizing chastity and devotion. Funerals take place in hues of white or black indicating mourning and death. Colours are a reference to emotional expression. The materiality of colours indicate the coloured cloth, coloured spaces, coloured food, and other commodities. Colours of things are able to harness and gauge the social milieu in a number of ways despite the fact that colours are scientifically considered as a quality rather than a quantity. On account of mythical, historical, cultural, religious, political and

semantic affiliations in South Asian communities, not only human beings but the deities are also encapsulated in specific hues: “Whether the gods had favourite colours I did not know, but Hanuman, the god of strength, was represented by red; Ganesh, the god associated with learning and education by yellow; Lakshmi, the goddess of light and wealth, by pink; and the god Shiva by blue” (Butterfly, 124). The devotees offer marigold flowers at the feet of the deity and at the end of *katha*, the priest blesses the devotees by sprinkling ruby-coloured perfume on them. The *katha* lays bare the importance of the process of dyeing to achieve appropriate colouring of commodities. Hence, colours are able to animate objects, create an aura surrounding an inanimate object, bring vibrancy as well as dispirit a place. Nonetheless, the thriving carnivalesque bazaars, exhibitions, and handcraft markets endorse the significance of clothing in the livelihood and lives of migrant groups. In recent times, textile sector has spawned handicrafts and traditional costumes which attract tourists and travellers to buy them as souvenirs. The night bazaar in *The Swinging Bridge* is one such resultant of ‘ethnogenesis’ and the awakening among the general population to restore and preserve ethnic artforms.

Notes

[1] When I discuss micro-commodities, I also take the intangible heritage and related paraphernalia into account. There, section 2.1 discusses the household objects along with the domestic space and chapter 3 focuses on food, culinary objects, and gastronomic practices.

[2] Most missionaries adopted children from non-European races in the plantations for missionizing purposes.

[3] *Panchayat* is a basic governing body in Indian rural areas to address local issues. Historically, women were excluded from being a part of this administrative body. However, women must mandatorily be a part of the *panchayat* at present time.

[4] Postcards, hoardings, and advertisements with a photograph or sketch of an anonymous women heavily adorned with Indian jewellery such as *jhumkas*, bangles, and necklaces were being circulated outside the West Indies to encourage tourism. The figure of these Indian women were colloquially called 'coolie belle'. It was a fetishized and exotic commodity to capture the colonial imagination. The photographs are also portrayed from a colonial gaze and hides the real conditions of the plantation workers.

[5] *Pathan* is an ethnic group primarily belonging from the Indus valley. They are known for their physical strength and robust nature. Indentured recruiters usually preferred men from the *pathan* background for their strength.

[6] The motif of colours associated with religious practices and various rituals is also seen in food which is discussed in chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Scrutinizing Consumption Patterns and Culinary Practices

3.1 Rethinking the Flow of Food

While nourishment is a human need, the provision of nutrition expresses class distinctions. Furthermore, eating patterns reveal age, sex, class, caste, culture, and occupation. Availability plays a vital role in the eating habits but human beings never consume everything available or edible. Human beings have always firmly maintained what they do not eat more strongly that what they eat. Hence familiar food choices have been central agents uniting as well as alienating people and people with unfamiliar consumption pattern have even been considered less human. Phenomelogically, tastes, nurturance, and digestion are eloquent aspects of self-definition as we learn to identify ourselves in relation to the other. What we eat, what we do not eat, and how we eat carry an important affective saddle.
Anthropologically, the act of social eating is referred to as 'commensal' which describes the interrelation between humans and gods. 'Breaking bread' is primitively the first fellowship among humans which makes 'bread' or *roti* an enormously significant form of nourishment. Food is intimately connected with kinship or social group and it assumes various forms of affiliation in the modern age. Food habits are crucial in validating social relationships and remain steep in their affective impact. With the help of the selected primary texts, I have discussed the evolution of Indo-Caribbean foodways and tried to understand food along with its numerous material and immaterial trappings which reflect various social issues. Since the consumption pattern of Indo-Carribbean people transcends and abuts cultural and geographical borders, it plays an active role in preserving, disrupting, or (re)producing identities, communities, social practices, political alliances, and economic structures. Using the concepts and framework of material culture, this chapter is concerned with the cycles of production, circulation, and consumption of culinary commodities and practices. The gastro-politics among Indian indentured labourers and the subsequent Indo-Caribbean population acts as a window to cultural values because food is an exposition of their ideological principles. Ingestion patterns, culinary appendages, cooking apparatus, and spaces all encapsulate a cultural capital which becomes

highly volatile when large number of people from specific socio-cultural backgrounds are transplanted in an unfamiliar space. Ironically, the reason for the mass displacement of Indians under indentureship was also the food product, sucrose, which bewitched the palette English nobility since early 1600 and eventually turned every Englishman into an inveterate sugar consumer by the 1800.

Indians in Caribbean islands continued sustaining relation with their homeland as a space for personal as well as collective development and inspiration. Indian migrants and following generations re-imagined the Caribbean as a 'home' that emerged from a heterogeneous sense of time and space. The migrants retained a dominant food culture that was instrumental in developing Caribbean foodways and trading system related to food commodities. The tension of migration and retention denotes food as a crucial indicator of cultural identity and provides a culinary map to colonial resistance that keeps the indigenous narratives and cross-cultural practices afloat. The analysis of food imagery in the novels provide a pluralism in the patterns of consumption while the performance of cooking and eating animate the literary sensibility of the author. The semiotic relationship between food and environment is central to human survival and identity. Hence, the process of migration of whole communities on a temporary or permanent basis leads to the rupture in the semiotic affiliation which either results in a complete amputation of their food culture or evolves into a cosmopolitan culinary practice. Food plays an authoritative role in their life and specific foods become inadvertent mnemonic of holidays, specific incidents, or social and familial get-togethers. Food has the power to control the complete sensory experience since it acts as marker of individual, cultural, and national identity. Caribbean cuisine is a cross-cultural mosaic of Indian, Chinese, African, and European elements that embodies a history of disenfranchisement and diaspora solidarity. Each island of the Indies has its own specialised cuisine according to the synergy of the ethnic population, market dynamics, and available food products[1]. It is notable to mention that Indians and West Indian people are highly agri-based which inadvertently makes people of differing nationality and culture, an organic consumers. When Annaise went to Mayaro bay for her Christmas holidays, she met and fell deeply in love with a young fisherman, Renegade. As she started spending most of her time her his wooden, beach-side house, [h]e prepared lunch with an exceptional seasoning of scotch bonnet peppers, bird peppers, French

thyme, salt, garlic and lime juice. All of our meals came from his morning catch: spicy stewed fish and coo-coo, or oil-down with blue crabs, or white rice and curried fish garnished with thin slivers of fresh scotch bonnet peppers. There was something completely intimate about our meals" (Jouvert, 60). Indian and Caribbean population have fed and subsisted on locally found or grown nutriment. The food culture of the Indo-Caribbeans was especially unique because it developed from a migrant community. This Indian labouring migrant community in the Caribbean shaped its food culture independently over several years of preservation and re-calibration of ancestral and local consumption patterns. The production and consumption of food among Indo-Caribbeans were re-imagined from memoirs much like their religion, their agricultural expertise, the music, and their way of living. The foodways of people of particular place are directly influenced and closely interrelated with the geography they are inhabiting.

The large majority of the Indian indentured labourers were recruited from the Indo-Gangetic Plain, also known as the Awadh region, but despite the demographic, the food culture had vastly diverged from the Awadhi cuisine that was marked by the usage of rich spices, cooking meat in tandoor ovens, and deep-frying ginger, garlic, and onions. This gives rise to questions as to why did the Awadhi people shift their ethnic food culture they were habitually consuming after migrating to the Caribbean sugar estates and how did this evolution of foodways happen over a short span of time. The foremost reason behind the different food cultures is the different climatic conditions between the British Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Guyana and the Awadhi region. The Indian region closest to the West Indies, in terms of climatic conditions, is Kerala, a state in southern India. Kerala also experiences a tropical climate with humid weather and incessant rains. The vegetation in this south Indian state is quite identical to the locally available produce in Trinidad and Guyana including jackfruit or *kathhal* in Indian and *koa* in Guyana, banana, breadfruit, sweet potatoes, eggplant, snake gourd or *padval*, bitter gourd or *karela*, lady finger or *bhindi* in Indian and *okra* in the Caribbean, green leaf spinach or *cheera* in India, and various kinds of taro plants. The presence of coconut, coconut oil, and rice is yet another common food culture between the Caribbean and Kerala regions. Despite crossing the forbidden black waters, years of restriction, and over a century-old diaspora, the Indo-Caribbeans managed to hold onto their food culture. The

predominant consumption of potatoes, eggplants, lentils, onions, rice, and wheat flour as their staple food is a striking example of the survival of foodways that translates into the survival of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora for a century. The Indians in the Caribbean islands devised new ways of importing or smuggling food commodities from their homeland which demonstrates a heroic resistance. The Awadhi areas namely, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh experience very dry summers and harsh winters rather than a tropical climate. The monsoons in the Indo-Gangetic Plains arrive late and are not extreme in nature since both the southwest and northeast monsoon winds enter the region after touring the southern and eastern parts of India. Unlike the wet rice cultivation in south India, the Indo-Gangetic regions are principally suitable for the cultivation of wheat, mustard, plantains, cauliflower, cabbage, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, gourds, spinach, and others. The Awadhis did not grow and rarely ate breadfruit, jackfruit, sweet potatoes, eddoes, and other taro plants. The usage of coconut can only be found in sweet dishes and unlike south Indian people, coconut oil is rarely incorporated in cooking. The inclusion of coconut oil in Indo-Caribbean cooking is a pronounced feature, much like in south India where coconut trees are a distinguishing feature of the landscape. The oil extracted from coconut milk is economical and has a pungent smell that regularly makes its way through the curries and *chokhas*, and is used to fry vegetables. People in southern India enjoyed the taste of tamarind in their curries and *dhal*, popularly known as *sambar*, and this south Indian unique tradition can also be seen among the Indo-Caribbeans as well. Tamarind became an integral ingredient for cooking fish curry and lentil soup with seasonal vegetables as it has several health benefits in surviving a harsh tropical climate.

3.2 Jahaji *Bandal*

Leading anthropologists have pointed out that the various functions, texts, and contexts of food are markers of social hierarchy, communal sensibilities, and identity traits giving rise to “gastro-politics” (Appadurai 1981) in South Asia. Unlike clothes, houses, and other paraphernalia of daily use, food is a constant necessity and a quickly expendable commodity. Though the indentured Indians have been severed from their parent domain, they are an extended part of their native land that

organically modifies by retaining their cultural skeleton while developing new characteristics. We find Deeda and a few other *jahajis* carrying roots, wrapped in a wet cloth, and seeds of local fruits and vegetables to sow in the foreign land, "Karailli! [Deeda exclaims] Here in Trinidiad! [with a tone of surprise and joy] So we were not the first ones to think of bringing seeds from home [Deeda thinks]" (Jahajin, 117). The very word *diaspora* has been borrowed from the botanical term *diaspore*, which refers to a part of a plant that helps dispersal, usually the seed. Hence, the similarity between the vegetal parts and humans, in terms of movement, growth, and survival, is multifaceted, though not without limitations. After enduring the defining 'middle passage', the coolies and the seeds carried by them are transplanted but only the most resilient ones are able to show growth and reproduction. Arriving indentees brought dry food items, seeds, and spices in a cloth bag, commonly called a jahaji *bandal* meaning a ship's bundle or sack, that used to be tied to an end of a cane and slung on their shoulders. This loosely tied cloth sack closely knit the migrating Indians with their homeland that helped them continue their legacy, restore indentured history, and reinvent their culture. The narrator's grandmother in *The Intended* tells him that Old Juncha, the narrator's great-great grandfather, "came from India in a boat with a dhoti wrapped around his waist and a sack of belongings on his back" (The Intended, 51). The jahaji *bandal* resembled a micro India with a few clothing items, grafts of plants, seeds, holy books like the Ramayana and Quran, sacred tulsi leaves, spices, tools, and utensils that were essential to an Indian way of living and transformed the landscape of the Caribbean islands.

During the many 'trial and error' phases of the indentureship, the estate owners actively encouraged coolies to become self-sufficient by allowing them to grow their own food supplies. This made the coolies carry seeds of edible fruits and vegetables across the *kala pani* and grow root vegetables, pigeon peas, and baby spinach, all easily cultivable, in the backyard of their barracks and in-between the rows of sugarcane. The Indian indentured labourers utilised their agricultural knowledge and appetite for vegetable-based meals to grow kitchen garden within the labour lodgings, around the barracks, and later in their grant lands. Kitchen gardens have always been an integral part of most families and met the requirements of vegetables and ground provisions for the whole family or neighbourhood since they

were grown by several families in common lands. Indentured migrant families found alternative ways to preserve and store the agricultural produce; they ripened tomatoes under their beds and also stored melongenes and pumpkins under trees or sheltered corners of their houses. The surplus produce was sold by the coolies in the local markets for extra earnings with the permission of the estate managers. The faithful adherence to one's culinary heritage despite distance and displacement shows defiance to transfiguration and compliance to food revision and cosmovision of traditional recipes with unfamiliar ingredients. Most of the *girmitiyas* carried essential spices like chilies, coriander, cumin, peppercorns, ginger, garlic, saffron, and an assortment of tenacious herbs as personal souvenirs that were functional in a foreign nation. The little pouches of aromatics served as a constant reminder of their families and home left behind as well as acted as a resistance to the deception and/or coerced separation. The fragrant spices fleetingly overpowered the pungent odours rising from the ships, providing a medicinal relief to the pervading atmosphere of misery and sea-sickness. Mona is overwhelmed with pride and nostalgia as the night bazaar on Divali witnessed a huge congregation:

> With the simplicity of older women who had brought their coal pots and tawas, filling the air with the smell of home cooking. Sada *rotis* [flatbread], *bhaigans* [eggpant] and tomatoes roasting for *chokhas* [mashed with spices], pepper, *bhandhania* [cilantro] leaves, *okhroes* [lady finger], *bhaji* [fritters], curried mango, and *carilees* [bitter gourd]. All that simple peasant food from the great Indo-Gangetic plain had crossed the *kala pani* and nourished us during a passage into death and sickness and unending labour, and into a light that was the present (Swinging Bridge, 299).

The seeds and spices were an assurance of self-preservation and cultural stability for the mass of indentured labourers who were able to survive the transoceanic crossing. In retrospect, the spices and seeds that crossed the *kala pani*, scattered and flourished in the Caribbean, played a fundamental role in sustaining and reinforcing the survival of an ethnic minority for over a century.

3.3 Invented Tradition

The study of foodways is crucial in understanding migrant individuals and/or communities. Food provides nourishment for physical as well as social growth. Food memories play an active role in reconstructing the past, assimilating the present, and manoeuvring the future of migrants; it paves way for social affiliation and class mobility. In the context of bonded labour, migration is always traumatic and food has the power to act as a dynamic mnemonic. The dynamism of this important material is derived from its association with childhood memories and important events either in a comforting or negative light. Even on a group level, food acts as a strong way of remembering the process of cooking and consuming it together. Culinary habits undergo constant changes but the pattern of daily diet among migrants is far more noticeable than natives. A migrant may seemingly prepare indexical food or ritual meals which, in fact, is drastically different from the traditional preparatory process and final taste and aroma. Although the food differs in its use of ingredients, it remains ideologically faithful to their religious, social, and national groups. Gastronomy plays a crucial role in maintaining social and cultural relationships and creating new associations. I will reflect on the ways in which food interprets the continuity and dissonance in the lives of the indentured labourers and Indo-Caribbean diaspora. The migrant characters draw on their memories to follow the foodways observed back home. They also observe and employ the patterns encountered in the foreign land. The ambivalence in their foodways brings changes in their identity as well as the host land because food is an essential commodity in cultural exchange and creation of societies; food has the capacity to build a better future for individuals and groups by coalescing the past and present; this demonstrates Hobsbawn's paradoxical notion of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn 1983). Migrant communities invented traditions that helped them observe a form of 'commensal sociality' (Renne 2007) that demonstrates how West African immigrants use food to assert protraction of their culture through gustation.

Renne has dwelled on the significance of specialty stores that sell ethnic products to displaced communities. Specialty grocery shops and restaurants engage with migrants in various ways. These stores and eateries allow migrants to purchase and prepare ethnic food in the traditional culinary process as well as provide a social

hub for migrants to assemble and interact which leads to community building. During the early years of indentured trade, major British-Caribbean islands were strewn with *kirana* or *mudikhana* (local grocery shops) selling Indian spices and condiments, cereals and pulses, and pantry staples. As the traffic of ships and Indian labourers soared, the number and variety also increased[2]. Better facilities allowed greengrocers to open up on street corners. In the post-indenture years, when Indians were recognised as the second-largest ethnic community in West Indies, the visibly large number of specialty stores could arguably be called convenience stores. The search for the best roti leads Fung to meet Ruby and Ram Maharaj, founders and owners of Ram's Roti Shop in Toronto. They recall how new Indian migrants or passers-by come to their restaurant and spend days crying, reminiscing, and sharing stories about India and their families in the homeland. Such restaurants reproduced home and provided asylum to migrants. Specialty shops served as a centre of network for local or national diaspora associations that developed solidarity and empowerment. Specialty shops started becoming a space of convergence for diaspora people. They also provided employment and shelter to migrants. Women were the most common customers in such places where they frequently met and shared information, culinary recipes, advice, gossip, complaints, and rumours. Ethnic restaurants were also usually operated by women like the "dimly lit illegal Trinidadian bar" (Jouvert, 102) in Brooklyn. The bar always played calypsos and Chutney music, the walls had calypsonian song lyrics written on them, and was truly unconventional in several ways. Firstly, this place was the meeting spot for Annaise and her boyfriend, Andy, who promised he was getting a divorce from his wife. This unconventional couple was sometimes joined by Andy's friend, Learie, who was simultaneously sleeping with four women. But the most unconventional aspect of this bar was Rachele who run the entire place. This Trinidadian woman was a single mother and could always be seen wearing gold jewellery and shiny clothes. The bar had earned regular customers despite having no fixed menu. Rachele had expertise in Trinidadian recipes of Indian, Chinese, or Creole origin and the dishes "depended on her mood, what she dreamt, and which man she seeing at the time" (Jouvert, 102). These shops were often located in a neighbourhood where a large number of Indian migrants settled. Despite the distance and difference, Indians were able to re-create Indian food in the Caribbean. They strove to locate ingredients, moulded pots and pans, assemble herbs, and prepare spices. The curious case of *chadon beni* or *shado*

beni is one such example of locating and substituting the commonly used herb, *dhaniya* or coriander. The unavailability of *dhaniya* led to the discovery of an herb similar to coriander which is culantro, a native leafy herb of the West Indies. It is locally called *bandhaniya* by the Indians or *shado beni* by Caribbeans. *Shado beni* is a different plant within the coriander family yet more intense and pungent in aroma and flavour when chopped or crushed: "Items such as these had made our lives possible in times when a life could barely be imagined. Like the *chardon bene* plant with its distinct coriander smell and strong taste. Its Creole name was *shado-beni* but for us it had become *bhandhania*; not *dhania*, but its wild cousin. (Swinging Bridge, 283). Shado beni is usually made into a paste or sauce that is used as a marinade and successfully fulfilled the role of coriander paste in Indian cuisine. With a stroke of luck, Amira discovered that the next town named Burnt Oak had several Indian specialty grocery shops. Though she would have to travel a fair bit for groceries, she was grateful for the bounty of "colours, sizes, shapes, scents … shoppers and shopkeepers" (Daughters, 45) who were mostly from India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. Her visits to Burnt Oak fulfilled Amira's culinary needs and reinforced her social identity. The familiar sights and smells inside Indian specialty shops brought a feeling of comfort for some and claustrophobia for others. The naming and packaging of ethnic products, décor, and music in specialty shops include references to the homeland that evoke a sense of nostalgia. Indian restaurant and product advertisements claim that the food and commodities are authentically produced which creates a sense of trust and intimacy between the shops and the consumers. Specialty restaurants are also known to host cultural fiestas when popular traditional recipes and important culinary skills are taught, famous ethnic artists are invited to perform live or an exhibition is held.

3.4 A Sensory Delight

The South Asian communities possess one of the oldest and most stratified histories of agricultural economy saturated with spiritual and divine values that creates the familiar social discourse. Food is intimately linked with place and season that results in varying cuisines based on seasonal produce and the people are hungry for in-season fruits and vegetables; even the seasonal ailments and infections have remedies in the local seasonal food. Migrants are faced different climatic conditions,

hence, left with the absence of seasonal food as Amira complains, "the vegetable shop doesn't have the vegetables we like: channa, sweet potatoes, small leaf chowrai bhajee. I dream of grilled aubergine and ripe tomatoes, with cumin, garlic, onions and sweet peppers. I can't find pumpkins that are ripe or creamy avocados. The girls ask for these daily. Just yesterday Vidya wanted to know when the mango season will come. No sugar apples, star apples, golden apples, Governor plums, pawpaw" (Daughters, 36). Food has been explored in two directions; the location and role of food in a social organization as suggested by Malinowski, or food as a cultural system as stated by Levi-Strauss. Consumption is always seen as a form of symbolic action and categorized into three domains including the household, the ceremonial, and the religious. The everyday household consumption pattern is the origin of a community in symbiosis with the local environment and social and ecological practices. Subsequently, the abundance of green vegetables, part of the daily diet in India, like the *baigan/bigan* (eggplant), *saag* (spinach), *kaddoo* (pumpkin) *tamatar* (tomato), *matar* (peas), and *phaliyaan* (beans) significantly reduced in variation and prepared occasionally during special events by the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. Evidently, the scarcity in the availability of vegetable produce due to the stifling tropical climate and a vastly non-agrarian Caribbean civilization relocated the consumption of vegetables from a quotidian meal to a part of a festive meal, reverberating the meta-journey of the Indian indentured labourers. The newly arrived indentees and the later socially downtrodden Indian diaspora typically have *rotis* (flatbread) accompanied by roasted tomatoes, *bigan*, or *saag* prepared on a *chulha* (earthen stove) with coals. The prosperous families are seen to indulge in a more filling and varied meal including *rotis* or rice, french beans, salad, chicken or lamb curry accompanied by homemade pickles and chutney followed by dessert. The presence or absence of rice, protein, condiments, and dessert signifies the socio-economic status of the consumer. The colonial obsession with wealth and power uprooted many communities from their homeland and incorporated a multitude of cooking methods and ingredients, simultaneously, local and global, and shows a cuisine that is truly transnational in spirit and scope[3]. The correlation between foodways and cultural rootedness is a widely established fact. The aroma from the numerous household in Kamla's neighbourhood in *Butterfly in the Wind* enfolds her with a sensory extravaganza and sense of belonging:

> It was a sensory delight to walk slowly in the dusk on the main Pasea road when the evening meals were being prepared. The women busily darting in and out of their kitchens were probably oblivious to the pleasures I received of the rich warm aroma of wood smoke, rotis lifting themselves from the hot iron *tarwas* [skillet], vegetables in massala … and the intoxicating smell of warm roasted spices … These flavours comforted and energized me, as one aroma mingled with another, so that by the time I arrived home I was in a more than ready state for my evening meal (Butterfly, 86).

The process of cooking and eating has a more tangible impact on displaced individuals as the auditory and olfactory perception provides a sense of a vital link to their native land and ensures a restorative effect, since, culinary habits are an important archive to differences of gender, race, and class. Very often, the marginalised get access and advantage of the material and lived reality by being able to recreate the desired food and flavours of the 'imagined homeland' with a culinary imagination, suitable adaption, and steady acculturation.

The similarity in the Indian and Caribbean cuisine is largely because Indians maintained a close relation with the motherland and continued their native culture. One of the main dishes regularly eaten by Indians is *dhal* which is also the principal source of protein for most of them. Caribbeans commonly prepare and eat yellow split peas (*arhar/tur/toor*) whereas Indians cultivated and consumed over twenty varieties of lentils including black-eyed peas (*raungi/chawli*), black gram split and skinned (*urad*), black gram whole (*sabu urad*), chickpeas or Bengal gram (*kala chana*), green chickpeas (*hara chana*), split brown chickpeas (*chana dhal*), white chickpeas (*kabuli chana*), kidney peas (*rajma*), split brown lentils (*masoor dhal*), split yellow lentils (*moong dhal*), green gram beans (*hara moong*). Since lentils were not produced in the Caribbean islands, they were imported from India along with onions, potatoes, spices, rice, wheat, other consumable items, and indentured labourers. It is also known that several Indian merchants began importing, distributing, and retailing imported food produce after the expiration of their indentured period. Once the indentured system became regularised, ex-Indian indentees utilised their knowledge of lived reality and trading prudence to import and

sell consumable products and other necessary items in demand by Indian labourers. The Indian merchants and small tradesmen hoarded these items prior to payday when the labourers received their wages and came to the local bazaars to purchase necessary commodities. This importation of Indian food produce and other commodities demonstrates the demand and insistence of Indians to sustain their food culture.

Indian diasporic communities were subjected to social and economic disenfranchisement well into the twentieth century. As we draw up the biography of Indo-Caribbean food, we are constantly reminded of the impoverished state of the colonies at the hands of the British Empire. Harold S. Laddoo's *No Pain Like This Body* shows the pauperizing impact of the Empire being nourished at the cost of fatalistic starvation. Shiva Naipaul's *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* pivot around the theme of hoarding and deprivation as suggested by the titular metaphor. The eponymous "chip-chip" is a type of small clam found in the Caribbean islands and the seashores of the south-eastern US. These tiny clams have very little meat in them and take a huge amount of time and effort to collect in-between the ebbing waves, hence, they are commonly collected and consumed by very poor people who survive on the bare minimum. Following the Malthusian ideology, the human population has long outstripped food resources resulting in the impoverishment of the Third-World nations and the excessive accumulation of resources by the Western capitalists. Industrialized Europe extracted maximum resources and labour from the colonies, leaving them crippled and rendering all their efforts at survival a complete disappointment. Through the title and the novel itself, Naipaul upholds the futility of human efforts and by extension, the specific efforts and lives of the indentured labourers, who arrived in the Caribbean with a prime intention of 'bread and butter'. On the other hand, successful Indian diasporic families enjoyed a great variety of food given the choices available to them in the metropolitan. The children of these families were often sent to the United States or the United Kingdom for higher education and better opportunities. The parents and family back home were always in fear that their children might settle there and never return or their sons might marry a white woman. Hence, when they came home on holidays, they were usually coaxed into returning home or an arranged marriage with Indian delicacies, especially their favourite childhood dishes. When Ved desperately wanted a long

break from the rapid expansion of Saran business, he planned on exchanging lives with his brother Robin who was studying law in England and sorely longed for Trinidadian sunshine, tamarind chutney, fried fish, and mangoes. Since Ved was well aware that his mother would not approve of his vacation, "[Robin's] mango lust and curry nostalgia were [his] weapons" (Like Heaven, 180). Robin or Rabindranath Saran was visiting home for six weeks but when he shared the news of a potentially successful career in England after completing law, Ved decided to capture his soul by attacking his belly with the secret weapon of coconut chutney. The next morning, Ved had to halt his scheming after Robin asked his mother to find a bride in four weeks so he could honeymoon in Barbados for the remaining two weeks. When his mother asked for his preferences, he handed her a menu that the girl must be able to expertly cook which remains a common prerequisite while choosing brides. His mother complained about the short amount that would involve hurried rituals but he informed her that he prefers a simple registry marriage without any fuss. Robin's main concern was that the girl must be able to fry *aloo* (potato) and *cachourie* (deep-fried snacks) which "must have the right degree of crispiness and the right degree of softness" (Like Heaven, 180). Thus, Robin and his mother began an intense search for a perfect bride among several girls; one of them was known for inventing cucumber chutney, while another had a secret recipe for curried coconut jelly. After an exhausting bride hunt, Robin shortly pursued Nerissa, the Muslim shop worker at Saran store, because Muslims were unmatched at making *sawaine* (vermicelli), paratha roti, and long-water goat curry. One of the best-known extravagant food cultures belongs to the north Indian Muslims who have mastered the beef and goat preparations in ghee with an abundance of dry fruits like almonds, cashews, and pistachios. Nonetheless, Indo-Caribbeans foodways had no influence of Indian Muslim food possibly, due to the absence of meat, dry fruits, sesame seeds, saffron, and other food commodities heavily used in their cooking. Ultimately, when Robin threatens his mother to marry a girl from India, she immediately retorts that he will surely suffer from diarrhoea from consuming excessive ginger in the food "Indian does cook" (Like Heaven, 183). This shows the difference between East Indian and West Indian cuisine. Decades of cultural diffusion and residual imperial influence created a desire to dissociate from the parent body and spurn the culinary heritage.

3.5 A Well-Rounded Meal: *Roti, Paratha,* and *Dhal Puri*

Roti symbolises an authentic Indian and Indo-Caribbean identity. It also reinforces a sense of comfort and belonging in an otherwise stressful situation fraught with changes. *Roti* and its corollary items like *paratha* and *dhal puri*, originated from parts of South Asia namely India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka before promulgating in distant parts of the world contaminated by colonial activities. These unleavened Indian bread are symbolic of an authentic South Asian identity and later, a Caribbean identity, particularly in Fiji, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago which admitted the largest number of Indian indentured labourers. *Rotis* came to the Caribbean shores along with the Indian indentees where unleavened flatbread was not commonly seen yet. Ashutosh Kumar found a report prepared by the Health Officer of Shipping in Trinidad, Dr. Bakewell, reiterating "[c]haupatties are the favourite food of nearly all coolies … the up-country coolies detest rice … and the substitution of wheaten flour for rice would make a most important difference to the nutrition of the immigrants" (Kumar 2017, 105). Indian diet in the Caribbean was barely enough for sustenance and eliminated the complex flavours that Indian cuisine is known for. *Roti* or chapatti characterised the adaptability in a deprived world (Mackie 1991, 154). *Roti* provided the strength required for the hard labour as well as protectiveness from alienation and discrimination. Indo-Caribbeans also invented *doubles* and *buss up shut/busupshat* which are popular and callaloo dishes that are ingrained in West Indian culture and signify cultural intermingling. They may seem to be mere vehicles to eat *tarkari*, vegetable side dish, or meat curries but it has become a staple food that is typically eaten with chickpeas, potatoes, and meat. Caribbean flatbread is buttery that absorbs the succulent flavours of the side dish or filling. It is easy to eat one but requires decades of practice. The influence of Indian food is clearly visible in the umpteen number of *roti* shops spread across the island nation which are run by both Indians and Caribbeans. *Dhal puris* and *doubles* have evolved as a favourite among fast food. But prior to the wrap style or roti with filling, *sada roti* or unleavened bread is the classic comfort food for all Indians settled outside their homeland. Trinidadian *rotis* are comparatively softer and more fluffy because of the incorporation of baking powder which is absent in Indian *rotis*. Furthermore, Caribbean *rotis* are often made with *maida* or all-purpose flour that is light-weight due to the low extraction factor

while the North Indian chapatis are made with *atta* or wholewheat flour that is quite heavy. The popularity and availability of *roti* have made it a symbolic food for Indians, Africans, Creoles, and other ethnic groups in the Caribbean islands because it has united them despite the historically divisive colonial practice. As Indian migrants found solace in the process of making and eating *roti* in the plantation estates, the Caribbean diaspora in Canada, Central America, and the UK also find reprieve from their sense of marginalization and isolation in consuming *roti* in a place that may seem hostile to the "other".

As the Caribbean became more multicultural and decentred, Indian culinary ways became a synecdoche for Indianness. On her first day at the Anglican school, June is immaculately dressed by her mother, Lucille, eager to carve out a place in the new progressive world. Unfortunately, Lucille makes the mistake of packing June's tiffin in a saucepan which immediately marks her as a coolie girl and invites endless ridicule from her classmates. The poor Indians generally ate *rotis* which can be made by stretching a little amount of dough and feeding a larger number of people. Along with rice, *roti* was a staple diet for the *girmitiyas*. But the *rotis* in Trinidad was made from white flour instead of *atta* or whole wheat flour which had not migrated beyond the north-western parts of India. The narrator of *Jahajin* discovers that Indian *roti* was comparatively smaller and thinner than the usual *rotis* in Trinidad and primarily, made from white flour since the wheat flour had yet not been imported. The Trinidadian *rotis* are usually five or six times larger than their Indian counterpart. The chief reason is the lack of time on the part of the indentured women labourers who made bigger *rotis* and cut them into smaller pieces for the other members or kept the remaining loaves for their next meal: "Trinidadian rotis are spectacularly bigger than the thin brown chapattis that exist in India. In Trinidad rotis are huge and at least an inch thick. A single sada roti can feed a woman and two small children" (Jahajin, 58). *Roti* used to be prepared on clay *chulha* that lent a softness by puffing it, giving it a local name of *phulka*. When Urmilla prepares a meal for Tiger's American boss, she refuses to cook on Rita's gas saying, "you can't cook roti and thing on stove" (Brighter Sun, 164). Urmilla insists on cooking her *roti* in wood fire that is a marker of culinary authenticity since *rotis* have traditionally been made on *chulha*. The cultivation of rice paddy by Indians and Chinese began with the prospect of a large and permanent consumer market in the Caribbean that expanded

the variety of staples in the Caribbean diet. Towards the beginning of the indentureship, rice cultivation was carried out by the members of a family, as depicted in *No Pain Like This Body*. Consequently, rice was cultivated by small cooperative groups of indentees on small portions of land with little investment and proved to be a lucrative source of income for the coolies, especially, the women who found the estate work extremely gruelling.

One of the most popular fast food in the Caribbean is "doubles" which is an Indian and African invention. Doubles has achieved crown status in Trinidad and Tobago and has become a cultural symbol of the twin island. The origin of this cheap yet filling vegan food can be traced back to the Deen family in Princess Town in Trinidad in the mid-1930s but the ingenuity of the Indian and African migrants not only kept the dish alive but made it an unofficial national food of the island nation. Doubles is a sandwich of curried chickpea or *chana* between two flatbreads or *bara* that is usually enjoyed as a hearty breakfast or an evening snack. The *chana* sitting atop the flatbreads is given a special Trinidadian flavour with a dressing of tamarind *chutney* that brings an addictive tartness. It is also served with a *shado beni* sauce and *kuchela* or a seasoned green mango and cucumber salsa. The curry is simmered overnight and the condiments add an extra punch of flavour that is absorbed by the soft and tender flatbreads. This Indian sandwich is sold from makeshift stalls at the roadside, especially in market localities or outside factories because they are largely eaten by small shopkeepers and manual workers. However, with the rise of popularity and demand, doubles became a leading contender of mainstream Caribbean street food and it is now sold in Styrofoam coolers on transportable mobiles like bicycles and tricycles. The immense popularity has pushed vendors and small restaurant or café owners to experiment with doubles by substituting the *chana* with a protein like curried chicken or pork. Although doubles emerged from the cross-cultural amalgam and the poster child of Caribbean fast food, it closely resembles popular Indian street food called *chole bhature*, in north Indian states, or *radhaballavi*, in Bengal. Although it cannot be verified, the dish was named by an African seller, and as the name suggests, it embodies a tectonic quality that keeps changing in position and structure; it represents the Caribbean melting pot of different cultures and time; and it also narrates the story of affliction as well as resilience. Another popular Indian bread that was carried and continued in the

Caribbean plantation nations, especially in Trinidad and Guyana, is *paratha*. Once the *paratha* travelled across the Atlantic, it was refashioned in appearance that lent the name *buss up shut* because it looks like a bundled or torn shirt. The *paratha* and/or *buss up shut* is a traditional festive roti that is made and eaten at special occasions like weddings because it is layered with *ghee* or clarified butter. The dough is folded and rolled out several times which is, both, physically strenuous and time-consuming. After being shallow-fried, the crispy *paratha* is beaten with a stick till it barely holds together and served with varieties of *dhal*, chicken or lamb curries, and semolina pudding.

The *petai paratha* in Bengal is an equivalent of the Caribbean *buss up shut* as the name suggests that is beaten and slapped down into soft and flaky bits[4]. All Caribbean tourism posters will inevitably feature a serene seashore, a vibrant carnival, and a delectable plate of *dhal puri* with a hot curry[5]. The *dhal puri* is several Indian allies like the *aloo paratha, bermi, kachourie,* and *kulcha* where the filling ranges from potato, vegetables, chicken, and *paneer* or Indian cheese. The preparation of a *dhal puri* is similar to a *paratha* yet it is known as a *puri* because it is deep-fried in a pan or wok like a *puri* instead of being shallow-fried in a *tawa* or skillet. A traditional Indian *dhal puri,* originally made and eaten in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, has a filling of ground split peas mixture and is enjoyed at weddings with curry, *chokha,* or *achar*. The filling was improved with curried lamb or chicken in Trinidad and Guyana which elevated it to a complete meal that is easy to buy from street vendors. The Caribbean *dhal puri* is portable and larger in size which led to its availability in Canada and other locations worldwide with considerable Indian and Indo-Caribbean diaspora population. Although the initiation of the *dhal puri* in the Caribbean islands is ascribed to Rostan Amin, a Muslim Trinidadian, who first started selling *rotis* in a grocery shop located in San Fernando in the 1960s, the diverse Caribbean society warrants the undulated popularity and cultural significance of the *dhal puri*. Making the perfect *roti*, *puri* or *paratha* requires dexterity and practice. The *puri* and *paratha* must have a perfectly seasoned filling that is pillowy. The dough has to be worked seamlessly till it becomes silken and stops sticking to the hand, finally making it soft inside and the right amount of crisp outside, a texture that makes it easy to scoop the curry that helps them make cultural innovations concurrently fall into a transcendental nostalgia.

The different kinds of *puri* and chapattis occupy a space of oral culture that can be understood through Kamua Braithwaite's concept of "tidalectic" which refers to the poetics of sea like "coolitude". The indentured labourers can be located within the maritime scholarship of "tidalectic" because it reinforces migration and diaspora experiences: "the movements of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic … motion, rather than linear" (Brathwaite 1991, 44). The underlining factor about the tidal movement is, despite being cyclical, it is not repetitive. The back-and-forth rhythm has the same point of contact and the point of retreat yet the tides coming in and going out are not mirror reflections, rather similar distortions. The Caribbean nations are insulated by a dynamic water body that causes fluid diffractions and to Donna Haraway, "[d]iffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference" (Haraway 1997, 273). Just the way tidal mobility is caused by several forces resulting in constant mobility, colonial forces produced tidalectic movement of communities that remains inscribed on the anthropogenic ocean. The relocation, reinvention, and perpetuity of the *roti* is a part of tidalectic orality wherein the Indian migrants went through a process balancing progression and regression, indeterminacy and resilience, and loss of home and reconstructing transnational identity. Gastronomic legacies enable transnational continuity and *roti* claims a fluid cultural expression that continually regenerates the binary of forced migration and inimitable subjectivity.

3.6 Circuits of Comfort Food

There was a tremendous change in the usage of spices which was one of the foremost reasons for the change in the taste despite a similar cooking process. The salient feature in Indian cuisine is the use of individual spices that produce complex and layered curries. However, this complexity is somewhat lacking in Indo-Caribbean cuisine because they use a single, mass-produced curry powder that was imported by merchants before the emergence of Caribbean companies that produced and exported packaged spices that vouched to concoct authentic Caribbean flavours. During the earlier importation period, the spice was packaged and sold as Madras curry powder indicating the origin of the recipe but soon the Indo-Caribbeans started manufacturing their own curry powder and began branding and marketing it as an

indigenous Caribbean spice. The commercial production of curry powder helped in developing a unified Indo-Caribbean cuisine and allowed non-Indians to also cook Indian dishes. When Tiger invites a couple of his American bosses, who insisted on having classic homemade Indian food, we find Urmila scurrying around the local groceries and preparing a full-course Indian meal with care and anxiety throughout the day, according to Tiger's instructions: "You have to cook like you never cook in you life before. The best things. Grind the masala yourself, don't buy curry powder from tall Boy. Get *achar* [pickle], get *dhal* [curried lentils], and make *dhal pourri* [deep-fried flour bread]. Make *meetai* [sweets]. Fry *channa* [chickpea]. Buy two fowl from Deen wife" (Brighter Sun, 160). Tiger's insistence on grinding the massala at home has a much deeper significance for Indians and comes from a place of deep insecurity of deculturization. For time immemorial, Indian women have been stereotyped as the 'mistress of spices' and pictured as grinding whole spices into finely ground and mixed massala. Prior to the availability of packaged spices, women were tasked with grinding spices that was believed to be more flavourful than the manufactured ones. This process of 'massalafication' takes on a whole new meaning for the Indian indentees and the diaspora community as a metaphor for cross-cultural cohesion. Tiger's American colleagues' desire "to eat Indian food" (Brighter Sun, 160) and "eat with their fingers" (Brighter Sun, 167) reveals the motive of culinary tourism and exocitism that leads to a cultural conflict. The expectation of a specific culinary gratification on both sides makes the dinner a staged act that lays bare the binarism when the two cultures collide in the multicultural space of the Caribbean; simultaneously disclosing class aspirations while performing ethnic identity.

When Mona recalls her visits to Grandma Lil's humble abode in the barracks of Iere Village, she remembers her as elegance and sophisticated way of living that was unusual among barrack dwellers. Despite diminished financial and living conditions, "she would make beignets dusted with icing sugar, pink and white sugar cakes, and fudge. If she had visitors for tea, she would whip up a cake, make dainty cheese sandwiches, and bring out a fresh tablecloth …She lived a mannered life, Indian style though. She would make massive jars of pickles every year when tamarinds and mangoes were in season. Rows of pepper sauce bottles would be ripening green and golden in the sun beating down on her windowsill" (Swinging

Bridge, 254). However, food, by itself, is not a social marker and requires the additional support of the best possible alcohol, proper cutlery, crockery, and a table to attain a respectable position in the community or secure desired favours from the invitees. The food becomes more elaborate and sophisticated with the gradual settlement and familiarisation with the Caribbean surroundings. This passage of shift in gastronomic preferences is often termed 'creolization' which appears to be rampant among the converts. The evangelized Singh family in *The Swinging Bridge* regularly indulge in "stewed beef with heavy Creole dumplings" (38) and we find Mona's aunt, Alice, experimenting with traditional Indian recipes by making "*[a]ccras* [fritters], *phoulouries* [flour fritters], even mini-dhal puris stuffed with deboned curried chicken … unusual concoctions" (Swinging Bridge, 88). These deep-fried snacks bear a close resemblance to Indian snacks apart from the covering agent. In India, fried snacks were usually coated with *besan* or gram flour but Indo-Caribbeans used plain flour because of the unavailability of *besan*. These recipes endorse a pluralistic cooking style that marries the Indian and Caribbean in a harmonious and flavourful manner. The Caribbean cuisine is as rhizomatic as the population which instills a sense of rootedness, whereas, completely discards any attempt at homogeneity and totalitarianism. After circumnavigating the foodways of the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean Sea, food becomes a governing approach to creolization. The circuits of consumption find a dominant language during the evocative carnival of the Indies. These literary instances represent the primacy of food in (re)assembling the fragmented self and communities during the segregating forces of colonialism and migration.

3.7 Grand Ceremonies and Commensal Feasting

Moving on from the intimate, private, quotidian sphere of the household to the unfamiliar, public, and ceremonial space of a feast unravels that gastro-politics in a more palpable and quantified way. Feasts surrounding the numerous rituals of an Indian marriage are deeply entrenched in establishing the relationship, reputation, and status in a quintessentially traditional structure. Marriage feasts act as a commensal alliance to the besieging *varna* system and a guide to the politics of moral and economic transactions. The pre-nuptial ceremonies render a solicitousness as evident in the spread for the suitor for Vasti in *Raise the Lantern High* and his

family: “Chilled coconut water was served and when everyone was seated at the table, the dishes were brought in by the ladies: stir-fried spinach and lamb biryani, mushrooms and crisply fried okras, grilled eggplant in a tomato butter and garlic sauce, French beans, tandoori snappers, warm silky dhal puri, fried prawns flavoured with sesame seeds. There were mango and tamarind pickles and coconut chutney. The silence was inviting, full and appealing” (Lanterns, 37). Just like the silence during a meal suggests absolute gastronomic gratification, sounds are also a sign of delight. Loud belching, slurping, and noisy sucking at meat bones violate culinary etiquette and signify relishing the food. Marriage arrangements prove to be a prolonged and continued outflow of resources, deciding factor of reputation, and the complete responsibility of the bride’s family. Matrimonial transactions remain tacit opening an endless chain of negotiations and exchanges. In *The Counting House*, Rohini’s mother, Finee, squandered her entire life’s savings for the wedding celebration, “[s]he would die, though, knowing that she had fulfilled her duty in successfully marrying off her only girl-child, as her own mother had once done for her” (Counting House, 16). The expenses borne by the bride’s family are seen as an investment for the welfare and security of the bride for a lifetime, and often, for several lifetimes, as Hindu marriages are considered to last for seven lifespans. When Mona in *The Swinging Bridge* attends a “bamboo wedding”[6] with her mother and elder brother, Kello, she is surprised to see the feast arranged by their poor Hindu relatives: “The food was served on fresh sohari leaves and eaten with our fingers: rice and dhal and curried chataigne, curried channa and aloo, pumpkin, curried mango, achar, kuchela, phoulouries, and roti … It was better too to eat off a fresh-cut leaf without bothering about knives and forks” (Swinging Bridge, 63-64). Such an elaborate menu paves way for enormous debt on the bride’s family and is the primary reason for gendered violence in the Caribbean. Marriages open a Pandora’s Box of never-ending festivities, beginning with anniversaries, birthdays of children, *naamkaran* [naming ceremony], and so on and so forth. The food culture of a *thali* or platter, which resembles a bento box, in social or religious functions like weddings, birth, and funeral ceremonies in India is also followed by the Indo-Caribbeans as well. A *thali* is a complete meal comprised of 7 to 10 food items including rice and/or roti, a fried snack (*pakora* or *bhaji*), a *dhal* or *sambhar*, mashed potatoes, *baigan bharta* or *chokha*, one or two vegetable medley, fish and/or meat curry, *chutney*, *achar*, and *halwa* or pudding. The north Indians served the side

dishes in small *katori* or bowls placed within a large *kansa* or brass plate while south Indians simply served all the food items on a banana leaf and this *thali* culture is an important ritual food in all parts of India. Indians in the Caribbean islands had a community way of living both in the labour barracks as well as in the villages during the post-indenture period where they lived like a joint or extended family with the other *jahajis*. This community living was a normal and suitable way of living for Indians back in the homeland as well where the rural people participated in each other's' social functions. Any religious event or wedding called for the presence and participation of the entire village where each family within close proximity was expected to contribute financial aid, skills or food provisions like rice, wheat, oil, vegetables, poultry, and other items. This unique and harmonious living among various religious and cultural groups in India was further extended to ethnic fraternity between the Indians and Africans.

The celebration of marriage anniversaries took place mostly, among the Hindu converts and the prosperous later generation Indian diaspora, who celebrated it in an anglicized manner that can be illustrated in Nayan and Anick's anniversary party including a wedding cake with a male and a female plastic couple holding hands. The creolized cuisine adopted by the diaspora makes itself evident in the arena of the festive. When the families of Tiger and Urmilla came to give their blessings to their first child in *A Brighter Sun*, the couple served curried chicken, roti, and rum to the guests. As a stark opposition to Tiger's feast, we see Devika discussing the party menu with her caterer, instructing a "North Indian-themed meal and a Chinese one: No, no, definitely no pork or beef, and the Chinese food would have to be done without a hint of pork, as there would be Hindus and Muslims at the party. Fish, chicken, duck — all three … arranged and served with European — well, not just any European — more like *French* class and fair" (Valmiki, 146). This epicurean feast, accompanied by an exquisite cocktail bar, an endless flow of alcohol, and a popular band performing live for the guests, was only a display of the prosperity and bliss of Krishnu family[7]. Food choices and culinary mannerisms not only form an integral part of social status but also bespeak the quality of scholarship received. Annaise's Grandma Esther had inherited property, erudition, and refined upbringing as opposed to Grandpa James, whose "only asset was his education, but even this was incomplete, for on the morning of their wedding, sitting at the lavish

breakfast of beignets, homemade guava jam, eggs and French toast that Grandma Esther had prepared, Grandpa James hesitated, unwilling to try something other than the modest slice of sada roti and hot cup of tea he was accustomed, and unable to use the knife and fork set before him. And Grandma Esther sat at the breakfast table and wept" (Jouvert, 29). While this wedding tale brought mirth and delight to the family members years later, the wedding breakfast brought regret and agony to Grandma Esther.

Grand feasts are synonymous with Indian celebrations and an animal sacrifice is a common ritual in most Indian religions. Tiger's wedding was the biggest event that ever took place in Chaguanas that lured Indians and Negroes from the village as well as nearby villages to attend the ceremony. It was a known fact that Indian wedding ceremonies included numerous rituals and plenty of food and drink, and the bride's family arranged a befitting feast for which "[f]ive goats and six sheep had been slaughtered" (Brighter Sun, 5). Aquiqah/Aqueeqah is an Islamic tradition of sacrificing a lamb, sheep, or goat after the birth of a child signifying the concept of 'a life for a life'. Eniath beautifully describes the celebration of Aquiqah where the entire Ali family gathers to celebrate the birth and naming of the newborn amid familial conflict and the altercation between Maya and Behrooz's new girlfriend, who is seen as an interloper by Maya. The sanctity of the ceremony manages to temporarily drive away the tensions in the family as they sit together to enjoy the Aquiqah feast of "traditional curried goat, basmati rice, pumpkin, mango talkari, roti and cool cucumbers" (Eniath, 74). The meat of the sacrificial animal is divided into three equal portion— one for family consumption, another for distribution among relatives, neighbours, and friends, and the third for the poor and needy. Father Khalid made sure that the ceremony was grand keeping Indian traditions in mind since he wanted the family to bond with one another once again and the "savoury scent of Indian spices — clove, cardamom and zeera" seemed to envelop the family together. Nonetheless, the presence of a feast is also seen in tragic occasions, like funerals, as food reveals individual and collective identity through simple acts of offering, receiving, and sharing.

Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* deals entirely with death; the initial shock after being informed about Kello's terminal disease, familial reunion and mourning

after prolonged estrangement, and the eventual acceptance that allows deliverance from the turbulent past of the remaining family members. After Kello's funeral chapel which included family and friends singing hymns, everyone gathered in the garage of their family home to grief and celebrate Kello's life. Their mother wanted to avoid all temper flarings or family broils at Kello's wake by banning alcohol. However, Mona and her cousins were adamant about giving a classic Trinidadian send-off to Kello that included "a real all-night wake, with the prayers and hymn singing … bottle and spoon, a cuatro maybe, some ole time kaiso, and maybe a little something to wash it down" (Swinging Bridge, 215). Such a wake service allowed the mourners to express grief through singing, crying, sharing stories, and drinking and Mona professes that "our kind of burial is the most civilized in the world" (Swinging Bridge, 216).

3.8 A Rumbustion Society

During the Christmas holidays, Annaise went to Mayaro, a coastal town, she encountered her first relationship with Renegade, a fisherman that developed into a deep connection. However, this fervid relationship came to an abrupt end when Renegade went fishing in the jouvert hours and left his soul in the sea. Annaise grieved on her own since she kept her vacation liaison a secret from her family, although her mother has her suspicions. After they left Mayaro and returned home, her mother understood her daughter's unsaid feelings and consoled her cooking her favourite food, "tomato chokha, smoked herring, fried bodi with aloo, and sada roti" (Jouvert, 63). Annaise also helped her mother cooking which was her way of bidding farewell to her first meaningful relationship simultaneously a means to cope with heartbreak. The death of Sydney Mahale, a rich and affluent man of Trinidad, was observed with a wake, a pre-funeral ritual, where friends and family gathered to mourn the deceased. People gathered in the house of the deceased, in this case, Sydney's house, and were offered *phoulouries* and *sahinas* [battered and fried spinach]. Some of those close to the deceased also brought specific cooked food items that were enjoyed by the deceased during their lifetime. Unlike the ceremonious farewell to the deceased in Mootoo's *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab,* the funeral of Rama in *No Pain Like This Body* is a grim affair that unfolds

like dark humour. The neighbours flock in to consume rum and offer false condolences. The father of Rama makes this the opportune moment to clean his reputation among the villagers and put the blame for his son's death on his inebriated wife and her negligence towards their children and household. At the same time, he is a negligent and tyrannical member of the house. Rum is another important consumption element common to everyone irrespective of gender, class, and generation. Besides sugar, slaves, and indentured labourers, rum was also a crucial by-product of the sugarcane industry in the West Indies. The origin of rum in the Caribbean can be traced back to the 1600s when some of the plantation slaves on the island of Barbados started fermenting molasses to make this alcoholic drink that brought them a sense of respite. In another ten years, the Barbados sugar estate owners introduced the method of distillation when they recognised the global appetite for this distilled drink and the enormous revenue from the production and export of rum. As the production and consumption of rum had spread like wildfire across the Caribbean islands and was commonly called a "kill devil" for its ravaging impact. Men across the island were solely responsible for this giving this spirit a bad name like 'Rumbustion' or 'Rumbullion'.

When the narrator's uncle in *The Intended* hurled obscenities at his mother and openly threatened to harm her saying, "look out you crab-louse whore I coming for you. Hear how I prepare cutlass to chop off you coconut head" (The Intended, 46), his mother simply said "he is a good man. Is only rum talking" (The Intended, 46). The widespread popularity and adverse effect of rum are frequently read and seen in mainstream media and the character of Jack Sparrow in the American fantasy film franchise, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is one of the most striking images of a drunken pirate who is morally ambiguous. Indian indentured labourers were notorious for their addiction to rum and were often held responsible for squandering their earnings and lives away. When the narrator's uncle, in *The Intended*, repeatedly misbehaved, his grandmother accused "[a]ll you Pa family is rum-suckers … low-breed coolie people who bring they bad habit all the way from India" (The Intended, 48). A state of drunkenness was an unlimited license for mischief and delinquent behaviour. On the one hand, we see Mona and her cousins, in *The Swinging Bridge*, indulging in harmless banter and pranks after having Grandma Lil's drunk pies during their summer holidays while, on the other end, we also witness the barbaric

treatment and continuous rape of Mala by her father under the influence of alcohol in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. The Canadian missionaries made an attempt to "quiet the night-time cries of beaten wives" (Swinging Bridge, 81) in the coolie barracks by forbidding new converts to smoke or drink.

Alcohol is the easiest and most convenient way of socializing because it was cheap and easily available. The consumption of alcohol becomes a form of 'social drinking' for the later affluent Indian diaspora. In *A Brighter Sun*, we find Tiger resorting to alcoholism as an initial step to acquire masculinity, other than smoking and wife-beating, as he thinks "[o]nly men got drunk, not boys" (Brighter Sun, 14). But masculinity worked concurrently with wife-beating as Vidia is advised by fellow cane-cutter, Kampta, that he must occasionally punish his wife to keep her in check. Kampta also offers some bush-rum, a spiced rum, to Vidia during the break-time but the latter "hated drinking rum, especially during the day. It slowed down his work so that he made less money. He sipped some though, to bolster his image with Kampta" (Counting House, 72). Vidia not only visibly disliked rum because of its after-effect, but he also refrained from spending his hard-earned money on alcohol much like Tiger. Yet these young men indulged in alcoholism out of peer pressure and found no sense of power or pleasure in it. Drinking is traditionally seen as a medium of bonding for men as they unwind after a day's labour and often end up spending the day's earnings in a drunken stupor. Indian women are rarely seen indulging in alcohol; if they did, it would be private. After the death of Ramsaran's wife, his mother-in-law, Basdai suffers from perpetual melancholy and insecurity of losing the perks received from Ramsaran. Basdai diagnoses and medicates herself with a special "cough-mixture" (Naipaul, 68) that is procured from the local rum shop at debt and stealthily kept in an old, unused bottle of cough syrup. Nonetheless, most male characters are portrayed as addicts and frequently seen wallowing in their desolation with the aid of the very commodity that is the root cause of their suffering, i.e., sugarcane. But the material destitution experienced by the *girmitiyas* is hardly exaggerated as the men immersed themselves in heavy bouts of local rum and cheap tobacco in an attempt to stave off their pangs of hunger.

3.9 Sweet Tradition

Along with their spices, early indentured Indians also brought religious practices and prejudices to the Caribbean shores and the culinary insularity exposes the racial dogmatism. The Brahmin women in *Sastra* dole out intense racial prejudice towards the Christian cook, Milly, and reduce her to a state of untouchability when they discover her eating and cooking habits: "To kill, cook and eat the sacred cow, as well as an animal that wallowed in mud and made grunting sounds was sacrilegious and obscene … So, to have the hand that put those meats in its mouth touching one's pillow, one's cup, was deeply repugnant to these Brahmin ladies" (Sastra, 56). The strict Brahminical diet has been the cause of severe caste-based violence in India and a reason for racial antagonism in the Caribbean as well. *Katha* is a Hindu religious storytelling ceremony of narrating the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and hundreds of people attended the ritual. In *Butterfly in the Wind*, Kamla's mother frequently arranged *kathas* for the villagers with immaculate arrangements and delectable Indian food. The guests were blessed with one spoon of *panchamirit* [nectar of Gods] liquid mixture of five (*panch*) ingredients prepared with milk, jaggery, curd, ghee, and honey. It was the distribution of *prasadam* that everyone looked forward to, especially prepared by her mother and it was "rich and crumbly, made of ghee and butter and sugar and flour and raisins. It was served with freshly grated coconut that had been lightly sweetened with sugar and sultanas" (Butterfly, 126). Apart from the *prasadam* and usual savoury delicacies, Kamla's mother offered her guests an array of sweetmeats like *pehra* [candied white gourd], *gulabjamun* [deep-fried donuts dipped in sugar syrup], *jilebi* [deep-fried pretzels dipped in sugar syrup], and *ladhu* [sphere-shaped sweets with variant ingredients].

Another milk-based delicacy in Trinidad and Guyana is 'paynuse' or 'peynoose' that is similar to a creme caramel. It is a lactose-free spiced sweetened curd that is prepared by boiling curdled cow, buffalo or goat's milk. This curd milk becomes a delicacy when brown sugar or sugar syrup and crushed or chopped ginger is added to the curd in generous amount. When Mukoon Singh suffered a seizure while working in the canefield one day, he was hurriedly brought to Deeda's room in the barrack which was also shared by his daughter. Deeda knew the healing benefits of buffalo milk and the nostalgia-filled smell and taste of paynuse would instantly

help Mukoon Singh by preventing him on missing a day's work that leads to pay cut and deprived of ration. Deeda had some calf milk, rejected by the overseers because it is bound to curdle, however, as a rural Indian woman, she started "boiling down the buffalo's milk with sugar and ginger, watching it turn into big round curds with clear syrup all around … the whole estate smelt of the khandsari sugar syrup boiling down in the vats inside the moulin" (Jahajin, 134). Despite the extensive usage and customary consumption of milk and milk-based products in India, Indians in the Caribbean islands ceased from using dairy commodities. The indentured labourers and first generation Indian community in Caribbean continued consuming curd or yogurt, buttermilk, ghee, and *paneer* (Indian cheese), however, milk products gradually disappeared from daily or occasional meals among Indo-Caribbeans. The predominant reason behind the decline is the collapse of dairy industry and cattle rearing which was principally a monopoly of Indians. Indian indentees and preliminary migrant communities considered rearing cows as a profitable investment as well as a pivotal symbol of Hinduism but the later generations abandoned the rural life that eventually led to the decline in dairy-based sweets and delicacies.

3.10 Food and Religion

The relationship between food and religion has been an ancient phenomenon and an integral part of the fabric of Indian religiosity. Progressively, we also find a more tolerant and embracing attitude in Mahabir's *Jouvert* when villagers " brought iron pots and gas ring cookers, and they cooked curried duck, curried chicken, channa and aloo and pumpkin— all Indian cuisine although the people who gathered were racially mixed" (Jouvert, 49). From the age of seven, Annaise spent time in the preparation for D-day with her father and frequented the Carnival where she is invited inside Black Maharajin's food stall. Sitting in that small stall and watching an African woman churning out her art on the food plates that is appreciated by people of every class and race makes her realise the spirit of the Jouvert and of the Caribbean: "I have come to understand that for us from the Caribbean, the space to create, to make art and mas, is like the booth I sat in that night, an extremely fragile space. It is a space that must be protected fiercely; a space that must always be fought for" (Jouvert, 5). Black Maharajin has been the most influential person in

Annaise's life and we find her replicating her recipe of a *pelau*, which is a traditional Caribbean dish, to be served in her art exhibition in Brooklyn as an integral part of the Caribbean ethos. While Annaise finds inspiration from an African woman, in *Sastra*, we find a devout brahmin woman, Draupadi, choosing an African woman, Milly, as her protégé and imparts valuable culinary skills: "she cooked like a true brahmin. For her it was a sacred craft. Milly still has her "Commandments" written on the calendar she keeps in the kitchen. They are Draupadi's dos and don'ts" (Sastra, 56). Drapaudi cooked with such scientific precision and spiritual devotion and was considered as one of the best cooks in Trinidad. Those who were fortunate enough to savour her food relate it as an out-of-body experience. The assimilation of Indian food preparation with African tradition has been limited. The only dish that is worth mentioning is *callaloo*, a vegetable recipe with taro or dasheen, water spinach, or amaranth. Nonetheless, this clear segregation between Indians and Africans in terms of food implies the preference and steadfast pattern of consumption among Indians who obviated the westernisation of food culture.

The practice of animal sacrifice and food distribution from religious institutions has a dual function — firstly, it is an exhibit of wealth hence, an easy bribe to the poor and lost souls, and secondly, a direct consequence of the thriving agrarian economy of India[8]. Following the pagan and Hindu deities, there are a number of gourmands who are offered food according to their preferences. Hinduism believes that harvested crops are a blessing from the gods and in return, the gods are offered cooked food known as *prasadam*. Thus, it is of great importance to appease the gods and goddesses in order to receive blessings in all aspects of life. The medium of this transaction between gods and human beings is inevitably through the priest, who has the sole access to the apt language and script for facilitating the divine transaction with the help of the required paraphernalia. This paraphernalia and the charges of the priest for helping the exchange differ according to the class and caste of the people asking for blessings. But the prohibitions overwhelm the ritualistic allowances in every religion. We find that Muslims consider pork to be a taboo but eat beef, while the Hindus consider the cow as a deity; the Brahmins observe a strict vegetarian diet unlike the other castes who regularly consume meat; there exists some level of restrictions considering the consumption of garlic and onions amongst some sects of Hinduism. Indians Hindus were further segregated

into castes and ethnicities, and most often, the ethnic tensions between the Hindus of North Indians and South Indians were far more palpable. The large Madrassi population incessantly chewing *pan* in Kamla's neighbourhood, afflicted her intensely as "their tongues and lips and spittle reminded [her] of raw meat overflowing with blood" (Butterfly, 106). Of course, their glaringly dissimilar customs also brought her unease to a great extent. These prohibitions and taboos are often the reason for divide and religious brutality. Ethnologists believe that the question identity has a stronger connection to food taboos rather than regular and positive gastronomy that binds individuals "into *sui generis* social groups in part through edible, but proscribed, totem animals and plants" (Farquhar, 147).

Indian Muslims and Hindus were excluded from their respective religious rituals and get-togethers: "Moslems were not invited to our *kathas* and *pujas* and we were not invited to their mosques" (Butterfly, 90). Despite such obvious hindrances we find Kamla's mother not only invite their neighbour, Mrs Hassan, to one of her sought-after *kathas* but also go to the extremes of satisfying her by making her goat and chicken meat *halal* and in return, Mrs Hassan frequently sent a bowl of vermicelli garnished with nuts and raisins. These individual efforts prove the embracing and adapting attributes among Indians who forgo religious segregation, otherwise strictly observed in India, but in a foreign land, they unite as Indians in the face of the "apanjaat" conflicts. With the perpetual European hegemony complemented by the missionaries and easy access to commercialized Western products, people of all classes, races, and religions celebrated Christmas with a secular fervour. Once again, it was the food that bound them together as we find most kitchens enthusiastically turning into bakeries, "softest lemon cake made for us children, and, for the adults, a rich, moist, treacle-coloured fruit cake made of sultanas and raisins and currants and prunes which had been soaked in rum for two months … freshly baked white bread and sweet bread made with fruit and nuts and ginger … tender roasted turkey, with its fresh herb and liver stuffing" (Butterfly, 94).

The culture of *pan* chewing is prevalent and immensely important to Indians. Betel leaf is a native of South Asia and the history, economy, and pattern of consumption is devoid of all imperial influence. While earlier it used to be

exclusively consumed by the elite and wealthy, with time and better trading, *pan* mastication became rampant among Indians. The prior exclusivity of *pan* mastication sanctified rituals in peninsular India. The process of seasoning and mastication of *pan* is decisively Indian in nature. *Pan* was a valuable product kept safely in a *pandan* that is a compartmentalised betel box including betel leaf, areca nut, lime paste, nut cracker, small spoon, and an assemblage of quaint tools. All the ingredients contain specific properties that are advantageous to personal health and hygiene. Moreover, the process of making a *pan* was intimate and tactile signifying the fingers of the maker touching the lips of the consumer through the *pan*. Hence, the social activity of making and consuming a *pan* binds people together. Regular *pan* consumption also forges connection between the consumer and local *pan* seller that encourages extra-colonial transactions of taste and commodities. The aroma and taste are stronger than tea, coffee, or whiskey. Masticating *pan* regularly also develops into an alkaloid addiction and brings physiological changes which are immune to imperial hierarchy, mimicry, and advertising.

3.11 Gendered Gastronomy

Food symbolizes cultural identification and a gendered division of labour, which is the real meaning of Appadurai's "gastro-politics", which creates a binary divide between men who are the food provider and women, the food server. The narrator's grandmother in *The Intended* had a relentless routine of household chores as he

> lay in the hammock watching he daub the bottom-house with fresh mud and manure, covering over the cracks. She worked all morning at several tasks simultaneously. Whilst food was cooking on the fireside she chopped up firewood for another day. She rinsed out clothes and hung them on the verandah rails to dry. She swept the hall. She fed the hens. She brought me a piece of fried fisd to the hammock. She ironed the clothes as soon as they were dry. She swept the rest of the house. She counted out money and went to Matam's hshop to buy salt and flour (49-50).

Though this misbalance of gender is class-based where the women of upper-class households enjoy gender flexibility. However, the cooking of food relegates women to the confines of the kitchen, they also get the power to turn the kitchen into a site of culinary palimpsest. The emphasis on grinding and blending spices, i.e., massalafication at home becomes an act of reinstating the imbalance as they are able to manipulate diasporic emotions through food, like cooking 'comfort food' to make their family feel at home and secure, or by preparing traditional desserts that evoke a celebratory gathering with loved ones left behind. Therefore, along with economic independence, women were also endowed with culinary leverage and healing powers, since the sense of smell and taste are considered to be the most enduring and intimate of the five human senses.

Some of the spices and ingredients are surprisingly multi-functional with therapeutic purposes that have roots in ancient *ayurveda* and recently acknowledged and utilized by allopathy — (i) commonly found in every Indian household kitchen, turmeric or *haldi*, has incredible healing properties including antioxidant, antibacterial, anti-carcinogen and anti-inflammatory (ii) clove and black pepper, native to India, is approved for oral health and constipation (iii) ginger greatly boosts the immune system against common cold and flu (iv) apart from helping in respiratory issue, the pungent aroma of saffron and cinnamon or *dalchini* adds a vitality (v) the versatile coconut oil is a natural healer containing antioxidants and infants are religiously massaged by mothers, grandmothers or maids for stronger limbs and better shape (vi) honey and garlic cloves are a source of antioxidants with antibacterial and anti-fungal properties (vii) carom seeds or *ajwain* reliefs stomach ache and indigestion. In the foreign nation, the marginalized communities without the privileges of healthcare became dependent on the women who had direct and complete access to ayurvedic knowledge and healing powers. Moving beyond treating slight ailments, women were effective healers acting as midwives, masseuses, nursemaids, governesses, babysitters, etc. (Dis)located away from their native land and suspended in a multicultural milieu, Indian women placed their trust in nobody but in themselves. They found new innovative and effective means of cooking, healing, sewing, and measuring things. Kamla's mother had her own way of testing the quality of every object she purchased. She tapped pumpkins, bit into rice grains, burnt fabric samples, smelled flowers and ingredients, and scrutinized

humans with strict professionalism. Living in a pre-refrigeration time, Kamla's mother bought milk twice a day and carefully checked the quality of the milk purchased from their milkman, Baboo: "If Baboo's fresh milk flowed out without leaving fine globules of fate clinging to the glass, or if it left the bottle with the same flow as water, she concluded that the milk was either tampered with or the cows were poorly fed … To my surprise he never disputed her methods. Again, if after boiling the milk (we had no refrigerator) there was not a substantial thick, yellowish cream at the top, she would ask him why this was so and expect a substantial improvement by the next delivery" (Butterfly, 109). Meanwhile, the mistress of spices who helm the kitchen, find their solace and independence through their cooking. When Mala, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, made a shark stew for her lover, Ambrose, and served her abusive father the same, he threw the steaming hot stew at her face, "[s]he slipped her tongue out of her mouth and licked the stew on her face … The stew was indeed well seasoned, perhaps the best she had ever cooked" (Cereus, 205). Mala's satisfaction at preparing a well-seasoned stew for the man she loved was greater than the pain inflicted upon her by her father. Whereas, her father, Chandin, subconsciously refuses to intake any sort of foreign fish which might lead to spiritual deculturization. Yet, Mahabir weaves a much harmonious tale of intergenerational as well as interracial partaking of gastronomic traditions experienced by Annaise during "boy's lime" when Black Maharajin and other women of varying races brought an array of food and "took [boy's lime] over completely, dancing and singing and laughing" (Jouvert, 50). Much before the advent of cookbooks, the oral accounts of shared recipes over many generations of female legacy had led to personalized forms of cookbooks and a cultural permanence beyond the understanding of the quantified measurements of modern cookbooks.

Culinary expertise proves to be Mala's mode of survival as she lives through betrayal from her mother, father, and lover. When she and her younger sister are accidentally left behind by her mother when she elopes with her queer partner, Mala is subjected to continual raping by her father, Chandin, who demands the women in his house to fulfil his physical, sexual, and emotional needs. The relationship between Chandin and Mala projects the gendered relationship between the consumer and the consumed as the patriarch of the house, Chandin expects Mala to cook and serve meals of his choice since Mala assumes the role of the "implicit wife" in the

absence of her mother. Hence, Mala utilises her cooking skills as an antidote against the perverse role imposed on her from a young age. Cooking is the highest and only form of self-expression at her disposal as evident from her special skills displayed during special occasions as opposed to cooking as "a chore she performed without much thought or caring" (Cereus, 202) for her father. Apart from cooking a special meal for her lover, Ambrose, Mala performs a self-immolation ritual to observe the anniversary of her mother's elopement. Mala substitutes fire with a chili pickle to burn her from the inside because she has been numbed to bodily pain due to the nightly rape and frequent beatings from her father:

> She thrust her finger into the bottle, scooped out a heavy clump of raw pepper and shoved the finger into her mouth … She didn't swallow, keeping the fire on her tongue, by then so blistered that parts of the top layer had already disintegrated … The roof of her mouth bubbled. Pepper mush oozed out past her clenched gums and spilled into the sides of her cheeks … A tide of peppery saliva cascaded over lips. She ran to the balcony and spat, salivating and expelling sauce and pepper flesh and seeds … Mala's mouth remained open, her lower jaw dropped partly in exhaustion, partly to release heat and let air in. Her flesh had come undone. But every tingling blister and eruption in her mouth and lips was a welcome sign that she had survived. She was alive (Cereus, 133-134).

Mala survives this metaphoric immolation just the way she survives all other traumatic experiences through her childhood and adolescent life. The gendered culinary practice among Indo-Caribbeans is explicit in the way Mala is supposed to understand Chandin's preferences and desires only by limited words or expressions and when his desires are not served adequately, Mala receives violent beating spiced with verbal abuses and foul character assassination. Mala utilises her culinary knowledge to exact revenge on Chandin as she strategically substitutes a dead pigeon for a fowl curry. The gastronomic expertise among Indo-Caribbean is subverted into a wealth of knowledge despite all repressive tactics that is detected by Anita Mannur who states that, "Chandin refuses to eat fish … yet Mala "cooks back", serving him something that is both inedible and foul, thus marking how her own culinary

knowledge becomes essential for her survival" (Mannur, 76). Mannur posits that "[h]er recuperation of her body and self, then, is effected through her reappropriation of the same tools and space that marked her domestic indentureship in the Ramchandin household" (Mannur, 77). In the face repeated betrayals and severe trauma, Mala acts on her culinary strength that Mannur refers to as "cooking back" and uses it as a metaphorical as well as a literal weapon. The first physical blow made by Mala on Chandin's head is with a meat cleaver and serves him "poetic justice" by gradually starving him to death.

Time and again, migrants have proved that oral traditions can easily vanquish regulated methods of cookbooks that systematise level of heat, type of utensil, amount of spices, number of ingredients, and allotted time. Indian cooking method were atypical and based on traditional female knowledge system that was passed on matrilineally or through informal cooking schools run by local women. Lily and Palli's cooking school in *Daughters of Empire* is one of a kind since two learned women started and conducted this establishment that primarily taught cooking to young girls as well as imparted valuable lessons to become good daughters, wives, and mothers. Young girls from neighbouring villages enrolled in the school where they were taught to "create deliciously healthy meals, food for the spirit and the body, for their families and friends … They learnt about the fibres, textures and flavours of vegetables, meats, fish and spices; they learnt how to hold, touch, smell and tastes vegetables and fruits in the raw and in the process of cooking. The structure of the fibres, the strength of the raw materials' natural flavours influenced the choice of spices as well as the methods of cooking: steaming, frying, baking, or the most commonly used method - stir frying" (Daughters, 51). Lily and Palli used traditional matrifocal knowledge and combined it with contemporary needs and conditions to equip the young girls with necessary tools to survive and thrive in varying circumstances. Arsenal of culinary skills and knowledge often helps women generate earnings through informal means through entrepreneurship like selling specialty items, home delivery within neighbourhood, or simply offering cooking services during local events and occasions. Kathas functioned as an important medium of orally ingesting food discourse through female bonding. During *kathas*, the women of the village got together to prepare food for hundreds of people over a couple of nights and drowns the village with a fragrance overpowered with spiritual

warmth. In *Sastra* women of three generations huddle together kneading dough, grinding massala, peeling and chopping vegetables and wondering, "how else are womanly attitudes, ways, notions and skills passed on? … [T]hese fingers are not programmed by a common genetic code, but by the powerful order of tradition" (Sastra, 60). This intergenerational sharing of recipes created a memory of secret recipes with magic ingredients that automatically make women the guardians and enforcers of culture and civilization.

In *Butterfly in the Wind*, the decision of making a soup is taken after deliberate thinking by Kamla's grandmother and the act of choosing the ingredients is of no less important than choosing suitable soldiers for national security. The process of picking stones from rice grains, grinding spices, milking cows and shelling peas are ways of female bonding as Kamla finds her grandmother, her washer-lady and cook, Daya, sharing a story of a woman hiding her lover under her petticoat when her husband unexpectedly returns home one afternoon. Kamla also learns ways of planting and growing spinach, cassava, yams, and homemade and home-ground coffee and coca. Subsequently, the figure of the grandmother (not necessarily by relation) ceases to become an obsolete archetype of traditional practices that is irrelevant and inflexible within the modern migrant communities. The first or older generation of female migrants have an inherent fluid vitalism surfacing from the transoceanic journey that creates an indelible connection with the "submerged mothers" (Brathwaite 1991, 48). This terraqueous association makes the kitchen space a maternal dominion that is recuperative. The matriarch is reconfigured as a figure that rewrites history through a culinary reimagining and becomes a maker of cultural assimilation. Consequently, food has the power to dissolve boundaries and distances with the help of the ingrained gustatory memory. When Jonathan returns to Trinidad from Canada to meet Sydney, he is overcome with a gustatory temptation that represents his umbilical affiliation with the country and its people: "My tongue danced inside my mouth: *banana, silk cotton, poui, immortelle, cannonball, breadfruit, mango, caimete, bois canot, nutmeg* — the words themselves becoming an umbilical cord" (Moving Forward Sideways, 92). The umbilical powers, more often than not, induces a faint familiarity despite the complete severance or non-conformity with one's past and heritage observed in Yasmin's attitude in *Worlds Within Her* when she "recognizes the *kurma*, the golden

jilebi — which she always thought of honey-drenched pretzels — and the white rectangles of *laddoo*. But she doesn't know the large yellow balls, or the smaller fried one (Bissoondath, 79). Yasmin has clearly very little and faint memory of common Indian sweets as she is unable to recall the "white rectangles" as *barfi* and the last two, *laddoo* and *gulab jamun*, respectively. Since her childhood, Yasmin has been unable to identify herself with the fellow Indians in the Caribbean, wanting to migrate further west to Canada and when she returns, her memory of objects and commodities returns as an obscure impression. Dabydeen's narrator in *The Intended* threw away the meat curry, boiled channa, half a dozen *chapatis* [flatbread], and *samosas* [puff pastry] lovingly given to him by Shaz's mother, since, he did not want his Oxford dorm room to smell of curry and spices, indicating a desire to sever ties with his heritage and accept or be accepted in the White Man's world. However, culture is not formed furtively nor does it sustain secretly or without active participation on an individual or local level. According to Bruno Latour's concept of *oligopticon*, "[m]acro no longer describes a *wider* or a *larger* site … but another equally local, equally micro place, which is *connected* to many others through some medium transporting specific types of traces" (Latour 2005). Following this definition, we can argue the equivalent status of the contributing flavours (African, Indian, Chinese, and European) of the Caribbean cuisine, which does not hold a higher position over its contributing elements as well because the important factor are the individual units which make a "network" rather than the whole fundamental institution. The configuration of flavours in Indian food by adding a foreign element that is locally found in the Caribbean confirms the importance of the micro-elements of production found in specific locations in creating a larger structure. On a meta-level, the Indian indentured labourers in the Caribbean reflect the relationship between the macro and micro without a 'top-down' or horizontal hierarchy, but another addition to their spectrum of interplay. Thus, the way the indigene and alien spices and flavours are appropriated to concoct 'memory food', the indentees and their descendants configure their identity, tradition, language, and consumption of commodities to create an "actor-network" structure which highlights the apertures, points of connection, and modes of transportation that links one point to another. Jewellery is another obvious manifestation of an interstitial product that overlaps and conjoins two seemingly disparate cultural structure — Indian and West Indian.

3.12 The Foodways of Indians in the Caribbean

This chapter on culinary practices and the materiality of food links several aspects of the Indo-Caribbean people and how it impacts formation of identity. For migrated communities food simultaneously evokes sense of familiarity and distance and of belonging or being a 'nowarian'. Analysing symbolic meanings associated with culinary knowledge and choices in the novels by the diasporic authors gives us an insight into the evolution of Indian migrants and later generations. We are able to understand how food is intimately connected with cultural, religious, and gender aspects, and underscores the confluence of the past and the present, tradition and heterogeneous, and the local and the global. This Latourian concept of 'localising the global' is central to understanding the multiplicity of the Indian identity in the Caribbean and proves to be a recurring trope in the micro-commodities. The constraints related to provisioning brought an intimacy between married couples who, possibly, did not share a close bond before they migrated to the Caribbean. Family meals hold a significant value because social bonds are formed and strengthened around food. The fictional works cited by me substantiate that crucial events of emotional bonding usually happen through consumption practices within the enclosed site of family. The significance of family meals increases among migratory family units because the family members gather mostly during meal times and the process of sharing emotions and food go hand-in-hand. The fragmentary state of mind seems to be temporarily patched together during family meals or subdued tensions find expression that helps in clearing misunderstandings or articulate hidden emotions. Most immigrants and diasporic people reminisce about communal or familial support on the basis of getting fed in a way that satisfies them, both emotionally and physically. Although women were the primarily responsible for rationing and cooking, the space of the kitchen and the cooking time transformed into a space and time for sisterly camaraderie. Meal preparations presented an opportunity for bonding among women and created a safe space for sharing. The imbrications of meals and migration is a dominant theme emphasized in the novels that I have analysed and it gives us insights into how foodways play complex role in the process of remaking homes, identity, and culture. Indians in the Caribbean were

aware of how remarkably different their food is from the original cuisine owing to the absence and substitution of ingredients and, despite same ingredients, the taste is vastly inconsistent because of differences in soil composition, cultivation pattern, and climatic condition. Indian indentured labourers and diaspora people make active efforts at recreating traditional and 'homely' foodways as a way to reassert their cultural dimension. The psychic re-imagination and attempts to maintain their ingestion pattern and food choices brings them a sense of authority and control over their life that may have been seized by the colonial regime. Hence, Indians felt empowered through food and consciously tried to cook them way back to their culture and agency. As they cooked food, which was manifestly getting altered from traditional Indian food, their culture and identity was also undergoing a process of acculturation.

The relationship between the characters and food expounds the economic conditions, emotional and cultural dimensions, and the identificatory construction. The process of recalling, documenting, and recreating foodscape encapsulates the entire process and experience of indentureship itself as one of remembrance, oral or archival documentation, and the eventual rebuilding of selfhood. Espousing the materiality, praxis, and experience of food makes apparent the conception of identity and development of community. The trajectory of this chapter investigated the way production and ingestion of food is inscribed with cultural symbolism, social relations, class and gender ideology. Food discourse of Indians in the Caribbean underscores that food is not ingested for only physical nourishment. The fictional work penetrates the necessity of traditional foodways to satiate their emotional needs which are starved by dislocation and disruption. Children of later diaspora feel chagrined rather than affiliated with the ancestral food choices and make conscious efforts to dissociate from traditional Indian foodways as well as cut the umbilical cord that connects them to their homeland. Immigrant and diasporic Indians share an ambivalent relationship with ancestral gastronomic ways of life. Food emerges as a potent vector of cultural continuity and transnational assimilation against multiple hegemonic forces. The food discourse underline the multiplicity of race and class in the Caribbean that finds a way to be enacted through culinary practices. The arrival of Indians in the West Indies has visibly changed the local dynamics of food production, consumption, and the idea of consumerism. Present foodscape of the

West Indies help us trace the rampages of Europeanism, transnational migratory pattern during colonialism, the struggles and choices made by the disenfranchised communities, and the integration into a new and inclusive society. Descriptions of cooking and feeding demonstrate the materiality and the way it surmounts emotional and psychological aspects for people. In the Caribbean, food has vanquished ethnic rivalries and formed a symbiotic relationship among the different groups of people who were drafted in the West Indies under various colonial regimes. Caribbean food literally befits as the true representation of Caribbean society and culture which identifies with the multiple ethnicities.

Notes

[1] Due to lack of direct access to the geographic space, it has not been possible for me to find the island-specific food trends and specialities.

[2] A *mudikhana* resembles a supermarket where the local shopkeeper keeps a variety of items demanded by the people. The items vary from food products, stationery, and other household objects.

[3] The concept of the "glocal" is discussed in chapter 2 section 2.

[4] Traditionally consumed for breakfast, *petai paratha,* is also torn and sold based on the weight.

[5] The spelling of *dal* and *dhal* is used interchangeably.

[6] The term "bamboo wedding" is used for a traditional Indian wedding that took place under a makeshift pavilion made of bamboo structure. The concept of "bamboo wedding" and "bamboo wife" is discussed in details in chapter 4.

[7] The difference in the ceremonious and feasts between the rich and poor Indians in the Caribbean also shows the measure retention and replication. The food served by the poor Indo-Caribbeans closely resembles the food items served and eaten in the homeland. On the other hand, the upper class Indo-Caribbeans serve a reformed menu that included both the Indian and Caribbean food ethos. This difference is also driven by the nature of guests; the poor Indo-Caribbeans usually affiliate with other Indo-Caribbeans whereas, the rich socialise with people from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

[8] Animal sacrifice is done by both Muslims and Hindus but the former considers the food made with sacrificial meat of the Hindus as a taboo because it is usually not kosher. This also results in the prohibition or exclusion of people from other religion to be a part of religious event.

Chapter 4

Women's Business: Narratives of Indo-Caribbean Feminism

4.1 Introduction

I have chosen to dedicate this final chapter solely to discuss the question of Indian women in the British Caribbean islands. The absence of material related to the Indo-Caribbean women's experiences owing to lack of literacy coupled with social inhibition, restricted interest, literary chauvinism, and limited scholarly space has resulted in a glaring silence. This severe discrepancy created a gap in our understanding of the assertion and rebuttal which helped the formation of the identity and reality of Indo-Caribbean women. The preceding chapters in commodity culture have established an apparent and resounding trope of women's contribution to the institution and preservation of the Indo-Caribbean community from the early days of indentureship to the contemporary multiracial West Indian society. The primary recruitment of female indentees and the defining Middle Passage was imbricated with mystery and silence for decades until recent scholarly and literary work excavated their stories which are imbued with colonial infringement and patriarchal offenses. The labour and remuneration pattern of female indentees exposed the severe differentiative and repressive regime practiced in the British Caribbean plantations. Fictional works by Persaud, Mootoo, Shinebourne, Espinet, Mohan, Mahabir, and others have narrated the wars, encounters, downfalls, and triumphs of the women in the face of multiple exiles. Narratives of indenture are historically limited and the history of indentured womanhood is doubly silenced. In such circumstances, fictional works from authors with indentured legacy or belonging to an Indo-Caribbean diaspora is a suitable strategy to gauge the volition, voice, struggles, and agency of the "other", who formed one-fourth of the mass immigrant workers. These authors have also commemorated the solidarity among disenfranchised women and the way they determined selfhood. The micro-commodities are unequivocally imbricated with female agency that employed imagination and intellect as accomplished modalities of migration, industrial residence, and diasporic existence. This recurring trope of feminist agency

necessitates a sole chapter to dive deep into the routes and roots created by Indian women in the Caribbean who were undermined and stereotyped as passive receptors of capitalist-colonialist agendas. They were silenced and subjected to an onslaught by dominant and draconian modalities that perpetually marginalised the existence of Indian women in global circuits. Female complexities and functional idiosyncrasies of voiceless subalterns were categorised as regressive but with postcolonial critique, I have tried to show how Indian women resisted dominant global structures and narratives with their quotidian lifestyle. Their stronghold on basic intelligence and traditional knowledge systems helped them reassert their presence and significance on the global canvas. It can also be argued that the mere existence of Indo-Caribbean women, despite continued physical, psychological, and sexual attacks, can be considered their biggest victory against the essentialist and hegemonic culture and civilisation.

This chapter elaborates on different forms of female agency in light of the transatlantic and transcultural contingencies. The period of indentureship was symptomatic of female agency despite continued vilification and multiple estrangements. *Jahaji*-sisterhood and generational negotiations penetrated every fabric of the Caribbean culture and legitimised their existence. Recent research works of Pirbhai, Mahabir, Reddock, and Kanhai have analysed the exclusionary challenges faced by Indian and Indo-Caribbean women, at local, national, and global levels[1]. Indian indentured women encountered familial, exilic, communal, and colonial oppression but the prevalence of women-centric economy and tradition in the West Indies verified that they had vanquished the politics of binarism with the employment of steadfast agency. While Indian indentured women did not have a formidable rebellion as Black enslaved women, the prolonged silence around the discursive resistance of Indian women has encouraged me to engage in a gendered interrogation. Patriarchal imperiousness was carried by the Indian indentees and the female modes of resistance subverted the dehumanising plantation society. My primary texts show how Indian women enlist and undertake the coolie odyssey and industrial residence with the subconscious awareness of never returning to their motherland. Most female indentees make the decision to sign the contract and travel without male supervision or permission, mostly, because a large number of them are tricked by local recruiters, making it too late to back out or they are simply

absconding. Making the Middle Passage alone, in itself, shatters stereotypical notions of female subordination. The transgressive female characters portrayed in the novels defy social, cultural, sexual, and gendered boundaries. British Caribbean estates further instrumented binarism that was flagrantly manifested in the discrimination of wages and ration that facilitated numerous forms of oppression. However, the oppression did not discriminate between single or married women who faced different but enormous levels of mistreatment, abuse, and subjugation. The women exercised alternate forms of rebellion — isolation, mutedness, madness, or retaliation — and generated a counter-culture of subaltern resistivity and sites of disruption. The recurring question of womanhood within this colonial system was a primary impetus to examine the nuanced dynamics of Indo-Caribbean women's diasporic situation, experiences, and approaches.

The trajectory of Indo-Caribbean feminism can be traced through a wide range of authorship and popular forms of art as well as critical scholarship that preceded. The scholarly and creative output including gender analysis from feminist artists, writers, scholars, and activists have been able to produce the Indo-Caribbean feminist epistemology that is a constantly evolving field. This chapter will further emphasise the gendered aspects of the Indo-Caribbean literature with special attention to feminist navigations, domestic relations, and cultural and political engagements. The writings and interactions over Indo-Caribbean gender and sexuality make them visible and further interrogate the bodily performances and their implications on Caribbean history. The discussions regarding gender/sex in the Caribbean has been defined by cultural crossings, diasporic cosmologies, identity enactments as well as binaries of traditions and transformations, myths and artefacts, and the sacred and the sexual. It must be noted here that the Indian experience in the West Indies and the littorals of the Atlantic Ocean occupy a central position in the political approach across ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation, and class which have a huge impact on the Third World feminist praxis. Indo-Caribbean feminist studies is characterized by the convergence of the devastating colonial activities in, both, India and the West Indies as well as a recognition for the dissimilarities present in the regional, national, and transnational socio-political milieu. Therefore, Indo-Caribbean feminism works towards strengthening the existing field by encapsulating and exploring the intersections of Indianness and Caribbeanness.

The political, erudite, and articulate black feminists recognised and foregrounded the "difference" among women that ensued from race, class, and/or ethnicity. Non-white feminists shattered the flawed notion of categorising women as a collective and homogeneous unit in society, and organised a distinct, yet not dissociated, branch of feminism that intended on strengthening global feminist movement. Therefore, gender equality that followed a rights-based ideology was introduced across the globe and started addressing the diversity among women, hence familiarized a wide spectrum of gender-related issues. Black feminism during the 1960s spearheaded by Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, and Alice Walker, to name a few, made great strides in defining a space for the marginalised women who posited a counterpoint to the dominant White discourse. Indo-Caribbean feminist thought gained significance with the emergence of post-colonial writings by Rajkumari Singh, Mahadai Das, Janice Lowe Shinebourne, Marina Carter, Patricia Mohammed, Shani Mootoo, Tejaswini Niranjana, Rosanne Kanhai, Ramabai Espinet, Rhoda Reddock, and many others who underpinned personal and political experiences of gendered and racial prejudices in their legacies. Their legacies have dealt with the cultural origins and variations in the Indo-Caribbean population that stands removed from its parent body yet stays culturally connected to Indian traditions. Consequently, the second largest ethnic population spread across Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Surinam holds a crucial position in configuring the gender relations and evolution of feminist consciousness in the West Indies. The long history of struggle of the Indo-Caribbean women produced an intricate branch within the dominant feminist stance and acquired a primary status as a dialectical development for the globally progressing feminist thought.

3.2 A Paradoxical Position

The ratio of the number of female indentee to men on board the ships making the Middle Passage kept changing depending on the ongoing debate and plantation requirement. Reddock mentions that the quota was changed to 1:2 in 1868 from 1:3 in 1857 before finally, settling upon 1:4 in 1878 (1994, 28-29). The massive shift in gender roles under indenture migration was crucial to the formation of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora community. The scarcity of Indian women and their, officially,

voluntary migration inclined the power scales in their favour despite the constraints put upon them. The choice of sexual partners for women was among one of the most significant reversal that ensued numerous advantages including monetary favours, jewellery rewards, dowry for the bride, and a degree of psychological supremacy. Rohini was quick to recognise her prerogative and freedom in the plantations:

> She knew there was a shortage of women on the plantation, that many of his fellow cane cutters would scheme with money to bribe her, or with poison to kill him, if only she consented to it … Although she would not dream of rejecting Vidia for such men, she still tormented him with the prospect of betrayal. She rubbed oils into her skin to keep it fresh and scented. She massaged her breasts and nipples … Miriam, the nigger maid in Mr Gladstone's house, showed her how to make curls in her hair (Counting House, 66-67).

Indian women who arrived to the British Caribbean sugar colonies struggled with ambiguous status; on one hand, they gained financial independence, sexual liberation, and considered guardians of Indian culture but, on the other hand, the increased level of authority drew patriarchal constraints, mostly in the form of violence. Foucault states that sexuality can be understood as a "dense transfer point for relations of power" (1978, 103) and rightly so, indentureship became a portal for women to gain money and sex which gives them the access to power.

The status of India indentured women was marked by ambiguity and they experienced a paradoxical freedom in the plantation. The labouring duty was the same for the women and the men but certain factors of the indenture regime was more onerous for the women. Reluctance of Indian women to indenture led to unavailability and shortage of potential female indentees. This resulted in a higher rate of remuneration to recruit women as compared to men: "the cost of recruiting single women was higher than that of the men. In the 1890s, it was roughly 50 per cent higher and by the end of indenture it was estimated at double the rate of men" (Mohapatra, 241). Ironically, once the women workers started working on the plantation, they were paid half or two-thirds of the wages of men for the same tasks. This diminution in monetary value of female indentees was a strategy to keep them

dependent on the male indentees through companionship and maintain the gendered (dis)balance in the Caribbean as well. Wage disparity suggested that the men would remain the primary bread-winner of the household while the women had to remain subservient to their husband or partners and their employers. The phenomenon of violence against women in the plantation emerged from the intricate relationship between the disparity in sex ratio and the strenuous labour regime. At first, when there was a demand for single women in the plantations due to imbalanced sex ratio, the planters and the people in India contested it with stiff opposition. Gradually, the skewed sex ratio compelled the planters to recruit single women due to the unstable labourforce which presented a set of issues. Firstly, the men who immigrated were unwilling to re-indenture for a second term because they wanted to return home to their wives and families which resulted in a higher investment on the part of the planters since they had to bring in a new crop of indentured labourers every five years. More importantly, the practical and ground-level problem was the acclimatization and training of new labourers required a certain period of time that led to lower production value with every new batch of indentees. Colonial offices suggested the introduction of women might induce the labourers to re-indenture but they did not pre-empt the tremendous gendered violence that invaded the British Caribbean sugar plantations with the invasion of women, who largely belonged to a low caste and class background. During the initial period, British government and planters were unwilling to induct family unites owing to a higher overhead investment since the planters were driven by capitalist agendas and harboured absolutely no sense of responsibility or dedication to the British plantation project or towards the mass labouring population:

> Robert Guppy, testifying before the Royal Franchise Commission of Trinidad in 1888, recounted an interesting conversation with a big proprietor friend who was setting up barracks to house newly arrived Indian coolies. The barracks with roofs of galvanized iron without any ceilings were unbearably hot in the afternoon. When Guppy asked his friend to remedy the fault the planter replied: The people ought to be in the field all day long, I do not build cottages for idlers … I want two years of good crops and good prices, and then I will sell my estates and go to live in Europe (Mohapatra, 241).

Plantation owners, managers, and overseers were against the recruitment and induction of women, especially, wives and pregnant women because they would incur loss of labour-time and result in higher cost outlay. Furthermore, unlike chattel slavery, indentureship forbid 'natural ownership' or continued tenure of children born in the estates to the *girmits*. However, with gradual changes in plantation regime, vacillating labour system, and the crisis in sugar economy led way to the conscription of family units and various categories of women.

3.3 Problem of Single Women

Officials and missionaries forced single coolie women into marriages to curtail their independence and freedom. Among the female indentees who migrated to the British Caribbean plantocracy, a considerable number of them were young upper caste widows who signed up for indentureship to escape their miserable lives in India. They were the easiest targets of patriarchal agents to coerce them into a union with a strange man and the consummation of such unions could clearly be identified as rape. Jacqui Alexander identifies such conjugal unions as the imposition of "hegemonic masculinity, procreative sex, subordinated femininity and vague but powerful notions of consent" (Alexander,140). Moreover, these women who had the courage to leave behind their home, family, and culture to live and toil in a foreign land with the acceptance that they may never return to their homeland felt an increased sense of betrayal by the British officials by compelling them into another unacceptable union. The transition from an independent working woman to a house-keeper who did household chores like cleaning, cooking, and washing clothes for a disagreeable man was cascading turn of event. Such marriages were contrived to turn them into an unpaid worker from a wage earner. Verene Shepherd has transcribed, edited, and reflected on the story of Maharani aboard the *Allanshaw* (1885) deriving information from the investigation transcripts of her alleged rape and ensuing death. The journey of *Allanshaw* witnessed several events including racism, mutiny, gendered violence, and a long-drawn legal investigation which revolved around a female indentured labourer. Robert Ipson, a black crew member, was accused and subsequently hanged to death for raping Maharani. Shepherd observes that the inquiry calls draws acute attention to Ipson's character along with Maharani's,

hence, the investigation transcripts emblematically and literally examines Maharani's body. Her brown body and actions are posthumously reviewed as the witnesses aboard the vessel give detailed statements regarding her interactions with Captain Wilson, her manner of clothing, her movements around the ship, and the following sexual assault. Shepherd's book focuses the 'sexploitation' of non-white passengers during the Middle Passage through the sexual exploitation of Maharani and the apparently false allegation on a black crew member. Numerous accounts and testimonies suggest that women engaged in sexual arrangements with the Captain and superintendents of the ship to gain some rewards such as better food, clean water, access to poop deck, medical care, soap bars, and clothing. These testimonies were largely recorded by White groups of people that reveals the calls for attention to theorise the experiences of women from the accounts of women navigating the geographic space of the *kala pani*. Interrogating the gender-specific exploitation in the Middle Passage can be instructive to question the role of "agency" of the subaltern women who were recruited through questionable means and mistreated throughout the course of the labour trade. Testimonies over sexual assault aboard *Allanshaw* were chauvinistic and grossly hedonistic, mostly emerging from a sense of resentment over the special treatment endowed upon her as well conspicuous malice against the Captain's exclusive access to Maharani's body. Despite several objections against sexual exploitation and treatment of women as commodities in tropical British colonies, indenture authorities flouted all laws and disregarded criticisms. Incidents of sexual abuse and violence against Indian women were common and similar to enslaved black women. Patriarchy was at its zenith on coolie vessels, consequently, Maharani was attacked physically — sexually exploited by Captain Wilson and raped by the Ipson — and assassinated posthumously — through the witness accounts by chauvinist crew members. The men aboard tried to character assassinate Maharani to protect their fellow crew member, Ipson, proving the case of alliance among disenfranchised groups of men; non-white men on ships subjugated by the Whites clinch a sense of pre-eminence over non-white women. Therefore, notions of conflict between the White and the non-white was a convenient argument that diminished the "agency" and "resistance" of women.

Male indentured workers toiled on the fields, cutting cane, carrying stalks, sweating in the factory indicating their work to be limited to the canefields. The

utilisation over male bodies in the British Caribbean sugar colonies rarely surpassed the stipulated claim mentioned in the legal contract. On the contrary, indentured women's body was claimed by the plantation officials, husbands, partners, and children through cultivation work in the canefields, household chores, sexual gratification, and reproduction of culture and children. Women's work in the plantation exceeded the clauses mentioned in the *girmit* and women's bodies were exploited, at all times, by people of varying race and hierarchy in numerous ways. Women's hands figured prominently in cultivation of cane and household work including cleaning, cooking, and washing. Their eyes expressed emotions and observe the obscure, it was used to lure men or avert unwanted attention, and to dream or despair. Their wombs were used for reproducing children and their bodies were used for sexual gratification, carrying cane stalks, and project an image of a benign, thriving, and civilised British Empire. Indentured women labourers were symbolic of the exotic and fertile landscape being (mis)used by colonial and patriarchal forces. Rajkumari Singh, a Caribbean poet of Indian descent, was the first woman to be published and greatly stimulated indentured memory. Her writings show a superlative reverence to Indian indentured women who were viciously preyed and devoured by the male gaze. Fictional works of Espinet, Persaud, Mohan, Mohabir, and Dabydeen unmask the stereotyping and prejudices against Indian women, and reaffirm the strong and independent matrilineal legacy of Indo-Caribbean women.

The case of Baboonie in *The Swinging Bridge* exemplifies the plight of single women. Baboonie was an old beggar woman who was an ex-indentured labourer and lived alone since she had no living family members. When she first appears at the doorsteps of the protagonist's house, she looked starved and weak and wore ragged ankle-length skirt with a blouse and an *orhni* covering her head. Baboonie lived in a makeshift house behind a local contractor, Toolsie's house. While, at first, Toolsie acted as a local guardian to Baboonie, when she started being regularly assaulted, he stopped protecting her. When Mona's mother employs Baboonie to clean their house, Mona's father objects on employing and letting Baboonie enter their house because "Toolsie say that in the night he does hear footsteps running and people beating down the door. He say, 'Everybody around here does beat that.' That is what he say. She used to scream at first and try to chase them away by cussing real nasty

but that didn't stop them" (Swinging Bridge, 111). Baboonie gets raped every night by multiple men simply because "she does live alone, she don't have nobody" (Swinging Bridge, 111) and this gang-rape is epistemic of the way society perceives single women as an available commodity. Moreover, she is ostracised from the same people who do nothing to prevent her nightly assaults. She is forced to beg and live in poverty because the people in the town do not want to employ her for fears that Mona also voices: "Silent deadly figures stalking through the night intent on one thing … Baboonie, huddled in a corner, waiting for her assailants, subjected to the inevitable, a grunting, groaning man, a whole procession of them" (Swinging Bridge, 111). Nonetheless, Mona's mother insists and fights against her husband to have Baboonie work for them and give her a fair wage.

3.4 Domestic Abuse and Wife-Murders

The amorphous mass of Indian women were morally condemned when they indentured to the Caribbean islands. Indian nationalists made potent arguments against the degradation of Indian women under indenture laws that separated the women from their culture, violated them, destroyed their family life, and ruined the prospect of a respectable future. Colonial authorities put up stories of idyllic East Indian family and devised regulations to protect the female indentees against the moral criticism that proved unconvincing and ineffective. Indians in the homeland and in the plantation bemoaned the loss of family life that led to an outcry demanding the restoration of Indian family life in the plantation that was brutally disrupted by the labour emigration. Colonial officials embarked on the restoration project prodded by the increasing instances of violence against women in the British Caribbean plantocracy. Important legal instruments like legislations, marriage laws, and criminal codes were established to preserve and sanctify the Indian family structure in the British Caribbean islands. The notable aspect of this entire project was that, once again, the Indian woman had to face the consequence of the development of family structure and protection of women during their plantation life. It was Rohini who convinced Vidia to indenture and made travel arrangements with the village recruiter indicating the maturity and pre-eminence of the wife in the marriage. When Vidia suspected Rohini of having sexual liaison with a "nigger", he

brutally thrashes her as Rohini is shocked since, he would not have the courage or thought of raising his hand on her when they were in India. However, circumstances changed in the Caribbean sugar industry because Vidia was promoted from a young man in India to the 'man of the house' in British Guiana and discovers new things:

> 'What niggerman?', Rohini cried … he stood over her in a daze, alarmed at his capacity to hurt her … Only yesterday Kampta had related what happened to a woman in a neighbourhood estate. The woman's husband was sick. He had been wretched for weeks, and the lonely coolies were waiting for his death so they could claim his wife. He lingered on beyond their patience; fortified by rum they broke down the door, chopped him to a mess, then dragged his wife to a respectable distance … He didn't want to compare Rohni's behaviour to the raped woman's, though it was true that since coming to Guiana their love-making had become more peculiar … Their separation from India and from his parents seemed a separation from a shameful immaturity (Counting House, 88-89).

The deep-seated patriarchy leads Rohini to cook for Vidia the next morning, clean the house, wash and lay out his clothes, and do all the daily chores "as if nothing had happened" (Counting House, 72). She has internalized patriarchal notions and enjoys the abuse because, to her, it is a proof of her husband's strong-will and ownership over her body. Another reason that Indian women continued living with abusive partners is because they had no option to leave because they were all trapped in the estate so they chose to accept and continue living their miserable lives. Furthermore, wives like Rohini and Urmilla were treated as an object by their husbands to demonstrate their manliness by means of physical abuse. Since Vidia and Tiger were barely out of their adolescence when they got married, they resorted to wife-beating as a way to feel like the "man of the house" and prove their machismo.

The phenomenon of adultery and wife murder had travelled to the heart of British Empire and officials wanted to reduce or suppress the official discourse. This discourse produced two key figures of the "adulterous woman" and the "deceived man" who played crucial role in constitution of marriage laws. Albeit the frequent incidents of adultery, men were quick to assume that their partners had lured or

intentionally consorted with other men that resulted ruthless beatings that resulted in deep or permanent scars and impairments, chopping off limbs, or fatal blows. Indian woman were placed in an ambiguous space of freedom and restriction within an existing exploitative regime. Colonial officials, plantation authorities, and Presbyterian missionaries eulogised the liberatory indentured regime that granted financial independence as well as an escape route from their repressive and downtrodden life in the Indian subcontinent. However, persistent gendered violence prompted them to condemn the actions and lifestyle of women on the plantations as immoral. The industrious nature of women became conspicuous because women indentees exercised a thrifty control over monetary transactions in British Caribbean islands; daily transactions, jewellery purchases, remittances to India, and lodging or land acquisition were mostly done through monetary payments by the women in the plantations. Wage-earning free women exercised great control in choosing sexual partners as well. Authorities and missionaries tried to curb such excess freedom and power wielded by Indian women immigrants by categorising types of women in the British Caribbean plantations. There was a docile and law-abiding single woman who lived alone or often, married by her choice or by authorities and missions. The second category was of depraved women who unleashed jealousy, partner-related crimes, and chaos in the plantation. A third category is a polygamous household followed by a monogamous family unit. In all these categories, it is the woman who is held accountable and tried on patriarchal scales of justice.

Marriage laws went through a gradual evolution considering, originally, it envisaged the prevention of wife murder during the 1880s. It was followed by an emphasis on restoring the family unit of the immigrants and progressively became inscribed with peremptory norms that subjugated the women but exempted the male counterparts. At first, the officials had to grasp the root cause of marital abuse and extreme violence before they could conceive preventive measures including recruitment process, family life in the estates, and marital acts. The colonial offices in England started getting reports on gendered violence in the 1860s that prompted the Secretary of State of colonies to demand regular reports of crimes against immigrant women in the British-Caribbean plantations. Annual reports exposed rampant atrocities on Indian women, [i]n Trinidad for instance, between 1872 and 1879, of 102 total murders seventy-six were of women, of which fifty-nine were of

wives … In British Guiana between 1885and 1900, of the 103 total murders, seventy-eight were of women, fifty-eight of which were of wives" (Mohapatra 1995, 232). These annual reports alarmed the planters who feared a discontinuance of indenture labour that was the only source of cheap labour post-slavery. Hence, British authorities were hastily dispatched circulars to recruit larger and better quality of women and informed the plantation managers and overseers to devise a lifestyle that harped strongly on a family life predicated on Indian values. The 1883 Indian Emigration Act prevented married women from migrating to British Caribbean sugar plantations without a formal permission from her husband or male guardian. Consequently, there was a more stringent security check for women enlisting for indentured labour and any report or suspicion of women eloping without familial consent resulted in getting detained at the depot and possible custody before being handed over to their family. In retrospect, imperialists and patriarchal agents kept the rhetoric of despoiled Indian woman alive for their ulterior motives; anti-colonialists used the trope of women's violation to prevent the mass migration while British colonialists claimed on offering an escape route. Family-oriented regulations and marriage laws enforced norms to be a "good woman" and created a more vigorous precinct for women to maintain. Morality came into play and labels such as "unfaithful wife", "licentious women", and "coquette" were frequently invoked to continue the cultural, physical, and psychological subjugation. Since a large number of women who were indentured migrated alone, the privileges of marital status and legal protection for families compelled single women to find partners in the estate or officials played a match-maker for such women. Hastily made marriages often faced unwilling partners and a good example is Munshi Rahman Khan, who was forcefully held responsible for a pregnant woman. Rahman Khan was threatened by the officials to, not only live with the expecting woman, but also take responsibilities of her expenses as a good husband should. Imperialists and troubled single women often held single, well-doing Indian workers wrongly accountable for their mistakes and trepidations.

Statistically, violence against women by their husbands, companions, or potential partners was much higher in Caribbean sugar colonies than in India. In *Coolie Woman*, Gaiutra Bahadur discusses the crimes against Indian women in the British sugar colonies of the Caribbean, Fiji, and Mauritius, wherein she cites

instances of recorded cases. Scarcity of women in the plantations resulted in treating them as a commodity that was frequently shared, seized, pawned, and passed around. Women were frequently mortgaged by their husbands or partners to clear off debts or in exchange for financial and other favours. It was a common practice for indentured labourers to share one woman as a mistress, a wife, or just a help for their daily chores in the lodgings. Such arrangements led to jealousy, quarrels, and violence, and more often than not, the women was always at the receiving end of it rather than the men who committed lecherous acts. Recorded crimes against women consistently suggest that the perpetrator, simply, wanted to maim their womenfolk. The physical injury was expected to act as a reminder for all Indian women to refrain from promiscuity as well as a territorial marking by the man. Hindu scriptural teachings was ingrained upon the Hindu migrants which are reflected in their actions as well. Mutilation of specific body parts of women to punish their depravity is evidently inspired by the episode of Shurpanakha in the *Ramayana*: "Noses, those representatives of women's honor, seemed to be a particular target. In 1914, an indentured man assaulting his wife aimed for her nose; failing to reach it with either cutlass or knife, he bit the tip off with his teeth. Guiana's immigration chief explained that the man was trying, pointedly, to inflict "the brand of infidelity." Of course, the men did not always act symbolically, carving a woman's body into a statue modelling dishonour" (Coolie Woman, 109). Women who dared to take control of their lives — financially, emotionally, and physically — were degraded and dehumanised that paved way for objectification. Possession over women's body resulted in mutilation of female anatomy. British legislations to curb gendered violence by promoting monogamous alliances only enforced dominance of men in a relationship and, since, the woman's voice was deliberately silenced, she fought against the system through alternate means which, eventually, validated the indisputable significance of Indian women during the period of indentureship and the formation of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean.

3.5 Sexual Assault, Incest, and Mistresshood

Sexual assault on Indian woman in the Caribbean through physical abuse, molestation, or rape is a double violence since Indian women have endured psychic assault through migration and indentureship. They have been lured and ensnared with false promises by local recruiters to forcibly sign indentured contract. The coolie odyssey has been a passage of dread, dismay, and regret only to resign to all forms of assault in the plantation colonies and live in exile. Without undermining the experiences of sexual assault survivors, the entire process of indentured labour can be identified as an act of violation on the Indian female body and mind. Colonial invasion is usually described as infringement of virgin landscapes and conquering it for colonial expansion. This draws a direct comparison between the territories and the female body which were violated by imperialists. The sexploitation of female labourers by the plantation managers, supervisors, and overseers was another source of menace that incurred trouble and violence. There were recurring incidents of molestation, sexual assault, and forced or voluntary interracial relationships between British officials and Indian women on the plantations. The sexual assault of Sunnariya in *Jahajin* and the following events appositely demonstrates the condition of indentured workers in British Caribbean colonies. Tales of Sunnariya's beauty and grace had spread amongst Indian workers as well as caught the attention of the overseers. One day when she was playing, telling stories, and eating cane with the children of her barrack in the canefield, one of the overseers, who was seemingly inebriated, molested her. However, the true story in its entirety was never known because the children ran off, leaving no witnesses, and Sunnariya narrated different versions of the incident each time she was probed. One reason might be a distorted memory of the traumatic incident or it can simply suggest her choice to withhold the actual occurrence to assuage the scandal and protect the honour of her father and her community. The British government, desperate to keep the indentured migration of Indians in operation, despite the frequent protests from anti-colonial organisations and the Indians in the homeland, they repeatedly sent out notices warning plantation officials against such acts. As a result, despite the cold-blooded assassination of the overseer, Mukoon Singh was deported to India rather than prolonged incarceration or a death sentence. Interracial relationships between the Whites and the female workers was familiar occurrence and Bahadur quotes an 1869 circular condemning

the laxity of the plantation officials for engaging in such relationships: “The implication is that overseers had an obligation to demonstrate the superior morality of the British and were failing to do so” (Klein, 60). British authorities perceived these relationships sabotaging the notion of a civilised and morally superior race. If psychological manipulation was key to the subjugation of non-white races then such illicit liaisons were undermining centuries of imperialism. Frustrated with her indentured life and disappointed with Vidia’s ability to impregnate her, Rohini chooses to become a mistress to Gladstone, like the black maid, Miriam. Planters and British officials have constantly mentioned that the non-white women engaged in sexual relations to gain privileges and intentionally became pregnant in hopes of inheriting portion of their wealth and a better life. Rohini also purposefully conceives Gladstone’s child. She imagines her unborn child “swelling her body to the roundness of the globe which one day it would inherit” (Counting House, 133) demonstrating her desire for material objects and wealth rather than education that Vidia wanted Rohini to acquire. This illegitimate relations, not only inspired jealousy among men but also, among the women as we find Miriam stealing Rohini and Vidia’s saving and misleading her into an abortion because she fears losing her privilege and control over Gladstone to Rohini. In several ways, sexual services, voluntary or forced, is another form of labour performed by Indian female workers in the plantations that highlight the corruption of the system and the twofold prejudice against women. Such sexual predation of indentured women by planters and British officials, with unbridled power over their body, draws attention to the exploitation as well the influence of women pervading the system.

In my interview with Peggy Mohan, she recognises that Indians were not in a position to deal with the “asymmetries of power”, hence, the assault on Indian women indentees were suppressed[2]. However, Mootoo shared a family anecdote with me during her interview where she talks about a recurring joke about her maternal grandmother was fair-skinned because her mother “was friends with the overseer on the estate. That is such a loaded idea. But there was pride”. Her family relished the idea of an illicit relationship of her great grandmother with an English man and publicly joked about it all their family gatherings. Such casual conversations and the presence of white people at the frequent parties organised by her parents during her childhood and adolescent years made her overlook the racial

politics. However, when she began researching indentured history as a young researcher in Canada, she came across photographs of children of her parents white friends at numerous parties she was never invited to[3].

The name of the town "Paradise" projects an idyllic space but, ironically, enables transgressive acts— alcoholism, rape, incest, madness. Mootoo deftly deals with sexual and psychological complications in *Cereus Blooms at Night* where the female characters struggle with sexual expression. Chandin feels strongly infatuated to Lavinia since his adoption but Lavinia initiates a lesbian relationship with Sarah, Chandin's wife, several years later. When Lavinia and Sarah elope Paradise town, Chandin thwarts their attempt at taking his daughters along, who are eventually, left behind and suffer unimaginable sexual abuse from their father. The novel emphasizes on the binary of natural and perverse through the characters and the different kinds of relationships. The town of Paradise is populated with various queer characters including Lavinia, Sarah, Tyler, and Ambrose as well as their queer relationships but the most queer or perverse relationship is conducted by the misogynist, Chandin, with his daughters. Mala's nightly deflowering by Chandin indicates the title's anomalous blossoming of flower at night-time:

> One night [Chandin] turned, his back to Asha, and in a fitful, nightmarish sleep, mistook Pohpoh for Sarah. He put his arm around her and slowly began to touch her. Pohpoh opened her eyes. Frightened and confused by this strange, insistent probing, she barely breathed, pretending to be fast sleep … Then he brought his body heavily on top of hers and slammed his hand over her mouth. She opened her eyes and stared back at him in terror … Galring and breathing heavily like a mad dog, he pinned her hands to the bed and forced her legs apart. That is how it started. The following night he sent the two children to sleep in their own room, but they both came to know that he would call for one or the other to pass at least part of the night in his bed (Cereus, 65-66).

This incestuous rape can be construed as a form of domestic indentureship of Mala who is also coerced into serving her father and satiate his physical needs, through household work, and satisfy his sexual desires, as a replacement of her mother[4]. It is

also Mootoo's remarkable story-telling ability that all the marginalised characters protect one another and provide solidarity. Hence, despite patriarchal oppression and abuse, the utopic nature of the town is derived from the bond formed by the marginalised characters who survive inexplicable trauma.

Characters and their relationships perpetually occupy a liminal space that results in identity-splitting or living a double-life. Chandin's innate awareness of his sibling relationship with Lavinia forces him to supress his real feelings for her and forces him to marry Sarah, another Indian girl with Presbyterian education. The homosexual characters evidently lead a dual-life. The most severe identity-splitting is suffered by Mala who experiences stark differentiation between the adult Mala, regularly raped by her father, and the child Mala who was lovingly called Pohpoh by her mother and sister. After betrayal from her lover and murdering her father, Mala abandons humanly living and language, interacting only with animals, insects, and nature. This multiplicity of Mala's identity is a direct consequence of sexual abuse, especially, incestuous rape. Mala's madness is a form of retaliation against the hetero-patriarchal hegemony which, on one hand, emphasizes on "normative" sexuality but, on the other hand, disrupts "normal" societal norms through incest and domestic abuse. Hetero-masculinist order of the Ramchandin home forbid Lavinia and Sarah's lesbian relationship, at the same time, Chandin perversely reformulates the definition of "wifehood". Chandin has always been a dispassionate husband to Sarah and an irresponsible father to his daughters. After Sarah elopes with Lavinia, he replaces his Sarah with Mala who is forced to act as a substitute for Chandin to project sexual aggression provokes by the male honour. Patriarchal desire for women ensures their commodification and consumption; indentureship necessitated the influx of Indian women for physical labour and later, heterosexual male desired, abused, and consumed women and young girls. Sustained desire of women by masculine forces warranted the commercialisation of women who were mere pawns within the draconian patriarchal system that deprived them of sexual agency. Male desire renders woman's identity to an anonymity and this obscurity makes it convenient for heterosexual men to replace women to enact their desire. The sexual deviancy closely guarded within the Indo-Caribbean community since the early years of indentured regime finds literary articulation in the works of the double-diasporic authors. The culture of male hegemony makes the rape of Mala "acceptable" and the

society chooses silence over criminalisation of such blatantly aberrant act. The quiet knowledge and consent by the public stems from the belief in matrilineal vindication by means of which Mala and Asha had to bear the onus of their mother's queer sexuality. In order to punish and "straighten" their genetic aberration, public vilification and unremitting rape was the justification. Since traditional Indian values were also disgraced by an alien culture in the form of the exilic existence, proselytization, and the supposed manipulation by a European woman, the community preys on the daughters to reclaim their honour and authority. The unapologetic expression of sexuality among non-heteronormative people inevitably result in social ostracism, communal and/or familial abuse, intimidation, and eventual suppression. Trapped in patriarchal imbalances, women bear the culpability of unwarranted violence and societal shame. The familial respectability of the Ramchandin household also pushes Sarah and Mala to suppress their sexuality and when they finally find ways to express themselves, cataclysmic events follow. Indian diaspora community has been quick to blame the victims at the cost of protecting the abuser which, in most cases, the woman is alleged of aberrant sexuality.

Survivors of sexual assault produce ways to block the pain of repeated colonisation of their body with a stoic state of living that forms a barrier between the outside world and their inner world. Just the way Mala withdraws from human society and takes shelter and starts mimicking and interacting solely with the natural world after killing her father for years of physical abuse, Pani also withdraws in a robotic state. When a young Annaise finds the presence of a stranger in her house one fine morning, she questions her mother who refuses to give any details except that she would be staying in their house and warns Annaise against questioning or bothering the sudden addition to their family. But Annaise is intrigued by this apparition with a peculiar name, Pani, mysterious identity, and withdrawn demeanour. Pani's interaction was limited to Annaise's mother, she never made eye contact with anyone or left the premises of the house, quietly helped in household chores like chopping vegetables, cooking, and cleaning, and retreated to the basement apartment in the afternoon. Annaise's queries regarding Pani were answered by Black Maharajin when she

> spoke about Pani for the first time. Pani was from a large family in Princes Town, and her childhood was difficult. Everyone knew that Pani's father molested his daughters, and that he beat his wife when she threatened to take her daughters and leave. One rainy afternoon, as Pani's father slept in his hammock, Pani took a cutlss and chopped him to death. The police were called but they never pressed charges, maybe because they knew about Pani's life and what her father did to her and her sisters. They … held Pani for an hour in the station, and then they let her go" (Jouvert, 37).

Both Mala and Pani express repressed anger by murdering their perpetrator and withdrawing from society because they feel intense betrayal by societal impasse. The silence around the incestuous rape stands in stark contrast to the public uproar surrounding the murder of the perpetrator and an ecstasy about the criminalisation of young women. Public censure can be understood as anger against their courage to attack their perpetrator and the will to defend themselves against systemic control over their body.

3.6 The Question of Bamboo Wife

Diaspora community mobilises their home through the investiture of a 'woman of the house' who restores and preserves cultural practices, hence, the man has to bring the woman into his house by marrying her in the traditional way. When a woman was married in the traditional Hindu ceremony, she was referred to as a "bamboo wife" that suggested non-Christian and primitive marital rites. Hindu marriages which were solemnised under a bamboo tent was were recognised as legal marriages in the British Caribbean island-nations. Bamboo weddings were legalised in 1946 and were not only a social stigma for the Indo-Caribbean people for decades but also brought proprietary challenges. Gainder was recruited by an *arkati* before stealing her father's money to elope an unfavourable marriage. During her middle passage, Gainder was physically molested by one of the White men who was killed by an Indian *jahaji*, Jeevan. Gainder falls in love with the man who saved her life and her honour but lost him when he was arrested for murder and sent ashore for punishment at St. Helena. When circumstances demand Gainder to find a husband, her *jahaji* family finds a young Indo-Caribbean Christian convert named Joshua to

marry her "under bamboo" (Swinging Bridge, 249). Although Joshua had enough money to have a grand Indian wedding, "it is customary for the bride's family to stand the wedding costs" (Swinging Bridge, 249). Since Hindu wedding ceremonies conducted "under bamboo" were not legally documented, a "bamboo wife" was dispensable but, due to their superior status, men were never referred to as "bamboo husband", enabling them to circumvent the stigma and shackle of traditional matrimonial bonds. The newfound agency and independence of these Indian women is rescinded by chauvinist paradigms. Mona's family had adopted a Presbyterian modus vivendi as most "newly educated people would throw out almost everything Indian at first" (Swinging, 29). One of the first things swiftly jettisoned by Mona's grandfather, Ganga Singh, was his "bamboo wife" after his marriage with her grandmother was mandated by the Presbyterian missionary. This imperious character of Presbyterian mission reveals deleterious impact on the psyche of Indo-Caribbean people and a condescending approach towards Indian traditions. In fact, these women primarily eloped the trammels of patriarchy faced erasure of their identities by institutions which lured them with respectability and liberation. The middle class status endowed by Presbyterianism ensures the erasure of Indianness, hence, a "bamboo wife" was invalidated and conveniently replaced by an educated Christian wife:

> Several other men of Pappy's generation who had done the same thing, persuaded by missionary interventions. These church people from Canada interfered so much in our lives; to me it was very puzzling. Big strong men like Pappy … allowing a few white men to rule their lives and tell them who to marry and who to leave. And what about love? Did Pappy love Mama or was the bamboo wife his one true love, like in love songs? (Swinging Bridge, 64).

When a letter addressed to Ganga Singh arrived from his "bamboo wife", Etwaria, soon after the demise of his Christian wife, informing him that she had been patiently and loyally waiting for him all these years. She requests him to live the remaining years with her in her house near the plantations. When Ganga considers moving in with Etwaria, his son is infuriated as he sees it as an act of disrespecting his mother. Eventually the family distress and discussions over Etwaria abated with

time and Mona imagines "that she dies alone in her tapia hut, childless, still faithful to Ganga, the husband who rescued her from loneliness in the strangeness of Trinidad" (Swinging Bridge, 66).

The indecisiveness and indifference by Indian men reinforce patriarchal norms in the Caribbean as well and several Indian men seize opportunities of socio-economic progress, advanced education, land acquisition, and better employment. When Munshi Rahman Khan learned that the indentured labourers were allowed to choose a partner without legal obligations, he feels dejected of not bringing along "a beautiful young *Brahmin* or *kshitriya* girl from Kanpur of my own choice" (Khan, 91) despite having a Muslim wife back in India. Although he was forced into marrying a girl of his father's choice, Khan shows no concern about her well-being or his marital status and remarries the sister of a fellow indentee when he is made to realise the advantages of having a wife in a foreign land. After his second marriage, Khan expediently erases all memory and concern about his first wife in India. Indian men swiftly recognised that the way to climb the social ladder is by erasing the residual Indian culture as Joshua prevents Gainder's Chutney composition, Ganga Singh abandons Etwaria, and Munshi Khan deserts his first wife in India. Colonial efforts at stereotyping the female subaltern in the Caribbean islands as "loose" and "tainted" to assuage the complaints from people in the homeland and the increasing number of "wife-murder, choppings, beatings, serious crime" (Swinging Bridge, 249) forced the single women to find partners in the estate. These matches were hastily done and often brokered by third parties like fellow indentees, *jahaji* families, estate employees, or Presbyterian missionaries. As a result, most of these arranged marriages proof to be stifling for the women who look outside for romance and respite. Local and legal guardians enforce "coolie" morality upon the women, especially, and they bear the brunt of a quasi-liberating system. Colonial administrators, initially, trap these women in dehumanising situations and finally, deflect the consequences and responsibility on them because women have incessantly been the subject of colonial scapegoating.

3.7 Matrilineal Kinship

The consciousness of Indians was shaped by the ossified caste system that characterised women as weak and passive subjects, perpetuating systematic violence upon the "weaker sex". Gender was inextricably linked to Brahminical caste system that was ensured over centuries through the strict practice of endogamy that reinforced the rules of marriage and sexuality in India. Indian "samaj" gave precedence to caste distinctions, family values, and living by the doctrines of the "sastras" or the Hindu scriptures. The Islamic practice also relied on skewed gender relations where Muslim women were viewed as effeminate and incapable of public duties. Although Muslim widows were allowed to remarry, only men were entitled to polygamy. Islamic scriptures not only dictate that women must be governed by men but also state that women exist through men. These beliefs established a common ground for both Hinduism and Islam to propagate all forms of abuse against women in pre-independent India. Caribbean culture in the major island nations of Trinidad, Jamaica, Guyana, Port of Spain, and Barbados experienced significant changes which were directly related to the *Ramayana* tradition. The *Ramayana* had an unambiguous impact on women's status in society. Majority of the Indians in Caribbean tried to hold on and imitate traditions as closely as possible and the foremost of them was the reproduction of the home space. It was essential to follow traditions inside their home because it was the only space in a foreign land that allowed them some form of authority, which was otherwise absent in the outside world. The domain of home and family unit was not only a place that nurtured crucial values and norms, it also acted as an emotional sanctuary that provided moral insulation from the rapidly evolving world. Religious schism and disintegrating tendencies made the need for women to take position of the supremo of the household which could symbolically represent a well-organized institution, free of strife and dissent. After Sarah elopes with her lesbian lover, Lavinia, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the very first thing Ramchandin does was stop going to church and resume living as a diaspora Indian. Ramchandin blamed the influence of Christianity and the western lifestyle of the Thoroughlys for his wife's homosexuality. As a result, he started to live like an Indian peasant once again as a way to atone his sins and a sign of protest against non-Hindu lifestyle. Indian indentured labourers and the diaspora fed their nostalgia by living according to the religious protocols to maintain

a continuity and prevent the widening schism from the ancestral homeland. Home was the primary space of culture for migrants and the women were the chief propagators of traditions and in-charge of passing down religious data to the next generation. When young girls overstepped permissive boundaries, the mother "was ultimately held responsible for what was perceived as the imperfections in her daughter's upbringing and character" (Butterfly, 98-99). This mother-daughter conduit worked both ways because daughters were also publicly shamed, shunned or suspected of inheriting their mother's wickedness or immorality, much like the way Mala and Asha were boycotted by their classmates and prevented from playing in the local park that was only meant for "good, decent people" (Valmiki, 87). The young sisters were subjected to frequent public humiliation because they had objectionable parentage, placing the moral culpability mainly on their mother. A daughter's accountability for her mother's faults is the most rigorous for Sita "who, living in constant subjection to the vagaries of an unsympathetic household, received the curses that ought, by right, to have been reserved for her mother" (Naipaul, 73). Sita, Mala, and Asha's mothers were labelled licentious, consequently, the daughters faced societal ostracism and abuse from their father who derived a perverse pleasure from punishing them and were prejudiced to think that moral flaw was a maternal heredity. There are several similarities in Sita, Mala, and Asha's relationship with their mother and the consequent discrimination faced by them but Sita's vilification was unjustified since she was deliberately abandoned by Sushila. Moreover, Mala and Asha's only solace and refuge from their father and society's onslaught was the happy memory with their mother, Sarah, and Lavinia, whereas, there was an apparent "disparity of character and the lack of understanding" (Naipaul, 165). While Sita was abandoned by Sushila in the Settlement, the latter's brief appearances disguised the latent plight and hostility in their relationship but as they spent a prolonged time together in Ramsaran's house and Sita 'coming of age' incited frequent bouts of invectives from Sushila who started considering Sita "merely another woman; and, by definition, a rival" (Naipaul, 226). Although Sita faced verbal abuse from people in the Settlement and her own mother, unlike Mala and Asha, she never endured physical abuse. When Sushila elopes from Ramsaran's estate, his first reaction is to punish Sita by stopping her education and forcing her to burn her books, that was sure to leave her devastated since she was passionate about literature and found an asylum in books, despite repeated appeals to donate them

instead. We witness a toxicity and tenacity in the mother-daughter relationship as both Sita and Mala quietly acquiesce to their father's abuse and ill-fated life.

Poverty-stricken Indian families considered girl child as a burden that must be married off to the first suitable man or a family that demands the least amount of dowry. On the other hand, girls with objectionable parentage or abandoned and orphaned girl children are utilised by their caretakers to make money through either misemploying them sexually or siphoning money off their rich husbands. Basdai is portrayed as one of the opportunistic parents who was "quite willing to sell their surplus daughters into marriage" (Naipaul, 27) in hopes of procuring social and monetary benefits from her daughter's marriage alliance. Rani was treated as a widow, "banished to the kitchen and the back of the house- or rather, hut" (Naipaul 26), because she was almost thirty years of age and unmarried. Rani was not quintessentially beautiful and possessed an unobtrusive demeanour, as a result, a marriage proposal from a wealthy man like Ramsaran was not only unexpected for her parents but it seemed like a hitting a jackpot for Basdai. She agreed to Ramsaran's hasty proposal albeit the knowledge of his illegitimate son, unscrupulous behaviour, and suspicious means of earning. However, Rani's marriage did not bear expected fruits for Basdai and she tried her luck at obtaining financial benefits from Ramsaran's fortune once again after the untimely death of Rani. Basdai was quick to notice Ramsaran's need for a companion and a domestic help to look after Rani and Ramsaran's son, Wilbert, and the household. Basdai decides to build an alliance between Ramsaran and Sushila, who was distantly related to her and left under her care at the Settlement. Basdai's relationship with Sushila was also an exploitative one. Sushila fled the Settlement twice as a young girl then returned as a pregnant woman. She left her daughter in Basdai's care because she disappeared frequently and was reported to have sighted in Port of Spain or San Fernando. Despite societal humiliation and verbal tirades from Basdai, Sushila seemed to prosper and arrive with toys for Sita and white rum for Basdai which softened her complaints. As a result, Basdai rightly saw the resemblance between Ramsaran and Sushila since they continued earning money through unknown means without paying any heed to public vilification carried out by the residents of the Settlement, both had illegitimate children, and showed complete disregard for conventions. Basdai was not only avaricious, she also exhibited a pernicious side when Rani bought a pair of

eyeglasses with twenty-two carat gold rim. This was the only valuable object bought by Rani with the allowance given by Ramsaran and she was quite pleased with it. However, Ramsaran was greatly annoyed by this new and extravagant purchase of his demure wife and Basdai was beyond angry enraged at her daughter's "flagrant effrontery" (Naipaul, 63). She feels cheated of the money that Rani spends on herself and feels betrayed, once again, when Sushila comes to the Settlement to take Sita to live with her at Ramsaran estate, and calls her "[u]ngrateful wretch" (Naipaul, 160) after Sushila refuses to be grateful to her for the match-making. Although Basdai planted Sushila in Ramsaran estate for self-serving purposes, Sushila undeniably receives benefits and luxuries that was beyond her means and yet she refuses to acknowledge Basdai for orchestrating the relationship with Ramsaran and looking after Sita for years while she abandoned her. The prolonged abandonment left Sita feeling like an orphan for which she had to wilfully remind herself, "I too have a mother like everybody else … She repeated the word in an endless hypnotic chant … Mo-ther … mot-her … moth-er" (Naipaul, 166). Sushila's sudden and brief appearances at the Settlement puzzled Sita who "tried to [Sushila] but it was not possible to love a shifting combination of scent and sound and colour which was there one minute and gone the next" (Naipaul, 166) but Sita developed a defence mechanism against her mother's apathy and people's abuse through a method of self-regard. She built the wall of self-love so high and strong that she became immune to her own mother's denigration, her lover's jilting, and Ramsaran's ultimate embargo on her education. Finally, Sita makes a quiet departure from her past life towards a brighter future with a respectable employment in Port-of-Spain. Sita's belief system and way of living was akin to Rani's rather than Sushila but, unfortunately, Rani was unable to unshackle herself from the oppression and her silent suffering.

Rani faced disdain from her own family members for she was considered physically unattractive and sexually infertile. However, to Basdai's relief, Rani gave birth to Wilbert Ramsaran despite severe complications during and after delivery. Thus far, Rani had grown accustomed to all injustices and vilification at the hands of her mother and neighbours but Ramsaran's iniquitous spurning enervated her for the rest of her life. Their marriage was a façade from the beginning as they had separate bedrooms and Rani was treated as a mere housemaid, doing household chores like cooking, cleaning, and serving from dawn to dusk. This simulated marriage had one

redeeming ritual when they shared a bed on Friday evenings but post-miscarriage of Rani's second pregnancy, she was "no longer summoned to the bedroom on Friday evenings and the marriage ceased, all but formally, to exist" (Naipaul 29). Nonetheless, a guilt-ridden Rani continued to bathe, perfume, and get dressed every Friday evening, knocking and begging Ramsaram to continue their weekly rendezvous that was met with "vain knockings on the door, the voice rising, falling and rising again, Egbert Ramsaran's hoarse, piping imprecations, the slaps and subdued yelps of pain … Came one Friday and Rani did not bathe and perfume herself. She had given up" (Naipaul, 30). Gradually, Rani disappeared within the dispirited household, finding a sense of freedom and delight in collecting stamps. In order to prove to Rani's family and the world outside Ramsaran estate that he did not keep her imprisoned for household chores only, he gave her a day-off every Sunday. Rani made sure to spend Sundays sticking the stamps, collected throughout the week, in albums that were kept hidden in her cupboard. Being shunned from public eye, first by her family and then by her husband, she travelled the world through the postage stamps depicting national flags or hallmarks of various foreign nations.

Trinh Minh-ha suggests that the memories of women are the earliest forms of library or archive since "the divine logos was, in fact, the word of woman, the Mother, as the original creator and maker of stories" (Mehta 2004, 136). This indicates the central role of oral history that serves as the only transmitter of female legacy, agency, and plurivocal stories amid the interminable cultural silencing. The oral heritage of Indian women have emerged from combining local versions of epics, mythology, and animal fables with family histories giving rise to woman-narrated folktales, maxims, and proverbs heard in daily life. The creative machinations manifested in the revisionist male-centred stories reaffirm the dexterity despite gendered inequality and oppression. The local Indo-Caribbean culture also demonstrates the everyday life and knowledge of rural Indian women. Cultural continuity and resistance against patriarchal control between Indian women and their Indo-Caribbean ally was guaranteed through matrilineal association. Since Indian women were frequently displaced under patriarchal regimes, a matrilineal retrieval and dispersal of ancestral narratives formed the locus of female primacy that defied diasporic realities. Initial attempts of severing the matrifocal umbilical cord by colonial and cultural chauvinism was neutralised by reclaiming and reimagining

authentic stories and memories. The wise mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, related by blood and otherwise, gained mastery over ancestral knowledge and acted as gatekeepers of Indo-Caribbean female history. They helmed the role of transformative interpreters of sociocultural and historical resistance as seen in the figures of Nani Dharmadai in *The Last English Plantation*, Kamla's mother and grandmother in *Butterfly in the Wind*, Deeda in *Jahajin*, Lily and Palli in *Daughters of Empire*, and Auntie Clarice in *The Intended*.

While growing up, Kamla's mother taught her to conduct herself graciously at all times by citing the example of goddesses. The story of Draupadi, especially, enamoured her and she mentions that "such stories affected me greatly and brought my mother and I closer together, and though in later years I realised that she had taken the material of many stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and with a sculptor's chisel shaped them to her own liking, it was always done with the affection of a mother trying to impart a deeper wisdom to her naïve, fast-growing daughter" (Butterfly, 99). The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have an overbearing impact on all of Lakshmi Persaud's novels where the grandmothers, mothers, and elder sisters create a highly moral atmosphere in the house and inculcate strong religious values upon the younger generation. Her novels emphasize on the pivotal role of *Ramayana* in Indian household that is unequivocally manifested in regular temple visiting, special *pujas, katha, bhajan, biraha,* and *matikor.* It is a known fact that the *Ramayana* left a trail of hundreds of different written and oral versions but family values remained the cornerstone of every interpretation. Hindus all over the world strove to attain *ramrajya* or a form of utopian space by following their preferred or suitable version of *Ramayana*. Hindu *jahajis* in the Caribbean also spun a plethora of *Ramayana* versions and most of them were heavily influenced by Tulsidas' retelling that emphasizes on the relationship of the divine couple, Rama and Sita. Sita held the undisputed position of the ideal woman among Hindus owing to her unwavering loyalty and reverence for her husband, Rama. Her womanly and wifely virtues eclipsed other female deities namely Lakshmi, Radha, Kali, Durga, and Saraswati who are comparatively maverick and aggressive by nature. The episode of Sita's "trial by fire" to prove her chastity after being rescued from the enemy's den is the decisive event in making her the epitome of womanhood: "Young Hindu girls … were unconsciously absorbing the sentiment and values of Valmiki …

absorbed into that ancient tradition of storytelling and felt a close bond with tales that were written nearly three thousand years ago and handed down from mother to daughter ever since" (Butterfly, 101). The mythically repressive modes of dominance inscribed women with subservient cultural imaginary authenticated by religious scriptures despite their wage-earning and commercialised activities in the plantation system. Often rebellious and new-age women problematized the sacred scriptures instructing self-abnegation and fidelity. While Ved engages in a playful banter with Anji about the *Ramayana*, she retorts, "After Sita get kidnapped by this monster Ravana, they put her on a big fire to prove that she wasn't unfaithful to her husband. That is all they were concerned about!" (Like Heaven, 212). Ved further coaxes her with patrilineal argument "suppose she had produced an heir a few months later … Son of Ravana would have inherited the whole kingdom" but Anji claims with firm belief that the text is "pure rubbish" (Like Heaven, 212). Indo-Caribbean matriarchs are credited for contesting the epics with creative re-imaginings that resisted cultural behavioural patterns for women. The mother was responsible to indoctrinate all aspects of a good Hindu woman to her daughter; they shared knowledge of managing the household with restricted resources and, often, limited wages of their husband. When adolescent girls were married off, they were imparted sexual skills to keep their husbands content in every way possible. Both Tiger and Urmilla had little knowledge about married life, they were quite uninformed about carnal knowledge, ergo they were hesitant and fearful of the unknown. Thus, when it was time for them to prove themselves as married adults to each other and their carping family members, Urmilla, who was merely thirteen or fourteen at the time of her marriage, tried to please her husband sexually by recalling her mother's words, "'*Beti*, whatever happen, don't frighten. You is a woman now" (Brighter Sun, 15). The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* had a monopolized leverage over wedding ceremonies, marriage dynamics, and family values. Few of the verses in the scriptures depict women as physically, intellectually, spiritually, and morally inferior to men. Furthermore, several scriptural passages have put women in the same category as untouchables. Some of the most memorable incidents in the *Ramayana* categorically convey that the highest virtue of a woman must be unwavering loyalty and absolute submission to her husband. All these factors converged to make women the passive receptor and fuel for the hierarchal and patriarchal authority. The oppressive patriarchal society combined with the British

colonisation forced India women to migrate to an unknown land in search for a better future.

3.8 Education and Alternate Knowledge System

The subterranean knowledge in orality is a silenced body of female expression and wisdom and emphasises on the primordial female bond that override canonical structures. After being subjected to generations of gendered victimisation, women devised protective ways to liberate and empower repressed female wisdom with the help of alternative modes of communication and confrontation. Elder sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and female teachers or elders in Indian culture act as communal healers, inspirational models, stabilizing forces or leaders of resistance. These Indo-Caribbean women demonstrate social and political tenacity by harnessing the collective potential of women within colonial and patriarchal parameters. The communal figures of womanhood act as models of female authority and function as mobilizing forces. They also figure as counter-models to idealised mythical abstractions. Lily and Palli's cooking school deserves special attention because young girls not only received cooking lessons but also domiciliary skills for six weeks. Amira was one of the first students to enrol at the establishment almost twenty years ago and reflects that "Lily and Palli had taken what all their students' mothers did and interpreted it, giving it a profound meaning … the difference was their parents did not imbue them with the quality they learnt to call 'a way of thinking'" (Daughters, 53). In combining traditional knowledge with radical approach, they illustrate a revolutionary role that addresses the prerequisites of a dynamic, multicultural, and post-colonial world. Under the tutelage of such radical female figures, new generation of women attain a dynamic social conduct. The impact of this schooling was so deep-seated in Amira's life that she decides to enrol her elder daughter during her summer vacation. Although the teachings were entrenched in paternalistic ideologies, several of the girls who belonged from backward classes expanded entrepreneurial skills by running small-scale catering occupation for local weddings and rituals while others sold home-grown vegetables in the local markets. Most of the students came from poor families that naturally led to different knowledge and approach towards food as Amira quickly grasps that the

other girls had no concept of *kachouris* with filling. This egalitarian schooling encouraged the girls to engage in a barter system, since they could not afford to buy all the ingredients, resulting new recipes cooked by "people of varying cultures and backgrounds" (Daughters, 52). Lily and Palli's own journey and dedication to forge female solidarity in their school in Penal, erstwhile British sugar colony of Trinidad, is inspiring. Both the women belong from different continents where they achieved education scholarships. They came to Trinidad and worked at the Archibald Institute for a decade where they were moved by the adverse effect of colonial occupation that worsened post-independence. Their empathy and desire for improvement drove them to impart education to women "to give them a ladder to climb out, to other careers if they were so minded" and create a sisterhood because "women would sometimes seek escape from miserable lives in the arms of another" (Daughters, 54).

While missionary institutions picked bright young boys, like Chandin, whom received enhanced education and greater opportunities to live a better by relocating to the UK or Canada, young girls were left behind. Due to the lack of education, young girls with indentured background remained trapped in the vicious cycle capitalist-coloniality. Soon, women in the Caribbean islands recognised the gravity of getting their daughters educated, since it was an escape route to break away from the toxic cycle, and the female indentured community derived a sense of achievement on witnessing one of their daughters getting education, receiving scholarship, and accomplish the success they were never able to. Kamla's passage to the UK to attend university is a matter of pride for the entire Indo-Caribbean community and they congregate to see her depart. Her passage to England is antipodal to her ancestors' passage across the *kala pani*. Years of struggle by the *jahaji-behen* seems to have reaped success through Kamla's second migration as Persaud states, "the sacredness of knowledge and learning and the acquiring of skills by women; these are good things. They themselves hadn't had the opportunity, but they were too happy to have lived to see this day, when a Hindu girl from this village was going to England" (Butterfly, 193). Although Presbyterian missionary schools were fraught were prejudices and self-serving motives, they also brought educational opportunities to Indians in the Caribbean from the early twentieth century. In fact, the success of Indo-Caribbean politics was directly related to the success of the

women of the community that started with the foundation of education institutions: "In 1912, when Naparima Girls' Nigh School, the first secondary school catering mainly to Indo-Trinidadian girls was established, many female indentureds who worked on sugar cane or cacao plantations saved for school fees in order to educate their daughters, displaying a nascent feminist consciousness by investing in female independence through education" (Mahabir 2013, 2).

3.9 *Aji* Culture and *Jahaji*-sisterhood

In India, women were reduced purely to their biological capabilities that immobilized the women by restraining them to traditional role of stereotypical and one-dimensional motherhood. This biological function is isomorphic in the symbolic representation of Mother Earth or Mother India that is source of nutrition, regeneration, and fertility. Indentureship included female indentees to support the biological scales that was reprehensibly skewed in the industrial British Caribbean colonies. Indian migrants, undoubtedly suffered exclusionary assaults and were treated as grossly essentialised symbols of traditional Indian feminity but they shattered the bigoted biological confines to liberate womanhood in the new land. The *jahaji*-sisterhood among Indo-Caribbean women is fundamental to reclaim the "self". However this sisterhood is not limited to blood relations, rather extends to embrace communal female bonds that permutates traditional concepts of bloodline. Terms like *deeda, aji, nani, amma, behen/bahin* are all expressions and honorific designations that move beyond the paradigms of reproductive capacity and shatters notions of motherhood. The norm of predicating a biological mother as an "ideal" and fixed womanhood, able to provide necessary cultural capital and recuperative abilities. Female power magnifies collectively, hence, the communal mothers act as alternative support system that provides values required in the new land in combination with the traditional knowledge brought along from their homeland. The role of nannies or midwives is a caregiver to expecting or ailing mothers, facilitate birthing, and raise infants as well as enable birthing and sustaining indigenous oral knowledge. Miles away from home and family, the narrator of *The Intended* finds familial warmth and care in his Pakistani friend, Nasim's family. When the narrator visits Nasim before he departs to live with his uncles in the northern part of England, Nasim's mother showers him with motherly affection and genuine concern as she

disapproves the narrator living alone in an unknown country at the age of fifteen. Her initial greeting and embrace makes the narrator feel like one of her own sons and she take this opportunity of his visitation to feed him, as he appears undernourished. She also heaps praises on the narrator as he passed his examinations with flying colours, confessing the entire family has high expectations from his excellent educational prospects. When he bids goodbye, she presses some money, making him promise to drink milk every day and all these gestures leaves him "feeling sorry for myself, wishing I had a family to go home to. Nasim's mother was like my grandmother" (The Intended, 24). Despite religious differences, people of the Indian subcontinent— India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka— were closely affiliated due to similar cultural, social, and ideological conditions that makes the protagonist of *The Intended* feel treasured in the home of this Pakistani family and feels a profound sense of comfort in the presence of Nasim's mother. Mothers in the Indian subcontinent felt maternal instincts towards all young children of Indian origin, act as caregivers to children, elders, and ailing members of the family and community. Nasim's mother also showered the narrator with unwavering support and feels a sense of pride when he secures a place in the Oxford University for further education. When the narrator visits Nasim's family before leaving for Oxford, Nasim's mother showers him with praises, gives her blessing, and "slipped some money into [his] blazer pocket, and gave [him] food, two tins of cooked meat curry and boiled channa, to take to Oxford. She ordered Rashida to wrap up half a dozen chapatis in tin foil, and all the samosas she could find in the fridge" (The Intended, 153). Indian female migrants have a long history of sacrifice, endurance, and entrepreneurship dedicated for their children. As a result, when the children achieve success and acceptance in the new world, the Mother also finds a silent recognition of the labour and abuse endured throughout the journey.

The *jahaji*-sisterhood that begins during the *kala pani* journey is determinedly continues between the first-generation immigrants and develops into intergenerational bonds. This camaraderie is stronger among the women due to common injustices like desertion, gendered assault, domestic abuse, and widowhood faced by them. The bond of empathy and steadfast *jahaji-behen* tie between Deeda and Sunnariya reveals a magnanimous bandwidth of solidarity and creates an intergenerational network between their families. Deeda felt a strong affinity towards

Sunnariya from their initial interaction at the Khidirpur docks and since then, they were inseparable, sharing beds on the ship and living in the same quarters in the estate barracks. Although Deeda felt a sense of responsibility towards Sunnariya, she was eventually entrusted with fixing her marriage and taking care of her till her wedding day two years later. Even after her wedding, Deeda helped Sunnariya during birthing, raising her children, and looking after her grandchildren as well. Deeda's life was so intricately entwined with Sunnariya that "her world seem to shrink after Sunnariya died" (Jahajin, 194). Concepts of *jahaji*-hood and post-indenture feminist solidarity emerged from shared sense of cultural fraternity and exilic trauma that expanded to form "pumpkin-vine family". The solidarity between *jahaji-behen* across traditional classification of pedigree has been vital in developing a transnational network of feminism centred on forced migratory experiences instead of nationality and ethnicity. The sense of sisterhood beyond family and ethnicity precipitated from the crossing of spatial, temporal, and societal precincts. Inter-ethnic solidarity among women also challenges the racial compartmentalisation strongly propagated by the coloniser. The relationship between Black Maharajin and Annaise's family contests all such socio-political notions differentiation and resists the erasure of feminist intersectionality. When Annaise's Canadian aunt and uncle return to claim their familial property, generously offered to Black Maharajin to stay by Annaise's father, he reminds his siblings that Black Maharajin's mother had raised them as her own. Black Maharajin's family is also Annaise's mother's pumpkin-vine family but with their second migration to Canada, they have left behind Trinidadian associations while Annaise's father unsuccessfully tries to remind them "[s]o many families in Trinidad have relatives and old people living with them and they not related to blood, but they still related. Look at Basdeo, he is our jahaji family and he has been living with us for years" (Jouvert, 82). Inter-cultural and inter-racial negotiation of identity involves Indian women in a complicated journey of self-affirmation. They had started exploring and employing agency since the *kala pani* crossover and survived years of contradictory circumstances that gradually brought them a social standing. Indian women achieved courage, individuality, and independence only when they crossed traditionally-determined thresholds— nation, culture, race, and gender— forming a female subjectivity based on the local culture of the Caribbean.

3.10 Feminist Prejudices

The British Empire made numerous developments in the social and economic conditions of India only because they saw themselves as reformers who are burdened with enlightening the heathen population, hence, their reformations failed to transform into practice among the Indians. Several historic reforms including the abolition of sati system in 1829 and Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 were made by the British government who also condemned the practice of child marriage and "devdasi" custom or temple prostitution. Despite such progressive reformations, the larger Indian population remained unaffected and continued practicing the rigid customs of ancient India. Partha Chatterjee posits that the invasion and permeation of western ideas of modernisation further sanctified prevailing patriarchal norms and traditions. It gave rise a sense of nationalism that not only defended but also endorsed traditional conventions and made the Indian subcontinent hostile for all the marginalised populations. The Indian women recruited as indentured labourers occupied an abject position[5]. Since crossing the *kala pani* was believed to take away the caste of the person, the women who dared to make the voyage across the black waters largely belonged to the lowest rungs of the caste system or were untouchables, who were outside the caste stratification, and simply wanted to abscond the indurated Indian society. Most of these women signed the *girmit* as their last resort to earn a livelihood, leave behind societal constraints and stigma, and gain freedom. Deeda had been living in her in-laws house and taking care of her son and mother-in-law in the absence of her husband. When the rice crops were destroyed during the drought, her mother-in-law went to live with her brothers, leaving nothing but a few handful of rice and *sattu* or roasted gram flour for Deeda and her four-year old son. She was finally forced to flee her native village along with her son since her husband, a migrant worker, never returned and left them to starve. The gender norms indicate an insignificant status given to women. Munshi Rahman Khan's autobiography corroborates this equation as it makes little to no mention of the women in his life, his first wife in India, his second wife in Surinam, and his daughters and neither does he write about the Hindustani women in the Caribbean but dedicates his autobiography to his sons. Moreover, the complete lack of empathy and repentance over abandoning his wife in India is not only appalling but appears to present a similar attitude showed by Deeda's husband. Even when Munshi Rahman

realises the benefits of lodging provided to married couples in the estates he thinks "[h]ad I known about such a possibility, I would have brought with me a beautiful young *brahmin* or *kshtriya* girl from Kanpur of my own choice" (Khan, 91) and yet, does not think of bringing his own wife. Rahman Khan was forced into marrying a pregnant labourer in Surinam who claimed him to be the father of her unborn and wrote that marriage was a burden for him. His approach towards women is indicative of the way women were treated by men in India as well as in the West Indies. His autobiography also reveals that being an educated young man, he easily got better jobs in the estates and enjoyed several perquisites; he even mentions that he maintained a friendly acquaintance with the estate managers. However, when the Indian woman claimed to be carrying his child, the managers were quick to force him into this unhappy alliance and take financial responsibility of the woman and the child. It validates the imperial anxiety of harbouring single women in the plantocracy would certainly have severe legal and social consequences.

Planters were vehemently against employing women workers and opposed family migration initially. Women indentees were considered liability and family migration indicated pregnant women and new-borns who were non-able bodies. The initial introduction of female labourers in the sugar plantations was a charade to subdue public outcry over disproportionate sex-ratio both in Indian as well as in the British Caribbean islands. It is also important to note at the very outset that when sugarcane plantations started collapsing and the estates were being abandoned, the first people to be laid off were the women labourers. They were left unemployed and without any provision for a return passage. Before the British Indian government started encouraging and allowing families to migrate to the sugar colonies of West Indies, most of the female indentees migrated to flee from abusive families or hostile financial condition. The rhetoric of runaway wife and eloped women was a persistent image and it became a matter of grave concern and point of dissent for anti-colonialists. Indian men and families criticized migration ordinances citing loss of sanctity and defilement of households and Indian traditions. Indian traditionalists vehemently protested to prevent women from getting indentured primarily because they feared losing their authority over female mind and body. However, the imperialists used the image of runaway wives as a ground of defence by claiming that the indenture trade offered such women with emancipation and financial

independence. Despite the numerous contradictory opinions and petitions, British Indian government planted layers of security to prohibit single women from migrating to appease the decrying Indian men. The Indian Emigration Act of 1833 determined that married woman were not permitted to migrate without an official letter of permission from their husband or in-laws. Such draconian laws were put in place to stop married women from eloping by posing as widows or unmarried women. However, the legal procedures were quite porous since numerous women like Deeda and Achamma in *Jahajin* and Sujaria and Maharani in *Coolie Woman* managed to elope their husbands, in-laws, and unfavourable living conditions. A mere suspicion on any woman by officers could lead her to be detained in the depot or get jailed. These fears forced many helpless woman to suffer rather than attempt to migrate like their male counterparts. British Indian government kept revising the ratio of men to women required for the ships to set sail and it was primarily this quota system that paved way for Indian women to migrate. Yet the government refrained from placing any form of legislation to prevent or regulate the migration of Indian men. Rahman Khan abandoned his first wife in India and immigrated to the sugar colonies in the Caribbean and his autobiography makes it very apparent that he fostered no remorse over it. Peggy Mohan also affirms that most of the Indian indentured men "had come as moglasiyas, leaving their wives behind in India. They were thinking now that they didn't want to even consider making that trip back in the boat" (Jahajin, 146). Women like Rahman Khan's wife and Deeda suffered economic crisis, social persecution, and familial abuse after their husbands left them for greener pastures. With growing agitation from conservative Indians and sympathisers, some agents and Emigration departments emphasized on the father, husband or male guardian's permission before the willing woman could sign the *girmit*. Emigration agencies collaborated with local police to conduct a thorough background check during the three to four months' waiting period. Therefore the complete lack of legal action against absconding husbands was not only anticipated but also affirming of gendered bigotry. Furthermore, such women were in need of a sustainable livelihood and thus, their undertaking of the *girmit* was a warranted act. The entwinement of gender and class shaped the policies and endorsed colonial views and the antiquated Indian perspectives related to gender and class. These tropes were further promoted by the *arkati* agents who propagated the view of low-caste women as morally corrupted than higher caste women and a Guianese

missionary once said, "[t]he great majority of women imported from Calcutta are very loose in their habits. They were bad in Calcutta and so they will … remain in Demerara" (Coolie Woman, 118).

My primary novels and secondary texts offer plenty evidence and instances demonstrating that the women willing to indenture largely belonged from lower caste and escaping unhappy or oppression marriages until the government and plantation owners started sending orders for indentured families. Despite being wronged, the watchdogs denigrated these women as "indecent", "immoral", or "sinful" and tried to impose puritanical values upon them largely perceived as "rudderless vessel with its masts broken being whirled down the rapids of a great river without any controlling hand" (Coolie Woman, 118). Planters were caught in a twofold issue; firstly, they had to maintain the quota of female indentured labourers in their estate and secondly, they were dubious because they believed that the "'better class of women' would not be good field labourers and were less likely to leave India" (Reddock 1994, 30). When the initial indenture period was extended from three to five years, British Indian government refused to permit industrial residence to women for five years and kept their contract period unchanged before the demand for a stable women workforce became imperative. Throughout the course of indentureship, there were several attempts to reduce the contract period for women indentees from five to three or two years in hopes of recruiting the 'right kind of women'. Brahmin and Kshatriya women who are twice-born, hence, of a higher caste were unwilling to cross the *kala pani* and do manual work in a foreign land. Emigration Agent in Calcutta also reached the conclusion that only lower-caste women were willing to indenture and would meet the expectations of the planters. Besieged with complains regarding immoral women indentees and gendered violence in the British-Caribbean sugar islands, the imperial government attempted to recruit women more acceptable to their Victorian values. The extended and stringent inspection of low-caste women immigrating to the Caribbean plantocracy resulted in a dearth of a female indentured labourers, degradation of family values, and escalation of violence against women. Consequently, a significant bounty was offered to the men to bring their wives and families to the Caribbean although it was given to the men instead of the wives. It seemed that the extra remuneration was paid

to the Indian men to sell their wives to the planters who gained an extra worker without paying the full price.

3.11 Female Labour

Plantation work was tacitly divided according to gender and the burden of re-creation of religious practices in the Caribbean brought added responsibilities and inequalities in terms of women's position, both, at home and in the fields. Although indentured labour had its own merits, as a form of 'wage labour', it gave rise to several gender-based inequalities. Women were paid 10-20 cents for manuring, weeding, and planting tasks while men's wage ranged between 25 and 40 cents and the daily average wage "is found to be 13.56 cents for men and 5.31 cents for women, the latter far less than 12 cents, the minimum stipulated for men" (Reddock 1998, 35). The wages varied from estate to estate and time period of indenture trade. Plantation managers presumed only strong men carry out heavy work whereas, women were assigned lighter work that resulted in devaluing the labour done by them. In *Jahajin*, the overseer of Esperanza estate divided the workers into groups of ten where the women workers were assigned the light tasks: "The men would cut, and [Deeda, Sunnariya, Acchamma] would strip off the leaves from the cane, clean the cane and make it into bundle, all the same size. Then the men would carry the bundles to the edge of the field so that the carts could pick them up and take them for weighing" (Jahajin, 120). Naturally, the wages for heavy and light work also differed. While heavy and skilled tasks were exclusively performed by ex-African slaves and able-bodied Indian men, children, feeble men, and women were employed to perform manuring, weeding, grass cutting, and making bundles which were the lowest paid jobs. Managers had created this false categorisation of work based on gender lines simply to exploit workers because every task in the plantation was equally gruelling and debilitating: "I looked at Sunnariya. She didn't look up. Now she was the one making the bundles. She didn't say anything, but I could see her hands had scratches too from stripping the cane. I hoped we could hold on until four o'clock" (Jahajin, 123). European model of the sexual division of labour was replicated with immense success in the British Caribbean plutocracy as the already discounted wages of women workers were deducted due to frequent late-coming and

absenting due to household chores and menstrual cycle. Labour division also allowed the Indian men to exploit their women workers who were expected to prepare the meals, take care of the children, and do all the household chores after completing their day's plantation tasks. Deeda and Sunnariya were given the added responsibility of cooking meals for Mukoon Singh and his two sons. Although every member would pay their share of expenses, only the two women were expected to pay as well as cook and clean. After completing the day's task, Deeda and Sunnariya return to their barracks with their bruised and aching body, "too tired to get up and wash our hands, wash our faces. Too tired to make tea. Too tired to go and get Kalloo. Later. Then Sunnariya said her father would be coming after his work. So I got up quickly and had a wash, combed my hair, put the pallu of my sari back over my head, and started to make some tea. Then I sent Sunnariya to go and get Kalloo" (Jahajin, 124). When the plantations started importing Indian families, the managers were quick to assign heavy work to the men of each family and small, irregular tasks to the wife and/or boy child. This allowed the plantation managers to get two persons work done by paying the wages of only one or one and half workers. They justified this gendered exploitation by citing the provider-housewife family model followed by the sugar colonies where the men earned enough for the entire family and the wives willingly came to work to help out during crop time. Marina Carter and Rhoda Reddock have mentioned that the managers assumed that the men were the primary breadwinner of their family so they intentionally paid the women half or two-thirds wages that would reinforce their secondary status in the household and in the plantation system. Mothers had to leave the small children with the *khelauni* (child-minder). The managers also mentioned that they never allowed pregnant women to work but provided them with adequate ration that could be repaid by her in due time. Most often, these women were left with no option than to work as a full-time indentured labourer without any wages, after delivering their child, till the debt was paid. On the other hand, there were several estates that employed women to do heavy tasks like cane-cutting and loading "like the men" (Jahajin, 146) although the managers only entrusted the old-timers with the heavy tasks.

The position of Indian women failed to achieve real improvement even after migrating 15,000 kilometres for the strong association between colonialism, slavery, indentureship, and Indian traditions. Indo-Caribbean feminists have been unearthing

personal histories of gendered violence that followed emancipation and free labour in the British Caribbean sugar colonies. The feminist narratives converge on one point where British Indian government and British plantation owners lay the onus of maintaining the moral atmosphere across the estate on the women indentees. The narratives have also affirmed that women exercised choice in partners and gained financial independence. While the narrator of *Jahajin* follows Deeda's journey that is similar to many of the women who migrated to the British sugar colonies after being pushed to the wall in colonial India. They continued being exploited in the estate but managed to redirect their lives towards a better future and built an inspiring legacy for the Indo-Caribbean diaspora women. Despite facing numerous hardships and exploitation, Deeda gained independence without any support. Even when Mukoon Singh was being deported back to India and offered to take her back with him as his wife, Deeda was absolutely certain of her response because she was well aware that "India would be a different story: in India I would be just a kahaar, and he would be a Thakur. A Rajput. Would he understand and protect me in India? Would he even see the problem? And would people there let us be happy?" (Jahajin, 180). Most women would grab this opportunity to return to their homeland along with an upper caste husband and this was Deeda's chance to attain freedom but she does not lose sight of the gruesome realities of caste in India and chose to continue living and labouring in the foreign colony. She decided to stay back where she could earn a livelihood for herself and her son without depending on a man since she experienced a similar situation earlier that forced her to leave her home. She decided to break the circle of disappointment and dependence.

3.12 Economic Independence and Feminine Agency

Indo-Caribbean indenture trade is undeniably underrepresented. It is vital and a highly intriguing field of research that helps us examine the gender roles and different phases of indenture over a considerable timeframe within a single geographical location. Most personal narratives have pointed towards the crucial role played by the women of the household who adapted and kept the family functional with the earnings of a single member of the family. Indentured families survived with limited resources and greatly depended on the local market. However, the prices

of commodities in the market was unregulated and hence, prohibitively exorbitant. As expected, the early indentured labourers resorted to alternative means of subsistence that came quite naturally to the Indian *jahajis* who largely belonged to a rural and peasant background. Indo-Caribbean diasporic people preferred agricultural work, and "grew vegetables in the yard, kept a few chickens and perhaps a few cattle or a donkey" (Brighter Sun, 10). Indian indentees grew their own food in the backyard of the barracks with the resources at hand. While some of the migrants carried various seeds with them across the *kala pani*, most others bought seeds and root vegetables, that could be locally sourced, to grow their own food. The demand for a stable and cheap labour force made the plantation owners and managers to encourage the Indian *girmits* to cultivate seasonal food crops that was suitable to the Caribbean soil and weather as well as required minimal time, efforts, and amenities. With more time, indentured workers were allowed to grow food items after the crop time when the fields were quite sparse: "Some of the people in the barracks were also getting ready to do jarda, as they said in French Creole, to plant things for themselves in the cane rows between the new plants. Hardee, arooi or dasheen, and reheri ke dal, pigeon peas. Chowrai bhaaji with pink stems and green leaves, was growing like weeds everywhere around the barracks, and we cooked it almost every day like spinach" (Jahajin, 146-7). Indian indentured labourers were unable to grow excess crops due to the lack of cultivating land but the diaspora Indians in post-indenture Caribbean had free access to land and resources, so they also made an earning by selling the surplus in the market. The women played a primary role in earning the extra money as well since they were able to cultivate appropriate crops in their backyards during their free time while their husbands were away at work. Women were also well acquainted with the land around their home since "[t]he barrackyard was buzzing with female life" where they did the "washing or cooking or sewing" and the children played around (Brighter Sun 22). Their peasant background coupled with the ample time at hand made it very easy for them to discover the kind of seeds that could be easily grown so "every villager grew peppers or bananas or string beans" (Brighter Sun, 10).

Traditional agro-knowledge helped Indian women to gain self-independence much easily in the absence of their husband. The narrator's grandmother's sister, Auntie Pakul, in *The Intended*, silently endured the villagers' accusations for her

husband's "mysterious" death. Auntie Pakul neither confirmed nor denied the accusations, rather

"buried him somewhere in the backdam and forgot about him, continued to plant her garden and sell once a week in the New Amsterdam market" (The Intended, 39). Not only surplus crops, the women also sold milk from the cattle they reared. Urmilla quickly realises the financial constraints of married life and decides to contribute in running the household by selling the milk from the cattle gifted to the newlywed by her father and also contemplates on making and selling homemade *achar* from green mangoes growing in their yard. Later generations of Indian women, who had gained considerable financial independence, utilised their cooking skills as a primary source of income. In such scenarios, the kitchen transformed into a space of entrepreneurship which helped these women elevate their status, both in the family and the society. The pivotal role of wives, often considered dispensable, is emphasized by this act of Urmilla for three key reasons; first of all, Urmilla's family were financially well-off and she led a more comfortable life than Tiger before marriage, secondly, she started carrying the heavy pail around the village to sell the surplus milk while she pregnant at a tender age, and lastly, she had no prior experience of selling anything but successfully got regular customers on her very first day. Besides selling surplus food products, women found an array of methods to cope with financial crisis and keep the family running under a tight budget. In the absence of their husbands and male members of the family, the women spent a lot time together while they cooked meals and washed and dried clothes in a shared space. They developed a bond, similar to the *jahaji behen*, where they shared similar money problems and tried to pull through together by means of barter system where the women exchanged home-grown vegetables, milk, or poultry to buy other commodities like soap, spices, and other items. Furthermore, the women discussed each other's special skills like preparing traditional curry or other natural abilities such as healing, sewing, livestock rearing, babysitting, and midwifery. They found ways to exchange these natural talents for things needed by the other. When Tall Boy "heard how Rita delivered Urmilla's baby" he decided to speak to Rita's husband, who was a regular customer at his alcohol shop and owed him a considerable sum of money, "and perhaps they could make a deal" (Brighter Sun, 62). The barter system worked hand-in-hand with the local credit system as the talents of the wives helped paying the debts owed by their husbands. The

shopkeepers kept a close eye on the Indian customers that could help them with personal work in exchange for settling their debts. When new batches of indentured labourers docked were brought in and old-timers gained the knowledge of women with talents like dancing, singing, scriptural recitation, curative practice or cooking, they were hired on special occasions.

Women indentees acquired leave pass from the overseers or managers and made extra earnings. *The Artist* had transported a number of Brahmin women on board, including Gainder, and Espinet cleverly uses *The Artist* as a metaphor that transports many female artists to their future venture. Gainder worked as a cane-cutter and earned a third of the male indentee's wage but her talent for singing and dancing brought her extra earnings. She was a skilled composer and performer and soon gained popularity and substantial wealth by performing at weddings, *kathas*, and other occasions in Indian families. *The Artist* allowed her to reinvent herself from a widow to a valued artist who saved enough money to purchase a land in a new country for post-indenture life. While she gained emotional and financial independence in the new land, patriarchal norms refused to allocate land to single women, forcing her to marry a man who waited "a full month after the wedding to tell Gainder that she must never sing or dance in public again" (Swinging Bridge, 249). When the over-ambitious and scheming Rohini felt disappointed after reaching Albion Plantation for it fell severely short of her expectation of quick wealth and a better life, she found employment "in the manager's kitchen, bringing in her own small sum of money to add to Vidia's wages" (Counting House, 65).

3.13 *Matikor* and an Ode to Women's Artistic Expression

Rosanne Kanhai's *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* contributed significantly in creating an awareness around the struggles and victories of Indo-Caribbean women. This anthology was a crucial precursor to understanding these women who transgressed the established boundaries and claimed a space by negotiating the exclusionary agendas through creative and cultural practices. The sisterhood among disenfranchised women explores the ways

in which cultural traditions were re-oriented to oppose patriarchal stranglehold. Traditions related to weddings or religious events were re-formulated with feminist expression motivated by the realities of their physical, political, and communal exile. The shared experience of diasporic dislocation finds favourable feminist solidarity by reinventing cultural forms that act as a system of knowledge passed on through generations. Cultural reinventions of *bhajans* (religious songs), Chutney music, carnival culture, and the *matikor* demonstrate the multiplicity of female energy and endeavour to recreate and preserve the Indianness but very often, we find a discrepancy between the emotion and the expression when we find women singing sexually suggestive songs during religious occasions or romantic ballads during funerals. Nonetheless, the songs and cultural enactments were a vital part of Indo-Caribbean women's cultural knowledge that sailed them through physical, sexual, and psychological victimisation.

One of the most important and culturally impactful Indo-Caribbean ceremony is the *matikor* which is a pre-marital ritual that is exclusively for women, subsequently, it remained an unexplored space until Kanhai and Espinet's fascinating discourse about this secretive yet dynamic ceremony on sexual initiation of young women. Kanhai has argued that, "As Indian women enter into Caribbean and global mainstreams, matikor acts as a reminder of the spiritual strength found in community and tradition" (Matikor, xi-xii). This female-exclusive ritual often takes place over two to three days and forms an instructive session for the *dulhan* or bride, who are usually fourteen or fifteen years old. As the name suggests, *matikor* is an earthly ritual indicating female fertility after cleansing of the young bride with *mati* or soil and a few other natural elements varying from holy water, saffron, cotton or khadi cloth, and fire. Moreover, the apparently secretive *matikor* celebrations take place exclusively during the night-time when the female family members and the women of the village gather with homemade snacks, musical instruments like tassa drums, and celebratory spirit. Firstly, *dulhan's* hands and feet are tattooed with henna or coloured with red dye to adorn her body and calm her nerves before the all-important wedding day and the first night with her husband. The pulsating rhythm of energetic drumming along with songs that have explicitly sexual connotations take over the rest of the ceremonial event. Female sensuality reigns over the night as the older women share their experiences of their sexual encounter varying from their

first intercourse, homosexual rendezvous, illicit liaison, and other erotic incidents. Sometimes, women also share traumatic sexual assaults which finds an outlet after years of suppression owing to the safe female-exclusive environment. As an audio-visual artist, Mona finds inspiration from the Indo-Caribbean ethnomusicology and Bess, her cousin, takes her to an old Indian woman who still sings and performs at Indian weddings. The old woman invites Mona to attend a *matikor* in a village in the southern parts of Trinidad and the latter feels exhilarated with the vibrant Indian ceremony simultaneously feeling dejected that the culture of her ancestors were unknown to her for her:

> I had never seen the Matikor before. It took place the night before the wedding when only women gathered, and through bawdy songs and lewd dances, love songs and open talk, the bride was instructed into the mysterious that awaited her in marriage. We arrived at dusk. The drummers, all women, had already started. Not a man in sight. Two older women crouched at the side of the house where the soil had been freshly dug. They mixed together ghee, earth, sugar, salt, and some petals on a broad leaf, wrapped it tightly and buried it … The women formed a circle, taking turns to dance to the centre of the ring, simulating the sex act in various ways, angry, fierce, tender. There were games as well … secrets were being passed from woman to woman … a oneness with their past and present that showed in every ripple of bare flesh (Swinging Bridge, 277-278).

Matikor had an aura that emanated from the congregation of the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, female griots, househelps, healers, and friends which temporarily relieves them of their marginalised status. There is frolicking and ribaldry among the women who feel one with each other as differences of age and class are forgotten. The performances during the ceremony satirized patriarchal social and sexual codes as the women parody hetero-patriarchal conduct, create phallic shapes, dress as men, and drink and smoke openly. It is an uninhibited celebration of femininity in a sexual and spiritual way that resists attempts on relegating them to a non-presence entity. Their creativity and liberatory rituals are archived orally as well as in printed form that substantiates the agency of Indo-Caribbean women.

Indo-Caribbean women shared a dynamic relationship with 'jumbie' or the unknown which was not necessarily an evil presence. During inexplicable incidents, the local women assembled to summon the jumbie, a ghostly presence, to aid, appease, or unravel mysterious instances. When the female protagonist in *No Pain Like This Body* goes missing or has probably died in the rice fields amid torrential rain, her mother starts drumming and singing to the jumbie, asking it to return her daughter:

doom doom doomed!

doom doom doomed!

Then she beated faster:

bamboo patcha! banga patcha!

bamboo patcha! banga patcha!

bamboo patcha! banga patcha!

go going gone!

… she beated the drum with all her strength and the drum sounded loud as if a spirit was bawling in the forest (Ladoo 134). Although the readers remain uninformed about the whereabouts of the protagonist, her mother's eccentric method in searching her daughter draws attention to the kind of relationship they shared which was certainly based on alternate and phantasmal belief system. The recurring instance of narration of woman's experiences through music in archival records, fiction, and artistic creation shows female agency that empowers them. Songs from Hindu scriptures sung were repurposed by women during various incidents suggesting the desire to "go back", to scriptural teaching, their language, or give over to nostalgia, because it brought them a sense of rootedness. Despite the persistent loneliness, sexual assault and social ostracism, Baboonie sings as voice stretches through the locality and enters the households which have banished her. The young Mona hears,

> *kangaal, parishan, triskaar, dhokna, parishan, parishan, parishan …*
> *pani, pani* … I listened to music and a story, till then unknown to me,

> coming through the wailing voice of an old beggar woman, crying through the rain, braking up the classical words of the Ramayana with her own tale of exile and banishment, and in the broken chords and unexpected riffs telling the story of a race. Of racial and tribal grief, of banishment, of the test of purity (Swinging Bridge, 112-113).

Women who sung and performed during *kathas* and religious ceremonies were highly respected and well-paid, but Baboonie's melodious singing is shut out by the people of the town who silently permit her nightly rape. Grievance singing by women usually has an aspect of 'looking back' when their life was happier and they felt safer. When their pain transcends human language, their pain transmutes into a musical narrative. The revolutionary feature of *matikor* underscores female agency and creativity that also forms the basis of Chutney. As the name suggests, Chutney is a form of female-centered music, largely derivative in nature, and blends Indian folk songs and *bhajan* with contemporary Hindi film melodies, rap music, and Calypso. Chutney gained prominence among Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean women because it articulated the experiences of women during slavery and indentureship. The songs also openly express women's sexuality and female solidarity, carving a subversive space within the colonial and patriarchal Caribbean society. Mona's artistic expression draws from her great-grandmother, Gainder, who performed Chutney and Mona recognises Baboonie's songs as portend to Gainder's Chutney. Tejaswini Niranjana's *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration Between India and Trinidad* (2009) is a remarkable study of the Chutney music and female sexuality. She argues that much of the notions about the "Trinidadian Indian" women's identity originated from the indentureship era when they were perceived as promiscuous women. The sexual connotation in the songs of Drupatee Ramgoonai, one the most popular Chutney-soca singers, have been widely criticised as obscene and vulgar but Niranjana contends the monopoly of Indo-Caribbean women in musicology and the Carnival culture that is a characteristic feature of the nation and impacts the culture, politics, tourism, and economy.

Indo-Caribbean women's integration amid transcultural shifting makes it highly problematic. They are continually faced with discriminatory behaviours exacerbated by intransigent cultural systems which places the Indian women in an

ambivalent position within and outside the matrices of home. Colonial orientalist perspectives on Indian culture and the patriarchal concern about women's protection had stereotyped Indian women even before they landed on Caribbean shores. Consequently, they were easily relegated to the domestic spaces where they were pigeonholed as homemakers. My investigation through selected fictional works reveals the way these women silently suffered and worked through labyrinthine structures that tried to subjugate them. Every instance of prohibition and oppression was cleverly subverted by them with their agency and individuality. Textual analysis elicited a courage to envision financial independence, psychic strength, and social change. Female indentured experiences and the Indo-Caribbean women's historiographies which have been depicted in these novels have valorised the migratory contexts, both past and present. Exploration of female relations and activities are marked with feminisation such as the conveyance of cultural mementos, functional commodities, reforming new home spaces, forging female solidarity, practicing and sharing cultural knowledge, providing communal services, and facilitating familial connections. The authors have reimagined the journeys of the female indentees and the experiences of the diasporic women that is reinscribed in their works. These novels are a fruitful ground to comprehend the impact of power differential in the women's uprooting and (re)routing. Literary representations besiege a disjunctive feminist space, emphasising on the problematics of cultural hybridity, identity hyphenation, and subjection to hegemonic interest. But Indo-Caribbean women surmount these issues by adapting and assimilating in their new environment. The female characters recalibrate their cultural values to find effective ways of belonging and recreate "home". For this, they are constantly sustaining and infringing upon conventions in their daily life which helps them refigure selfhood. Questions of female independence and agency are negotiated and firmly foregrounded in relation to Indo-Caribbean women who occupy a pivotal position in the multicultural Caribbean culture and nation.

Notes

[1] While these feminist scholars have worked on archives and history, I have drawn from their arguments to explicate the literary narratives.

[2] Refer to appendix 1.

[3] Refer to appendix 3.

[4] Domestic abuse can be interpreted as an extension of the master-subject relationship seen in plantations. Chandin's sexual violence and oppression over Mala can also be seen as a way of oppressing Lavinia.

[5] When new ordinances mandatorily required a specific number of women indentees on board, they enjoyed a certain measure of privilege and negotiating power.

Conclusion

This is the first in-depth study of the literary works on indentured labourers written by authors who share Indo-Caribbean heritage. The endeavour to analyse the relevant literary novels and select paraliterary texts on Indian indentured workers in the British-Caribbean plantocracy produces an alternative view of the lives, culture, and agency of the *girmitiyas* and their descendants. A positive growth in the Indo-Caribbean fiction comments on the escalating interest and necessity of establishing the history and coeval circumstances of their life. Authors such as V.S. Naipaul, Cyril Dabydeen, David Dabydeen, Mahadai Das, Shani Mootoo, Ramabai Espinet, Rajkumari Singh, and Leelawatee Manoo-Rahming have made integral contribution to Indo-Caribbean fiction which has encouraged critical work encompassing the historical context and contemporary issues of the Indians in the Caribbean. The intention of focusing on the larger Caribbean region rather than specific island-nations construes the under-representation or/and misrepresentation of Indians in the Caribbean. Additionally, a larger geographical expanse allows focusing on a wider spectrum of the community and illuminates isomorphic condition of the Indians who formed a notable minority in Trinidad, Guyana, and Jamaica. Another reason for choosing the Caribbean milieu to study the indentured system is because the fictional work on Indians in the Mauritius and Fiji islands is not as flourishing. Coolie voices are still negotiating and developing as it seeks to embrace the imaginative avenue on a global scope. Indian indentured diaspora needs to accommodate new spaces through diasporic memory, re-presentation, and rethinking that will develop the discourse from colonial studies to global cultural studies.

Indian indentured trade had numerous disappointments in the British Caribbean sugar plantations. The planter class faced immense pressure to amend and accept the new reality of a post-emancipated society. The expansive plantation territory across the Atlantic littorals acquired by the British planter class became a burden for them as they found it enormously challenging to conform to the new labour regime. Indians who migrated to the capitalist plantations as indentees were also a product of a failed British imperialist project. De-industrialisation, exploitative

agricultural activities, changes in revenue system, drain of wealth, frequent drought, and an overall decline in economic opportunities in India pushed a significant percentage of Indians to indenture. Shortage of labour was a persistent petition made by the planters, entrepreneurs, and the coterie of agents. Along with structural push factors, these Indians made a choice to emigrate in hope of better economic prospects as well as ennoble their socio-cultural situation. Cane cultivation in the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent was already being done freely by peasants. The British Empire drew similarities between the two regions under British waves and took advantage of labour issues on either side to insert large groups of Indians in the Caribbean colonies. Technological developments in the nineteenth century shipping industry was a vital agent for the entire indentured system. Shipping legislations greatly assuaged the voyage and made it bearable, together with medical measures and food provisions. A close investigation of the changing shipping measures, emigration regulations, dietary and medical facilities reveal the desperation of the planters to import Indian workers in sound condition.

Objects of personal use carried by the Indians across the *kala pani* transformed into objects of culture. Items including foodstuff, attire, household commodities took on new meanings and significance when they were uprooted and displaced over the transatlantic journey. These objects helped them assert their agency and accommodated their cultural practices against all odds since the owners retained them despite numerous obstacles while eloping or leaving their home, making arduous journey to the colonial bureau or the dockyard of Calcutta, followed by their waiting period prior to embarking on the coolie odyssey which was a long belabouring period itself. The crucial bond of *jahaji bhai/behen* formed in the chronotopal port and ship spaces, free of familial kinship and caste prejudices, provided an emotional and psychological support and created new legacy in the form of the pumpkin-vine family. The *jahaji* bond has deeper significance as these disenfranchised people gained an invaluable possession in a liminal space geared to dispossess them of all physical and psychological authority. Much of the literature is written by the descendants of these Indian indentees from the tales heard passed on generationally.

The plantocracy worked on a commission basis pushing the plantation managers, overseers, factory workers, and the indentured labourers to maximise production with limited time and resources. This resulted in a concentrated and streamlined task regime making all other practices and activities, irrelevant to sugar production, receive minimal attention, hence, prevention. Freedom of religious and personal practices of the indentees, which does not affect the duty hours, was permitted as well as encouraged by the overseers. Numerous emigration legislations over the period of indentureship made genuine attempts to plug the loopholes and prevent ill practices by the colonial offices and the recruiting and emigration agencies. With the increasing protestations, complaints, and violence among Indians, both in the homeland and in the Caribbean sugar plantations, colonial government wanted to steer clear of the comparison between slavery and indentureship. Strict regulations were also exercised to protect the indentured workers to maintain the continuous supply since the collapsing plantocracy desperately needed their labour. On the other hand, anti-indenture supporters, later historians, and researchers have alleged the indentured legislations and laws as oppression through legal methods. It has been claimed that once the *girmit* is signed, it was practically impossible for the *girmitiya* to breach the contract and resort to legal means to safeguard their rights. Concomitantly, the shining jewel of the Crown, India, voiced their grievances against this exploitative labour migration and made the British government acquiesce the abolishment of indentureship in 1917.

Indentured labour migration was a direct consequence of the European socio-economic hegemony over the Indian subcontinent and the world, at large. There was internal migration by people from various provinces or districts across India to other parts of the country as well as overseas migration to Mauritius, Caribbean, Natal, and Fiji islands which can be understood as a result of political and economic transformations brought about by British imperialism. As traditional structures of livelihoods were adversely affected by British-Indian economic policies, Indians were forced out of their homes to seek alternative means of earning. Although the total number of Indians who chose to emigrate was comparatively a minor proportion of the entire population but the fact that these Indians found emigration an attractive choice albeit the uncertainty and demanding circumstances shows the intense impoverishment. Specific districts or areas suffering extreme economic

depression and destitution correlates with the highest number of people who registered for emigration; people from the districts of Bengal, Bihar, and the United Provinces were the easiest targets of the *arkatis*. This correlation becomes more transparent because these provinces were frequently affected by drought, deluge, and famine resulting from climactic and man-made conditions. Zones of indentured recruitment become, inadvertently, associated with the global colonial activities and alliances which were fluid, volatile and demanding. The uneven recruitment reconstituted the transmission and acquisition of regional economy and culture. A more clinical study on the registered number of indentees drawn from specific districts to reveal the socio-economic susceptibility at definite timespan could not be included in my thesis. An archival research on the age, caste, and class of inhabitants prone to indentured recruitment due to insufficient means of livelihood among densely populated areas is necessary for a statistical evaluation of understanding the condition in India during the indentured labour trade. My future research endeavour will certainly focus on the reason behind the overseas migration by inhabitants of certain districts, thus far only undertook seasonal domestic labour migration, determined to embark on a long-term overseas relocation.

Migrants from the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and UP envisaged a heterogeneity that was a distinct marker of the Indian culture that is never static or uniform. The religious and culturally diverse migrants formed cultural segments which were uprooted and planted in the British Caribbean sugar plantations. The ships transported humans, goods, cultural segments, religions, and ideas through the chronotope of waterways flowing amid continents. Emigration agents were solely concerned with keeping the cost of transferring the labourers as low was possible with marginal damage or loss of human cargo. The primary motive of the planters were also aligned towards profit maximisation hence, the cultural and religious practices of the Indian indentees was never repressed. Religious traditions which did not transgress the laws and power of the colonial state were allowed. Profound nostalgia and a cogent cultural legacy motivated Indian immigrants to reconstruct a distinctly “Indian” culture. Given the hostile host conditions and contradictory geographical landscape, the exact transplantation of Indian culture was difficult. Hence, Indians tried their best to emulate modified cultural practices, religious beliefs, and ideologies which materialised into a pastiche cultural heritage. The

implication of intermingling and sharing accommodation among Indians of varying caste, religion, and district affiliation created an umbrella “Indian” identity in the plantation society. The Indian indentured workers and their descendants, who chose not to make the return passage and build a new life in the Caribbean after the revocation of indentured trade, experienced a dilution in their cultural practices. The traditions and ideologies which were transported from India were tailored to adjust and assimilate in the host society and contributed to the development of an inimitable Caribbean culture. The evolution of language is an intriguing discourse and requires complete attention across disciplines as history remains impinged on language. Discourse on the attempts at deferentially syncretising the Indian culture in the Caribbean through legal policies over time is necessary to answer questions about the constitution of Indians in the colonial state as well as the independent West Indies. The syncretisation of the two most dominant groups— Indians and Africans— and the evolution of the Caribbean can be better answered with the access to official documents, records, proceedings, and reports of the British imperial government, Government of India, and the Protector of Emigrants Office which. My future research trajectory will try to reconstruct the position of Indians after the abrogation of indentured trade system in 1917.

Post-indentureship saw many Indians remaining engaged in cultivation and pastoral activities, mainly because they were acclimatised to agricultural work in the Caribbean and they also received or purchased land after their indentured tenure. This could also be seen as a political act to prevent Indians from climbing the socio-economic ladder by restraining their mobility and deterring them from gaining advanced skillset and profession. On the other hand, the repatriates faced a different form of predicament whereby they were castigated, vilified, and ostracised from their family and neighbours. The caste-bound Indian society forced the repatriates to buy their way back in to their caste, their family, and in society. Brahmin priests siphoned most of the earnings brought back by the ex-indentured labourers. They were also forced to offer extortionate gifts to their nearest kin and arrange a lavish feast for the villagers that left them little to no money they earned and saved during their indentured tenure, rendering it futile.

The indentured system was completely terminated in 1917 due to the disputes in the sugar plantations, continuous economic decline of cane sugar, and protests by Indian nationalists. Even after the official termination, planters resorted to every possible means to extract workforce from India which was cheap and efficient. Concerns of complete shutdown of plantations followed by an uncertain future of the Caribbean colonies were put forward by the planters to entreat the British government for an alternative system to keep exporting Indian labour to the colonies or the plantations in need of labour supply. British government responded to pleas of labour issues by organising an "Inter-Departmental Conference on Assisted Emigration from India, to British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Fiji" in May 1917. The outcome of the conference along with a number of preliminary formal and informal meetings among government officials suggested "A Scheme of Aided Colonisation for Indians in British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Fiji" which was described thus:

> The new system will be entirely free, and the indentured system together with the titles and characteristics attaching to it will be abolished, The system to be followed in future will be one of aided colonisation, and its object will be to encourage the settlement of Indians in certain Colonies after a probationary period of employment in those Colonies to train and fit them for life and work there, and at the same time to afford a supple of the labour essential to the well-being of the Colonies themselves.

Colonial offices also furnished detailed reports on the necessity of Indian emigration referring to the prosperity of Indian indentees and stronger socio-economic ties between Caribbean colonies and India. Despite British delegations insisting the nationalists and British India government to continue supporting the plantation cause, this new system remained non-implemented. The formidable and persuasive reports written by Charles Freer Andrews and William Winstanley Pearson where they documented statistical facts and arguments against the Indian emigration of coolies to British overseas colonies including Fiji and Natal acted as primary forces in discontinuing indentured system in all forms and practices. Their *Report on the Indentured Labour in Fiji* raised greater concerns about the

relationship between the Indian settlers and the other people in each colony. Their observations also questioned the relation of the Indian settlers and the diaspora with the mother country and their position in the colonies. This imperial experiment on a global magnitude created the old Indian diaspora, arguably the largest, widespread, and notable diaspora in contemporary world.

The people of history, specifically, labour migrants and their descendants are denied agency in the general imagination and scholarly observation. This monograph is dedicated to rethinking the history and genealogy of Indian indentees by studying their material culture as a key aspect to more important topics like social structures, cultural enactments, religious grammars, and kinship. Although their life was mobile and fluid to follow a specific trajectory, there is an overarching attempt to bring a holistic analysis of the entire indentured people and culture. This research on colonial migrants and their diaspora is a crucial and legitimate discourse when there is a public and political dialogue concerned with cultural sustainability and preservation, global risks, rights, and security. Academic arguments within the social sciences are bringing a resistance by challenging the static and regressive narratives of cultures. Public knowledge is derived and designed by hegemonic principles while the domestic remains protected from politics, debate, and scrutiny. The invalidity of this distinction among the indentured migrants makes them vulnerable to hegemonic conceptions. When the Indians are uprooted from their domestic spaces and implanted in a politically-governed public domain with stunted movement and authority, the divide between the public and the private stands fallacious. Such departure from social construction paves way for ingenious coalescence of host and homeland, public and domestic, and local and global. The domestic practices of the disenfranchised people are labelled as uncivilised and deviant, necessitating immediate diagnosis and remedial measures. Despite their dysfunctional and susceptible conditions, the Indian prompted resistance and carved a singular trajectory supported by daily routines, material culture, and social arrangements. The assiduity and mutability acted as an effective passage into the public realms of nationality, innovative ways of livelihood, and land ownership.

Emigration from British India such as Grierson’s report along with other administrative surveys, digests, and writings have been the primary source of

knowledge about indentured migration. This thesis sought to engage with the concepts of tradition and innovation by sifting through literature and paraliterary texts. This emigration system has emphasized on the mutual interaction between the local and the global and the authentic and the amended which are not necessarily contradictory or counter-productive. As one generation partially faded away, the next generation re-inscribes themselves like a palimpsest which makes their identity complex and evolving. The distinctively Indian culture among the migrant and diaspora community in the Caribbean colonies can be understood by recognising the ways in which the people synthesised the old and the new. Their agency aided them in rejecting foreign elements to maintain their uniqueness, domesticate host principles, and envisage a truly inclusive experience.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Questions: Shehnaz Kabir

Responses: Peggy Mohan

Date: February 2022

I. *Jahajin* is an invaluable book of study for every scholar interested in the indentured labour trade as well as the Caribbean. What inspired you to begin writing this volume that eloquently incorporates fiction and journalistic modes?

RE: For a long time after I did my recordings (for my PhD research, and for a research project I started right after on Trinidad Bhojpuri as a language death situation) I was looking only at the language, at **how** the old women spoke Then, Rhoda Reddock, when she was still a student, visited me in Delhi and suggested that I look also at **what** was being said in my tapes, the women's story of migration that was at the heart of it all. I could suddenly see it. It was also my own story that I had been thinking of writing with all of this in it. Then I sat for, oh, thirty years, wondering how to do this: as a film, or as a book. Then, once I decided it would be a book I was ready to start. The first draft took me two months to write.

II. The narrator of *Jahajin* has autobiographical elements. How has your heritage of indentured labour shaped your sense of understanding the *kala pani* and the subsequent diaspora?

RE: I think I simply grew up with fragments of my family's story, as well as the information I had gathered as background material to write the introduction to my PhD dissertation. I couldn't quite identify with the old women I had recorded, their helplessness, the way they had to make the best of a life thrust upon them. But as I found myself committed to move with my husband to live out my life in India, I could see it. The sense of… exile. But

at the same time the version of my family's past that I got to hear was a very filtered view. As good middle class people there were things they (unconsciously?) wanted to forget. That is why in *Jahajin* there is that very Caribbean absence of anger as a background note, of a whole subtext missing, the sort of reaction someone born, say, after Independence would not be comfortable with.

III. You have a PhD in Linguistics, you have taken several interesting vocations that easily make you a multi-media artist, you presently teach Western music in Vasant Valley School, and simultaneously work with linguistics fiction and theory. As a multi-media personality, how do these disciplines overlap in your life— personally and intellectually? And what impact do they have on your creative output?

RE: Actually, starting this term (Jan 2022) I now teach linguistics at Ashoka University! My life has come full circle, like Deeda's, with me back to being the linguist I had once set out to be. I have always been impatient with the plodding academic approach expected of linguists and other scholars, with no place for imagination, for whimsy, for leaps to make connections, for acts of courage. So whenever I found myself out of academia (most of my life!) I was struck by the sense of color all around me, the space to see, the little children who understood so much, who made me clarify my thoughts and take out all the impressive waffle that would have made it difficult for them. I **did** often talk to children about the things I was writing, as it often fitted in with what they were studying. Migration. Language. That is probably where the simplicity in my writing and thinking comes from. I once did cartoon animation; I still have the tools, but now use them to make maps and diagrams for my lectures. And while it isn't strictly necessary, I love to get pronunciations exactly right, taking my cue from phonetics, but something more too. And music has taught me about performance, and that academic writing, like song writing, does not give you unlimited space to expand. I feel a template guiding me. The one time I am not nervous is when I am giving a Zoom talk.

IV. In many ways, Jahajin is driven by the folktale of Rani Saranga. Can you tell us about this folklore?

RE: The Rani Saranga story is one I happened upon, with Sughri starting to tell it to me in her wonderful clear voice. The next day when I went back for more she insisted that her friend knew it better. Her friend's voice was not as clear and lovely, but she started over and told it to the end. The more I dwelt on it the more I felt it was a metaphor of their own lives, and of my life (I was at that point in the story where she has asked the prince for a little time on the edge of the forest before she goes to his palace to live). Another thing that was unusual was that it centred around a woman, one who is always a few steps ahead of the men in her life. There was something special going on. Then on a visit to Patna in 1976 staying in a little hotel I played my recording to some of the men working there, and they explained bits I hadn't quite understood, because they knew the story too. That every woman who leaves her home to go to her husband's is another Saranga. Is **that** what was meant by the words 'from another house another Saranga was watching'? I knew that a good folk tale had to have a happy ending. But given that this was an unusual woman paired with a less ambitious man, on the one hand, and an overly indulgent but distant one on the other, there was no way this story could realistically end well. So the 'happy ending' had to come through magic, and an *uṛan khatola,* pirouetting in the sky as if to give Saranga and her first love their seven *pheras* at last, but not on terra firma. I think there was a sense that this ending was forced, that there might be other endings. That she might, in fact, go back home in the car with her sister in law and father in law, and make her life in a more sophisticated world.

V. Most of the characters in *Jahajin* are women and indentured literature witnesses a predominance of the female experience that contextualizes the concept of "double marginalised". What were the emotional stakes while writing about the sufferings and joys of the women that you come from?

RE: I think the preponderance of women has to do with women simply living longer than men, and old women taking the extended twilight as a cue to think back on long and eventful lives. So in that sense I really only knew the women. It wasn't like a choice I made. It was easy to put myself in Deeda's place: she was a strong and interesting character, independent and optimistic. It was easy to identify with Janaki, the old *sonarin* from Ayodhya, who set herself up in business twice, as a *khelauni* and as a shopkeeper. It was more upsetting to find, with all the bits and pieces I knew about Sunnariya, my own great-great grandmother that I couldn't construct a character I really liked. She turned out conservative, compliant. But I had grown up to think of her as someone ethereal! In a way, just as I didn't look outside the Indian community on the estates, I didn't look outside the women's world to compare their agency with that of Indian men. So the women don't come across as doubly marginalized. The men are always seen from Deeda's point of view. And she refused to think of herself as a loser.

VI. You have an indentured background and can be called "twice migrated". So I would like to know your view on belonging to national space. Do you think of yourself as a diasporic subject or consider yourself as belonging to a perpetual history of migration?

RE: That is one question that draws a blank. I simply don't identify with any **group**. The face that I see in the mirror doesn't look Trinidadian, or Indian, and I don't 'feel' Canadian, though there is enough inside my head to let me speak as Trinidadian or Indian. I remember as a child stopping myself from asking who I really was, because I was never happy with any answers. No: I am not a migrant: I have a very comfortable nest in Delhi that I have made friends with, and it takes effort for me to stir out of it. I guess you could say that I live alone.

VII. You have done exhaustive archival and fieldwork to unearth the stories of ex-Indian indentees during your time in the Caribbean. Could you share your

experience of the entire process of discovering the ex-indentured labourers and your interaction with them?

RE: It wasn't that difficult. In those days I was excited, and I would go into a village with a friend who was helping me, a friend who knew the countryside far better than I did, and simply ask. Who spoke the language? Who could I record? Often I would hear that there was someone in the village who was a *jahajin*: there were more of them alive back in the 1970s. I really only stuck to my part of Trinidad: Caroni. It turns out that there were more *jahajis* and Bhojpuri speakers in the remote south of Trinidad, but I didn't feel… at home there. As soon as I walked into their homes speaking Bhojpuri I would almost always find them curious and happy to be able to talk to a young person about their memories. I had one strange experience, going into an old woman's home and breezily telling her that I knew that she had come from India… She stopped me, sat me down. Told me that from the way that I knew that she and her brother(?) had come from India, that I had to be Krishan Bhagwan. That 'I' had escaped once before without her getting to do a proper *puja*. So I sat while she did her *aarti*, and left with some oranges and bananas as offerings, but no interview.

VIII. The Indian indentured labourers are commonly known as "coolies". However, you refer to them as "jahajis" while abstaining from using the term "girmits". Can you explain the meanings and the reasons behind the usage of these terms, and their relationship with the Indo-Caribbean diaspora?

RE: 'Coolie', in Trinidad, is what you would call an 'N-word'. You could get into trouble for calling someone that (though I know that many academics from abroad, and writers from our community, find it an effective word that makes people's ears perk up). *Girmitiya*, too, is full of condescension, and has the bad taste of a time on an estate we would rather forget. I know the word *girmitiya*, and can feel its link to *girmit*, the indenture agreement, but while I was a young person in Trinidad I didn't hear it used. When I was in Kolkata a young academic kept referring to us as

'indentured laborers', taking his cue from *girmitiya*, and just couldn't see why I didn't like it. Do you think you could refer to modern Black Americans as 'slaves'? Or is it a way people in India have of assuring themselves that was are still 'less' than them, however modern and cosmopolitan we might seem? We have the word *jahaji*, which has the factual bit about the ship journey, and a sense of the relationships we made when on board together. I think *jahaji* conveys it all.

IX. How would you describe the Caribbean aesthetic and what impact did Indians have on the Caribbean-ness?

RE: The general culture of the Caribbean (outside of the Spanish-speaking lands) is creole. Indians, wherever we live in the Caribbean, speak the local creole. Creole culture is by its very nature inclusive, spontaneous, open. So while some parts of the Indian experience have found their way into creole culture, like some of our fast foods, and more recently Chutney music, Indians have been less inclined to share our culture or our language, less inclined to offer it up as part of the great Caribbean feast. The result is that our culture has been slow to take off into new directions, to warm to a vibrant and exciting environment full of creativity and freedom, and our language is almost gone. The only way they could have survived and grown was if we had been ready to share them with the bold and inventive spirits all around us, and see them change as they grew.

X. You have briefly represented racial politics in your book through the episode of Sunnariya and the overseer. However, racial identity is not at the forefront of the text. How do you understand race in the Caribbean?

RE: I didn't see the episode with Sunnariya and the overseer as 'racial politics'. Maybe it is. Maybe we wish that away since we were not in a position to deal with asymmetries of power. It just… came out, raw. There are racial issues in the Caribbean, but since I don't approve of racial politics,

I keep it at arms' length. I also don't feel up to date on the situation there now: I've been away since 1979.

XI. Unlike Deeda, some of the other central characters converted to Christianity soon after starting their new life on the estate. Can you speak about the religious values among the Indian indentees and diaspora in the Caribbean?

RE: I guess it's simplest to say that a lot of the peasantry converted. Some wanted to get away, some wanted the advantages of education, or a sense of connect with the modern outside world. I am not religious myself, so to me it is all like seeing something at a distance that I don't fully understand. My great grandfather believed deeply as a Presbyterian, and growing up in a home like his I know about the culture. But even as a small child I could see the contradictions: we were Indian, but Christian? Why did we change? We were often called 'Presbyterian Hindus', since there had been some carry-over of Hindu culture in the form of *pujas*, of a Christian sort. We married freely with Hindus and Muslims. But most of the time religion didn't seem to be an issue at all.

XII. Do you think the linguistic variability among the Indian diaspora reflects the brokenness or, literally, the indent in their identity, or is it characteristic of the multicultural environment of the West Indies?

RE: The language did survive quite well in Surinam. In Trinidad it didn't, partly because attempts to teach us Hindi in school made the old ones uncertain of whether the Bhojpuri we spoke was fit to pass on to the young. Both were called 'Hindi' in those days, but one was good, and one seemed to be 'broken'. Perhaps, unlike Surinam, Trinidad had a strong current pulling Indians into the creole world, towards a more unified field. So in about two generations children's preferred language was no longer the Bhojpuri we had spoken on the estates, but creole, and slowly Standard English. But come to think of it: isn't that exactly what is happening in India? Local dialects

giving way to Standard languages like Hindi, and then English as the poor transit into the middle class? In that sense it is Surinam that is the odd man out.

XIII. Your book has made a crucial intervention in considering subaltern history and voice. The book is an exploration of an ex-coolie, Parbati, and her experience of the indentured trade as you unravel that relegated past through language. Can you share your experience of research and how difficult was it to find and sieve through the vast amount of information for your book? What has been your valuable source of data?

RE: Apart from my aunt's, Marianne Ramesar's, Masters Thesis on the subject, published as *Survivors of Another Crossing*, I had her and Brinsley Samaroo of the University of the West Indies just an email away if I suddenly had questions. Like: how did the migrants get from Nelson Island to Esperanza Estate? At that time much of the area between Port of Spain and Central Trinidad along the west coast would have been a swamp, with no road through. Or: where would the closest whistle stop to Esperanza be for the train to San Fernando? Were the Samaan trees at Grant School on Coffee Street there back in the 1880s? Did the indentures sleep on cots, or on the floor of their barracks? I was able to Google search and get photos of the old jetty at Monkey Point, where the sloop from Nelson Island stopped to debark my migrants. Or the exact date the ship with Sunnariya arrived in Trinidad. I even managed to Google into the accounts of Esperanza Estate and find a hospital bill for my great-great grandfather. And then there was everything that my great-grandfather had told me, that my father had told me, because that was family lore too. My recordings of the old *jahajins*, and the things they told me after I had packed away my tape recorder. Little touches that would never have found their way into history books or archives.

XIV. You chose the fictional genre to disseminate the lost narratives of the Indian coolies instead of opting for a critical non-fiction form of writing. Why do you think literature is an important vessel for communicating the nuances of this colonial past? What do you think is lost or gained in the process of re-imagining the indentured trade?

RE: I think it always seemed to be a story to me, not an academic treatise. I could see characters, and the Saranga story demanded its own space as part of a three-stranded braid. I didn't know if it was important. At that time there weren't any other books like it, seeing through the eyes of the women who had made the journey. When it began to take shape in my mind I was seeing it as a film, and had filed away the beginning as shots, making it easy to transform what I saw into prose and keep on writing. Maybe I have always been impatient with the greyness of academic texts. My fourth book, *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants: The Story of India through its Languages*, doesn't read like an academic text, even though it is all about Indian languages and what they tell us of people and history. It is more of a long walk with a reader I am having a conversation with.

XV. Who have been your biggest literary influences?

RE: I read a lot; it is my go-to time-pass. But except for writers who have influenced my non-fiction writing—David Quammen, Siddhartha Mukherjee—I can't think of any fiction writers whose style touched me enough to leave a mark. Maybe Jean Rhys, a Caribbean writer who wrote in the mid-20th century, and—like me—had to live out her life in exile, Britain in her case. The Caribbean poet Derek Walcott. But I don't know.

XVI. Are you acquainted with any critical work on indentured trade?

RE: Beyond Hugh Tinker? I read *A New System of Slavery* when I was writing my dissertation. But I didn't approach *Jahajin* from academic sources. I just went out and asked for information I needed as I wrote.

XVII. Do you think that there has been any progress over the past few years in increasing public knowledge over the system of indenture?

RE: I don't know. My great grandfather had a thing about us moving on, continuing the journey, but not dwelling on the past. Increasing public awareness of the indentureship system isn't a priority for me; it is over and done with. By writing *Jahajin* I gave readers a glimpse of what it might have been like to **be** a *jahajin*, and how these women handled what must have been an almost impossible situation, with dignity, and with grace. Isn't that the message my *jahajins* would have wanted to pass on before they closed their eyes on this world?

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

Questions: Shehnaz Kabir

Responses: Ramabai Espinet

Date: May 2022

I. I quote Mona from *The Swinging Bridge*, "All it took then in Trinidad was looking Indian; all it took now in Canada was skin colour. We had not moved an inch." Steeped in themes of Indo-Caribbean identity and double diaspora, what was your inspiration in writing this seminal text? How is an Indo-Caribbean migrant and the subsequent diaspora perceived after almost a century of termination of indentureship?

RE: In this text, I sought to understand the flux of my own origins and my under-articulated existence. From where? Nowhere. Nothing was clear. How to pick sense out of nonsense? Where to begin? Nada. Such was my inspiration, or rather, the lack of it, together with the challenge of creating something out of nothing.

One important feature of my early life was an absence of the history of Indians in the Caribbean. And it existed to such a degree that it was unnoticed, especially in my childhood. Christianity/education was an essential part of the early history of my large extended family and not as is the case of V.S. Naipaul, of having a sense of things Indian, though he assessed it as formless, vague. Throughout the small territory of Trinidad, the Indian community was hardly a homogenous one, except for racial phenotype. We were Indians, not Negroes, as the terminology went in those days, but beyond that, there were several different categories of Indianness- Hindus, Muslims, Christians, the educated classes, the labourers, the silent and compliant ones, and those seeking political off "Indentureship' was not a word in my vocabulary until much later.

But I felt my Trinidadian identity acutely, and with great pride and pleasure. I was aware that I was part of a vibrant, unique culture, cosmopolitan in the extreme, and largely inflected by its Creole cultural forms, and I loved it. The calypsos, Carnival culture, language, style – in all of it I took great delight. So, when I say nothing – I

mean nothing that identified my specific cultural origins. I believe the "Caroni Dub" chapter of TSB speaks to that identity.

How perceived? In a thousand different ways, all of them replete with contradictions. Nothing was seamless here – far from anything neat and tidy. "After indenture" is being defined and redefined constantly these days. At the time when my own voice was coming into being, there was precious little. My first steps had everything to do with decolonial thinking, with the task of un-learning.

II. The term 'coolie' is circumvented in most conversations related to indenture. What is the signification of the term for you? Is there a conscious effort to replace the word 'coolie' with other terms including 'bonded labour', 'labour immigrants', 'jahajis', etc. to suspend the notion of victimhood and introduce a sense of optimism and agency to the indenture experience? What subtexts do these terms include?

RE: I don't know about that. There is a resurgence of the term "coolie" in many recent iterations. Gaiutra Bahadur uses it assertively as the title of her text, *Coolie Woman*. "Coolie" was used as a term of denigration in the early days of indenture, when the subjects of indenture were seen simply as tools for cheap labour, similar to the terminology attending the enslaved African peoples, in the immediate period before. "Coolie" is still used in many parts of the Caribbean as a racialized insult. The terms "bonded labour," "jahajis" etc. were not, as far as I'm aware, part of a conscious effort to replace the term coolie. However, the 150th year of Indian arrival in the Caribbean (1988) was a watershed year for Indians in the Caribbean and its Diaspora, and several forgotten concepts such as "jahaji bhai" were re-discovered and introduced at that time.

My own experience of the term "coolie" began in my earliest years in Trinidad and Tobago. It was a racial taunt, exactly analogous to the term "nigger." The two major races in T&T hurled these insults at each other whenever circumstances warranted it. Without reserve. But never in polite company, among educated persons or in mixed social gatherings. Exactly like profanity. However, on the streets and in the schoolyard – yes. Not unlike the use of racial epithets wherever

racial, class or caste distinctions are in play – in the West, the Caribbean and I'm sure, in India as well.

However, after Trinidad became an independent state in 1962, a new national rhetoric became part of our unfolding identity as a sovereign nation and the Prime Minister, Dr Eric Williams, declared those specific terms of denigration, verboten. It became part of the unsavoury colonial past that we were exhorted to join forces in discarding. By this time, the philosophical/literary movement of Negritude had emerged in Paris among French Caribbean and African students (Cesaire, Senghor, Damas) in the 1930s and spread quickly among the intelligentsia in the French Caribbean and Africa. Add to that Marcus Garvey's work and his establishment of the UNIA in 1914 – its message of pride in blackness was embraced widely throughout the Caribbean and parts of the U.S. So, there was a movement of conscientization occurring among Black Caribbean subjects at that time, that was not the same among Indo-Caribbean people. Militancy in labour union politics was very much an active struggle among Black folk in Trinidad and many working-class Indians too. Still, there was no parallel movement of Indo-Caribbean assertiveness or philosophical questing in terms of identity. Not at that time. Remember too, that "indenture" was still a practice until 1917. Nevertheless, the later struggle for independence was one that was shared by most citizens of the country, so there was a readiness on all sides to abandon backward practices such as racial taunts. In spite of these efforts, race relations in T&T are truly fraught with contradictions, and it is well to remember that public utterances are not the same as exchanges in private within individuals' zones of comfort.

III. Can you explain the push-and-pull factors working behind this colonial migration? Also, how does your own journey as a "twice migrated" individual affect your understanding of 'home', 'migration', and 'nationalism'?

RE: I had no consciousness of being a "twice-migrant." I began to hear that kind of terminology in Canada in the 1990s, but it never spoke directly to me. Home was Trinidad, the Caribbean, and its complex, beautiful and infinitely interesting archipelagic sense of becoming. My "longing for India" can best be understood as a voyage of discovery, an intellectual effort in adult life. By the time I went to India,

I was deep into the study of indenture and its implications, for myself and other Indo-Caribbean people. But always, it was clear that there was little uniformity among migrants in terms of reactions. The Indian identity embraced by Caribbean people is expressed very much in terms of redefining Indian identity in Caribbean terms. Though the circumstances attending the practices of indentured labour were similar in Mauritius, Fiji and South Africa, in each of these territories the circumstances produced different identities and certainly different ideas of home and nation. Even within the Caribbean, these small islands have produced citizens who, apart from common ethnicities, have different and intersectional island attitudes to the concepts of identity and belonging.

IV. What does the title *The Swinging Bridge* mean and how does it encapsulate the trans-generational narrative of Mona and her great-grandmother, Gainder?

RE: There are numerous unstable bridges, walkways, and gangplanks throughout the novel, the first of which is the unsteady gangplank on which the indentures make their precarious climb into the ship which will take them across the Kala Pani. Incidentally, the term ***Kala pani*** only became part of the lexicon of indenture (though there is no doubt that it was experienced as such on the actual voyages) in the 150th wave of affirmation, referred to earlier. The term is used metaphorically – the ground remains unsteady, nothing is solid, the sense of precariousness is continuous.

V. *The Swinging Bridge* keeps the women (Gainder, Mona, Baboonie) and a homosexual (Kello) at the forefront of the narrative. How did you conceptualise the politics of 'gaze'? Did these 'double marginalised' characters help in reframing the 'gaze' and give the readers an acute understanding of the Indo-Caribbean experience?

RE: The story's narrative arc is formulated through the character of Mona, a young woman caught in an artistic struggle to realize herself as a filmmaker in Montreal. She is sharply aware of the colliding identities around her but has not really attained

clarity about her own place in what she perceives as the messy, contradictory flow of the social and political currents around her. Maybe there is more clarity about these situations now, but I do wonder if that has been attained by essentializing identities and artificially filtering out what was the messiness of overlapping ideas. I'm not convinced that real clarity exists at this point. It is still mired in the process of becoming, and I don't find that daunting at all.

The "gaze" is distinctly feminist, but beyond that I'm not inclined to comment. The reader's perceptions matter here – mine are embedded in the work itself. Mona's brother, Kello, is catalytic in his movement throughout the novel because so much of the plot, the themes are impelled by his circumstances. His death is a tragedy for this migrant family, almost leaving them all (including the parents) with the destabilizing sense of being orphaned.

Again, does this work give readers an acute understanding of the Indo-Caribbean experience? I can't answer such a question – ask the readers, the critics, or yourself.

VI. **RE:** Themes of belonging and queerness have a strong prevalence and drive the novel in several ways. What was your interpretation and execution of queerness in *The Swinging Bridge* and your writing career? How and why is queer intimacy expressed/supressed in domestic and public narrative spaces?

In *The Swinging Bridge*, Kello's is the only queer identity explored. He chooses to remain closeted from the rest of his family, is confidently out, but private, and puts his trust in his two sisters' complicit silence about his sexuality. He has used the relative anonymity of life in North America to avoid confrontational episodes with his immediate and extended kin. The novel was being written in the 1990s and was published in 2003. Now, many years later, the context is different for LGBTQ2+ identities. But we do know that there is no uniformity globally about queer identities and its cultural/political ramifications, so that complicates things a bit, doesn't it?

About the interpretation and execution of queerness in my writing career – I have no idea. Again, let's hear the critics and theorists. I don't set out to create work with a distinct political agenda, but my political beliefs and positions are strong and very clear to me. They intersect my life in every possible way, so why would they be absent from my creative work? The Indo-Caribbean community is, in many ways,

a conservative one. My own path has not been very different. Does this put me in a state of struggle within this community? Yes. Notice that I did not say "my" community. I live in a state of overlapping and colliding communities – I write from that place too. I remember in a past interview some years ago describing myself as an insider/outsider. There is no difference now – it's the only place in which I can exist.

VII. Can you elaborate on the dominant themes related to the body, gender roles, female purity/shame, and desire in *The Swinging Bridge*? How did you develop these themes that overlap with patriarchal and nationalist narratives prevailing among the Indo-Caribbean population?

RE: Over to you again, Shenaz. If these themes are present in the text, then there they are. It's not my task to elaborate on them and I don't care to. If there are certain specific ways in which you want me to comment, then you must ask me more specific questions.

VIII. The 1833 Abolition Act has been a watershed event in the history of mankind. Despite the legislation, what, according to you, are the key points of differentiation between 'slavery' and 'indenture trade'?

RE: "Indenture trade" is not a term in common use. I object to it because it is premised on the notion that human beings are commodities. One of the key differences between enslavement and indentureship is that, under the system of indenture (characterised by Hugh Tinker as "a new system of slavery"), planters were compelled to pay wages for labour performed, unlike slavery, where free labour was deemed to be the right of the colonizers. The wages for indentured workers were abysmally low, even for those times, one shilling a day on average, but because food rations were also allocated to them and lodging was free, they were able to accumulate small savings. Unlike the middle passage, access to recruits was not unlimited, so the regulations attending these newer systems of bonded labour became enormously expensive. Thus, when the term of indenture (5 years) was completed, incentives of small land grants were given to Indians in lieu of the return passage to India, which was guaranteed to them under the legislation in force. (There are numerous complications to this story that would have to be researched

further if you are interested; I'm only outlining here the bare bones). These savings in addition to the land grants, gave Indians a kind of start-up after their term of indenture was completed. This is one big difference between the two systems, but in many other respects they were similar.

IX. Can you share your research and writing process behind *The Swinging Bridge*? How did your heritage and indentured history influence your understanding of the *kala pani*, indenture trade, and your creative oeuvre?

RE: I believe I've already covered some of this. My academic discipline is Literature. I'm retired but I still teach one course in the Caribbean Studies Dept. at the University of Toronto. My studies in Literature were focused on literature written in English, including the work then categorized as "Commonwealth Literature," which was only just emerging. My PhD dissertation was on Caribbean writing: on the work of two Dominican writers, Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. As I mentioned earlier, making sense out of nonsense was the driving force behind my desire to study and to produce Literature.

My intellectual exploration into the history of India, the indenture system, and the early years of settlement in Trinidad were part of my literary endeavour, in study as well as in creative work. There was little targeted research that was necessary for *The Swinging Bridge* to be written, so steeped was I already in the history of this migration. The most intriguing elements to me, to this day, are what is unattainable except through works of the imagination, and that is the understanding of such vast psychic and material displacement as must have occurred at the time. But how did they cope with it? Who were the key actors?

X. Can you describe the impact of Indians on the Caribbean, in terms of religion, politics, and material and social culture?

RE: Their impact is much larger than you might expect, because it is estimated that they form only about 20% of the total Caribbean demographic. Trinidad is reputed to be the Caribbean Island with the best street food, most of which evolved from Indian traditional sources. "Roti" and "doubles" (a bara and channa sandwich) are

two famous examples. Indians are a force in the Caribbean, socially, culturally, and politically. In Trinidad and Guyana, they are the majority populations by small percentages. I can recommend some texts – let me know if you would like some references.

XI. While migration narratives focus mostly on 'going away' or 'leaving', how do you re-negotiate the 'return' journey to one's ancestral home in your works?

RE: The middle section of the novel focuses on the return journey. Thomas Wolfe's idea that you can never go home again is still an echo in many writers' minds about the folly of undertaking such a return journey. I'm thinking too of Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*. But in the novel, Mona experiences it as a voyage of discovery or re-discovery. This is mostly because she had never experienced her homeland as an adult and her revisit led to a new understanding of the complexity of the socio-cultural and political forces at play in her home territory and in the Greater CaribbeanRegion.

XII. According to you, how is the fictional genre an apt medium for re-imagining indentureship? Can literature communicate the emotional and political currency of this human trafficking from our colonial past?

RE: I believe we've already covered a lot of this ground in your previous questions. The short answer is YES. Perhaps more so than many other creative forms because of the vast terrain that literature covers.

Appendix 3

Interview Transcript

Questions: Shehnaz Kabir

Responses: Shani Mootoo

Date: September 2022

SK: You are a video maker, painter, and visual artist. You also come from an illustrious family with prominent political influence. As a multi-media artist, how does your writing overlap with visual artform and what impact do they have on your writing process?

SM: I don't know how to answer that...I mean in some ways they are two very different processes even if they might be dealing with the same material. In some ways, I actually prefer to work with visual art forms and the reason is I have more or less developed a kind of a way of...you know I've been doing this for so long and I find it very difficult to put it into words. And part of the reason is that I want to abandon individual work. I want to abandon the use of verbal lang with...with...I feel there is a possibility of another way of thinking and seeing and experiencing that could possibly be reached without language, without grammar, without syntax, without the trappings of ways of thinking which is like language, you know...verbal languages and so on that forces to take into consideration ways we have already thought about things and that direct us...because of the way language is...direct us to think in another way. So I like visual work because it allows me to experience (things) in a different way than writing. Now the thing about writing is that I like the very opposite thing that I was just talking about. In writing you can become...you can get so so so specific, that you can almost have no equivocation. The equivocation that is inevitable in visual work is delightful. But in writing, to me, it is not delightful, unless it is in the form of poetry where the equivocation is meaningful. But...so the two things...the two forms and then within the two forms, the separate two forms, there are many many different things. Like in writing, you know, there's the fiction, there's the poetry and then there is the poetry mixed with the visual and so on like Kane Faya (?). Don't know if you saw my work Kane Faya?

SK: No. I haven't. Is it available…?

SM: It's available for (on) Amazon. Because it shows...what it does is it blends...it blends poetry, some kind of prose and very much visual images in it. Each page of the book is like a canvas. Now this is like, this is the front of the book, right? But umm…let me show you for instance, ok for instance, here is one poem...it starts like this, it goes like that...have you seen this?

SK: Yes.

SK: *Cereus Blooms at Night, Valmiki's Daughter,* and *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* all three novels have pivotal parent-child relationship that acts as a driving force of the narrative. Although the nature of the parent-child relationship are vastly different, there is an inter-dependence owing to the issues of gender and sexuality laced across the three stories. Parents do play a significant role in shaping the lives of children but does the importance of their role increase manifold among queer diaspora families?

SM: Yeah, I think I think the importance of parent's role does increase hugely among queer diaspora families, yes, or individuals. Queer diaspora families could be when you say, like, I don't know if all parents of a queer child will call their family a queer family. But there are queers among those families who would then have their own families and the role of the parents. Of course it could be a few things. The importance of their role in these…So queer diaspora families could be like the family, say my partner and myself, we form a family if we have children, the importance of our role amongst our family. Do you understand what I am saying?

SK: Yes. I do.

SM: Also parents, do my parents, for instance, think of themselves as having a queer family. I don't think so. I think we remain the outsiders in their family. Even as supportive as they are I don't think they would ever think that they have a queer family. They have a family and some of the children in their family at queer. But yes, I think parents can help their children, you know, have...Because in these particular diasporas that I...this particular diaspora that I belong to, it's also raced. and we are facing so many different problems here in these northern white mainly...even when not like mainly white, white holds the power in these countries and therefore race is often times more visible than one's queer identity. And if you

have parents who are really imparting strength along these different ways you will get along better in these kinds of societies. But if you don't have your family and you're dealing with race and you're dealing with queerness and you're dealing with queerness in your own queer family that is not accepted by society, you know it's very tricky. And that is what I wrote about in *Moving forward sideways like a crab.*

SK: *Cereus Blooms at Night* seemed more explicit about deviant relationships, aberrant behavioural patterns, and queer culture than *Valmiki's Daughter*, where the acceptance came only from the Frenchwoman, Anick. Both novels also depicts polarised socio-economic class of people. Did the imaginary island of Lantanacamara allow you to create better space for non-conformists? What was your approach while representing such different strata of people and space, in the two novels, inhabiting Trinidad?

SM: yeah, so that is the kind of question that I would like to see you answer, like how you see it and I'll tell you why. When I...*Cereus Blooms At Night* was the first novel that I wrote, it's the second book that was out on Maine street. But it was the first novel. I was writing...when I was writing this book. I was not out as a writer really I wrote out on Maine Street because a publisher asked me to write. I was a practising visual artist and the publisher came and asked me to write a book and I did it as I did it as an experiment. I did it as an artist more than as a writer and when that book came out and it was like now finished, they asked me if I was writing again and that's how I came to write *Cereus Blooms At Night* because they asked me again to write. I was not interested in carrying on this writing thing. It is after *Cereus Blooms At Night* and all the exposure I realised you know what, I think I like this. I think I like this better than the visual art world because there was more communication with many more different kinds of people and so on. But the problem with *Cereus Blooms At Night,* the writing…

Actually, I saw it was out on Main Street. A book travels...a book by a mainstream publisher, well you know even though it was a small press but still it was a mainstream publisher, travels a great deal farther into the world than an exhibition or a painting and a work of art. I was living in Canada. If I was going to write my truth. I would write about queerness. I would write about race and those kinds of things but I was not out in the world. I was not out in Trinidad. You know I just simply was not

out. Also when i wrote *Cereus Blooms At Night*, the landscape is very much Trinidad for most of it, right. But I created...it's the first time I was writing a novel and I was not a writer so I can't really know what I was doing what I knew was that to set this story in a place like Trinidad, I have the strong sense that it was not paying attention to the history, the socio economic (and) political specificities of Trinidad and i felt those things were so very important. That, to write a fantastical story that was *Cereus Blooms At Night*, and not pay attention to those very important things was in a way to do to that colonised country that I came from what a lot of other writers who are not from those spaces do too...you know living outside of the country. It was disrespectful to the country to do that and that's why I created a fictionalised space, right. You know by the time i got to *Valmiki's Daughter*, I feel that I had, I had shown whether it is in work itself or through blank conversations and my interviews and this and that, I feel that I had by that time shown I was not...that I had no intention of abusing the landscape or the...abusing Trinidad as merely a canvas for any kind of story I wanted to tell so I felt by the time I got to *Valmiki's Daughter*, I could be more open about where this was taking place.

SK: That sort of shows the journey that you had as a writer also. I mean, that's truly amazing.

SK: The 1833 Abolition Act was a significant cultural template. Despite the statute, colonial regime found ways of trafficking labour forces from the Indian subcontinent. Although the British Empire placed several regulations to prevent exploitation, the ships carrying the indentured labourers, for instance, were the same that transported slaves along with equivalent risk, uncertainty, and inhumane conditions. What, according to you, are the key points of differentiation between ‘slavery’ and ‘indenture’?

SM: Well, I feel that the words themselves bring to my mind, or bring to my colour and race and I think that has been a convenience, that association, that visual association with the two words has been a convenience for Indians, in Trinidad. It is, I feel that there has been a cheap kind of ease and perception to say that we were slaves, we were indentured, when in truth, people in the indentured situation were, they were treated in a lot of ways like slaves for a long time. But it suits us to make this distinction between how we perceive, between the stigma we see attached to

slavery and what we consider a mild stigma of indenture and I feel that is very much on the shoulders of racism, Indian racism. You know, we prefer to think of ourselves as having had this privilege of being indentured rather than having been slaves.

I don't think that in reality, maybe the period was shorter for Indians in the situation...and maybe there were more eyes looking on, particularly the Presbyterian Church, for instance. But I think that it allows us to create this difference and this situation to perpetuate racism towards Blacks. And I think that is very very problematic. Because we should really be banding together (against) the colonial activities towards us all. Because in the past when I grew up, Indians tended to prefer to be aligned with whites, you know, as if whites loved us but I don't believe that was true. But they preferred to imagine that than to align ourselves with Blacks against colonialism and in favour of a Trinidad that was striving for independence. But we're stuck back in that place even though today there are a lot of people who are trying to correct this problem I'm talking about.

But still, there's a celebration as indentured which I'm not sure that it is well-advised entirely.

SK: I get your point.

SK: The poetics of ‘Coolitude’ tries to redefine the indentureship and re-imagine the journey of the labourers across the *kala pani* to the oppressive employment and ultimately, settle in a foreign land amid variegated cultural encounters. What does the term ‘Coolitude’ mean to you?

SM: The question of Coolitude. I mean, just to tell you it is not...I have tried very hard to be open to Torabully's notion of Coolitude. But it just..I've tried intellectually, I've tried emotionally, I've tried in different ways to be open to it. But it does not speak to me.

SK: Racial intermixing is a vital part in the process of ‘queer bildungsroman’, common to *Cereus Blooms at Night, Valmiki’s Daughter,* and *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab*. Can you talk about the racial tensions and cultural assimilation that you witnessed in the Caribbean archipelago?

SM: As I said to you in the last question we spoke about, when I was growing up in my mind, I was in what, 1972 or I think was the Black Power Movement in Trinidad. So I was about fifteen and there were a handful of Indians who participated visibly. But I think many, many people were...many Indians did not want to be involved in this Black Power Movement. I mean Black Power was specific in some ways, but I think Indians could have taken this opportunity to support Blacks but we did not. And also to carve a place for ourselves. But I think that you know there's still that hierarchy where we prefer to side with the whites that with the blacks.

I remember in my own family, we had...my family did a lot of entertaining, they were politicians and socialites. We did a lot of entertaining and we had a lot of white, perhaps more whites than Indians. And there was a joke that my grandmother, my mother's mother, who was very fair skinned, very very fair skinned. Did I tell you about this joke before? I have been writing about it. They would say, family members would say, her mother was friends with the overseer on the estate. That is such a loaded idea. But there was pride. The overseer would have been white, yes? She was an Indian woman and they are loving the idea that she was friends with this white person. Now, who knows, I mean if there was any truth, I don't believe there was any truth because they were very fierce as well. It's like the notion that all Indians are very dark and if you happen to be a lighter skin then you are a better Indian than this other Indian.

The other thing is they were so pleased that out of this joking union of my great grandmother and the overseer, the possible thing, they don't know if it's true, came these fair skinned children. That's all that mattered. Not the possibility that she ended up being with this man or could have been disowned by her family because of this. Those kind of things didn't seem to come into play with this idea.

So yeah I mean I also remember that the school that I went to, the convent that I went to, you know some funny things like we had these two lovely mango trees in the yard and they were huge very old...

Ok, so what I was telling you two things about that. You know these big beautiful mango trees and under them were these benches and in the heat of the break time period like lunchtime and break and so on, we understood, we just simply

understood that we could not go to those...those benches. Those were for the white girls. And this is as children right? And sure enough, if we went, they would come and move us right out of it and take it over.

The other thing was that my father was a doctor. He was the doctor from many many many of these white people because their families tended to work for the big oil companies or you know insurance companies and you know Daddy was the doctor. As I said to you, my parents would have all of these parties and the parents of those white children in our schools would come to those parties and when we had parties at home, we would be encouraged to invite their children.

Now, it was quite an amazing thing for us because we had parties but they never had parties. Those white people never had parties. Sometimes the parents would have parties and my parents would go to them. You know, but we wouldn't go to them. Until I was here in Canada and I began to do research as an adult. Way, way, way...i'm now...i'm not even in my university years, I'm past that and I'm doing research about the… and looking up different people and groups of people and and I come up on all these photos of the same white people in my school and the many parties that they had and what it says that they had the parties for children, but they did not invite the doctor's children. They did not invite us. So yeah. So race was on the surface and it was underground as well.

One other thing I wanted to say about that is that here in Canada when I was...so many of my partners, almost all my partners have been white. I had one long relationship with an East African Indian woman for a long time but outside of that relationship all my relationships were white, with women who were white. And when I came to Canada I was not out in Trinidad and when I was living in Vancouver and when you saw an Indian person on the street. They tended to be from India but you did not want them to know that you were queer. Because of what we learnt about the these people are kind of like the closest thing to family and you don't want family to know...visually right? The closest thing visually to family and you don't want it to ever get back to family. You don't want family to know that you were queer.

So you keep away from the Indian communities. You keep away also from the Trinidad communities. the Caribbean communities because there are definite prejudices. You know we know about the prejudice against queer people in the different islands and definitely in Trinidad and in Jamaica. We knew about these things. We hear it in music, you read about it, the bashings you know and in some ways, it was safer to be with people who are not on your...in any way related to your world or could bring questions to who are you, or who is this person? You know she's Shani from Trinidad and then news gets back to Trinidad, you. So it was safer to be with white people. You know I didn't know this at the time when I was...this was like this survival instinct. And it's long, long afterwards and I'm looking and thinking why did I do that? Why was I drawn to white people? It's not because I loved white or loved, you know whatever...all the different things that are associated with white. It's because specifically I think because...being amongst white people created a safer space as a queer person from the Caribbean, a queer Indian person.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Fiction

Bahadur, Gaiutra. *Coolie Woman*. Delhi. Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt. Ltd., 2015.

Bissoondath, Neil. *The Worlds Within Her*. Berkshire: Vintage, 2001.

Dabydeen, David. *The Counting House*. 1996. Reprint, Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2005.

—. *The Intended*. 2005. Reprint, New York: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2010.

Eniath, Aliah. *The Yard*. Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2016.

Espinet, Ramabai. *The Swinging Bridge*. Ontario: A Phyllis Bruce Book: 2007.

Khan, Ismith. *Jumbie Bird*. London. Macgibbon & Knee, 1961.

Ladoo, Harold Sonny. *No Pain Like This Body*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1987.

Mahabir, Joy. *Jouvert*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2006.

Maharaj, Niala. *Like Heaven*. Berkshire: Arrow Books, 2007.

Mohan, Peggy. *Jahajin*. Uttar Pradesh. Harper Collins, 2007.

Mootoo, Shani. *Cereus Blooms at Night*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.

—. *Valmiki's Daughter*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2009.

—. *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab*. New York. Akashic Books, 2017.

Naipaul, Shiva. *The Chip-Chip Gatherers*. London. Penguin Modern Classics, 2012.

Persaud, Lakshmi. *Butterfly in the Wind*. New York. Peepal Tress Press Ltd., 1996.

—. *Raise the Lanterns High*. London. BlackAmber Books, 2004.

—. *Sastra*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2006.

—. *Daughters of Empire*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2012.

Shinebourne, Jan Lowe. *The Last English Plantation*. Leeds, Peepal Tree Press Ltd., 2002.

Selvon, Samuel. *A Brighter Sun*. Croydon. Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1985.

Non-Fiction

Fung, Richard, dir. *Dal Puri Diaspora*. 2012. https://vimeo.com/59276489.

Laing, James M. "Handbook for Surgeons Superintendent of the Coolie Emigration Service." *British Colonial Office, March* (1889).

Mahabir, Joy. 2009. "Silent Archives: Indo-Caribbean Women's Jewelry." https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ccs/icsa/contributions/paperabstracts/silentarchivesjoymahabir.pdf.

Mintz, Sydney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Mohapatra, Prabhu P. "Restoring the Family: Wife Murders and the Making of a Sexual Contract for Indian Immigrant Labour in the British Caribbean Colonies, 1860-1920." *Sage Journal* 11, no. 2 (1995): 227-260. https://doi.org/10.1177/025764309501100203.

Shepherd, Verene A. *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 2002.

Sinah-Kerkhoff, K., E.W. Bal, and A. Deo Singh, eds. *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer: Munshi Rahman Khan (1874-1972)*. New Delhi: Shipra, 2005.

Secondary Sources

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Alexander, M. Jacqui. "Redrafting Morality: The Postcolonial State and the Sexual Offences Bills of Trinidad and Tobago." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 133-52. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Allen, R. B. *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Labourers in Colonial Mauritius.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Anderson, Clare. *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815-53*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

Appadurai, Arjun, ed. *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Aronson, Marc, and Marina Budhos. *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science*. New York: Clarion Books, 2010.

Balderston, Daniel, and Mike Gonzalez, eds. *Encyclopedia of Latin American and Caribbean Literature 1900-2003*. London. Routledge, 2004.

Bates, Crispin, and Marina Carter. *Sirdars as Intermediaries in Nineteenth-century Indian Ocean Indentured Labour Migration*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Bates, Crispin, ed. *Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora*. London: Palgrave, 2001.

Bhana, Surendra. *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal, 1860-1920: A Study Based on Ships' Lists*. New Delhi: Promiela and Company, 1991.

Bhabha, Homi K. Diaspora and Home: An Interview with Homi K. Bhabha, 7 December 2017. https://blog.degruyter.com/diaspora-and-home-interview-homi-k-bhabha/.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Bhabha, Homi. "The World and the Home." *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 141–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/466222.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Bragard, Véronique. "Gendered Voyages into Coolitude: the shaping of the Indo-Caribbean woman's literary consciousness." *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* 20, no. 1 (99-111).

Brathwaite, Kamau. *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. Staten Island, New York: We Press, 1999.

British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. *Coolie Indentured Labour*. London. Abraham Kingdon and Newnhan, 1888.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1-22.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.

Carter, Marina. *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

—. *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.

Checkland, S.G. *The Gladstones: A Family Biography 1764-1851*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1971.

Deb, Nilanjana. "(Re)moving bodies: People, ships and other commodities in the coolie trade from Calcutta." In *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World*, edited by Supriya Chaudhuri, Josephine McDobagh, Brian H. Murray, and Rajeswari S. Rajan, 115-128. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Checkland, Sydney G. *The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1761-1851*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Emmer, P.C. "The Meek Hindu; The Recruitment of Indian Indentured Labour for Service Overseas, 1870-1916." In *Colonialism and Migration; Indentured Labour Before and Slavery*, edited by P.C. Emmer, 187-207. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986.

Eng, David L. "Epilogue. Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies" In *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* edited by Judith Halberstam and Lisa Lowe, 204-228. New York: Duke University Press, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822381020-007 .

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Farquhar, Judith. "Food, Eating, and the Good Life." In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susane Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, 145-160. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2006.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1977.

—. *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics* (Spring, 1986): 22-27.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Ghosh, Kaushik. “A Market for Aboriginality: Primitivism and Race Classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India.” *Subaltern Studies X* edited by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu, 8-48. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gumilev, L.N. *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of the Earth*. Moscow: Michelle and Co., 1993.

Hangloo, Ratan Lal, ed. *Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean: History, Culture and Identity*. New Delhi. Primus Books, 2012.

Haraway, Donna J. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Harney, Stefano. *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora*. Jamaica. University of West Indies Press, 2006.

Hassankhan, Maurits S., Lomarsh Roopnarine, and Hans Ramsoedh, eds. *The Legacy of Indian Indenture: Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Migration and Diaspora*. New Delhi. Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2016.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hosein, Gabrielle Jamela, and Lisa Outar, eds. *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Hoskins, Janet. “Agency, Biography, and Objects.” In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susane Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, 145-160. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2006.

Kale, Madhavi. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery & Indentured Labor in the British Caribbeans*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Kanhai, Rosanne, ed. *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*. Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2011.

—. *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*. Trinidad: University of West Indies Press, 1999.

Kelly, John D. “Coolie as Labour commodity: Race, Sex and European Dignity in Colonial Fiji”. In *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, edited by Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass, and E. Valentine Daniel, 246-267. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1992a.

Kelly, J.D. “Fiji Indians and “Commoditization of Labor.” *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 1 (1992b): 97-120.

Klein, Alison. *Anglophone Literature of Caribbean Literature: The Seductive Hierarchies of Empire*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Kopytoff, Igor. “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process”. In *The Social Life of Things*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 64-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Kumar, Ashutosh. *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

—. “Feeding the Girmitiya: Food and Drink on Indentured Ships to the Sugar Colonies.” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 40-51.

Lal, Brij V. *Chalo Jahaji: On A Journey through Indenture in Fiji*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2012.

Lal, Brij V., Maurits S. Hasankhan and, Doug Munro, eds. *Resistance and Indian Indenture Experience: Comparative Perspectives.* New Delhi: Manohar, 2014.

Lal Brij V., William Safran and, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, eds. *Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Lai, Walton Look. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies 1838-1918.* Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lockard, Joe. "Sugar Realism in Caribbean Fiction." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* (1995): 80-103.

Mackie, Cristine. *Life and Food in the Caribbean*. New York: Amsterdam Books, 1991.

Madanipour, Ali, Judith Allen, and Goran Cars. *Social Exclusion in European Cities: Processes, Experiences and Responses*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998.

Mahabir, Joy, and Mariam Pirbhai, eds. *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Mahabir, Kumar, ed. *Caribbean Issues in the Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2013.

Mannur, Anita. *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

McNeil, J. & Lal, Chimman. 1915b, *Report on the Condition of Indian Immigrants in the Four British Colonies – Trinidad, British Guiana or Demerara, Jamaica and Fiji, and in the Dutch Colony of Suriname or Dutch Guiana*, HMSO, London.

Mehta, Brinda. *Diasporic (Dis)locaions: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004.

—. *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1989. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16xwccc.

Mishra, Vijay. "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora." *Textual Practice* 10, no. 3 (1996): 421–47. doi:10.1080/09502369608582254.

Mootoo, Shani. "This is the Story You Write." *Lodestar Quarterly* (2004): 1-8. <lodestarquarterly.com/work/188/>.

Naipaul, V.S. *The Enigma of Arrival*. New York: Knopf, 1987.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad*. Hyderabad. Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., 2009.

Northrup, David. *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

O'Callaghan, Evelyn. *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: "A Hot Place, Belonging to Us".* London: Routledge, 2004.

Ortiz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1995.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Pirbhai, Mariam. *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture: Novels of the South Asian Diaspora in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific*, Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009.

—. "On "Moving Forward" Toward the Un/familiar: An Interview with Shani Mootoo." *Studies in Canadian Literature* (2015).

Reddock, Rhoda. *Women, Labour & Politics in Trinidad & Tobago: A History*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994.

Reddock, Rhoda and Shobhita Jain. "Plantation Women: Introduction." In *Women Plantation Workers: International Experiences*, edited by Rhoda Reddock and Shobhita Jain, 1-16. Oxford: Berg, 1998.

Renne, Elisha P. "Mass Producing Food Traditions for West Africans Abroad." *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 4 (2007): 616-625.

Report of the Inter-Departmental Conference on Assisted Emigration from India, to British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Fiji, 1917.

Robbins, Bruce. "Commodity Histories." *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (2005): 454-463.

Rogoff, Irit. *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Roopnarine, Lomarsh. *Indian Indenture in the Danish West Indies, 1863-1873*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Schneider, Jane. Cloth and Clothing." In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susane Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, 203-220. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2006.

Sinha-Kerkhoff, Kathinka, Ellen Bal, and Alok Deo Singh, eds. *Autobiography of an Indian Labour, Munshi Rahman Khan (1874-1972): Jeevan Prakash*. Delhi, Shipra, 2005.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.

Speckmann, Johan D. *Marriage and Kinship among Indians in Surinam*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Worn Worlds: Clothes and Identity on the Renaissance Stage." In *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, edited by Margreat de Grazia, Maureen Quiligan, and Peter Stallybrass, 189-231. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

—. “Worn Worlds: Clothes Mourning and the Life of Things.” In *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, 27-45. Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1999.

Steiner, Christopher. “Rights of Passage: On the Liminal Identity of Arts in the Border Zone.” In *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, edited by Fred R. Myers, 207-231. New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2001.

Tilley, Christopher. “Objectification.” In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susane Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, 145-160. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2006.

Tinker, Hugh. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920*. 2nd ed. London: Hansib Publishing Ltd., 1993.

Torabully, Khal and Marina Carter. *Coolitude: An Anthology of Indian Labour Diaspora*. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

Turner, Victor. “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*.” In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 93-111. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.