

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

## **Abstract**

There was a mass labour emigration between the years 1837 and 1917 from the Indian subcontinent to the Caribbean islands ensuing from the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 which became a potent mechanism in the formation of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. 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 adaptation 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 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” 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. 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.

**Keywords:** indenture, Indo-Caribbean diaspora, materiality, agency, culture