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Freedom Denied

Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917

Rhoda Reddock

One of the long-held myths about Indian women immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago is that they migrated with their families under the power, authority and control of their male relatives and were docile and tractable. These views ignore the historical documentation on the 'Indian Women Problem' which confronted the colonial office as far back as 1845 when Indian indentureship to Trinidad began. Contemporary research in women's history has revealed that a large proportion of Indian women did make a conscious decision to seek a new life elsewhere. They came as workers and not as dependents. However, the planters saw women as 'unproductive' labour and policies facilitated their exploitation as cheap labour. In addition the hierarchical social structure of the Brahminic-Sanskritic tradition brought about a conflation of interests between migrant Indian men and the colonial capital. Indian women in the colonies did not easily or willingly submit to these designs.

UNLIKE most contemporary research on women's history, this paper seeks not simply to reclaim past glory. It seeks rather to correct the strongly adhered-to myths and untrue generalisations about the character of immigrant Indian women which prevail in the commonsense understanding of history in Trinidad and Tobago. This 'commonsense' historical tradition as far as Indian women are concerned has led to the commonly-held views that (1) the Indians unlike the Africans migrated as families and as a result of this and other reasons the Indian family system could be continuously maintained in its traditional fashion, and (2) that the Indian women who migrated did so under the power, authority and control of their male relatives and were of docile and tractable character.

The emergence of a new era of historical research into the Indian experience in the Caribbean has done little to debunk these myths. Historians working in this area have sought to ignore the pages and pages of historical documentation on the 'Indian Women Problem' which was a recurring feature of colonial administrative concern throughout the period. Recent exceptions to this rule, include David Dodd (1976) and Tyran Ramnarine (1980) both writing on British Guiana. The latter in particular makes use of the available material but in a very uncritical manner, accepting colonial definitions of class, character and morality.

In addition to the debunking of long-adhered-to myths, this paper, as with other work in the area of women's history, attempts to bring forward pertinent theoretical and analytical questions which emerge in this context but are of relevance to the wider understanding of the complex inter-relationship between sexist, racial and class exploitation and oppression. More specifically, this paper brings to the fore the sex-specific aspects which are necessary to a fuller understanding of the process of migration and of the labour process in general. For example, it counterpoises the relationship between women as a source of labour-power in themselves, i e, as workers and producers; women as producers of the labour force and reproducers of labour-power and the manipulatory use of women by capital and the state as stablisers of the male labour force.

Most importantly however, this paper clearly shows that in spite of the apparently successful exploitation and manipulation of women by capital in this way, which was largely mediated through the desires and actions of men; Indian women in the Caribbean in general and in Trinidad and Tobago in particular did not willingly and easily submit to the economic designs of local and colonial capital or the state. Like women throughout history they resisted and fought to maintain their relative degree of autonomy which in the last instance was in many ways wrested from them.

Another important analytical point which emerges in this paper is the character of women's labour within class society and in this particular instance racist colonial capitalist society. This paper will not go into the historical origins of the sexual division of labour but its most common characteristics are also evident in this case. Most relevant here is the definition of women as non-earning housewives and men as 'income-earning breadwinners' even in instances where this is clearly not the case. This has given women's labour first, the characteristic of a presumed non-existence and were acknowledged, an economic value which renders it non-paid or low-paid. The prior definition of women as dependent 'housewives' in addition facilitates the invisibility of women's work by allowing vast areas of their productive and reproductive activity to be 'hidden within the household'.

In the case of Indians in the Caribbean, this capitalist sexual division of labour was combined with the hierarchial social structure of the Brahmanic-Sanskritic tradition which included the seclusion of the non-productive women of the twice-born castes, as a symbol of purity and higher caste status. As we shall see in this paper, it was this historic conflation of interests between migrant Indian men, struggling to improve their socio-economic and caste position within a new and hostile environment and the colonial capital and state's desire for a stable and eventually self-reproducing and cheap labour force which eventually led to the curtailment of the social and economic autonomy which numerous Indian women had sought to achieve in the new society.

The source material for this paper is, as would be expected, disparate and scattered and reflects mainly the views of colonial bureaucrats. Existing life history interviews of women and men who had actually experienced indentureship, reflect the experience of the latter period 1900-1917 and little prior to that.[1] In historical terms however a great deal more material exists on this subject than for many others. Similar data on recruitment, work experience and domestic organisation for women during slavery for example in the case of Trinidad and Tobago is much less easily available.

This paper has been compiled from various primary and secondary sources such as government correspondence and publications, annual reports of the Protectors of the Immigrants, reports of various commissions of enquiry, publications of the period and literary studies based on similar material. It is by no means complete but it is envisaged that the debate which ensues could stimulate Caribbean socio-historical scholars to make a new examination of this subject.

When Indian indentureship to Trinidad began in 1845, what later became known as the 'Indian Women Problem' had already reared its head. The initial phase of migration to the Caribbean of Indians destined for indentured labour on the plantations, began as early as 1838 when migrants to the then British Guiana were among the 6,000 men and 100 women (approximately) who were shipped to Mauritius, Australia and British Guiana between 1834 and 1839 (Cumpston, 1953: 21). This initial phase of indentured Indian emigration followed fast on the heels of the abolition of slavery. This, it has now been ascertained was an attempt (and eventually a successful one at that) by the plantocracy to reduce their costs of labour as well as to re-establish some degree of labour control on the plantation.

The first prohibition of indentured Indian migration which took place in 1839 was fuelled by the activities of the re-organised Anti-Slavery Society against this 'new system of slavery'. One of their major objections had been the small numbers of women among the migrants during this initial phase. In November, 1844 therefore when the Government of India lifted its ban on inden-

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tured Indian emigration to the Caribbean one of the conditions was that at least 12½ per cent of the emigrants be female (Jha, n d I: 171-2).

The inclusion of quotas for women according to I Cumpston, however, was mainly for public consumption (Cumpston, 1953: 69). In 1845, therefore, when the Fatal Rozack brought the first 227 Indian immigrant labourers to Trinidad on May 30, 206 were men and 21 women (Kirpalani, *et al*, 1945). In addition to the factors in the receiving countries which favoured migration, it also emerged in response to developments in British India where as described by I Cumpston:

> To natural hazards and traditional fragmentation of family holdings to an excessive degree, were added changes in production following the training of British rule (Cumpston, 1953).

In the eighteenth century India had supplied cotton goods on a large-scale to Europe, but now she was losing her position as a manufacturing country and had been transformed into a consumer of British goods. The textile industries were the first to collapse before competition. Weavers and other workers were left without employment and had no alternative but to fall back on the land. The land however did not welcome them. According to J C Jha, British land policy in India had sought to create and perpetuate a class of large landowners to the detriment of the small peasant proprietors through, for example, the permanent settlement of Bengal in 1793.

This settlement destroyed the land tenure rights of small holders while increasing the powers of landlords or *zamindars* over the tenants or *ryots* (Jha, n d II: 2). This situation was further aggravated by the recurrent famines in North India during the nineteenth century which affected peasants and rural artisans which was later compounded by the annexation of Oudh to the British Indian Empire in 1956 (Jha, n d II: 3).

Within India itself one of the apparent effects of this combination of destructive colonial policy with natural hazards was the migration of those affected to the towns from surrounding areas. It is also possible that this period witnessed an increase in the number of girls consecrated to the temple goddess as ritual prostitutes. For these landless unemployed, facing the increasing competition for survival in the towns, emigration to the British colonies was one alternative.

The system of indentureship was organised through two emigration agents in Calcutta and Madras. They were responsible for the recruiting, safe-keeping and transportation of immigrants from India to the colonies. In each recruiting territory there was an agent-general of immigration later known as the Protector of the Immigrants. They and their staff were responsible for the receiving and assigning of immigrants to estates, looking after their well-being—health, food, working conditions, et cetera, and the prosecution of estate owners who failed to provide adequately in any of these areas.

In spite of the experience of Caribbean slavery where women engaged in plantation labour, manifested a higher survival rate than their male counterparts (Reddock, 1985), the planters adopted the growing notion of women as being unproductive and policies accrued from this idea. The relations of production between planters and their female indentured labourers must however not be seen only in ideological terms but also as resulting from the planters initial unwillingness to finance the cost of reproducing a second generation of workers in the Caribbean. This fact went a long way in creating the possibilities for Indian women's independence in the Caribbean, the following paragraphs will attempt to examine this more concretely.

Recruitment Policy and Reproduction of Labour Force

From its inception, Indian indentureship in Trinidad as in all receiving territories was characterised by a numerical disparity between the sexes. As already noted far fewer women were recruited and a number of reasons could be used to explain this. In India itself in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as today, unlike in most other countries of the world, the ratio of women to men in the population was much lower. In 1911 according to one source, the ratio of women to men in the United Provinces was 915 to 1,000 (Blunt, 1969: 67), while in Punjab (including Delhi), at this time, the ratio was only 817 women to every 1,000 men (CO 571/5: 11985). Recruiting therefore took place in a situation of an already existing unequal sex ratio.

Throughout the indentureship period, the approach towards the recruitment of women varied over time in relation to the desire of the plantocracy and the exigencies of the recruiting situation as mediated through the policies of the colonial authorities. Some of these have already been identified and include, the relative necessity to reproduce the labour foce locally, the need to stabilise the male labour force and the problems incurred in securing the 'right kind of women'.

During the early period, therefore, as noted by Ramnarine (1980: 2) the planters were interested in immigration as a source of direct labour, women as a source of labour were seen as financial disabilities due to the financial risks of child-bearing and child-rearing. Thus in the early period little encouragement was given to family migration or for women to migrate. In addition the supposed 'natural weakness' of women was assumed to be another discouraging factor which recent writers continue to accept without question. Thus in a search for 'able-bodied' labour few women were recruited. During the initial phase therefore between 1845 and 1948 no legal restrictions on the proportion of males to females existed. At least two authors Weller (1968: 2) and Cumpston (1953: 69) state that encouragement was given to men to bring their wives and families. However this could not have been very successful. In 1857 the ratio was set at one woman to three men (1:3) and in 1859 it was changed to one to two (1:2). In 1860 however, due to difficulties in recruiting the 'right type of women' this was reduced to 1:4 by Act XLVI of 1860. According to Weller (1968: 4) however, the Protector of the Emigrants in Calcutta had the discretionary power to alter this standard.

The main areas of recruitment were the markets, railway stations, bazaars and temples. The main towns in the north were 'nakas' between Delhi and Benares, for example—Allahabad, Fyzabad and Agra. Muttra (Mathura) was apparently a main area for the recruitment of women possibly women dedicated to the temple goddess (Tinker, 1974: 123). From time to time statements were made against the recruitment of women from these areas because of their 'low moral character' similar reservations were however never made about men recruited from these same areas. The emigration agents were at pains to explain to the planters and the Colonial office, the difficulties of obtaining the 'better class of women' and pointed out that these if recruited would be totally unsuited to estate work.

Certain magistrates therefore carried out thorough investigations of single women's backgrounds before they would allow them to migrate. This was usually done through the police and could take from one to three months (Tinker 1974: 131). The women's statements were not accepted. Obvious disqualification was of course the manifestation of pregnancy by single women during the waiting period, known prostitutes or what were described as 'coarse low-caste females' were also disqualified. But in periods of great shortage these controls could not be maintained. This contradictory situation was never adequately resolved. In 1913, A Maisden, the Trinidad government emigration agent writing from Calcutta to the Under Secretary of State in the Colonial office had this to say:

> ... it is in the recruiting of women that more than half our difficulties in emigration consist, and which causes recruiters to get such a bad name, and fall into disfavour with magistrates. In one district where the recruitment of women had come to a full stop for several months a new magistrate was appointed who refused to register any woman for the colonies unless the recruiter who presented the woman at the court for registration gave some evidence that he had been to the woman's village and obtained the sanction of her husband for her to go abroad. The recruitor replied "if I do this I shall get my throat cut as the husband will be sure to attribute the cause of the woman's leaving her home to my influence, no matter how little truth there may be in the allega-

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tion" (CO 571/1 No 33014, 1913, p 8).

By the mid-nineenth century, much concern was being voiced over the 'kind of women' who were being recruited. Many of the alterations which were made in the official recruitment ratios were made with this in mind. Throughout the period, contradictions continued between the planters short-term preference for adult male migration and their long-term need for a self-reproducing, cheap and stable labour force. Among the male Indian workers, their desire for a docile, secluded and controllable women as befitted their aspirations for higher caste status, conflicted with the planters need for women as labourers and the non-availability of women of 'the right kind' for migration to the colonies. The effect of this latter contradiction was manifested in the increasing violence among Indian men over women and towards women in all recruiting territories during the latter half of the nineteenth century (See Niehoff and Niehoff, 1960; Dodd, 1976, and Ramnarine 1980, etc).

In July 1868 therefore the proportion was again increased this time to 1:2 but the Government of Bengal complained that this would lead to the recruitment of 'a low caste of women mainly prostitutes'. The figure was altered once more by the Government of India to 1:3 but finally it was fixed by the colonial office at 2:5 (Brereton, 1974: 75; Weller, 1968: 4).

Or so they thought ...! According to Weller, again in 1878-79 the proportion was once again reduced to 1:4 on the plea that females migrating prior to October 31 that year had had a high mortality rate. The recruiters used this opportunity to turn back family groups and individual women and to send single men. Unlike what has been commonly believed, the majority of Indian women came to the Caribbean not as wives or daughters but as individual women. As late as 1915 the commissioners McNeill and Lal described the composition of women indentured labourers thus:

> The women who came out consist as to one-third of married women who accompany their husbands, the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or been put away by them. A small percentage are ordinary prostitutes. Of the women who emigrate otherwise than with their husbands and parents the great majority are not, as they are frequently represented to be shamelessly immoral. They are women who have got into trouble and apparently emigrate to escape from a life of promiscuous prostitution which seems to be the alternative to emigration ... What appears to be true as regards a substantial number is that they ran away from home alone or accompanied by some one by whom they were abandoned that they drifted into one of the large recruiting centres and after a time were picked up by the recruiter (Cotton, 1915: 372).

Following from this initial observation it is interesting to note the types of women who did migrate. Of the two-thirds who were not wives of migrating husbands the majority as mentioned earlier were widows. In India then as now, in many cases the position of widows was particularly abhorrent. In particular, Brahmin widows and those of other twice-born castes who in spite of certain possible escapes suffered the stigma of impurity, were forbidden to remarry and were forced to live miserable lives in the homes of their in-laws. In particular the case of child widows was particularly difficult and was an issue eventually taken up by the nationalist movement (Mies, 1980: 49). As a result of this Brahmin widows comprised a large proportion of those migrating.

The remaining number usually comprised women who had left their husbands or been deserted by them for whom prostitution or destitution was the only remaining alternative in India. A smaller number included unmarried women who were pregnant or already practising prostitutes seeking a new life. Thus one can observe that the decision to emigrate in itself was a sign of the independent character of these women and the decision to emigrate alone and as individuals was a sign of their strength. According to David Dodd writing on British Guiana:

> ... many of the women who did come to the colony tended to be already more independent and self-seeking than those whose fathers, husbands and brothers decided that they should not go ... (Dodd, 1976: 9).

This contrasts greatly with the commonly-held image of the docile, meek Indian women arriving five steps behind her husband. Within India itself, its utility for certain categories of women was recognised by the colonial authorities.

In 1882-83, Tinker (1974: 266-7) noted that two reports were forwarded to the Indian government on this question. The first was by Sir Alfred Lyall Lieutenant-General of the North-Western provinces and Major D J Pitcher. They believed that:

> A very large proportion of the women who now emigrate are persons who have been turned out of the home, or have lost their friends by famine or pestilence; some were Hindu girls who have been forced to become Muslims in some inter-communal quarrel; many were widows; therefore women might benefit more by emgiration.

The other report was written by G A Grierson, a scholar of ethnographic and linguistic studies. It was forwarded by the secretary of the Bengal government to the Indian government in March, 1883.

Grierson also saw emigration as a necessary outlet for women in trouble. He asserted that the best sort of female recruit was drawn from those abandoned and unfaithful wives who could make a fresh start by getting out of the home environment (the only alternative for them was prostitution). Many magistrates refused to register an absconding wife; but said Grierson, 'women have rights too, and if an alienated wife was determined to go, no officer has the right to stop her".

According to Tinker "... It was a radical suggestion within the conservatism of Indian society and Anglo-Indian officialdom" (Tinker, 1974: 267-8). These two reports however did have some effect and once more the ratio of 2:5 was advanced. It is interesting to note that the social reality of life in India did not always conform to the ideology of 'conservatism' which was and is often propounded. The fact is that many women were 'deserted' or abandoned or had children outside of marriage. It is possible that the Government of India saw this as an opportunity to rid itself of some of the aberrations.

Reports vary as to the actual nature of the recruitment process. It is possible that differences can be explained chronologically. But it is also possible that in any one period, different methods were used, depending on the character of the recruiters.

The main question usually discussed in relation to this is—to what extent did people come of their own free will and to what extent were they forced to come. If one attempted to use the two approaches mentioned above, it is possible to suggest that at all times both were used, but differences as to the degree of one over the other can be analysed chronologically. For example, Tinker points out that a clear correlation can be seen between increases in migration and years of economic difficulty. For example he states:

> Thus in 1860-1, there was famine in the North-Western Provinces and a high departure rate from Calcutta (17,899 in 1860 and 22,600 in 1861). The year 1865-6 produced famine in Orissa and Bihar and a high emigration (19,963) while from 1873-5 there was acute scarcity in Bihar, Oudh and the North-Western Provinces ... (Tinker, 1974: 119).

While one can accept this general rule with regard to migration in general, the recruitment of women presented special problems. After the initial period when no specific sex proportions were laid down, the effects in the colonies were such as to make the recruitment of women an issue throughout the period of immigration. The independence of character of the initial female recruits left much to be desired as far as the planters and Indian men were concerned. To a large extent both groups desired women who could facilitate a certain degree of 'stability' in estate life, who could accpet a subordinate position and also work diligently in the fields. The following letter gives an example of this feeling:

> Trinidad,
> April 26, 1851.
>
> No 40,
> My Lord,
>
> I have the Honour to report the arrival of the "Eliza Stewart" with 173 Coolies on board.

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The number is small but the appearances and condition of the people are highly commended.

There is but a small proportion of women (eleven) which is to be regretted.

I am happy to say that a great number of Coolies who have completed their five years have declared themselves ready to accept the bounty.

If a cargo entirely of women could be sent over, I have little doubt that the greater number of the Coolies would remain here permanently.

I have the honour to be
My Lord
Your Lorship's Most
Obedient Humble Servant
Harris

The Right Honourable
Earl Grey
(CO 295/173)

The above letter illustrates clearly the planters need for some women as a means of keeping experienced workers in the country and available for work on the estates. Later in the century, the need for women became increasingly apparent but the old contradiction of the 'kind of women' continued to rear its head. In 1891, the sex ratio for the entire Indian population in Trinidad was 637 women to 1,000 men. (Clarke, 1891). In 1893 therefore, surgeon-major D W D Comins recommended the reduction in the period of indentureship for women from five to two years as a means of encouraging the migration of women (Comins, 1893: 49). In making this recommendation which was eventually accepted with a reduction to three years, Comins was pandering to the prevailing ideology within the Indian and Trinidad ruling classes which accepted the definition of women as 'housewives' and of seclusion as a sign of high caste status. The hypocrisy of this ideology however and the way in which it was/is used to mask women's productive contribution to the society and economy was clear in his addendum to this recommendation. He assured the planters that after the two-year indentureship period, he was certain that the husbands would not allow their wives to 'sit idle' if plentiful and good wages were available (Comins, 1893: 49). By the early twentieth century the recruitment of women became a much more serious issue as complaints were being made to the Government of India and increasing opposition was emerging against the 'slavery of Indian' men and the prostitution of Indian women'. It is interesting to note the way in which the exploitation of women was characterised, not in terms of their work as labourers but in terms of their morals. In other words, while the realisation of men's life potential was seen in terms of their labour and work, for women who were also workers, it was seen in terms of the necessity to control their sexuality. In this period, therefore in an effort to:

(i) ensure a self-reproducing labouring population in the face of the threats to end emigration;
(ii) supply an adequate number of women to stabilise the male population; and
(iii) to assuage complaints that women were placed beyond the control of their menfolk and leading an independent life, family migration was reluctantly supported.

In response to the demands for an increased number of women migrants, in the early twentieth century new rates of commission were established which offered a much higher commission for women than for men. At the same time however attempts were made to place more stringent controls on the type of women recruited.

In 1915 for example, C W Doorly, emigration agent in Madras informed the Under Secretary of State for the colonies of recent changes in rates of commission for recruitment. The new rates were:

Original Rates	Men	Women
1-10	35	45
11-20	45	60
21 and over	55	70
Alterations beginning October		
1-10	35	55
11-20	40	70
21 and over	45	80

He gave as reasons for these alterations the difficulties he was having in filling the required quota of women. He says:

> ... the continued scramble for women does undoubtedly lead recruiters to take a certain number of persons who are not desirable emigrants. As an instance I may mention by occasion of my last shipment to British Guiana. I was very short of women and yet in a week prior to the embarkation I had to reject nearly 20 women as undesirables (CO 571/3, 54685; p 3).

In 1916 and 1917, the period immediately preceding the abolition of the system of indentureship, great debate ensued within colonial circles in India on this question. In August 1916 for example, W M Hailey, Chief Commissioner of Delhi argued that: "... if a high proportion is insisted on, the females will always tend to comprise a proportion of prostitutes and women who were seeking to escape their husbands or their families ..." (CO 571/5, 27270). This view was shared by many others who after years of experience distrusted the establishment of proportions as a means of dealing with this 'problem'. In December 1916, in a pamphlet "Labour in Fiji" Andrews advised that a bonus be given to men migrating to encourage 'the taking out of female children by married persons' rather than recruit a number of 'unattached women'. On this same issue, E L Hammond, Secretary to the Government of India, argued that married emigrants should be encouraged to take their families with them to the colonies; that greater facilities be given to unmarried immigrants to find wives among the free population and married immigrants whose families have been left behind be given part of the costs of bringing them over (CO 571/5, 27270). In December that same year, Sir Wilmot G Golvin, chief commissioner of Ajmer-Merwara also rejected the fixing of sex proportions and instead recommended the giving of 'large bonuses in the case of Fiji and Trinidad for married couples taking out daughters of age between 10 and 14 and bonuses of less amount in similar cases emigrating to Jamaica and British Guiana' (CO 571/5, 27270).

In 1917 the debate continued but the emigration agent took on a more defensive posture. Doorly, emigration agent for Madras argued that:

> It must be borne in mind that genuine field labourers such as the planters require can be obtained only from the lowest castes, i e, from the non-moral class of the population. A more moral type is found higher in the social scale, but such women would be useless in the fields...

He continued:

> In my view the class of women recruited during the recent years is not an undesirable class for the men who accompany them and who are drawn from the same social stratum as themselves ... (CO 571/5, 27680).

To prove that family migration was accepted out of the planters necessity, Doorly in another confidential letter noted that while he had always favoured family recruitment, the colonies always objected to receiving dependents. "Now", however, he admitted, "we must look to families for our chief source of supply and in order to get them we must take a fair number of old and broken down ... dependents ..." (CO 571/5, 27681).

The above represents only a sample of the discussion which took place. Unfortunately it was too late to have much effect on the existing system. Many of these recommendations were incorporated into new proposals made initially in 1917 for the replacement of the system of indentureship by one of assisted migration. By 1917, however in response to the great public outcry in India the system was abolished.

A great deal more can be said on this question of recruitment, however what is apparent is that for a number of reasons, the majority of Indian women who came to the Caribbean were not the docile, subordinate wives which the traditional understanding of Caribbean history would have us believe. In spite of the many cases of kidnapping, enticement and false information (Tinker, 1974: 124), it is clear that a large proportion of women did make a conscious decision to seek a new life elsewhere. Unfortunately their intentions did not fit in with those of the planters or the Indian men in the colonies and already at this recruitment stage attempts were made to control the situation.

WOMEN'S LABOUR IN PLANTATION AND PEASANT PRODUCTION

Much less consistent data exists on the exact nature and character of estate work than

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exists on recruiting. There is general agreement that it was hard and inhuman but exact details of changes over the entire period for example are hard to come by. Most of the data which is easily available is relevant to the latter period when changes had been made after various commissions had reported, and not for the earlier period. Most of the information on estate labour is derived from these reports:

1 Surgeon-Major D W Comins, "Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad", 1893.
2 "Report on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates (Part I)" and "Minutes on Evidence and Papers laid before the Committee (Part II), 1910". (The Sanderson Report).
3 James Mac Neil and Chimman Lal, "Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in the Four British Colonies and Surinam (Part I) Trinidad and British Guiana, 1915".

Unfortunately, many historians writing on indenture have ignored this fact and taken this information of the latter eighteen (18) years of indentureship to be relevant for the entire seventy-two year period.

Plantation work in general meant work on primarily sugar estates but it also included work on cocoa and coconut estates. As would be expected, tasks differed accordingly. On sugar estates the degree of work varied with the season of the year. During the production season, work continued up to 14 to 15 hours a day and all indentured labourers—men, women and children were involved. Most work was allocated according to 'tasks' a kind of piece-rate system and the 1875 Ordinance specified five tasks a week to an immigrant. The main occupations on the estates as outlined by Comins for Woodbrook Estate were:

Drivers	35c per day
Carters	30-35c
Watchmen	30c
Weeding	25c
Stock-keepers	25c
Planting cane	25c per 450 holes
Supplying	25c per day
Banking chiefly by contract and free coolies	$ 6½ per acre
Forking, flat	40c for 6,000 to 7,000 ft
Forking, burying trash	40c for 4,000 ft
Forking, furrows	40c
Manuring (pen)	10c per 100 holes
Manuring (foreign), (small children)	10c to 15c per day
Cane cutters, chiefly free	25c for 20 to 55 rods
Cane carriers at mill	25c to 30c per day
Mill workers	25c to 30c per day
Fuel carriers	30c per day
Stockers	35c per day

(Comins Diary, 1893:3)

While in general wages were low for all indentured labourers, for women it was even lower. Comins noted that 'women, boys and weakly men are given *permanently* some sum less than 25 cents per task because *it has been decided* that they are unable to do a full task ...' (my emphasis) (Comins, 1893.) McNeill and Lal found that women normally earned 'about one-half to two-thirds the wages of male immigrants' (M & L, 1910: 20). Even in periods of high season when for example at Palmiste Estate in 1891, men got 50, 60 and 70 cents for a task, all women received a flat rate of 25 cents a day on task-work (Comins, 1893: 36). In addition to the payment of low wages, Comins found on some estates the practice of carrying forward 'an ever accumulating debt' for rations supplied to women during pregnancy. This resulted in them earning no wages for months or years (Comins, 1893: 15).

Some writers found however, that in spite of wage differentials some women could earn a gross salary almost equal to that of the men by doing more tasks and/or working extra hours. For example, McNeill and Lal found that:

> The best woman workers earn almost as much as the average man ... (M and L, 1915: 20-21).

Unfortunately the wage differentials in most instances served their traditional purpose of making the Indian woman dependent on men in spite of the fact that they were full-time workers. This practice although universally in existence was contrary to the terms of agreement made in India which stated that adults over 10 years should be paid as adults with no differentiation made for women, weakly men, boys or girls (Comins, 1893: 9).

The appendix to the Sanderson Report gives a breakdown of wages on various estates. Ross Shiels (1969: 113) noted that the statistics given in this report are often incomplete and inadequate, but used for an illustrative rather than in an accurate analytical sense they can be helpful in the absence of comparable data (Table 1)

A further factor differentiating female indentured labour especially during the latter period, was the length of indenture. As the pressure to encourage large numbers of 'respectable' females grew a number of actions were taken to facilitate this. In the mid-1890s therefore (Tikasingh, 1973: 112) the indentureship period for women was limited to three years. While a few 'well-off' Indian men could afford to keep their wives at home, the large majority of women did continue to work on the estates. This change was used as a bait to encourage men to migrate with their wives, during this latter period when family migration was encouraged. As we have seen in 1892 when Comins recommended the reduction of the indentureship period of women to two years. He assured the planters though that after two years of indentureship he was certain that the husbands would not allow their wives to 'sit idle' if plentiful and good wages were available (Comins 1893: 49). In the light of this recommendation, however one is at pains to reconcile this with the observation noted in his 'Diary' that 'The women are so well off that many of them do not work' (Comins Diary, 1893: 4). Another source however states that in 1891 when the sex distribution for the entire Indian population was 637 females to 1,000 males, there were 14,131 female agricultural labourers to 26,771 male (Clarke, 1891). This view is also supported by Shiels who stated that not only did the majority of women continue working after the three year period but worked harder during the next two (Shiels, 19: 162).

During the late nineteenth century, the Trinidad sugar industry faced one of its perennial economic crises. Among the measures taken to control the falling rate of profit, was the introduction of cane farming in conjunction with the reduction of wages. The system of cane farming, like most peasant proprietorship, was based on the existence of at least the basic nuclear family where the wife would work 'at home' in cane production and subsistence food production but could provide additional labour on estates when needed during harvests. Men on the other hand continued to work on the estates but could contribute to their private production during their spare time. This system served a number of purposes for the planter by providing a ready reservoir of cheap labour; providing an alternative

Table 1: Brechin Castle Estate April 1, 1907-March 31, 1908

Number of Immigrants	Average Actual Days Worked Per Head	Total Wages Earned ($)	Average Wage Per Day Per Head
Average Wage Per Day Actually Worked			
Males 461	195.44	22,830.44	25.33cts
Females 181	94.02	3,512.85	20.64cts
Average Wage Earned Per Legal Working Day			
Males 461	280	22,830.44	17.68cts
Females 181		3,512.85	6.93cts
Average Wage Earned Per Day at 365 Days Per Annum			
Males 461	365	22,830.44	13.56cts
Females 181		3,512.85	5.31cts

Source: Sanderson Report: 1910, 139-40.

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source of sugar cane, thus removing dependence on wage-labour (in the light of numerous strikes during this period); and subsidising wages by allowing workers to produce a certain proportion of their own food (Johnson, 1971).

Between 1869 and 1879 therefore 19,055 acres of Crown Lands were given to Indian immigrants in lieu of return passage and between 1885 and 1900 a further 37,256 acres of Crown Lands was sold to Indians. (Brereton, 1979: 179-181). This system allowed many men to fulfil their desire for a 'secluded' wife who did not labour for a wage on the estates. This withdrawal of women from plantations to peasant production also fitted in with the overall colonial policy of defining all women first as 'housewives' as this was the period when Indian men were being supported by the Colonial State in the reconstruction of their family system in the colonies. Thus the yardstick eventually used to determine whether suitable conditions existed on an estate was in terms of men's labour. Quoting from the Sanderson Report:

> It is provided in the Ordinance (?/70) that when by the returns of the Protector is that 30 per cent of the adult males indentured to any estate during the year earn a wage averaging less than 6d per diem for the whole 365 days, it shall not be lawful for the Protector to entertain any applications for fresh immigrants on behalf of that plantation ... (Sanderson, 1910: 66 my emphasis).

This is important to note for in spite of relatively sizeable working female populations on the estate their wages were of no consequence in determining conditions on the estate. This criteria was uncritically accepted by the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) in their fight against immigration.

In concluding this section, the point to be noted is that with few exceptions, Indian women like their African counterparts before them, came to the Caribbean as workers and not as dependents or as the planters wished to portray them 'for other purposes'. During the initial stages however, the planters were unwilling to cover the costs of the local reproduction of their labour force which large numbers of female workers apparently implied. At later periods however, the ideology of woman as 'unproductive labour' facilitated their exploitation as cheap labour at one half the costs of male labour; through their availability as part-time labour during harvests and eventually as a means of reproducing the cheap labour force when indentured migration was eventually abolished.

Social and Domestic Organisation

As alluded to earlier, one of the main factors affecting the position of Indian women in Trinidad and Tobago was the low proportion of women in relation to men. That this was considered a major problem by the state, the church and the men is apparent from the records. Table 2 gives an idea of the sex ratio between 1871 and 1911.

The records as would be expected, express the views of the dominant groups. Nowhere except in quotations[2] is the voice of women heard. Even the oppressed Indian men through their illustrious letter writer Mohammed Orfy were able to have their views made public. The way in which the women perceived their situation therefore, has to be judged from their actions and analysed with the backdrop of colonial and religious moralism removed. As to how women were perceived by these various institutions the following quotations give us some idea:

The Presbyterian Church: "There were no zenanas[3] in Trinidad. Our women immigrants are not recruited from the class that in India are shut up in zenanas. In Trinidad they find themselves of added importance through the small proportion of their sex. They have great freedom of intercourse and much evil example around them. Sad to say they often show themselves to be as degraded as they are ignorant. On the other hand many are beautiful and lovable, faithful to their husbands and devoted to their children. This however is by no means the rule" (Morton, 1916: 185).

"SEM (Sarah Morton)—The loose notions and prevailing practices in respect of marriage here are quite shocking to the newcomer. I said to an East Indian woman whom I knew to be a widow of a Brahman, "You have no relations in Trinidad, I believe"; "No Madame", she replied, "only myself and two children; when the last (Immigrant) ship came in I took a *papa*. I will keep him so long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once; that's the right way is it not?" This will be to some a new view on woman's rights" (Morton, 1916: 342).

The Colonial State: "The proportion of Indian females in the colony is so much smaller than that of males that it is impossible for every man to have a wife of his own even if he wished to have one. This evil is also increased by the fact that in some cases Indians, such as shopkeepers, landholders et cetera who are in comfortable circumstances have more than one wife and though they may be married to one, keep another as a concubine ..." (Note by the Protector of Immigrants to Surgeon-Major D W Comins, 1893: 30-31).

"Predisposition to immorality among women emigrants. The Government of India in paragraph 7 of its despatch observes that it is inevitable under existing conditions that among female immigrants there should be 'a large proportion of persons who are prostitutes, social outcasts or who have been unhappy in their domestic relations'. These persons besides being prone to immoral conduct themselves must by their example exercise a corrupting influence on the respectable women who are compelled under present conditions to live in barracks with them ..." (A note on the System of Assisted Emigration to the Colonies, 1916 CO 571/5: 27270).

The Men: "... another most disgraceful concern, which is most prevalent and a perforating plague, is the high percentage of immoral lives led by the female section of our community. They are enticed, seduced and frightened into becoming concubines, and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs.

... they have absolutely no knowledge whatever of the value of being in virginhood and become, most shameless and a perfect menace to the Indian gentry" (Mohammed Orfy, on behalf of destitute Indian men of Trinidad, CO 571/4 WI 22518 (1916).

"Is it permissible for a male member of the Christian faith to keep a Hindoo or Muslim female as his paramour or concubine? Is this not an act of sacrilege and a disgraceful scandal according to the Christian faith to entice and encourage Indian females to lead immoral lives? It is a burning shame, and a grave cancer of a disgraceful and scandalous nature, which is predominantly amongst the females of India. This tends to prove most detrimental to the welfare in general to our community. Is it plausible that as those females desire to live as paramours with males of a different race to hers. Fathers nor husbands, nor brothers, who are their lawful protectors have power over them and are not in the least heard when such matters are brought before the authorities; all the consolation these lawful protectors derive are, so long as the girls are pleased, no one has power to interfere" (Petition of Indentured Labourers in Trinidad, 1916).

What is evident from these quotations is that many Indian women probably for the first time in their lives, got an opportunity to exercise a degree of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before. As pointed out in an earlier section, the majority of women who did migrate were already independent women who were seeking a new life. These were hardly the type of women who would fall back into the oppressive life patterns from which they had fled. This situation in rela-

Table 2: Sex Ratios (Males Per 1,000 Females) among Estimated Net Immigrants to Trinidad, 1871-1911

Period	Sex Ratio	
	East Indian	Other
1871-1881	2,143	1,101
1881-1891	2,117	1,246
1891-1901	1,748	1,147
1901-1911	3,037	744

Source: Jack Harewood, "The Population of Trinidad and Tobago", CICRED Series, 1975.

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tion to the women differed greatly from the desires of the men. To them migration was an attempt at improving their economic and if possible their caste status. The practice known as 'sanskritisation' common in other areas of high Hindu migration was not absent here. Maria Mies in her book "Indian Women and Patriarchy" shows clearly the increased restrictions on the social, sexual and economic freedom of women the higher up the caste and/or economic ladder. In fact a restricted wife was/is a sign of high caste. That this was/is the position, at least of Mohammed Orfy (although apparently Muslim) is clear by the use of the words 'Indian gentry' to describe the indentured or ex-indentured labourers in Trinidad and Tobago. These words obviously express an aspiration on their part to re-create themselves as an Indian gentry in this country.

Many writers on this subject have chosen either to ignore the situation of Indian women in this period or to accept the judgments based on colonial and religious moralism. Tyran Ramnarine for example, writing on British Guiana, noted that "This Ordinance (16 of 1984) apparently brought no improvement in *the class of women* recruited . . ." (Ramnarine, 1980: 6, my emphasis). While J A Weller noted that the "paucity of women created various sorts of *immorality* in the depot, on shipboard and in the colony" (Weller, 1968: 3). These authors accepted uncritically these definitions of *morality* as well as the class prejudices of the colonial authorities. It is however in relations to the registration of non-Christian marriages that most of the discussion has taken place.

In discussing the question of marriages, one first has to come to terms with the phenomenon of 'depot marriages'. According to Tinker, in spite of the strict segregation of the sexes, relationships did develop between them. It is interesting that while still on the Indian sub-continent, people were willing to disregard caste, religion and custom, and get married. One can suggest that among the poorer agricultural classes/castes from which the majority of the immigrants were drawn, restrictions on marriages were less strict. Or the explanations could be seen on a more subjective level as Tinker does:

> The advantage to the man is obvious: he had someone to cook for him and to attend to him in a society where females were very scarce. But there was also advantage to the woman in securing a protector in a savage new environment, and in establishing some sort of recognised position in a social order, which held no place for an adult single woman (Tinker, 1974: 140).

These marriages were however the exception rather than the rule for Ramnarine notes that of the 4,000 adults who travelled to Guiana in 1892, 421 marriages took place on board ships (Ramnarine, 1980: 3-4).

These marriages, in spite of their being legally registered as such, on the arrival of the ships had no claim on stability. Indian women apparently preferred to leave their 'depot husbands' for men who had lived longer on the colony and could offer them a better standard of living. So great was this problem that by 1882 the immigration authorities in Trinidad and Tobago were considering the possibility of registering these marriages 12 months after the immigrants' arrival in the country.

In relation to the legal registration of marriages which had taken place in the country other problems arose. These arose from the fact that the majority of Indians saw no necessity to register their marriages at a government's registration office when an elaborate wedding ritual had already taken place. In India itself there was no need for registration. The discussion on this subject has occurred extensively for example—Jha, 1975, Weller, 1968, Ramesar 1973 et cetera. Much of the discussion (not necessarily in these texts) has centred around the obvious failure of the Colonial government to automatically accept Hindu and Muslim marriages as being legally constituted. Most writers quite rightly condemned this as the means through which thousands of Indians were robbed of their land and other inheritances by being declared 'illegitimate' as well as being debarred from attending secondary schools. With the exception of J C Jha, few have sought to explain why, in spite of the immeasurable economic and social loss incurred by this practice the majority of the Indian population up until the 1930s refused the relatively easy solution of registering their marriages. This is not to exonerate the colonial authorities but to attempt to extricate the underlying reasons for this situation. The following may serve as an explanation:

In 1893, Sarah Morton noted a case where a father had sold his daughter nine times for money and goods and on each occasion had refused to deliver her (Morton, 1916: 342). Similar instances were noted by other authors. Tinker for example noted that this was common in all receiving countries. He states:

> Because females remained in scarce supply the parents reversed the usual Indian custom of providing a dowry for their daughter when she became a bride and often instead demanded a bride-price . . . (Tinker, 1974: 203).

Among the labouring classes (and tribals) from among whom the majority of migrants came, *bride-price* and not dowry was the norm. In their new situation however, girl children did gain an increased value due to the shortage of women. Weller noted that "female infant children were considered a valuable addition to a family and were reared with great care" (Weller, 1968: 71-2). This improvement in the 'marketability' of girl children by their fathers did not really represent an improvement in their position *per se.* Rather child marriage from as early as ten years became the rule.

The advantages of this new situation however, was that women could now on their own accord leave one husband for another or have parallel relationships with more than one man. Sarah Morton noted with dismay many such cases, including one where the mother left her child with its father when leaving to go to live with another man. Of course reports vary as to the degree to which women left one man for another or were enticed or seduced away from one man to another. Proponents of the former position viewed this action as immoral while proponents of the latter, viewed the woman as hapless childlike victims of adult, worldly men. In either case the independent intelligence or decision-making capacity of the woman was not considered. The independence of Indian women was seen therefore as a source of shame by Indian men. In addition the inability to have one woman upon which he could exercise all the power and authority denied in a colonial situation only added fuel to the fire.

It was for this reason therefore that around 1880, according to Weller, 274 Indian men in the presence of the Presbyterian Reverends Morton, Grant and Christie petitioned the government for the right to prosecute an unfaithful spouse and their partner in guilt in the magistrates court, the complaint court or the supreme court with damages of £ 10, £ 25 or more or imprisonment. The wife was to be imprisoned if she did not return to her husband. In other words, the men sought less to punish the women than to possess and control them. These recommendations were accepted and promulgated as the Indian Immigrant Marriage and Divorce Ordinance, No 6 of 1861 which was later incorporated into the Immigration Ordinance of 1889 (Weller, 1968: 69).

The law therefore was one means through which the Indian men sought to re-establish control over their women in a situation which denied them any other source of power. In addition to this, another weapon, more easily available to them was used. A weapon used by men internationally to maintain control over women—violence and in the specific case of the sugar plantation, the cutlass (machete). One Guyanese clergyman, Archdeacon Josa, sympathetically put it this way:

> It is any wonder then that the Hindu who, according to his own religion, is so far superior to the woman, when he finds that his wife has proved unfaithful takes his 'cutlass' and makes mincemeat of such a thing? He considers woman a mere chattel, we feel for the man. We could almost wish that capital punishment were abolished for such as he—until he learns to understand that woman is his equal—his helpmate—his wife (In Dodd, 1976: 11).

The murders of women therefore, was a phenomenon common to all areas of high Indian migration. Trinidad and Tobago was by no means at the head of the list. Accor-

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ding to Donald Wood between 1859 and 1863, twenty-seven murders were committed by Indians and in each case it involved the wife or mistress of the murderer (Wood, 1968: 154). While in British Guiana between 1885 and 1890, 40 murders of women occurred of which 33 were of wives killed by husbands or reputed husbands (Ramnarine, 1980: 2). But not only did the men kill women but to a lesser extent they killed other men and/or committed suicide. To some extent these actions had the effect of stereotyping Indian men, but more importantly for the purposes of this paper, this violence had the much more lasting and important effect of placing Indian women once more firmly under the control of the men through the reconstruction *albeit* in a different setting of the Indian patriarchal family system.

That violence was necessary for such a reconstruction is apparent. The continuous letters of Mohammed Orfy to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Indian government and numerous other authorities bear testimony of this. In addition, the inclusion of clauses in the immigration ordinances prohibiting the 'harbouring of an immigrant's wife', and the continuous court cases resulting from breaches against this law, are all evidence of the struggle which ensued. The Indian woman did not 'naturally' give up her new found freedom as some writers would have us believe, but was forced to do so and kept in that position through similar means. This is not to deny however that the equalisation in the proportion between the sexes over a period of time, would have had the effect of changing the relationship between the sexes.

The dissolution of caste endogamy was another important effect of this situation. Although the majority of migrants came from the lower agricultural castes, it is known that members of higher castes including Brahmins and Kshatriyas (mainly Rajputs) also came (see Weller, 1968: Appendix Table 7). Indeed Donald Wood goes so far as to suggest that between 1845 and 1870, Brahmins comprised the second largest caste represented among the immigrants (Wood, 1968: 143). Wood notes that some Brahmins falsified their castes in order to be allowed to migrate as they could be rejected by the officials as unsuitable labourers (p 143). In addition it was known that a large number of the widows who migrated were from the higer castes where widow remarriage was totally forbidden. On a whole most of the five main factors governing Hindu marriage noted earlier in the paper—endogamy, exogamy, prohibited kin, virgin marriage and hypergamy were broken down virtually irreparably. In the case of the last mentioned, hypergamy, Brahmin widows formed relationships and/or married men of lower castes and the opposite occurred to a much greater degree. Comins noted in 1893:

> Thousands of men have been for years past living with women who are not the same caste with the result that their children would in India be looked on as outcasts; I refer here of course to the Hindu part of the population ... (Comins, 1893: 31).

Attempts to re-establish strict caste endogamy had much less success as it was obviously in the interests of only a minority in the Hindu community.

Similarly among Muslims (as among Hindus) the practice of polygamy was virtually impossible. Comins noted in 1890 that among 282 marriages declared on arrival, there were six cases in which tow women were entered as the wives of one man (Comins, 1893: 30). He however did not state the religions involved. Polygamy is in theory permissible for all Hindus but in practice, rare. In such a situation as existed in the migrant colonies, more often than not the opposite situation of consecutive relationships occurred.

EDUCATION

It was through the Church that the Christian community was able to establish its greatest influence over Indian women. This was through the Canadian Presbyterian Indian Education System. This mission began work in 1862 under Reverend John and Sarah Morton and they worked specifically among the Indians. The views of Sarah E Morton on Indian womanhood have already been expressed in this paper; her efforts to change it call for an analysis of the Mission's education programme.

By 1890, Comins noted that there were 49 East Indian schools with 1,958 boys and 926 girls, with an average attendance of 1,876 pupils (Comins, 1893: 33). He also noted that while education of boys comprised industrial training and land cultivation those for girls comprised 'Needlework and cutting-out underclothing ...' (Ibid, 35). This finding did not diverge greatly from the stated aims of Mission Education as outlined by John Morton— '... to teach the largest number the three R's, a knowledge of the way of life and duty, and to the girls sewing' (Morton, 1916: 225). Comins found that very few children of indentured labourers attended school. One can only suggest that they are too busy working on the estates. On visiting Tunapuna Presbyterian School on June 11, 1891 he found 12 Indian girls present and was informed by the mistress, Miss Blackadder, that the girls were "merely sent here to be taken care of to save their mothers trouble, and not for any educational advantages they might receive" (Comins Diary, 1893: 15).

Post-primary education of girls usually meant an extension of house-wife-oriented training. In 1890 a 'Home for Christian girls' was opened with the express purpose of developing girls who 'would naturally be qualified above all others to be *wives* of our helpers' (Morton, 1916: 347, my emphasis) or Biblewomen for the Church.

This imposition of Western European middle-class housewife ideology taught in all 'Indian schools': when combined with a strengthened Indian patriarchal family system re-established partly through violence, served to create the prototype of the submissive, subordinate, docile Indian housewife which many would have us believe followed her husband from India. For a fact, the women of the agricultural castes were not then or now housewives. The prerogative of a zenana or secluded housewife was not that of the majority of Indian men who migrated during the indentureship period. But it was their aspiration and in this they were supported by the Colonial Church and State.

ABOLITION

The position of women in the colonies of migration was one of the main 'whipping horses' of the Indian nationalists against migration. It reflected the colonials acceptance of Victorian (colonial) ideology on immorality and 'women's place'. As noted before the campaign was seen as one against 'the slavery of men and the prostitution of women'. The reports on the 'immorality' of women in the colonies were seen as inflicting a blot on the image of India which should be removed. Because of this emphasis on women, the campaign made much use of women's organisations associated with the nationalist movement. Meetings held throughout India, mainly among middle and upper class 'ladies' passed resolutions calling for the abolition of this system. Telegrams of protest were received for example from: the superintendent of the Widows Home in Cawnpore; the Ladies Branch of the Home Rule League and from public meetings of 'ladies' of Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Godhra, Surat and Amraoti, dated January-February, 1917 (CO 571/5, 27270). Fiji appeared to be the focal point of discussion, but it is possible that 'Fiji' became a generic concept for all colonial territories of migration. At a public meeting of women of Ahmedabad, the women resolved to approach the wife of the Governor-General of India, Lady Chelmsford to intercede with her husband on this matter. In this the governor's wife was appealed to as a woman who could identify with conditions of women overseas. The resolution read in part as follows:

> ... the system of indentured labour under which Indian women are taken to Fiji compel them to lead a bad and immoral life and subjects them to indignities and outrages. Children born in such immoral conditions are brought up in degradation. This shocking state of things requires that the system of indentured labour should be stopped immediately. We humbly beseech Her Excellency to hear this cry of defenceless women and children of India and to champion their causes. We are confident that as a woman and a mother Her Excellency will appreciate the deep feelings of Indian women on this subject, and we pray that Her Excellency may be graciously pleased to lay before His Excellency the Viceroy this supplication of

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women and children of India . . . (CO 571/5, 27270).

So great was public agitation in India that even the proposal for the system of assisted emigration had to be shelved. In the latter years, attempts were made to address these complaints, such as the implementation of the law giving the governor the discretionary power to transfer estate employees (presumably Europeans) found guilty of 'immorality with an East Indian woman'. This and other actions aimed at protecting the 'chastity of Indian women' by the government however came too late for the abolitionists and as is well known virtually all migration of labourers from India was abolished in 1917.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore in a preliminary fashion the experience of Indian women within the indentureship system in Trinidad and Tobago. In so doing it has sought to return the Indian women their proud history of independence and struggle for some degree of autonomy over their lives. This history of struggle from the initial decision to migrate to the rigours of the plantation is one which unites them with oppressed and exploited women the world over who when necessary and where possible have resisted their oppression and fought for their autonomy as women and as members of exploited classes. This paper also sought to show how through the prior definition (although not usually the reality) of virtually all women in capitalist society as dependent housewives, large areas of the work of Indian women in cane-farming and peasant production have gone unrecognised and of course unpaid.

Today as women in Trinidad and Tobago like women throughout the world seek to define a new agenda for the future, the appropriation of our history is a necessary prerequisite. It is hoped that this study can bring forward new insights which will be helpful in providing a more complete analysis of the experience of Indian indentureship in the Caribbean.

Notes

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1 For more on this see Maria Mias, 'The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour', ISS Occasional Paper, The Hague, 1981.

2 Interviews with ex-indentured labourers have been carried out by Peggy Ramesar. It is hoped that these could be published as documents in the near future.

3 *Zenanas*: 'part of house for the seclusion of woman of high caste families in India and Iran (Pocket Oxford Dictionary, 1982; 1054).

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Birla Yamaha

BIRLA YAMAHA is entering the capital market on November 20 with a public issue of 27.20 lakh equity shares of Rs 10 each at par to raise a part of the finance required for its Rs 25 crore project to manufacture 75,000 portable generators and 25,000 multipurpose engines per annum. Out of the issue, 1.36 lakh shares are reserved for allotment on a preferential basis to the company's employees and 54,000 shares for business associates. The project has been promoted by Ashok V Birla and Yamaha of Japan. Both of them will have 26 per cent stake each in the company's equity capital. Confident of the investors' faith in this company, the issue of equity capital has not been underwritten. The company's shares will be listed on stock exchanges at Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Madras, Ludhiana and Kanpur. Though Yamaha has provided technical know-how in the past to some other ventures in India, this is the first time that the Japanese firm is participating financially in a project in India. Birla Yamaha will be the first company in India to manufacture portable, fuel-efficient generators with outputs ranging from 0.5 to 4.0 KVA, suitable for homes, offices, shops, banks, hospitals, clinics, petrol pumps, etc. The introduction of multipurpose engines would be a boon to the agricultural sector. They have other applications too. Being light weight and portable, in terms of technology they are a generation ahead of those available in the Indian market. The company does not foresee any difficulty in marketing its products. The issue is being managed by the Merchant Banking Division of J M Financial and Investment Consultancy Services and Merchant Banking Bureau of Canara Bank. Credit Capital Finance Corporation is advisor to the issue.

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