



Women, family institution & indenture

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Abstract

Introduction: These days there is a growing concern of women empowerment and education for girl child, we would try to analyse the situation of women under indentures especially in Trinidad and Tobago. First section tries to analyse the identification of women in the indenture. In indentures women were primarily identified with their physical and capital-utilitarian perspectives and attributes.

Conclusion: so far we envisaged the state of women (specifically Indian women) from the stratum of social identification of women in indenture to its role in family institution and marriages and also to the educational aspects of the girl child.

Keywords: empowerment, capital-utilitarian, endogenously

Introduction

These days there is a growing concern of women empowerment and education for girl child, we would try to analyse the situation of women under indentures especially in Trinidad and Tobago. First section tries to analyse the identification of women in the indenture. In indentures women were primarily identified with their physical and capital-utilitarian perspectives and attributes. They were more exploited than men and whenever they were paid at all, were paid the lowest of the workers in the indenture. Women were seen as a source of labour force on one hand and as the reproducers of labour power on the other. And even within households they were treated as dependent housewives and defining them in this way (i.e. Dependent housewives) ignores their painstaking manoeuvre i.e. the vast productive home activities and the reproductive activities in the household. And not just this, they were allured, seduced, attacked, frightened and forced by various men (including planters and males of a quite different race) to make immoral physical relations and stay as concubines and paramours. Now it is questionable that who all were responsible for this, was it the men under indenture or the planters and the state and the society in place which let that all happen, or the endogenous environment which made all this a needful equilibrium to happen? Was this all sufficient for the fulfillment of the rational capitalist setup? Was this really the wisdom or the so called 'beauty' {i.e. Efficiency argument} [irony] of the rational capitalist thought then?

The second section tries to understand the social design of the family institution in indenture. Instead of seemingly quite successful modification and demeaning of the role of women by the dint of capitalist treatments accommodated with the desires of males, Indian women did not easily and wishfully surrender to the mass hungry capitalist inducements [provided by the economic designs of the state]. 'Indian Women Problem' had already reared its head from the beginning of Indian indenture ship. The hierarchical social structure of the Brahminic-Sanskritic tradition brought about a conflation of interests between migrant Indian workers and colonial capital. The use of the term "Indian gentry" in indentures in the book "Indian women

and patriarchy" definitely expresses an ambitious aspiration on their (the Indian people) part to reorganise themselves as an Indian gentry in the far-to-India 'indenture countries (specifically in Trinidad and Tobago), where the sense of responsibility of family was realised in terms of self-imposed discipline by few Indian women in terms of constrained freedom in the matters of immoral social relations and sexual conducts. We also find the instances of women independence in terms of social concerns and family matters, however it also affected their children and family worsely and the colonial Govt. had to interfere so as to sustain the integrity of workers life in indenture to reduce the volatility due to women's independence in switching male choice. We would like to disagree with the opinion that "many Indian women perhaps for the first time in their lives got an opportunity to exercise some extent of control over their social and sexual lives which they had never had before in their own country. As 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." on the other hand, these days violence against women (whether within or outside of the family institution) is seen as a punishable offence but still is created. Here one can point that "it's a general opinion in all religions and in society that violence is bad in terms of its outcomes, even then is created by the people who had such opinions. So, "assuming that people are rational, then why did they do so?" we would try to analyse the situation in context of indentured labour setups in Trinidad and Tobago. And [since the problem of violence was made inbuilt and endogenous by the planters by creating shortage of women i.e. by manipulating the effective sex ratio on plantation, and by recruiting socially unfit workers in order to worsen the situation. Hence it is naive to point that a rational (profit maxi missing) setup with inhumane conditions was accepted to be in effect, wherein the religious principles always supported humanity and fraternity. So, in a sense it indicates the dominant hunger for the money of the system and suggests the essence of regular scrutiny of violations of human rights within rationally controlled setups by the state.

Also in the last section, we would like to view the data and the state of indentured girl child's educational aspects and we find that they were generally sent there majorly because their mothers wanted to be free from them for that time, although it exhibits ignorant aspects of child education, but there existed at least some amount of concerns regarding education and later the educated girl child was valued more.

I. Identification of women

In indentures women were primarily identified with their physical and capital-utilitarian perspectives and attributes. They were more exploited than men and whenever they were paid at all, were paid the lowest of the workers in the indenture. Women were seen as a source of labour force on one hand and as the reproducers of labour power on the other. Also the state (besides the manipulatory use of women for capital) used women as stabilisers of the male labour force *. [From Rhoda Red dock, "Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indenture ship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917" page (ws-79) second column].

And even within households they were treated as dependent housewives and defining them in this way (i.e. Dependent housewives) ignores their painstaking manoeuvre i.e. the vast productive home activities and the reproductive activities in the household. And not just this, they were allured, seduced, attacked, frightened and forced by various men (including planters and males of a quite different race) to make immoral physical relations and stay as concubines and paramours. Now it is questionable that who all were responsible for this, was it the men under indenture or the planters and the state and the society in place which let that all happen, or the endogenous environment which made all this a needful equilibrium to happen? Was this all sufficient for the fulfillment of the rational capitalist setup? Was this really the wisdom or the so called 'beauty' {i.e. Efficiency argument} [irony] of the rational capitalist thought then? At this point it is interesting to see the reactions reflected in the petition of indentured labourers in Trinidad, 1916: but on the other hand (the dominant side - Govt.), the low proportion of women in relation to men (low labour reproduction) was considered a major problem by the state (this problem was found to be inevitable under existing conditions) and hence Government desired for such immoral behaviors to take place and tried to make such things happen endogenously by including more prostitutes, social outcasts, unhappy in their domestic lives and indiscipline women in the female immigrants. Who were more prone to immoral sexual conducts and would also influence the women with higher esteem in 'Indian gentry' who lived with them.

Social design of family and marriage instability in indenture

Instead of seemingly quite successful modification and demeaning of the role of women by the dint of capitalist treatments accommodated with the desires of males, Indian women did not easily and wishfully surrender to the mass hungry capitalist inducements [provided by the economic designs of the state]. 'Indian Women Problem' had already reared its head from the beginning of Indian indenture ship. The hierarchical social structure of the Brahminic-Sanskritic tradition brought about a conflation of interests between migrant Indian workers and colonial capital. The use of the term "Indian gentry" in indentures in the book "Indian women and patriarchy" definitely expresses an ambitious

aspiration on their (the Indian people) part to reorganise themselves as an Indian gentry in the far-to-India 'indenture countries (specifically in Trinidad and Tobago), where the sense of responsibility of family was realized in terms of self-imposed discipline by few Indian women in terms of constrained freedom in the matters of immoral social relations and sexual conducts.

However, given the scenario that scarcity of women was creating various sorts of immorality in the depot, on shipboard and in the indentured sites, maintaining the self-superiority by few women in Indian gentry was difficult. And to the women of lower social order this paucity of women provided them the opportunity to switch (by marrying) to men from higher social casts and status and hence a chance to improve their living conditions and enjoy greater freedom. This practice known as 'sanskritisation' was common to Ares of Hindu migration. Sanskritisation is a particular form of social change found in India. It denotes the process by which castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes.

Also in case of Maryland, due to lack of the male protectors, female indentured servants were often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. On the other hand, without parental oversight, some young women were enjoying more freedom in choosing spouses and the scarcity of females enabled some to use marriage as an avenue to upward mobility. The high mortality rates in case of Maryland meant that Chesapeake (place in Maryland, Virginia, U.S.A) wives generally became widows, but as such they wielded considerable family authority over the property in the absence of adult male relatives; many widows increased their property by remarrying (generally more than once). So, in this unstable world personal relationships were typically short-lived and successive remarriages led to complex family structures that included stepsiblings from multiple males.

Now coming to the context of marriages in indentures, first we should come to the phenomenon of 'depot marriages' (depots located within the country before sending the workers to the designated indentured nations). It is of interest that in spite of the strict segregation of the sexes in depots, relationships did develop between them. It is also interesting that while still on the Indian subcontinent (in depot), people were willing to disregard caste, religion and custom and get married. And also among the poorer agricultural classes / castes from which the majority of the immigrants were drawn, restrictions on marriages were less strict. So they were willing to get partners.

Of the 4,000 adults who travelled to Guiana in 1892, 421 marriages took place (data from Rhoda Red dock, "Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indenture ship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917) on board ships. However, these marriages, in spite of their being legally registered, 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.

However, there were some reasons that despite the huge economic and social damages caused by sexual

independence and marital instability of unsatisfied women, the majority of Indian people refused to register marriages often which was considered to be an easy solution for increasing family stability, but only few scholars have tried to explain this phenomenon. The following is a case study which may serve to answer this question:

As a result, one thing that was in favour of women (in cases of unregistered marriages) that now women were in a sense supported by their parental families to afford leaving one husband for another or having parallel relationships with more than one man. And reports vary in terms of the degree to which women left one man for another.

So in my views, here if we consider marriage as a contract to 'accompany throughout the future situations', the both parties serve as counter-parties in the agreement and the 'Govt.'s marriage registration department' serves as the writer of the contract and exercises the legal authority. In this case the concentric (legal or any other) power of stabilising the 'partnership / marriage' integrated, in cases of breach of the contract was not in the hands of counter parties; people outside (i.e. Govt. authorities and judiciary) the contract had stake on their lives. Given the sexual and marital mobility of women and the freedom of making choice being enjoyed by women the males had to bear the consequences of such breaches of the contract. [i.e. hurt are the feelings of many of those who relied heavily on these contracts. Those would have also derived (whether) right or wrong lessons and would try to find solutions (whether) partially or fully successful and acceptable, and tried to make credible commitments that they could manage to attempt and would give message for not breaching this partnership contract. Though, since state has motive of stability, it accepted their offer and added to the credible commitment part.

The ones who suffered the real injustice did not have any support and no one had an incentive to sympathise them (this part is due to mother) but what of those children whose mothers did not realise 'the moral support and responsibility' more desirable than to switch the male partner and lead a new life (and try to forget what all did in the days gone).

In moral perspectives this is not good, rather a sin towards the favours of that innocent child. The left male partner could not as nurture the child as a mother would. And this is not a beauty of 'female independence'. Such children would have to become future of their generations. And the concept of 'female independence' is a requirement as far as it is for the betterment of their life and for the people of society altogether. But to the extent it hurts to her own produced living creature and its life, then it should demand some control and regulation over female independence, this is like producing negative externalities to others for the long future by the deeds of your forgotten days. And this is the phenomena that would continue unless some control and moral enhancement is motivated upon you. And this would have been one of the major reasons for moving of men to courts for the sake of the child (which could be even girl also, so this was not at the loggerheads with 'women empowerment').

Control over women was established through law by men if they failed to establish through any other means. Violence in sugar plantation was seen as a major tool to establish control over women. And according to Hindus who considered themselves superior than women, used to take cutlass and make mincemeat if he found his wife to be

unfaithful. So murder of Indian women migrant was seen as common phenomenon in Guyana and between 1885 -1890, 40 murders of women occurred in which 33 were wife killed by their husbands or reputed husbands. Trinidad and Tobago were at the head list in these phenomenon. So violence was considered as a lasting and important phenomenon in Indian patriarchal family system.

So that people could learn how to beautify the given single life with the chosen partner. It needs to be thought that families should be mentally mature towards how to progress given the existing and effective constraint. But competing with other families and showoffs of male-satisfaction and jealousy and quarrels and switching partner is neither the goal nor achievement of the usually seen human behaviour rather it shows 'materialistic hunger' of human to anyhow content itself and that's too endlessly growing with no better end. This should be taken care of. The wise message can be given by generating (ideal demonstrations etc.) awareness to show the desired and wise living patterns and habits and developing scientific temperament, accompanied with incentive compatibility designs and supported with a dispute resolving mechanism would try to make the social set up and working environment more favourable.

But this was not chosen by the 'state then' and the planters, the possible explanations could be "that they did not have direct credible profitability of doing so", but they can never say that the issue was not their responsibility. This points that they tried to put as little efforts and costs as to just ensure the profit generating capitalist set up though being inhuman. It might also have been thought that once they would all disappear (or die), the issue of inhuman treatments would never be raised. And that's why the hidden mentality is being exposed by the economic historians visiting backwards following the existing footprints. And thinking along this opinion, it may be inducing that planters would not try to make the workers live long, so that the exposed inhumanity would have been a desired feature to be persistent.

Educational aspects of women in indenture

By 1862 in Trinidad, great Influence of education on women was established through church by Christian community. By 1890, it was noted that East Indian schools with 1958 boys, 982 girls with an average attendance of 1874 student but very few children of indentured labourers attending school. Mainly education of women comprise of needlework whereas of boys it comprised of industrial training. Post primary education of women were seen as an extension of house oriented training. It was only for two reason position of Indian women started changing in Trinidad was that, there was an rapid expansion of both urban and rural schooling which was a consequence of community own initiatives as a result of acceptance of contribution of women as a wage earner to the family in consumer economy.

On the other hand, In Caribbean (1838 -1917), Indian women were seen as both free and less free as compared to India. And in Guyana, education of Indian lagged behind that of Indian in Trinidad. As colonial government of Guyana actively denied education of girls. But recommendation of Swettenham circular in 1904 which remained in force till 1933, put no pressure on Indian parents who wanted to keep their daughter in seclusion. Till 1925 only 35% of Indian girls were in schools and literacy

rate was found to be low as compared to Trinidad, though certain data from Guyana suggested that many Indian women benefitted by shifting their languages to English. In 1931, it was found that only 16% of literate in Indian languages and only 1.8% of Indian women voters were found there.

Conclusion

So far we envisaged the state of women (specifically Indian women) from the stratum of social identification of women in indenture to its role in family institution and marriages and also to the educational aspects of the girl child. At the length, it can be said that instead of seemingly quite successful modification and demeaning of the role of women by the dint of capitalist treatments accommodated with the desires of males, Indian women did not easily and wishfully surrender to the mass hungry capitalist inducements [provided by the economic designs of the state]. 'Indian Women Problem' had already reared its head from the beginning of Indian indentureship. The hierarchical social structure of the Brahminic-Sanskritic tradition brought about a conflation of interests between migrant Indian workers and colonial capital. The use of the term "Indian gentry" in indentures in the book "Indian women and patriarchy" definitely expresses an ambitious aspiration on their (the Indian people) part to reorganise themselves as an Indian gentry in the far-to-india 'indenture countries (specifically in Trinidad and Tobago), where the sense of responsibility of family was realised in terms of self-imposed discipline by few Indian women in terms of constrained freedom in the matters of immoral social relations and sexual conducts. However there existed the cases of family instability but that was the situation endogenously created by the planters by creating shortage of women.

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