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The Indian Diaspora numbering some 24 million, spread all over the globe, has had a number of phases spread over time and space. There was the ancient migration to Southeast and West Asia when Indian traders and holy men spread Indian religions and commodities widely. Those connections have lasted until today. From the 17th century, European traders discovered the vast wealth of India which impelled them to trade and conquest, using their superior military might. As slavery in tropical colonies became the favourite method of wealth accumulation, Indians were now included among the slave population, exported to East Africa and Mauritius. After slavery was abolished, others were inducted into indentureship as the new replacements: Chinese, Pacific Islanders and Indians. For the Indians this new form of bondage lasted from 1838 to 1920, after which, there was an effort to continue the system under a scheme called

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'Assisted Emigration'. This, as the author points out, was strongly resisted in India and so that scheme came to a premature end.

However, the Indian diaspora did not begin nor end with this indentured system. There was an influx of educated Indians in Western Europe and North America from the 1960s, as these nations opened their doors to Asian peoples. Radica Mahase's study chooses the migratory slice which immediately follows the abolition of slavery.

Research on the movement towards the abolition of slavery are abundant. Works on the movement leading to the abolition of indentureship are very rare. Now, finally, we have a comprehensive study as a complement to the anti-slavery studies. Mahase spent years combing archives in India, the United Kingdom and the Caribbean to produce a good example of a subaltern study. This is history from below, that is, writing from the level of the subject people. The scope of the work is comprehensive in that it covers all of the areas to which Indian Girmitiyas (agreement signers) were dispatched: Natal, Fiji, Mauritius and the Caribbean. The historiography tends to produce writings which focus on specific areas. This account encompasses all the areas in a comparative sweep. The major thesis of the book, namely the agitation for abolition, does not come early in the text. The early section highlights the de-industrialization of India through the drain of Indian resources and the replacement of Indian handicrafts by European commodities (pages 31-34). The narrative then gives a list of place names of the recruiting areas. These names were transferred to the sugar colonies in remembrance of the ancestral abodes: Meerut, Cawnpore (Kanpur), Fyzabad, Patna and Pahari Village. Indian place names became personal designations by those who wished to perpetuate the memory: Bharat, Saran and Gaya.

The narrative then documents the considerable profits accumulated from the 'coolie trade' by the shipping companies such as the Nourse Line. British ship manufacturers had a field day and contractors became millionaires by selling food, water, blankets, warm clothing and the many utensils needed for the long voyage. In the Caribbean case, the *jahaj* (ship) crossed three oceans, namely Indian, Antarctic and Atlantic. All of this useful information precedes the major theme of the book, namely the opposition in India and in the colonies of this 'new system of slavery'. In these later sections, we read of the agitation by Gandhi in South Africa. The success of this campaign encourages the Mahatma to transfer his agitation to India where leaders like Tilak and Gokhale had already made the campaign a part of the larger anti-British struggle of the Indian National Congress.

This book traces the Indian agitation by pressure groups which went into the villages campaigning against bondage abroad. This is the strongest part of the book. Here the author uses very diverse sources including songs and poems, Indian newspaper clippings and official documents generated by British

administrators to illustrate the increasing unpopularity of the system. This is followed by tales of trauma suffered by those who were repatriated to India and were rejected in the ancestral villages. These helpless Girmityas were able to re-enlist for a second time for service in the colonies, but this facility came to a sad end in 1917 when the Government of India ordered the end of further indentureship. The plantocracy, for its part, sought to cut their losses by devising a new scheme of assisted emigration to which Gandhi put an early stop. All the incidents at the colony level, from Garden Reach in Calcutta to the 'coolie ghat' in Paramaribo are now woven into the larger tapestry of the Girmit Record. This makes the book, *Why should we be called coolies?* a 'kheesa' that takes the study of the plantation diaspora one step closer to a clearer understanding of this global phenomenon.

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