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HerStory: The *Jahajin* Poetics in Literature from the Caribbean

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HerStory: La poétique *Jahajin* de la littérature des Caraïbes

Résumé

Bien que des recherches historiques et anthropologiques approfondies aient été menées dans les Caraïbes sur le système impérial de l'engagisme indien qui a duré près d'un siècle et qui a remplacé l'esclavage dans les années 1830, elles n'ont accordé que peu d'attention critique au discours des écrivaines de la région. Contrairement à leurs homologues masculins, les écrivaines des Caraïbes ont développé une poétique distincte du paradigme de l'engagisme et sont sensibles dans leur approche de l'expérience de leurs ancêtres féminins qui a causé d'immenses bouleversements psychologiques dans leur vie. Ils mettent en avant l'aspect humain de l'aventure à travers une perspective sexospécifique de l'expérience et repositionnent leurs personnages féminins pour les rendre centraux dans le récit. Leurs récits négocient, interrogent et parcourent les constructions culturelles et théoriques qui ont été jusqu'à présent dominées par les écrivains masculins dans le discours principal. Cet article analyse une sélection de littérature sur l'acte d'aventure écrite par des écrivaines caribéennes afin de mettre en évidence la poétique distincte qui émerge lorsque l'écrivain est une femme. Avec leurs techniques de narration, ces femmes écrivaines ont tenté de revisiter l'histoire de l'aventure comme son histoire.

Mots-clés : engagisme, caraïbes, poésie féminine, littérature anglophone, *jahajins*

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Abstract

While extensive historical and anthropological research on the almost century long imperial system of Indian indenture, which replaced slavery in the 1830s, has been conducted in the Caribbean, it has paid scant critical attention to the discourse of the women writers from the region. In contrast to their male counterparts, women writers in the Caribbean have developed a distinct poetics of the indenture paradigm and are sensitive in their approach to the experience of their female forbears which caused immense psychological upheaval in their lives. They foreground the humane

aspect of indenture through a gendered perspective of the experience and re-position their women characters to make them central to the narrative. Their narratives negotiate, interrogate and navigate the cultural and theoretical constructs that have hitherto been dominated by male writers in the master discourse. This paper analyses select literature on indenture written by Caribbean women writers in order to highlight the distinct poetics that emerges when the writer is a woman. With their techniques of narration, these women writers have made an attempt to revisit the 'his'tory of indenture as 'her'story.

Keywords: indenture, caribbean, women poetics, anglophone literature, *jahajins*

I echoed your emancipation cries (Manoo-Rahming, 2000: 13).

Introduction

The British system of Indian indenture was not merely a political strategy devised by the colonial powers aimed at replacing slavery after the abolishment of the latter during the 1830s. Instead, almost a century of indenture (1833-1920) proved to be a complex political-economic-socio-cultural arrangement that ruptured the entire fabric of existence of the indentured Indians and resulted in a number of consequences that followed in its aftermath. The nineteenth century bears witness to large scale transcontinental migrations – the Europeans to the Americas and Australasia, and the Chinese and Indians to the plantation colonies of the European empires. The latter migrated under the predominantly-British system of indenture which replaced slavery and allowed for indentured people to be transported to other colonies till 1920 (when indenture was abolished in all its forms). From erstwhile British India alone, “1.3 million indentured Indian workers migrated to the following colonies/countries: Mauritius, British Guyana, Natal (South Africa), Trinidad, Fiji, Guadeloupe, Kenya, Uganda, Jamaica, Dutch Guiana/Suriname, Martinique, Seychelles, St. Lucia, Grenada and St. Vincent” (Clarke, 2010: 9). Nearly 239,000 Indians journeyed to British Guyana and approximately 148,000 Indians travelled to Trinidad in the Caribbean. The Indian diaspora in the Caribbean forms a sizeable number today and has produced an enviable corpus of anglophone literature. The earlier literature on indenture in the Caribbean was limited to stereotyping Indian women labourers as sexual beings engaged furthering their position on the plantations through relationships with British planters and overseers. Alison Klein in *Anglophone Literature of Caribbean Indenture* looks at the “seductive hierarchies of Empire” in the early narratives and highlights how:

representations of women and their relationships in these narratives demonstrate that for British authors, power over women labourers bolstered the masculinist enterprise of empire; for anti-colonial authors, the abusive treatment of women labourers acted as a catalyst for nationalist arguments; and for feminist authors, relationships between women offered an escape from concentric circles of patriarchal oppression and suppression (Klein, 2019: 3).

Indenture narratives written by women writers in the Caribbean foreground the marginal and create a narrative space which is significant for critical analysis. This is because they challenge the set patriarchal hierarchies through a poetics of kinship, which is formed through their shared experience. What the Caribbean male writers of indenture tend to highlight as an “event” in history, women writers instead interpret as a “process” with lasting effects. The women writers thus, present a gendered perspective by approximating “their truth” and privileging it over the largely contested male version of “reality”. In doing so, they re-visit, re-interpret, re-analyse and re-present the experience of indenture and its nuances in the Caribbean, along with its generational impact on the society in general and the indentured diaspora in particular. They also extend the indenture discourse in the Caribbean by employing distinct narrative techniques to place the *jahajins* (indentured sisterhood: a term derived from women who sailed on the same *jahaj* (ship/s)) on the centre stage, and adopt a set of poetics to reinstate the indentured women to their rightful place in ‘his’story. They do this through their portrayal of women undergoing indenture as strong and empowered, attributing them with a sense of agency, thereby overshadowing the male writers’ characterisation of the same women as marginalised and ‘victimised’. Further, the women writers make a conscious attempt to veer away from attributing the position given to women in indenture by the male writers as representational of the oppressed, who thus, needed to be protected.

Male writers have been engaged in writing about the period of Indian indenture much before women writers arrived on the literary scene in the Caribbean. Writings by male authors challenge the colonial records, question the stereotypes, re-position indenture on the literary map and mine the rich oral tradition to project the “lost” indentured voices. This is testified through the rich historiography of male voices on the subject. However, the women in their writings remain unvoiced. On the other hand, women writers of the discipline have recently become involved in the process of reclaiming and recovering the ‘unheard’ female voices in order to re-present the ‘her’story in ‘his’story. They follow a matrilineal approach by uncovering the trajectory of indenture in their own families while working on the genealogical historiography. Apart from contemporary novelists, such as Laxmi

Perusad, Peggy Mohan, Gaiutra Bahadur and Ramabai Espinet, who are exploring and re-tracing the migration history of their women ancestors, poets including, Mahadai Das, Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming and Rajkumari Singh, as the third and fourth generation indentured diaspora in the Caribbean, are, through their poems, simultaneously drawing attention to the underwritten accounts of the experiences of their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

In the indenture narratives written by men, women have rarely appeared as the “subject”. It is then left to the women writers, who can speak and write, to become the voice for their sisterhood. Their distinct feminine sensibility renders them the ability needed to comprehend and critically evaluate the subtler shades of the shared experiences of women in indenture. Two of the celebrated contemporary women writers of the Caribbean indenture diaspora are Peggy Mohan and Gaiutra Bahadur. Mohan’s *Jahajin* (2007) and Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman: the Odyssey of Indenture* (2013) (thereafter referred to as *Coolie Woman*) are thoughtful in the language they use to depict the ‘victimization’ of women. Where male writers hint at shades of voyeurism and titillation (David Dabydeen terms it the “pornography of empire” in *Tibisiri*), thereby perpetuating the stereotypical image of indentured women, it is the women writers, who instead of depicting their female characters as victims, celebrate their strength and spirit and make them emerge as survivors and saviours. They document the means through which the Indo-Caribbean women were able to resist and challenge the traditional roles ascribed to them by gender. Rather than being perceived as mere objects in a male-written narrative, the indentured women become the subjects in the works of women writers and poets.

1. Women Writers Interrogate the Male Gaze

Critic Brinda Mehta’s term “*kalapani* discourse” highlights the traumatic migration experience of the women who crossed the ocean from India in order to indenture in the Caribbean plantation colonies (Mehta, 2004: 10). Mariam Pirbhai uses the term “*jahaji-hood*” for the bond that was formed between the indentured Indians voyaging on the same ship to the plantation colonies. *Jahaji-hood* encompasses the “labour diaspora’s shared sense of bondage, cultural affinity, and spiritual fraternity as it was initiated by the traumatic and perilous journey” (Pirbhai, 2009: 25). Literary theorist Vijay Mishra examines the experience of women in indenture and suggests that it has been downplayed in the male narratives. He also highlights that while men were living miserable lives in their indenture, “equally miserable and much more abject were the bodies of the women, the rarely written underside of indenture experience” (Mishra, 2014: 84). Male writers have long constructed the indentured women as gendered beings inhabiting liminal spaces between sexuality

and morality. In their writings, they tend to depict women as mere objects bearing multiple forms of individual and systemic violence. Either she is portrayed as a victim of the White overseer's lust or she is the cause for violence among Indian males owing to her status as a coveted minority. Women writers instead, are sensitive in their portrayal of the victimisation of the indentured women, while also highlighting their resilience and cloaking them with a dignity that is largely absent in the narratives written by men.

The male gaze restricts sexual molestation or rape to an act that brings dishonour to the woman and her entire family. They shift the focus of the psychological trauma of rape to one that concentrates solely on social honour. The conflict regarding women in male narratives, centres around an indentured woman involved in either a consensual or a non-consensual sexual relationship with either a British plantation manager or a well-to-do *sirdaar* or with another Indian indentured male who is socially better-placed in the plantation hierarchy. In his novel *Sunday Morning Coming Down*, Peter Ramkeesoon, describes one of the female characters who has been seduced and 'discarded' by the male protagonist Jason, as looking like "a small-breasted wide assed, washed out young whore... hoping for a greasy fuck" (Ramkeesoon, 1975: 3). Male writers are disposed to see the indentured women as vulnerable beings with no voice, who need to be protected, and are thus, metaphorically depicted in their writings as symbolic representations of the colonisers' power over India. Further, with indentured women being vested with the role of protectors of Indian civilization and culture, the men bestowed themselves with the role of protectors of their women's virtue. Male writers thus, do not take due cognizance of the inherent psychological trauma attached to the victimization of women. Women writers on the other hand, take note of, and portray the mental pain and suffering of their kin in a sensitive manner. In her novel *Jahajin*, Peggy Mohan narrates an incident of sexual molestation of an Indian woman named Sunnariya by an official on the plantation. "Her orhni was off her head, her clothes were dirty, and her eyes had a bright crazy look... she rushed to pick up a lota and started washing herself. Then she tore off her skirt and threw it aside" (Mohan 2007: 150). The woman narrator in her book sensitively portrays the psychological trauma Sunnariya would have undergone at the time. "The look in her eyes is something I will never forget. As if she didn't care anymore. As if there was nothing worse that could happen to her now" (ibid.: 151). Male writers also tend to assign themselves the role of 'honest historians' and their literary world is populated with male characters who dominate the narrative. Munshi Rahman Khan's *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, carries the translators' regret note in the introduction, where the reader is informed that "his world was

clearly a man's world" and that the book "teaches us next to nothing about how Hindostani women experienced life on the plantations at the time" (Khan, 2005: xxxi). Despite having two wives, the Indian women in his book remain unvoiced and invisible.

When a woman is at the helm of affairs and takes over the task of writing her genealogical historiography, she compels a revisit to the indenture paradigm through an alternate reading. Women writers do not develop or comment upon the stereotypical view of Indian women undergoing indenture in the Caribbean as either that of an abused woman or an adulterous wife. Instead, their women characters demonstrate their triple vulnerability owing to gender, race and class in the host land. Further, instead of being 'victims' of circumstances, they evolve to become survivors who are equipped with endurance to speak out, thereby negating the earlier systemic silencing of their *jahaji behens* (ship sisters: a term unique to Indian women under indenture who travelled across the waters on the same ship). A proto-feminist bond develops between the women characters in these books, based on their shared experience of oppression and marginalisation in the foreign land. The bond is so sacred that it becomes an alternative survival strategy. Brinda Mehta mentions how "The unmaking of the female body complements the unmaking of Indo-Caribbean history" (Mehta, 2004: 167). Shortlisted for the 2014 Orwell Prize for Political Writing, and winner of the 2014 Gordon K and Sybil Lewis Prize, Gaiutra Bahadur's seminal book, *Coolie Woman: the Odyssey of Indenture*, explores the complex issues of migration in the post-slavery exploitative system of indenture. As a memoir in the literary non-fiction genre, it delves into a subaltern woman's point-of-view exploring the origin and legacy of the life of her great-grandmother who was brought to British Guiana (present-day Guyana) around 1903 to work in a sugarcane plantation. Bahadur's narrative portrays a panoramic picture of Indian indenture and offers a gendered perspective about the women who had become a part of the system. In narrating the story of Sujaria (her great-grandmother), the memoir also extrapolates the voices of the other indentured women "from the moment they left their villages, through their middle passages, through their reinvention and struggle in a new world" (Bahadur, 2013: 177). She traces the journey of the "pregnant and alone" Sujaria, beginning her tale from the circumstances which made her leave her home in India, through the long voyage on the ship to British Guiana and her arrival as an indentured labourer in the plantation colony. It also voices Sujaria's trauma at becoming a *coolie* (a dehumanizing term used by Europeans and Creoles to address Indian indentured people). While charting Sujaria's life through her indenture and till her death in 1962 in Guyana, the narrative also connects and interweaves the stories of other Indian

women indentured into the system. Bahadur uses a unique narrative technique by asking rhetorical questions throughout the book in order to revise the representation of women in India's migration history. The crucial role they played in assimilation, acculturation and community-building becomes the focus of the narrative. Women writers like Gaiutra Bahadur thus position women at the centre of their narratives, "... they reclaim the bodies of women migrants, honoring the sacrifices these women made and urging their female descendants to devote themselves to birthing a new nation". (Klein, 2019: 177) A close reading of indenture narratives by women writers reveals their women protagonists controlling the plot and coming across as powerful individuals. They are constructed as a challenge to the male-dominated discourse and oppose gender assumptions.

Women have for long been silent, marginalised and invisible in the indenture discourse. Their role in the history of migration has remained restricted by the male writers to their portrayal as travelling wives of their indentured husbands, with their experience being subsumed by the experience of their male counterparts. However, the writings have witnessed a marked change over the last two decades with the third and fourth generation women descendants of indentured migrants in the Caribbean re-telling the 'her' story of their matriarchs. Gaiutra Bahadur has lamented the fact that "mystery darkened the lives of many women who left India as coolies" (Bahadur, 2013: 26). The prevalent law stipulated 40 women for every 100 men in a ship bound for the colonies, thereby forcing the recruiters to meet the quota by convincing women to indenture. No ship would be allowed to sail if it did not meet the 40:100 ratio. However, this was not an easy task as women rarely came into direct contact with the recruiters. This led to a logjam, which in turn led to several cases of kidnapping, deceit and forceful detention of women in the depots. In reaction, the 1903 law was made more stringent, not allowing any married woman to emigrate without the permission of her husband. Recruiters found it easier to convince single women to emigrate. The easy targets for the recruiters were the socially-vulnerable women. The Report of Sir George Grierson, the British civil servant posted in Bihar, has been cited by Bahadur in her book. He had classified female emigrants into four groups:

The wives of men who had already been to the colonies and had returned to fetch them, destitute widows with no one to take pity on them, prostitutes and "married women who have made a slip, and who have either absconded from their husband's house with or without a lover, or who have been turned out of doors by their husbands. (Bahadur, 2013: 33).

Biased reports like these stereotyped the indentured women as 'morally degenerate' but never questioned the reasons that 'forced' women into indenture.

The rigid patriarchal Indian social order was not sympathetic towards women who did not conform to its moral standards governing societal norms. Single women did not encompass only those who had never married. The category consisted of a number of sub-categories such as widows, who were treated as rejects and thus, exposed to acute hunger and poverty. The only alternative available to them was prostitution. “There is a reason the word *randi* or *ranri* can mean both young widow and prostitute in both the Bhojpuri and Bengali languages” (Bahadur, 2013: 35). Then there were married women who had been left by their husbands for another woman. Such women could not return to their parents and were ill-treated by their in-laws. They considered suicide as an alternative to their pitiful lives. Women who had been seduced and abandoned were also rejected by the society. These push factors made women ‘willing’ to indenture. The pull factor came from the British demonstrating indenture as a means of liberating the women from an oppressed life. The women thus emigrated under the erroneous belief that indenture would liberate them.

2. Testimonies of Women in Indenture

Male writers have cast a suspicious eye on single Indian women belonging to the lower social strata and perceived them as immoral. It is true that during their indenture, they faced greater economic and sexual exploitation at the hands of the planters, as well as at the hands of their Indian male ‘protectors’. However, female writers are sympathetic to the testimonies of indentured women, revealing “glimpses of headstrong women, determined to go or not to” (Bahadur, 2013: 31). Narratives, such as *Jahajin* and *Coolie Woman*, extrapolate many hybrid voices belonging to the indentured women who were taken from India to the British Caribbean. In *Jahajin*, Deeda, the chief protagonist makes the reader journey with her from India to Trinidad. Narrating her experience to a linguist who is recording and transcribing her narrative, she goes back in time recounting from her memory, and speaks in Bhojpuri, the language in which she witnessed her indenture. She had journeyed as “single woman, but she was married, and she had a child with her” (Mohan, 2007: 15). “I was married before I came. And my husband is still in India. I came alone and left him behind” (ibid.: 16). In two short sentences, she pushes her husband into the margins and takes the centre stage in ‘her’ story. Deeda’s story of her indenture, like those of the other *jahajins*, challenges the male writings and reveals a different narrative, one that depicts indenture as a release for women like her and Sujaria. Indenture allows them a sense of freedom to voice their hope and wish for a future distinct from the one they would have been forced to live in India. Deeda reveals the shift in mindset during her voyage with the following words:

After the storm something had happened to all of us. It had all started when Sahatoo Maharaj had stood on the deck and smiled. We stopped looking back. I think we had finally crossed the kala pani in our minds, changed from being the people we were before. The sad notes of the beeraha we had sung as we crossed that ocean had brightened into a new song, a song with no dark corners and no storms. (Mohan, 2007: 82).

She also informs how the *jahajis* gave themselves a collective identity, with those voyaging on the same ship becoming “*apanpalwaar*” (our family).

With their indenture, for probably the first time in their lives, the women received an opportunity to earn wages for their work and enjoy a degree of financial independence. This would have never been possible for them in India. Their paucity also accelerated their emancipation and granted them a level of agency that would have been unimaginable in the homeland. On the plantations, they could choose to leave their husbands and either marry another without the barriers of caste and social class which dictated marriages in India, or they could simply live with another man without the formal institution of marriage. “New hierarchies emerged across the dark waters” (Bahadur, 2013: 92). However, it is pertinent to note that when colonists emphasized upon women in the colonies doing what was unthinkable in India, they negated the fact that the choices made by them were in essence a pseudo choice. In either selecting or changing their partners, the indentured women were pragmatically seeking their own protection against sexual exploitation by the planters. Gradually, over a period of time, the dearth of women allowed their parents to demand a ‘bride price’ for their daughters. In India, they would have seen their own daughters of marriageable age as a financial burden owing to the social practice of giving dowry on their weddings. In the Caribbean, the same women had become an economic asset for their family.

In the narratives written by women, the female characters are the pioneers, setting forth to a new land and making it into a ‘home’ for the generations that followed them. Entrusted with the task of protecting their culture, women kept the traditional norms, customs and language of the homeland alive in the host land. While men had carried religious books and artefacts into their indenture, binding them to the culture of the homeland, women had carried seeds that would allow them to acculturate and assimilate in the new land. “In a little bag she was carrying some damp soil from *muluk* and growing in that soil was a root of *hardee*, turmeric” (Mohan, 2007: 65).

... the migration came across to me as a story of women making their way alone, with men in the background, strangers, extras. In the history books it had always

been the other way around: it was the men who were the main actors. But there was also this unwritten history of the birth of a new community in Trinidad. And it was women who were at the centre of the story. (Mohan, 2007: 204).

Women knew that a return to India was not an option available to them since they had flouted the social norms by leaving the homeland. Nostalgia and melancholy for a lost home does not feature in the indenture literature written by women. Men, on the other hand, were sanguine in the fact that at the end of their indenture, they could return to India and would be welcomed with open arms. Their writings carry numerous references to nostalgia and mourning for the homeland along with a strong desire to return. Women writers instead, build upon the connections with their female forbears and highlight their metaphoric significance as the central structures that housed and preserved the culture and tradition of India in the Caribbean. They were also the frontrunners in assimilation and acculturation. The shared sense of sisterhood that developed between the indentured women is evident from the following exchange in *Jahajin*, where Deeda informs Sunnariya, “This is a different country... The only way for women like us to manage in this place is to hold the wheel for ourselves. Don’t tell me you are not glad for a chance to make up your mind” (Mohan, 2007: 172). The bond between the women indentured in the Caribbean became so strong that it transcended generations and even overturned the traditional Indian roles of a dominant mother-in-law and a subservient daughter-in law. “She knew that for her own piece of mind the person who mattered most was her mother-in-law. The boy was less important” (175).

Women writers exhibit a distinct linguistic sensibility from their male counterparts. They mount an underlying counter discourse that runs parallel to and questions the master narrative allowing it to be re-opened for analysis. Their works give voice to the hitherto silenced women in the male-centric discourse on indenture. Verene Shepherd has spoken out about how “colonist historiography has tended to mute the voices of exploited people, and the subaltern, as female, was even more invisible” (Shepherd, 2002: 7). Writers like Bahadur and Mohan have been commended for their extensively-researched narratives that have succeeded in articulating the many voices of women in indenture. Lydia Pyne has applauded Bahadur for giving “the indentured Indian women a voice and a legacy where these women have typically lived in exclusion, stripped of any historical voice” (Pyne, 2014). *Coolie Woman* becomes a medium allowing Bahadur to open a dialogue with the past and document the polyphonic voices of the indentured women who were illiterate and could not write about their experience. Mikhail Bakhtin has described polyphony “as texts or utterances where more than one voice can be heard”. It allows for “a plurality of independent and equally valid voices

which are not subordinated to any single authorial hierarchy” (Herman, 2008: 443). The strong polyphonic voices of the women in *Jahajin* and *Coolie Woman* steer the narratives and expect to be given a patient hearing after having waited decades for someone to write and hear them. In the male writings, they have remained relegated to the margins as indentured women, stock characters possessing stereotypical qualities, further bound by their limitations. In *Coolie Woman*, Bahadur has strongly resisted such stereotyping, instead offering the example of an indentured woman named Baby, who repeatedly petitioned the courts in British Guiana, even going so far as to write to the officials in London, about her facing harassment by plantation officials and other male labourers (Bahadur, 2013: 94). Such reports, revealing women to be strong agents of change are not referred to by male writers since they are contrary to the limited role assigned by them to women in indenture, as weak beings requiring the protection of men to survive on the plantations.

Edward Said refers to the postcolonial narrative as a counter-discourse, one that is imperative to reclaim the lost voices that speak in direct contrast to the Western hegemony. He underlines the importance of the “colonised breaking free of Western narratives or theologies and representing or narrating themselves, for themselves and others” (Herman, 2008: 452). Male writers of indenture utilize various techniques to revise and recreate the history of indenture in order to challenge the hegemonic discourse that privileges the West and tries to dominate over and silence the ‘other’. The role of such writers is very crucial and critical since the history they excavate can only find expression and be narrated through their works. Women writers of indenture literature go one step further by challenging and broadening the intellectual discourse while simultaneously rectifying the stereotypes about women and giving them a voice to speak for themselves. After comprehending the tropes on which the male writers have built their narratives, women writers build parallel and opposing structures in order to both, challenge and shift the narrative towards a gendered understanding of the indenture experience. Through her critical survey, Mariam Pirbhai has highlighted the distinct narrative techniques used by women novelists. According to her, “Indo-Caribbean women novelists arguably work in tandem with historians in the memorialisation and excavation of women’s narratives, for they not only strive to fill in historical gaps but also to mobilize these stories as models of cultural and feminist agency for present generations” (Pirbhai, 2010: 47).

Conclusion

A close of study of the narratives on indenture written by women allows the reader to observe the specifically-designed strategies used by their writers to foreground the marginal. Women writers articulate the voice of the voiceless,

which has rarely, if ever, found space in the male narratives. This is because women writers do not evade issues or gloss over hard questions. Their approach is more analytical, critical and interrogative. They adopt a gendered outlook in their narratives and locate specific virtues in the feminine experiences that are generally subordinated, and at times even excluded in the male narratives on indenture. Women writers also aid the emergence of a hybrid identity for women in indenture by privileging their private and personal histories over long-held banal stereotypes. They highlight the 'collective consciousness' of the women as pioneers in indenture. Further, they refuse to categorise the women into male-defined binaries. Their writings fill the lingering aporias in the 'his'tory of Indian indenture. A holistic view on Indian indenture in the Caribbean can only be gleaned when equal visibility and space is given to the works of Indo-Caribbean women writers. Their writings are thus both, complementary and supplementary to the master narratives on Indian indenture.

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