

A PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE INDIAN INDENTURED LABOURERS IN *THE SWINGING BRIDGE* BY RAMABAI ESPINET

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Abstract

This study seeks to dispel the erroneous belief surrounding female indentured labour held by European scholars. The study highlights Indian indentured labourers' experiences and how both genders especially women were able to adjust to colonial control. The study examines the text under review through a contextual reading, interpretation, and analysis using concentration on the qualitative research approach. It also makes reference to critical studies and other non-literary materials about the system of indentured labour. The dominance of a putative superior culture over a presumed inferior culture is explained by the theory of power. Further to the study, though Indian women were able to flee the harsh reality of patriarchal society back home, they eventually returned to face similar challenges when they established themselves abroad. This study exposes the abuse of women, showing how white managers and as well as Indian males, who were supposed to be protectors, sexually assaulted them. The study's conclusion emphasizes that, while indentureship may have given women the chance to carve out a place for themselves, the system in its entirety, is predicated on racial domination, cruelty, and survival in the assumed new world.

Keywords: Sexual Oppression, Miseries/Brutality, Indentured Labour, Power/Dominance, Survival, Self-Realization/Identity and Racism

Introduction

Colonial writers have often underrepresented the experiences of indentured labourers in the Caribbean, leading descendants to write about their experiences in aesthetic works like essays, novels, plays, and poetry. This paper portrays the reality and miseries of Indo-Caribbean indentured labourers through the selected novel, *The Singing Bridge*, contrasting the portrayal of Indian women in colonial

literature. The selected novel criticizes the exploitative system of imperialism on East Indians, highlighting how British rulers extracted riches from colonizing nations, particularly India. The author's descent from Indian indentured labourers adds a unique perspective to this study. Indentured labour has a long history in the Caribbean colonies of France and Great Britain. In the 17th and 18th centuries, British colonial powers brought thousands of European labourers

to start new lives in various British colonies (Perry, 1969, p. 35). In the British colonies, however, indentured labour was used as a means of punishing those who lost civil wars and rebellions; during the Battle of Preston in 1648 (Bull & Seed, 1998) and the Battle of Worcester in 1651 (Atkin, 1998). Oliver Cromwell sent thousands of captured prisoners on forced indentured servitude. Following the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685, King James II also sent the rebels on indenture, and similar practices persisted into the eighteenth century.

The abolition of slavery accorded slave owners compensation for each slave and gave them protection on their plantation economies. In the past, the enslaved were forced into apprenticeship for four to six years. Before then, independent black labourers were already experiencing their freedom and were not willing to remain submissive and obedient to the British and French colonies which brought a decrease in crop production. Based on this, there were only little plantations in 1838-39 and most of the crops decayed in fields as the labourers were not interested in any form of labour because of their newfound freedom. Places like Trinidad and Guiana encountered labour shortages because a large portion of the land in these colonies were sugar plantations. Even though owners of the plantations were forced to raise wages to attract ex-slaves to work, the ex-slaves were only interested in cultivating their land/fields. Also, the ex-slave women picked up domestic work and had their children enrolled in missionary schools. Consequently, they were all less concerned about the British and French plantations.

Based on the above developments, planters started recruiting labourers from abroad as sugar production began to fall and its price skyrocketing. Pointedly, many planters tended to be European labourers for they were believed to be superior to blacks. Also, it was foreseen that recruiting Europeans into the plantation work

would increase the population of Europeans in the Caribbean Islands. Private recruiters brought labourers from different European countries, but it could not ease the labour shortage. The new European migrants died due to tropical diseases for they were not used to the environment and most took the less demanding jobs. Though African descent provided a steady supply of labourers, the actual demand was far from being fulfilled. Also, an effort to recruit labour was made through the migration of Indian indentured labourers, which started in the 1830s and ended in the 1920s. Recruiting agencies brought in significant numbers of workers under the watchful eye of the British colonial rulers. Therefore, more than 1.5 million Indian labourers were sent to the several sugar colonies situated across the globe, owned by the British, Dutch, and French empires (Hugh, 1993).

The mid-19th century abolition of slavery is closely related to the pressing demand for this enormous number of labourers. Meanwhile, the migration to Europe by Asian labourers has remained a debatable issue for historians. One group regards it as a new form of slavery where labourers were exploited and treated like slaves while the other groups of historians regard it as a voluntary migration decision of the labourers to change their miserable situation. Additionally, most Indian labourers voluntarily signed up for indentureship because they wanted to work overseas just to be able to change their circumstances (poverty, early marriage, and caste systems). Some wanted to change their lifestyle from beggars to earning hands. The indentured system gave lower-section people a chance to overcome the harsh situation in which they were badly trapped (Gillan, 1962). Those who were unemployed also registered themselves as bonded labourers. The recruitment process was made more accessible, and recruits were given advanced salaries at home which helped them to provide for family members left behind. At the

heart of the system were the recruiters or *Arkatiyas*, who looked for labourers at the temples, markets, villages, and railway stations. They knew very well how to fulfill the demand of workers. The recruiters often recruited people who were in trouble, and those who had fallen out with their families, or wished to earn a lot of money in a foreign land (qtd in Kirpalani, 1910, p. 31). Most migrants belonged to the lower social castes, particularly Pariah and Vannia. More than 260 social groups/castes have been identified in the different sugar plantation colonies and the refugees were humiliated in many locations when they were sold at auction to the highest bidder, much like animals (Swinton, et al., 1859, p. 8).

Although few women joined their husbands, arrangements were never made for women because the indentured labour was initially intended to be merely temporary. This led to an imbalance in the proportion of males to women, which in turn caused irregular relationships with prostitutes, involuntary celibacy, and homosexuality. Due to the appalling living conditions on the plantations and the desire for a family, the plantation owners were compelled to bring a significant number of women to these colonies (Hugh, 1974). Therefore, in 1853, the British government established a law requiring all ships to have thirty percent female labourers. However, in 1868, the regulation was amended to increase the number of female labourers to forty percent per hundred males, and it was fully enforced in all the colonies (Pineo, 1984, p. 198). In addition to those who went with their partners, other women did so in order to flee economic and social oppression, and a tiny percentage were prostitutes. The journeying unmarried women saw migration as a means of emancipation from social constraints. Because there were fewer women than men in the colonies, they discovered that choosing superior life partners was simpler. The conventional male-

female duality was reversed in these colonies, with women positioned in the centre and men at the periphery. Undoubtedly, some women endured hardships in the plantation colonies, but in general, this offered them the chance to create their own identities.

It is noted that, the importation of Labourers from Asia was not cheap. The cost of recruiting and deporting a single labourer ranged from \$50 to \$60 on shorter distances. Longer routes amounted to \$100 to \$200 without repatriation cost granted to the migrant labourer (Adamson, 1973). The plantation owners considered Indian labourers less productive because they were physically smaller and weaker than Africans especially in places like Peru. Based on this, they tied wages according to the completion of tasks instead of the working hours. Drastic and extreme measures were taken to avoid absenteeism. Those who missed a day were forced to work for two days as a punishment. Due to these severe measures taken by the colonialist, the five-year contractual agreement tended to become six to seven years to complete. Displeasure and unhappiness gave rise to many strikes in different colonies at different times. They were all brutally put down and many workers turned to opium, drinking, and gambling to release stress and partially escape the reality of their ordeal.

Furthermore, the advocacy and the howl for the abolition of indenture labour began in South Africa the year 1894. Mahatma Gandhi pointed out the harm/destruction of nature in the bonded labour system. He began the *Satyagraha* campaign from 1906 to 1913 just to highlight the conditions of indentured labourers. To drive his goals, he changed his dressings and styles just to look like a labourer. As a critic of indentured labour, Gandhi returned to India as he travelled through different nations to enlighten people of the brutality the indentured labourers faced daily. Gandhi did not leave out the issue in many of his

public speeches during his anti-indenture campaign at different states/places. His written article, “Indenture or Slavery” in the Gujarati Magazine *Samalochak*, criticizes the indenture system by comparing it with slavery. He says:

Indenture is indeed a state of semi-slavery. Like the slave before him, the indentured labourer cannot buy his freedom. A slave was punished for not working; so also is an indentured labourer. If he is negligent, does not attend work for a day, if he answered back, - he will suffer imprisonment for any one of these lapses. A slave could be sold and handed over by one owner to another, so too indentured labourer can be transferred from one employer to another. The children of a slave inherited the taint of slavery; much in the same way, the children of an indentured labourer are subject to law specially passed for them. The only difference between the two states is that while slavery ended only with life, an indentured labourer can be free after a certain number of years. It should be noted, moreover, that the indenture came after the abolition of slavery and that indentured labourer were recruited to take the place of slaves. (Gandhi, 1915)

In India, the Indian National Congress also took up the fight for the Indentured labourer in the nationalist agenda. They spoke against the ill-treatment and subjugation of Indian labourers in different colonies. This evoked nationwide uneasiness as the spreading of citizens worldwide as bonded labourers began to decrease.

Objective of the Study

The migratory process of Indian indentured labourers to the Caribbean between 1834 and 1920, alongside the hardships and resistance to the colonial rule system, are

highlighted in this paper. Crucially, the paper's main goal is to foster consciousness of female Indian indentured labourers, show how the female Indo-Caribbean people survived and resisted oppression in the West Indies, and to dig further into the suffering and fate of Indentured labourers in Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*. Furthermore, a close contextual reading, interpretation, and in-depth analysis of the selected text suffices to explore the desired occurrences in this study. The study also uses content-based analysis in accordance with the qualitative method of the humanities to examine the system of indentureship in the Caribbean. Thus, Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* presents primary source while critical works, as well as biographical, historical, and other literary writings(s) such as articles, journals, books, and other supportive sources for the findings serve as secondary materials.

Theoretical Framework

The notion of power is complex for it has diverse impacts at variant levels as in gender, race, economy, reputation, and relationships. Power at each point is tied directly or indirectly. It could be seen as the ability to persuade the decision-making of others by an individual, group of individuals or society. Also, “the capacity of something to be or to do or to become something (Patton, 2005, p. 467)”. Therefore, it would not be out of place to say power creates social, economic, and political differentiation in society, dividing people into two wide-ranging categories which is known as dominant and subordinate. The dominant class wields control over the inferior/weak groups that might or might not be aware/mindful of their suppression.

The theory of power has gained more attention since the 16th and 17th centuries in the publications of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) and Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan* (1651). Both thinkers viewed and analyzed power from their perspectives. Machiavelli argues and

believes that, a strong unity and central government under one leader would save Italy from neighboring countries. His recommendation was for a strong and powerful Prince to emerge from Italy. Thus, he suggests the separation of politics from religion and claims that, the state is supreme, non-religious, and independent. It is only through this non-detachable means of power that a ruler can achieve success. Machiavelli is of the view that, a Prince should have the qualities of the fox and the lion. He should be both clever and strong. He advises the Prince to prepare a strong army to overcome internal and external threats. Machiavelli is also of the view that humans are by nature, cantankerous and power-hungry. He believes that, only a strong leader with unlimited power can restrain any resistance. He ignores the concept of individualism, so ideas like equality, liberty, and justice are regarded as a means to serve the end. His focus was on the sovereign unilateral power that controls the entire state.

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) highlights the social contract theory, which gives absolute authority to the sovereign. The sovereign can take control of everything without its subjects' consent. The ruler protects people from external threats as well as from their own selfish and evil nature. He talks about laws and their implementation. Power according to Hobbes, is a tool for obtaining something good in the future. He sees it as a "present means to obtain some future apparent good" (p. 56). The ultimate aim of securing power is to use it well. Hobbes talks about the positive power which can be used for the welfare of the people and believes that the state comes into existence due to the social contract of humans. Further, he talks about the human nature of acquiring unlimited power. Due to this longing for power, competition and conflicts arise in society. He points out three basic reasons for conflict in a society as he writes:

So that in the nature of man, we find

three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name. (Hobbes, p. 185)

The obsession for power can be curbed only by a powerful state. Hobbes believes people lived an impoverished and rough life before their states of origin. There were no laws, no education, and no property. Then from the desire for peace and security arising in humans came a contract for a civil society and through this contract, the state came into being. According to Hobbes, the state provides security to lives and property. Due to the contract, Hobbes believes individuals have surrendered their sovereignty to the sovereignty of the estate. This is why Hobbes advocates for authoritarianism. He believes people need a sovereign authority like the magnificent Leviathan, which can protect the people from all dangers. He believes that if anybody can limit the power of another person, then that person has power over him. He regards the same principle for the ruler of the state also, as he proclaims, "that king whose power is limited, is not superior to him, or them that have the power to limit it; and he that is not superior, is not supreme; that is to say not sovereign" (p. 246). The sovereign should have absolute power to fulfil the common interests of his subjects. Hobbes rejects the pluralism of power as it, according to him, gives rise to anarchy and wars.

The primary difference between

Machiavelli and Hobbes is that the former discusses what power is, while the latter describes what power does. Hobbes stresses on the 'causality' while Machiavelli emphasizes on 'strategy'. Machiavelli regards the individual as the means, and the state as the end. In contrast to him, Hobbes gives priority to people over the state. Hobbes considers it the state's responsibility to safeguard its citizens' rights. Similarly, the British dominance/brutality over the Indians reiterates both theories submissions. It further highlights the negligence/absence of the Indian state policies/decrees that could have prevented the colonial oppressions in the recruitment/indentured processes.

The Nature of Female Indentured Labourers

To portray the gloomy sides of indentured labourers, a publicized report on the abuses of the indentured system is shown as C. F. Andrews (1916) in his interviews with 'coolies' in Fiji said that, potential migrants at the depots felt;

...fear, suspicion and alarm ... but also a sense of helplessness, like that of an animal who has been caught in a trap and has given up the useless struggle to escape (Andrew & Pearson, p 22).

Some of the migrants felt an irresistible urge to break out of confinement at the depots or during the initial days of the ship's journey. They either deserted the depot before the journey or jumped overboard to escape what awaits them at the plantation. In the words of James Smart of Bengal Pilot Service, a man responsible for tugging ships through the Hooghly, notes that:

During [the] passage on the river several of them jumped overboard, I can't say how many, for they were never mustered, but every night almost some went overboard - I saw two men myself jump overboard, and I don't think they reached the shore (qtd in Mishra, 2022, p. 244).

Indentured labourers kept on having the issue of diet and water for the first few decades of European trades, as is evident enough in the testament by migrants at various commissions of enquiry during the course of the nineteenth century. Ramdeen, a *sirdar* who made the journey in 1840, notes that:

We were in great distress for want of water on board ship; I had myself at one time to pay a rupee for each *lotah* [a utensil] of water; I did this four times during the voyage. We did not get enough to eat either, and we had occasionally to bribe the serang with the money we had of our six months' advance, to give us more (Bates, 2012).

As a testament, Bhugwanti a girl testifies in connection with the molestation of her friend Habibullah:

I remember the night before we arrived [in Mauritius]. I was sleeping in the 'tween decks with Habibullah and Chabraji. I saw the second mate come down. He came down three times. The first time he walked about and went away. The second time he walked round and went away. The third time he held Habibulla by the hand, and she said 'don't hold my hand, or I will complain to the baboo'. He also put his hand on her breast (qtd in Mishra, 2022, p. 14).

Coming from these struggles, sufferings, miseries and death, the female Indians survived all forms of suppression and oppressions of the Europeans and they created a safe haven for themselves and their descendants in a foreign and hostile environment as they reclaimed their identities.

The Swinging Bridge by Ramabai Espinet's accounts for a gender experience on migration and exile. Mona, a young female film researcher, is the protagonist of the story in the

novel. Mona is born to an Indo-Trinidadian family. Her great-grandmother (Gainder), made the indentured worker's journey from India (Bihar) to Trinidad in 1879. The novel highlights the aesthetic development of Mona Singh who is a representative of Indo-Caribbean women. The experiences of Mona depict the great efforts for recognition and a place of one's own in a foreign and extreme racial divides. Mona moves with her family to Canada at age seventeen. Mona gets to know that to put down roots in Canada, she will have to reconnect with the place of her ancestors by unveiling the repress past of her forefathers. Her experiences as a first time migrant from Trinidad to Canada shows and depict how homesick and alienated the Indians feel in the plantations and, the challenges they have to endure in a new diasporic society. They want to desperately escape the anti-Indian racism, bankruptcy, and decreasing job opportunities in Trinidad. They also pray to live better lives in other lands. Mona loses her balance because of this immigration. She feels alienated from her country of origin. Mona remains incarcerated in Canada because of prejudice and discrimination based on gender. She is unable to find her own niche in the diasporic community. Although she is an adult, Mona spends her days idly meandering. Her longings caused her to become physically, emotionally, and geographically dispersed. She in tandem belongs to everywhere and nowhere because of her dual sense of belonging. She still identifies as Indian despite her connections to Trinidad and Canada. She grows into a personality with multiple identities.

The novel is written in a form of reclaiming one's identity in a sense that, a girl of the fourth generation wants to know the reason and consequences of the migration of her maternal ancestors through the lens of a feministic standpoint. *The Swinging Bridge* is divided into three parts. Part One, Borrowed Time, Part Two, Manahambre Road, and Part

Three, Caroni Dub. In the first chapter which is known as Borrowed Time, Mona tells of the history of her great-grandmother Gainder. Gainder migrated in 1879 with other women to escape an arranged marriage on the advice of the villagers to her elder brother to a much older man after the death of her father. She hails from a family of high caste (Brahmin) but they were poor. Gainder escapes from the marriage with a widower and arrives at Banaras, where she travels on a ship to Trinidad. The society she arrives at gives her a new liberty while she searched for a different lifestyle in the plantation. Patricia Mohammed reiterates in her research on *Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad* (2001), pointedly:

Indian women began to wield power that they did not and could not possess under the conditions of the dominant gender system which defined life in India (p. 39).

The Swinging Bridge dives into the past in 1958 to show the imperfection, plights, struggles and survival skills of the Indian women after indentureship. Having escaped the harsh reality in India and made the indenture journey, they begin to face the issue of sexual assaults and other forms of violence as they are forced to put up resistance against the same onslaughts experienced in India and the Eurocentric portrayal of Indian women as vulnerable and stereotyped with insatiable sexual urge and naturally immoral. *The Swinging Bridge* exposes the patriarchal lack of sympathy towards women through the character Baddall who tries to take sexual pleasure from his sister-in-law Muddie. She is unable to react furiously because of the fear of being discovered by other family members. She utters her discomfort inaudibly. Mona who is the sole eyewitness of the episode describes her mother's helplessness. She pointedly says:

Muddie was making the cries of a

small caught animal. Uncle Baddall was trying to bend his head to kiss her, and why didn't she take the pot of hot water off the stove and dash it in his face? His smiling face, he was smiling, he knew that he would get what he was after. (p. 38)

Baddall sexual advance does not only stop at the hem of Muddie. He has been taunting Mona from a very young age. Mona always escapes his grips. At a time while in Grandma Lil's house, Baddall keeps begging Mona for sex. He emphasizes that, "nobody will know, nothing will show" but Mona refused him and put all her strength into getting away (p. 196). Her resistance and ability to save her honour is visible through the scratches she gives Baddall with her long fingernails. Baddall always struggles with her. Mona keeps this as secret and never mentioned it to even her mother as she knows her mother Muddie who is also powerless. Her mother has scolded her for being too childish in her behavior. She has also witnessed how Muddie evades Baddall's sexual attempts. So, there is no point telling her mother for the mother will want it as a secret.

There exist racial divide as Afro-Christians see the Indians as outcaste and exclude them from the ordinary national discourse. As pointed out in *The Swinging Bridge* the Indians are force to marry other races so they could lose their unique identity. Mackie writes and states that, if it happens naturally, it is welcomed over time, but if coercive efforts are used to get mixed with the others, then it is oppression to his community (p. 68). Da Da speaks for the masses against the oppressive power inflicted Indians. His action of defiance gives strength to his family. Bell Hooks notes in her book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989) that:

moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and

struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible (p. 09).

The experience of racism becomes real for Indians even before they were wise enough to know history. For Mona, it is at age five that the idea of race struck her. Even though she knows that she is different, other girls out rightly makes fun of her coolie background. They shout at her, "coolie, coolie, coolie!" (p. 168). Mona detests coolies because she believes they are dirty and ugly. The awful nuance of racism mars her wanting to travel to Trinidad. The experience heightens Mona's sensitivity, perception of the dual nature of her being. She feels extremely stun by the emotional assault of a middle-aged man who she requests to lower the volume of the radio. The Creole man very rudely said, "if you don't like it, why don't you go back where you came from?" (p. 46). This heightens the racial distinction in the Caribbean and the impact it has on migrants daily lives. After many years of leaving Trinidad, the racial segregation does not change, it remains.

In the novel, Ramabai Espinet exposes the traumatic experience and the fate of women when their men abandon them. Some of the women escaped abandonment in India only for them to experience same in the new world. For instance, Mona finds a bundle of love letters wrap in old brown papers. She unwrap the parcel and read the letters address to Mr. Ganga Singh. Ganga Singh is the name of Mona's grandfather Pappy (Stephen), before he accepts the Christian faith. His earlier marriage with Etwaria lasted for two years only. His marriage with Etwaria has no legal bond on him because it is a traditional marriage. Etwaria's love letters were full of longings, hopes and show sense of waiting for her beloved. When Mama dies, Etwaria wrote and sends a man to Pappy in order to know his plans for a reunion. He is ready to return and take Etwaria but his son is angry about the decision.

Mackie views Pappy's wish for a reunion as a show of disrespect to his demised mother so, Pappy never reunited with Etwaria. Many other women refuse the Britishers faith (Christianity) so they were isolated and considered heathens. Etwaria is abandoned by Pappy and she lived an isolated life in her hut until her death.

In La Plata, Toolsie a well-known contractor gives Mackie a place to live rent-free for two months as he tries to build and complete his house in Canada. We get to meet Baboonie (which means a young girl) a wretched female character. The novel describes her as an old lady who lives alone in one of Toolsie's huts. In an attempt to get work, she comes to Mona's house and Mona's mother receives her lovingly while her father objects to her coming to their house. Though Baboonie is an old woman and a beggar, she is sexually exploited by the villagers at night frequently. No one takes care of her and no one provides help. "Baboonie fought off intruders upon her body with curses and threats and words sung from the holy books..." (p. 98). Baboonie is a representation of poor Indian women who were abandoned by the society. Without the male figure in their lives, they become vulnerable to sexual and emotional exploitation.

While resisting colonial rule, De Doctah, a prominent politician who is believed to be the messiah and a man that will unify the Africans and the Indians; a man who uses catchy phrases like "Massa day done" and "all ah we is one" (p. 64) becomes a leader (prime minister). In the bias ruling of De Doctah "the prime minister's partisan display of power for the benefit of the blacks population had destroyed any vision of oneness and equality" (p. 66). Based on this, the Indians do not only have to contend or battle and resist the rule of Britishers alone, they are also forced to battle with the Black Africans onslaughts in the Caribbean, even though they were all settlers. Through the written letters of Da Da who is also known as Mackie, we see these

portrayals and resistance shown thus:

January 3rd, 1964

Dear Sir,

I write this letter as a true patriot of this country. My love for this land where generations of my forebears have toiled and struggled, wept and loved, is a pure one. I write not for myself but for my countrymen.

Sir, the leader of our land, fondly regarded by everyone, even myself, as De Doctah, has labelled my people, the Indians of this land, as a "hostile and recalcitrant minority." In so doing he consigns us to the dungheap of history. How can we contribute to the enterprise of nationhood, trapped as we are by this perception of ourselves which is lodged in the hearts and minds of our fellow countrymen of other races? I say other races, but let us honour plain speaking and be more blunt. The two chief races in this land are Negro and Indian. I say that our leader is setting us up, one against the other. I say that this is wrong.

My countrymen, when will you wake up and see the light? Our only hope for the future is unity! We must unite!

Think, I beg you.

I remain, sir,

Yours sincerely,

Nizam Maharaj (p. 66-67).

This first letter is written as a reaction to the De Doctah's comment about the Indians as a hostile and recalcitrant minority. Mackie debunks this views because when De Doctah is campaigning for the seat of the prime minister, he promises the society unity and equality and that is why he uses catchy phrases like "all ah we is one" (p. 64). Unknown to the Indians he does not share the vision of the Indians. The second letter

(Espinet, p. 67-68) captures the experiences of Indians after indentureship. The racial divide that has its root from the arrival of Indians in the Caribbean continues to the third and fourth generations. Decades have passed and yet the issue of superior and inferior race becomes an issue in the Caribbean. In the hierarchy of succession, the Britishers are at the top, the Blacks at the middle while the Indians are at the bottom of the pyramid. The letters that Da Da writes are letters that were written during a period when it is a taboo for an Indian to marry a Negro. Finally, the third and final letter is written 6 month after the second. By then, Trinidadians were leaving Trinidad for Canada because of the employment opportunity. Also, things were not getting any better in Trinidad because of the constant hatred, onslaughts and the great divides between races. Politics further worsen the plights of all races in Trinidad because of marginalization. This is not the ideal society that, the Indians were hoping for their children when they were casting their votes for De Doctah.

Conclusion

Edward George a British politician in a playwright says “Beneath the rule of men entirely

great, the pen is mightier than the sword” (1839). The written letters of Da Da in *The Swinging Bridge* reiterates this quote. Furthermore, the novel highlights the destructive effects of Indian women's indentureship for they became victims of sexual harassment and instead of punishing the victimizers, the women are always blamed for being immoral and prostitutes. Domestic and sexual violence against women was common during the indentured journey and in the New World. Though they were always considered secondary in preference to men, women became an important discourse in Espinet's works. The novel *The Swinging Bridge* becomes a substitute for history based on oral tradition. It gives an accurate historical narrative of the hundreds and thousands of women who migrated to the presumed new world from the 19th through the 20th century. These women's debates have a transformative relevance in terms of gender ideology, causing resistance to the patriarchal and colonial depictions of women's alienation. Espinet rebuilds live stories which is similar to Gainder's to depict and paint a picture of all those women who suffered gender inequity like Mona, Muddie, Baboonie, Rosana, and Aunt Vennie among others.

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