

The immigration of indians in the 19th century

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



Topic: The immigration of East Indian indentured workers to the Caribbean in the 19th century could be regarded as a new system of slavery. Slavery was the initial labour system used by Europeans on their plantations in the Caribbean. It was implemented in the 1600`s, the Europeans forcefully took people from the African continent to the Caribbean on various trips. The path in which the slaves were carried between Africa and the Caribbean is known to historians as the Triangular Trade. These Africans and those from the African lineage became slaves on the plantations where they were not seen as humans and were treated as animals or property.

After the freedom of the enslaved population in the 1830`s, the planters were faced with irregularity of labour on the estates. This was because many of the slaves had left plantation to go start a new life. In addition, the remaining population had cultivated land of their own; often when it was harvesting time instead of harvesting the crops on the estates, the freed people would harvest their own crops which posed a problem to planters. As a result of this major problem, planters now had to develop new strategies to regulate the labour force on the estates.

A major to the inconsistency of the labour on the estates was importation of indentured workers namely; Chinese, Surinam`s and the East Indians. However the researcher`s focus in this IA will be on the East Indian indentured workers. There are various factors that made the strategy of importing East Indians a success. These factors are commonly referred to as push and pull factors. In the East Indies at that time, specifically in India, there was a large population. The large population was not being utilized

hence there being a large number of unemployed people. Many of the East Indian people had nothing tying them down in India.

Other reason for success of the importation of the East Indians was that India experienced similar climatic conditions to that of the Caribbean. Indian labourers who had already proved successful in Mauritius; they were then considered to be a good bet for survival in Jamaica. In 1837 John Gladstone, father of Prime Minister W. E Gladstone and owner of two plantations In British Guiana, applied to the secretary of state for the colonies, to get permission to import Indian labourers. In 1838 with the arrival of 396 Indians, the great flood of Indian immigration had begun(Tinker H).

This meant that the indentured workers were imported between the periods of 1838 and 1885. West Indians were imported aswell to British Guiana and Trinidad, with 238, 909 and 143, 939 respectively while countries like Jamaica received 38, 681 because the labour shortage was not as devastating as it was in Trinidad and British Guiana. These indentured workers that were now being imported into the Caribbean came under contracts. These contracts played a vital role in the working conditions of the Indians on the plantations, or should have. The conditions applied to all immigration schemes.

The contracts were not drawn up by a mutual person or an East indian or a planter, the contracts were drawn up by West Indian planters, who wrote up the contracts to their own likings. Therefore the contracts tended to the employers benefit rather than to the benefit of the employees (East Indians). The conditions of the contract varied according to the scheme and colony involved. Before they could sign the contract they were to appear in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-immigration-of-indians-in-the-19th-century/>

magistrates court and were to be fully informed about the conditions of the contract so that they were aware of what they were getting themselves into.

This was however not the case; first and foremost the contract was written in English which posed a problem to the Indians who were not familiar with the language, this created a language barrier, so basically the Indians signed (thumb marks) the contracts ignorant to what they would face on arriving at the new world. The British government in the beginning would only allow contracts for a one year period, gradually this changed in 1848 and in 1863 changed from three years to five years respectively.

Many historians will say that the immigration of East Indian indentured workers to the Caribbean in the 19th century could be regarded as a new system of slavery. There are several factors which might have caused them to come to this conclusion. These factors can be divided into two groups: transportation process and the life on the plantation. The transportation process starts off with the potential travellers gaining documents and passes from officials in India to travel. There were many persons who wanted to come on this economic endeavour because of the poor working conditions and high unemployment rate in India.

On the ship itself, the experience was similar to that of the slaves. There were tight spaces and little to no moving space for the passengers. There were also many deaths during the long voyage despite the presence of a surgeon on each ship. Life on the plantation was similar in that the Indians were ill-treated just like the slaves. Investigations by the Anti-slavery Society revealed that many of the immigrants had died quickly (Tinker H). They were badly beaten, wrongly imprisoned and many of the Indian women raped.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-immigration-of-indians-in-the-19th-century/>

In addition to the physical abuse of the indentured servants, the plantation owners were not paying them the money they agreed to, which is a breach in contract and it constitutes criminal acts on the planters part. The indentured workers were paid less than the slaves and were initially placed at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. However, owing to the culture of the Indians, when they arrived on the plantation they considered themselves at a higher social status than the slaves due to the skin colour difference while in reality some of the slaves were at a higher economic status than they were.

In conjunction both groups were forced to abandon their way of life and subscribe to that of their masters and employers. It went to the extent where any union outside of Christian marriage was not recognised. The indentured servants also lived in poor health conditions. Several individuals who came from various family groups had to live in small, three to four rooms in housing called barracks. Also, they thrived off a monotonous, disproportionate and poor diet consisting of rice, flour, dried fish or goat, peas and seasonings which were served as rations.

There were also differences which can arguably be considered not compromising the support of the view being presented. There is the point that the Indians chose to come to the Caribbean while the Africans were forced and coerced. Africans were being converted from Muslim and other indigenous beliefs to Christianity and the Indians were converted from Hinduism. However, both through secrecy retained some of their beliefs systems which is openly being practiced today.

Also, children got the opportunity to get quarterly checked by a doctor as it was a strict policy stipulated by the Indian government. These minor differences were not enough to propose that the Indians were treated better than the slaves. Joseph Beaumont, Chief Justice of British Guiana published a pamphlet in England in 1871 entitled "the New Slavery" because he saw that in practice, immigration labour schemes were slavery under different name. though the emigrant from India entered into the contract voluntarily, he was often ignorant to the conditions that he was agreeing to.

The system depended on the officials in charge. They could check the abuses, and there were cases of colonial officials who did their utmost to secure fairness for the immigrant. Sir John Peter Grant in Jamaica and Sir Arthur Gordon in Trinidad worked on behalf of the immigrants during their governorships. In general, there was a lack of good will on the part of the planters and authorities towards immigrants. In concluding by definition, immigrant labour was not slavery because it was entered into voluntarily.

The contract gave rights to the immigrant who was paid for his labour, however, language created a barrier so the Indians often misunderstood the contract and they got paid less than what was promised to them. The Indians were denied the natural freedoms of humans being outside their hours of labour. Immigrants were also subject to arbitrary treatment and various inducements were trying to persuade them to extend the contract after the five years but most wanted their freedom. Hence, my view that the Immigration of East Indian indentured workers to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century could be regarded as a new system of slavery.