

Girmitiya: An Unfamiliar Saga of Indian Poor Migrant Laborers

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ABSTRACT

Girmitiyas were laborers whom the British Empire sent to Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, and the Caribbean (mostly Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and Jamaica) to work on sugarcane plantations for the benefit of European settlers. On the one hand, the present study briefly describes migration and tries to understand various socio-cultural and economic consequences that led to the first generation of Girmitiya laborers and their descendants. On the other hand, their sukh-dukh (way of life) such as *vedana* (derived from ethnic oppression), *parakram* (bravery), *harsha-vishad* (happiness), *shringar* (erotic), *bhakti* (devotion), *nari vedana* (women's suffering), *udveg* (excitement), *zeal*, *prakriti prem* (attachment with nature), coincidence-disconnection, and emerging social values, etc. are illustrated in the present article with the help of their folklores and available literature. To get an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic problems, various secondary sources have been used in the present article.

[**Keywords:** Culture, Indentured Labor, Folk, Hummer, Literature, Sociology]

Introduction

In the movement of population change, migration plays a vital role in society. Every stage of human life, people have migrated from one place to another for various reasons, like in Search for livelihood and food, to escape from natural calamities and enemies. Migration is a universal phenomenon in society applicable in all stages of human life. It is generally known as any movement of people from one place of origin to another to settle down (Kaul, 2008). Labor migration takes place firstly by the rational decision of an individual, an individual makes a decision based on free will to migrate to a place where there is a demand for labor, and secondly, capitalist developments or social pressure need lead to a family to move from their native place. There are two key reasons for labor migration: the first is "migration for survival," and the second is "migration for subsistence." The migration for survival indicates that the labor faces several social and economic hardships and it becomes necessary to shift to live. The unskilled labor communities generally include

landless, illiterate, and vulnerable sections most belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes. These people migrate for brief periods of time and do not go very far from their homes since migration is a necessary means of supplementing income to cover the gap left by seasonal employment and to ensure survival (Prasad and Akundy, 2021).

Youth is a special category of society which largely comes under the age group of 17 to 25. The new generations have played an important role in society for social change and development. The migration of youth has been a serious problem in the society. The main causes of the youth migration are economic and social reasons. Youth migration seems to be primarily driven by the pursuit of social mobility. In these stages, people start to take the responsibility of the family. The youth plays a vital role in meeting the economy of the family. The reasons like the large size of the family, the cost of cultural and religious activities, involvement in various bad habits like drinking, smoking, and gambling, and the frequent natural disasters make many parents lose their livelihood and become poorer. Therefore, they force their children to engage in various activities to earn a living and sustenance for the family. So, the overall burden of the family depends upon whether the male children (within the age range of 15 to 24) can do work or not. Therefore, due to the urgency of earning the youth are entering the labor market. But in their local area problem like unemployment, and the non-availability of employment opportunities promote migration among the youth.

The rural-urban migration is driven by both push and pull factors in rural areas. In India, most of the people who live in rural areas are dependent on the agricultural sector. Most of the laborers are landless laborers and small land-holding farmers in rural areas. They do not get adequate wages and employment opportunities in the village. So, they are pushed from rural areas to urban areas in search of a living. As a result, it generates urban prosperity and streams of rural-urban migration in India (Oberai and others, 1989).

Migration has been a universal phenomenon. According to the Indian census (2001), male migrants are nearly 90 million while female migrants constitute 261 million of the Indian population. Out of all the female migration, 139 million falls under the category of intra-district mobility. It describes how many ladies moved from their birthplace to different places as a result of marriage. It was found that 42 million interstate migrants were recorded in 2001, of which 19 million were men and 22 million were women. It's clear that female mobility was greater than male mobility in both circumstances. These numbers seem tremendous in all reports. Analysing more closely, we see that, as of the 2011 Census, about 62 percent of India's internal migrants are short-distance intra-district migrants. Twelve percent of migrants were long-distance interstate visitors.

Migration can happen due to the repeated disasters that strike regularly, cyclones, floods, droughts, and famines hit at different times in different regions. For instance, the coastal region is prone to cyclone floods, whereas the western part and southern parts of the state are repeatedly affected by drought and famines. Above all these problems created a vacuum in the livelihood of the people. Disaster creates problems like poverty, landlessness, flood, and drought creating crop failure, the nonprofit of paddy. These causes like indebtedness, non-availability of wage work in villages, and alternative livelihood prompt migration.

It appears that Migration is the survival strategy for the people. For the alternative source of livelihood, migration is their first choice. It is closely related to the eradication of poverty. To deal with such social causes, youths have been playing a vital role in the family as well as society.

Other Aspects of Migration

Migration is a process of residential and behavioral change of the living beings found in every society. It means the movement of people from one place to another for the betterment of their socio-economic and political status. In the era of globalization, rapid transport, and ICTs have made international mobility of the population easy and possible. This is evident in the case of Indian International migration. South-South migration is prominent in Asian countries. India is one of the countries in the southern global hemisphere that produces large number of migrants to the GCC countries. India has the 2nd largest diaspora (30 million) population after China 50 (million) in the world (MEA). Gulf Countries are one of the major migration corridors in the South-South Migration in the world. It is evident that GCC has foreign expatriates from all parts of the world, but the majority of the population is shared by Asian migrants, especially from India (Kohli, 2014).

Girmitiya: The Indentured Emigration

The early 19th century saw the start of indentured emigration as a response to the labour shortage brought on by

the British Empire's abolition of slavery. The legal eradication of slavery in European nations, particularly in former British and Dutch possessions like Mauritius, Suriname, Trinidad, Tobago, Jamaica, Fiji, etc., is the origin of Girmitiya Majdoor's legacy. These countries faced a shortage of laborers for farming in several countries. At that time, the British-Indian government sent about 1.2 million workers from India to the above-pointed countries. Labor depots were built everywhere, and workers were recruited. People living in poverty and plagued by landlords left family relations and went to these countries across the seven seas with a dream of betterment. These workers were sent on a five-year contract and were consumed in sugarcane, coffee, and cotton fields. Being contract workers, they were called Girmitiya due to declaring the 'contract' and 'agreement'. After intense opposition from Indians, the agreement and contract were stopped in the year 1917. The descendants of Girmitiya laborers in these countries celebrated 100 years of ending the indentured practice (D'Souza, 2010).

Emigration from Uttar Pradesh has a long history. Its inception was from the colonial period and is practiced to date. After the end of the slavery system in the 1830s, there was a shortage in labor supply in sugar plantations of the European and British colonies (Lal, 2001). This condition gave birth to indentured labor migration from India. During indentured labor emigration, approximately 1.3 million indentured laborers migrated from different Indian states to other colonies. Eighty percent of the migrants from the 1880s to the end of indentured emigration in 1916 were from Uttar Pradesh, thirteen percent came from Bihar and Bengal, and the remaining migrants came from Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and other places (Ibid). In this system, a large number of indentured laborers migrated from Western Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Bombay. In this arrangement, each indentured laborer had to serve a five-year contract. Uttar Pradesh produced more indentured labourers than any other state during this time. Over the course of colonial migration to Fiji, the Central Provinces sent 2,808 or 6.2% of all immigrants, Bihar 4,771 or 10.5%, Oudh (now Ajodhya) 13,207 or 29%, and Uttar Pradesh 21,131 or 46.5% of all emigrants (Lal, 2013).

Table No. 1: Indian Emigrants in GCC countries

Data Sources: MOIA, 2015

Sr. no.	Countries	NRI	PIO	Total Indian Emigrants (in million)
1.	Saudi Arabia	2800000	13	2.800013 million
2.	UAE	2000000	2349	2.002349 million
3.	Kuwait	758615	1096	.759711 million
4.	Oman	707850	880	.708730 million
5.	Qatar	600000	677	.600677 million
6.	Bahrain	350000	2500	.352500 million
7.	Total	7216465	7515	7.223980 million

Malhotra (2018) illustrates an interesting story: 'In the 37 years spanning 1879-1916, nearly 60,500 laborers from various religions and castes were transported to Fiji Islands on 42 ships making approximately 87 trips. On 11 January 1908, Mohan, a laborer from Sarnagi village of Haraiya tehsil of Basti district of Uttar Pradesh, left his home, relationship, and relationship with another ship on 11 January 1908 and left for Suriname in tripsⁱ (among them were Rajmohan's great-grandfather and grandfather). Suriname was then under the Netherlands. Rajmohan of the fourth generation of the Mohan family has become a popular figure and sings the life story of the Girmitiya with emotional attachment. Rajmohan expresses his suffering and reveals, how one-third of the 40 thousand workers returned from Suriname after the contract was over, in his live performance.

Most of these also went to countries like Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, etc. while some returned to the Indian continentⁱⁱ. The life of these indentured laborers was not easy. He went to Calcutta by train and later Suriname by water. Seeing the train of millions of Indian workers and then going abroad by ship, an unknown poet wrote or sang the folk song ('*Railia Baron Piya Ko Liye Jaay Re*'), which is still sung in the Bhojpuri region. In this song, the woman of the village says the train and the ship as her enemy because they are taking her beloved husband abroad. She wishes for Piya to melt the train ticket, burn the city he is going to, and shoot the bullet of the officer he is going to work under so that his beloved does not get away from him, but later on she realizes the real enemy of her husband is money and poverty. This song Rajmohan also sings well in his live programs. Most Girmitiya did not return to their country because they had to come back here to do 'rental farming' while they were becoming

the owners of the farms in Suriname and other countries. Rajmohan says that descendants of Girmitiya are happy and well-settled now. The offspring of Girmitiyas are still working in the field but as an owner. They love their ancestral country India very much. They watch Hindi and Bhojpuri movies and celebrate Hindu festivals like Holi and Deepawali.ⁱⁱⁱ

Table No. 2: Number of Indenture Laborers of Uttar Pradesh in Fiji during Colonial Period

S. No	District Name	No. of People	S. No	District Name	No. of People
1	Basti	6,415	12	Bara Banki	769
2	Gonda	3,589	13	Bahraich	750
3	Faizabad	2,329	14	Banaras	672
4	Sultanpur	1,747	15	Lucknow	613
5	Azamgarh	1,716	16	Kanpur	583
6	Gorakhpur	1,683	17	Unao	556
7	Allahabad	1,218	18	Agra	549
8	Jaunpur	1,188	19	Mirzapur	527
9	Ghazipur	1,127			Total=28012
10	Rai Bareilly	1,087			
11	Pratapgarh	894			

Data Sources: Lal, B. V. (2000)

Rajmohan narrates that Girmitiya youth also love the culture of their forefathers. Marriage is for three days and in it, all the rituals are Kodwa, Turmeric, Bhatwan, Tamarind Ghotai, Dwarpooja, Kheer Khawai, etc. Love marriages also want to have a three-day marriage ceremony and all rituals should be played in it.

Caste of Girmitiya

Many Girmitiya in Mauritius, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad, and Fiji were from Bihar and U.P. and belonged to mostly Dalits and backward classes.^{iv} After the end of the five-year contract, most of the Girmitiya settled in the same countries but lived the whole life dream of returning to their country and village. Few of them get a chance to return but after coming back from there they cannot find their village and family while a few were lucky who returned to their villages and they also got their families. The inhabiting places of Girmitiya are based on caste groups because the notions of caste still exist among them.^v

Folk Songs of Girmitiya

The folklore is closely associated with lower castes in India and the majority of the Girmitiya were also from very low-income groups. After examining a few videos, available on YouTube, can be said that instruments like Dhanatal with dholak, harmonium, etc. can be seen in their cultural practices. For instance, the Dandatal is a musical instrument of eastern Uttar Pradesh, which has now been refined in Surinam in a sophisticated form. Many narratives say that the Girmitiya workers who went to Surinam from eastern Uttar Pradesh had also taken this instrument with them. A famous folksinger Rajmohan often visits India and searches for a picture of the old Dandatal. Similarly, folk artist Jeevanlal and his comrades who came to perform the Dhobia dance from Ghazipur had this Dandatal. Rajmohan often says from the stage that watching Dandatal is a major achievement of his life. He says that he would go to the different parts of Surinam and show the people a picture of Dandatal.

Literature on Girmitiya

In his book "Tears in Paradise – Suffering and Struggles of Indians in Fiji 1879-2004," Rajendra Prasad describes the horrible abuse that the British inflicted on Indian Girmitiya workers in Fiji between 1879 and 1919. Slavery by another name was the indenture system (agreement) under which they were hired. Girmitiyas lived and worked in such horrible, inhumane conditions from the start. The author notes that among colonies that used Girmitiyas on several continents, Fiji had the greatest rate of infanticides and suicides. The author's lived experiences as a descendant of Girmitiya grandparents helped him to sketch or capture the suffering, socio-economic struggles, other challenges, and sacrifices of the Girmitiya.^{vi} He writes, "Overseer's whip comes down upon her half-naked back and legs. The child is struck also. Both are crying...Barnicoat poured boiling water on Poligardu's genitals...Blomfield bashed Naraini's head on stones... her face covered in blood..." The author associates those socio-economic challenges with the policies of the British government because they recruited 60,965 Indians to work in the sugarcane plantations in Fiji. The recruitment procedure was rife with dishonesty and deception, and

the primary goal of those who engaged in it was to seduce gullible, uninformed, and defenceless poor peasants into areas they had no idea existed or had ever considered populating. When these Girmitiya realised they were being separated from their homeland, it broke their hearts. The author describes a ship incident that provides a peek of a historical horror disaster (1882). He reports that about fifteen trainees leaped overboard and perished because there wasn't enough room for them. Many sickened on board, and some passed away from homesickness. Girmitiya women were often the victims of rape and molestation. They had to work long hours in the fields and endured the customary beatings, kicks, and sticks of the white Overseers. Pregnant women in their later stages were compelled to work without any social safety net. Few people ever gave birth in the fields, and the majority had to go back to work a few days after giving birth or becoming pregnant. Their social behaviour was altered by the harshness of plantation life. The author uses Hannah Dudley as an example of a Methodist missionary. Dudley requested that the indenture system be abolished in a letter to the Indian leaders dated November 4, 1912. She stated, "I shall never forget the first time I saw 'indentured' women." They were coming back from their jobs for the day. I cannot get over the expressions on those women's faces. The theme of Rajendra Prasad's portrayal of Fiji's modern history is "An Uncertain Future," which echoes the marginalisation and racial discrimination of Indo-Fijians under successive governments as their constant fear of the future kept them on edge. The horrific events are skilfully described in his book "Tears in Paradise," which will leave readers with chilling memories of agony, endurance, confusion, violence, and inspiration for millions.

Folksongs and Migrants

Folklore in India has always been an integral part of the Dalit-Bahujan community and most of the indentured laborers were also from this working-class community. Hence, along with musical instruments like dholak, harmonium, etc., the Dandatal can be seen in their cultural practices. For example, the Dandatal is a musical instrument from eastern Uttar Pradesh, which has now been refined in Suriname in a refined form. The indentured laborers who went to Suriname from eastern Uttar Pradesh also took this instrument with them. A famous writer, Rajmohan has also written on the old Dandatal. This was the Dandatal of folk artist Jivanlal and his companions who came from Ghazipur to perform the Dhobiya dance. He described seeing the Dandatal as a great achievement of his life and said that he would go to Suriname and show a picture of it to the people (Prasad and Bibhar, 2020).

Table No. 3: Local Genres and Its Popularity among Castes

Castes	Folksongs
Kumhar and Kahar Caste	Kaharva Folklore
Ahir/Yadav	Birha, Lorik, Faruahi Folklore
Pasi/Pasvan	Pasiota Folklore
Mushar/Vanmanus	Deena-Bhadri Folklore
Badhyi	Gopi-Thakur Folksongs

Prasad (2017)

Suresh Rituparna writes that the voices that embody the sweet smell of Indian soil on foreign land have been expressed in various folk songs, which can be understood through these lines (Pravasi Alha)-

“Desh Bhi Chota, Raiyat Choti, Chhota Kutumb Hamar” (I left my country, I left my property, I left my entire family.”).

“Yek Ram Mor Gayile Videshva, Sakal Dukhva Deyi Gayili Ho Ram. Ye Sasu-Nanadiya Birahi Boleli, Kekar Kamahi Khayibu Ho Ram” (One husband has gone abroad, he has caused me all pain. Oh Ram, mother-in-law and sister-in-law tease me by saying ‘whose earnings will I eat).

The above folksongs describe the ethos of different castes. Even today, in the rural areas of North India and countries like Fiji and Surinam, these genres are especially popular among Ahir, Pasi, Gaderia, Dhobi and other working castes. The singer presents these genres with the help of some musical instruments like Dholak, Harmonium, Ghungroo, and Kartal along with his five or six companions (singing group). Prominent sociologists - Milton Singer and Robert Redfield weaved these working-class folk songs (Virha, Nakata, Nautanki, Malhar, etc.) into the concept of "Little Tradition". These folk genres of singing are oral and flow from one generation to another through songs in a rhythmic form. These songs depict vividly everything from the misfortunes of the common man to the struggles of daily life.

Girmitiya and Other Essay

The Girmitiya system was started by the British at the beginning of 1834 and it was declared prohibited in 1917. Mahatma Gandhi started a campaign in South Africa against this inhuman practice. Gopal Krishna Gokhale

proposed to end the Girmitya system in March 1912 at the Imperial Legislative Council. A total of 22 members of the Imperial Legislative Council decided that they would continue to propose this proposal every year until this inhuman practice was abolished. In December 1916, at the Congress session, Mahatma Gandhi proposed the India Security and Girmity System Act. After this, in February 1917, a huge meeting was organized in Ahmedabad against the anti-Girmity system. CF Andrews and Henry Pollack also spoke in opposition to the practice. After this, the anti-Girmity campaign continued to gain momentum. In March 1917, the Girmity opponents gave an ultimatum to the British government that this practice be abolished by May. Seeing the growing anger of the people, the government finally had to think seriously. On 12 March itself, the government published a prohibition in its gazette that laborers should not be sent to countries outside India under indenture.

Indians make up about 68 percent of Mauritius's population. More than half of these people are about 52 percent people of North India, whose ancestors used to speak Bhojpuri. It was the living of the workers of North India that they lived and worked under adverse conditions, but it was also the tolerance of Mauritius, it gave those Indians a chance to thrive and grow. An example of this is Sivasagar Ramgoolam, who became the first Prime Minister after Mauritius was freed from British slavery. He received the status of Father of the Nation in Mauritius.^{vii}

Difference between Indentured and Slave

The slave could not be free from slavery even if she/he paid the money, but the indentured with the obligors were only so much that they could be released after five years. The indentured could have been exempted but had no money to return to India. They had no choice other than to either work with their boss or to be arrested by some other owner. They were also sold. They could be tortured for not working, or for doing work. Generally, whether the indentured woman or the man was not allowed to marry. Even if some indentured marriages were performed, slavery rules were applied to them.^{viii}

Like a woman could be sold to someone and children could be sold to someone else. Forty percent of the women used to accompany the indentured men; the young women were kept by the British owners. When the attraction ended, these women were handed over to the laborers. The children of the indentured were the property of the owners. If the owner is older than his children, he gets him to work or sell it to others. The indentured people were given only livable food and clothes. They were deprived of basic needs like education, entertainment, etc. He used to work hard for 12 to 18 hours daily. Hundreds of laborers died of famine death every year while working in inhuman conditions. There was no hearing of the owners' atrocities. Fiji was the first hideout of the indentured. Mahatma Gandhi called himself the first indentured person.

Although the consignment of indentured laborers reached Fiji before India in the 18th century. Indian laborers were taken there to work in the sugarcane fields, so that the local culture of England could be saved, and the European owners also benefited. Today, Fiji has more than three and a half lakh people of Indian origin in its population of 9 lakh. Even Fiji's language is Fijian Hindi.

M.K. Gandhi and His Experiences

The novel 'Pahla Girmitya', written by senior writer Giriraj Kishore, is the story of Mohandas Karam Chandra Gandhi's South African struggle. Gandhiji visited Britain for the first time when he wanted to study law. The family members gave permission, but the society ostracized him. The behavior of his sister and brother-in-law taught Gandhi the first lesson of society. Since then, his faith in Indian society has increased. When he returned from Britain after completing his law degree, the family had great expectations from him, but after a few days, they were disappointed when Mahatma Gandhi failed miserably in the legal profession. Elder brother Laxmi Das advised him to go to Africa to plead the case of Dada Abdullah, a close associate of African businessman Abdul Karim Javeri. Helpless and unemployed Mohandas Karam Chandra Gandhi set out on a journey to Africa on a one-year contract.

Enduring the hardships of the journey, they landed in an unknown country on 8 March 1893. Mohandas K.C. Gandhi looked different, completely painted in a foreign color. Dada Abdullah himself was present to receive him on the shore. He had found out what Mr. Gandhi's appearance would be like. Dada Abdullah, alighting from the Turo ship, went forward, shook hands, and said in unclear words - 'What should I do with this white elephant?' Mohandas heard this and smiled. Dada was accompanied by Africa's famous personality Parsi Ji Rustam and two more people.

Dada Abdullah was the biggest Indian businessman in Natal. He had business with many countries. Dada was

called the first Indian Sindbad the Sailor. He had come to Africa from Mauritius thirty years ago. It is said that these days success has become Dada's pet pigeon. There were eight to ten ships which used to carry out the work of Abdullah and Company. Dada used to do business with countries like Britain, Spain, Portugal, America, Canada, India, Mauritius and Surinam.

His relative was Seth Tayyab of Pretoria, who was the second biggest businessman. There was a case going on between Dada Abdullah and Tayyab ji due to business dealings. The decision of which was becoming difficult. Both of them could not get justice even after spending a lot of money in African courts. Tayyab ji owed Dada forty thousand pounds which he did not want to pay. Dada informed Mohandas K. Gandhi about everything. Dada Abdullah went to show the courtroom of Natal at Mohandas's request the next day. When both of them reached there, the hearing of some case was going on. Dada Abdullah and Gandhi ji went and sat in a corner. The court magistrate's eyes kept going to Gandhi's turban again and again. The magistrate raised his hand and said - "Young man, take off your turban." Gandhi ji got up and walked out of the courtroom in protest. This thing hurt Gandhi. The turban that was thrown was not Gandhiji's but his country. He prepared a draft and sent it to the 'Natal Mercury' newspaper. The next day's newspapers were filled with news of Gandhi. This was the first incident of its kind. This was the first bracelet thrown by Gandhi in the socio-political pond of Africa. After this incident, Dada Abdullah was very impressed with Gandhi's personality, he understood that he had made the right choice of M.K. Gandhi.

Dada Abdullah was a farsighted person. He had told Mohandas in detail about Pretoria and had also arranged for a first-class train ticket for him to go there. Abdullah had instructed Gandhi that only white people travel in first class there and no Indian is allowed to set foot in first class. Despite this, Mohandas decided to travel in first class. First Lesson in Train

The capital of Natal was Pietermaritzburg, from where one would go to Pretoria. Dada himself had come to see off M.K. Gandhi. Before boarding the train, Dada had made Gandhi aware of the situation that only whites travel in the 'first class' here, 'go carefully'. What Abdullah had feared happened. The whites pushed Gandhi out of the train in Maritzburg. It was very cold in Africa in the month of June. Gandhi's luggage was deposited with the station master and Gandhi was forced to spend the night in the open sky in the cold winds. This thing completely shook Gandhi's self-respect. However, it was common for them to insult a coolie (Indians were called coolies in South Africa) in this way. Gandhi fell asleep while looking at the open sky and some Indians came there and put a blanket over the sleeping Gandhi and went away.

Political Initiative

When Dada Abdullah heard about this, he telegraphed the Indian businessmen of Maritzburg and after lobbying with the railway department, arranged a train for the next day to send him to Johannesburg on the same ticket. Gandhi got time to talk to the businessmen there. Gandhi wrote a letter to the railway department and told them that he was a barrister from London and there was no such order in the Queen's government that anyone should be a victim of racial discrimination. When Gandhi's letter reached the railway department, there was a lot of commotion there. Finally, it was decided that only clean and tidy Indians could now travel in the first class. This was the second most surprising thing for African newspapers, the discussion of which created a lot of buzz in all the newspapers.

There was no train from Johannesburg to Pretoria. Therefore, the rest of the journey had to be undertaken by carriage. During this journey, Gandhi was beaten badly by a white passenger. In response, the thin Gandhi offered him the other cheek and said, 'You can hit me on this cheek too!' This embarrassed the white man. This is where Gandhi got the idea of 'non-violence' against injustice and got the strength to fight without arms. During the rest of the journey, Dada's telegram went ahead, and Gandhi followed behind.

When Gandhi went to meet the lawyer nominated by Seth Abdullah, he saw that this lawyer did not pay attention to the dispute between the two Seths and considered the work of propagating Christianity more important. He sent a telegram to Abdullah and took permission that he wanted to meet Seth Tayyab ji. He went to Seth Tayyab ji and talked to him about the case among many other things and put forth the whole situation. Seth Tayyab talked about this and that but was defeated by Gandhi's arguments and it was decided that a mutual settlement should be reached between the two. Both the Seths could not believe that this could happen. It was decided that Seth Tayyab had a loan of thirty-seven thousand pounds left. Seth became anxious, Gandhi also got an agreement made between the two families that Seth Tayyab would pay the outstanding amount in installments so that he could be saved from bankruptcy. The matter was agreed upon, and both the relatives were united again.

Migration and Some Other Facts

Gandhi had come to Africa on a year-long agreement (which was called Girmity in the local language). In this sense, he was the first indentured laborer who had completed his contract (Girmity). In a year, Gandhi could know only a little about the Indians here. Whatever he could know, the gist of it was that the Indians here lived a very hellish life. The case that had been going on for a year was also over. Preparations for Gandhi's return were made at Dada Abdullah's house in Natal. Dada never tired of praising Gandhi in front of many guests. Gandhi was shocked when he saw that day's newspaper kept on the dining table. People asked what happened. He has said that the 'Indian Franchise Bill' was being presented in the Natal Parliament. When they enquired in detail, the situation became clear that by making this law, Indian people were being deprived of their rights. All the businessmen decided that the fight for this would be fought under Gandhi's guidance, but Gandhi's contract had ended. Dada Abdullah was a very clever man. He said that when Gandhi bhai's contract was over, some attention should be paid to him as well. People understood the matter and unanimously put forward the demand to give work to Gandhi in Africa.

Suffrage and Political Draft

Gandhi read many documents, talked to elderly people, and gathered information about the right to vote. A draft was prepared against the government in a hurry and ten thousand signatures were collected from Natal residents. Seeing the words written in different languages for the first time, Gandhi felt that he was among his people in India. When the hundred-page draft was presented before the government, the Speaker of the Parliament was surprised. But by then it was too late, and London had been informed of further action on the law. M.K. Gandhi prepared a second draft and sent it to the Empress in London. After a very tough struggle, the bill was repealed, and there was an uproar in the newspapers and the white community. The above story gives a glimpse into how a migrant suffers and struggles for survival

Conclusion

During the colonial period, Indian indentured labor emigration in Hindi-speaking belts remained a very important site to fulfill the shortage of laborers in the plantation economy. Therefore, this process of emigration was started during the British colonial period. And this process is gradually increasing today. During the indentured period, laborers mostly emigrated to Fiji, Surinam, Trinidad, and Mauritius under the control of British imperialism, and these regions had favorable climatic and weather conditions to produce plantation crops like sugar, rubber, tea, and coffee. Later on the shift has been seen after 1970 mainly in the case of unskilled workers in GCC countries. It was a different migration than indentured migration from India. It has been evident from the census of Indian data that Eastern Uttar Pradesh has been an important source of an out-migrating region at an internal level as well as international level. According to MOIA (2015), a report revealed new phases of emigration from states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These states possess the largest demographic favorable conditions for young population emigrants to the Gulf.

These Girmityas have gone through tremendous changes and have been a symbol of suffering and humiliation. However, they have not only come out from the trauma of socio-cultural changes, but they also influence the way of life of the existing population of the residing places like Mauritius, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad, and Fiji where they have been forced to live for longer. Their suffering can be seen in the existing literature and folk songs. Even today, they use Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and some other local dialects at home.

Notes

ⁱ Retrieved on 15/02/2021 from <https://scroll.in/magazine/886645/a-teenager-traces-her-indian-great-great-grandmothers-life-as-an-indentured-labourer-in-fiji>

ⁱⁱ Retrieved on 15/02/2021 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIQLptKE9H4>
<https://www.bhaskar.com/national/news/somewhere-there-are-slaves-somewhere-in-girmitya-pardes-we-fought-for-the-country-01618229.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Retrieved on 11/02/2021 from <https://www.livehindustan.com/news//article1-story-96880.html>

^{iv} Retrieved on 11/02/2021 from <http://marginalised.in/2019/04/15/girmitya-up-bihar-fiji-mauritius-surinam/>

^v <https://www.amarujala.com/uttar-pradesh/kushinagar/11554228813-kushinagar-news>

^{vi} Retrieved on 10/02/2021 from <https://hindi.scoopwhoop.com/girmitya-labours-has-a-painful->

[past/#.6ktab4qrj](#)

vii Retrieved on 15/01/2021 from <https://www.jagran.com/news/national-jagran-special-girmitia-is-bonding-factor-in-india-mauritius-relations-16952386.html>

viii Retrieved on 15/01/2021 from <https://www.prabhatkhabar.com/news/bihar/story/850429.html>

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