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East Indian Women and Leadership Roles During Indentured Servitude in British Guiana 1838–1920

By Lomarsh Roopnarine¹

Abstract

The following article examines leadership roles among indentured East Indian women in British Guiana (now Guyana). The research shows that leadership roles among indentured East Indian women were not as broad as those among indentured East Indian men. The main reasons for this are that Indian women were recruited from the lower ranks of Indian society, which stymied leadership roles, and the authoritarian structure of the plantation system, which supported patriarchal trends. Moreover, the colonial records do not reveal leadership roles among Indian women because the records are based on imperial domination and exploitation, reflecting anecdotal rather than analytical evidence. The article shows that in spite of restrictions, indentured Indian women did engage in leadership roles on the sugar plantations but were not as open about these roles as their male counterparts were. Nonetheless, their engagement in leadership roles was instrumental in turning adverse circumstances to their advantage, and they used strategies that were not altogether obvious to the supporters of patriarchy.

Key Words: Indentured Indian Women, British Guiana, Leadership Roles, Plantations, Makeshift “box hand” Cooperatives, Panchayat

Introduction

Published studies on leadership roles among East Indian (hereafter Indian) women during indenture in British Guiana (now Guyana) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are rare. Except for historian Hugh Tinker's limited focus in his book *A New System of Slavery: Export of Indian Labor Overseas, 1830–1920* (1974) and Trinidadian historian Kusha Haraksingh's article “Indian leadership in the Indenture Period” (1976) about four decades ago, there appear to be no substantive published studies on any aspects of Indian leadership during indenture. Of course, there are published studies on Indian resistance during indenture, which may be seen as one aspect of leadership insofar as Indians challenged their indentured engagement for a better existence. Yet, the role leadership played in resistance is not altogether clear. Moreover, when studies do examine Indian leadership roles during indenture, the focus is overwhelmingly on men.

An examination into Indian indenture historiography reveals that, to date, there is no published study on Indian women's leadership roles during indenture in British Guiana. At best, they are marginally mentioned. There are, however, some studies on indentured women and

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resistance (see Hassankhan and Lal 2014) and Indian women and matriarchal roles in the social sphere (see Hosein 2011). Perhaps the omission of Indian women's roles during indenture is understandable since they were brought to British Guiana merely to accompany their husbands and to take care of their families. Their disadvantaged backgrounds as single women, peasants, or even prostitutes in India and the patriarchal nature of the British Guianese plantations along with their small population size stymied rather than supported leadership roles. Of 239,939 Indians brought to British Guiana during indenture, only 25 percent were women. Moreover, many Indians saw themselves as transients or sojourners in British Guiana and therefore expressed no serious desire for leadership roles, particularly if those roles jeopardized their return to India and challenged the plantation establishment. Yet, to accept that Indian women played no significant leadership roles during indenture would be a gross misconception. Are we to believe that for over eighty years Indian women were not involved in any leadership roles during indenture?

The following article acknowledges that Indian women's indentured engagement was marginally different from slave bondage. They were locked in a low-wage plantation regime where they were expected to produce for their overlords without distracting, disturbing, or dismantling the established paternal plantation structure. Their indenture contracts provided them with a limited opportunity to be marginal beneficiaries of the overall indenture system without an option to compete for leadership roles. Their overlords' low perception of them also undermined opportunities for leadership roles in their new environment. The article, however, attempts to show that within this structural dominance Indian women were involved in leadership roles within and beyond the confines of the plantation system. The objective of this article is two-fold. The first is to find out why Indian women have been excluded from the literature of leadership roles during indenture in British Guiana. The second is to explore whether or not indentured Indian women were involved in leadership roles in British Guiana. If they were, what were those roles? How might those leadership roles have allowed Indian women a greater degree of flexibility and freedom during indenture? The focus of the article is not to look for hidden leadership roles, for example, in the social and domestic domains as well as in the marketplace, which are important areas for the exploration of leadership roles elsewhere. Rather, the focus is to look for noticeable identifiable roles among indentured women like those of their indentured male counterparts and their plantation bosses. Structurally, three areas of leadership are explored: on the plantations; in the economic domain, specifically in the makeshift "box hand" cooperatives; and in the *Panchayat* (Council of five males). The aim and hope is that the findings of this article will serve as a platform for more debates and discussions on Indian women during indenture in British Guiana and the Indian Diaspora.

Methodology

This article developed out of research that the author conducted during the late 1990s for his doctoral dissertation and eventually his book *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation* (Roopnarine 2007). The author conducted research again in Guyana during the first decade of the twenty-first century and recently in the summer months of 2014. From the research, it became apparent that the experience of Indian women during indenture was either absent or not accurately represented. To avoid the replication of errors, this research uses a qualitative approach based on colonial archival sources as well as oral narratives. The narratives allow the author to collect data from the perspective of the descendants of indenture rather than

to rely solely on archival information. Interviewees were selected based on age and residence. All interviewees were at least seventy-five years old and lived and experienced plantation life in the county of Berbice, Guyana.

Since the indenture system operated on leadership and subservience, it is important to define leadership in the context of the plantation indenture system. A culturally neutral definition of leadership is a system in which one or many individuals influence the mind, opinion, attitudes, and actions of others on how to behave on some particular issue or mission. There are, of course, many theories of leadership across the social sciences. Some influential theories are: great man, trait, contingency, situational, behavioral, participative, transactional and transformative. These theories have been used to explain commercial or business management from a Western perspective. The methodological approach to leadership among indentured women becomes challenging, particularly since they were mainly exposed to the Panchayat leadership (a council of five males), which was predominantly non-Western in style. In British Guiana, this leadership style persisted in a diluted form, largely due to the callous and capitalist nature of the plantation system. While no single approach is sufficient to describe leadership, it is argued in this article that the leadership style that emerged in British Guiana among indentured women had more to do with their plantation situation and individual reputation than natural traits, which in turn shaped behavioral leadership styles.

Literature Review of Indian Women During Indenture

If the planters had their way, Indian women would not have been in British Guiana. The planters openly declared that they preferred a predominantly young, male labour force. They took this position because they thought women would be a burden to the plantation system because they bore and raised children. The ratio of men to women was not a great concern. In 1838, when indenture began, the ratio of men to women was 100 to 3. This gender disparity led to a staggeringly high level of social ills on the plantations as men competed for women mainly from their own ethnic background. Women who were thought to be unfaithful were abused and even murdered by their alleged partners and spouses. To rectify this problem, the colonial authorities argued that although some of the violence against women was a transfer from nineteenth-century India, the ratio of women to men should increase. The authorities settled on 40 women to 100 men before any ships could leave India for British Guiana. This new regulation appeared unrealistic since recruiters had difficulty trying to convince women to travel out of India, mainly because of traditional customs and the uncertainty of the entire indenture scheme. Finally, it was agreed that the ratio should be 25 women to 100 men.

No one is particularly sure how Indian women fared during indenture. Scholars have proposed binary opposite arguments. On one hand, it is argued that the experience of Indian women during indenture was marginally different from slavery. This argument is premised on the background of the immigrants before leaving India and their exposure to the crass plantation system. Their gender disparity, caste, religious backgrounds, and low social status before arrival stymied efforts towards cohesion and mobilization. They arrived as indentured workers with no voice or will of their own and remained more or less the same during their sojourn in British Guiana. Within and beyond their plantation world, women had little choice but to carry the double burden of balancing low-wage labor work with household duties and expectations. Whenever they failed to meet expectations, they were abused and even murdered. Women were caught between the European and Indian patriarchy and were often sexually abused or

susceptible to advances made to them from their immediate European and Indian supervisors (Tinker 1974; Poynting 1987; Beall 1990; Carter 1994). Indian women were paid lower wages than men, and married women's wages went into the bank accounts of their husband. On some Caribbean islands, the death rates of Indian women were much higher than those of men (Roopnarine 2009). Deaths were caused by murder and childbirth. In summary, it was difficult for indentured women to find and experience freedom on and beyond the authoritarian plantation complex.

By contrast, it is argued that indentured women used the labor system efficiently and effectively to emancipate themselves from patriarchal and plantation structures, which eventually put them in a better position in the Caribbean than in India (see Lal 1985; Hoefte 1987; Shepherd 2002). For example, in the Caribbean, Indian women were not subjugated to India's stern caste system and were able to earn their own wages. Moreover, the shortage of women on the plantations in the Caribbean allowed them the freedom to reverse the bride price required of them in India. Dutch historian Peiter Emmer (1986) proposes that most East Indian women left India willingly, and the indenture system gave them the choice between fieldwork and staying home. The female Indian indentured servants in Suriname, he argues, used the contract system more than men to increase their social status and to emancipate themselves from the hierarchical social system in India. Guyanese historian Brian Moore claims that indentured Indian women in British Guiana controlled their social and sexual lives and "it was not uncommon either for a woman to leave a man with whom she was living for another, then for a third, and perhaps for a fourth and sometimes return to one of those whom she had previously deserted" (1987). Trinidadian feminist scholar Rhoda Reddock (1985) shares a somewhat similar conclusion and writes that Indian women did make a conscious decision to seek a new life elsewhere. They came to the Caribbean first as workers and not as dependents. She states further that Indian women did not conform to planters' narrow, unproductive views or to the Indian hierarchical social structure. The polarized arguments of Indian women's experience during indenture have generated a wave of interest. New studies, however, have departed from these arguments and have examined agency in order to understand the experience of Indian women during indenture. The argument is that the study of agency, whether collective or individual, in the household or on the plantations, against European or Indian men, would reveal perhaps a better understanding of how Indian women fared during indenture.

Findings and Assessment of Indian Women's Leadership Roles During Indenture: From the Perspective of Archival Records

The first objective of this article is to find out why Indian women have been excluded from the literature of leadership roles during indenture. To do so, the author conducted research at the Guyana National Archives, which houses most of the Indian indenture records. The records reveal very limited leadership roles of Indian women during indenture. This is not surprising. While it was not possible to examine all the records, an examination of a fair number of them showed that limited attention was paid to indentured Indian women on the plantations and information on their leadership roles was consistently absent. There are perhaps two reasons for this. The repressive nature of the plantation system supported by equally repressive legislation stymied opportunities for female leadership roles. Fijian historian Brij V. Lal and New Zealand historian Doug Munro believe that:

the laborers' difficulties [including opportunities for leadership] were compounded by a lack of cohesion within the Indian work force itself. The labourers' diverse social and cultural background, their differing aspirations and motivations for migrating to Fiji, their varying individual experiences on the plantations, and the absence of institutional structures within the indentured community, which could have become avenues for mobilization, all combined to frustrate the potential for collective action. (2014: 126)

This observation is also true for British Guiana. Additionally, the roles of women were perceived to be secondary to those of men or men's work and were treated as a burden rather than a bargain to the plantation system. Their domestic duties such as taking care of the household and raising children prevented them from being as productive as men on the plantations. The second reason is that Indentured Indian women were not involved in the writing of their own history, mainly because many were not schooled in academic institutions. Moreover, their history revolved around oral traditions, which were silenced within the paternal indenture plantation structure, and as a consequence, some of their testimonies were lost. Also, they spoke a language that was foreign and incomprehensible to the recorders of indenture. For the most part, indentured Indian women were illiterate or perceived to be illiterate people who were incapable of interpreting the written procedures and policies of their indenture contracts. They tried to resolve this challenge by asking other literate Indians as well as members from the planter class to assist them whenever communications were unclear. But the challenge of clear communication between the planter class and indentured Indians still persisted. Colonel Duncan Pitcher, from the planter class, recognized this problem and advised the Sanderson Commission of Enquiry on Indians in the Caribbean (held in London) that the colonial government should provide every estate with one writer who was capable of writing and reading in Hindustani, Urdu, or Hindi for indentured Indians. He also emphasized that there should be a traveling writer/reader assisting illiterate indentured Indians on every estate. Pitcher was informing the Commission that while Indians in British Guiana wanted clear communication on aspects of their indentured lives, including communication with their relatives in India, they were handicapped by the inability to read and write. He finally suggested that communication would make indentured Indians more comfortable in their sojourn in British Guiana (*British Parliamentary Papers 1910*). His suggestion was not taken seriously.

Perhaps the main reason for the limited information on the leadership roles of indentured women is that the concept of memory, narrative, or history written from "below" or from the subaltern model was simply inconceivable during the period of European colonization of the Other, save for occasional cases. The archival records reflect a pro-imperialist understanding of Indian women's experience during indenture based on the imperialists' own views and perspectives, reflecting anecdotal rather than analytical evidence. The record collectors relied on authority rather than evidence to write on Indian indenture. Writing on indentured Indian women and resistance in Natal, South Africa, historian Kalpana Hiralal urges researchers to carefully examine and juxtapose archival records to provide new insights into gender relations during indenture (2014: 244). The archival records at the Guyana National Archives are arguably inconsistent with the reality of Indian women's experience in relation to their leadership roles during indenture. Even in the provenance form, the archival records show more weaknesses than strengths. One example will suffice to demonstrate what the power holders thought of indentured

women and what Indian women thought of themselves. The indentured women's perspective of themselves never appeared among the archival records.

The planter class was not shy about expressing how they felt about indentured Indian women. They viewed them with much distaste and often described them as being deficient in cleanliness and neatness. Their hair was unkempt and their hygiene was generally poor. This might have been an accurate view of Indian women since they were peasant-oriented individuals who were busy working in the fields and home, which left little time for them to take care of themselves. However, there might have been another side to the poor state of Indian women that did not even cross the minds of men. The plantation environment was fertile ground for sexual abuse. Women worked in the fields, sometimes alone, and without any protection. Even their homes were not well secured. Women were generally powerless in the male-dominated indenture system. Given these situations, some women might have kept themselves in a poor state to appear unattractive to male predators, and consequently, might have prevented sexual advances and safeguarded themselves against any form of exploitation (Roopnarine 2014: 178). Leadership of protest in this regard was administered on an individual rather than on a collective basis and might not have been available to the recorders of indenture. However, to indentured women, it was a form of leadership in which they took control of their own lives, leading them to engage in innovative ways to protect themselves from the vile and virulent side of indenture.

The archival records did show that Indian women were involved in a series of revolts and instances of resistance (*British Parliamentary Paper 1871*; see also Mangru 1996; Ramnarine 1987). The best known was the Plantation Devonshire Castle Revolt on the Essequibo Coast in 1872. An estimated fifty women joined their husbands protesting unfair wages and poor working conditions. This should not be surprising. Indian historian Kapil Kumar argues that researchers "have demonstrated ordinary women folk were also at the forefront during the struggle of 1857 [and] at some places they instigated men to fight the British" (2014: 39) Contrary to the "Sorry Sisterhood" thesis, it would seem logical that Indian women who arrived in British Guiana during the Sepoy Mutiny would have continued their resistance when living and working conditions were not up to normal standards. Kumar made an interesting connection stating that two townships in Trinidad, Barrackpore and Fyzabad, were named after Indian towns where major uprisings had occurred (2014: 19).

What is interesting about these revolts, other than that they were open confrontations with the colonial regime, is that Indian women did participate but their actions were placed under the umbrella of men. Indian men, such as Parag, who was involved in the Plantation Devonshire Castle Revolt, received undisputed and undivided attention as the main leader. Arguably, Indian women's roles in revolts were doubly silenced, first by the colonial regime, and second by indentured Indian men. Rarely do archival records show that women mounted protests by themselves. Instead, their actions were recorded as supporting Indian men to carry their grievances. Their modes of resistance were ostensibly perceived to be more collective and supportive of their male counterparts rather than being individual and idealistic.

Findings and Assessment of Indian Women's Leadership Roles During Indenture: From the Perspective of Indentured Indian Women

In the previous section, it is argued that Indian women were involved in the leadership of protest but at a marginal level. This evidence is drawn from and supported by colonial archival records. While there is some merit to this perspective, it is neither adequate nor accommodating.

Other methods of exploration and analysis are warranted. Towards that end, the author conducted field research on and around a few plantations in Berbice, Guyana. The British Guianese plantation system operated in a hierarchical manner in which each managerial rank depended upon the other. The white managers realized that in order to carry out their twin objectives of reaping economic benefits and maintaining a disciplined labor force, some level of leadership flexibility had to be allowed and administered. This flexibility might have emerged not from humanitarian liberal work ethics but rather from the long-held reputation that the tropical plantations were “the whiteman’s graveyard.” To ensure a well-functioning plantation system that embraced a top-down system of management, the managerial staff allowed some members of the laboring force to be strategically placed in leadership positions to serve as intermediaries between the planters and indentured peasants. Subsequently, some Indians became sirdars, drivers, or headmen on the plantations, a position between the European overseers (managers) and plantation field laborers. It was an important job that involved responsibility for planting, weeding, caring for, and harvesting sugarcane. These individuals were also advisors to other indentured laborers on matters relating to wages, rights, and assigned work. Women were not totally excluded from these intermediary positions of leadership.

Kusha Haraksingh gives the impression that the plantation system relied only on male supervisors. Hugh Tinker gives a similar impression and implies that Indian leadership on the plantations was lacking. These authors were obviously writing at a time when gender issues on Indian indenture were not on the table. Like Indian men, women were also placed into their own weeding gang or category on the plantations. Even though their supervisors were men, women held intermediary leadership positions. Indian women were *sadarines* or headwomen on the plantations. These women became *sadarines* not because of high caste status but because of their experience and skills relating to plantation labor. They were most likely to have finished at least five years of indentured servitude and had learned the fundamentals of indenture. These female leaders certainly knew how to read and write (Hindi and English) since these were prerequisites for intermediary positions of leadership during indenture. They used these skills to communicate and interact with their European supervisors and other indentured women under their command. The *sadarines* were essentially go-betweens, and their leadership responsibilities revolved around service rather than eloquence. Some of their most demanding responsibilities were to have the female workers complete their assigned tasks in a timely manner, to ensure limited disruptions and stoppage of work, and to command respect and trust from both their supervisors and the workers under their control at crucial times. Their experienced positions made them natural spokespersons for other indentured women on issues relating to better wages and unfavorable working conditions. In return, the *sadarines* received higher wages and enjoyed other intangible benefits, such as power on and beyond the plantations, that were denied to other indentured women. These attributes, however, were not always earned amicably but from authoritative behavior, learned perhaps from their supervisors. To prove to their supervisors that they were not inferior and inept, they would demand deference from other indentured women and extract favors from them through the art of social bullying. One interviewee (July 2014) remarked that the *sadarines* discouraged loose communication between themselves and the indentured female labor force, especially when their supervisors were around. On the transportation—usually a lorry—to work and on the plantations, *sadarines* would separate themselves from the “causals,” or inexperienced indentured women (Field notes 2014).

Field research also indicates that there were two types of female workers under the leadership of the *sadarines*. The first was the “right hand” women, who followed and obeyed the

instructions of the *sadarines* with the expectation of receiving lighter work and a pay increase as well as having a friendly, reliable relationship with them beyond work. In times of trouble, these “right hand” women could call upon the *sadarines* for assistance in personal and family matters. The *sadarines* were also advisors and councilors to other indentured women. The second type of workers were the “left hand” women, who were dissatisfied with the *sadarines* but rarely confronted, challenged, or even reported them to higher authorities because of the fear of malicious reprisal. Their apathy, however, was perhaps a message of passive resistance. These dynamics were representative of the larger plantation structure, in which the policy of divide and conquer was the rule rather than the exception. The need for trustworthy and reliable intermediaries on the plantation provided opportunities for indentured women to lead. The women in leadership were not necessarily natural born leaders.

The reputation of the *sadarines* was also recognized and used in other leadership roles not directly related to plantation work. The *sadarines* were also community leaders dealing with and assisting in financial matters. They were organizers and coordinators of *boxhand* or *susu*. Every week on payday the *sadarines* would ask twenty or so indentured female contributors to “throw in” about 10 cents of their weekly wages (\$2.00) into a pool, and then the lump sum of money was given to one indentured woman. This pattern was repeated every week until all women received a lump sum of money. While the process was democratic, some women would indicate that they would like the first or second draw, and the *sadarines* would collect a small fee for their leadership role. *Boxhand* guaranteed that women would have their own money to invest and could avoid borrowing from banks with high interest rates. The *boxhand* system is still practiced in former indentured communities in Guyana. Haraksingh writes that “box money” was organized by male headmen:

The driver [male] managed the whole affair—contacting the persons who would take part, ensuring that they paid their contributions on time, settling disputes that arose, and keeping the accounts. For his troubles, he took a small commission but was also able to ensure that the first draw would go to him. (p. 25)

Haraksingh’s findings were somewhat similar to what occurred with indentured women, and recent research indicates that the practice was more common among women in British Guiana (Field notes 2014). The reason for this is that women earned their own wages and were less dependent on males. It was not uncommon for the *sadarines* to advise and encourage women “to take some money for themselves” and give the rest to the family. Male workers also took some money for themselves before bringing their payroll home. What is even more significant about *boxhand* is the ingenuity of the *sadarines* in creating financial survival mechanisms for indentured women in an environment where the indentured officialdom cared less about the welfare of the workers and more about how they performed and produced on the plantation. The leadership of *boxhand* provided a deep anchor for unfortunate indentured women, enabling them to rely on themselves to take care of their own immediate needs and to break out of the low-wage regime of the plantation system.

Indentured women might have been involved in the Panchayat. In India, the Panchayat was local government on a village level, which the national government could rely on to carry out administrative and judicial responsibilities. It was an informal institution that consisted of three to five men who were residents of the village. Since the elected individuals had to have some level of knowledge and property, low-caste persons and women were generally excluded

from the council. Each elected member served for three years. In British Guiana, the role of Panchayat diminished because the Western-oriented work routine revolved more around material and monetary values and less around Indian customs. Indians were brought to British Guiana for the sole purpose of working on the plantations and not to occupy important positions of leadership. Furthermore, in India, the British depended on local Indians to conduct local daily affairs. In British Guiana, the situation was reversed. It was the transplanted Indians who depended on the British. But arguably, the Panchayat might not have lost its functional place in society. Within the complex situation of cultural rupture and retention, Indians might have sought their own ways to deal with and solve their own problems in their predominantly bachelor-oriented indentured world. In the process, they might have turned to the Panchayat, despite its eroding strength during indenture. This might have been a strong possibility because Indians distrusted the Western-oriented court system to administer fair justice (see *British Parliamentary Paper 1871*).

The mere shortage of women certainly weakened Indian patriarchal norms and strengthened women's positions within British Guianese plantations and communities. While women were exposed to and suffered from bouts of abuse and were sometimes even murdered, some did experience upward social mobility. This was possible because of the breakdown of the caste structure, which led to the status of women being determined and dictated not by ascribed but achieved characteristics. Some women took advantage of the low ratio of women to men to have more than one male partner and even bargain for a bride price rather than being subjected to a dowry. The semi-liberating atmosphere of the plantation system allowed women to realize their potential, even if that meant penetrating into male-dominant domains. Given the increasing transformation of the Indian social structure because of the impact of the indenture system, the once male-dominated Panchayat might have also become more socially flexible, allowing room for women from influential backgrounds and skills. Field research implies that in the 1920s, soon after they were emancipated from indenture, some women did accompany their husbands when the Panchayat was administered. The effectiveness and outcomes of their participation are not precisely known. The mere fact that women had made inroads into the Panchayat system suggests that the system was more flexible than previously thought, even if women's roles were one of observation and subservience. The point is not that women could not participate but rather if women were really interested in the politics of Panchayat. Equally plausible is that in a society where men and women socialized separately on most occasions, one would suspect that men would have a difficult time settling disputes and providing solutions to women's problems. Therefore, it may not be farfetched to theorize that there was possibly a parallel but hidden female Panchayat during indenture that was geared towards dealing with women's issues and challenges.

Concluding Remarks

The article has two goals: to find out why Indian women were excluded from the literature of leadership roles in British Guiana during indenture (1838–1920) and to find out if indentured Indian women were really involved in leadership roles. If they were, what were they, and did their participation impact their own lives? Two basic techniques were used to carry out these goals: (a) the use of archival and secondary sources; and (b) the use of oral history, namely interviews and conversations with descendants of indenture who were at least seventy-five years old.

The findings are that Indian women did participate in leadership roles that were not recorded in archival records. Arguably, the recorders of archival information did not probe deeply enough to find out or try to understand how women dealt with their indentured lives on the plantations. The role of women was simply taken for granted or they were seen from the prism of their male counterparts, even when they openly engaged in the leadership of protest. They were seen and recorded as supporters of male leadership.

Oral history techniques used to examine significant events during indenture show that women were not always subservient and non-participatory in leadership roles. Women were *sadarines* or headwomen in their own separate plantation domain and demonstrated the same leadership qualities as men. They were the spokespersons for other indentured women and even commanded respect from the European supervisors in an ever-patriarchal, conflicted plantation zone. At times, they acted like their supervisors, applying stern leadership qualities. But, on the whole, they were fair and just to those who came under their sway. There are a few limitations of this article, however, since the focus is exclusively on three domains for leadership roles among indentured women in British Guiana. More research is needed in other areas where women were more prevalent and active such as in the social environment (raising the family, for example) as well as in the marketplace. The hope is that the findings of the article will inspire others to study indentured Indian women and leadership.

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