

THE BRITISH TREATMENT OF WOMEN-SLAVES OF INDIAN AND NON-INDIAN ORIGINS DURING THE COLONIAL AND DIASPORIC PERIOD

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The colonial human trafficking involved kidnapping, slavery and displacement (immigration), besides illegal shipping of Indians under the guise labourers, indentured labour, etc., (migration) that are rarely discussed by the Indian researchers, though plenty of documents are available. The despotic economic growth of the European colonial forces has been linked with such practices. Modern researchers have clearly exposed such tendencies working under the new masquerades even today (Davidson 2010, 244-61).

Diasporic history cannot be complete without such critical studies, as the displacement due to the activities of deportation, banishment, extradition, ex-communication etc., taken lace among the Colonial forces during the last 300-350 years. The *doctrine of lapse* worked in two different form – one explicit – by annexing the Indian Kingdoms that did not have heir and two - deporting the heirs, thereby annexing such Kingdoms.

From Trans-Atlantic to Indian Ocean Slavery

Recently, the western scholars (Vink 2003, 131-77 & Mathew 1995, 195) have been pointing out the importance of study of *The Indian Ocean Slavery*, as it is a relatively neglected and unexplored theatre in the context slave trade. After Trans-Atlantic Slavery exposition, they started discussing and debating about the Indian Ocean Slavery.

Whether the historians were preoccupied with its Atlantic counterpart or otherwise, it has only belatedly drawn their attention. Recent studies have emphasized the African dimension of the trade to the almost complete exclusion of Asian sources of supply and have therefore done little to probe the diverse and unique features of slavery in the region. In particular, the presence and role of Indian slaves has hitherto been given scant attention, despite its significance in the colonial history of the region.

Marina Carter (2006, 800-813) provides an overview of the literature on the slave trade in Indians, and suggests a number of avenues for further research, in particular in developing linkages between the various strands of migration of Indian slaves, convicts, and indentured labourers throughout the Indian Ocean littoral. Of course, K. M. Panikkar (1931, 177-79), R. C. Majumdar (1965, 278-89 & 595-669), Radha Kamal Mukherjee (1931, 762-64) and others

(Arasaratnam 1995, 195) have recorded the slavery conducted by the British in different forms. Here, the British role in slavery particularly that of women and their treatment is discussed.

European Slave Trade in India

The Western system of slavery inherited and percolated through Europeans had worked in India. Thus, after the Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and French, the British inherited such legacy of not only colonial Indian business and trade, but also the connected and interlinked slave trade (Ramakrishna Rao 2007, XIV Session TNHC).

Evidently, the Portuguese operated in Hughli, Goa, Cochin and other places, in connivance with the Dutch, the Danish and the Spain. When the British dominated, they operated through the Portuguese. Of course, after the ban of slavery in the British (1843), French (1846), and Dutch (1873) colonies caused severe shortages of labourers on sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, rice and rubber plantations, but China and India sources provided the alternative sources of labour (Pandey et al. 2006, 72), thus the continuance of “slave trade” under the guise of “supply” through the traditional conduits used conveniently to circumvent law. Slavery changed to *Coolie* or *coolitude* and it appears in different forms in different times.

From Negritude to Creolite (Carter and Torabully 2002, 1-17) and Slavery to Collitude – The Changing Paradigms of Diaspora

Unfortunately, the Indians or the English bred and learned writers and researchers have not understood the terminology used by them with hidden racism coupled with contempt. Negritude, creolite, coolie, coolitude and such other expressions expose such psyche. When diaspora has been the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, it is a central historical fact of colonization.....the practices of slavery and indenture.....resulted in worldwide colonial diasporas (Ashcroft et al. 1998, 58) and Creolization has been the process of intermixing and cultural change that produces Creole society (Ashcroft et al. 1998, 68-70). Coolitude is described (Torabully 1996, 13) as the characteristic, that “It is impossible to understand the essence of coolitude without charting the coolies’ voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude”.

Marina Carter and Khal Torabully (2002, 11) have in fact used the expression “***Redefining India Diaspora: Towards Coolitude***” in describing the Indian counterpart of creolization! Cale d’Etioules, the founding text of coolitude, has been described by Jean-Georges Prospe as, *Unhappy memories that have been reclaimed by the poet in a new form of creative thinking called Coolitude, a sort of Indian version of Negritude.*

East India Company: ‘Servants and Slaves’

Michael H. Fisher (2004, 42-48, 214-215, 228-241) uses the expression *Indian servants (including slaves)* or *servants and slaves* in the context of slavery followed by the British. The East India Company (EIC) adopted and adapted unique method in recruiting, engaging and making Indians work for them under different capacities. The Company, British Officers and Missionaries worked together in this aspect. They engaged low-caste and untouchables purposely for the household and menial work. Still trained and other categories were employed as butlers,

women as *ayahs* and cleaning work (Kadam 1997, 35-6). He pointing this, obviously perplexed by the hidden contradiction and hence proceeded to note, “It was no wonder, then, that large numbers of untouchables in those days were converted to Christianity, Confining myself to conversions to Christianity, let us consider the ‘quality’ (rather than the quantity) of the conversions. How does Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism differ from the earlier conversions of untouchables to Islam and Christianity?”

Fisher (2004, 54), also lists out their engagement as – *gardeners and night-soil removers, horse-grooms and palanquin carriers, heralds and messengers, cooks and table attendants, hooka-tenders and body-servants, armed guards and clerks, translators and language teachers, as well as lady’s maids, nursemaids (ayahs) and concubines* (emphasis added). Thus, the selection of women slaves has been explicit and about this “*ayahdom*”, a sort of modern serfdom, none had discussed!

Marriage with Local Women

The marriage with local women is just the Mohammedan/Moghul model followed by the Portuguese and adopted by the Dutch (Lal 1988, 1-222). The so-called “Portuguese model” was proposed by Governor Johan Maetsuyker of Ceylon (1646-1650). A professed admirer of the Portuguese system of the intermarriage of Portuguese soldiers (*casados*) and settlers (*moradores*) with indigenous women, Maetsuyker suggested the union of white men to Asian or Eurasian women to promote “colonization”. In the absence of white wives for the settlers, he was even prepared to tolerate intermarriage with Sinhalese, Tamil and Eurasian women.

The “*arrival of thousands of slaves on Ceylon in the wake of a widespread famine in Southern Coromandel (1658-1661)*” was perceived by Van Goens “*as the hidden disposition of divine Providence in order to repopulate the lands here and to support the Company’s designs.*” But, it is a fact that they were brought there as slaves.

The British too adopted such method. Many Indian women were went or rather sent to Britain as servants or slaves. Though some of them were married to the British and merged, most of them were sexually exploited. On the other hand, the Indian men taken there had to convert to Christianity to marry a native Britain woman. Initially, Indian sailors were in great demand, followed by artisans and workers in different fields.

During 17th and 18th centuries, the British newspapers carried advertisement about the “running away of Indian slaves. Though, they used to discuss *Indian Servants and Slaves*, the fact being that that they traded slaves. Michael H. Fisher (2004, 56-9) recently points out the exponential raise of “servants” going to Britain between 1708-79! They were from Bengal, Tamilnadu and Surat (1708-79) and the males and females had been almost same (1708-76). Another interesting point is the exponential increase of Indian Seamen: Lascars and sailors leaving for Britain during 1741-1767 period.

Here also, the bias, evidently, racial against Indian women has been explicit in the writings of the western scholars. Coralie Younger (Colins 2006, 1-260) called the white women as “*Wicked women of the Raj*”, the European women who broke society’s rule and married to Indian Princes. When European Officers and petty clerks could take Indian women as concubines and

slaves, why not Indian Kings have European women? Perhaps, like Moghuls, she wants that it should be in one-way only! However, she has not been worried about lakhs of Indian women carried away by the Europeans, enslaved, sexually harassed, tortured and disposed off. Thus, the racial bias is evident in the treatment of Indian and non-Indian women.

M. Sundara Raj (1993, 10) has dealt with the issue in a different angle. He points out that from the ports of Nagapatnam and Cuddalore slaves were transported to northwards (based on Tanjore District records). Female slaves were mostly engaged to serve the wives of British Officers. Mohammedan rulers too obtained slave-women and children. In one case, parents complained to the police that their children were kidnapped and kept in the house of the Nawab in Madras (Public Consultations 1812, 1888-89). Slave girls were used for prostitution. Europeans kidnapped and transported females to Burma, where they were made concubines and prostitutes (Campbell 1934, 245). They also kept women of Tamil Nadu in their houses. Of course, the European sailors always profited on trafficking and trading slaves. Though slavery was abolished in 1843, traffic in women and children continued in different forms. Though the British abolished slavery in 1843, it was carried out by the British officials and sailors in one way or the other. Therefore, it is intriguing as to how they pretend as saviours of rights of women, children and so on.

Women-Slave Trade

As pointed out the women-slave trade had been very lucrative with huge profits. The Arab legacy continued through the Europeans. Unlike men-slavery, the women-slavery served double purpose, the sex and free-labour. Interestingly and intriguingly, Goa played a crucial role in International slave trade. Ironically, Inquisition (Priolkar 1961, 141) too was carried on by them perhaps to aid and abet women-slavery. Albuquerque was notorious for procuring women, that too, beautiful women. He enforced new Rules in such a way that women were always victim. On November 3, 1592, it was proclaimed the slaves of infidels (Hindus) who converted themselves to Christianity would be freed (Priolkar 1961, 141). A decree promulgated by D. Sebastiao in 1562 enforced that a Hindu widow converted to Christianity, she would get all her jewels and property. It has to be noted that In Goa, there was no ban for the practice of Sati. Thus, a woman could circumvent using these provisions. Again during Inquisition, Virgin and married women were raped and thrown in the flames (Herculano, 1851, 177). This is again revealed through the speech of an Archbishop delivered on 1897,

.....Here the Inquisitors went to the length of imprisoning in its jails women who resisted their advances, and after having satisfied their bestial instincts there, ordering that they be burnt as heretics.

(Pereira 1923, 263)

Thus, the escaped or the readily converted ones or chosen ones became slaves.

T. Gune (1981, 26) mentions “*Escravos*” (Slaves) as one of the voluminous record available at Goa Archives on the slavery in India and there are 10 volumes on slavery alone covering the period 1682 to 1765. Interestingly, not only most of them consist of the registers of

slaves in the Tiswadi, Bardez, Salcete, Daman and Diu and the New Conquests, but also there are several documents mixed up in other series such as Moncoes do Reino, Cartas Patentes e Alvareas, etc.

Teotonio R. de Souza (1994, 114-31) gives details of slavery from a manuscript entitled *Castas de Aforria aos Escravos* (HAG Ms.860). Accepting that slavery had been a common feature in Goa much before it became profitable trade for the Portuguese in the Americas, the recording of Prard (Pyrard 1944, 51) is given. His account gives details starting with 17th century slave market existed in Goa. Many *Corumbins* and *Chardos*, local people of the particular castes from Goa were transported to Ceylon and sold as slaves in 1644. Based on the resolution passed by the Public Revenue Department. This negates the claim that the local people had privilege of not becoming enslaving.

The manuscript contains 113 folios is itself a Slave Register describing the 350 deeds duly signed by the Chutch authorities and slave-owners. Here, the choice of female slaves has been interesting, as the two-thirds of the slaves were females that too an average of twenty! The deeds also refer to orphan children handed over by the Fathers of the Christians to the care of certain families under condition of teaching them good manners and Christian doctrine, treating them well in their infirmities, training boys in some suitable skills and the girls in marriage at the appropriate age. So the question arises why the Church Fathers sold such innocent children as slaves? Coming to the treatment slaves thus purchased, it is confessed that not only they were ill-treated but also used for prostitution (de Souza, 171-72). That the European Companies worked together in this aspect is proven by the Goan International slave market, where slaves were procured, categorized, traded and shipped to different destinations according to the requirements of the Companies, colonies and officers. In spite of the British pressure and the wave of liberalism in Portugal, the slavery continued and in 1853 all the three taluks of the Old Conquests Goa had around 100 slaves (HAG Mss. 2976, 2877, 3018)!

G. V. Scammell (1981, 162-73) describes the Spaniards and the Portuguese connection and the usage of slaves as labourers, craftsmen, sailors and infantry depending upon the skill of the captured or bought. He points out that the girls attended to their masters' every need and in Goa added their earnings from prostitution to their owners' income. Such was the ubiquity of female slaves as concubines and mistresses that, as was pithily remarked of Albuquerque's alleged monopoly of the charms of galaxy of beauties captured in Goa "*not even Mahomet had it to good*" (Scammell 1981, 162-73). This is exactly similar to Moghul harem and Khusroz.

Women Slaves or Womanizing Slaves? The Mogul-Portuguese Methodology!

Why the European Companies indulged in slavery, that too, in kidnapping of and indulging in slavery of Indian women? What worked behind in treating other men, women and children as slaves? The Mohammedan-Moghuls had a practice of harems (harem in Arabic means sanctuary) and seraglios and for which they procured women by all means (Lal 1988, 165-67). Capturing women after the defeat of Indian Kings, kidnapping, buying from slave traders, marrying under the Mohammedan law as *nikaha* (contractual four at a time) and *muta* (temporary for a particular time or period) and arranging *Khushroz* or fancy bazaar were the methods used by them (Tirmizi 1979, 167 & @21). There had been Moghul-Potrtuguese skirmishes in carrying

away female servants and slaves of each other, as revealed through incidences taken place during Jahangir period. Monoel Tavers, a resident of Hugli seized richly laden boats and carried away female servants including two slave girls of Mumtaz Mahal. Shajahan attacked a Portuguese colony in Hugli in 1632, took away 400 Christian prisoners to Agra including women as slaves. The handsome European women were distributed among the Umara (Bernier 1999, 177). Here also, the reason has been evidently religious. Interestingly, Francois Bernier (1999, 175-178) gives details of Moghul-Portuguese nexus in selling slaves. They used to capture people on the occasion of marriage or some other festival, engage them for their activities, sold to Portuguese of Goa, Ceylon, San Thome and other places.

Recent researches (Rasmussen 2004, www.minority-report.dk/dansk/kalender.html) point out the slave trade carried from Serampur, Tranquebar, Andaman & Nicobar through Sri Lanka also. The Jesuit Pierre Du Jarric (1999, 28) too discusses about the Europeans enslaved by Akbar pointing out the Goa connection with the slavery and existence of a slave market there. Thus, Moghuls-Portuguese-Goa-Slavery connection plays its role in the case of Meera also. Like Moghuls, the European Companies and rulers would have practiced such practices of seraglios, slavery and sex in their own way.

Slavery to Prostitution

Prostitution could be the last resort for a woman, when she could not find an alternative to save her honour and decided to live thereon, and as well as, escaping from the death or death-like situation and decided to live with comforts. However, compelled prostitution could be the different one. Here, the methods adopted and adapted by the slave-catching experts were evident, as they were targeting the weaknesses of Indian women. The concept, practice and establishment harems and seraglios actually encouraged women-slavery linked with prostitution.

The Treatment of Women-Slaves

In general, though their treatment of Indian slaves had been very cruel, their ill treatment of women slaves had been inexplicably scandalous, dreadful and heinous. There are many documents to prove the fact. The "*case of the ship Adramytte*" records how Hajee Durvesh involved in the so-called illegal slave-import, brought three Muslim girls – one Greek and two Turks for sale in India, as deposed before the Chief Magistrate (Adam 1962) of Calcutta on November 24, 1826. Here, the point to be noted is the urge of restoration of the Greek girl to a Greek gentleman of Calcutta, whereas, no such preferential treatment was recommended for "Hindu / heathen / kafiri slaves". This is similar to the Mohammedan or Shariat law in which no non-Muslim is allowed to sit or transact the proceedings where a Muslim is involved. In fact, conversion and Angelicization (Fischer 2004, 9-14, 53-54, 103-106,429-437) was forced on Indian women in all places. In London, it was mandatory, as revealed through the laws enforced.

Thus, her age-old mental status was disturbed and then psychologically, she was harassed by carnal satisfaction and finally used for extraction of house-odd work. Thus, finally death only liberates her from indenture, bondage or slavery. As official figures of how many Indian women were abducted, kidnapped or purchased as slaves from India, sold outside India and other details are not known, the miserable stories of unknown Indian women-slaves would be in mystery only.

The Theological Interpretation of Women-Slavery

The case of “Hindu Prince Meera” (1606-1688) shows how the Portuguese could exploit of Indian woman, even if she was an Indian princess from her age of 12 to 60 by all means in different countries under different masters. Therefore, the position and condition of ordinary women before such heinous hounds, pillaging pirates and sucking slave-traders is unimaginable and inexplicable. Recently, Eliza F. Kent (Kent 2004, 23) while discussing about the conversion of women and children including that of Tranquebar, interprets the experience of women converts and the ways in which conversion transformed gender roles and expectations. She argues that the creation of a new "respectable" community identity was central to the conversion process for the agricultural laborers and artisans who embraced Protestant Christianity under British rule. By the creation of a "discourse of respectability," says Kent, Tamil Christians hoped to counter the cultural justifications for their social, economic, and sexual exploitation at the hands of high-caste landowners and village elites. Kent's focus on the interactions between Western women missionaries and the Indian Christian women not only adds depth to our understanding of colonial and patriarchal power dynamics, but to the intricacies of conversion itself. But she does not expose the heinous atrocities and crimes heaped on Indian women by the colonial hounds and created wounds.

Markus P. Vink (Adam 1840, <http://books.google.com/books?id=AU5JuYAq8YoC>) has also discussed conversion as a means adopted by the missionary. In fact, his discussion exposes the Christian dilemma in accepting morality and immorality together in condemnation of having Christian slaves and conversion of slaves! But, Kim Su Rasmussen (2004) finds the racism as one of the reasons for the Europeans to enslave Indians. Had they believed that Christianity could abolish slave trade and slavery, then, the moment, Indians get converted the stigma must have been disappeared. But the stigmatic theology emboldened them to continue the trade chaining the slaves irrespective of their gender and age. Another irony is the theological wrangle conversion of the converted from Catholicism to Protestantism and vice versa. Could one bondage remove other bondage or bondages are added? As for as the women slaves are concerned, it is evident that they are chained doubly, suffered accordingly and died unsung and unrecorded also.

Was there Racism behind the Slavery?

Kim Su Rasmussen, in his paper “*What Is Danish Racism?*,” Korean-Danish Historian of Ideas states: “*Another aspect, which is important in order to understand the complexity of the current racism in Denmark, concerns a pervasive historical repression of Denmark’s colonial history. In my opinion, there exists amongst the ordinary Dane a pervasive denial of the history of Danish slave trade and the Danish slave colonies in the West Indies. A majority of citizens in Denmark might have heard of the formerly Danish owned West Indies, but only a very few possess a detailed or merely general knowledge of the islands’ history and their role in the transatlantic triangular trade. This historical repression does not concern the specialized professional historical treatment, but has to do with the collective memory: the problematics is not about how the history of Danish slave trade is written, but how this history is remembered by the Danish population.*” According to Su Rasmussen, this denial is not accidental. Denmark’s imperial history – not only in the West Indies, but also in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Tranquebar (Fischer 1962, 9-14, 53-54, 103-106,429-437), Serampore, Nicobarean, and the Gold Coast of West Africa – paints a picture of the Danes, which is in direct conflict, if not

incompatible, with Danish self-perception today as a liberal, tolerant, progressive people. Thus, if racism, theology and unfair trade practices all work together, occurrence of this type heinous crimes and human right violations are perhaps very difficult to discern, analyze and even criticize.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, the following points are noted as conclusion:

1. The slavery of women and children carried out by the British in an organized way had been a black chapter in the colonial history or rather crime history of the British aiding and abetting with other European Companies.
2. The racial stigma attached to such practice is alarming and it is inexplicable.
3. When the British had taken every opportunity to criticize Indian manners, customs and behaviour through historical, missionary and colonial interpretation, it is intriguing to note that they themselves had indulged in such practices more than Indians.
4. Definitely, to save their face, they have suppressed the practice of slavery and slave-trade conducted in the Indian Ocean Region and that to from India.
5. However, the suppression of slavery and slave-trade in the case of Indian women has exposed many human-rights violation and other unethical and immoral practices followed by them.
6. Enjoying the benefits of India but imposing worst to India is surprising in the context.
7. Ironically, the first demand for the establishment of the Inquisition in Goa was made by Francis Xavier (Priolkar 1961, 23) through a letter addressed from Amboina (Moluccas) to D. Joao II, King of Portugal, on May 16, 1545.
8. Even conversion of women and children, for slavery purpose and its theological interpretations prove to be farce and redundant.
9. The atrocities and crimes heaped on Indian women and children have been the bloodiest chapter in the Indian history. That the same Portuguese collaborated with the British and others has been revealing in the context.
10. Power of any sort corrupts everything. When it is corrupted, it has no shame or compassion and it is only exhibited in the British treatment of women-slaves.

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