

The Repatriation Debate After the Abolition of Indenture

| CIRCLE | Text Transcript

This is a text transcript of the webinar “The Repatriation Debate after the Abolition of Indenture” presented by the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Guelph. The event was moderated by Ashna Jassi, PhD candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Guelph. It was recorded October 7, 2020. The guest speaker was Dr. Heena Mistry, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training Specialist, Wilfrid Laurier University.

Transcript:

Ashna Jassi:

Alright, perhaps it's a good time to get started and people can continue to join the meeting. First, I want to say hi to everyone. Welcome to our webinar! Thank you so much for joining us and I hope you're all keeping well and safe as we get into the fall months. My name is Ashna Jassi and I'll be chairing today's webinar with Dr. Heena Mistry.

To give you a little bit more information about me, I'm a PhD candidate in social psychology at the University of Guelph. I'm also a graduate member of the CIRCLE Committee, and today's webinar is brought to us by CIRCLE, which is the Canada India Research Center for Learning and Engagement.

CIRCLE was established in February 2020 at the University of Guelph and it aims to be an interdisciplinary nucleus in Canada for cutting edge research on the India and the Indian diaspora to showcase, advocate, catalyze and foster an equitable, respectful and sustained exchange of knowledge between Canadian and Indian scholars on complex and emerging, and unexplored topics related to sustainability and social and economic well-being.

All that being said, we would like to welcome you to today's webinar. We are very fortunate to have Dr. Heena Mistry joining us today and sharing her research with us. I would also like to introduce Dr. Heena and all the wonderful work that she is doing. Dr. Heena is the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training Specialist in the Office of the Provost and Vice President academic at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada.

She was an undergraduate student at the University of Guelph as well in the Department of History from 2009 to 2013. She holds a PhD in history from Queen's University and her dissertation examined debates between anti-colonial nationalists and the self-identified Indian liberals they critiqued.

These Indian liberals who they critiqued argued for the reform of empire into a liberal Imperial Federation. These figures employed the argument for Imperial reform to institutionalise Indian

parity with white settler citizenship, especially for global Indian diaspora in the early 20th century.

Dr. Heena has held visiting fellowships at the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University and the Center for Indian Studies in Africa at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Currently, she's also collaborating with our local artists in Guelph, Jagdeep Raina, to research Guelph South Asian diaspora histories. Thank you very much for joining us Heena and we are very much looking forward to hearing more about your work.

Before we dive in, there's just a few logistical points that I'll point out for today's webinar. I'll ask that everyone please keep their microphones muted during the webinar. And also, if you could turn your videos off, that way we just are ensuring we can establish a strong connection to view Heena's presentation.

In terms of the format of the webinar, Heena will be providing us with some slides about her work and then we will have a question period after her presentation. To ask a question, feel free to use the wave reaction which is at the bottom of your Zoom screen. So, we will have a question period at that time. Feel free to use that emoji and then we will- sorry I will call on you to ask your question.

Another option is you can feel free to type in your question in the chat bar at any time and I will ask these on your behalf during the question period. Lastly, I just ask that we keep in mind the timing for the webinar because we would like to include as many questions and comments as possible and we have until 12:15 Eastern Time. So, please keep that in mind as well. Alright, at this point I will pass it over to Heena. Thank you.

Heena Mistry:

Thanks so much Ashna. I'm gonna share my screen now. Trying to get this working. Okay, can you guys see okay?

Ashna Jassi:

Yeah, we can see you. Thank you.

Heena Mistry:

And you can see just the screen, right? Just the slideshow?

Ashna Jassi:

That's right.

Heena Mistry:

Ok, awesome. Thank you so much. So, good morning everybody. Thanks so much for joining and making the time to come to my talk. And thanks as well for Sharada for inviting me and

having me here and to Ashna for, you know, doing all the coordination, setting up and everything. I really appreciate your hard work and all of this. So, I'm gonna move on.

So, I'm going to be talking today about the repatriation debate after the abolition of indenture. I'll be talking about basically debate surrounding the repatriation of Indian settled in British colonies after the abolition of the indenture system in 1917. So ex-indentured Indians, their descendants- Sorry, ex-indentured Indians and their descendants, Indians who sat at the Raj's decision-making tables, non-indentured Indian diaspora communities, white settler governments, and planter governments all shared ideas about where exactly in the British Empire Indian diaspora should be.

I'm certainly not the first person to be talking about repatriation in the aftermath of indenture. Many Caribbean and South African scholars of Indian diaspora and indenture, like Uma Dhapelia-Mesthrie, Basdeo Mangru, Lommarsh Roopnarine and others, have written about patterns of repatriation and re-indenture and the marginalization of Indian repatriates and those who decided to not to return to post- Sorry, and those who- basically of those who decided to return to India post-indenture.

I'd like to add to this conversation though by thinking about the larger influence, the larger significance of diaspora to the parameters of Indian nationalism. Particularly, I'm interested in how policy and nationalist rhetoric differentiated repatriates depending on where they were coming from and the context in which they sort of left to labour overseas, do other things.

So, discussion surrounding repatriation during the interwar years though, I would argue that they reveal how Indian nationalists and others resisting British imperialism sometimes drew borders around belonging as Indian, especially in British India. [Slide show titled 'Plantation Locations Pre-1840' with an image of the world map captioned '14.2 Major Sites of Capitalist Plantations, 1790s-1830s. Dots represent approximate regions of plantation production.' These dots are primarily located in parts of the Caribbean, South America, Africa, and India].

So, I put up a picture of plantation locations pre-1840 because we're going to, we're going to get some context here and I want to start by talking about slavery. I want to start by giving some context around just also the- Some context surrounding indenture and other forms of Indian labour migration and repatriation. This story has roots in what happened after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833.

So, after that happens, reparations were paid to slave owners in the British Empire. In 1835, slave owners receive financial compensation amounting to 40 percent of the calculated market value of their slaves. This amounted to a total of £20,000,000 and expense that would amount to about 300 billion today is the figure that historian Kris Manjappa gives.

British taxpayers finished paying off these reparations to slave owners made back in the 1830s only in 2015. [Slide show titled 'Plantation Locations Post-1870' with an image of the world map

captioned '14.3 Major Sites of Capitalist Plantations, 1870s-1930s. Dots represent approximate regions of plantation production.'

These dots are located in the same locations as image 14.2 but with additional dots in parts of South America, Africa, Burma, and Southeast Asia]. So now I've pulled up a location of- Sorry, the locations of plantations post-1870. So, in tracing where slave owners spent their reparation money post-abolition of slavery, historian Kris Manjapra has found that much of this wealth was reinvested into bringing plantation agriculture to British colonies in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia.

The reinvestment of these reparations brought tea, rubber, sugar, to-go coffee and other plantations to sail on, which is contemporary Sri Lanka, Malaya, the Straits Settlement, Burma, South Africa, etcetera the list goes on. And so, I think that context is important to know if we're going to- Once I start talking about what I'm going to talk about in a minute.

[Slide show depicting an image titled 'Migration and memory: Indentured labourers from India 1830s-1917.' According to the image, labourers primarily went to Mauritius (451,800), British Guyana (238, 700), and Natal, South Africa (152,200)]. And then the next thing I want to talk about is indenture. So once again, as I reiterate, as I want to reiterate the abolition of slavery did not end on free forms of labour.

They just morphed into different forms of unfree and semi-free labour, including apprenticeships that bound former slaves to their ex-masters for fixed portion of each working day for four to six years. Rather than paying fair wages or reparations to emancipated slaves themselves, planters across the British Empire lobbied colonial and metropolitan governments to organise another steady stream of workers to keep the cost of labour low.

These planters had relied, had long relied, on government for support and sustaining the production of goods, especially sugar and cotton whose profitability had depended on slave labour. Indentured Asian migration was the system that arose to meet planter demands as a result of all this lobbying.

Indenture was a contract system that brought workers from British India to plantations in the Caribbean, the African continent in Fiji. What you'll see on the slide is just a map of, this is taken from The Economist, a map of the different- Well, sorry, like a chart of the different areas in which indentured labourers from India went between the 1830s to 1917.

But indenture wasn't the only form of labour migration leaving the subcontinent in the 19th century and early 20th century. Outside of indenture other forms of labour migration and recruitment system, such as the Khan Galian Maestri systems, brought workers from British India across the Bay of Bengal to sail on Malaya, the Straits Settlement colonies in Burma.

In his book, "Crossing the Bay of Bengal," Harvard historian Sunil Amrith points out that from 1843 to 1940, 90% of all immigration from India moved across the Bay of Bengal and not

necessarily to indentured areas where indentured labour was employed. By 1917, under the pressures of World War One, labourers went to war fronts instead of colonial sugar estates.

And combined with those restrictions as well as agitation across the Indian subcontinent and in the diaspora against indenture, the system eventually came to an end in 1917. So now I'll move on to talking a little bit about how people were talking about repatriation after the abolition of indenture.

The abolition of indenture was not the end of the story of colonial administrators and planters attempting to manage the movement of colonized people, particularly Black and Asian workers across the globe. People of all walks of life in India and the Indian diaspora protested the indenture system.

From the Bhojpuri Resistant Songs of agricultural workers in the countryside warning people not to sign themselves away to recruiters, to elite Indian nationalists who sat at the decision-making tables of the Raj. Two Indian community settled in British colonies across the globe who weren't necessarily migrant workers.

It was clear that protest against indenture crossed several boundaries, like both class-based, geographical etcetera. And in the years immediately preceding and following the abolition of indenture, we saw the rise of anti-colonial nationalism as a mass movement in India and across Indian diaspora all over the world.

However, the abolition of indenture, repatriation and the varied context in which it applied, marked boundaries in the parameters of Indian nationalism, particularly discourse surrounding repatriation highlighted which immigrants from South Asia belonged in India and which were considered far better off overseas. Indian nationalists who spoke against indenture around the turn of the 20th century became obsessed with repatriating those who finished their indenture contracts in the Caribbean, Fiji, and the African continent.

[cough] Excuse me. M. K. Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was an Indian liberal reformer and several Indian members of the Indian Legislative Assembly and the leadership of some Indian diaspora political organisations in different places, were among those who argued for repatriation as the most desirable alternative to remaining in places with anti-Indian legislation.

Their reasoning was riddled with fears that the overwhelming dispersion of unskilled Indian labourers, instead of merchants, scholars, lawyers and others they considered more respectable, obstructed the extension of the civil and political rights of White British subjects to Indian British subjects. And so, in response to earlier calls for repatriation, others raised alarm about any form of organized repatriation effort targeted at Indians overseas, especially those not born in India.

Stories started to circulate about repatriates living in the slums of major coastal cities in India, who face ostracization and poverty upon their arrival. Many who journeyed to India with their families under government sponsored incentivized repatriation programs had not lived in India

for years, had children born abroad, or were themselves born abroad. And so, it didn't, they didn't necessarily assume that coming back to India was coming back to homeland of sorts.

So today, I'm going to be talking about two- I'm going to focus my talk on two particularly interesting responses to the end of indenture in the 1920s. The first is a piece of legislation that criminalized the immigration of unskilled labourers beyond the Bay of Bengal. And then the second is a report that called for the end of repatriation campaigns. It was co-authored by the South African born son of indentured sugar estate workers and the journalist who helped Fiji repatriate, Totaram Sanadhya, write his account of indenture in Fiji.

So now I want to talk about some efforts made to contain labourers' post-indenture. So, Indians in the decision-making chambers of the Raj saw the dispersion of Indian manual labourers overseas as undermining their post-war efforts to obtain civil and political parity with white British subjects in the Commonwealth.

Indian elites feared that the inability of Indian laborers to return risked rendering India and globally dispersed Indians as coolies, which is a derogatory term for an Indian worker in several contexts. Although it also was sort of reclaimed later on among endangered diaspora communities.

So, discussions between members of the legislative assembly surrounding the management of Indian labour migration, which took place around the passing of the Indian Immigration Act of 1922, capture an ambivalence around the presence of coolies in areas not proximate to the Indian subcontinent. So, these discussions clearly indicate that the bills restrictions aimed to contain Indian labourers within India in order to reshape India's global image away from that of a labour reserve.

Many Indian proponents of the bill referred to immigrants as quote "Ignorant Workman" who heedlessly compromised India self-respect when they went abroad. Some Indian members of the Legislative Assembly and Council of State though, pushed back against these ideas and this included figures like Narayan Mulhar Joshi, founder of the All India Trade Union Congress, who raised concern that the bill unnecessarily criminalised those who tried to migrate outside of its provisions, which restricted immigration of labourers.

But the bill was meant to lay dead the indentured system in its grave by curtailing unskilled labour migration to anywhere but the Bay of Bengal. And the bill illustrates how fear surrounding the dispersion of unskilled labourers exempted the areas where most Indian immigrants went to work.

But, as I mentioned earlier, between 1843 to 1940, 90 percent of all immigration from India was destined for Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, areas around the Bay Bengal. And many of these migrants worked on tea, rubber, and sugar estates that were funded by reparations payments firstly to slave owners who profited off of transatlantic slavery, as I also mentioned earlier.

The exclusion of the British colonies in the Bay of Bengal from the Indian Emigration Acts restrictions meant that it would not do what it claimed, which is to clean up after indenture by containing unskilled labour emigration. So now I want to move on to the second example of discussions about repatriation that I want to talk about today.

So, within white settler colonies, especially South Africa, repatriation was synonymous with containing Indian numbers and preserving areas for white settlement. From 1895, the South African government organized and incentivized the repatriation of Indians and the dispossession of Black South Africans in order to preserve the colony for white settlement.

And one of these measures was the requirement of a £3 tax, it's quite famous actually if anyone's read anything at all about Gandhi. So, one of these measures was the requirement of the £3 tax from Indians who resided in the colony outside of an indenture contract. Many Indians who could not afford to live in South Africa outside of an indenture contract or couldn't afford to pay the £3 tax, yet had no real connection to India ended up repatriating there, or reindenturing themselves in order to be able to stay.

In 1914 though, the Indian Relief Act, which is the product of Gandhi's South African civil disobedience campaigns of 1913 to 14, eliminated the £3 tax. So, the Indian Relief Act provided Indians, including those born in South Africa, with a free passage to British India, provided that they give up their rights to re-enter South Africa.

And Gandhi intended for this new program of incentivized repatriation to a swaraj or eliminate White settler fears of Indian encroachment. He deduced that if White South Africans could see that Indian numbers would either stabilize or reduce that they would either be less compelled to pass racist legislation targeting Indians.

But, by 1927, both White settlers and Indians in South Africa were really dissatisfied with the Indian Relief Act's terms, especially its repatriation terms. So White settlers were upset with it because they were adamant that repatriation under the Indian Relief Act did not actually adequately reduce Indian numbers.

And then many South African Indians were unhappy with how enthusiastically the South African government began mobilizing the repatriation component of the Indian Relief Act to eliminate Indian numbers in the colony. This led the governments of India and South Africa to renegotiate the terms of the Indian Relief Act and create yet another incentivized repatriation scheme with slightly better terms.

On this new repatriation scheme, which is called the Assisted Emigration Scheme, provided a bonus of £20 to voluntary emigrants, free transportation back to India, and assistance for repatriates upon return. Unlike the former repatriation schemes, the Assisted Emigration Scheme did not require Indians to immediately give up their right to domicile in South Africa.

And between 1927 to 1940, over 16,000 Indians left under the terms of the Assisted Emigration Scheme. However, South African Indians continued to protest this new repatriation scheme

because it did not actually challenge White supremacy. Although it gave some provisions to Indians to remain in South Africa, it did not challenge the premise of White settler entitlement to that land. So now I want to talk about some folks who-

Ashna Jassi:

[inaudible] just got one comment. Sorry to interrupt you, just we have one comment asking if you could speak just a tiny bit slower.

Heena Mistry:

Oh sure, yeah.

Ashna Jassi:

Thank you so much.

Heena Mistry:

Of course. Sorry about that.

Ashna Jassi:

No problem.

Heena Mistry:

Okay, so now I want to talk a little bit about some folks who are raising alarm about the repatriation scheme. So, some of the most prominent voices in support of India's decolonization endorse repatriation. However, many activists who supported marginalized repatriates raised alarm about it as well.

Until the 1930s, the most recognized commentators on Indians overseas, including M. K. Gandhi and Reverend Charles Freer Andrews, argued that for ex-indentured Indians and their descendants, repatriation to India was the most desirable alternative to remaining in the colonies with anti-Indian legislation.

In the 1920s Charles Freer Andrews, whose picture you will see in like the middle towards the left, he was an Anglican missionary and a friend of Gandhi who independently investigated and reported on the position of Indians in Fiji, Malaya, Kenya and South Africa. In 1931, Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi, the South African born son of indentured sugar estate workers, co-authored a report with journalists Benarsidas Chaturvedi on the hardships facing repatriates. And you'll see both those pictures on the right.

Their report contained quotations from interviews with repatriates themselves, as well as photographs of the Natal House in Madras which the government of India had opened to provide shelter for repatriates under the Assisted Emigration Act. And the photo in the poster

advertising the talk is actually of the Natal House in Medras which houses repatriates who struggled upon their return to India.

So, Sannyasi himself in the top right-hand corner, he had experienced the hardships of repatriation as a child when his father returned to India following his mother's death. In 1904, as a 12-year-old boy, he returned to India with his father who had actually, he actually had the financial means to build up a comfortable life upon return by becoming a zamindar in their ancestral village in Bihar.

So, this is very much unlike many other repatriates who didn't actually have many financial means to support themselves upon arrival. When he and his father first returned to their village, the panchayat, or the village assembly, was willing to accept Sannyasi's father as- was unwilling to accept Sannyasi as his father's legitimate son, since it could not be guaranteed that his mother, who died in Johannesburg in 1899, was of the same caste.

And so, the panchayat told his father that he must choose between staying with his children or integrating into the community. His father ended up deciding to label Sannyasi, his South African born son, as illegitimate in exchange for acceptance into the community post-repatriation. So Sannyasi, this obviously this experience stuck with him for his life and he became a transnational activist both in India and South Africa who would like cross between the two who protested repatriation schemes throughout his life, partially because of his own experience with repatriation.

And then, as I mentioned before, Benarsidas Chaturvedi, who is in the bottom of the right-hand side, had assisted Totaram Sanadhya, who was another indentured repatriate write his widely distributed "My 21 years in Fiji" pamphlet which condemned indenture. So, both Sannyasi and Chaturvedi wrote a report against both Andrews' and Gandhi's assertions that repatriation schemes could actually do anything to eliminate white settler fears of the Indian problem, which is a term used to describe White fears of Indian competition in South Africa.

[Slide show titled 'Raising Alarm About Repatriation' on the left and an image of the front cover of A Report on the Emigrants Repatriated to India under the Assisted Emigration Scheme from South Africa and on the Problem of Returned Emigrants from All Colonies by Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi and Benarsidas Chaturvedi on the right.].

Okay, so now I want to talk a little bit more about their report. In the report's introduction, Chaturvedi admitted that while his earlier work had actively campaigned for the repatriation of indentured workers, he had mistakenly thought that people of Indian descent born overseas could happily settle in India.

And now, he was sure that they could only ever live fulfilling lives outside of India, where many had anyways spent most of their lives. And the report detailed how Indian repatriation after the abolition of indenture had disastrously left repatriate stranded and misplaced in India, which was essentially a foreign country to a lot of them.

After working with Chaturvedi to support repatriates in Kolkata, Charles Freer Andrews would eventually condemn repatriation as well. And correspondence between Andrews and Chaturvedi reveals that the desperation among repatriate settled in Kolkata. Andrews would meet with repatriates, some of whom insisted that they be sent back to colonies that they had formerly resided in or else they would commit suicide.

And in his autobiography, Sannyasi criticized Andrews, Gandhi, and others who spoke about repatriation for endorsing it, while the voices of repatriates themselves were silenced for fear of how they might escalate Indian public opinion against the Raj, who had also endorsed these repatriation schemes.

Sannyasi was disturbed by the despicable conditions of repatriates who suffered malaria mosquitoes, homelessness, disease and poverty after their arrival in Kolkata. And despite his grassroots work with repatriates, he continued to read appraisals of the repatriation scheme by Gandhi and Andrews in major newspapers well into the 1920s.

And so, he was very agitated and he attempted to publish his own denouncement of the repatriation schemes, but was refused publication several times before he ended up being successful. Historian Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's work, delves deeply into the annual reports on the repatriation schemes that were written by the agent representing the Government of India in South Africa. And also, she delves into records from the Government of India on the repatriates under the Assisted Emigration Scheme.

She notes that there were discrepancies in wages and the cost of living in India has compared to South Africa and that, in combination with isolation that they encountered in India, translated to the economic marginalization of many repatriates. Many were caught between a rock and a hard place facing unemployment when post-World War One economic, the global economic crisis hit South Africa in the late 1920s, leading to pressure on industry and agriculture to tackle White unemployment by hiring primarily White workers.

So now I want to talk about Indian colonization schemes which also kind of came out of the repatriation conversation. In light of the growing public discussion over the marginalized place of repatriates taking shape after the abolition of indenture, Gandhi had actually written in favour of organized migration schemes that placed Indian repatriates in other colonies that wanted access to a constant stream of Indian labourers.

So, sugar producing colonies, like British Guyana and Fiji, had received a steady stream of Indian labourers since the 1830s. But as I mentioned before, World War One suspended the flow of labour to sugar colonies in order to supply labour to the warfronts. And so, in combination with that, a rise in food prices, influenza outbreaks, pandemic like we're seeing now, and more competitive wages and other industries, coupled with the abolition of Indian indenture and that drew workers away from sugar estates.

So, no longer having the supplies of labour that allowed them to keep wages low and turn a profit for themselves, sugar estate workers owner- Sorry, sugar estate owners in British Guyana in Fiji turned to lobbying their governments to recruit like free, quote unquote, free migrant colonists from British India to settle as free agriculturalists in sugar colonies. So, in Fiji, planters had begun by the 1880s to lease out small plots of larger sugar estates to Indians over- To overseas Indians.

Sorry, to Indian overseers and labourers who had completed their indenture contracts. But as the cost of living increased after World War One also, labour is demanded, wage increases that planters were of course resistant to that because it cut into their profits. So White settler governments, including the South African government, colluded with the governments of sugar colonies who were looking for another stream of labour, especially in the Caribbean and in Fiji who wanted unfettered access to labourers after the abolition of indenture.

These Indian colonization schemes were meant to move Indian workers who they were trying to- White settler governments were trying to repatriate away or incentivized to leave to sugar colonies that wanted them as workers anyway. And there was an example of that happening where Seema Sohi and I think Lisa Chilton also wrote about this in Canada where in order to incentivize the departure of Punjabis from BC, they tried to attract people to go as colonists to Honduras.

Again, this is also tied up with our own local history here in Canada. So, with that, I just want to give a few concluding thoughts. And wrap it up. The provision of repatriation helped distinguish indenture from slavery, even though planters often avoided honouring that component of the indenture contract or offered alternatives to repatriation.

Throughout the existence of Indian indenture, the Government of India had pushed for the guarantee of free return passages for immigrants. Although Indian activists writing against repatriation sometimes distinguished it from deportation, they criticized both as forms of expulsion. Both were legalized forms of expulsion for sure.

Officially deportation at this- When I read it in these contexts, denoted exile without due process that could be carried out regardless of whether someone owned property or had children born in the state that deported them. Whereas when they talk about repatriation, it's kind of sometimes just differentiated as, while being state orchestrated it might appear to be consensual on the surface.

However, those who protested against repatriation schemes in their writing and activism highlighted the overlaps between deportation and repatriation. They oftentimes describe repatriation schemes as deportation as well. So, post-indenture, the many stakeholders in the global dispersion of Indians debated who should be allowed to leave British India's shores and where Indian labourers should be allowed to work post-indenture.

Colonies which no longer had access to an unlimited stream of indentured workers contorted themselves to find new ways to attract free Indian labourers. White settler colonies around the Indian Ocean searched for new ways to manage and reduce Indian numbers. And so, I guess the final thought that I want to give about this is that, the story of repatriation after the abolition of indenture helps historians problematize the assumption that British India was an inherent home for Indians overseas, which is a common theme in Indian nationalist rhetoric of the 1920s and 30s.

So, with that, I just want to thank everybody for coming and listening and I'm looking forward to your questions.

Ashna Jassi:

Great, thank you so much Heena for your fascinating talk. I think there's a lot that we can dive into in terms of questions on this topic. We will now move on to your question period. So again, if you have any questions to ask, feel free to use the wave emoji which is located at the bottom of your Zoom screen and I will call on you to ask your question. At that point, you can unmute yourself and feel free to engage in conversation.

The other option is to write your questions into the chat bar and those ones I will ask on your behalf to Heena so there's a few options there. We'll see maybe if anyone is waving their hands. Okay, so, we have a question from Harshita Yalamarty so please feel free and I guess I can unmute you. Well, perhaps you can unmute yourself Harshita and-

Harshita Yalamarty:

Yes.

Ashna Jassi:

Thank you.

Harshita Yalamarty:

Hi, thank you. I just, Heena that was a really wonderful presentation. Thank you so much. That was a lot of information compressed into a very small package but- And I have- There's just so much more to explore I think there. But yeah, thank you so much for your presentation. My question really was about, it was just a request for you to maybe elaborate a little bit more on the caste and gender aspect that you spoke about briefly, especially where the panchayat of the village basically refuses to accept the family back right?

And, there's that very sort of gendered aspect of lineage or inheritance and the taboos around traveling abroad. So, if you could elaborate a little bit on that it's very interesting. And I was wondering if there was any connection with some of the folk songs that you spoke about? I would love to hear more about that too, the folk songs that were warning people to not sign the contracts and not go abroad.

And wondering if the sort of migration and caste taboos were part of that warning that activists or communities were giving each other in terms of saying don't go. So, yeah. I mean I have, again, lots of questions but these are the ones that are off the top of my head so I might take up more space later. But, thank you so much for your presentation.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah, thank you. And also, it's nice to finally meet you digitally. So, thank you so much. These are really important questions and I'm really glad that you asked them. I'm going to try and answer I think both at once. I would say that, yeah. This is kind of the interesting thing about the repatriation question. And also, I think one thing that I wish, maybe more scholars would bring more into it, is also the way so much like caste and race kind of overlap in this too and these anxieties about caste purity do often overlap with race as well. So-

Harshita Yalamarty:

Yeah, and sorry just to interrupt you. But I was just thinking about how that- I was wondering if you think that this kind of purity and sort of lineage and blood purity is, if we can talk about that as a colonial mechanism because it's the same thing you see in, for instance, the Indian Act here right?

Heena Mistry:

Yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

And the burden of proving membership to a community or not with your actions falls on the women.

Heena Mistry:

Yes.

Harshita Yalamarty:

But at the same time, I know, for instance, you and I have talked about how caste is not only a colonial construct, right? That's-

Heena Mistry:

Yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

A misreading of that and caste exists before and outside of colonial structures. Of course, it's influenced and constructed by it, but-

Heena Mistry:

Yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

Anyways, sorry.

Heena Mistry:

No, no that's, again, like these are really important points. And so, one of the things that, about the song. So, one of the things that I find really interesting is that- Also, you should definitely read Ashutosh Kumar who's written a lot on the Bhojpuri songs and resistant songs about indenture. But one of the things that's kind of interesting, at least that I kind of notice, is that a lot of the songs focus on, I've noticed, safety or, you know, don't give yourselves up to the thing that you'll be sent away to somewhere that you don't know.

There's, that there's like, conditions are being hidden. Whereas, the Indian nationalist rhetoric is obsessed with these questions of sexual immorality among indentured women, and that you shouldn't be going overseas because of the risk of illegitimate children or marrying out of caste. The other, like, when you read Sannyasi's autobiography, and you read even Totaram Sanadhya's biography about indenture, the outrage comes at the fact that caste hierarchy is not being upheld.

So, in Sannyasi's thing, with Sannyasi, he literally in his autobiography says things like oh, you know, the reason why he found repatriation, how he was treated upon return so outrageous is that he was like "But I am of Kshatriya caste so I should be entitled to- These illiterate villagers don't know what they're talking about. I actually deserve and I'm entitled to their respect." And then with Totaram Sanadhya's too.

When he's talking about indenture in Fiji, the outrage that comes is the fact that, someone who, like he is upper caste and someone who is lower caste than him has authority over him in the field, right? That's an overseer, things like that. So, it's almost like a lot of the outrage that comes and what gets really promoted by the nationalist rhetoric is the overturning of these hierarchies.

So, and again, like how gender is kind of is obviously tied closely into that too. And even when it comes, and why I sort of brought up race as well too is that, my supervisor has sort of written about this as well, Amitava Chowdhury. So, he talks about how efforts by, towards sort of the outside in some colonies where indentured workers were sent, that you would find Hindu missionaries, even though that's obviously not really a thing.

But they sort of come and try and foster this sense of Indianness or culture to avoid having Indian indentured workers intermarry with African or emancipated slaves and their descendants. So, it's this like, there's this anxiety about caste. But there's also an inter-like caste relationships as a form of, like being caste is a form of sexual immorality. But also, I would say interracial relationships too as well.

That also becomes I think a source of anxiety among communities and among nationalists within India who are looking at what's happening overseas and saying like "Oh, this is a problem in the Caribbean. This is why we need to end indenture." Whereas when it comes to the Bay of Bengal when people are leaving and migrating and doing work, 90 percent of that is happening there.

But for some reason that's okay because maybe these certain categories and structures are not necessarily being overturned in the same ways that they are in places where indentured workers were going. So, I hope that that kind of speaks to your question. In the way that you wanted [laughs].

Ashna Jassi:

Right, I see she's written "Thank you" in the chat [laughs]. So, we do have a few more questions in the chat as well. One of them was wondering if you could comment more about the backgrounds of the labourers and where they were recruited from in terms of, yeah, where they were, I guess which part of India there from. Also, their caste background or education or any other interesting details.

Heena Mistry:

Okay. So, again, this isn't necessarily my expertise, but I would say that- I would definitely recommend that you read Ashutosh Kumar's work, virtual others who have done a lot more work on this than I have. But I would say, if I was just to sum this up, I would say that people of all, mostly from Bihar, a lot of people from Bihar were recruited to go. And, that people came from a variety of backgrounds as well.

Yeah, so I, yeah. It's like a whole diversity of people but those are mainly, that was mainly the place where people were coming from. And it depended also too because, if we're talking about indenture versus talking about migration in Southeast Asia, Ceylon, a lot of the folks who were going to Burma, Malaya, Ceylon were going from South India to these places.

So, a lot of people from around the Madras and stuff were going to Ceylon and Malaya and Burma and stuff like that. That's the other thing that I want to highlight too is yes this is about repatriation. Oftentimes what's entered in the debate is indentured repatriation but the reality is that well, why is the fact that 90 percent of those who left to work overseas were not going under indenture but for some reason they're not being included in this conversation as well? But yeah, I hope that helps.

Ashna Jassi:

Yeah, that's really fascinating. So, there's a second question here which asks about, so one of the attendees mentions that he worked in Belize, which is the British Honduras, and he met some people of British, oh sorry, of Indian descent there. And, his question is wondering if the

movement of Labor from Canada was considered significant in terms of the moving of laborers I believe from Canada to other nations.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah. So again, like I would really point you to look at Seema Sohi's work on this because she's worked like really extensively on like that. Like she's just written and researched like really excessively on like the campaign to get, to incentivize like the migration of Punjabis in British Columbia to Honduras to work. But that didn't actually go through it was more like they tried to get it, they tried to set it up but, and they tried to sort of frame it.

Again, like post-indenture these colonization schemes are really interesting because they try and frame them. Like they're basically a response to the abolition of indenture and the fact that like they can't get any more workers anymore because they can't, you know, like they can't actually compete as like employers with other employers, because their labor, like the conditions of labor on those plantations, are just so awful, right?

And so, one of the things that then they try and do is like with these, sorry, colonization schemes is that they're trying to frame these as better terms than they actually are. So, and one of the things that they do to sort of like prove that its free migration is to, like, engage in these sorts of like community consultation type things. So, like they hire, you know, like they hire two representatives. Like Seema Sohi's book talks about this, so again, if you're interested, you should totally read that.

But yeah, she sort of talks about how there's two representatives like from the Punjabi community in British Columbia who go and then they like they are asked to report on the condition in Honduras and they say it's stupid, like you know, it's awful it's not actually that great like people aren't treated that well here.

And then they go back and obviously the scheme, the proposed like colonization scheme to attract like Indians from Canada to go to Honduras like doesn't actually fall through because community members reported and they said like it's not good, so don't do it. But so, I would say like it didn't actually happen.

So, I'm not too sure like how Indians who are currently, like people of Indian descent who are currently in Honduras, if there are indentured descent. But I don't think that as far as I know that there were any folks who came who ended up going like via a Canada scheme to Honduras.

Ashna Jassi:

Great, thank you so much. So yeah, that's really fascinating. That was also a question I had as well as the relation between Canada and migration. We have another question here, so I'll just give this a read. The question is, could you give us some indication of the relative numbers of indentured laborers you chose to return and those who chose to remain and settle in Africa, the Caribbean, Fiji and so on at the end of their contracts?

Also, do you mind describing a bit more about your motivation? Sorry, about the motivation behind the decisions in favour of remaining versus leaving.

Heena Mistry:

Okay, so just to recap so I make sure I answer all this. So, motivations to leave versus return. And then, sorry the first part of that question was how many, like the numbers?

Ashna Jassi:

Exactly. Yes, if you have any idea of the sort of numbers of what that looked like.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah, I can't recall the exact numbers but I would again point you to folks who have written about this. So, like Lommarsh Roopnarine, Basdeo Mangru, let me see another one, Clem Seecharan. They've all sort of written about this. And obviously Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's work has really detailed stuff, like they've gone through everything.

But I would say like the reason why I kind of got interested in this topic too is because of Caribbean scholars who were like pointing out that it actually like was a significant amount of folks who did decide to either like reindenture themselves post finishing like their first indenture contract or to return; sorry, there weren't actually like that many who returned and there were several reasons for that.

But a lot of people chose to either like stay outside or to stay outside of India or to reindenture themselves, not the same place, in another colony to work on another estate. So, one of the reasons why like people would stay is that well sometimes planters didn't honour like their portion of the indenture agreement which is to provide a free passage to return.

So, some people just like some plantation owners defaulted on that side of their contract which is why also like this becomes a problem within India too, is like that people aren't holding that side of the indenture contract because they want them to stay. Other times like planters they try and like incentivize people to stay like was the case in Fiji where they leased out, like they gave out parts of the states.

When sugar, like I think in the 1880s there was a crash in the price of sugar or something and so like it wasn't profitable to keep up this all on their own so they would like give portions of the estate to workers, like small portions to settle and remain. And I think that this also happened in British Guiana as well and like other places as well. So sometimes people were like incentivized to stay, other times people like did actually make a significant amount of amount of money and they went back.

So, what is it? John Kelly and Martha Kaplan like in their book they have a chapter in a book by Chakraborty called Swaraj in Diaspora, Diaspora in Swaraj, it sort of goes. So their article kind of actually like pushes back against like the report that Sannyasi and Chaturvedi wrote, because

they sort of claim like you know, there are some repatriates who would come back and they had actually earned a lot of money and they were actually sending back some sort of like remittances; and they had like created, you know, like villages and named them after like places in Trinidad and Fiji and whatever.

So, like that, that was a thing like that, you know, they did come back with some money, but that wasn't obviously like everybody's experience. That's also where I have a problem with that article too, because I feel like they don't really go through the fact that when I talk about how Sannyasi had so much trouble trying to publish, the fact that a lot of repatriates were struggling in at least the 1920s like around that time, around the abolition of indenture too, when these incentivized repatriation schemes come about. So, I think I answered. I could tell how that question is sort of like walkabout way, but yeah.

Ashna Jassi:

Yeah, thank you so much. It's quite complex. So, thank you! I think we've gone through all of the questions in the chat, so if anyone has any other questions, feel free to raise your hand or again, type it into the chat as well. One question that perhaps I can ask you while we're waiting that I had was, if you have any thoughts on how these, I guess, the ancest- The descendants of these labourers are doing today? And how are the relations between their families and the majority communities where they ended up? I know you mentioned inter-racial relationships being kind of, I guess, protected against during this time period, but are these relations improving? And if you had any thoughts on that?

Heena Mistry:

Yeah, that's a big question but thank you for asking it. So, I would say, again like my supervisor's research sort of goes into this too is that like if you look at the different places- I'll just put up this map again. [Slide show depicting an image titled 'Migration and memory: Indentured labourers from India 1830s-1917.' According to the image, labourers primarily went to Mauritius (451,800), British Guyana (238, 700), and Natal, South Africa (152,200)].

Okay, so like these are all the different places in which like indentured repatriates, sorry, like indentured folks went. But obviously as I talked about, places around like the Bay of Bengal, to Ceylon, Malaya, Sri Lanka, Burma, all these places they all had huge populations of Indian migrant workers.

And so, I would say it's really dependent on the context, because like in each of these different places like the context was very different in that different numbers of Indians went to those places depending on their proximity, or Indian nationalist interest in making something happen in those places.

There would be different degrees of hybridity or religious syncretism or, you know, integration or whatever. So, like for example in Jamaica, a lot of people- It was a smaller proportion of Indians who went and a lot of people did actually end up intermarrying. And so, you have a lot

of intercultural families in Jamaica as compared to like Mauritius or South Africa and Natal. So, I think part of this depended on proximity to the Indian subcontinent, which is again like why go back to Harshita's really important question about caste, you know.

One of the reasons why- And race and how those kind of tie together is that this anxiety of oh people are quote-on-quote losing their culture and the kind of coded ways in which race works their way into that and also caste. So, in a lot of Caribbean colonies you have a lot of, you know, culture that makes families. And, again, in more recent years, towards the end of the 20th century, when you see even today, if you see sort of the ways in which diaspora is mobilized by homelands, right. What are the different ways in which...

The reason why I guess I got so interested in this project is that I found it really interesting that immediately post 1947, you see figures like nationalists like Nehru and Sarojini Naidu and others who they tell the diaspora that, you know, we're actually going to cut you off in that you don't actually have any protections, you're not really entitled to any help from independent India anymore.

Whereas in the 1920s and 30s you see people like Indian nationalists actively trying to engage the diaspora and saying "You are the global Indian diaspora, you need to fight to, you know, support the anti-colonial nationalist movement from wherever you are." Basically, like a lot of my dissertation write talks about how a lot of Indian Nationalist Rhetoric calls on the diaspora and tells them: "You are only going to be able to fight Anti-Indian Legislation in the places where you're settled if India becomes independent."

Then immediately post 1947, that's not the case, they say "Look we can't help you out." And this becomes a problem in places like Ceylon where- Like independent Sri Lanka, where a lot of the tea estate workers who are Tamil Indian, they end up kind of becoming stateless and then that ends up becoming sort of the roots of those folks and their sort of, you know, uncertain place.

Around the Bay of Bengal this also becomes an issue and like Burma we see again anti-Indian... Yeah, like sort of discrimination against Indians in Malaya etcetera. So, I would say like, that is a whole huge complex story that goes into it. And all these different contexts are so very different. My long way to reply to your question [laughs].

Ashna Jassi:

Yeah, thank you so much. It's all super fascinating. Yeah, I completely empathize that it's very complex and very context dependent. Alright, so again, feel free to raise your hand if you have any more questions for Heena. Or again, feel free to drop them into the chat bar.

Sharada Srinivasan:

I have a question Heena. Sorry yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

Sorry Sharada, I just wanted to jump in a little bit and add a little thing to what Heena was saying and maybe get her comment on that too, but you should go ahead.

Sharada Srinivasan:

Harshita maybe you should finish your comment and then I can ask my question.

Harshita Yalamarty:

Okay, thank you. I just wanted to say that it's been interesting also in the last, I think around 10 15 years maybe, following the Indian Nation-State's relationship with the diaspora, especially the descendants of indentured labourers who left during colonial times.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

So, one of the initiatives by the Indian Nation-State to connect with diasporic communities and solicit or elicit investments back into India from them because the perception is that diasporic communities are necessarily doing more economically, are more economically powerful than the ones, than the folks within India.

So, there is a kind of return to the motherland sort of an approach to diasporic communities, right? And so, that's called the Pravasi Bharatiya. Yeah, that's the festival but then there's also a commission for it. And in the last few years, they really kind of hopped on the fact that political leaders in countries like Fiji and Mauritius and I believe in Guyana as well, are of Indian origin or have Indian heritage.

And so, there's been a sort of claiming of how well Indians have done abroad. Which basically erases all of this history that we've just heard from you Heena.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah.

Harshita Yalamarty:

So, yeah. I find that to be- I mean it's interesting to think about the relationships not just to the families and communities, but the relationship that's now been reframed and set up by Nation-States with communities abroad.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah, I think, and again thank you so much for bringing that up because it also kind of reminds me of how I think this story of like homeland mobilizing diaspora oftentimes is at the very root

of the model minority myth. This idea that... I think, especially the case in South Africa and like different... like East Africa all these different places where- And even Canada too. We see that here too.

It's like this idea that gets mobilized, like you said Harshita just to sort of elaborate on what you said, like that... sort of celebrating Indian quote-unquote success when not realizing that there is this interesting kind of place that we have here too. As in, especially in the South African contexts and the East African contexts where Indian diaspora they're attempting to get sort of like parity with White settlers often times, but then they're not necessarily- They want inclusion within White supremacy, but then they're not necessarily challenging White supremacy.

They just want inclusion into it. So, they're still okay with upholding these systems of settler colonialism in South Africa and East Africa, even in Canada here too. I think that's also something that I would implore South Asian diaspora in Canada to sort of think about in the same way.

Here too, what are the contexts in which they sort of end up logged in and then how are they interacting in those contexts? What are the ways in which sometimes they end up, I guess... what's the word? Like appealing to White supremacy in order to get advantages as well, without necessarily- Obviously that's not the case all the time like there are so many instances in which people express solidarity.

If I think of like (indiscernible) has written about Makhan Singh who was like a trade union activist in Nairobi who was also, you know, interested in ensuring that African workers also received better conditions. And in South Africa too, folks like Ahmed Kathrada who goes to jail with Mandela.

So, there are those examples as well, but I think like what I wish would get a little bit more talked about too was the fact that there were also many who are upholding these systems of racism and settler colonialism too and not necessarily challenging them, to dismantle them, but challenge them for the purpose of getting inclusion within them.

Ashna Jassi:

Thank you Heena. Very fascinating. So, I think Sharada you can feel free to jump in at this point.

Sharada Srinivasan:

Okay, thanks Heena and thanks Ashna! You know just as you were talking, you know, doing your presentation and in your responses, the thing that's been working in my mind is, I'm not a historian, but I'm fascinated by history for what it is, but also for its relevance to what is currently happening, right? There are some processes that are so central to both capitalism and to Nation-States.

One of them is labour movement and particular forms in which labour is then captivated, right? So, in the context in which you are talking about, is mostly so-called unscaled labour, you know,

indentured labour. But currently of course, what we are seeing, to a lesser extent now but certainly for a long time in India, and I think it might come back again is the movement of skilled workers, right?

So, if you see countries like Canada, US and other countries, they're also interested in migrant, you know, skilled migrant labour. They're not interested in people with low-skills. They really want high-skills, right? So, in some ways, there is a sort of a repeat of what we have seen historically in the context that you've described happening in a slightly different way in the global system, economic system.

I mean this is not so much a question but if you have something to share, I know this is not the focus of your work, but I thought, you know, why not just collectively think aloud about some of these issues? Thanks.

Heena Mistry:

I would actually challenge the idea that Canada is not looking for unskilled workers. It's temporary foreign workers who pick all of our agricult- Like all of our, you know, our farm products and then they don't get the benefits of citizenship or pathway to citizenship. So, I'm-

Sharada Srinivasan:

Sorry Heena, I meant more the Indian labour not, yeah. I was thinking of the agriculture season; agriculture labour is coming to India and it's all the coming from the Caribbean and it's all the same in Canada. But I was more referring to the Indian labour. So just to clarify...

Heena Mistry:

Yeah. So, I guess... Could you repeat your- I guess just to reflect on that like the fact that, you know, who is actually coming? How does Canada sort of like- What relationship does like- What sort of migration now comes to Canada and how does that sort of connect to what-

Sharada Srinivasan:

Yeah, not just Canada, right? But US, the European Union, all of these countries. So, in an earlier time, like in the context that you were talking about, the historical period that you were talking about several largely British and Dutch colonies. So, again European powers, they had particular forms of labour, particular formation of labour, right? With it be capitalism. and colonialism.

And I'm seeing some similarities to the present context in the current global economic order that it may not be so much unskilled labour as it was then. It may not be indentured labour in the exact form. But still there are ways in which labour is appropriated and I think predominantly in the way high-skill labour is being appropriated by some of these countries, right? So, in many ways there are similarities is what I'm trying to say.

Heena Mistry:

But I would also like us like... Push back on that too and that... I think maybe if we're thinking about international students and what they sort of contribute too, especially Indian international students and the ways in which sort of their research labour is appropriated by Canadian universities and then, again, not really given clear pathways to citizenship, not given the same kind of supports.

I think we saw this really strongly when the pandemic came about in March how a lot of international students, including Indian international students, were, you know, especially graduate students were giving a lot of labour to the university in exchange for not very much pay with very little entitlement to support from the government for the work that you're doing and what you're contributing to Canada's research industry.

I would say that, I think that's maybe an important component and maybe where I would see sort of crossovers to how... to what I'm seeing in the context that I'm talking about in the early 20th century as well. But yeah, I mean. Again, if we're going to talk about Indian migration to the Global North too, I think that we also need to think about what- I guess, there's a whole diversity of folks who are in these places, right?

So, if we think about, for example, like the UK. We have Indian diaspora in the UK who have been there a long time as a result of these processes that I'm sort of talking about. Through sort of multi-colonial, like going through East Africa, the Caribbean, etcetera. And then ending up in the UK. But then how I think a lot of- And then how that- Again, very different from new folks who come like direct from India as well.

But I also think- Again, you see a lot of the same problems that are kind of identified in the 1920s of Indian diaspora who are sort of pushing for their inclusion within White supremacy but not actually necessarily challenging it in the Home Secretary of the UK. Or of, I guess, right-wing Indian politicians in the United States.

You know, I think that that- Who also come as professional- Like many, at least in the United States, many of whom come is professional diasporas too. So, I think that... It's kind of hard to always, to give a definitive reflection or thought to what you're saying. But I think... I hope, yeah. I would... That's what I would say about that.

Ashna Jassi:

Great, thank you very much Heena. So, again, feel free to raise your hand if you have a question for Heena.

Heena Mistry:

Yeah, I guess I'm- Oh sorry, never mind.

Ashna Jassi:

Any other thoughts there or?

Heena Mistry:

I just thought I'd share this comment about celebrating, you know, that there were messages in India celebrating Jagmeet Singh as Deputy Prime Minister. But then at the same time, there's also a lot of Hindu nationalist backlash towards him. You know, getting in and how a lot of the rhetoric around Jagmeet Singh's leadership role is that while, you know, like...

I guess sort of the same anti-Sikh rhetoric that you kind of see within India pushing back against his own Palestine activism and activism for Sikh rights. So, I would say like- I just noticed Sharada's comment, sorry, Harshita's comment about that. Yes, there's positive stuff like that, but then, I don't know, I mean primarily, I've only really seen the negative backlash within South Asian diaspora here towards Jagmeet Singh's leadership.

Harshita Yalamarty:

Sorry, just to contextualize why wrote that comment was because I was thinking in terms of how the Nation-State disavows the violence towards minorities within the country, and also the violences and the erasures suffered by the communities that left or were made to leave as in the case of indentured labour.

But at the same time, now the kind of rhetoric that dovetails with India as a superpower is to claim that people of Indian origin who have done quote-unquote well for themselves and have come to political leadership positions are somehow the glory of that is reflected back onto the Nation-State.

So, I remember when this started happening, I had family that were sending me messages saying "Wow look at you, you're in Canada and you have an Indian Prime Minister" and I said "Well, no." I don't think Jagmeet Singh would in any case identify himself as Indian. And also, he is from a community and his own sort of, I think, political history reflects an opposition to the Indian Nation-State and, you know.

So, it's very much like a... You know the kind of blanket claiming of "Our sons have gone abroad and done well for themselves" and something like that circulating in nationalistic patriotic kind of veins basically does what you're talking about, right? It erases all of this kind of complicated history with the Nation-State.

My work is sort of centered in India as well. That's why I'm kind of thinking in that context of how, you know, in a lot of ways the legal kind of, like what you were talking with the legal expansions and the kind of legal context for depreciation and all. I see some of those echoes in nationalist rhetoric and claiming and, you know, how the economic context has obviously shifted. But there is a kind of very instrumental claiming and disavowal of people abroad is what I'm trying to get at.

Ashna Jassi:

Great, thank you very much. So, I guess this could be our final call for questions since we are just about at the end of our webinar.

Minaxi Mistry:

Hi there Heena, this is Minaxi. I hope it's okay just to squeeze in one last question. My question to you is: As a descendant of parties that have, that immigrated out of India and were part of this movement around the globe, what was your motivation for your research into this area? What do you feel has been the long-term benefits of this globalization of Asians around the world? What do you feel has been the biggest benefit of it?

Heena Mistry:

So, I guess like what... I'll just answer first the first part about, you know, like why I think this is an important- Or why I find it interesting or why- Yeah, again, this is sort of like my background. My grandparents left India in the 1950s, they've worked in Kenya and one in Uganda for several years, and then went to the UK right before the 1968 British Citizenship Act stopped non-white citizens on the empire from being able to be entitled to come to the UK.

I think part of it is just that a lot of diaspora studies that- A lot of times I think Indian diaspora is really- What Indian diaspora offers to diaspora studies is so interesting just because of the multilayered, how multilayered and how like diverse and also very well documented their diaspora history is.

So I think that it- Especially in a place like Canada where we have all these layers of diaspora here or in the UK where there are all of those different layers of diaspora, it sort of shows, like it is this really interesting pushed back to sort of like nationalist rhetoric that, I guess Harshita was talking about as well, where these efforts to claim diaspora populations as Indian in certain years and then just totally ignore them in other years that I think it sort of pokes holes in the idea of nationalist rhetoric and that it is a very fragile unstable way of thinking about belonging.

I would say the case of global Indian diaspora history is really interesting. And I don't think it's also necessarily unique to Indian diaspora history too. I think that there's many examples within transatlantic Black diaspora histories too where these ideas of belonging and, I guess with the examples of Sierra Leone and Liberia, how sometimes it's the idea of belonging in a certain place can be mobilized to move people to other places.

So, when I was talking about the colonization schemes earlier, you know, one of the ideas was that British Guyana could be marketed to Indians in South Africa who are facing anti-Indian legislation that they could come to British Guyana and that British Guyana could be an Indian colony. There was another case for that in Tanganyika where, you know, Tanganyika can be an Indian colony like a homeland for Indians who couldn't settle in India. And similarly, Liberia and Sierra Leone are sort of like, they're similar to that.

Israel is kind of similar to that too. The idea that you can have- The idea that, you know, homeland is inherent. The idea that there can be a place where, you know, ethnic homogeneity is key and that that is what defines belonging. I think that all the ways in which that hasn't been the case, that those ideas have been challenged.

I think that is what the story of Indian diaspora, but again, not exclusively Indian diaspora, has shown us, right? They're really useful tools. Looking back at Indian diaspora history is a really useful tool for poking holes in nationalist rhetoric and ideas about patriotism.

Ashna Jassi:

Amazing. I think-

Minaxi Mistry:

Thank you Heena.

Ashna Jassi:

Thank you, thank you for the question. I think that was the perfect way to sort of wrap up our very complex discussion today. Thank you so much Heena for your fascinating discussion and your research. We really enjoyed having you. We would also like to say thank you to the audience. Thank you so much for joining us today. Hope you continue to take care and stay well.

Also, thank you to Sharada for organizing this event, to Shirley, and to Heather for supporting us in making this all run smoothly. A quick note that the next CIRCLE webinar will be on October 28th and we will have Dr. Sanjay Ruparelia joining us.

His title, sorry, his talk will be titled "A New India, A New China? The Politics of Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping." Also, if you'd like to join the CIRCLE email list, please send an email to indiaresearch-l@uoguelph.ca, and that's included in the chat as well. Alright, so that's it for today. Thank you so much to everyone again and I hope you stay well.