

Sex ratios in Indian indentureship and longer-run implications

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Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre and the Aameena Gafoor
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Topic of the day

Laws Impacting Indians in the Diaspora: From Indentureship to Independence

Motivation

In early March 1874, two ships with indentured laborers from Asia arrived in British Guiana:

- The *Corona* arrived on the 2nd from China. Of its original 354 adults, 40 (11.3%) were women.
- The *Clyde* arrived on the 6th from India. Of its original 375 adults, 110 (29.3%) were women.

Indian indentureship and the sex ratio

Key questions:

- What were the laws regarding the sex ratio of Indian indentured laborers?
- Did these laws actually have an effect?
- What were the implications in the long term for the population in British Guiana?

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Emigration

- The abolition of slavery in the British Empire led West Indian and Mauritian planters to seek labor elsewhere.
- Indentured laborers from Africa (largely from west Africa and people liberated from slaving ships), China, India, and Portugal filled the labor gap.
- Over one million Indians left for locations all around the world from 1838-1917 as part of government-run indentureship.

Other emigration in the British Empire

- At the same time, the British oversaw mass emigration to major settler colonies (Australia, Canada, etc.) and to the US.
- The same British government agency within the Colonial Office facilitated both indentureship and European settler emigration.
- In 1868, almost 40% of British (English, Irish, and Scottish) overseas emigrants were women.

Early era

- No laws initially existed for recruitment of indentured laborers.
- This led to extremely skewed initial voyages out of India. Roopnarine (2015) reports that the ratio of women to men was 3:100 in the earliest voyages to British Guiana.
- Early voyages to Mauritius showed a similar pattern (Lal 1981).
- On Trinidad's first ship, the *Futtle Rozack* (Fatel Rozak), just 22 of the 209 adults were women for a ratio of 2:19.

Statutory changes

- During the 1850s and 1860s, British officials repeatedly tried to set minimum (and sometimes maximum) ratios of women to men.
- In the late 1860s, the ratio was fixed at 25 women:100 men.
- Finally, in 1868, the ratio was fixed at 40 women:100 men (33:100 for Mauritius) per the Colonial Office.
- The 40-100 rule was the standard for the remainder of indentureship.
- For instance, Fiji started indentureship in 1879 with this rule.

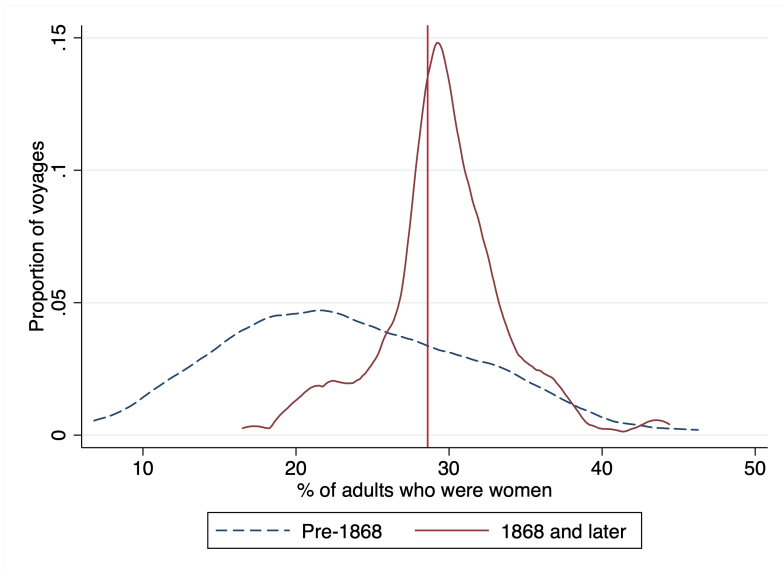
What were the sex ratios on ships?

- The 40-100 rule implies that $40/(100 + 40) \approx 28.6\%$ of adults should have been women.
- I examine several colonies using both data summaries and individual-level emigration passes.
- I cannot determine causality, but the data provide suggestive evidence of what happened.

British Guiana

- 524 voyages from 1845-1917 with embarkation data.
- Data sources include Emigration Commission reports, other Parliamentary Papers, annual reports from the Immigration Department, and ship arrival reports.
- I believe this covers almost every single ship to British Guiana.

British Guiana visualization



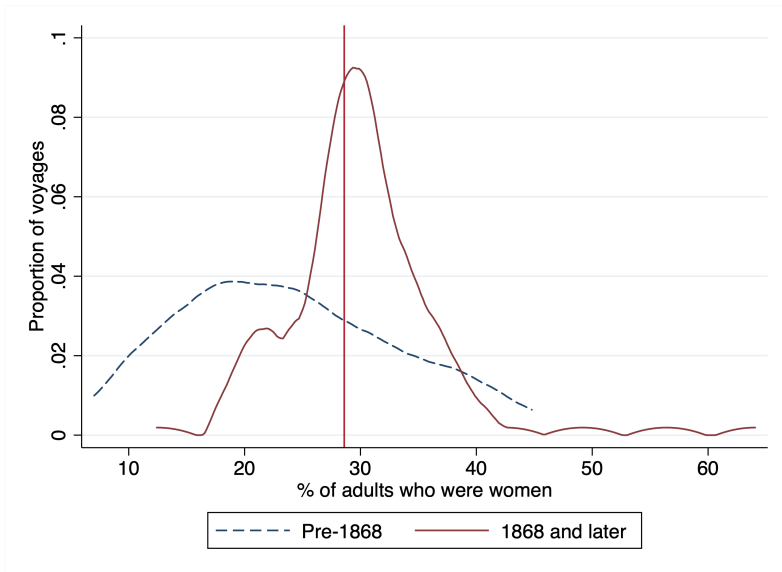
British Guiana summary

- Pre-1868: 174 voyages, average of 23.5% women.
- 1868 and later: 350 voyages, average of 29.7% women.
- Overall: 524 voyages, average of 27.6% women.

Trinidad

- 216 voyages from 1845-1917 with embarkation data.
- All voyages from 1845-1889, with some coverage after.
- Data come from Emigration Commission reports, other Parliamentary Papers, and original emigration passes held by the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad visualization



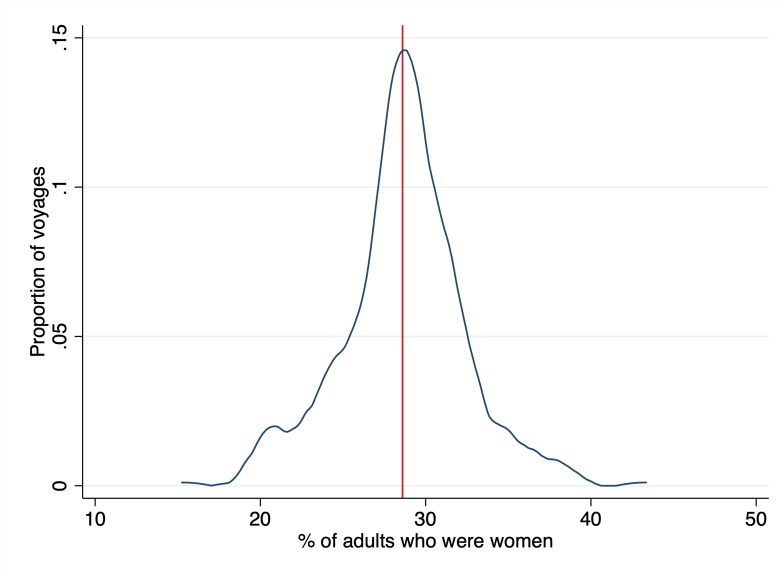
Trinidad summary

- Pre-1868: 100 voyages, average of 23.7% women.
- 1868 and later: 116 voyages, average of 30% women.
- Overall: average of 27.1% women.
- One ship, the *Artist* in 1878, was over 60% women.

Natal

- 381 voyages from 1861-1911.
- Data come from records held by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- The data cover almost all voyages from India to Natal except for two that appear to have been incorrectly digitized.

Natal visualization



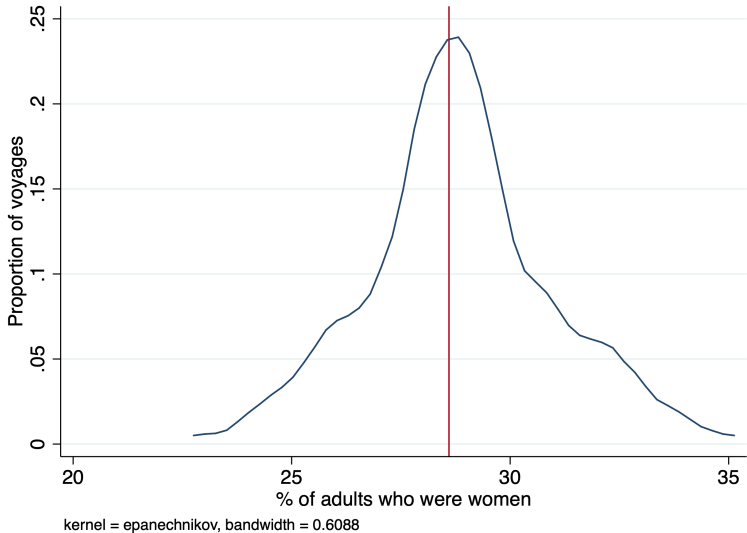
Natal summary

- Most voyages started after 1868, so I do not split at 1868.
- Overall: average of 28.6% women.

Fiji

- 87 voyage-port pairs from 1879-1917.
- Data come from original emigration passes held at the National Library of Australia.

Fiji visualization



Fiji summary

- All voyages started after 1868, so there is no split at 1868.
- Overall: average of 28.8% women.

Overall summary

- Both British Guiana and Trinidad show low percentages of women prior to 1868.
- In 1868 and later, the law mandated that 28.6% of adults had to be women (for a ratio of 40 women to 100 men).
- Fiji and Natal came very close to this with 28.6% and 28.8%.
- British Guiana had a slightly higher percentage in this period of 29.7%.

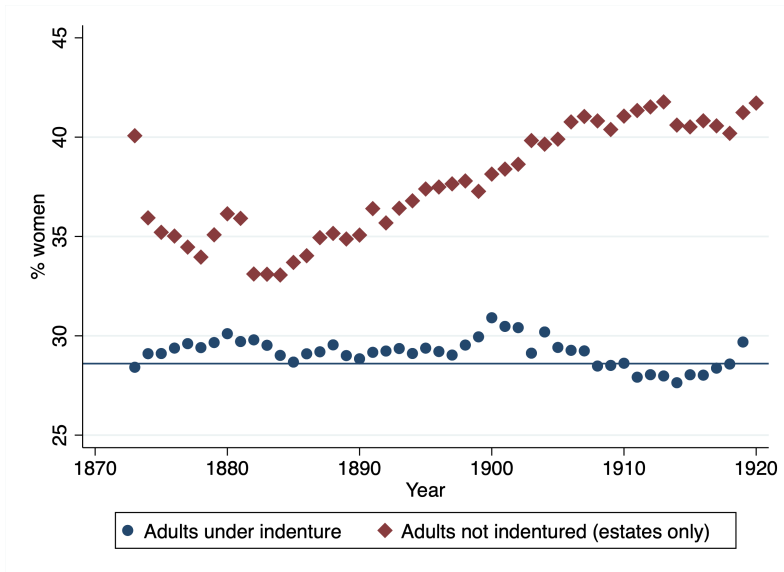
What were the impacts of the skewed sex ratio in the long run?

- The 40-100 rule meant that much higher numbers of adult men arrived.
- New indentured arrivals kept this discrepancy high, whereas other migration, births, and deaths (in the long run) reduced it.
- The skewed sex ratio was artificial and created by indentureship itself. In Bihar, one of the main sending sources of indentured laborers, there were more women than men in 1901 and 1911—perhaps due to indentureship and other migration.

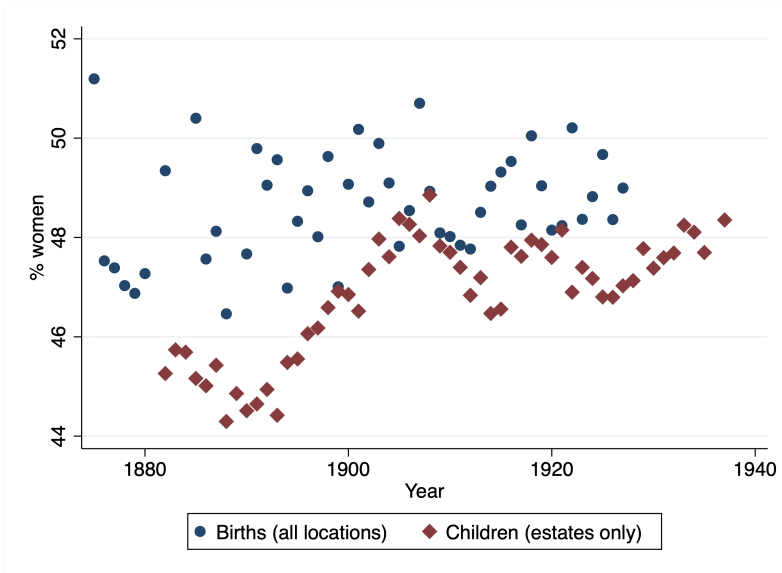
British Guiana

- I examine the sex ratio of the population from the 1870s through the 1950s.
- Data come from immigration reports, Blue Books, and the colonial census.

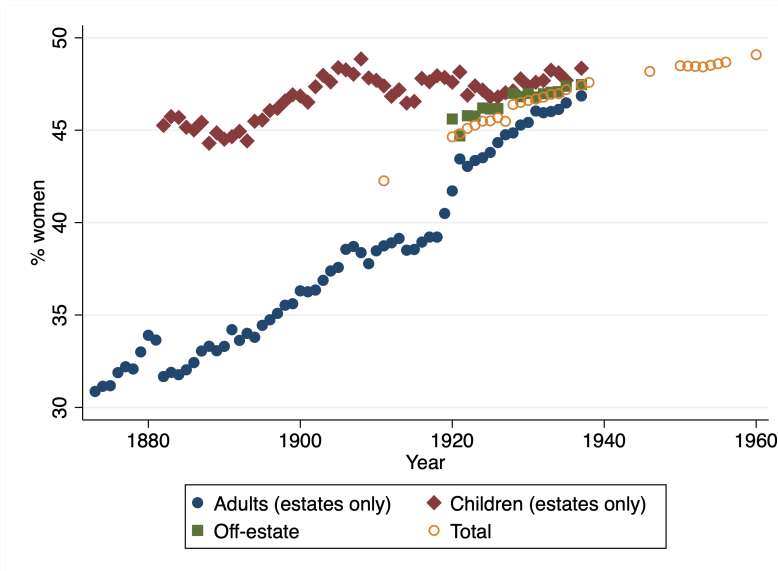
Adults on estates in the era of indentureship, 1873-1919



Births in all locations and children on estates, 1875-1937



Combined demographic data, 1873-1960



Acknowledgments

- Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre and the Aameena Gafoor Institute
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Thank you

Questions or comments:
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