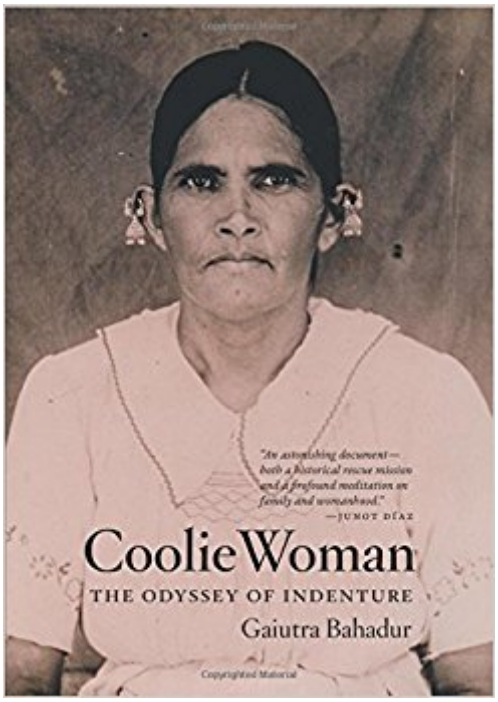
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Coolie Woman: The Odyssey Of Indenture



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Synopsis

In 1903, a young woman sailed from India to Guiana as a “coolieÃ¢â ¬Â•—the British name for indentured laborers who replaced the newly emancipated slaves on sugar plantations all around the world. Pregnant and traveling alone, this woman, like so many coolies, disappeared into history.Ã Â InÃ Â Coolie Woman—shortlisted for the 2014 Orwell Prize—her great-granddaughter Gaiutra Bahadur embarks on a journey into the past to find her.Ã Â Traversing three continents and trawling through countless colonial archives, Bahadur excavates not only her great-grandmotherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s story but also the repressed history of some quarter of a million other coolie women, shining a light on their complex lives. Shunned by society, and sometimes in mortal danger, many coolie women were either runaways, widows, or outcasts. Many of them left husbands and families behind to migrate alone in epic sea voyages—traumatic “middle passagesÃ¢â ¬Â•—only to face a life of hard labor, dismal living conditions, and, especially, sexual exploitation. As Bahadur explains, however, it is precisely their sexuality that makes coolie women stand out as figures in history. Greatly outnumbered by men, they were able to use sex with their overseers to gain various advantages, an act that often incited fatal retaliations from coolie men and sometimes larger uprisings of laborers against their overlords. Complex and unpredictable, sex was nevertheless a powerful tool. Examining this and many other facets of these remarkable womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lives,Ã Â Coolie WomanÃ Â is a meditation on survival, a gripping story of a double diaspora—from India to the West Indies in one century, Guyana to the United States in the next—that is at once a search for oneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s roots and an exploration of gender and power, peril and opportunity.Ã Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“An astonishing documentÃ¢â ¬â •both a historical rescue mission and a profound meditation on family and womanhood, Gaiutra BahadurÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Coolie Woman spans continents and centuries, the private and the national, to bring to light the extraordinary lives of the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s great-grandmother and the other quarter of a million coolie women that came to the New World as indentured laborers. BahadurÃ¢â ¬â„¢s meticulous research and tireless perseverance have restored an important chapter in our historiesÃ¢â ¬â •outstanding work.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Junot DÃƒÂ-az, author of This Is How You Lose Her)Ã¢â ¬Å“Deeply personal yet assiduously researched. From the treacherous sea voyage to the colonial outpost of British Guiana to the sexual privileges conferred on indentured women as the scarcer sex, Bahadur reconstructs the Ã¢â ¬Ëœcoolie Ã¢â ¬â„¢ woman Ã¢â ¬â„¢s fate in astonishing detail.Ã¢â ¬Â• (India Ink, New York Times)Ã¢â ¬Å“Bahadur has written a masterly chronicle of the lives of Ã¢â ¬Ëœcoolie women Ã¢â ¬â„¢ (and also Ã¢â ¬Ëœcoolie men Ã¢â ¬â„¢). . . . . The stories are both poignant and horrific: abuse, promiscuity, rape, mutilation, cuckoldry, and murder abound (according to Bahadur, this legacy still survives in Guyana), owing to the shortage of women and the double struggle between Ã¢â ¬Ëœmen and women, colonizer and colonized.Ã¢â ¬â„¢ . . . This spellbinding account of a story that needed to be told is highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Library Journal)Ã¢â ¬Å“In reconstructing the lives of the indentured and, in particular, the experience of her greatÃ Â- grandmother, Gaiutra Bahadur has produced an intricate, thoroughly researched, and beautifully written book that evokes the experience of emigrant Indians and their descendants.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Times Literary Supplement)Ã¢â ¬Å“This is a story of how colonialism made the modern world, and of how some of the women who laboured in foreign lands worked to build the wealth that still sparkles in the enclaves of opulence and power from London to La Lucia. This is a complex story about our complex past that offers little to the often crude nationalisms that, from Guiana to Fiji and South Africa, not to mention India, are emerging inÃ Â response to our inability to really decolonise our societies. Those who wish to find romantic myths in the past to power deeply conservative ideas about the present, and the role of women in an imagined future, will find little to work with here. What this book does show, and what history always shows when itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s examined properly, is that the past was just as complex and messy as the present. But it also shows that in that messy complexity there is, then as now, resilience, innovation, renewal and courage.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Vashna Jagarnath The Con)Ã¢â ¬Å“The strength of this book resides in its

rivetingly intricate documentation of the experiences of Indian indentured females that Bahadur provides. The author succeeds in presenting otherwise underexamined or overlooked details of the lives of these women in a very compelling narrative, woven from skeins of meticulous details but never pedantic in its presentation. Drawing from a notable range of pertinent primary and secondary sources, the work can definitely be used as a source of valuable corroborative details in both academic and nonacademic engagements with the Indian indenture system. Coolie WomanÃ Â has definitely earned itself an undeniable place in the narratives of gender, migration, labor, Indian, Caribbean, and diaspora studies.Ã¢â ¬Â• (sx salon)Ã¢â ¬Å“In Coolie Woman, [Bahadur] combines her journalistic eye for detail and storytelling gifts with probing questions, relentlessly pursuing leads to create a haunting portrait of the life of a subaltern. Ã¢â ¬ËœCan the subaltern speak?Ã¢â ¬â„¢ the theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had asked rhetorically. Yes, she can. Through the story of Sheojari, Bahadur shows how.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Salil Tripathi Independent)Ã¢â ¬Å“A moving, foundational book, investigating the experience of indentured Indian women in the Caribbean. It is solidly researched and as such it reveals the difficulty of understanding the human lives concealed within documents. Bahadur delicately reconstructs these womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lives, seen only through a glass darkly, piecing them together with respect and even admiration.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Women's Review of Books)Ã¢â ¬Å“Coolie Woman is about indenture, yes. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s also a product of unflinching inquiry into community, diaspora, displacement, New World immigration, the body politic, and the persistent legacy of colonialism. Reading it is immersive, dense, and challenging in the best way: it marks a series of redefinitions, broadening the basin of oneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s assumptions governing indenture. It illuminates the tableaux of Indian womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s stories, blowing heaped decades of dust from their surfaces. Bahadur handles this history without compromise, imbuing it with prismatic context, deepening the true stories that can be told about the journeys that so many women undertook.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Shivanee Ramlochan Trinidad & Tobago Guardian)Ã¢â ¬Å“Coolie Woman is a genealogical page-turner interwoven with a compelling, radical history of empire told from the perspective of indentured womenÃ¢â ¬â •or Ã¢â ¬Ëœcoolies,Ã¢â ¬â„¢ as they were known by the British. The collective voice of the jehaji behen (ship sisters) has been barely audible across the centuries, until now. . . . Bahadur grants us rare imaginative access to the odyssey through the experience of womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s stories she finds in the archives.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Guardian)Ã¢â ¬Å“IndiaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s indentured women may have been deprived of the right to tell their own stories, but Bahadur has told us hers. And through it she breaks a historical silence, and gives untold truths a voice.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â (Books & Culture)Ã¢â ¬Å“With a poignant narrative that is part biography, part history, and part memoir, Bahadur gives voice to the voiceless.Ã¢â ¬Â• (The

Writer)Ã¢â ¬Å“Fascinating story, which will have resonance for millions of others who are swept up and transformed by history and have to find a new way to create Ã¢â ¬Ëœhome.Ã¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬Â• (Andrea Stuart Literary Review)Ã¢â ¬Å“Gaiutra BahadurÃ¢â ¬â„¢s pathbreaking book carefully excavates an imperial history of violence and uprooting. But this is no simple account of victimhood. It shows, with understated literary power, the bitterly paradoxical nature of colonial modernity: the unbearable dialectic between enslavement and liberation that many unsung millions underwent in their private lives.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Pankaj Mishra, author of From the Ruins of Empire)Ã¢â ¬Å“Gaiutra BahadurÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book made me realize how the experience of a whole generation of women like her great-grandmother profoundly challenges the various stereotypes we have. This is a highly original combination of careful scholarship and well-told personalÃ Â journey.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Adam Hochschild, author of Bury the Chains)Ã¢â ¬Å“With the exhilarating meticulousness of a period film,Ã Â Coolie WomanÃ Â recreates a vanished world and casts a personal searchlight on theÃ Â saga of indenture. Gaiutra Bahadur rescues her great-grandmotherÃ Â Sujaria and other coolie women from the archives by means of aÃ Â narrative that is both scholarly and soulful. In detailing the bitterÃ Â journeys of her forebears, in making their astonishing experiencesÃ Â real and sympathetic, and in registering the complexities of theirÃ Â livesÃ¢â ¬â •not least the extent to which they made choices where one mightÃ Â have expected helplessnessÃ¢â ¬â •Bahadur honors their memories and showsÃ Â herself their worthy descendant.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Teju Cole, author of Open City)Ã¢â ¬Å“Gaiutra Bahadur braids a dazzling rope from the history of Indian migration to the Caribbean, the experience of Indians in Guyana and of Indo-Guyanese immigrants in the United States, and the joy and pain of Ã¢â ¬Ëœreturnâ¬â„¢ to India. Deeply researched, elegantly written,Ã Â Coolie WomanÃ Â is a major contribution to the literature of diaspora.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â (Richard Drayton, King's College London)Ã¢â ¬Å“An impassioned, meticulously researched, and gripping book that shines a fierce light on a dark, unexplored corner of the history of colonialism and slavery,Ã Â Coolie WomanÃ Â intertwines the personal and the historical to sensational effect. It is also a uniquely affecting piece of work.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Neel Mukherjee, author of A Life Apart)Ã¢â ¬Å“Every so often a history book comes along that grips you into a cascade of compelling narrative. The writer excavates new ore from old seams. Coolie Woman is such a book, destined for a unique place in the multi-mirror of Caribbean culture.Ã¢â ¬Â• (John Agard, author of Half-Caste)

Gaiutra Bahadur is a journalist and book critic whose work has appeared in the New York Times Book Review, the Washington Post, Ms., and the Nation, among other publications.Ã Â

This is an important part of history that we much look at more closely. Many people don’t know about numerous attacks on India and Indians, the abuse and suffering of many generations of Indians or the multi-millennial genocide of Indians in Asia and elsewhere.------ AND ----------"In addition, the term "mulatto" was also used to refer to the children of whites who intermarried with South Asian indentured servant brought over to the British American colonies by the East Indian Company. For example, a daughter born to [a] South Asian father and [an] Irish mother in Maryland in 1680 was classified as a "mulatto" and sold into slavery. The more usual case was the use of the principle of partus sequitur ventrem, adopted by Virginia in 1662, which made the status of a child dependent on the status of the mother. Children born of slave mothers were born into slavery, regardless of who their fathers were; children born to white mothers were free, even if mixed race.Although still in use by some, the term mulatto has fallen out of favor, and is considered offensive by some in the United States. Today, more popular terms include biracial, multiracial, mixed-race, and multi-ethnic."----------Many people don’t learn in American History or World History about the important contributions of Indians and Indian-Americans."WWIThe war began with an unprecedented outpouring of loyalty and goodwill towards the United Kingdom from within the mainstream political leadership, contrary to initial British fears of an Indian revolt. The Indian Army in fact outnumbered the British Army at the beginning of the war. India under British rule contributed greatly to the British war effort by providing men and resources. This was done by the Indian Congress in hope of achieving self-government as India was very much under the control of the British. The United Kingdom disappointed the Indians by not providing self-governance, leading to the Gandhian Era in Indian history. About 1.3 million Indian soldiers and laborers served in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, while both the Indian government and the princes sent large supplies of food, money, and ammunition. In all 140,000 men served on the Western Front and nearly 700,000 in the Middle East. Casualties of Indian soldiers totaled 47,746 killed and 65,126 wounded during World War I."In WWI the commanders did not see that the tools available for fighting on the defense had far surpassed those available for offense. The machine gun and modern artillery way overmatched the Tommy and the French Polliu in their wool tunics. The British Tommy was not even equipped with a helmet in the first months of the war but went into combat wearing only a wool garrison cap.It seemed that the presiding commanders were devoid of imagination and continued to send battalion after battalion of men up against dug in machine guns, hoping that shear numbers would win the day. At the Battle of the Somme, whole brigades of new volunteer provincial troops were fielded. They were sent on the

offensive against the German trenches only to be shot down in windrows...57, 470 were casualties the first day. That meant 5747 casualties per hour, for the first 10 hour day of combat, including 1924 men killed per hour. Compare that to the 2000-3000 killed in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last NINE YEARS! The Brits lost almost that many in one hour."WWII" India, officially the Indian Empire, declared war on Germany in September 1939. The Provinces of India (which included most of modern-day India and the present day Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar), being imperial colonies of the United Kingdom, were by default a part of the Allies of World War II. Several Indian princely states provided large donations to the Allies to combat the threat of Nazism and Fascism.The financial, industrial and military support of India formed a crucial component of the British campaign against the Axis powers. India’s strategic location at the tip of the Indian Ocean, its massive production of armaments, and its huge armed forces contributed decisively in halting the progress of Imperial Japan in the South-East Asian theatre. The Indian Army during World War II was one of the largest Allied forces contingents which took part in the North and East African Campaign, Western Desert Campaign and the Italian Campaign. At the height of the World War, more than 2.5 million Indian troops were fighting Axis forces around the globe."

A well written and well researched book. I awaited its delivery with anticipation and could not put this book down after I started to read it. I enjoyed reading every chapter. Ms Bahadur has done an excellent job of presenting the evil of the indentured system that took place in then British Guiana during colonial times and its consequences. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys deep and thoughtful reading.

In fourth grade we had to dress up and celebrate our family history. Unsure what that meant I asked my dad. He said we were cane cutters. I wore a white collar shirt and trousers, what I assumed cane cutters wore. Everyone at school expected me to wear a sari or shalwar. I was the only Indian (or POC) in my grade. I wore Indian clothes for Quranic functions, weddings, etc. I didn’t even think to wear Indian clothes for immigrant heritage day! Who would cut cane in religious (good) clothes? Today I wear Western and Eastern clothing together, the two no longer separate.The jewel you have created will forever be with me.Thank you!

I enjoyed reading this book. It isvery beautifully written. The research was immense; but it was the binding of this research in such clear and thoughtful words that make this book such a great read. I highly recommend this book because it gives you a meticulous look of the thoughts that pervaded

the minds of the immigrants and their bosses in the "new world".

Insightful, beautifully written, and more deeply researched than anything I have ever read. A penetrating look at story that has rarely been told. Must read!

Well researched and very well-written. Reads, in part, almost like a novel. Relates how the British Empire handle labor shortages after end of slavery in its colonies.

This accounting of life of Indian women in the last century fills an essential chapter in the history of all women. When I think of Indian women, I see colorful saris, arms and throats dripping with gold. Stories of those who threw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres were of mad women, I thought, not of decent women doomed to begging and prostitution by their in laws. Guyana, to me, meant sweltering fields of nothingness, where leaders of cults hid from the world. Scottish clans, crofts, and the English throne are part of the history of this dreadful place, as is slavery and indentured servitude. This history is well annotated and well written, with a few instances of awkward language usage. I found this a most enjoyable and informative read.

amazingly good. highly recommend it. personal history combined with actual submerged history of movement of poor people from one continent to another to perform back breaking work in the 19th-20th century...definitely worth reading.

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