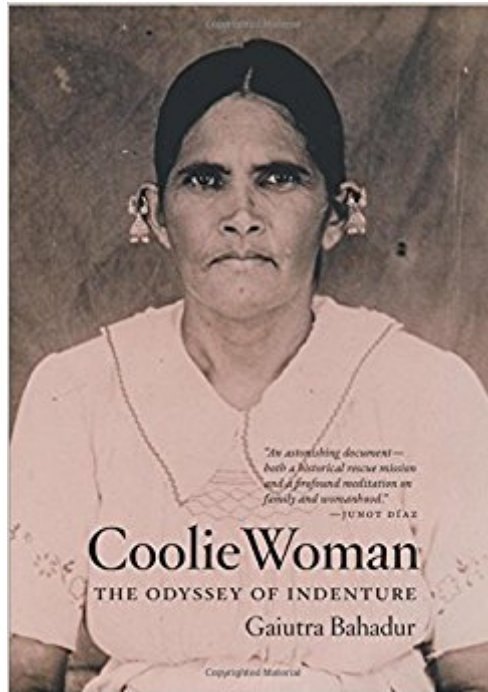


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# Coolie Woman: The Odyssey Of Indenture



## Synopsis

In 1903, a young woman sailed from India to Guiana as a "coolie"; 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. In *Coolie Woman*; shortlisted for the 2014 Orwell Prize; her great-granddaughter Gaiutra Bahadur embarks on a journey into the past to find her. Traversing three continents and trawling through countless colonial archives, Bahadur excavates not only her great-grandmother'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 passages"; 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 women's lives, *Coolie Woman* 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 one's roots and an exploration of gender and power, peril and opportunity.

## Book Information

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (August 4, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022621138X

ISBN-13: 978-0226211381

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (28 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #373,952 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Guyana #77 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > India &

## Customer Reviews

A well written and well researched piece of literature! This book is spell binding and brings you to an emotional level when reading it. It is so informative and wonderfully written, that I did not want to put it down. This book is a must for those whose ancestors were on those ships, and for all those who want to find out about the lives and hardships of those courageous women. Ms. Bahadur is obviously an accomplished writer and I look forward to her next publication!~Terry Ishmael~.

I enjoyed reading this book. It is very 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!

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.

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."

WWI The 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 sheer 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."

This is a striking and well-written book that illuminates a slice of history that's too often overlooked. Ms. Bahadur has an amazing way of getting inside the minds of those who made the risky, uncertain voyage across the seas. Her stories about the perils faced by women aboard the ships from predatory men (as if hunger and illness weren't enough) deserve a place in the history books. I gave this book to a relative, in addition to reading it myself, and it has sparked some great discussions.

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.

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!

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