

“Coolie” Question in the Age of Transition, 1940s to 1960s.

This paper investigates the transition from Empire to Nation from the vantage point of the “coolies” employed in the tea plantations of Assam. By doing so, it attempts to ask and answer whether there were continuities with colonialism? The complexities of decolonisation are explored by scrutinising the ‘promises’ and ‘hopes’ of independence and by evaluating the behaviour of the Indian state in practice. To do so, it examines the visions and industrial policies of the post-colonial state and its conversations with the “coolies”. In the overall biography of the Indian nation, the decades from 1940s to 1960s is crucial to investigate how the idioms of “migrants” and “migration” acquired negative idioms in policy making. This paper is therefore a critical conversation between the nation and the “coolies”.

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