

Coolies, Climate and the Territories of Mobility

Rituparna Datta

CRG, Kolkata

The theme of the paper is an inspiration from Mamang Dai's 'Escaping the Land' to question the feeling of 'ecstasy' that come with connection to land while living in contentment in natal homes and remembering the same through myriad relocations in a diasporic life. It is not an attempt to write the history of people who left India under the contractual labour system of indenture and became apart of plantation capitalism and build on to the nationalist critiques of the 'Empire of Hate' but to bring forth the connection of life, land and climate and their integral interplay in the colonial politics of coolie mobility that failed even to be assertive enough to be rescued even from the 'footnotes of history' as oblivious of its existence yet was omnipresent in the obsessions of the modern Empire in preserving the lives of the natives in its transmigration and relocation in the estate colonies. The land here is looked into as a mobile category that encapsulates the climate of belonging in its literal and littoral. Climate is thus both a combination of seasons of acclimatization as well as a delusion of reconnecting lives over a spatio-temporal distance. Climate here is looked through the prism of labouring capital to understand how the continued narration of debility, poverty, famine and changing agro-economy pushed the coolie mobility; the mortality during the sea voyages and its continued impact on redesigning the travelling season; and territories of thought that ties the belongingness of life to land for coolies pronounced to be 'escaping' the weary natal homes. Thus brings back focus on the complex epistemic interplay of 'longing for future' in the conditioned sensitivity of the capitalist margins through an unpredictable momentum of bodies of belonging.