

(Re)presenting Ships of Indentured Laborers - Marine Poetry of Tora bully and Das

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Abstract

A significant outcome of the historical fusion of imperialism with commerce was the shift from the Afro-Atlantic slave trade to the indentured labor system between 1834 and 1920, involving numerous Indians enduring challenging voyages to colonial plantations. These ship journeys are perceived as transformative rites of passage, redefining individual identities as they bid farewell to ancestral roots. In the context of diaspora studies, the research prioritizes human journeys and emotional transformations over mere geographic displacements. The impact of ships on indentured laborers extended beyond their generation, leaving a lasting impression on succeeding generations' art and literature. Poems written by these descendants illustrate the profound effect of the indenture experience and the significant role of ships in shaping their collective memory and cultural identity. Among such literary works, Khal Torabully's *Coolitude: Cargo Hold of Stars* and Mahadai Das's "They Came in Ships" stand out, providing voices to those whose stories might otherwise remain untold. Adopting Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, ships are seen as spaces transcending societal norms, fostering transformative encounters among diverse individuals. These vessels represented microcosms of societies, engendering dialogues that questioned established norms beyond their functional purpose as transportation. Furthermore, the paper draws from Edward Said's ideas to explore ships as sites of exile, unveiling concealed narratives and illuminating historical truths and power dynamics. By reclaiming the marginalized history of indentured laborers, this study reveals the ship's pivotal role as a critical space influencing migration narratives and cultural identity.

Keywords: colonial, exile, heterotopia, migration, space