

## FLEETING AGENCIES

This book offers a bold new perspective on the concept of agency and history of long-silenced coolie women—their role in the colonial economy and transnational movements.

The history of transnational labor has refused to acknowledge the importance and agency of women workers. In this landmark study, the author revises and decolonizes the history of transnational female plantation labor. This is the first book to examine the history of Indian coolie women who migrated to British Malaya and contributed to the Rubber Empire's making.

The author disrupts the male-dominated narratives by focusing on gendered patterns of migration and showing how South Asian women labor migrants engaged with migration, interacted with other migrants, and negotiated colonial laws. In exploring the politicization of labor migration trends and gender relations in the colonial plantation society of British Malaya, it shows how the immigrant Indian coolie women manipulated colonial legal and administrative perceptions of Indian women, the gender-perspective roles within Indian societies, relations within patriarchal marriage institutions, and even the emerging Indian national independence movement in India and Malaya, all to ensure their survival, escape from unfavourable relations and situations, and improve their lives. Through this study, the author introduces the concept of *situational or fleeting agency* to provide a nuanced understanding of the term “agency” within the contexts of subaltern and colonial histories.

Meticulously researched, *Fleeting Agencies* is a major contribution to labor migration history, inter-Asia history, and British Empire history.

**Arunima Datta** is Assistant Professor of History at Idaho State University, USA, where her research focuses on transnational labor migration, gender, and women's history and Asian history.

## GLOBAL SOUTH ASIANS

Throughout the modern era, South Asia and South Asians have been entangled with global flows of goods, people and ideas. In the context of these globalised conditions, migrants from the subcontinent of India created some of the world's most extensive and influential transnational networks. While operating within the constraints of imperial systems, they nevertheless made distinctive and important contributions to international trade, global cultures and transnational circuits of knowledge. This series seeks to explore these phenomena, placing labourers, traders, thinkers and activists at the centre of the analysis. Beginning with volumes that seek to radically reappraise indenture, the series will continue with books on the mobility of elite actors, including intellectuals, and their contributions to the global circulation of ideas and the evolution of political practice. It will highlight the creativity and agency of diasporic South Asians and illuminate the crucial role they played in the making of global histories. As such it sets out to challenge popular misconceptions and established scholarly narratives that too often cast South Asians as passive observers.

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# FLEETING AGENCIES

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A Social History of Indian Coolie Women  
in British Malaya

ARUNIMA DATTA



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*For  
Mimi, Papa, and Adi*

## CONTENTS

*List of Tables* ix

*List of Figures* xi

*List of Abbreviations* xiii

*Acknowledgments* xv

### INTRODUCTION

i

#### 1. COOLIE WOMEN IN THE EMPIRE'S RUBBER GARDEN

Historical and Contextual Background

27

#### 2. "TAPPING" RESOURCES

(Re)Figuring the Labor of Coolie Women on Estates

48

#### 3. MANAGING "PARTNERSHIPS"

Domesticity and Entrepreneurial Endeavors

78

#### 4. NEGOTIATING INTIMACIES AND MORALITIES

Enticements, Desertions, Violence, and Gendered Trials

103

CONTENTS

5. BECOMING “RANIS”

Coolie Women as Rani Jhansi Regiment Recruits in World War II

125

CONCLUSION

151

EPILOGUE

157

*Glossary* 165

*Notes* 168

*Bibliography* 209

*Index* 233

## TABLES

1.1	Indian male-to-female ratio on FMS rubber estates (1911–1931)	41
2.1	Daily wages of Indian weeders on FMS rubber estates (1918–1936)	56
2.2	Daily wages for rubber-tapping on rubber estates according to estate locations in FMS	57
2.3	Daily wages of factory and store coolies on FMS rubber estates	59
3.1	Headlines used while reporting Indian crimes in Malaya (1905–1939)	88



## FIGURES

2.1	Indian coolie woman tapping a rubber tree in Malaya, 1900	53
2.2	Rubber tappers carrying pails of latex from estate to factory in Malaya, 1900	54
2.3	Coolies working in a rubber factory, 1900	55
2.4	The hierarchy on rubber estates	70
2.5	“Five people among rubber trees”: Indian coolie woman and her estate overseers	71
3.1	Coolie lines and workers on a rubber estate in Malaya, 1920	83
5.1	Members of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment with a portrait of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi at the center	130
5.2	Subash Chandra Bose reviews “Rani of Jhansi” Regiment and other Indian National Army officers, 1943	131
5.3	Rani of Jhansi Regiment soldier in training	144
6.1	Saroja, her sister, and their mother, Selamma, in their Dunedin estate, Putrajaya, 2011	160
6.2	Women and child estate workers on Abaco rubber estate, Semeyenih, 2011	162

## ABBREVIATIONS

AGIM	Agent of the Government of India in Malaya
AN	Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur
BL	British Library
CO	Colonial Office Records
CUKL	Cornell University Kroch Library
FMS	Federated Malay States
IIC	Indian Immigration Committee
INA	Indian National Army
IOR	India Office Records
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
NAI	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NAUK	National Archives of United Kingdom, London
NAS	National Archives of Singapore
NLI	National Library of India, Kolkata
NLS	National Library of Singapore
OHI	Oral History Interviews
PAM	Planters Association of Malaya
RJR	Rani of Jhansi Regiment
SS	Straits Settlement
TNSA	Tamil Nadu State Archives
UMS	Unfederated Malaya States
UPAM	United Planters Association of Malaya

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