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Radhika Mongia. Indian Migration And Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State. Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2018.

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Radhika Mongia. *Indian Migration And Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State.* Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2018.

Marx famously chastised philosophers for their infatuation with ‘interpreting the world,’ while neglecting the need for its change. Is an act of “interpreting” bereft of revolutionary potential? Doesn’t recasting the reality in newer and brighter light sometimes bear transformative potential? Radhika Mongia, a sociologist at York University, Toronto, Canada, persuasively demonstrates this metamorphic possibility by rereading Indian migration to South Africa in the early 20th century. She retrieves this otherwise richly researched historical event from a not-so-distant past and turns it into a vibrant explanation of the fading of an imperial state into a nation-state. The fact that catches Mongia’s sharp vision is the antecedents and consequents of the migration of the Indian indentured labor to South Africa before and after the country’s unification. While she duly brings out the plight of the forced migrants, her critical attention remains trained on what the migrants and their migration entailed, and how they altered world history.

In doing so she constructs a rearview mirror of history to draw events of yesteryear into sharp focus in contemporary life. Mongia’s incisive hindsight upturns events and their subterranean motives to illuminate the whys and wherefores of Indian migration and how it transmuted into even bigger historical events. Her analysis of colonial Indian migration from British Empire traces a shift from a world dominated by empire-states into a world dominated by nation-states. She draws upon her expertise in historical sociology to explain the configuration and reconfiguration of power relations and their triggering impact on a train of events that could have not been foreseen. Mongia thus carves out an explanatory pathway that few historians dare take, let alone tread. For her, history and its subjects are not shards of fatalism, as historians generally tend to perceive or present; they are rather events that pulsate with life and burn with lifelike energy to create and recreate the world. She craftily infuses history of Indian migration with her imaginative, interpretative energy that births the meaning of the world around us.

She approaches her subject (of Indian migration to South Africa) with a meticulous and methodical examination of a protracted trajectory that sets the stage for the forced movement of the indentured labor from one British colony to the others scattered across continents. In Mongia’s account, the end of slavery and slave labor on far-off colonial plantations triggered the need for their replacement. Since 1834, when slavery in British colonies was abolished, 1.3 million Indian indentured laborers were brought in to fill the void. Between 1834 and 1917, the Indian indentured labor was sent to twenty countries across the four continents. Their well-known destinations included Mauritius, Reunion, Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Surinam, Guadeloupe, Fiji, Australia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa, which each boast of sizable numbers of descendants of Indian migrants to this day. The Indian indentured labor was disparagingly referred to, among others, as “Indians,” “East Indians,” “Asiatics,” “Coolies,” “Natives of India,” and “Hindoos.”

Mongia’s major articulations on gendered nationalism, the formation of a nation-state with its racial and religious tropes, and the fading of an empire-state into a nation-state begin with the case of Indian indentured migration to South Africa. Prior to its union in 1910, South Africa consisted of four provinces: Natal, Transvaal, Cape and the Orange Free State. Most of the Indian migrants came to Natal and Transvaal – in that order. The British annexed Natal in

1843, and fifteen years after India was brought under the direct rule of the British Crown in 1858. Mongia notes that by “the close of the 19th century, Natal, Transvaal, the Cape and the Free State instituted all manner of discriminatory legislation against “Asiatics” (p. 91), a term that encompassed Chinese as well. A case in point is the Transvaal that passed Law 3 in 1885, which denied “Asiatics” right to citizenship in the province, and confined them to “certain locations.” Even in these “certain locations, “Asiatics” had their right to own fixed property restricted. Here Mongia demonstrates a tension between a racializing South African state and the liberal-progressive ethos of British imperial state, the resolution of which, in a cruel joke, inflicts further indignity upon “Asiatics.” “The imperial state,” Mongia writes, “disallowed the restriction of Indians (as British subjects) to certain locations on the grounds of race but agreed to the legislation if it was framed in terms of safeguarding public health on account of “dirty habits” of the Indians” (p. 91). In other words, the British imperial state and its liberal-progressive ethos agreed to the restricted movement of Indian migrants for “hygienic” reason, but outlawed it for “racial” reason. By this logic, the British imperial state disagreed that Indians should be restricted to “certain locations” because they were “Indians,” but agreed to their restricted movement for being “dirty?” One may wonder which is worse: having been restricted for being “Indians,” or for being “dirty?”

The discriminatory legislation was to affect tens of thousands of Indians, who like Mauritius and the Caribbean, were moved to Natal to work there on sugar plantations, in coal mines and on railroad. Their migration suspended in 1866, after the world was hit by depression in the wake of the American civil war, and a decline in demand for sugar in Great Britain. It was resumed again in 1874 only to be terminated in 1911 by which date, Mongia reports, 152,184 Indians had already been brought to Natal under indenture. The growing Indian population in Natal was accorded three classifications: (a) Indentured Indians; (b) ex-indentured Indians and their descendants, the colonial-born Indians, and (c) predominantly Muslim and Parsi Gujrati traders who voluntarily migrated and settled in different colonies. The latter category also included a young attorney named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Over time, Indian migrants of all stripes had grown into a vibrant Indian diaspora, which further invited discriminatory measures. One such measure was legal and judicial annulment of “Indian marriage” (of both Hindu and Muslim Indians), which Gandhi mobilized against with what Mongia describes as “gendered nationalism.” In protest, Gandhi’s calls for *Satyagraha* (passive resistance) in 1906-1911 honed his political tactics of nonviolence, which traveled with him on his later journey to his native India, which was, then, under British imperial rule and remained so until 1947. Gandhi and his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, grew into the loudest voices against such restrictions as ‘marriage license’ for Indian migrants, and refusal to recognize their ‘Indian marriage’ solemnized by Indian customs and religious orders.

These restrictions were emblematic of early 20th century South Africa that was resounding with the rising crescendo of exclusionary nationalism. In this evolving xenophobic environment, Indian migrants began to find themselves, both literally and metaphorically, ‘outliers.’ In such turn of ‘otherizing’ events, just as the Indian elite found common cause with the Indian diaspora, so did the tens of thousands of Indian workers toiling in South African coal mines and on sugar plantations. Mongia goes to great lengths to mine history for such historical developments as one of Indian miners’ fabled strikes that changed their future and the future of the Indian elite. A strike of indentured workers in the coal mines in northern Natal was announced on October 15, 1913. Within two weeks, about 5,000 indentured Indian workers from the mines and railways were on strike and willing to court arrest. By November of that year, the

strike had spread to the sugar plantations in the south, raising the specter of potential strikers to 60,000. Worldwide reports of state brutality and the mass arrests rendered the passive resistance struggle a success. Mongia's subalternist weight of evidence finds glory in the protest of the Indian labor. She goes so far as to argue that the Indian subaltern's struggle in British South Africa made a Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi into a storied Mahatma Gandhi. In her words, the triumph of miners' strike "reconfigured Gandhi as Mahatma Gandhi" (pp. 105-106).

Gandhi and his newspaper *Indian Opinion* had frontlined the struggle for justice for the Indian indentured labor. Gandhi called a *Satayagrah* in support of repealing a resident tax of three sterling pound on the ex-indentured labor, and recognition of their marriages solemnized in accord with Indian faiths. He challenged a court judgement that annulled Indian traditional marriages. Gandhi employed tropes of what Mongia calls gendered nationalism to invoke the masculinist biases of the Indian men in support of the indentured labor. "A nation," Gandhi wrote, "that cannot protect its women's honor and the interests of its children does not deserve to be called by that name. Such people are not a nation but mere brutes. Even animals use their horns to protect their young ones. Will men, then, if they are men, hang back [from joining the movement], clinging to their wretched finery and their pleasures" (p. 102). Gandhi's articulation of gendered nationalism, in Mongia's reckoning, distracted the bigger issue of a racializing South African state and the emergence of territorialization with a national jurisdiction over immigration it caused. Mongia's rereading of Indian labor migration to South Africa and the subaltern struggle waged by working-class Indians in South Africa contributes to the profound examination of the ways in which an imperial state faded into a nation-state, particularly the fact the the British imperial state came to accept national jurisdiction and hence nation-state to govern immigration. Radhika Mongia's fascinating analysis of Indian migration to South Africa and its history-making aftermath is fascinatingly readable. *Indian Migration and Empire* certainly places Mongia among the established scholars in the field.

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