

**Kala pani Crossings #3:  
Across the Oceans: Post-Indentureship Trans-Oceanic Transformations**

**Institut Français de Pondicherry / French Institute of Pondicherry**

in partnership with  
EMMA, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, France  
DIRE, Université de La Réunion, France  
IHRIM, ENS-Lyon, France  
VALE, Sorbonne University, France

<https://emma.www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/valorisation-partenariats/programmes-europeens-et-internationaux/kala-pani-crossings>

**Dates:** February 22-24, 2024

**Venue:** Institut Français de Pondichéry / French Institute of Pondicherry

**Languages:** English and French

**Deadline for submitting proposals:** July 1, 2023

**Notification of acceptance:** July 15, 2023

This conference follows up on the seminar 'Kala pani Crossings: India in Conversation' that was held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (Sept 2019), and on the symposium 'Diaspora and Gender across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans' that was hosted by the University of Pondicherry (Feb 2020). It also seeks to build on the publications that emerged from these two academic events (*Kala Pani Crossings: Revisiting 19<sup>th</sup> century Migrations from India's Perspective*, Routledge 2021; *Kala Pani Crossings, Gender and Diaspora: Indian Perspectives*, Routledge, forthcoming 2023).

Over one million Indians were transported between 1834 and 1917 to sugar colonies under the system of indentured labour in order to meet the demand for cheap, unskilled labour after the abolition of Atlantic slavery in 1833. Substantial work has been produced over the past 30 years by scholars in the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius and Reunion Island, gradually gaining more visibility. Yet, it is a chapter that has long struggled to be included within the framework of Indian history.

Kala pani Crossings #1 had meant to interrogate the relative absence from the historiography of those 19<sup>th</sup> century migrations from India to Fiji, Mauritius, Reunion and the Caribbean, from the perspective of India, suggesting new understandings of the relationship between India and its post-indenture diaspora. Kala pani Crossings #2 had been particularly interested in exploring the intersections of diaspora and gender within the diasporic and Indian imagination.

Kala pani Crossings #3 intends to widen the scope in space and time, and include countries such as South Africa, Malaysia or Indonesia, as well as other kinds of labour recruitment and organisations such as the kangani system in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. It also seems just as crucial to include the more recent migrations towards the Gulf countries.

The focus will also be placed on the literary and artistic creations that emerged from the post-indentureship period to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to analyse how those creations echo and intersect across oceans and generations, and create the conditions of a reinvention of self not only in the diaspora but also in India, among the descendants.

As the trans-oceanic labour migrations morph into many different avatars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this conference seeks to raise the question of the legacy of indentureship and of its historiography, and to explore similarities and divergences between these displacements to understand connections and continuities with 19<sup>th</sup> century indentureship and the evolving socio-cultural organisations of diaspora populations.

This conference will offer a platform for discussions on how artists, musicians, writers, film makers, playwrights etc. particularly from the 'old diaspora' assert and negotiate multiple ideas of home, the nation and the self through their aesthetic creations, spaces where normative practices can be challenged. The conference will also focus on multiple creative strategies that engender dynamic connections between India and its 'old diaspora' today.

Its aim is to study:

- the possibilities of negotiation or resistance that are created by literature and the arts, and how those possibilities are determined by race, class, caste, or ethnicity;
- how the traditional definitions of Indianness, gender, and caste were reshaped along the migratory routes, as well as the impact such a reshaping had, if any, on the subcontinent;
- how visual artists, musicians, writers, film makers, playwrights etc. complicate the representations of these migrations, from the diaspora and / or from India;
- how fruitful it would be to make comparisons between trans-oceanic and internal migrations within the Indian sub-continent, especially as regards folk and artistic productions written about indentured labourers or internal migrants (movies, folks stories, songs etc);
- the impact of return migration in India, and the ways writers and artists portray returnees and problematize their social reintegration and cultural readjustment;
- the role of memory and post-memory in literary, folk and artistic creations;
- how languages (Indian languages, English), artistic and cultural artforms have evolved, transformed, or been reshaped by migrations;
- what it can mean for contemporary India to look at the dynamics of racial and cultural formations in the diaspora, and to learn about the alternatives to norms of gender, patriarchy, class and caste;
- what connections, dialogues, and solidarities can be conceived today in arts, culture and politics between India and its 'old diaspora' and its descendants;
- how these connections reflect in turn on the new diasporas, in the Indian Ocean for instance.

We invite contributors to send their proposals (a 250-word abstract, title, author's name, a 150-word bio, and contact information) to the co-convenors' Kala pani 2024 email address:

[kalapanipondicherry2024@gmail.com](mailto:kalapanipondicherry2024@gmail.com)

The conference will be an in-person event.

Please note that speakers will be expected to find their own funding for travel and accommodation. Suggestions for local accommodation will be made.

#### **Conference coordinators**

Prof Judith Misrahi-Barak, Postcolonial Studies, EMMA, University Paul Valery Montpellier 3, France  
Prof Alexis Tadié, English Literature, VALE, Sorbonne University, France

#### **Conference co-organisers**

Institut français de Pondichéry (IFP)

Dr Jenni Balasubramanian, Department of French, Tagore Government Arts and Science College, Pondicherry, India

Prof Corinne Duboin, Black diasporic and Postcolonial Literature, DIRE, University of Reunion Island, France

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