From Calcutta to Kingston
A cartography of Coolitude

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ABSTRACT
‘From Calcutta to Kingston: A cartography of Coolitude’ meditates on the ancestral inheritance of the indentured Indian diaspora through coordinates mapping time and space, tasks historically completed by imperial powers upon seizing colonial lands. In this poetic-prose, coordinates anchor an origin – yet sugarcane becomes a new set of coordinates, following the call to unmoor the geographical fixity of origins invoked by Khal Torabully in his theorizing of Coolitude. This specific piece conjures the coordinates of indentured Indian descent among Indo-Jamaicans, a diaspora that has remained eclipsed within histories of Indian indentureship. Mapping the coordinates of places like Ashoka Road and Cockburn Pen in Kingston, Jamaica – significant sites of the indentured Indian diaspora – to the coordinates of the indentured Indian diaspora in New York City, the piece engages in its own kind of map-making: one that threads the echoes of indenture alongside its geographical uprooting, yet an uprooting that has generated a new form of survival among descendants of the indentured.

KEYWORDS
Indo-Jamaican prose, Coolitude, Jamaica

coolitude [ˈkoʊlɪtoʊd]:
repository of ship charters from Aaprvasi Ghat to Old Harbour
flux of memory, of history
compendium of transoceanic bodies

i. 1845, SS Blundell

The ship is only a body, until the mast draws blood from the mouth of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Kala Pani, Caribbean Sea. The ship is only a body until that monster of blue swallows and spits its blood out from Belfast wood to Calcutta port. This: the stained-glass fragmentation of inheritance.

ii. Calcutta 22.5726° N, 88.3639° E
    Gorakhpur 26.7606° N, 83.3732° E
    Lucknow 26.8467° N, 80.9462° E
    Kingston 18.0179° N, 76.8099° W

Cartography of the bodies survived: out of language, conjuring diaspora. Sugar: suture this myth of monolith subalterns. Bellowing hog smoke pimento and coconut rubbish. Zinc roofs burn in daylight: a white blinding as the white cotton of Sahib white.

iii. Cutlass cane and calabash

Alchemy of saffron into green, black and gold. From cutlass and cane to calabash, the origin stories of oil inked into the veins of banana leaf. Chowk and chowtaal, the melding of fire and lyric into ancestral ash.

iv. Cockburn Pen

Hindustani twang and slang, clamour of dhantal and cow hide. This: requiem of indenture. Exile grants us multiple Kala Panis: our bodies, vessels each time. Verse by verse and limb by limb. Here, your shipwrecked odyssey; here, your cane stalk genealogy. Exile affords the genesis of a third dawn: our bodies forge contours of a new hyphenated history.
v. Rituals of machete

sugarcane ~ perennial uprooting of the body

sugarcane ~ of the Tropics: solar declination, crystallized descendant of the eclipse

sugarcane ~ bruises of burlap and raw

sugarcane ~ site of woman’s body

sugarcane ~ the absence of your blood

sugarcane ~ Trojan Horse of exile

vi. Hosay Massacre 10.2906° N, 61.4494° W

Gun Hill Road 40.8695° N, 73.8464° W

Liberty Avenue 40.6745° N, 73.8965° W

Reincarnations wander from Ashoka Road to White Plains Road. Out of ancestral bone: your blood grows synonymous with your harvest.

vii. After Babylon: reprise

Mapped onto the monolith of empire: mountain ranges, harbours and sugar estates inked degrees west from London. The colonizer etches boundaries and people in its name. An imaginary landscape of a cane stalk spun into your blood, the black and white photographs hang in the National Archives: Coolitude survives.