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## The *Kala Pani* Connection: Francophone Migration Narratives in the Caribbean Writing of Raphaël Confiant and the Mauritian Writing of Ananda Devi

Rohini Bannerjee  
anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

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Despite the Hindu taboo of crossing the black sea or *Kala pani*, the colonial era saw great migrations of Indian indentured workers to both the Caribbean and the Indian Oceans. In the hope of escaping socio-economic hardships and colonial occupation of their motherland, many Indians opted to board ships and transport themselves, with or without their families, to the sugar cane plantations of Martinique and Mauritius. The fictional francophone works of both Caribbean writer Raphaël Confiant and Mauritian writer Ananda Devi recount the physical and spiritual dislocations of such *Kala pani* crossings. In this paper, I attempt to make both historical and literary links between the migration narratives of Confiant and Devi. By comparing and contrasting their Francophone texts, this analysis will bypass first the outdated discourse of Aimé Césaire's *négritude* whereby the Francophone Caribbean is an ideal space of ethnic purity emphasizing the predominantly African origins of the region, and second, the reprise of *l'indianité* in the Francophone Indian Ocean as a form of asseverating ancient Hindu tradition to preserve ethnic and, in particular, Hindu caste purity. Instead, I will discuss Confiant and Devi's acceptance of *la créolité* and *le coolitude*, respectively, thereby constructing an alternative Indo-Francophone identity linguistically and culturally, what Françoise Lionnet would reiterate as a positive process of intercultural negotiation (48-49).

By acknowledging *la créolité* and *le coolitude* as vital components for identity construction in Francophone literature, Confiant and Devi are highlighting the shared experience of crossing the *Kala Pani* in the formation of present day Martinique and Mauritius on the Francophone map and accordingly, validating the plurality and discontinuity of the socio-ethnic history that are Francophone Martinique and Mauritius. The historical links between Confiant and Devi's Francophone works are evident when comparing their eloquent descriptions of the Indian Diaspora to Martinique and Mauritius. A great sense of loss and displacement, both physical and psychological, experienced by Indian indentured workers leaving their homeland characterize this Diaspora. As a result, these works enable dislocated geographical points to merge and hence, help to reformulate new cultural identities, which are, as Stuart Hall underlines, "unstable points of identification or suture ... within the discourses of history and culture" (234).

Amongst all of the physical and sociological instability that is the Indian Diaspora, Marina Carter's text, *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire*, chooses to discuss the volatile state in which Indians decided to leave all they knew for the unknown world of indentured migration:

Indian indentured migration has been stereotyped as involving a higher degree of coercion in recruitment and a consequently inferior knowledge of receiving societies, a greater emphasis on single male migrants as opposed to families, harsher living and working conditions at the point of production, a negligible and uncertain remuneration for work undertaken, the application of harsh physical and judicial methods of disciplining labor and consequently a more limited means, for

Indians, of achieving mobility and establishing family and kin-based settlements or a semi-independent economic sector in the new setting. (2)

Both Confiant and Devi rely on historical fact, and personal accounts of human experience and memory to help readers appreciate why so many Indians, with or without family, left the Indian provinces of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, amongst others, to board ships bound for the “other” or “elsewhere” so to escape the socio-political hardships of famine, poor caste relations, and stifling colonial rule in India.

Raphaël Confiant is admired as one of the literary pioneers of the Francophone Caribbean. A great champion of *la créolité* alongside his co-authors of the 1999 publication *Éloge de la Créolité*, Jean Bernabé and Patrick Chamoiseau, Confiant focuses his literary lens to emphasize the diversity of the Caribbean experience as manifested in his 2004 novel, *La panse du chacal* (The Jackal’s Belly), based on the 1854 arrival of Indian indentured workers to Martinique.

In *La panse du chacal*, the harsh realities of the three-month journey across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans become vividly clear. It is 1854 and parts of British India, in particular, the province of Tamil Nadu, are suffering a severe famine and thereupon, Confiant’s male Indian protagonist, Adhiyaman Dorassamy has the misfortune of witnessing his own parents, members of the *vaishya* caste, fall victim to what Dorassamy would consider the ill-fated karma of untouchables, being eaten alive by starved jackals. Not only does Dorassamy fear physical harm from the animals, but is determined to escape both India’s drought and colonial inflicted anguish, as noted in the text: “pour se rendre au-delà des mers en guise d’expiation de tous les sacrilèges commis par leur ancêtres” (“in order to place oneself beyond the waters as a mask of atonement for all the blasphemies committed by their ancestors”; Confiant 51; my translation).

Dorassamy heads to Pondichéry, a French territory and the epicenter of French import/export business, where a ship coincidentally is embarking on what he is falsely told is a two day excursion to nearby Coromandel. With slavery recently abolished, British and French colonialists are in dire need to supply workers to their demanding sugar cane operations abroad. The ship fills to capacity with willing Indians engaging in an act of pure escapism and evasion to furlough India’s economic starvation that is a result of famine and imperial rule. Desperate sugar cane owners now have the indentured workers required and the anticipant Indians have temporarily broken their karma of dying hungry and poor in their homeland:

Nous avions hâte de mettre pied à terre et de découvrir cette nouvelle vie pleine de promesses qu’à Pondichéry on nous avait fait miroiter. En Amérique, aucun risque de mourir de faim et de finir dans la panse du chacal comme ces milliers d’entre nos frères et nos sœurs demeurés sur la terre natale! En outre, les salaires étaient, nous affirmions, dix fois plus élevées qu’en Inde.

We really wanted to touch the ground and discover a new life full of promises which in Pondicherry had been dazzled before us. In the Americas, there was no risk of dying of hunger or of dying in the belly of jackal like how thousands of our brothers and sisters had died in our native land! In fact, the salaries were, we confirmed, at least ten times greater than in India. (Confiant 144; my translation)

Naive and unaware of what three months aboard a ship will physically and emotionally entail, Dorassamy believes that *l'Amérique* is in the Indian Ocean and only a few steps from Coromandel. In truth, the boat ride is long and arduous with passengers described more as wild animals:

Bientôt une odeur fétide envahit la cale, mélange d'urine, de restes de repas, de sueur et de pets. Ils étaient devenus des bêtes sauvages, des fauves désemparés devant l'imminence d'un cataclysme.

Soon a foul odor invaded the boat, a mix of urine, leftovers of meals, sweat and flatulence. They had become savage beasts, out of control wild animals before the imminence of a cataclysm. (Confiant 106; my translation)

Crossing the *Kala Pani* is not only physically challenging, but also passengers feel immense guilt for abandoning India at the time of colonial rule and severe famine. By evading Mother India and the regenerating waters of the Holy Ganges, many indentured Indians felt that crossing the forbidden *Kala Pani* meant the end of the reincarnation cycle and the possibility of never reaching a higher caste status:

Ombre du Kala Pani qui flotte sur nos têtes, nous rappelant que nous sommes en train de commettre la plus répréhensible des fautes: abandonner la terre sacrée de l'Inde. Partir au devant d'aventure au bout desquelles il n'y aurait, immanquablement, que douleurs, angoisses, maladies inconnues, affrontements sans fin avec des peuples aux langues barbares et aux croyances démoniaques. Partir dans l'Autre Monde, celui où il est vain d'espérer pouvoir atteindre un jour la moksha, la délivrance.

The shadow of the *Kala Pani* that floats in our heads reminds us that we are in the midst of making one of the greatest of mistakes; the suffering, the anxiety, the unknown illnesses, the never-ending encounters with people who speak barbaric languages and have demonic beliefs. To leave for the Other World, where it is futile to hope for the achievement of *moksha* or deliverance. (Confiant 167; my translation)

Instead of the harsh conditions and spiritual strain ending in Coromandel, the ship arrives in Martinique and into all the cultural, religious, and linguistic complexities of indentured plantation work and settlement. Dorassamy still believes, however, that he will return to India

after five years: “D’ailleurs, tu seras logé, nourri et payé, sans compter qu’au bout de cinq ans tu seras rapatrié aux frais de la Compagnie des Indes” (“In fact, you will be housed, fed and paid, without taking into account that after five years you will be repatriated at the expense of *Compagnie des Indes*”; *Confiant* 55; my translation). Some of the passengers naively believe they are off to Europe to work as domestic help for the English: “Peut-être que les Anglais nous conduisent dans leur pays, en Europe, pour que nous leur servions de domestiques” (“Maybe the English are taking us to their country in Europe so we can serve as domestic help”; *Confiant* 123; my translation). It is clear that these passengers have been seduced by the utopic promise of leaving India temporarily and are unaware of the realities beyond the *Kala Pani*.

### **Devi’s *jahabi bhai***

In a similar fashion, Ananda Devi describes the “*voyage volatile*” of Indian migrants to Mauritius in her 1993 novel *Le Voile de Draupadi* (*Draupadi’s Veil*). Born in Trois-Boutiques in the southern region of Mauritius, Ananda Devi, an anthropologist and translator, is also a prolific contemporary writer of Indian Telegu descent. Her ten novels, published from 1989 through 2009, search for a Mauritian identity, an identity that includes and accepts all angles of Mauritian contemporary life including its problematic postcolonial history, the present-day multicultural influences from India, and the intricate role of women. In *Le Voile de Draupadi*, she particularly emphasizes the level of deception, frustration, and pain that the indentured workers, known as *asjahabi bhai*, or “boat brothers,” suffered when leaving their wives and children in India, after having been misled to believe that they would soon return to them.

Through this story about a contemporary Hindu Mauritian couple desperately trying to cure their ill son, Devi’s pen returns to the past, to a time when the sick child’s grandparents first arrived in Mauritius. This reflection helps readers discern the vital role of Hindu tradition and thought in modern-day Mauritian society, and specifically, the notion of karma in curing the young boy. The *past* actions of the sick child’s grandparents, that is, their volatile choice of leaving India and the Holy Ganges for the prospect of another life elsewhere and subsequently crossing the *Kala Pani*, now negatively influence the present-day reality of their Mauritian-born and -raised grandchild. His illness is validated by history; his ill-fated karma is dodged by his forefathers despite the gruesome conditions on their boat. They are promised return to Mother India; an unconsummated promise that results in postcolonial pain and suffering. The retribution for leaving India is not only a one-way ticket to Mauritius, but a permanent exile for the future Mauritian generations:

Mon grand-père, le père de l’oncle Sanjiva et de ma mère, était venu de l’Inde au début du siècle, sur l’un des derniers bateaux amenant à l’Ile des travailleurs «engagés». Les conditions du voyage étaient terribles, mais plus effrayante encore

était la conviction qu'ils ne pourraient jamais revenir en arrière, refaire le trajet à l'inverse.

My grandfather, the father of my Uncle Sanjiva and of my mother, arrived from India at the beginning of the century, on one of those boats bringing indentured workers to the island. The travel conditions were terrible, but what was more frightening was the belief that they could never return, never take the ride in reverse. (47; my translation)

As Julia Kristeva says in *Strangers to Ourselves*, the human psyche is never at rest, especially that of the migrant (26). And as Confiant does, Devi confronts the ethical question asked by Indians when they cross the forbidden *Kala Pani*, forsaking her for prosperity elsewhere:

Car lui aussi, il est mort par le feu, ce feu invisible et intérieur du regret, de la nostalgie de la terre perdue, le feu du 'kala pani' l'eau noire qu'ils ont été forcés de traverser et qui a effacé derrière eux toutes les traces, rompu toutes les attaches, englouti leur mémoire d'une manière tellement définitive que l'exil est devenu leur patrie, pas cette terre, pas cette île, non, l'exil. Qui peut comprendre cela, maintenant que nous en sommes à la troisième ou quatrième génération. Qui veut comprendre une telle existence en suspens, l'absence d'appartenance?

For he also, died by fire, an invisible and internal fire of regret, of nostalgia of lost lands, the fire of the *kala pani*, the black water which they were forced to cross and that consequently erased behind them, any traces, severed all attachments, engulfed their memory in such a definite manner that exile became their homeland, not this land, not this island, no, exile. Who can understand this, now that we have become third and fourth generations? Who wants to understand such an existence in suspension, the absence of belonging? (47; my translation)

Devi goes beyond the physicality of the trip and deeply examines the regret and guilt resulting from this emotional displacement; her writing does not hide behind any romantic or exoticized account of ship travel. Sailing off with exile as the destination results in death and squalor on board:

Au bout du voyage, bien qu'une dizaine de coolies fussent morts en route, et qu'ils fussent tous moralement et physiquement épuisés par la dysenterie et la malnutrition, ils se sentirent assez forts pour exiger d'être envoyés sur la même propriété.

At the end of the journey, despite a dozen coolies dying *en route* and becoming all morally and physically exhausted by dysentery and malnutrition, they felt fairly strong to request they be sent to the same property. (47; my translation)

Instead of denying this difficult period of Mauritian history, Devi embraces it and underlines how the breaking away from India to join an insular life on Mauritius has become an integral part of Mauritian historical identity. Being a country with no indigenous population, all Mauritians have ancestry outside of the island. As Vinesh Hookoomsing states, “Mauritius was liberty, leav[ing] their Indian universe and try[ing] to anchor in insularity the original village, the one model they know” (262). Mauritius was even a stop-off venue for many Indians destined for Martinique. In the case of Dorassamy’s mother-in-law, after realizing her husband has died on the ship, she decides to commit a form of spiritual *sati* by ending her journey prematurely and voluntarily disembarking in Mauritius, widowed and homeless. Because Mauritius is close to India, there is the hope that she can return to her homeland and begin the next stage of her life as a Hindu widow. Historically, Mauritius became a sort of safe-haven for those unable to continue to Martinique, another socio-geographical link between these two sites of indentured work.

Upon arriving in Mauritius from India, be it as a final destination like Devi’s protagonists or as a detour on the way back home like that of Confiant’s widowed character, many Indians realize that the villages they left back in Tamil Nadu are quite different from the urban port being built in Port-Louis, Mauritius. Despite all the rupture, they endure and overcome the omen of crossing the *Kala Pani*:

Avec le temps, tous les jahabi bhai, privés de leur raison d’être, dépérissent et moururent. Ils n’avaient plus aucun sens: Le village les avait longtemps dépassés, ils n’étaient plus que des reliques dodelantes, des fantômes d’un autre âge qui survivaient par un miracle de résistances, ne voulant pas admettre la futilité de leur existence.

They were more than swaying relics, phantoms from another time that survived by miracle of resistance, not wanting to admit to the futility of their existence.  
(49; my translation)

Devi nourishes her text with memory, not as a morbid attachment to the past but as a method of understanding contemporary Mauritian diversity, and thereby, creating an Indo-Mauritian identity.

### **The Indian Linguistic Link**

Confiant and Devi not only share the historical fact of the actual displacement of Indian indentured workers to Martinique and to Mauritius, they practice similar literary techniques. Their *imaginaire francophone* expands beyond the realm of the French language itself. Confiant and Devi both use the Créole of their respective regions in their work; however, in both *La Panse du Chacal* and in *Le Voile de Draupadi*, not only are Créole and French used, but also there is a continued presence of Tamil and Hindi, languages spoken by the indentured workers at the time

of arrival. As Jean-Marc Moura explains, “a writer must witness his/her own language by giving examples of what is truly spoken by contemporary society” (157).

For young Vinesh, Dorassamy’s son and character that is representative of the first generation of Indo-Martiniquais, the only language spoken at home by his parents when not in the presence of their children, is Tamil: “... il le réservait aux conversations chuchotées qu’il avait avec ma mère, lorsque nous ... étions couchés et qu’il nous croyait endormis” (“... he kept it for the whispering-type conversations he had with his mother, when we ... were lying down and he thought we were asleep”; 211; my translation). Confiant outlines how Vinesh’s exposure to Tamil is limited to overhearing his parents discuss their past in India. Be it limited, Confiant’s inclusion of Tamil in his text is integral to the power of memory and linguistic heritage of these indentured workers. The Tamil echoed in Confiant’s novel is not overtly translated and never completely unveiled but is simply present, appearing as an unconscious addition to the text, easily integrated into the syntax of French.

According to Laté Lawson-Hellu, these additions may possibly isolate the characters speaking the language of the Other (317), reiterating Jacques Derrida’s thoughts that “writing, because it is always done in the Other’s language, because there is no language that we can simply, naively call our own, is a form of estrangement, of alienation” (209). However, the presence of Tamil in *La panse du chacal* creates a sort of dialogue between the other languages in the novel. In a similar fashion, as Devi becomes more and more comfortable writing in French about Mauritian life, the more she seems at ease in letting other languages like Hindi and English into her text, creating a sort of microcosm of languages that juxtapose each other (Lawson-Hellu 317). Little effort is made by Devi to explain her use of Hindi and English, again, as in Confiant’s case, the non-French languages are simply present as a semiotic liberation from the need to translate each and every parole mauricienne.

### ***La créolité and la coolitude***

It is clear from the historical and linguistic links between Confiant and Devi’s work that these writers are embracing the Indian Diaspora as part of the Francophone experience in Martinique and Mauritius. More specifically, Confiant adjusts his definition of Indo-Caribbeanness from the impracticality of Césaire’s paragon of *la négritude* whereby the Francophone Caribbean is an ideal space of ethnic purity emphasizing predominantly the African origins of the region, to the all encompassing identity model of *la créolité*, an attempt to describe the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the French Caribbean, that is, advancing the concept that French Caribbean identity comes not only from its African heritage but is equally and respectively also influenced by Indian and Chinese indentured workers, indigenous Caribbean peoples, and European colonialists.

In *La Panse du Chacal*, Confiant embraces the idea that French Caribbeanness can not be limited to the African ex-slavery experience. There are several instances where the Indo-Martiniquais character of Vinesh is being bullied by an Afro-Martiniquais working in the sugar cane plantation. Confiant arms Vinesh with the power of acceptance and gives voice to the Indian experience in Martinique:

Je parle le créole et un peu le français et je n'éprouve aucune de ces difficultés qui paralysent mes parents, lesquels n'ont jamais pu vraiment s'habituer à ces langages étranges. Je suis fils du dernier convoi et n'en éprouve nulle honte.

I speak *créole* and a bit of French and I don't meet with any of the difficulties that paralyzed my parents, the ones who never could really get used to these foreign languages. I am the son of the last convoy and I am not at all embarrassed. (212; my translation)

Congruous to Confiant's all encompassing view of the Caribbean via *la créolité* is Devi's renunciation of *l'indianité* in the Francophone Indian Ocean as a form of asseverating ancient Hindu tradition to preserve ethnic and, in particular, Hindu caste purity. Instead, Devi has opted for the validation of the history and culture of those Indian indentured workers and thereby take possession of their entangled past that other Mauritian writers may have earlier evaded. As Devi explains in her text:

Le refus de la souffrance est une lâcheté et une faiblesse. Prenez-la et faites-en une force, pour aider les autres, pour vous aider vous-mêmes. Vous aussi avez votre raison d'être sur terre.

The refusal of suffering is cowardly and is a weakness. Take it, and make it a strength to help others, to help yourself. You also have a reason to be on this earth. (159; my translation)

For Devi, the acceptance of the suffering of migrating Indians is vital to the mosaic construction of Mauritian identity and is in fact the basis of Khal Thorabully's coined concept of *la coolitude*. Thorabully, an accomplished Mauritian poet, underlines that *la coolitude* is the Indian alter ego of Confiant's *la créolité*: *la coolitude* is to *l'indianité* what *la créolité* is to *la négritude*.

By reprising the derogatory word "coolie" used in colonial and slavery semantics as the *Kulas*, the porters, the untouchables, the *dalits* and *harijans* of India, the unwanted pariahs, the human burdens during the time of famine and colonial prosperity, Thorabully successfully revitalizes this term by contriving a neologism that allows the coolie to break free from his imposed karma. Sweeping past the concept of *l'indianité*, and its continuous preoccupation with recreating India and all its ideals and traditions amongst the Diaspora, Devi's Mauritian writing is another literary vehicle for Thorabully's reconceptualization of the identity of indentured workers of Indian descent through the process of *le métissage*, intercultural exchange and present

day linguistic creolisation. In fact, it is Confiant himself who confirms in the 1999 preface to Thorabully's publication *Chair Corail: fragments coolies* that the poetics of *la coolitude* brings an indispensable stone to the edifice of créolité (9).

Confiant and Devi's novels can be categorized as Francophone works which openly acknowledge and respectively celebrate the interconnected literary movements of *la créolité* and *la coolitude*, thereby constructing a global Indo-Francophone identity that remains both linguistically and culturally to their places of origin. As Marina Carter and Khal Thorabully emphasize, the literary tools of Confiant's *la créolité* and Devi's *la coolitude* are a form of acceptance of the "crosscultural *vagabondage*" (194), as well as a cultural intermingling which reflects the attitude of Francophone literature to colonial indentured Indian history and contemporary Martiniquais and Mauritian society.

### Conclusions - Oppositionality Theory

It can be affirmed that Confiant and Devi have used their historical *plume littéraire* not only to link both the historical migrations of Indian people and culture to Martinique and to Mauritius but also to emphasize the inclusive theories of *la créolité* and *la coolitude* that to include these migratory experiences into the greater Francophone cultural experience. These two novels create Indo-Francophone links, historical ones in particular, whereby the displaced indentured workers of India are replaced in a modern Francophone context -- they are now Martiniquais or Mauritians, French-speaking, with close ties to both Créole, Tamil, Hindi, and English. Confiant and Devi are slowly but surely enlarging the Francophone literary borders. As Edward Said's reasserts in his essay "The Politics of Knowledge":

Marginality and homelessness are not, in my opinion, to be gloried in; they are to be brought to an end, so that more, and not fewer, people can enjoy the benefits of what has for centuries been denied the victims of race, class, or gender. (385)

Instead of labeling the *Kala Pani* connection between the Indian indentured workers headed to Martinique and those destined to Mauritius as random acts of displacement, or merely marginalized Indo-Francophones by default, Confiant and Devi use their texts to accept the complicated history of displacement and acknowledge these Indian workers as pioneers to Martinique and Mauritius who consequently became part of the contemporary Francophone world. Confiant and Devi's protagonists are not transient characters who only long to return to the homeland. Instead, in both texts, the second and later third generations of Indo-Francophones are clearly described as contributing members of their new nation, overcoming the ill-fated karma of their ancestors who crossed the *Kala Pani*.

At this point in the analysis, oppositionality theory demonstrates a method of understanding the characters established in the writing of Confiant and Devi. These first and

second generation Indo-Francophones break the cycle of marginality in Francophone literary circles with the addition and acceptance of the “Indo” prefix. Both writers do not submit to the stereotypes of the Indian indentured worker wanting to return to India and avoid all possibility of creating a Martinique or a Mauritius respectful to their own identity. Instead of denying the realities of the Diaspora, Confiant and Devi *use* the displacement from India as a sort of “détournement du pouvoir” or “a diversion of power” (Chambers 10; my translation), a form of tactic, an underdog weapon to manipulate one’s weaker socio-political position as “indentured worker” while still under the control of the stronger, colonial French plantation owner.

In Confiant’s text, there are several examples of the Indian migrant *using* his position as the “weak” plantation worker to remind his compatriots that the European colonialists are the minority, despite having all monetary power:

Indiens et Nègres, Nègres et Indiens, c’est du pareil au même! D’ailleurs, notre peau n’est-elle pas du meme noir? Le Blanc a toujours cherché à nous diviser mais, au présent, il nous faut redresser la tête. C’est pas parce qu’on a signé un contrat qu’on doit lui obéir au doigt et à l’oeil, tonnnere du sort!

Indians and Negros, Negros and Indians, they are the same! In fact, is our skin not of the same darkness? The Whites always looked to divide us but, at the moment, we must sit up and pay attention. It’s not because we signed a contract that we have to be at their beck and call, a clap of fate! (204; my translation)

Similarly, in Devi’s novel, one of the *jahabi bhai*, Sanjiva, despite the abhorrent conditions on board, *uses* his state of weakness, this “*savoir faire* ... ‘knack’ ... ‘art’, [this] *techné*” (Chambers 10), as a way of gaining control of his confined quarters:

Mon grand-père devint, comme sur le bateau, leur guide et leur soutien. Il les galvanisait. Il les rendait réels. Il fit plusieurs grèves de la faim pour obtenir une amélioration de leurs conditions.

My grandfather became, like on the boat, their guide and support. He galvanized them. He made them real. He held many hunger strikes to obtain better conditions for them. (48; my translation)

The power of prayer and spiritual endurance is tested on the ship to Mauritius as the boat brothers strive to maintain some level of self-control. Despite the fact that many of the boat brothers’s caste members view them as physically disconnected from India, spiritually separated from the protection of the Holy Ganges, and thus assumed dead, these *jahabi bhai* persevere and return to the holy *Gita* and the nostalgia of their life in India:

Ils avaient tous traversé le *Kala Pani*, l’eau noire de l’océan, et ils savaient qu’ils étaient déjà morts pour ceux de leur caste qui étaient demeurés en Inde, que le

rituel des morts avait été célébré en leur nom. Leur seul recours était la prière. Mon grand-père récitait des versets de la Gita, et ils l'écouaient, les yeux remplis d'un tumulte qui ne pouvait s'exprimer en paroles. S'appuyant les uns contre les autres, se forgeant des liens plus solides encore que ceux qui les avaient jadis liés à leurs familles et amis.

They all crossed the *Kala Pani*, the black water of the ocean, and they knew that they were already dead for those of their caste who remained in India, that the rites of the deceased had been performed in their name. Their only recourse was prayer. My grandfather recited the verses of the *Gita* and they listened to them, their eyes filled with an uproar that they could not describe in words. Leaning on each other, forging links even more solid than the ones they had formerly made with their families and friends. (47; my translation)

By using the art of the tactic as outlined by Ross Chambers and Michel de Certeau, Confiant's verbally-abused plantation worker and Devi's protesting *jahabi bhai* reinstate the notion that those Indians, who did in fact successfully cross the *Kala Pani*, broke free from the guilt-ridden karma of abandoning India and instead have used their state of weakness to better themselves and their future generations.

As Stuart Hall writes, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (244). As present day Martinique and Mauritius continue to display great socio-ethnic diversity, so do their respective literatures. Confiant, in an interview forthcoming in *The French Review*, discusses the ever-present role of *créolité* and acceptance in the French Caribbean while Devi, in her most recent publication, *Indian Tango* (2007), looks at the Indo-Francophone woman's experience upon returning to modern day India and how the pathways of old tradition and modernity question one's identity.

It is vital to underline that both Confiant and Devi hold fast to some specificities on the level of language and cultural practice, but each constantly negotiates identity construction within the geopolitical sphere, enunciating a multi-ethnic and hetero-lingual identity rooted in choice and acceptance rather than in illusory and one-sided allegiances. Consequently, both writers succeed in eliminating the marginalization of the Indo-Francophone diasporic experience. After (re)discovering Confiant and Devi, readers are able to easily attach the socio-cultural prefix *Indo* to the larger framework of *Francophonie*. Despite having to abandon India by crossing the *Kala Pani* and entering the forbidden or *l'interdit*, the Indians of Martinique and Mauritius, as described by Confiant and Devi, abandon purity and instead embrace the notion of being Indo-Francophone, Martiniquais, and Mauritian and then, by virtue of their new multi-immigrant society, respect cultural differences.

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