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“The materiality of wages among Indian migrants in British Guiana, 1870-1917”

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The vast expanse of oceanic water that separates India from what was then British Guiana did not necessitate the complete separation of Indian indentured migrants and their homeland. Connections between families and friends were maintained through letters and remittances, if not ultimately through a return passage. Crossing the *kala pani* was, in certain respects and in certain cases, an act redeemable through paper and its transportation, as a transfer of money. Although much has been written within the field of labour history on Indian migration to British Guiana, the particularities of wage-giving, the more minute details of receiving money, how it is kept, and used, is almost non-existent in this historiography. Money, within the Indian migrant population, was not simply an exchangeable item which stored value but, in the form of melted sovereigns, could be worn on bodies as jewellery, and by female bodies in particular. This paper’s aim, therefore, is twofold: to establish the everyday practicalities and practices of a waged indentured migrant in British Guiana in such a way that reminds us that these migrants owned property, whatever form that took, and to tie this into how these wages were then sent back to India through the very bureaucracy that brought Indian migrants to the Caribbean. Ultimately, it will explore the intersection between paper, metal, and mobility, within the British imperial world.