

Book Reviews

Narayan Lakshman, *Patrons of the Poor: Caste Politics and Policymaking in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. xx + 249 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, index. ₹675 (hardback).

Narayan Lakshman's *Patrons of the Poor: Caste Politics and Policymaking in India* is an exhaustive and detailed study of two states, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the first of which had a relatively pro-poor policy agenda, the second did not. Lakshman's study links these policy differences to the way in which caste patterns in the states conditioned the patterns of differing political mobilisation.

In Tamil Nadu, pro-poor policy was exemplified above all in the Noon Meal Scheme, a scheme for providing free lunches for school children that helped both the quality of education in the state and significantly improved nutritional levels of children. This was continued through all the vicissitudes of governance, with power shifting between the DMK and AIADMK.

The ability to follow such pro-poor policies was not accidental. The origins, according to Lakshman, lie in the nature of what he calls 'fractured caste dominance' in Tamil Nadu, meaning that there was no one caste numerically and politically dominant at the state level; different castes dominated in different regions. This led to a fluidity in politics. With the heritage of the Dravidian movement, mobilising tendencies with some kind of radical ideology emerged, and various forms of populism developed. The DMK based itself on a form of what is described as 'assertive populism', mobilising anti-Brahman and Tamil sentiments of what were essentially middle level caste groups. In contrast, the AIADMK, relying on charismatic leaders, represented a form of 'paternalistic populism' and found a base among the lower caste groups and women (The AIADMK and DMK differed in other ways also, for instance, with the DMK voicing a Tamil nationalism and the AIADMK a more inclusive Dravidian nationalism). This resulted in more of a 'class assertion' which could have an influence on pro-poor policies. Thus, though the NMS

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was begun in a period of full resources, it was continued even when the state's fiscal resources were under pressure. However, shrewd financial management prevented fiscal collapse. It should be added that in no case did the pro-poor policies threaten existing property relations or really mean a transfer of resources from the rich to the poor. Rather, within the existing structure, they provided some relief and upgrading to the poorer sections of society.

In contrast, Karnataka's policy was focused on the allocation of resources to irrigation schemes, which simply aided the status quo rather than seeing any real transfer to the poor. There were few pro-poor distributional efforts or outcomes. This, in turn, was a result ultimately of a pattern of relatively stable caste dominance, in which *Vokkaligas* and *Lingayats* continued as 'dominant castes' through the entire period. Together, *Vokkaligas* and *Lingayats* constitute over 26 per cent of the population, with *Lingayats* more dominant in old Mysore state. Though there was some challenge and assertion of lower caste groups such as *Kurubas*, these did not really threaten that dominance. Political power fluctuated between Congress and Janata Dal parties, but few differences emerged in policy. Rather than populist schemes like the Noon Meal Scheme, resources were allocated heavily to irrigation policy—which had little pro-poor implications. In contrast to Karnataka, capital expenditure on the irrigation sector was relatively minimal in Tamil Nadu, since most of the groundwater potential was fully exploited.

Varying regional caste structures thus, are found by Lakshman to be the most determinant factor in producing or not producing pro-poor policy outcomes. What is the nature of this materiality of caste? In his introductory chapter, he offers some considerations but these are awkward and somewhat unconvincing. In actuality, the fact that caste structures exploitation, so that surplus is channelled upward among the different *jatis*, provides a strong grounding for maintaining identities. In the traditional *jajmani* system, which undoubtedly existed for some time, especially in the Karnataka regions (though Lakshman gives no data on this), there was direct exploitation of the artisan castes by mainly the peasant *jatis* they serviced. In more recent times, the hierarchy has continued indirectly. This chain of exploitation has fostered action within caste lines; kinship relations along caste lines mean that this reality is shared in a particular way. Castes lower in the hierarchy often resisted, but there was little solidarity of rebellion.

Thus, differing structural features of these chains of exploitation and dominance could lead to differing patterns of action. Where there was stable caste dominance—one or two groups dominant over an entire state—little opportunity for solidified resistance or even assertion existed. Where caste dominance was unstable or fractured, more pressure from below could be felt. Thus, in Tamil Nadu, the rise of the Dravidian movement which provided an ideology for populist assertion has resulted in the pro-poor policies which Lakshman identifies.

In conclusion, this is an interesting and well-documented study. Hopefully, a comparison with other states will enable the analysis to become more nuanced.

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Anjan Ghosh, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Janaki Nair (eds), *Theorizing the Present: Essays for Partha Chatterjee*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. xii + 322 pp. Plates, notes, references. ₹695 (hardback).

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The volume is a collection of 12 articles by scholars who are, or who have been, affiliated to the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. It celebrates the work of Partha Chatterjee as well as his long and very productive association with the Centre, first as a Fellow and then, as Director. It moves across multiple and diverse disciplinary areas. While that adds to its range and depth, it also makes the reviewer's task very difficult. Anjan Ghosh, one of the editors, died an untimely death shortly after the volume was put together. It is poignant, therefore, to recall that tragic loss along with the celebration.

The Introduction, written by Ghosh and Nair, discusses Chatterjee's intellectual trajectory. Each author in the volume has tried to build the article around a particular concept, especially associated with him. Predictably, that of political society has claimed the attention of most. Dipesh Chakravarty makes an elegant addition to Charles Taylor's notion of the politics of recognition which depends on the articulation of a sense of historical wounds, inflicted on a vulnerable community by a dominant

one. He says that a process of healing is already on its way when the besieged community describes its wounds. This depends on a consensus about the wounds, reached between the dominant and the subordinated—a consensus, that however, remains fragile and contested. He examines both propositions in the contexts of Indian dalits and Australian indigenous people, the latter being an unusual and valuable parallel. He moves on to the importance of the realm of personal experience and the limits of its articulation within an academic discipline of History.

Janaki Nair invokes Chatterjee's famous dictum on the nationalist resolution of the woman's question to show the varieties of feminist writings that have emerged in the last few decades. The spectrum, by its very breadth, indicates a pending irresolution. She points out the problems that feminist historical writings face when they are enclosed in a corner, folded in upon themselves. Because she brings in so many varied examples of writings, the essay sometimes gets a little breathless. M. Madhava Prasad, in his study of the politics of hierarchising Indian languages in the post colonial situation begins with Appiah's insistence on combining citizenship with identity, the language of politics in public places with one's own language use. He then considers the Indian context and the controversial issue of which Indian language should have what kind of status. Gyanendra Pandey attempts a 'science of violence', which, as opposed to war, forges an Other. He refers to the violence of the quotidian, he cites words that describe violent episodes and he also cites silence about violence. He talks about violence among communities as well as violence that happens inside each community. He multiplies the spaces of violence to such a point that we may, perhaps, lose a sense of distinction.

In an excellent essay, Ranabir Samaddar takes up Chatterjee's formulations on sovereignty—which is attached to the subject instead of always and necessarily to the state—as an entry point into a situation when the state confronts an insurrectionary figure and wants to initiate a process of governance rather than of obliteration: a more subtle aspect of statecraft. In the gap between the two, he says, the figure of the political subject emerges, as an excess beyond the mere rebel. He studies this in the context of Naga peace negotiations and looks at the dialogue between the state and the NSCN—a dance of peace offering and its subversion.

Tapati Guha Thakurta contrasts the politics of the art world with the autonomy of the art practitioner. Gandhi's iconisation by the sculptor

Debiprasad Roy Chowdhury and by the painter Nandalal Bose, is cited as a counterpoint to the work of Ramkinker Baij. She points out that the first two received official and mainstream sanction for their representations, while Ramkinker, a more individualistic and unruly sculptor-painter, was marginalised. Between the contrasts lies a rich history of different art forms, art theories and art criticism. The story of nationalist appropriation and marginalisation is very well told. But Ramkinker, too, acquired an iconic aura among a middle class avant-garde and one wonders what made it possible. Ramachandra Guha studies Rabindranath's travels abroad to focus on a controversy-ridden process of exchange between the poet and the world—contentions that were largely created by his unrelenting internationalism and his sharp and bold critique of nationalism.

In a very interesting essay, M.S.S. Pandian captures an essential paradox about nationalist claims on the unconditional loyalty of its subjects. He unpacks the moves through which this loyalty is sought to be mobilised even as he identifies the points of rupture where the representational claims are undone when the nation privileges a particular majoritarian streak which metonymically presents itself as the entire nation—either marginalising or violently repressing other particularities. He then refers to two striking departures from nationalist claims, Rabindranath Tagore and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker. Pandian establishes his arguments on the register of cultural marginalisation—it would have added to his arguments had he also said something about the separation of marginalised communities from their material resources, adding the politics of distribution to the politics of recognition.

Asok Sen, an inspirational figure for intellectuals in Kolkata and beyond, has been an especially close associate of Chatterjee. He takes up Chatterjee's reflections on relations between state and organised capital on the one hand, and non-corporate capital, especially of peasants, on the other. Sen disagrees with one point that Chatterjee has made—that unlike rural insurrections during colonial times which the early Subaltern Studies collective had celebrated, peasant resistance today cannot possess the same validity as both state and peasantry have moved over to a situation of mutual contestation through negotiations for welfare. He presents a different understanding of the present phase of Indian capitalism to argue for the continuing efficacy of earlier modes of struggle. Indeed, many of the rural struggles present today involve critical issues of survival and livelihood, and they prove the limits of negotiations. They also

affirm the efficacy and relevance of the insurrectionary form that has, on several occasions, managed to resist the combined powers of state and multinational capital.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharya carries on the debate, combining ethnographic research with important general observations. He focuses on West Bengal's surprising tradition of political parties controlling the social sphere. This is done to such an extent that all social and material claims have to be mediated through some party or another, including claims that belong to intimate areas of life. Bhattacharya looks at how the Left Front initially built up its hegemony through rural bases and policies, and how its weakening rural reformism progressively eroded that hegemonic status. He makes the pertinent point that Chatterjee's concept of negotiated gains within the political society framework works far better in an urban context than in a rural one.

Anjan Ghosh observes the changing form of the annual Durga Puja in Kolkata—from a neighbourhood based performance to that of an *inter-para* (neighbourhood) competitive spectacle that, despite its transience, happens on a gigantic scale. He observes this in the context of changing employment, skill, desires and needs under globalisation, media direction and corporate awards, closely tracking the emergence of theme based pujas. He also observes, interestingly, the temporary suspension of civic spaces at Puja time, an illegality that is officially approved and that unifies the entire political spectrum. He counterposes the new spectacle confronting urban publics against the Habermasian public sphere based on rational communication.

Pradip Kumar Datta revisits the well publicised case of Rizwanur Rahman in Kolkata where family and police combined to separate a legally married couple and the death of the husband in mysterious circumstances. Since the marriage was across community and class, diverse social segments of the city, representing discrete urban localities, came together to demand justice and to protest with peaceful candlelight vigils. The theme of love as spur to collective action is established via two Bollywood movies. The notion of conjunctural collective is suggested as a useful counter against Chatterjee's notions of performative community and political society. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the issues the protests raised were, perhaps, more akin to Chatterjee's understanding of civil society, even when they involved urban lower middle classes from where Rizwanur himself came. They stressed the legal right to

consensual cross-community marriage, judicial investigation and police procedure.

It is a surprise, and something of a pity too, that many of the essays have either been published before or are re-workings of earlier work. This, perhaps, indicates the relentless pressure on scholars today to publish or perish. Nonetheless, the volume is a rich tribute to Chatterjee's contributions to social science scholarship.

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Richard K. Wolf, *The Black Cow's Footprint: Time, Space, and Music in the Lives of the Kotas of South India*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005. xv + 313 pp. Tables, figures, plates, maps, notes, references, glossary, indexes. ₹795 (hardback).

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In *The Black Cow's Footprint*, Wolf explores 'the ways in which the *Kotas*, a south Indian minority community, make and remake themselves and their world through music, dance, and other activities' (p. 1). These actions are filtered through his 'interest in how aspects of space, place, and time are socially deployed or constructed' (p. 1). One of the proclaimed aims of this study is to refine the study of 'identity' and the author pushes 'the limits of a musical disciplinary perspective' (p. 3) in doing so.

In this context, the temporal setting of the black cow story and the locations of its footprints take on a special significance. The black cow leads the *Kotas* to the Nilgiri Hills and indicates where to find each village. The descendants of the founders continue to reside in each village's respective 'house of the erected post' built on that original spot, which 'constitutes a centre of moral gravity' (p. 5). Such space/place/time matrices become coordinates for Wolf's concept of 'spacetime'. He uses this notion, borrowed from anthropologist Nancy Munn, to position *Kota* activities, attitudes and identities with respect to four spatiotemporal forms/processes: anchoring, centripetence, centrifugality and interlocking.

Wolf employs spacetime patterning to theorise *Kota* identity formation during the tribe's two main ceremonial complexes: the god complex (*devr*) and the death complex (*tav*). While the *Kotas*' physical and spiritual

trajectories are recognised as multifaceted, they generally proceed inwards (through centripetence towards unity) in the god ceremonies and outwards (by means of centrifugality towards differentiation) in the death complex. Wolf grounds his analysis of the Kotas' god and death rituals in detailed ethnography akin to what Clifford Geertz called 'thick description' in his seminal study titled *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). He then uses the ethnography to theorise further: for example, to look into Kotas' metaphysical positioning in time and space, which is partially achieved through internal and social mapping of places through song, the cross-domain valuation of unity in society and music; and the converse move to individuality and bond breaking in mortuary rituals. Wolf also delves into the types, meanings and consequences of affect in Kota ceremonies. In doing so, he considers how both musical and non-musical processes (such as cooking, consulting a diviner or cleaning a house) register in the 'emotional texture' of the Kota ritual (p. 177).

The persistence required in following Wolf's wide-ranging and, at times, highly-complex investigations of non-musical issues pays off in the holistic image of Kota music that emerges at the end of the book. While music itself is most directly addressed in Chapters 2 and 4, it is dealt with throughout much of the text. At times, Wolf considers broader issues related to music's social function, as in his analysis of song texts filtered through the comments and reflections of his Kota collaborators. In other sections, he analyses musical details, such as how the *kol* players (the main melodic instrumentalists of the Kotas) 'anchor' their melodies around structural drum beats 'and more or less fit the rest of the melody in the intervening spaces' (p. 2).

In Chapter 5, Wolf develops his concept of anchoring across a range of spacetimes. For him, anchoring not only serves as a metaphor for musical coordination from where it emerges in the study, but also describes the connections Kotas make with their geography, histories, social relations and large-scale temporal events. The anchoring metaphor is especially useful because it allows room for 'real' world reflections: anchor points in music, time or social contexts may shift or be entirely reworked to meet ever changing circumstances.

By positioning music in relation to many other activities, Wolf fashions a worldview of Kota music. He brings the reader into the Kotas' richly complex world of sound, smell, tastes, textures and thinking. Targeted towards ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, folklorists, scholars of

religion and Asian Studies, *The Black Cow's Footprint* is an extremely valuable addition to the limited literature on Indian tribal peoples. A meticulous ethnography presented in a style which is a descriptive treat, it succeeds in creating vivid images of Kota life in the mind, much like the way all music aspires to. The comprehensive glossary and detailed index add to the monograph's value for a variety of readers who will be drawn to Wolf's careful ethnography and multidimensional analysis.

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A.R. Vasavi (comp. and ed.), *The Inner Mirror: Kannada Writings on Society and Culture*. New Delhi: The Book Review Literary Trust, 2011 (first published in 2009). x + 199 pp. Notes. ₹395 (paperback).
DOI: 10.1177/0069966713483035

The book represents a novel academic project: it seeks to counter the erosion of the 'sociological imagination' in the universities that are not linked to the metropolitan academic centres of India. Vasavi addresses here the long noticed but neglected aspect of our universities, particularly our 'moffusil' universities, with their uninspiring syllabi and textbooks, political interference and indifferent pedagogic structures. In short, our social sciences teaching in these universities fails to ignite what C. Wright Mills calls the 'sociological imagination' that intellectually engages students with their societies and cultures. This book is a compilation of socially sensitive and relevant articles in Kannada written by some prominent intellectuals of Karnataka. Here is a bouquet of creative writing in Kannada with which students studying in Kannada medium institutions could easily engage because they are familiar with the events reported and the nuances of local culture. This book offers an 'inner mirror' to Kannada culture, according to Vasavi. I am a bit puzzled by this metaphor but with modern technologies, I suppose even mirrors deep inside could reflect to the world outside! These 'inner mirrors', she suggests, complement ethnographies and encourage students to develop fresh perspectives on society and culture. She quotes from the Sanskrit scholar Pollock who thinks that 'vernacular' literature—a very colonial expression—would combat epistemological determinism. She thinks that such writings would also work against essentialist trends

of cultural studies that have become fashionable in the West. Like many sociologists who wish to differentiate themselves from postmodernist trends, she perhaps feels that sociology should pay closer attention to structural processes, a view that I endorse.

This book contains 15 essays plus Vasavi's introductory chapter, which makes out a case for such a book. In her introduction, Vasavi reviews the academic scene in 'moffusil' universities and stresses the importance of drawing upon the wisdom, sensibilities and cultural memories hidden in local cultures to combat 'epistemological determinisms' and stimulate the growth of indigenous social science perspectives, theories and concepts. This book is part of the series titled 'past continuous' launched by the journal *Book Review*. The editors of this series offer a valid rationale for such compilations of translated articles: they hope local cultural perspectives enrich the disciplines of humanities and social sciences, and lead to the formulation of a theoretical framework based on such local diversities.

The first part of the book contains three essays on Kannada nationalism. This part begins with an essay written by D.R. Nagaraj, a distinguished Kannada thinker from the subaltern classes who unfortunately passed away at a young age. Nagaraj's article, first published in 1997, adopts a universal perspective that recognises the creative potential of cosmopolitan Kannada nationalism even as it senses the danger of its morphing into a form of chauvinism and fundamentalism. The other two articles written around the same time as Nagaraj's, reveal how the slippage from universalism to parochialism and even to communalism could almost imperceptibly happen. K.V. Narayana's article complains about the continued dominance of English that stymies the development of Kannada and G. Rajashekar shows how a local Kannada newspaper amplifies seething anti-Muslim passions in the town of Puttur in coastal Karnataka, showing how Kannada nationalism is getting distorted. Moreover, while the dominance of English is seen as the bane of Kannada by the Kannada nationalists, Mogalli Ganesh's article on dalits which is included in the section on caste extols the liberating value of the English language for the dalits.

The second part, devoted to the theme of religiosity, is by far the best in the book. I would commend especially the essays by Chandrashekar Kambar and U.R. Ananthamurthy as of immense value to social science scholarship. Kambar's essay on the gods and goddesses of Shivapura is a lyrical ethnography of the moral and religious life of the village that

rectifies recent distorted and motivated interpretations of Hinduism. U.R. Ananthamurthy's essay is written in a confessional mode on his reluctance to side with the activists demonstrating against the ritual of the naked worship of Goddess Yellamma in Chandragutti, in the Shimoga district of Karnataka. He agonises over betraying his socialist and rationalist impulses because the worshippers may be superstitious, but on that sacred occasion, their nakedness acquires a mystical quality that the rationalist protestors cannot grasp. This essay draws out the subtle strands of the cultural sensibilities that cannot be pinned down by even the most sophisticated analytical frames in the social sciences. To demonstrate this, I quote below an intensely evocative and incisive passage from his essay:

We the modernisers, send our children to English medium schools and look for a day when the English translated wisdom of the Upanishads, the imported computers, the sitar music on video cassettes can coexist peacefully and can enrich our temporal as well as our spiritual existence. In the meanwhile there are going to be too many mouths to feed in this country and some of them defiantly walk naked to worship the goddess on a hill. And they fight back with tridents. Some political activists who have always been critical of police brutality ask angrily: 'What were the police doing with their rifles?' Alas, they do not examine self-critically the implications of what they ask. (p. 91)

Apart from this section, the last section on modernity and development is evocative and powerfully expressed, but the essays merely bemoan the inexorable churning of modernisation. They see no silver lining in the dark clouds of modernisation.

By compiling such essays and editing them, Vasavi breaks new ground in the social sciences. The older generation of sociologists merely complained of academic colonialism and offered empty programmes to 'indigenise' the sociology of India. Here is a brave attempt to push the social sciences in that direction.

I have a few complaints against this collection. One is its pessimism; where are the essays that stir revolutionary consciousness or identify the positive fallouts of modernity? Should I infer from these essays that Kannada sensibility shuns revolution? Another is that most of the essays, with a few prominent exceptions, make feeble attempts at deep reflection. This collection shows no evidence of leaning against epistemological

determinism. While it is important to retain cultural memory as some of the essays point out, it is more important to anticipate future trends. Should we infer then that the Kannada cultural sensibility clings too tightly to its past?

It is difficult to argue that the authors in this volume represent authentic Kannada sensibility because they are also erudite scholars in English. For instance, it is difficult to tease out Kannadiga sensibilities from Ananthamurthy's essay because of his vast erudition that ranges from socialism, postmodernism to Sanskrit scriptures. This remark applies to each of the authors in this book. And is the book free from essentialism? I doubt it, because the essays are basically essentialist reflections that bemoan the loss of Kannada cultural memory—whatever that may imply.

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K.S. Singh, *Diversity, Identity and Linkages: Explorations in Historical Ethnography* (with a foreword by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. xii + 156 pp. Bibliography, index. ₹545 (hardback).

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This book is a collection of 11 essays by Dr K.S. Singh, who is best known as having led the massive People of India (PoI) project as Director of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI). Holding the essays together is the enduring theme of 'difference and diversity'—what constitutes diversity, its dynamics and the contours of a composite culture based upon diversity? Cutting across two millennia, the temporal scope of the set of essays is only matched by its geographical ambit—the whole of the territory of historical India until post colonial times. The foreword by historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya locates the oeuvre of the author as an exploration of the dynamics of grouped pairs of concepts—'diversities and affinities', 'pluralism and synthesis' and 'composite culture' (p. ix). The volume does not disappoint.

The first chapter sets up the theoretical basis for the book—an exposition of how identity is very closely built upon ecology, relationship to space and cultural adaptations (p. 14). Having set up such an understanding of culture and identity, the next seven chapters take on the task of how difference and diversity is approached in ancient, colonial and post colonial times.

Chapters 2 to 4 look at the *Mahabharatha* and *Manusamhita*, and a lesser-known text *Varna Ratnakar* as indigenous attempts at ethnography. These texts describe the richness of existing ‘communities’ of difference. The *Mahabharatha*, for instance, documents 363 different peoples (ethnic names of nations, tribes or regions/space), albeit in scanty ways. Moving onto the later *Manusmriti*, the author discusses how Manu (albeit problematically) constructs elaborate lists of classifications of people, most importantly according to *varna* and *jati*. Finally, the *Varna Ratnakar* (14th century) documents various kinds of *jatis* and forest tribes in the region of Mithila (eastern India, today’s Bihar). In each of these chapters, the author skillfully compares the ethnographic data with contemporary data from the PoI project to show how things have changed, and how migrations and mixtures may have occurred.

Chapters 5 to 8 engagingly portray the colonial and post colonial attempts at ethnographic productions. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the British surveys, gazetteers, census instruments; the various methodologies used; the intense debates over race and caste; and the ‘officialisation’ of stereotypical characteristics of communities. Chapter 7 is a quick historical sojourn into the making of the ASI and the forces that shaped its focus and structure such as physical anthropometry, perspectives on tribal peoples of India and a consciousness of ASI’s role in nation-making. Finally, we have a description in Chapter 8 of the massive undertaking of the ASI to document data on the ‘human heritage’ of India which culminated in the PoI project in the middle of 1990s. Due to his intimate knowledge of this project, the author ably outlines its major axes of diversity—biological, linguistic, cultural (including cuisine) and occupational. The last part of this chapter talks about the ways that globalisation impacts diversity.

The final set of three chapters rounds up this volume and act as book ends along with Chapter 1. Here we see an attempt to think through the implications of the ethnographic documentation of diversity and difference in the space called contemporary India. Using the ancient Jaina concept/theory of *Anekantavada*, Chapter 9 tries to set up a basis for approaching diversity in such a manner that opposites could be seen to co-exist in the same space (p. 102). Boldly talking about the fact that ‘we are mostly a mixed people’ (p. 102), the author makes a critical observation that ‘we should not romanticise diversity’ (p. 103) since it is capable of being subsumed within hierarchy and inequality. The next chapter puts forward the strongest case for empirically capturing the now quasi-legendary

‘syncretic’ character of India’s communities and the basis of its composite culture. Here, we are able to discern how each (large religious) community hides a rich amount of heterogeneity within and shares many symbols with other religious communities, how linguistic regions (carved out of the 325 languages) host multiple communities that share many traits despite their differences, and how there exist at least 600 different communities that have religious segments within (that is, where people, sometimes in the same family, profess different religions). The final chapter is a short one that lays out the author’s principled commitment to viewing India as a composite culture, the threats to syncretism and shared space that forces of communalism pose and the need to study and promote inter-community ‘linkages’ (the third term in the main title of the book) as a site that nurtures and builds the kind of society that the author envisions for India. Singh’s credentials as a bold public intellectual grounded in his data allow him to simply state that ‘[t]here are Sathes in every corner of India’ (p. 118, referring to the cluster of villages in Ghaziabad district of U.P. where a living tradition of Hindu–Muslim segments within the same lineage has existed from many generations) and that ‘[t]here is no alternative to living together’ (p. 125).

The strengths of this volume are obvious—its attention to empirical detail, its defence of the inherent value of human diversity and the thoughtful explorations of what a truly composite culture means. Here, the author’s mastery over the dizzying ethnographic data on Indian population is something to be savoured at a time when attention to empirical data gets a short shrift in the rush to combat an empiricism that disavowed critical theory. The antiquity of ethnographic attempts that document castes along with tribes, ethnic, regional and linguistic groups is sobering in light of recent debates around the caste census.

The book could have benefitted from an explicit discussion of the ‘process of differentiation’ or the ‘production of difference’ and diversity of everyday life. Why, for instance, did cultural variety evolve in such differentiated ways across eco-zones in India? Are cultural differences only resulting from adaptations, or do socio-psychological factors and political power inform the need to distinguish ‘Others’ to create one’s own group? In short, what is the theoretical lens by which one can view the production of ‘difference’ and hence of Otherness? To be fair, the author does show some insight into such a process, albeit without pursuing or giving clues as to how he would approach such questions. For example, in Chapter 3, he

notes how Manu constructs his norms of behaviour ideologically and thus 'reconstructs social reality' (p. 37). Manu's predilection for 'difference' and maintenance of community boundaries is obviously not obsolete, but is a feature of valourisation of diversity along caste lines. Nevertheless, the possibility of such an insight is not followed through in the chapter or the rest of the volume. Such a discussion would probably have added much depth to the otherwise interesting ways of posing the all-important question of India's famed 'unity in diversity' or as the author incisively reordered it, 'diversity in unity' (pp. 104–06).

In sum, this is a very valuable collection of essays that honour the memory of one of India's most innovative minds committed to uncovering the scope, nature and dynamics of diversity, and contributing to thinking about how to value, respect and build a composite culture that is truly liberating for all. It will be useful as a text in seminars on social history, cultural theory, critical multiculturalism and public policy.

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N. Jayaram (ed.), *Diversities in the Indian Diaspora: Nature, Implications, Responses*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. xviii + 250 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references. ₹695 (hardback).

and

Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan (eds), *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-diaspora*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. vii + 378 pp. Notes, references, index. ₹695 (hardback).

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Both these books share common concerns but work around very different assumptions and methodologies. What they have in common is a larger interest in the making and functioning of a Diaspora—in this case, the South Asian one—and in the understanding of difference that was as constitutive of diasporic imagination as common identities and invocations were. But this is precisely where the similarity ends, with Koshy and Radhakrishnan attempting a more theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of the modern—indeed, post colonial neo-diaspora and with Jayaram unravelling the diversities within the diaspora by looking at

detailed and empirical studies. Each of these approaches has its relevance even if they do not establish the case for the efficacy of the very category of the diaspora as a useful heuristic unit. We know and are told how diasporas are different and diverse, and how notions of homes left behind are differently imagined, but what this understanding can do to unsettle assumptions about nationalism, cosmopolitanism and even global capital is never very clearly spelt out. This is especially so in Jayaram's edited volume, where a very tentative attempt is made in the introduction to look at the idea of the diaspora conceptually and empirically by identifying its multiple skeins. It is not followed through and what we have instead is a short summing up of the various contributions that take up the history of the making of a diverse diaspora and how diversities play out in the manifestation of complex identity politics. While this is undoubtedly important, it falls short of questioning the very category of the diaspora and the way it has tended to be used and even deployed in what seems to be more a pragmatic engagement with the pressures of post national politics in an era of globalisation. Koshy and Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, attempt to do precisely this when they introduce the idea of a neo-diaspora and in the process, focus attention on 'the constitutive role of the shifting forces of capitalism in determining the modes of migration from South Asia.

The essays that make up Jayaram's volume look at a range of issues that include the implications of diversity within the Sikh/Punjabi diaspora for articulation of nationhood and identity; issues of assimilation and state policy in Malaysia; language issues in Mauritius and certain other specific case studies. Many of these offer valuable information and insights, some of which I will highlight. Ravindra Jain, for instance, makes the important point in his essay that it may help us to engage with the idea of process inherent in the continuous articulation of a diaspora group. This will enable a better appreciation of the tensions within it, the fluidities of its imagination and negotiation with the local situation at hand. Of course, the question that inevitably arises is how certain institutional practices around the Gurudwara impact the process that Jain refers to. This also raises issues of public policy, a feature that T. Marimuthu takes up in his study of Malaysia and suggests that there is a clear divergence between Malaysian national culture and Malaysian minority community culture. What does this really mean? Do we see this articulation as somehow connected with an essentialised understanding of Indianness? We do know

from other writings that the hyphenated Malay–Tamil cultural experience was a creative and productive amalgamation of remembered practices and of local habits, and that there were frequent pleas to eschew the cringe complex of Malay Tamils vis-à-vis mainstream Tamil standards in language or music. In terms of education and language, we also need to recall how the choice of English as the language of opportunity and empowerment has prevailed among younger members of the Tamil speaking diaspora and how this gestures to a very different set of pressures.

The essays that look at the Indian experience in Mauritius foreground the importance of looking at non-British stations and to investigate whether and in what way the experience was different. Particularly interesting is Vinesh Hookoomsing's work on Chota Bharat in Mauritius and the relative success of Creolisation over the assertions of Hindi and Hindutva. Two other essays on Indians in Mauritius and Reunion respectively offer more details of the experience of Indians and their practices. What could be useful is to see how debates on language and identity and essence can set up a conversation with debates on what constitutes 'Frenchness' in France, especially in the context of French immigrants from North Africa.

The volume also carries specific case studies—of Cochin Jews who are socially marginalised in Israel, and of Jains whose business acumen ensured their participation in extensive regimes of circulation. These essays are informative but lack an interpretive edge and do not, in any sense, help problematise the domain of diaspora analysis. This is in fact one of the major challenges that diaspora studies encounters: we are told of the differences in experience, in terms of class and community variations, of the cultural inheritance each group within the diaspora plugs into, the survival strategies that they adopt in the new lands of their residence but these do not translate into any significant theoretical framework for treating the diaspora as an analytical category. As a result, empirical work and ethnographies of contemporary cultural practices remain un-reflexive and self-indulgent narratives, barely engaging with more substantive issues of state policy on immigration and/or discourses on multi-culturalism and tolerance.

Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan's book, on the other hand, is a different proposition. The introduction is lucid and sets out clearly and eloquently the usefulness of locating a neo-diaspora that speaks of a very different moment in its history, shaped by the forces of capitalism, colonialism and nationalism, making up the experience of global

modernity. Each of these experiences produced serious economic and structural changes leading to voluntary and involuntary migrations, and also to debates on citizenship and what ought to constitute its basis and on a very different perception of the homeland and their positioning in relation to it. Some of the essays provide fascinating insights into the reluctance of the diasporic subjects to return ‘home’, rendering the relationship between home and diaspora fraught and less than idealised. A second question that the volume addresses is the importance of looking at the diaspora in order to revisit ideas of the community. Is the proliferation of diasporic communities the key to a new formation of the future or can they be? Do they spell the failure of nation states? While the volume does not offer immediate answers to the question, its contributions do engage with these issues. Equally significant is the attention some of the essays pay to gender and race in diasporic identities—Munasinghe’s essay, for instance, shows how Indians were excised from the hegemonic discourse on Creole identity. The volume also carries important contributions on film and the production of a globalised Indian identity.

Space prevents me from treating in detail the excellent individual contributions. The first section entitled ‘Social Networks, Cultural Practices and the Processes of Settlement’ has a piece on the historical roots of the Indian diaspora in Mauritius where Indian settlers did not conform to just being indentured labour and where elite formations played a number of significant social and economic roles which do not readily find adequate mention. This is not to discount the preponderantly labour dominated profile of the diaspora in the Indian Ocean. The experiences of indentured labour, their cultural and ritual practices that enabled them to enjoy leisure time and also to articulate a distinct set of subjective preferences are eloquently mapped out by Sudesh Misra’s piece on the *tazia* in Fiji. Misra argues convincingly that the *tazia* comprised an autonomous site that was pitted against the world of regulated plantation labour and that it was an aesthetic political practice. While the essay does not draw from comparative experiences of other diasporic labour groups within the British Empire, it may be useful to consider whether within this kind of de-territorialised community/class formation, cultural practices alone have radical potential.

The second section ‘Religion, Displacement and Belonging’ carries essays on Muslim recognition and Islamophobia in Britain, how the two discourses have fed into and off each other, on South Asian assertiveness

in Britain and on migrant experience perspectives from Kerala. The ethnography undertaken by Osella on the experience of Kerala migrants is rich and underscores the ambiguity of the experience. The respondents talk about the ambivalence of the entire experience, about returning home, about raising children in what is seen as a safe zone helps problematise the idea of 'diasporic longing'.

The following sections look at gendered cultural productions in Britain and the United States, and at diaspora histories that emphasise the need to move away from a national bind in understanding experiences of mobility and migration, random and sustained. Finally, there is a section that looks at diaspora politics and imaginaries, in war and in peace—on Tamil nationalism and Bollywood productions that offer us very starkly contrasting representations of the non-resident South Asian, exile in one and NRI in another.

The essays in all cohere well to produce what I consider to be a major intervention in the field of South Asian diaspora studies. They make a serious effort to go beyond the usual and conventional narratives of unproblematic long distance nationalism, of representing diasporic subjects as model minorities, and of locating their politics within a limited schema of identity assertions around language and religion. The fact that this volume looks at class, race and gender, and that it attempts to open up ways of thinking afresh about globalisation and to rework in more imaginative, but also in hardy pragmatic ways, the diaspora–homeland continuum, makes it a major contribution to an expanding and exciting field of research.

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Dilip Subramanian, *Telecommunications Industry in India: State, Business and Labour in a Global Economy*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010. xiii + 685 pp. Tables, figures, index. ₹895 (hardback).

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ITI's founding in 1948 as a departmental production unit of the department of Post and Telegraph (P&T, later Department of Telecommunications or DoT) reified the Nehruvian vision of a custodial role for the state in the economic sphere. Its incorporation as a company two years later

did not alter the essence of its existence as a monopoly supplier of telecommunications equipment to the monopsonist P&T, while continuing to remain under P&T's complete administrative control. The liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s that was so spectacularly instantiated in the telecommunications production and services sectors and which represented a breakdown of the 'anti-Schumpeterian bargain'—to use Peter Evans' phrase—did not transform the state-ITI relationship in any significant manner. In this meticulously researched and carefully argued monograph, author Dilip Subramaniam suggests the label 'bureaucratic production regime' to explore the triple foundation of state ownership, soft budget constraints and monopoly market power, and their ramifications for the company. This interdisciplinary interrogation of the strategic and tactical choices made by the state, ITI's management, union and workers over more than half a century of its existence is enriched by copious references to sociological work originating in France where the author is based. The book's stark analysis serves to illumine the reasons for the decline of this once-profitable state owned enterprise (SOE) and encourages a richer appreciation of the 'public sector company as an unstable and shifting compromise between economic and social goals brokered by a medley of political forces' (p. 665).

The first five chapters of the book deal with the political and economic strategies adopted by the state and management with regard to sector policies, technological choices, work practices, advent of competition and the transition to a fully competitive telecommunications equipment market. Given the low priority accorded to telecommunications services by policy makers in the initial years, ITI faced significant monetary and technical resource shortages. While the direct technology transfer route adopted for the strowger system at inception was a reasonable success, the author traces how incompatibility with local needs and inefficiencies on the part of the technology provider made the subsequent arrangement for crossbar systems an abject failure. Poor technological and managerial choices led to intra-organisational disputes and rivalries that were exacerbated by the dismal performance of ITI's research and development department. A toxic combination of monopoly and state regulation caused many organisational dysfunctions such as material shortages on one hand and high inventories on the other, work shirking and overtime, quality lapses leading to delivery slippages, low machine, labour, capacity-utilisation as well as overpricing. The author is careful, however, not to endorse

economic Darwinism, instead preferring to explain ITI's declining performance in terms of the interplay between the policy environment, market structure and managerial shortcomings. A combination of poor policy decisions, absence of cost-consciousness and lack of managerial foresight in technological matters caught ITI totally unprepared for the advent of competition in both equipment manufacturing and services. The author argues that deregulation and partial de-nationalisation result in dual dependency among SOE that are subjected to both bureaucratic and market coordination without deriving the benefits of either, and ITI was no exception. Worker ambivalence to the company's difficulties, ineffective managerial efforts at internal reform, poor intra-organisational coordination and lack of policy consensus regarding the company's future—all contributed to its inevitable decline. While some of his conclusions supporting aggressive state intervention to aid ITI's recovery are open to debate, there can be no denying the utility of the author's analysis of the pathology of its failure.

The next three chapters add value to the corpus on industrial sociology by focusing on workers' interactions amongst themselves—both individually and as a collectivity in the union—and with management. An ethnographic exploration of work in one of the assembly shops marshals some evidence to question the thesis—advanced by Harry Braverman—that employers systematically control each step of the labour process so as to dispossess workers of their knowledge and skill. The author speculates that the non-atomising, 'craft-centred' labour configuration in the shop was a result of management's anxieties regarding workers' resistance to change. In addition, the non-strategic nature of the particular assembly's product line allowed workers to exercise significant autonomy in their daily work. A multivariate analysis of the sociological background of workers at the Bangalore plant of ITI to elucidate its nature and transformation follows; not surprisingly, the conclusions of the survey confirm the persistence of geographical, linguistic, gender and caste cleavages and discriminations among organised labour. This sociological survey forms the backdrop to an exploration of the growth and development of unionism in the plant that derived key features such as its independent plant-level nature and internal leadership from the broader workers' movement in Bangalore, and was dictated by pragmatism and strategic considerations rather than by ideology. The unique flavour that this imparted to the three-way relationship between workers, union and management is more fully

explored in Chapter 8 with respect to struggles around monetary, mobility and work-related issues that point to the workers' capacity for autonomous action and a recurring 'pattern of a dovish leadership capitulating to a hawkish base' (p. 546). The last chapter, tracking the politics and enduring salience of language and caste in the Bangalore unit, serves to repudiate the teleology of modernisation theory and exemplify the failure of the Nehruvian modernisation project.

The success of the book lies in the erudite explication of the complex economic, political and sociological factors that give pause to pat allocative efficiency explanations of SOE performance and failure. Apart from its scholarly worth, this cautionary tale has particular resonance for many other enterprises, not excluding the public sector successors to DoT that share many of the strategic and operational characteristics of ITI. It makes us wonder whether 'the articulation of a different institutional, normative and competitive mix' (p. 657) is indeed possible in order to rescue these companies, the government and the public at large from the mire of their indifferent performance.

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Doris R. Jakobsh (ed.), *Sikhism and Women: History, Text and Experience*.
New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. vii + 383 pp. Notes,
references. ₹795 (hardback).

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This work is a critical exploration of chequered debates on gender in Sikh studies, primarily in the west, bringing to the fore the conventions, complexities and contradictions between the theological discourse of core Sikh 'texts'/ideals and lived realities of Indian and diasporic Sikh communities. It coincides with the launch of a journal *Sikh Feminist Review* by the Sikh Feminist Research Institute based in Canada.

Foregrounding these debates in the historiography of colonial Punjab, Jakobsh's comprehensive introduction explores the crucial influence of Enlightenment ideas of religion as a systematised and non-amorphous

sociological unit which abstracted Sikhism from a complex set of kinship, economic and political relationships that were central to Punjabi life. Besides, colonial military ambitions supported religious reform that reproduced and sustained masculine ideals of martiality and martyrdom. Essays in this volume focus on the late 19th and early 20th century. They also dwell on contemporary religious reform debates on Sikh identity and what is construed as Sikhism's inherent egalitarianism and distinctiveness not just from Hinduism and Islam, but also from several 'denigrate' strands of Sikh practices. In doing this, they establish the predominance of selective core 'texts' and a homogenised Khalsa identity.

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh invokes Khalsa identity and the re-feminisation of ritual in Sikhism to represent an ideal which needs to be reaffirmed by critiquing the negative influence of Punjabi cultural norms on Sikhism which dilute the feminist epistemological basis enshrined in the verses of Guru Nanak. Most of the papers, however, represent the contradiction between the supposed 'normative' ideal of the Khalsa and its 'selective' influence on the predominant structures of the state and caste/kinship patterns since the 18th century. For instance, Purnima Dhawan's study of Mani Majra rural estate discusses the de-legitimisation of succession rights of women. Another important element of the debate is the authorship of the Dasam Granth and its inclusion or exclusion as a sacred text in Sikhism. Robin Rinehart analyses two sections of this text and argues that the usage of the metaphor of Durga in *Chandi Charitra Utki Bilasa* and deceitful women in *Charitropakhian* for a predominantly male audience has important meanings for the construction of gender in Sikhism.

Doris Jakobsh contends that several periods within Sikh history have served specific moments of gender constructions, particularly in defining the idea of women's honour and identity. While discussing the characters of Bhai Vir Singh's novels, C. Christine Fair highlights the idealised lives of extraordinary women who cook, clean, nurse, kill and die for their faith and the *panth*; and how the second 'life' of these novels were useful for imagining the Sikh world in transnational nationalism of the Khalistan movement. Anshu Malhotra's essay explores how the colonial interventionist structures, while intending to cleanse the upper castes (for instance, Khatri and Jats) of their polluting practice of female infanticide, perpetuated the symptoms which they sought to reform. Several contributors further posit the dichotomy between lived roles and the identity of women in Punjabi kinship and Sikh ideals.

Michelle Maskiell highlights the sharply gendered contours of the idealised Phulkari lore and the construction of conservative, nostalgic evocations of women's work in the supposed timeless rural patriarchal household. Nicola Mooney further explores the pervasive ways in which Jat culture, whether rural and historical or urban, middle-class and contemporary, constructs and maintains social difference and inequality for women. Preeti Kapur and Girishwar Misra suggest that even while the outer boundaries of identity have assumed significant influence in marriage alliances of Sikh men and women, the representation of men and expectations from women continue to be largely defined by ethnicity, caste, class and kinship patterns. Jagbir Jhutti-Johal's powerful narrative of the role of Sikh women in Sikh institutions and their perception of Sikh tenets gives a conflicting account of the ways in which women in Punjab view the issues of *sewa* and women's intervention in predominantly male roles at Gurudwaras significantly differs from the women activism in the West.

Investigating the contradictory context of transnational migration and diasporic environment, Kamala Elizabeth Nayar analyses the tensions and clashes between tradition and modernity that are experienced by women in Canada. Inderpal Grewal locates the 'refugee' figure of Sikh woman as a mobile subject of human rights across many networks of communication and connectivity and displaced by many violent transnationalisms. Constance Elsberg analyses the centrality of the 1980s and 1990s in the emergence of the category of (the largely women) *gora* Sikhs in Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) and Sikh Dharma (both founded by Yogi Bhasan in the US), premised dominantly on the Khalsa identity. However, women played a limited role in shaping it. Margaret Walton-Roberts foregrounds how in rapid marriage agreements arranged between NRIs and families in Punjab, males tend to represent the embodiment of 'modern' western wealth and power whereas women are more bounded, traditional and subservient to the wishes of their families. Kanwal Mand's work compliments this through an analysis of the working lives of transnational women, an extension of their gendered roles factored according to Sikh household needs and hierarchy.

This work is of immense significance for social scientists for a comprehensive reading on a wide range of debates on gender in Sikh history. The scholarship seeks to strike a delicate balance between theology and interdisciplinarity within the larger historiographical debates on Sikh

and/or Punjab studies. However, a term like 'Sikh feminism' within the theological discourse on Sikhism de-legitimises other categories like 'dalit' Sikh. Thus, even though Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh seeks the possibilities of gender with Sikhism and within Sikhism, the important dilemma of limits of religion as a trope of recovery remains. Similarly, even though there is always an afterlife of a text, it is difficult to imagine Sikhism outside the context of hierarchical Punjabi landscape and limit the academic language of religion to selected 'text/s' and static frames of time. Even ideals of an egalitarian Sikh sphere cannot be bereft of the role Nath's played in shaping a critique of caste and ritual purity in the landscape of early medieval Punjab. The feminine allegory in the Guru Granth Sahib can similarly be located within the literary milieu of Sufi and Bhakti poetry which needs to be separated from the modern notion of gender equality. This work thus opens a foray of possibilities for further research.

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Andre Béteille, *Universities at the Crossroads*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 205 pp. References, index. ₹550 (hardback).

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Being one of the largest and most complex systems of its kind in the world, Indian higher education is packed with contradictions of numerous kinds. Amidst a series of profound changes and tremendous expansion over the course of last century, Indian universities continue to enroll a record-high student population, employ a large labour force and operate through numerous institutional networks and alliances. As the discourse on 'world-class university', 'innovation university' and 'entrepreneurial university' begins to gain prominence in India, the questions of unevenness of quality, support and structure re-emerge. As pointed out by many, the expansion of higher education in historic proportions has also brought along several moments of crisis. These overt contradictions have perhaps contributed to the growing scholarly interest in universities in recent years. Andre Béteille's book *Universities at the Crossroads* does add to the conversation about the changing imagination of institutions of learning.

It is a timely intervention that takes us through many significant epochs in the life span of Indian universities.

The essays offer a sense of familiarity and continuation, for one gets re-acquainted with Bêteille's intellectual investment in institutional analysis. Written in a rather conversational spirit, the essays also present a continuation of his liberal democratic positions on many contentious questions. Public institutions in India have been at the centre of Bêteille's scholarly engagement for long. As he correctly acknowledges, the new public institutions entered the Indian social landscape with a (relatively) open and secular structure, which differed from the exclusively kinship-based social organisations. Given that universities have been a necessary part of the Indian project of modernity, how do we make sense of these superimposed structures? How do we understand the heavy-handed bureaucracy, regimentation and regulation that govern our universities? In many ways, Bêteille returns to the questions of equality, openness, inclusion and the very purpose of higher education. Capturing the changes in Indian higher education is a massive project. Bêteille gives some screen time to 'quotas', 'caste prejudice' and the 'limits of equality'. As far as the tenor of his arguments goes, however, reading the essays (which were mostly delivered at various institutions) shows how hard it is to imagine socially just universities.

The essays take stock of the gradual expansion of public institutions, particularly the ways in which universities and colleges have been elemental in creating democratic spaces for access, action, participation, individual and community mobility. From first generation learners to first generation white-collar workers, then to first generation transnational flexi-workers, the presence and experience of higher education is closely tied with the struggles around aspirations, middle-class values and migration of different kinds. In his charitable reading of the history of universities in India, Bêteille highlights the open character of Indian institutions and notes, 'Dalits, Muslims, and women were not debarred from entering the universities as their counterparts would have been till the middle of the nineteenth century in Oxford and Cambridge' (p. 17). Given that the rapid expansion of Indian universities took place in the 20th century and the access to higher education for dalits and Muslims is low 'even today', one wonders what the point about 'open access in principle' serves.

The point is not an anecdote in isolation. It sets the stage for Bêteille's larger argument, which rests on the premise that Indian universities have

been open enough and it is time now for them to be more selective. For instance, the University Education Commission's observation, 'Intellectual work is not for all, it is only for the intellectually competent' is mentioned frequently in the book. For what seems like a not-thought-out-filler, lacking in analytic or research basis, the above quote is used by Béteille to draw attention to the rapidly changing demographics in higher education and the dwindling standards. The two, according to Béteille, are causally connected. For him, social inclusion should be the mandate of universities, but only to a certain extent and it should be subsidiary to the pursuit of scientific scholarship.

Reservations have been at the heart of much of the anxiety about the role and functioning of our universities. The subtle and explicit manifestations of casteism, caste-assertion and caste-blindness all get played out in education in many ways. A quick glance at the history of higher education in India allows us to see the ways in which upper caste men sought to inhabit institutions of higher learning in the 19th century. Possibilities of government employment and social prestige were the immediate motives behind the investment on the part of the upper caste elite, who went on to occupy administrative, political and intellectual leadership roles. To my disappointment, Béteille does not consider the nuances of the making and spread of higher educational institutions, their relationship with political power and the reasons for strategic investments and claims on these public institutions by various groups. Instead, he looks at the compulsions of higher education within the over-familiar frames including caste-based quotas, social inclusion and academic standards. What is more intriguing, Béteille chooses to talk about 'caste prejudice' (not casteism) and 'quotas' (not reservation), thus opting for a lexicon that reduces structural realities to individualised experiences. Addressing the question of caste, for instance, he states:

Social prejudice based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or caste exists in one form or another in most if not all societies. There is at best a difference of degree between India and other countries. It is difficult to agree that the very limited presence of the backward castes in the best university institutions is due solely to the social bias against them. Why has the bias against them remained unchanged or, as some say, even increased when the bias against women in those very institutions has declined significantly? (p. 54)

Comparing the trajectory of backward castes in higher education to that of ‘women’ who are interestingly not marked in terms of their castes is supposed to make us re think caste-based reservations in education. He goes on to state: ‘Where they [caste quotas] have been used on a massive scale, they have contributed to a better mix of castes and communities, but they have also contributed to a steady decline in academic standards’ (p. 57). Unfortunately, neither do we see a substantiation of these claims in the essays, nor do we find an exposition on academic standards.

To reiterate the point made above, Bêteille’s essays tell us how hard it is to imagine academic spaces as open and democratic. The changes in higher education can be understood in the context of social inclusion, or alternatively, in the context of social justice. The crossroads at which our universities find themselves are messy, no doubt.

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Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009. xiv + 310 pp. Figures, plates, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. ₹695 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966713483046

Here’s a title that brims with promise. Pleasure, popular literature/culture, entertainment have all attracted renewed scholarly interest in the wake of the rise of mass media in the late 20th century. Francesca Orsini tracks back a century or so to ask what constituted entertainment, pleasure and popular publishing in the region she terms colonial north India. This is a challenging task for a historian, given that what is regarded as ephemera tends rapidly to disappear. But Orsini comes up with a surprisingly rich body of material—thanks in part to the archiving energy of the India Office and the British Museum, but more to her painstaking checking of local library lending registers, publication data relating to commercial presses and combing through contemporary magazines for reviews and letters from readers. In addition, the period studied straddles the years when Hindi began differentiating itself from Urdu.

The popular/canonical divide is accompanied, Orsini shows, by a technological one. The educated elite read the uplifting and reformist

material brought out by publishers, such as the famous Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow. Readers of the popularly circulated texts studied here came from a different class (and possibly caste—though that question is not addressed at all) and were quite often neo-literates. While books patronised by the elite were printed in moveable type and were relatively expensive, lithography made it possible to produce in large numbers the songbooks and short narratives, patronised by these subaltern readers, and sell them at a more modest price. Separate chapters deal with printed versions of literature that earlier would have circulated in the oral mode—*barahmasa* and other songbooks, and *qissa* printed in both Urdu and Nagari scripts. Two long-running serialised publications, both ‘big hits’, Pandit Ratannath Dar Sarshar’s *Fasana-e Azad* in Urdu and Devikinandan Khatri’s *Chandrakanta* in Hindi, are then taken up for detailed study.

Both these works, Orsini writes, ‘subordinated ideas of social reform [the mainstay of canonical texts of the time] to a combination of pleasures and aesthetics: the older pleasures and aesthetics connected to tales and poetry and the new pleasures...suspense, uncertainty regarding character and plot, verisimilitude of setting and character’ (p. 162) associated with the novel. Episodes of *Fasana-e Azad* appeared, first daily and then weekly between 1878 and 1885 in *Avadh Akhbar*, the Lucknow-based Urdu newspaper edited by Sarshar himself, a Kashmiri pandit from a family that had relocated to Lucknow. Accompanying each episode was a discussion of plot, character and literary form in which Sarshar began with readers’ questions and responses, and went on to comment on the art of fiction. Most readers were forthright and quite specific about what they liked, disliked or wished for and many appreciated his ability to realistically depict life in the inner world of a Muslim family. Indeed it would seem that realism—or as Sarshar put it, ‘Nechar [nature]-nechar- nechar’ (p. 184)—was the principal new pleasure on offer in these narratives. And as the author, who took pride in the richness of his detailing, pointed out, ‘neither prose nor verse, neither story nor *masnavi*’ (p. 184) could offer *nechar* in similar measure.

The serial turned out to be something of a communal experience, with families, groups of friends and even fellow travellers in a railway compartment getting together to read or listen to and discuss each episode in the hero’s adventures. The story set in an elite and cultured Muslim world managed to build up a whole new and intense relationship between author, narrator, characters and readers, Orsini points out. Disappointingly,

however, the study remains a rich ‘description’ and does venture to develop the concepts or draw on frameworks that would help us capture a sense of the meaning or historical significance of this new intensity or of popular reading itself.

When *Chandrakanta* was first published in four parts between 1887 and 1891 from Banaras, it met with overwhelming popular acclaim. Khatri soon started his own monthly fiction magazine *Upanyas Lahari* in which the story continued until the 24th and final (for the time being) part appeared in 1905. *Chandrakanta* was written in the Nagari script in a studiously non-literary—in other words, non-Sanskritised—prose that was close to the spoken form and its familiar Persian/Urdu vocabulary. His Hindi, he said, contrasting it to that of towering canonical figures such as Bharatendu Harishchandra, was such that ‘one does not need to reach for the dictionary in order to read it’ (p. 224). So popular was this serial, we learn, that scores of men and women learnt the Devanagiri script to read it. The fantastic plots and stock characters clearly signal the Urdu *dastan* as source. This affiliation includes the use of the *ayyar*, a character described in the glossary as ‘spy with almost magical skills of disguise; the prince’s companion in a *dastan*’ (p. 279), clearly something like the hero’s ‘sidekick’ in a present day Rajnikant or Chiranjeevi film. Orsini describes Khatri as ‘Indianizing and Hinduizing’ the *dastan*. In addition, she says, the account ‘made characters and adventures that existed only in the imagination move closer to the world of the everyday. The result was not a “realistic” novel but the thrilling possibility of imagining oneself as part of that wonderful world’ (p. 205).

A final chapter discusses the early 20th century rise of the *jasusi upanyas* or detective novel. Though this was a new genre in Hindi–Urdu (as indeed it was in the European languages), both in its suspense-structured narrative and in the scientific rationality, it points to earlier strands of logical deduction and divination, Orsini argues. If we go by the example of the Sherlock Holmes type observation that ‘a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right’ (p. 239), we would need to acknowledge Amir Khusrau, the author of that example of observation and deduction, as one of the progenitors of the genre of detective fiction! And for Sherlock himself, we should not be surprised to find genetic stock that traces him back to the *ayyar*. Two other themes run richly through

the weave of the argument—women readers (but not writers) and the Hindi–Urdu question.

Orsini's method is resolutely that of the realist historian. She tells a story and the narrative is based on a thick accumulation of facts and backed by detailed documentation. It is a method that manages to straddle history, anthropology, Hindi and Urdu literary studies and what today might be termed media studies, with equipoise. I cannot remember a page without a footnote and recall many with three or four. A student may not need to look elsewhere to fill out her bibliography of British and American work in the area. However, a difficulty with such realism is that it takes too much for granted and glosses over the questions that lead us beyond the identifiable, touchable–countable, physical object to open out 'formations' such as the popularity, pleasure or entertainment. The classical literary critical method used here—of providing some contextual information about author or location and then concentrating on the story—leaves unaddressed questions such as: Who were these readers? Were they urban? Or rural? What class or caste were these 'neo-literates'? If the songbooks replaced performers such as the *domini*, what can we take that to signify? Is this process in any way similar to what happens with Bharata Natayam, the Khayal or the vaishnav women of Bengal? At the end of this rich book, one is still hungering for some 'conceptualisation' of popularity, pleasure and entertainment in colonial India.

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