Listening To The Song Of Singamma
Shefali Jha

Interpreting ‘Doubleness’
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Of Urban Planning and Capitalist Transformation
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Life-Telling in New Terms
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A Roadmap For Reforms
Sarthak Bagchi

Efficacy of Quotas
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Enclosures and boundaries have a conflicted meaning for women. Enclosures are often not safe spaces for them and women have to constantly resist boundaries in order to live their lives. The book under review looks at how conventional Tamil symbols—unbroken enclosures like bangles, pots, wedding halls, the kolam or doorstep design—signifying auspiciousness (p. 104), are reinterpreted in the songs of Tamil Paraiyar women as signs of deprivation and restriction. How do Tamil Dalit women gain their insights into the real meaning of women’s lives? Trawick tells us the origin story of the Tamil goddess, Mariamman, a Brahman woman named Renuka Parameshwari, who in trying to escape her husband’s command to kill her, ran into a Dalit hut and clung to the Dalit woman living there. Her axe wielding son beheaded both women; when he was granted a boon for obeying his father, he asked for his mother back; the Brahman woman was reborn with a Dalit body and the Dalit woman with a Brahman body (p. 40). Is this story trying to tell us that in patriarchal societies, all women share a caste, irrespective of their class and actual caste status? It is this status of domination, experienced similarly by all women, that Dalit women in Tamil Nadu lament in their songs.

Trawick’s book seeks to make us enter the world of Dalit castes and Adivasi groups in Tamil Nadu through the songs sung by their women. The book describes and analyses the ‘crying’ songs, and the work and love songs of the Paraiyars, the stories of the Arunthathiyars, and the ‘song of Singamma’ of the Kuravars. Many Arunthathiyars or Chakkiliyars still have to work as manual scavengers, the Paraiyars are predominantly agricultural labourers, and the Kuravars, like the Irulans/Villiyars belong to the Scheduled Tribes. Trawick argues that through their songs, the illiterate women of these groups give us knowledge not only of their world, but also of how our world is structured.

Trawick, who was trained in linguistic anthropology, has spent more than twenty years doing field work in southern India (for this book, from 1975 to 1991) and in Sri Lanka. Her rich ethnography of the verbal art of oppressed communities in Tamil Nadu, enables her to illuminate their world to us. This Indian world contains enormous and unnecessary poverty and is marked by exclusion. The women from these excluded groups of Hindu society sing not only of being barred from shops and temples, but also of their own promise which is allowed to go waste. They sing that they are like ‘clusters and clusters of eggplants,...With no one to join and embrace us, We poor girls rot with the plant’ (p. 96). Faced with constant denigration and condescension—they are poor, dirty, uneducated, rough, worthless—these women still create a world with their songs in which they are not mere objects to be looked at, but are also subjects who look back at those gazng at them. As Trawick puts it, ‘When you look at another person, they in turn look at you...One must recognize that other person to be, like oneself, not just an object in the environment but a maker, a builder of it, someone for whom creation may be even more important than survival’ (p. 164).

If the lower castes face the brunt of oppression, the women of these castes can be seen as the most oppressed. They express their pain and suffering in their songs; but a song is more than a cry of pain. It presents us with layers of meanings. The ‘crying’ songs or laments traditionally sung by Paraiyar women at the death of an upper caste person or about the mother (‘O mother who bore me’, p. 78) or elder brother leaving or abandoning the younger daughter/younger sister. Trawick interprets these songs as indirectly protesting the maltreatment of the upper castes: ‘some nonliterate female rural members of the Paraiyar caste question not only their status in the social hierarchy but some of the assumptions upon which that hierarchy is based...the abandoned younger sister becomes metaphorically linked with the untouchable woman...’ (p. 111) The songs that Paraiyar agricultural workers sing while doing hard physical labour—weeding fields, lifting loads, building roads—also contain an implicit criticism of their situation.

Trawick uses her encounter with Sevi and her ‘song of Singamma’ to give us another example of the creative response of lower caste women to their oppression. Sevi is a married Paraiyar woman who sings about Singamma, a young girl belonging to the community of the Kuravars. The Kuravars, originally forest dwellers, are now seen as wandering gypsies who hunt crows, and sell birds and trinkets to fairs; they are looked down upon even by the ‘untouchable’ Paraiyars. Singamma of Melur was a Narikuravar girl ‘who was gang raped when she went out to the market, then murdered by her brothers to protect the honour of their caste. Her body was cut into pieces and buried in the floor of their hut. Singamma returned as a ghost, demanding honour for herself as well. A shrine was built for her near the place she was killed’ (p. 195).

In Hindu society, are Dalits and women seen as leftovers, remainders to be cast away, not really part of the whole, things to be discarded? A leftover, a remainder must be kept in its place. When women forget their place, when they transgress their boundaries, by thinking an unbidden thought or taking a forbidden step, they are punished egregiously. In both the Mariamman and the Singamma stories, when doubts about the chastity and the purity of the women concerned arise, they are themselves held guilty of the transgression and punished severely by death. Trawick offers us this interpretation of the story: ‘the Singamma story, like other Indian tales of apotheosis, moves through tragedy to triumph and ends with a powerful woman renouncing dependency: rising from defilement, death and corrosion, and standing at last as a deity, defiantly alone’ (p. 197)

Listening To The Song Of Singamma
Shefali Jha

DEATH, BEAUTY, STRUGGLE: UNTOUCHABLE WOMEN CREATE THE WORLD
By Margaret Trawick
University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2017, pp.304, $69.95
Trawick’s book seeks to make us enter the world of Dalit castes and Adivasi groups in Tamil Nadu through the songs sung by their women.

For Trawick, both Sarasvati, the Paraiyar woman who becomes a medium for the goddess Mariamman, as well as Singamma, represent a rejection by Dalit and Adivasi women of the ideal of perfect Tamil married womanhood in the name of freedom. Mariamman and Singamma have low caste associations, yet they are worshipped by numerous upper caste and middle class women; is this perhaps because these figures represent a critique of the patriarchal status quo? Trawick has certainly done us a service by collecting, writing about, and showing us the value of the songs sung by low caste women in Tamil Nadu.

However, to turn a figure treated with extreme injustice into a goddess, a goddess who is seen as powerful and who is worshipped and supplicated so that she looks with favour at her believers—does Trawick think that is a kind of compensation for how women are actually treated, or that the turning of these persecuted women into goddess figures is a creative strike by Dalit women against their actual condition? To discover beauty and struggle in the face of death—is that how one should try to escape the meaningless death of particular lower caste women, or is one to see these songs of Tamil women from oppressed groups as part of the political protest against caste and gender based injustice? These are some questions that the rich ethnography of this book leaves us with.

Shefali Jha is Chairperson, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences II, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

**Book News**

Gender, Caste and the Imagination of Equality edited by Anupama Rao is a sequel to the influential volume, Gender & Caste: Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism (2003). It explores the changed terrain of discussion, and examines how religion, political and economic relations, and debates about sexuality and the politics of representation have reshaped the caste question in contemporary public life.

Women Unlimited, 2018, pp. 350, ₹990.00

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**Practice of Karo-Kari**

Mahuya Bandyopadhyay

HONOUR UNMASKED: GENDER VIOLENCE, LAW AND POWER IN PAKISTAN

By Nafisa Shah

Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2017. pp.390, PKR 1150.00

Honour as the bedrock of family life and values is a familiar and well-researched idea in the literature on gender, family and kinship in South Asia. Honour Unmasked, while locating itself within this terrain makes a significant contribution to the field for the following three reasons. First, it is valuable for the site and context of study, as ethnographic work on gender and power in Pakistani society is relatively limited. It is also significant for the complex methodological terrain that the author traverses, owing to her multiple identities as she gathered information and data about honour and violence in Pakistani society, and the inherent difficulties of researching a context that is otherwise silenced and hidden. Finally, the work is particularly noteworthy for the careful and ethnographically embedded ways in which it draws out connections between the intimate and private spheres of people’s lives and the domain of public life in Pakistani society.

Conceptually, the ethnographic material would have benefited from a perusal of Das’s notion of honour in her essay on Punjabi kinship (Das 1976). Here Das argues that honour in the family is maintained and practised by the sacrifice of the bonds created through the transmission of natural bodily substances, namely blood and semen. While the former is transmitted through childbirth, the latter is passed on through copulation. Both these implicate the ties of family and marriage. The sacrifice of these bonds through blood and semen are often at the heart of practices of maintaining honour. The ethnographic articulation of honour and the notions of ghairat (defensive honour) would certainly gain a conceptual edge by taking into account similar articulations of this notion.

The book provides powerful evidence to debunk the notion that modern societies rely on incarceration and the penal system to uphold the legal and moral codes of society and to fulfil the functions of detention, retribution and reform about transgressions of these codes. In a thorough documentation of the practice of karo-kari, i.e., the sanction of death and eviction against blackened men and women—those accused of sexual transgressions, the author shows us the intricate connections between honour violence, law, power and the state in the Upper Sindh area of Pakistan.

In doing so the author also reworks the tradition-modernity dichotomy, unravelling how the traditional practice of karo-kari is reshaped by forces of modernity and modern institutions. This also has broader implications for the domain of the ethnography of the state, to see how the state comes to be embedded in the everyday lives of its people. The legal system and the space of law is revealed through karo-kari as an incoherent system, full of the contradictions of the workings of a colonial legal framework, resistance to it, and the interweaving of religion, custom and customary law. All these appear like tectonic plates, at times super-imposed, or undergoing subduction; or colliding to create strong effects on everyday life in society.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first, the author describes the phenomenon of karo-kari and shows its linkages to notions of honour, law and moral power. Honour is strategy. Women become black not necessarily because of their sexual and social transgressions, but because of the actions of men and women who brand them as kari and inflict the punishment of death or eviction on them. Honour in this strategizing and the witnessing of transgression is paradoxically, then only known through its aftermath. In this section, the author also provides the historical, colonial and legal context within which the ethnographic data is based. This is enabling
Bewitchingly Beguiling

Simi Malhotra

THE WITCH: A HISTORY OF FEAR, FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE PRESENT
By Ronald Hutton
Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017, pp. xvi+ 360, $ 30.00

The book provides powerful evidence to debunk the notion that modern societies rely on incarceration and the penal system to uphold the legal and moral codes of society and to fulfil the functions of detention, retribution and reform about transgressions of these codes."

for the book, as it articulates the shared dialectical history of custom and law and reveals the larger processes that construct and change custom and law, thereby shaping everyday practice. In the second section, the book deals with specific examples of karokari violence and shows how these are embedded within the law and legal processes and resonate with it. The collisions within the family and that of the family, legal institutions and the state are thus revealed. In the final section, the author is concerned with the normalization of violence in people’s everyday worlds in Upper Sindh, arguing that justice is constituted both through community practices and state procedure. While the entire book is about expressing that which is silenced, the book ends with a resolute articulation of women’s trajectories in karokari and in the contexts of marriages of choice and elopement.

Honour Unmasked is valuable as it encompasses important methodological lessons for the study of aspects that are silenced in society. How can ethnography uncover these aspects and what kinds of anthropological language can ethnographers access to voice that which is silenced? While the book does well to relate to anthropological traditions, unfortunately it is unable to dwell on the complexities of applying the ethnographic method to the study of honour and violence. Further, the ethnographer dons many hats, such as those of researcher, activist and politician; and the ways in which the stories of power and the workings of violence are unravelled are not bereft of the politics of these identities and their selective articulation. These would significantly alter the tone and tenor of this work.

Reference:

Mahuya Bandyopadhyay teaches Sociology at the School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

The book provides powerful evidence to debunk the notion that modern societies rely on incarceration and the penal system to uphold the legal and moral codes of society and to fulfil the functions of detention, retribution and reform about transgressions of these codes."

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Reference:

Mahuya Bandyopadhyay teaches Sociology at the School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.
“Who a witch is has been a subject matter of much debate among scholars of different hues for several decades, with some scholars examining its social and political aspects, and some others dealing with its more anthropological and folkloric elements. Hutton though begins his book with a somewhat simple definition of a witch as ‘one who causes harm to others by mystical means’.

having rejected God and Christian faith and how they got condemned as Devil-worshippers is an interesting exploration that Hutton takes up in this section. The outlawing of divination and magic by the Church spurred witch hunts in Europe in early fifteenth century, and in the late sixteenth century Protestants specifically targeted magic and helped popularize the belief of witches as serving Satan. It is only after that, that witch hunts became commonplace, having got entangled with social and religious strife in Europe, especially in the aftermath of the crisis in post-Reformation Christianity.

Witches, according to Hutton, also remain ‘one of the very few embodiments of female power that traditional western culture has bequeathed to the present’ and it is hardly a wonder that they were seen as unruly and a threat to the community. Witch-hunts, according to Hutton, emerged out of a resultant discourse that surrounded the disruptive figure of the witch, where thousands, mostly women but also men, were put to death for apparently conspiring with the devil. The ‘harm’ invoked by witches was always thought to be personal, often aimed towards neighbours, and consequently they were suitably punished for it.

Hutton’s book makes one wonder though if the practice of witch-hunting is based on some universal archetype. For instance, he refers to instances of witch hunts in India, South Africa and Congo, among several other diverse spaces, in the same breath. Universal archetype or not, witches can certainly be seen to help express a whole gamut of anxieties and fears and have for that reason become a ready subject matter of myriad myths and legends.

Performance, Affect and Politics

Navaneetha Mokkil

PERFORMANCE AND THE POLITICAL: POWER AND PLEASURE IN CONTEMPORARY KERALA

By Ameet Parameswaran

Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 248, ₹795.00

Performance and the Political uses five critical modes—vision, voice, gestural, machinic and animality—to address questions that are intimately linked to our present such as: what is the political? How do we engage with performative practices in which transgression is not mapped through the paradigms of agency and individualized resistance? Spanning the time period from Emergency to neoliberalism, Ameet Parameswaran’s book focuses on a wide range of performance practices such as theatre, poetry, and other popular forms such as Kathapraangam (this form usually involves a single storyteller narrating a story interwoven with songs and is performed at public gatherings and events) and ‘Mimics’ Parade’ (a performance form that uses humour and parody as its base and emerged as one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Kerala in the 1980s) to delineate the complex intertwining of the performative, the political and the affective. The meticulous and sustained attention to the dynamic workings and historical specificities of a range of cultural forms is definitely one of the most impressive feats of this book.

There is an insistence in this book that we need to look at performances as thoroughly localized. Parameswaran argues that we need to examine how performances reconstitute the affective realm of the region and thereby the region itself. He handles in a nuanced fashion the difficult task of conceptualizing and engaging with the contours of the regional and translating its tonalities for a wider audience. For example, in the analysis of Sambasivan’s highly controversial Kathapraangam performance during the Emergency, Irupataam Noortrandu (Twentieth Century), based on a Bengali novel by Bimal Mitra, Parameswaran draws our attention to the statement ‘Calcutta city is a sugar candy, for me, to savour’ by Kunti Guha (the central character of the performance) who moves unmoored through the disjunctured spaces of the city. Parameswaran observes that Sambasivan uses the term ‘kalkandakani’ (p. 139)
There is an insistence in this book that we need to look at performances as thoroughly localized. Parameswaran argues that we need to examine how performances reconstitute the affective realm of the region and thereby the region itself.

(sugar candy) to point towards how ordinary objects and acts—in this case, the cheap, yet lingering pleasure of sucking on rock sugar—become a gesture towards an elsewhere. It captures the tantalizing entanglement of pleasure and violence in urban spaces. The author focuses on the process of translation and draws attention to how verbal expressions can trigger embodied memories of sensory acts thus casting the regional as a ‘performing archive’ (p. 141)—a live and shifting structure of modulation of affect that undoes the dominant tendency in academic studies to frame the regional as a static and bounded space.

This is one of the first books in the field of Performance Studies in India that offers a sustained and insightful engagement with theories of affect. Parameswaran embeds the reader in the body of scholarship on affect theory and develops this field in new directions. We encounter the affective here as multivalent; it is not in any way intrinsically harnessed to modes of resistance. The author interrogates the relationship between affect and power and demonstrates how power works by inducing and modulating affect rather than by regulating it. This in turn troubles the paradigms of visibility and voicing—the political cannot be understood within the binary paradigms of speech and silence, visibility and invisibility. Rather, he suggests that we need to pay close attention to the ways in which vision and voice are orchestrated for differing ends. In chapter 2 he analyses how in the statist framing of Naxalites the spectacular is used as a way of producing clarity—for example, the photograph of a handprint in blood is linked to the young Naxalite Ajitha in 1968 to expose and concretize her as a terrifying figure. In the face of this statist ordering of terror via the field of vision, Parameswaran analyses how poetry, speech—acts and theatre that question this totalitarian regime compel us to ‘see’ through the spectacular. Thus his analysis is not fixated on what is shown or revealed but on how the specular domain is deployed to channel the affect of terror in different ways. Similarly in his analysis of the voicing strategy used by theatrical performances of the Janteeya Samskarika Vedi (People’s Cultural Forum) and the powerful poetry recitals by Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan in 1970s and 1980s he interrogates the problematic of cultural forms that deploy the auralic voice by drawing on the domain of the ritual. He points to the problem of reading the public recitals of Kadammanitta’s Kuratti (Tribal Danese 1976) as stirring the listener and producing an instant collectivity purely because of its ritualistic excess. He argues that the ambiguity and power of the ‘passionate voice’ does not nestle in the affirmation of Utopic collectivity (p. 63); rather the tenor and tone of the play of voices activate modes of hopelessness and unbelonging, dislodge voice from logos, and cross-fertilize the tragic and the playful in order to register a democratic impulse.

Thus, one of the central questions in the book is how we conceptualize and locate the impulse or potentiality of transgression. Parameswaran reminds us of the dangers of conceptions of unfettered resistance and an absolute letting-go of the history of disciplining that does not allow us to address how the subject participates in authoritarian structures. Any fullness of voicing, seeing and acting, such as the figure of the ideal Kerala woman or the figure of the dangerous Naxalite, which accentuates a singular affect, becomes an instrument for identification that contributes to regional and national projects of consolidation. In sharp contrast to this, performances that embody the democratic impulse straddle the risky terrain of disjuncture and failure.

All the chapters in the book make us aware of the fragility and persistence of visions of another order. We are dislodged from the familiar edifices of agency and resistance through figurations that move between possibility and impossibility, failure and hope, and presence and absence. The power of the book lies in the care and attention with which Parameswaran traces this ‘corporeal, frantic movement’ (p. 54). Resistance does not appear here as a straight line of progression or a traceable arc; rather it is the gag in language and the failed acts (for example, a tragic act that turns comic) that point to possibilities of disruption that may not get reified. The gestural mode becomes an important site of the political in this book because of ‘the centrality of mediality in gesture, wherein one can go beyond the binary of means and ends’ (p. 101). The act of bringing alive the possibility of transformation through performance practices cannot be teleological—it has all the risks of life itself; of violence and pleasure coexisting on the same thin line. To quote from Parameswaran’s postscript that brings him to the here and now of political struggles in JNU: ‘the political emerges under the condition where one is simultaneously caught in something on which s/he does not exercise any agency and yet in which s/he is actively (or indeed, passionately) invested’ (p. 219). It is this passionate investment that this book seeks to understand and that is why it speaks to the predicament of our times.

I now put forward two sets of questions that can further complicate the terrains of investigation opened up by the book: The fifth chapter offers a gender critique by drawing out the complex intersection between gender and the animal as played out through the body of the Japanese actress Mikari as an elephant in the play Sahyande Makan: The Elephant Project (2008). Parameswaran engages with how the kinaesthetics of this performance can be unpacked only via discourses of femininity, masculinity and the animal in the region. In the discussion of John Abraham’s film Amma Ariyan (1986) Parameswaran observes that ‘habituated gender practices’ are evoked in the film ‘both for their force and their tremendous limits’ (p. 116). It would be productive to think further about how a staging of these limits shape the performative worlds that we encounter in all these cultural practices in which the authorial function rests primarily on men even though the performing bodies are often feminine. How and why is gender central to this project of affective politics? Do these practices dislodge structures of gender even as they operate via available registers of gender?

What is the position of the scholar or the intellectual in this public world of affect, performance and politics? What are the links between the political, the affective and academic writing? In academic writing, instead of aiming for full exposure and clarity, how do we retain the capacity to stay with staggered processes of becoming?

Navneetha Moikkil is Assistant Professor at the Center for Women’s Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Evil in the Mahabharata by Meena Arora Nayak analyses how the values espoused in the Mahabharata came to be distorted into meagre archetypes, creating customary laws that injure society even today.

Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 376, ₹650.00
Akhil Katyal deals with a subject that has been researched upon recently. Bringing socio-psychological identities and religious identities together in the same research needs courage, especially in the contemporary political ambience in the country. The blurb hints at certain exciting debates, Katyal unveils much more than that.

The book not only encompasses ‘doubleness’ of socio-cultural phenomenon, but also political activism about same-sex population that queer people envelope themselves into. He furthermore extends it to political activism with his own queer theories of interpretation of ‘doubleness’.

The Introduction describes the intersectionality of socio-psychological, socio-cultural and socio-political identities. The historicity of terminologies for same-sex identities has been explained well, with reference to several theorists. Interestingly, Katyal uses his own idiomatic terms to specify subtle differences of same-sex desires, for example, a few explicit sexual idioms, a few ‘civil’ idioms, legal idioms, and virtual idioms. He intersects these idioms with the prevailing trends and contemporary queer activism. The intersections are filled with literary authors to social scientists, critiques to activists, for instance, Chughtai to Chevers, Maya Sharma to Dave, he includes them all. The contribution of queer collective, ‘the Nigah’ has also been mentioned in detail.

The following chapter explains the paradigmatic structure of sexual hierarchical patriarchy. The freedom of being man and choosing to be sexually active has been critiqued through this chapter. His explanation of the power structure of sex is well-defined and critically analysed. Katyal uses illustrations to validate his point of view on laundebaazi, which he explains as a socio-cultural norm of playing amongst boys and their acceptability is widely considered as normative. His reference to Cohen’s philosophy correlates with his own argument of contemporary scenario as a socio-political culture of masti, where the duality is explicitly through the subtlety of ‘intimacy and rape, hierarchy and equality, violence and consent, dependency and freedom’. Male friendship is described as harsh as the infliction of sadism either with force or with willingness, and bromance seems more avid amidst emotional intimacy. According to Katyal, it has been reduced to effeminacy and anal penetration and thus, recites the historicity of gays as gaandu and cbhakka, thus, establishing the scenario of same-sex desires.

The chapter that follows analyses the activism of same-sex men in this democratic independent country. At the beginning of the chapter, there is an emphasis on explanation of sexuality from theorists, mainly Bristow. The chapter builds on the historiography of policy and plans on AIDS and the germination of activism. The widespread upsurge to eradicate AIDS under the national policy and the participation of society through the facilitators and moderators, and queer activists, for awareness and sensitization. This phenomenon changes the idioms for same-sex desires at a different level. Katyal doesn’t hesitate to term this kind of activism as political and ‘doubleness in action’.

The following chapter is focused mainly on gay writings from India, regarding same-sex population. Katyal critiques the whole notion that gay writings can only be by gay writers.

Katyal questions the duality of this creative genre of expression, where the autoethnographical characteristics are more vehement than just a creative art; taking examples of Agha Shahid Ali, Hoshang Merchant, Gyansingh Shatir and Vikram Seth. He further critically analyses the banal crudity of the politics of publishing houses as a ‘marketing gamble’.

The concluding chapter is based on the terminology and doubleness of ideological politicking of the queer collectives. Katyal elucidates how the mere abbreviation usage of same-sex population changed to today’s form of queer. He lays out the history of terminology of LGBTHIK to LGBT to queer. Critiquing this whole idea of idiomatic development as doubleness of queer politics, Katyal justifies the title of his book as apt and deciphers each of the words of the title through detailed descriptions and analysis in every page of every chapter.

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Of Urban Planning and Capitalist Transformation

Raphael Susewind

ACCUMULATION BY SEGREGATION: MUSLIM LOCALITIES IN DELHI
By Ghazala Jamil
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 244, ₹750.00

Muslim life in urban India has attracted fresh attention since the publication of the Sachar Report a good decade ago. The subsequent debate has gone through three distinct stages.

Initial scholarship, including the report itself, outlined and quantified the extent of Muslim disadvantage with a broad brush. It demonstrated violent exclusion over decades; the associated deprivation in health, employment, housing, and other material indicators of development; and the symbolic marginalization of Muslims in the emerging middle-class narrative of ‘Shining India’.

Roughly five years later, Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot published Muslims in Indian Cities, a groundbreaking volume that added a decidedly spatial dimension to the debate and at the same time unpacked the generic post-Sachar picture into multiple distinct trajectories of marginalization. Not every segregated Muslim space in urban India is a ‘ghetto’, nor every demographic concentration is the outcome of communal violence, and the story of former princely seats of power like Lucknow or Bhopal can be quite different from that of declining working class cities like Ahmedabad or Bombay—or so the argument went.

Subsequent literature continued to open up a panorama of diversity among Muslim Indians that has long been overlooked. Younger authors like Raheel Dhattiwala, Sandrien Verstappen or myself took the opportunity to analyse Muslim residential clustering from alternative vantage points, without necessarily assuming that the Sachar Report’s bleak outlook applies equally everywhere, and without assuming that all and everything can be explained by communal violence.

With Accumulation by Segregation, Ghazala Jamil sets the next milestone. Her book builds upon the first two stages in the debate—and then transcends them. Jamil looks at five different Muslim localities within Delhi—Shahjananabad, Seelampur, Jamia Nagar, Nizamuddin and Taj Enclave—but her book, unlike the work of Gayer and Jaffrelot, is not a typology.

Instead, Jamil moves the analysis one step further by embedding all five localities in wider debates on urban planning and capitalist transformation. Her book has three broad sections of two main chapters each. The first section recounts the previous two stages of the debate outlined above: the story of exclusion that came out of the Sachar report, and the story of diversity that followed the publication of Muslims in Indian Cities. In these chapters, Jamil already consciously avoids simply following either take, though, emphasizing nuance but resisting the temptation to simply typologize. She also sets out her theoretical framework, inspired by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt variety.

The second section develops her core argument, demonstrating how all types of segregation—from the depressed ‘slum’ through to the privileged ‘enclave’—feed on the same wider processes of capitalist globalization, material in essence but mediated and made powerful through discourse. Reconfigured labour markets—a key driver of segregation in ‘slums’—are not the same as real estate markets—of essence in ‘enclaves’. The lived realities in these different spaces is also clearly different, as is the ability of residents to make choices, to be secure, to prosper and progress—something that becomes very obvious in the last section of her book, as well as the hopeful (against all odds) conclusion.

What sets Jamil’s analysis apart, and what makes it such an important contribution to the literature on Muslim segregation in India, is that she demonstrates how the internal differentiation that we increasingly recognize is itself a product of, and contributes to, wider capitalist processes.

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Life-Telling in New Terms

Anne Murphy

PIRO AND THE GULABDASIS: GENDER, SECT AND SOCIETY IN PUNJAB
By Anshu Malhotra
Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 408, ₹995.00

This masterly new work by Delhi University historian Anshu Malhotra enlivens the study of religion, gender, and caste in late colonial Punjab, with compelling explorations of post-Partition religious and cultural forms. The centre of her study is Piro (d. 1872), a female devotee of a nineteenth century guru named Gulabdas (1809-1873), who led a sect that came to be known by his name: the Gulabdasis. The work which will be accessible to and valued by scholars in colonial history, postcolonial studies, religious studies, and gender studies, as well as far beyond these. It provides both a detailed and textured account of Piro and her work in the context of the Gulabdasi community ( chapters 1-5) as well as a multi-faceted exploration of the significance and legacy of the community in various contexts both within the colonial period (through an account of the Lahore Singh Sabha, the cusp of the emergence of the dynamic print culture we associate with the late nineteenth century, allowing a fuller understanding, in comparative terms, of the transformations associated with this period (p.12).

As she shows, we face in our understanding of Gulabdas the problem of how people then, and today, came to terms with the sexual mores associated with him; particularly through his association with a former sex worker turned devotee, and then further partner to a guru. Piro represented in many ways a dramatically unconventional life; at the same time, Malhotra shows us, she reveals much about conventional roles and expectations for women, and the kinds of possibilities offered by religious subjectivities in this period of great social change. Also revealing of both that time and ours is the trouble that people have had in the past and in the present in coming to terms with this exceptional, and yet normal, woman, and her role in the Gulabdasi sect (p. xviii).

Malhotra explores in her first chapter the two different representations of Guru Gulabdas that prevail: as a visionary and literary savant ‘steeped in the best traditions of Vedantic thought and bhakti ideas’ (p. 47), as well as Sufi ideas (p. 51) and as a rebellious and unconventional leader of a small, dissenting religious community. The same combination of elements is visible in the works of Piro herself (p.135), representing a quest for the ‘theological equivalences’ that undergird questions of religious self-formation (p.157 ff. and elsewhere).

Malhotra provides a compelling account of advaita ideas and their circulation, a crucial element of early modern and early colonial modern religiosity that as a whole invites further exploration (p.10 ff.), providing an ‘on the ground view’ of advaita religiosity that is all too often lacking in our understanding of religious philosophies and their ‘popular’ lives (p.11, pp.19-20, p.39 ff., elsewhere). She also provides a sense of literary production at the cusp of the emergence of the dynamic print culture we associate with the late nineteenth century, allowing a fuller understanding, in comparative terms, of the transformations associated with this period (p.12).

As she shows, we face in our understanding of Gulabdas the problem of how people then, and today, came to terms with the sexual mores associated with him, particularly through his association with a former sex worker (pp. 29-34). While citing the parallel case of Wazir Singh, Malhotra notes that ‘it was the social challenge that radical caste-denying sects, with their praxis that probably attempted to reframe gender relations as well... which ranked among the orthodox and the custodians of the status quo, that led to their denunciation’ (p. 35). One can see a similar tension around caste.

Second to fifth chapters provide a richly textured close reading of Piro’s compositions, considering the form of autobiography as a whole and the ways that narrativization functions to shape the unfolding of the autobiographical process. Malhotra details the techniques Piro used to assert her voice, taking on the experience of other women devotees and heroes (and the models bhakti provides), and the narrative employment associated with figures such as Hir of the famous tale Hir-Ranjha, Sita, and bhakti figures, in general and in specific, such as Kabir and Mira (p.xxviii, p. xliii, p.73, p.84 ff., p.127 ff., p.140 ff.). These can be seen as part of the way ‘Piro ‘fixes’ her story with people, places and topographical indicators in some sort of reality’ (p. 66), as well as a complex form of agency, as explored in chapter 5, through the invocation of prior forms (p. 187ff.). The agency of the guru must also be factored into this, as Malhotra shows. In this way, and many others, she invites us to consider in new ways how the autobiographical functions, and how a life story comes to function within and out of multiple registers. Distinctively premodern in form, language, and rhetorical make-up (p.71), Malhotra convincingly argues, Piro’s work in the nineteenth century offers an invaluable opportunity to understand life-telling in new terms. Chapter 3 also invites consideration of the thorny question of religious identity and conversion, exploring the ways Piro both ‘plays up the Hindu/Muslim imbroglio and telling her story’ while simultaneously rejecting ‘formalist Hindu/Muslim religious identity, clearly stating that her guru is above the limits set by such identities’ (p. 96). We return to important questions around religious identity in the final substantial chapter of the book when the author considers the Gulabdas community today.

Most importantly, the book represents an extended meditation on gender, demanding that we consider, ‘What did it mean to be a prostitute, a possible concubine, and a vulnerable woman who had little control over her life, whose sexual favours and access to her person could be bought?’
The third part of the book, comprising chapters six, seven and eight, extends this exploration of Gulabdas, Piro and their world to explore their broader implications and later iterations. The chapter on Giani Ditt Singh is particularly deep and evocative, drawing out the complicated ideas and practices that shaped this later (after his time as a Gulabdasi) important Singh Sabha thinker and activist. Malhotra describes Singh’s (to use his later appellation) ‘marked ambivalence on caste’ (p. 202), where he maintains the frame of it at the same time that he undermines it. She describes how Ditt Singh became involved ‘with the Arya Samaj and the new politics that came in its wake’ (p. 214), perhaps because of the increasing marginalization of the Gulabdas community and their practices and rhetoric of inclusion in a more religiously agonistic public sphere (p. 217); her discussion of Ditt Singh reveals his strong resonances with his contemporary, Bhai Vir Singh: he was comfortable ‘with the literary and pluralistic cultures of precolonial Punjab’ (p. 222) even as he sought clear definitions, with a strong attachment to the miraculous resonances of initiation into the Khalsa (pp. 231-3).

The ways that caste was reworked in this context have much to tell us about the persistent need to think through caste, to think beyond it. The following chapter explores modern theatrical renditions of Piro’s stories, allowing us to see how Piro has both been appropriated, valorized, and transformed, her story taking shape in different ways in the hands of different authors. Here the author grapples with questions of historical truth, and the ways in which the writing of any biography shapes the ‘story’ of a life to a logic other than its own (knowing that, as she has established earlier in the book, autobiography too has its own logic that is created as a thing, and cannot be seen as innocent or unconstructed).

In the final chapter, the author provides a powerful entry into the Gulabdas community today, revealing the complexity of its formations in India (away from the original centre of the community, which now lies in Pakistan). The telling of the story of Gulabdas, as well as Piro (as also shown in chapter 7), within this ongoing communal context takes on an altogether different form from the more literary renditions examined in chapter 7.

There is so much of value in this book, in some ways one is wishful for even more: each chapter is so rich that it almost functions independently; one feels the author could in just a few steps develop each chapter into a single monograph, such as on the Gulabdas as a sect today, and their uses of the past in the building of the present. But there is wisdom to the decision to put this together, compiling such richness in a single work; doing so provides a prism-like, multi-perspectival view on Piro and the Gulabdas tradition. One place where one does particularly want to know more is with regard to the caste formations of the Gulabdas community in the present; as Ajay Bhardwaj’s film Kite Mil ve Mahi (2005) shows so beautifully, the eclectic ‘syncretism’ identified by Malhotra at the tomb of Muhammad Shah, a disciple of Gulabdas, is very normal, indicative of a capacious lower caste religiosity at the intersection of numerous traditions (pp. 312-3). We see some discussion of this, but this tantalizing bit makes one desire for more (p. 318). The utilization of the very terms sought to be demolished by Piro (and by Ditt Singh, too) —castelessness through caste—is to be expected: a system of power imposes itself, and even rejection of it must be framed within its terms (p.134).

One question that remains in one’s mind, after reading the work, is the question of ‘Hindu’ identity itself, which is discussed throughout (from p.xxviii to the end). This, too, brings a host of questions for further thought. What is Virender Das’s relationship with explicitly Hinduizing regimes operative in the last two decades in India, and how does his formation of an openness to caste difference interact with such forces? If the goal is to understand, Malhotra argues, ‘Hinduism as its adherents believe it is’ (p. 315), one wonders if ‘popular Hinduism’ makes sense at all, as a category, at the comfortable intersection of so many traditions, as is visible in the comparable religious sites Bhardwaj highlights at the intersection of Dalit and Sufi practice.1 Cosmopolitan eclecticism seems integral to the Dalit experience of religiosity in Punjab today, suggesting possible fruitful comparison with Virender Das’s communities. This was even more so in the past.2 As I have described elsewhere in a volume Anshu Malhotra co-edited we can see in eighteenth century Punjabi Braj texts that express Sikh communal perspectives that Sikhs were contained within a sense of ‘Hindu’ in broad contrastive terms, at the same time that Sikh positions were representing a separate tradition alongside others that were portrayed as similarly distinct (some of which are now included under the umbrella term ‘Hindu’).3 The term, in such texts, seems to function akin to the term ‘gentile’ in the West, indicating what one is not, not what one is.4 Do we therefore need to think of Gulabdas and the Gulabdas as ‘Hindu’, at all? Or, are they positioned, in their own terms, as something else, Hindu perhaps only if a term is needed to say what they are not, but not what they are? As the author notes in her exploration of Gulabdas’s ideas, ‘he was inspired by, or perhaps even in touch with, a radical stream of thought that existed in Punjab, which across the divides of Hindu and Muslim communities agreed on the significance and the location of god/holy within the self’ (p. 49).5 Malhotra’s work has given us the ability to think critically about such intersections, and ask them in new ways; for this alongside everything else, is a masterly work.

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1. It was not until the formulation of the Gurdwara Act of 1925 and subsequent legislation that the term Dera, for example, came to designate non-Sikh sites; prior to that, the term was used far more broadly. See Anne Murphy *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Traditions* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

2. Anne Murphy ‘The garbals literature and the idea of “religion” in Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice’, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New York and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93-115. We do not to see this as a “capacious Hindu” identity, but instead an entirely different notion of “Hindu” from what we know of today, that is not a religious identity at all, but an indication of a contrast.

3. We can see this elsewhere, even though its significance is not entirely acknowledged: Lorenzen’s *Who Invented Hinduism?*, pp. 639-640.

4. I have explored a similar set of ideas, regarding the meeting points that should be our focus rather than the overarching categories that are contravened by these meeting points, in a forthcoming essay, ‘Sufis, Jogis, and the question of religious difference: Individualization in early modern Punjab through Waris Shah’s Hir’ for a multi-volume edited work that compiles research conducted in a multi-year project on religious individualization at the Max-Weber-Kolleg Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, Universität Erfurt (forthcoming).

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Making tea is an art and making a perfect cup—hold on, is there a universally accepted way of brewing tea? There is, if we believe, the International Standard Organization; but who cares! George Orwell liked it without sugar, Maulana Azad liked it without milk—he thought adding milk is a British innovation. Hamid Dabashi likes it only in transparent cups. Gandhi didn’t like it all. Kashmiris prefer it with salt and Tibetans like it with Yak butter.

There are a thousand ways of preparing tea and every preparation is heavily influenced by local culture and customs. How one prepares and drinks tea is an identity marker in an increasingly globalized world or this is what Jurgen Wasim Frembgen is suggesting in his travelogue *A Thousand Cups of Tea*. He takes us through a journey in which he presents the meaning of tea. Not just as a beverage but as a way of living from Morocco to Pakistan to India. Tea symbolizes a relationship.

Having studied the Muslim societies of the Indian subcontinent, West Asia and North Africa for over 35 years, Frembgen offers an intimate portrait of these regions. Sometimes the detail is so personal and unique that it is impossible to ignore Frembgen’s approach towards the people and cultures he is studying. Consider this: Frembgen provides an important insight on the medicinal folklore linked to food in Eastern societies (he insists on Muslim societies). According to this folklore, every food item is basically ‘hot’ or ‘cold.’ Understandably, these terms do not refer to temperatures but on the nutritional value of the item. However, this is a nuanced generalization as some foods can be regarded as hot even if they are low on calorie. Perhaps the right way to detect the ‘quality’ is to see its usage in a particular culture and how it affects the metabolism.

‘The human body must maintain a vital balance between these qualities’, is the thumb rule of this folklore. Tea, according to this folklore and depending upon where one is preparing it, is both hot and cold. Black tea is hot (with milk ‘hotter’) whereas green tea is cold. For Afghans, drinking green tea in summer keeps them cool whereas Indians or Pakistanis drink black tea in summer for the same purpose. ‘As the idiomatic saying goes, garmi garmi ko marti hai’—Heat kills the heat.

Even if this is mere folklore, anthropologists have studied how the medicinal value of tea sustained the Industrial Revolution at least in Britain and Japan. With the industrial revolution urban centers began to develop and soon turned crowded with appalling living conditions. Historically, as people congregated in large numbers they died of diseases and epidemics born out of polluted water and land. This restrained the size of the cities but with the introduction of tea in Britain, cities began to grow. The reason: people were drinking boiled water with a unique herb that had anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory qualities.

Coming back to the book, it explores the various ways in which tea is prepared, drunk and cherished and introduces the multiple tea cultures inadvertently shaped by the lifestyle of these people. In Morocco, the author tells us that locals prefer nana-shay—a sweet fragrant mint flavoured beverage—which is ‘more or less considered a staple food’ in the region. Shay is the Arabic word for tea. A fleeting look at the word and one recognizes that it is a derivative of *Chai*, the subcontinent equivalent of the standard Chinese (Mandarin) word for tea *Cha*. As Arabic script lacks the sound *cha*, Arabs had no other alternative but to compensate it with the sound *sha* deriving from the 13th alphabet of the Arabic language *shin*. The English word tea is itself a derivative of the Southeast dialect of Chinese language *te* or *tay*.

In Egypt, people drink *Karkadeh* with its fruit-like taste and every cup brewed separately. However, the tea culture of Egypt is incomplete without the numerous tea and coffee houses—familiar meeting places for politically active people. But then once upon a time these cafes were popular places for listening to music, reciting epics or folk tales from Arab mythology or stories from *Alif Laila*—the celebrated Arabic masterpiece *A Thousand and One Nights*. Or they simply acted as private literary salons for poets, writers and other artists. Even women, Frembgen notes, were ‘permitted to take part in the debates and listen to the poetry readings’.

Frembgen provides a sketch about how these cafes or teahouses are (were) sites for displaying ‘Western hedonism’ and enjoying the Orient; thus popular with western tourists or colonizers. But that also means that they have come under attack from Islamists.

The cafe culture dots much of the Arab World. Now acting as places for political and religious discussions, at some cafes occasionally a professional storyteller (*Hakawati*) will appear. For women these cafes have become places where they enjoy their little freedoms in a strict patriarchal society.

In the subcontinental literary and artistic milieu, there is a prominent place for India *Tea House* of the colonial era. Some of the finest writers are associated with it in both the countries but the book notes that due to the change in the social environment, the *Tea House* in Pakistan had to be closed for financial reasons. Any revival has led to fears of commercialization of the place but that has not stopped artists from finding new places—indeed on the internet.

For the common people in the subcontinent, *Dhaba* is the perfect place to nourish themselves with cups of tea. It is here that the book charts a new territory—nothing fascinates a reader more than detail. In the early pages, the author shows how tea is prepared in these little shops (or in some places *Dhabas*, that look like high-end restaurants, for example, the ones in Murthal, Haryana) to the way it is served and the trivia associated with these places. In urban spaces, the author notes that there are just ‘tea shops’. *Chai* is either served in glass cups or in clay cups with or without spices.

Adding spices is ubiquitous throughout South Asia and the Arab world but it is the...
Afghans who take it to a ‘high’ level by dissolving opium cubes into it. ‘Special teahouses, called saqikhanas, are dedicated exclusively to the consumption of these drugs.’ Saqi, perhaps the most used expression in Urdu poetry, means wine-provider. As one observer noted, ‘Wine with all its associations in Persian and Urdu ghazal poetry stands for the intoxicatedness that confronts and neutralizes the distractions generated by too much of rationality.’ And Saqi is that companion (beloved or even God) who helps you to achieve this tranquility. For the Sufis of Konya—the place of Rumi—mysticism means to taste the sweetness of tea by adding sugar, a foretaste of paradise.

As a rule tea is also associated with hospitality throughout the East. While visiting different places Frembgen points out the different ways in which people in these regions extend their hospitality to the guest. This is no surprise for in this part of the world god comes in the form of a guest. The book also displays tea cultures through the photos taken by the author or by other photographers. These images serve like ‘documents of fact’ without ever over-emphasizing their role as aesthetical images to appeal to the senses. Some are poorly composed but then the subject in them enthralls with her gaze or smile.

One notices from reading the text and the photographs that Frembgen sees the whole phenomenon from a vantage point; it is unclear if it is because he is not a native or he deliberately liked the idea of being a guest. In both cases, Frembgen does not miss the point that tea offers the best interpretation of how a global exchange of cultures, ideas and goods is possible in the most sublime of ways and the West, even when they delight in the idea of tea, have much to learn especially in the art of brewing.

References:


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A recent revival in the unearthing culinary histories of India has brought forth some marvellous writing. The study of food has been serious business in certain parts of the world for quite some time, with university departments dedicated to the subject. However, India has lagged behind in this respect. This gap is slowly being filled, both through academic and popular writing.

Popular publications have had a tradition of carrying written recipes, mostly to benefit the home maker in infusing variety in daily cooking. Subsequently, with the opening up of the Indian economy, attention turned to international cuisine and ingredients available in Indian restaurants and departmental stores. Simultaneously, the interest in regional and hyperlocal cuisine, thus far relegated to home kitchens, made their mark as saleable products. These developments coincided with a spurt of food-related shows on television channels. The internet contributed to the fetishization of food via an incessant stream of what is colloquially referred to as ‘food porn’—photographs of food on social media such as Facebook and Instagram.

Somewhere in between the flurry of trends, what is evolving is the social history of food. Research into developments related to ingredients and cuisines tell us as much about human societies as they do about food itself. Our interest here is not merely one of the gourmand, though perhaps that goes with the territory, but of a deeper understanding of how food has impacted societies, and in turn been impacted by it. The volume under review, Curried Cultures: Indian Food in the Age of Globalisation, wonderfully collated by editors Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, is particularly interesting in this respect.

Ray and Srinivas are interested, not so much in focusing on South Asian food cultures for the sake of recovering historical trajectories alone, but in exploring its linkages with processes of globalization. The introductory chapter serves as a crash course in the finest theoretical literature available on the subject. This serves as the platform for viewing subcontinental food outside the limiting pale of regional cuisine, and as distinctly global in both provenance and reach. Similar research has been conducted for cuisines, mostly from the developed world. These foods are truly global due to their relatively easy availability in large parts of the world. There is an additional characteristic—food from the western world is seen to be a desirable cuisine, much more than several others. Hence, it becomes a sort of a standard in evaluating the ‘global-ness’ of cuisines. Any keen observer will understand that such markers, far from being innocent, signify power relations among cultures. Curried Cultures marks a break from this Eurocentric gaze. Akhil Gupta’s essay sets the tone by highlighting the movements of crops and therefore cuisines. When proponents of globalization studies focus on ‘McDonalisation’, it implies a one-way flow of culture. However, pepper, a spice that is indispensable to western cuisine, and several others, travelled to Europe from South and South East Asia. The larger point is to establish parity in the historical flows of globalization. The colonial encounter shaped South Asian cuisine in multiple ways. The book looks at two interesting aspects. The first is an essay on how the queens of the royal families of India were quick to adapt to food preferred by the colonizers within their own kitchens. They did this while preserving their own cuisines, and would frequently infuse elements of two distinct cuisines and develop new dishes. Far from being stuck in some haughty traditional rut, the ladies of royal households were responsible for normalizing the serving of European food in India. A second aspect deals with a more defensive response to the introduction of an alien food. British colonizers pejoratively classified Bengali men as weak and effeminate, and blamed a good deal on the cuisine. The Bengali gent asserted the superiority of his diet, and reacted with a special emphasis on vegetarianism. This was further tied to the superiority of the nation itself.

In a country with caste taboos and strong notions of purity, eating out sounds counter-intuitive. Among several sections, eating outside the homestead was looked down upon because one was always in danger of breaking caste codes. The chain of Udupi hotels managed to pull off a feat where it brought what was temple cuisine, with assurances of being cooked by Brahmins, to the public
space of a restaurant, where caste could be
lost simply by intermingling. Udupi hotels
now span across the globe, and its cuisine is
now available as pre-packaged food. In fact, a
well-known Indian brand was recently brought
out by a Norwegian company, but it is a fact
little known to customers. If the expectation
was that globalization would break down caste
barriers, then it has been belied. Caste, with
its vice-like grip, has adapted itself to
globalization while losing nothing of its
rigidity. Class barriers have not broken down
too greatly either, as upper crust restaurants
pride themselves on catering to the discerning
customer, and teaching people how to eat.

Where does tradition stand in this state
of flux? Much of Indian cooking, as done by
trained chefs or the layperson at home, prides
itself on the idea of tradition. Tradition, along
with the notion of ‘authenticity’ are often
the selling points of Indian cuisine
worldwide. One tradition, that of dum pukht,
has been celebrated in the country and across
the world. One of the most startling essays
that embarked upon a journey to trace the
origins of dum pukht, asserts that it is a
‘pseudo-historical’ cuisine. During her
research, Holly Schaffer finds a host of
different explanations for the origins of dum pukht,
both as a technique, and as a cuisine.
Towards the end of the chapter, the author
concludes with questions about attempting
to ‘fix’ points of origins and genealogies. The
ossification of techniques and cultures often
arises from a bid to search for authenticity,
whereas it is free proliferation, with much
addition and subtraction, which is the
process that can keep a tradition alive.

The book examines Indian cuisine in
settings outside of place of origin. The
chapter on British ‘curry houses’ traces the
place of Indian food in the United Kingdom.
A few items from North Indian cuisine
became staples of the British food scene. The
British populace reviled the smells of spices
emanating from the homes of South Asian
migrants, to the point of using it as markers
differentiation, and shifting out of
localities once they came to be inhabited by
people from the subcontinent. Yet, they
would make an event out of eating food served
at Indian restaurants, usually with decor
reminiscent of an odd mix of flimsy Mughal
and colonial nostalgia, as a badge of their
multicultural credentials. The immigrants
too negotiate the alien terrain as best as they
can through food. A Pakistani restaurant
owner drew clear lines between his cuisine
as a marketable commodity to the British,
cooked by him and other trained underlings,
and the food that fed his soul, cooked by his
wife, back home in Pakistan. Globalization
does not always succeed in blurring the lines
between home and the world, and in fact,
may contribute towards sharpening it.

One of the most fascinating essays is
about the history of the oldest Indian grocery
store in Berkeley, California—Vik’s. From a
small establishment, its span increased and
it acquired a certain fame in the area.
Subsequently, it started a ‘chaat café’—where
Indian snacks and fast food were served. The
chaat café catered to both the Indian diaspora
missing the flavours of home, and also
introduced Americans to a wider range of
Indian food. By bifurcating its operations,
it was able to continue as a trendy Indian
food joint as well as a comforting source of
supply for Indian groceries.

_Culinary Cultures_ has uncovered
processes of globalization through the route
of food. All the contradictions that are
available to other issues when analysed
through the lens of globalization seem to
apply in this case too. However, it places
Indian food rightfully as not merely a
recipient but also a catalyst and active user
of the transactions and flows of globalization.
It sheers away from notions that peddle
Indian food as exotica, inscrutable, cocooned
in its limited geography, mystical and
repulsive, all at the same time. Through its
cuisine, as through its politics and economy,
the Indian subcontinent has always been an
integral part of historical globalization. To
view it as anything less is unacceptable not
only because of Eurocentrism, but also
because it injures the cause of furthering the
understanding of globalization itself.

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A Roadmap For Reforms

Sarthak Bagchi

RETHINKING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA
Edited by Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 527, ₹995.00

The recently concluded Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh had a very interesting moment when a 101 years old voter pushed the button at his polling booth in the remote Kalpa village in Kinnaur district of the State. Shyam Saran Negi, would have been passed on for any aware and conscious senior citizen who believes in exercising his duty of citizenship by voting, had he not been India’s first voter. Negi, who cast Independent India’s first vote on 23rd October, 1951, has been voting in almost every election ever since including the recently held one. This footnote in the history of Indian democracy is a telling fact as it represents the relative youth of India as a nation. It is fairly impossible to find any other established democracy, which will still have its first voter going out to the polling booth in contemporary times. And despite this relatively young age, India’s public institutions have been performing fastidiously for the last seven decades to connect different levels of the State with its citizens like Shyam Saran Negi. The book under review takes an accurate stock of the performances and limitations of these different public institutions in India and is aptly titled Rethinking Public Institutions in India. In organizing the scheme of the chapters for this book, the editors, Mehta Kapur and Vaishnav have taken a brave attempt of including a vast array of institutions, each of which is worthy of having a book on its own. The editors tie these public institutions to each other through various themes like internal and external accountability, political interference, personnel failures, legal ambiguity and coordination dilemmas.

Through the chapters in this volume the authors and the editors try to capture the transition of Indian public institutions from ‘old order’ institutions to ‘new order’ institutions. The analysis provided is robust, comprehensive and rich in its balance of highlighting both the negative aspects and positive achievements of India’s public institutions. The book is highly recommended for scholars and students of public policy, public administration, formal institutions, governmental agencies, administrators and policy practitioners.

James Manor analyses the model of the ‘working president’ in his analysis of the institution of presidency. He argues that—because post-1980 changes inevitably required presidents to intervene more often—people in India must adjust their attitudes to what constitutes appropriate behaviour by presidents. Drawing on rich observations from the past presidents and those who occupied the office in contemporary times, Manor stresses that presidents have not just the option but a responsibility to raise moral and constitutional concerns. Describing the changing role and expectations from the office of president since 1989, Manor prescribes a change in the mindset of the Indian people, who he thinks should be more tolerating and accepting towards presidential activism during the period of government formation.

M R Madhavan analyses the structure, role and effectiveness of the most prolific institution of the Indian Republic, its Parliament. He highlights that many important characteristics like number of women representatives, standard of educational profile of the representatives and the average age of representatives has gone up over the years in the Parliament. However, he also points out that there has been a downward trend in the number of sitting days of the Parliament between the 1950s till 2012. A similar negative trend has also been noticed in the quality of questions raised and answered in the Parliament. This can be linked to the loss of time that has increased in the days when the Parliament is in session.

Like Manor, Madhavan also observes the impact of the rise of coalition politics and the fragmentation of political power to have affected the functioning of Parliament, undermining its critical deliberative role in a functioning democracy. According to the author, the Indian Parliament has much to be proud of as a key institution of the Indian Republic. While the Parliament has provided a channel for negotiating competing interests and holding the country together, there are still ways and methods to make Parliament more responsive to the increasing needs of transparency that dictates the rules of engagement in modern democratic societies.

As a remedy, the author suggests more role of the Opposition in deciding the agenda of discussions and pre-determination of a schedule of sessions every year to make the government more accountable to the questions from the Opposition. He also suggests more transparency measures to be incorporated into the functioning of various parliamentary committees and to incorporate more research and referral staff for such committees in order to add more teeth to their functioning.

Madhav Khosla and Ananth Padmanabhan analyse the Supreme Court of India, which is found to be playing two crucial roles of that as a legal institute—with appellate and constitutional powers—and that as a public institution that is required to engage with, respond to, and negotiate the political pressures and social expectations that surround it. The Supreme Court, to quote Mehta, is facing a ‘judicialization of politics and politicization of the judiciary’, making it a fixture in the daily rituals and drama of democratic life. Through their extensive analysis of the various aspects of the Supreme Court, the authors point out that it has been over-burdening itself with a large number of appellate cases which has resulted in a significant backlog on its limited reserve of staff (31 judges). As the Court has begun to spread itself thin over a massive backlog of cases, the role of the constitution bench has also diluted. Separation of appellate and constitutional work, they think, will enable the Court to cement its identity as a strong legal institution. The authors also highlight the exemplary improvements undertaken by the Court by resorting to the use of technology for improving its registry, e-filing of petitions, maintenance of an exhaustive website and online accessibility to daily orders and judgements. All these improvements have made this institution more accessible to the public—even though its geographic location still remains out of reach.
for a vast majority of common citizens.

Errol D’Souza looks at the Reserve Bank of India tracing its history both as a banker to the government and to design monetary policy so as to maintain price stability and ensure adequate supply of credit for economic growth. The chapter critically analyses India's top financial institution's role in designing monetary and financial policies, management of public debt and in the management of foreign exchange reserves of the country. In these crucial roles in a developing and yet a giant-sized economy like that of India, the RBI has emerged as a highly credible voice on issues of monetary policy, banking and finance. This is despite the constant tension over the role and influence between the Governor and the Deputy Governor of RBI and the Ministry of Finance, including in the current NDA Government. The author thus recommends the need for independence from political influence and interference as that of primary importance for the continuation of its rich legacy as an exemplar public institution in India. According to the author, as per Keynes's recommendations during the setting up of the RBI, the geographic distance between the RBI, headquartered in Mumbai and the Ministry of Finance, headquartered in Delhi, would be sufficient to keep them at a safe distance. However, given the changing time, and the increasing compliance of the present Governor with the political leadership, this geographic distance is not proving to be enough for maintaining a policy of non-interference.

In his chapter on public expenditure governance, Nirvikar Singh shows that fragmentation in ministerial decision-making process complicated both policy formulation as well as implementation. The overt reliance on ministers is an impediment in consensus building during the decision-making process for important policies. As a solution in this decision-making logjam and to initiate more accountability and effectiveness, Singh recommends a more effective decentralization, as an additional external accountability created by decentralizing power can, boost levels of internal accountability.

Looking at the important new regulatory institutions in infrastructure in crucial sectors of electricity, telecom, petroleum and natural gas and coal, Navroz K Dubash finds that establishing guidelines to enhance accountability and transparency 'may be among the most significant contributions of regulatory agencies to the challenges of infrastructure governance'. Dubash also indicates the prevalent opportunities of dispensing political patronage through regulatory bodies, where politicians reward compliant officers by handing them prized postings, for taking 'favourable' policy decisions are the biggest hurdles in this pursuit of making public institutions more accountable.

R Sridharan looks at the important institutions of the Comptroller Auditor General (CAG), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) in his analysis of the institutions of internal accountability. His analysis draws heavily from the previous work on these institutions by S K Das in the earlier book on public institutions by Mehta and Kapur, published in 2005. Das found the CAG’s impact to be of marginal effect, CVC to be ineffective as an anti-corruption institution and the CBI to be too close to political executive for independent and non-partisan performance. More than 10 years later, Sridharan, by studying the same institutions concludes that those conclusions still hold true. The author shows that if the legislature chooses to ignore reports from the CAG, the latter has very little recourse. Similarly, the CVC is unable to pursue investigations if the implicated officers or bureaucrats have not left an official paper trail of their wrong doing. It has very little investigative powers and depends heavily on CBI, which in turn is still seen as a handmaiden of the government used often by incumbent governments, both overtly and covertly to threaten political opponents. Focusing on the financial accountability aspect of public institutions, Amitabh Mukhopadhyay provides a detailed analysis of two of the most important institutions involved in securing accountability, CAG, Comptroller Auditor General and PAC, Parliamentary Accounts Committee. In his exhaustive analysis of both these institutions beginning from their historic and constitutional groundings to their contemporary functioning, the author finds these institutions to be lacking in terms of transparency in its operations. While others like the Supreme Court and local governance bodies have significantly increased their outreach by improving their websites into more user-friendly interface, CAG has a long way to go in that direction. Similarly, like Madhavan, who looked at Parliament, Mukhopadhyay too recommends media coverage for PAC sessions and hearings so as to make its operations more transparent. Social Audits, especially those of the MGNREGA have proved to be effective in detecting irregularities, but they appear to have limited deterrent effect due to lack of information on public officials.

K P Krishnan and T V Somanathan look at the civil services and trace its effectiveness since Independence as well as offer suggestions to make it more effective. They find that the average age of candidates at intake has risen significantly over the years. The authors suggest that the civil service has done well in preserving the overall constitutional order but performed poorly in impartially implementing laws and policies at the individual level. They find the biggest single weakness of the civil service to be the rampant political interference through a combination of wielding a carrot (as plum postings) and a stick (as transfers). In their detailed analysis, the authors also highlight the abysmal record of recruitments in the civil service where just among the IAS officers, there is a vacancy of as high as 29 percent of its entire cadre strength in 2012. They also point to the over-representation of officers from the smaller and better governed States in the central deputation as compared to the officers from bigger States. According to them this impacts the policy preferences being set at the central level. Coupled with the poor quality of State public service commissions and staff associations, this leads to a policy paralysis in poorer States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have been historically marginalized. The authors also link the productivity and effectiveness of civil services to the successful implementation of important institutions like democratic decentralization and the Right to Information Act, which have become key instruments in taking the government to the population and in making government authorities more transparent and accountable. In this regard, they claim that the importance of an efficient civil services becomes even more vital.

E Sreedharan and Milan Vaishnav analyse one of the most celebrated public institutions, the Election Commission of India. Much like other public institutions, the ECI has also undergone a transformation in its operations, influence and effectiveness in the transition from the Congress era to the coalition politics era, when there were as many as four general elections in a matter of nine years. The authors point out how the democratic deepening in India posed serious challenges to the conduct of elections as the Commission had to protect the democratic rights of the newly mobilized communities, while guarding against clashes rising due to competing social identities. Drawing on one of the common themes attempted by some of the other authors in this volume, the authors of this chapter have also highlighted the importance and influence that one person can come to bear on the entire identity of a
public institution. The period of T N Seshan as the Chief Election Commissioner is still a fond memory for policy practitioners in New Delhi as well as common voters in remote rural Bihar, as someone who impacted the way in which elections were monitored and managed. Although Seshan initiated striking reforms in the operations of the ECI, two of the staggering challenges in the conduct of free and fair elections in India faced by the ECI are the problems of money and muscle in Indian elections. According to the authors, like much of the malaise plaguing other public institutions in India, the solution to these challenges also lies with the political will, in this instance opening up political party funding to the ambit of RTI.

In his chapter on democratic decentralization, T R Raghunadan traces the trajectory of the evolution of the local government system in different Indian States. The author touches upon the decentralization experience in various States like Kerala which empowered and strengthened the village panchayats to Madhya Pradesh which vested power in communitarian sub-committees to escape the stranglehold of entrenched chiefs (sarpanch) to Bihar, which was the first State to reserve 50 per cent of elected panchayat positions for women. The chapter while charting the evolution of various panchayati raj institutions and their role in providing a credible local self-governance structure in the remotest of locations in India, also highlights the various technological innovations that have been incorporated into the functioning of these local governance bodies across Indian States. This chapter provides an ideal reading for scholars and researchers in public policy and public administration.

While the editors have laid out a very coherent and comprehensive thematic mapping of all the various institutions analysed in this exhaustive volume, a conclusion summarizing these manifold observations and a combined roadmap ahead for the growth and effective functioning of these institutions would have been a value addition to such a hard toiled and insightful academic endeavour.

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Freedom of Expression And The Indian Constitution

Vikram Raghavan and Prachi Tadsare

REPUBLIC OF RHETORIC: FREE SPEECH AND THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA
By Abhinav Chandrachud
Penguin Books, 2017, pp. 304, ₹599.00

P urulia is a town in Bengal’s western periphery. Under British rule, it was the headquarters of the sprawling Manbhum district. At Independence, the entire district was allocated to Bihar. But its substantial Bengali population actively resisted what they perceived to be Hindi imposition. Demonstrations soon became a daily occurrence as the State administration strove to contain the language agitation.

Amidst this surcharged atmosphere, the authorities in Manbhum seized a lengthy Bengali pamphlet calling for a violent and bloody revolution. The rambling pamphlet darkly hinted that those who brought Bengali into disgrace would die. Although its author was not identified, its publication was traced to the Bharati Press in Purulia. Invoking the Press Act, the government ordered Shaila Bala Devi, Bharati Press’s ‘keeper’, to deposit 2000 rupees with Manbhum’s Deputy Commissioner ostensibly to deter such publications in the future.

Moving the Patna High Court, Shaila Bala Devi challenged the government’s order and the relevant provision of the Press Act under which it was issued. She claimed that her freedom of speech protected by Article 19 (1) (a) of the newly enacted Constitution had been infringed. The matter was heard by a three-judge bench that included Justice JG Shearer, an Englishman who remained in Patna after Independence. Shearer wanted to dismiss Devi’s petition. But his two Indian colleagues declared the Press Act provision at issue unconstitutional.

In his judgment, Justice Sarjoo Prasad observed that freedom of speech was so conceivably wide under Article 19 (1) (a) that it could even include verbal or written incitements to murder. This startling observation was a stray remark. It wasn’t the deciding factor in Prasad’s opinion. Even so, as Abhinav Chandrachud tells us in his enticing new book, Prasad’s words were ‘almost single-handedly responsible for the First Amendment’.

A practising lawyer in the Bombay High Court, Chandrachud has produced with astonishing regularity a number of books on Indian constitutional law and history. Republic of Rhetoric is the latest addition to his impressive line-up. As a physical object, the book’s hardbound version is pleasing to behold. It has an eye-catching cover (more on that later) and is set in bold font. A talented writer, Chandrachud does not overload the text. Rather, he anchors his sentences with bountiful and aesthetically precise endnotes. These notes are crammed with rare gems from legal history, reflecting the author’s meticulous research. Few other legal scholars have consulted as much primary and archival material as Chandrachud.

In the book’s opening chapters, Chandrachud recounts how draftsmen like Macaulay framed speech-restrictive laws for India by borrowing heavily, although sometimes sharply diverging, from English jurisprudence. As the national movement gained steam, these laws were used to prosecute political activists for speaking out against colonial rule. Not unsurprisingly, therefore, when the Constituent Assembly convened, many members reflexively supported the inclusion of a fundamental right to free speech. But this exuberance was quickly tempered by Partition’s genocidal mayhem. Deeply disturbed by the communal madness, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar insisted that free speech could never be an
absolute right under the Constitution. His position ultimately prevailed over dissenting backbenchers.

The Assembly gave free speech and expression the first place in Article 19’s list of six fundamental freedoms. But it shackled this freedom by authorizing future governments to impose restrictions on a variety of grounds. Even so, as the book tells us, Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Patel seemed privately convinced that Article 19 impeded the government’s ability to control vitriolic communal passion. And Sarjoo Prasad’s opinion gave them just the excuse they needed to remedy that shortcomings.

By portraying Prasad’s views as reflecting the judiciary’s overall attitude, Nehru had the provisional parliament swiftly enact the First Amendment. This amendment authorized even more restrictions on freedom of speech than the Assembly had originally included in Article 19. Things only went downhill thereafter.

On the book’s front flap, Chandrachud summarizes his central thesis. He claims that the Constitution, particularly Article 19, did not make a significant difference to free speech in modern India.

This claim is underscored by the book’s title: Republic of Rhetoric. It suggests that the Republic’s founding led only to rhetorical changes to the underlying body politic. This point is vividly made on the arresting book jacket. Thick black lines run horizontally across the cover completely obscuring sentences of indecipherable text.

In contemporary India, Chandrachud tells us, free speech has been severely curtailed. It is stifled by sweeping restrictions that successive governments recklessly impose and courts obligingly uphold. He bunches these restrictions into a few broad categories: obscenity; contempt of court; criminal defamation; hate speech; and insults to national symbols. He devotes a separate chapter to each category. In each chapter, he insightfully reviews the relevant statutory provisions and the applicable case law.

Chandrachud explains that many free-speech restrictions presently in force in India today were influenced by, or imported from, England during the Raj. Surprisingly, however, our courts have been reluctant to hold that these restrictions infringe freedom of speech under the Constitution. Emboldened by this judicial reluctance, governments have not just retained most colonial-era restrictions. They have significantly expanded several of them.

It is common knowledge that prosecutions targeting activists, writers, and editors are rising at an alarming rate across the country. Many of these actions are simply intended to harass and intimidate dissenters and political opponents. This depressing state of affairs leads Chandrachud to despondently conclude that Article 19 has done little to protect free speech and expression today. We are no better off now, he insists, than we were under British rule.

Chandrachud does not make this controversial claim lightly. Indeed, he began the groundwork for it in his book about the Bombay High Court. In that book, he reveals how judges like MC Chagla openly resolved to continue administering ‘British justice’ after Independence. Like other reviewers, we find that Chandrachud’s thesis well researched and persuasively reasoned. But we think it is somewhat overstated for several reasons.

First, the claim that Article 19 has made no difference glosses over the fact that there is a lot more speech in India today than at any time before in its history. This change is especially dramatic since the Constitution was adopted. In 1950, the proverbial ‘market place’ for ideas and expression, which Article 19 sought to protect, was dominated by a finite number of political leaders and activists, All India Radio, a small number of established newspapers and journals, and pamphleteers like Shaila Bala Devi.

Seventy-plus years later, that market place has gigantically expanded in scope, content, and diversity. Today, an abundance of newspapers and magazines are published in print and online in many languages. The majority of Indians now rely on privately owned broadcasting channels, rather than government sources, for news and entertainment. Millions exchange information and peddle rumours through social media and electronic messaging services. In fact, any Indian with access to Facebook, Twitter, or even WhatsApp can reach a much greater audience than any of Bharati Press’s pamphlets.

Accordingly, in assessing the Constitution’s overall record on free speech, the troubling increase in speech restrictions and prosecutions must be fairly juxtaposed against the huge expansion of the market place for ideas, speech, and expression, which have erupted under the shadow, or despite the existence, of Article 19.

Second, Chandrachud overlooks the normative impact from the fact that speech is a guaranteed fundamental right under the Constitution even if it can also be extensively abridged by restrictions. As Kenneth Roth argues, the mere codification of a right in a human rights charter or foundational document can generate public awareness, which, in turn, could have real and tangible consequences. Indeed, the very existence of Article 19 forces the state to defend speech-restricting laws and actions as consistent with that touchstone’s requirements.

Third, Chandrachud’s disenchantment with Article 19 seems puzzling given his extensive discussion of successive Supreme Court decisions upholding press freedom. Article 19 was the constitutional cornerstone for every one of those decisions. The outcome of those cases may have well been different without the fundamental freedom to speech and expression. The Article also underpins other landmark decisions, notably the judgment which declared that citizens have a right to information and the one that ended government monopoly in broadcast frequencies. And beyond lawyers and courts, citizen activists and social movements expressly invoke Article 19 when challenging government policies or demanding political reforms.

Fourth, freedom of speech and expression in Article 19 cannot be evaluated in isolation. That is because it coexists and intersects with other freedoms in that article, including the right to assemble peaceably, move freely throughout India, or practice any profession or trade. Freedom of speech under Article 19 is also closely related to the fundamental right to practice, profess, and propagate any religion in Article 25. We also cannot neglect the growing interplay between freedom of speech and the right to life and personal liberty in Article 21 that now also includes the right to privacy.

Fifth, Chandrachud seems to imply that the Constitution through Article 19 breaks no new ground because there was an existing common law right to free speech in British India. He offers no direct citation or authority for this remarkable claim. Assuming there was indeed such a right, it would have offered little solace to the subjects of Princely States where the writ of British Indian common law ran, at best, unevenly. Furthermore, Parliament and the State legislatures could have freely modified or restricted such a common law right if it wasn’t entrenched in the Constitution.

Despite these reservations, Republic of Rhetoric is a lucidly written and intensely engaging book. It is an encyclopedic resource not just for lawyers but also for ordinary citizens. Besides its controversial thesis about Article 19, the book makes distinct contributions to our understanding of Indian free speech law.

Chandrachud documents how extensively Sarjoo Prasad’s words were used to ensure the First Amendment’s swift enactment. Commentators had previously...
assumed that the Supreme Court’s decisions in the Romesh Thapar and Brij Bhushan Cases resulted in this amendment. Chandrachud also revisits the neglected, yet controversial, Sixteenth Amendment, which inserted the phrase ‘sovereignty and integrity of India’ into every oath of a constitutional office.

Throughout the book, Chandrachud shines a light on the legal system’s paternalism. Oral sedition was specifically made a crime in British India on account of the country’s ‘ignorant, and therefore the dangerous, classes’. Relics of that sentiment survive even today when judges reason that the Indian public is ‘ignorant and illiterate’ and easily capable of being misled.

Chandrachud catalogues the growing case law on India’s national iconography: the anthem, flag, and state emblems. Forced displays of constitutional patriotism, he suggests, can seriously jeopardize the Constitution’s deeper commitment to free speech and expression.

Finally, Chandrachud critically explores how contempt-of-court proceedings chill free expression. He disassembles the leading cases on the subject. He does so clinically, yet respectfully. He also tackles the mysterious sub-judice rule at some length. But that rule’s impact on investigative journalism and sting operations behoves more analysis in a next edition.

Returning to where we began, Bihar appealed the High Court’s verdict in Shaila Bala Devi’s case. Speaking for the Supreme Court, Justice Mahajan upheld the Press Act’s provision under which the government demanded a security deposit. He pointedly admonished Sarjoo Prasad for systematically misreading the Court’s previous judgments on free speech. Yet, Mahajan also chided the Patna judges for taking the pamphlet a bit too seriously. It was full of bombastic nonsense and it should have been simply ignored. Mahajan’s colleague, Justice Mukherjea, a native Bengali speaker agreed that the pamphlet was full of meaningless words.

This anti-climactic end to Shaila Bala Devi’s litigation came too late to save the Assembly’s original formulation on free speech in Article 19. By the time the Supreme Court decided on the appeal, the First Amendment had long been adopted and was being enforced across the country. To find out what happened thereafter, we recommend that you read Republic of Rhetoric!

Vikram Raghavan and Prachi Tadsare studied law in India. This article is written entirely in their personal capacity. It does not represent the views of any institution to which they may be professionally affiliated.

Efficacy of Quotas

Ashwini Deshpande

SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH INCLUSION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF ELECTORAL QUOTAS IN INDIA
By Francesca R. Jensenius
Oxford University Press, New York, 2017, pp. xvii+228, ₹408.00
(Part of the ‘Modern South Asia’ Series; Series editor: Ashutosh Varshney)

Caste-based quotas, whether in education, jobs, or electoral positions, are routinely vilified for lowering the quality of the space they are applied to, because of the belief that those chosen through quotas are inherently inferior to those selected on open, or non-quota, positions. This widespread belief transcends the boundaries between academic arguments and popular perceptions.

The only way to assess the validity of the ‘lowering-merit’ argument would be to analyse it empirically, in a rigorous manner. Collect data on the outcomes of interest (e.g., productivity of enterprises where a part of the workforce is selected through quotas, or various educational indicators for colleges etc.), and assess if quotas have resulted in lowering the average (or shifted the distribution) for the particular outcome being assessed.

This is easier said than done, even when there is inclination on the part of the researchers. Most researchers (what to speak of journalists or lay persons) take the ‘lowering-merit’ argument at its face value, and as not worth researching. If something is as obvious as daylight, why spend time and effort investigating it? Thus, for instance, the spate of articles or commentaries produced by well-known academics in the aftermath of the Mandal Commission announcement in 1991 took this for granted, and deplored the quota mentality, equating it with vote-bank politics, i.e., politics of appeasement, where quotas were merely one more instrument to secure more votes, and nothing good could possibly come out of them.

Fortunately, that tide has started to turn over the last decade and more, certainly among academics. There is now a fair amount of empirically grounded, quantitative and methodologically rigorous research, a great deal of this from economists, but also from quantitatively-inclined political scientists and sociologists, which evaluates the efficiency effects of reservations, or affirmative action, in India.

The challenges in this track of research are considerable. For one thing, because of the pre-Independence history of quotas, there is no clear-cut and unambiguous ‘before-and-after’ data, which would allow neat identification of the incremental effect of quotas, after accounting for other changes that would have occurred in the interim. Second, because quotas are applicable to government (or electoral) positions, access to administrative data are needed, which are often not easy to come by (as I discovered when, for my 2014 study, I was collating data to assess the productivity effect of quotas in the Indian Railways, the largest public sector employer in India. After running from pillar to post, I finally, rather fortuitously, found the data in a disaggregated form in annual zonal reports, which I then compiled into measurable indicators.) Many researchers are employing innovative and novel ways of using existing large data to produce the badly needed evidence on the effect of caste quotas. The volume under review, based on the author’s PhD. dissertation, is a very welcome and important addition to this branch of enquiry. The author uses publicly available data (combining detailed data from the 1971-2001 censuses of India, with reservation status), and a clever empirical strategy to produce a nuanced, in-depth and solid treatise on the effect of electoral quotas at the constituency level over three decades. What adds value to her work is the fact that she supplements her study with more than 100 in-depth interviews with Indian politicians, civil servants, activists and voters from four Indian States (Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka) as a part of her qualitative fieldwork in order to understand the mechanisms that produce the results that her data reveal.

As Jensenius shows, politicians in India spend most of their time in their constituencies, with a very small amount of their time taken up by Assembly meetings. If Scheduled Caste (SC) politicians are ‘weak’ or ‘inefficient’, we should expect to see less overall development in constituencies.
reserved for SCs. Also, if SC politicians systematically try to benefit the SC community within their constituencies, we should expect to see more redistribution to SCs in reserved constituencies than in comparable general (non-reserved) constituencies.

Jensenius examines both—changes in the overall level of development, as well as the distribution of resources between SCs and others—in each constituency. Her data set includes estimates of development indicators for more than 3,100 State Assembly constituencies from the 15 largest Indian States between 1971 and 2001, making it possible to examine development patterns in reserved and general constituencies over a 30-year period. She finds no negative developmental effects of electoral quotas, i.e., development indicators are no worse in reserved constituencies, compared to non-reserved constituencies, controlling for other factors. Additionally, there have been several positive outcomes as a result of quotas, going beyond standard development indicators. She finds that quotas have contributed to breaking social boundaries by bringing a marginalized and stigmatized community into positions of power—a group that most likely would have been elected in smaller numbers had it not been for these quotas. This has also contributed to reduction in caste-based discrimination in reserved constituencies.

These findings are very valuable and indicate, in line with other empirical literature that estimates the impact of quotas, that fears of increasing inefficiency are not backed by empirical claims.

The author is a political scientist, from a discipline that in India has not transitioned into quantitative analysis so far. Thus, my suspicion is that the methodology outlined in this research is more likely to be accessible (in India) to economists, and not as much to sociologists and political scientists, the two broad disciplines that would benefit very much from the insights of this comprehensive research. But I hope that the results of the study, summarized clearly and simply, will be accessible, and more importantly, would help in battling preconceived and incorrect notions about the presumed detrimental effects of caste quotas.

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Enigma of Voting Patterns

K K Kailash

ELITE PARTIES, POOR VOTERS: HOW SOCIAL SERVICES WIN VOTES IN INDIA
By Tariq Thachil
Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, (South Asia Edition), pp.352, $32.99

Tariq Thachil’s Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India revolves around the empirical puzzle as to why poor people support political parties that do not promote their material interests. While this puzzle has received considerable attention in wealthy western democracies, it has been ignored in the non-western world. Thachil attempts to plug this gap, when he examines how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is identified with the more privileged sections of society has managed to attract the support of the least advantaged. Previous scholarship on the rich-poor paradox points to three alternative strategies available to elite parties. These include, redistributive programmatic shifts, patronage and ‘distracting’ appeals to a voter’s moral values or social identity (p.5). Thachil argues that these explanatory frameworks do not travel well outside the wealthy West. He instead proposes that private provisioning of local public goods by organizations linked to elite parties allows them to get close to the poor without hurrying their core base. This politically motivated service-based strategy is financed by the party and its supporters and has no connection with public funds and personnel. At the same time, these privately provided services are almost universally available and are not targeted to specific groups or individuals.

This service delivery based strategy is neglected in the literature since most analyses are only looking for programmatic and clientelist relationships between parties and voters. He argues that since they are not part of party promises during elections they do not establish programmatic linkages. At the same time, they do not count as patronage as they are neither financed from public resources nor is there a quid pro quo relationship as in vote buying. Thachil’s study impairs the dominant clientelist understanding which assumes that all electorally motivated goods and service provisioning are based on the feeling of reciprocity ignoring the possibility of ‘voluntary gratitude’ as well as service provision without discrimination.

The book contributes to at least three sub-fields of political science. First, it adds a new dimension to understand the success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The three explanations we currently have include the step-down thesis by Heath (1999) which explains BJP’s geographical expansion as well as social expansion to the lower castes in the 1990s; the polarization thesis of Wilkinson (2004) which underlined how a polarization between Hindus and Muslims allowed the BJP to consolidate Hindu votes across the caste hierarchy and the bridging-alliances strategy by Sridharan (2005) which examines how strategic electoral alliances helped the BJP to expand its geographical footprint.

Thachil’s service-based strategy adds another dimension to understand the rise and spread of the BJP. Second, it enriches the comparative study of party organization and strategy in multiple ways.

Thachil’s main point is that the findings in the party studies literature based on the
experience of the West are unhelpful in other areas. For instance, he shows that when political parties attempt to mobilize sections of society with diverse interests, parties cannot rely on a ‘single linkage strategy’ as is often simplistically assumed to be true about non-western political parties. Thachil finds that parties innovate and deploy ‘separate tactics for specific social constituencies’ (p. 140). This innovation in his study simultaneously appeases the contradictory demands of two sections of society who are otherwise suspicious of each other. At the same time, the dual appeasement strategy does not rock the boat. On one hand, low cost service provisioning benefits the beneficiaries who otherwise do not have access to quality health and education services. On the other hand, it controls the pace and direction of social transformation, without compromising upper caste interests.

Thachil clearly does not share the dominant pessimistic view of the decline of party organizations either. He shows that organization still plays an important part in both mobilization and recruitment. He also joins the debate on whether parties minimize risks by rewarding their core supporters or maximize their vote share by focusing on new voters. The study finds that this is not an either or choice, but instead, as noted above, parties balance the demands of the old and the new to remain electorally competitive. Furthermore, most studies have hitherto focused largely on the advantage incumbent parties have because of their sustained access to government resources (p. 141). Thachil’s adds non-state actors and a service-based strategy to the repertoire of mechanisms available to opposition parties to both recruit and retain voter support. Finally, Thachil’s comparison of religiously oriented elite parties also underlines the limitations of current scholarship. His study shows that the relationship between ideological and electoral goals of political parties merits closer examination.

This study also enhances our understanding of non-state actors and welfare provisioning. Thachil adds outsourcing by political parties to the basket of reasons as to when and why non-state actors appear and find space. Traditionally this basket included state and market failure, decentralization, neo-liberal reforms and so on. By providing welfare, non-state organizations linked to political parties not only build goodwill for the party but also carry out recruitment and mobilization tasks.

The study combines a variety of research strategies over twenty months of fieldwork including archival research, content analysis and elite interviews. The elements of qualitative research gives the study depth and allows Thachil to unravel the complex multi-dimensional process through which the service-based strategy converts everyday contact with the non-elites into electoral returns without alienating the entrenched elites. The quantitative analysis of national and local survey data not only gives the study greater depth but also allows him to eliminate alternative explanations for subaltern support for the BJP and demonstrate the existence of a ‘broad division of labour’ between the ‘party and movement’ (p. 33). While Chhattisgarh is the primary area of research, the study also tests the explanatory framework in the States of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

Kerala and Uttar Pradesh allow Thachil to demonstrate that the potency of any strategy depends on what it is pitted against. The service-based strategy is unlikely to be the winning formula when rival parties either use a programmatic appeal to woo poor voters or when there is vertical mobilization of the poor by an ethnic party. Thus while it worked in Chhattisgarh it did not sell in Kerala where there appears to be a programmatic linkage between parties and the voter and the governments have implemented robust social policies. In Chhattisgarh, the main challenger party, the Congress, relied on vertical linkages with elite patronage without incorporating subaltern groups. This strategy was inefficient in the transfer of benefits since it relied on a host of intermediaries and did not allow for direct linkages (p. 180). This lack of organizational grounding created space for the BJP and consequently, its embedded service-based approach was unchallenged.

At the same time the service-based strategy does not work well in Uttar Pradesh because the Bahujan Samaj Party drew sharp lines between different social groups. Despite the poor material conditions of the subaltern sections, this sharp polarization left little space for service-based organizations.

Thachil has also examined the relationship between service delivery and the BJP expansion in other States. He found that in Tamil Nadu, like Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, the space for a service-based strategy was closed. Not only were the backward castes and Dalits already politicized but Tamil Nadu also ranked high on the human development index in the country. On the contrary, in Karnataka, the main challenger parties followed the ‘vertical patronage network’ (p. 269) strategy and the State’s record in service-delivery was relatively poor compared to its southern counterparts. Consequently, there was a demand for the services provided by the Hindu nationalist organizations. The service-based strategy it appears works best in regions marked by relatively low social development and where elite-patronage has held sway. Therefore, while it works in Karnataka it did not find much purchase in Tamil Nadu.

In his conclusion, Thachil acknowledges the challenges of sustaining a service based strategy. The challenges notwithstanding, Elite Parties, Poor Voters I believe is not about electoral strategy alone. If we read it in conjunction with findings from psychology, Thachil actually draws the broad contours of the long term agenda of the Hindu nationalists. While most parties and even analysts focus on electoral victories, the Hindu nationalists and its affiliated organizations it appears are thinking ahead, preparing for the long haul.

The service-delivery based mobilization is a prolonged and arduous process and does not have any obvious connection with the cause of Hindu nationalism. Yet the strategy allows the Hindu nationalist agenda to not only get close to people, who would otherwise have nothing to do with the cause but also capture their minds. The embeddedness of service-delivery providers makes it easier to sell their preferred frame that can be used to make sense of events and more importantly politics. Thus building trust and capturing minds through routinized interaction builds as well as long-term roots for the cause.

The success of this strategy of capturing
**Democratization of Science**

**Aasim Khan**

**CONTESTED KNOWLEDGE: SCIENCE, MEDIA, AND DEMOCRACY IN KERALA**  
By Shiju Sam Varughese  
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 308, ₹995.00

What counts as scientific knowledge is often a subject of popular controversies and yet science is commonly understood as being too complex for public engagement. In his book, *Contested Knowledge* about risk controversies in Kerala, Shiju Sam Varughese contends with this particular paradox. The book explores the social dynamics that transform the nature and substance of scientific truths and in turn highlights the central role that the media now plays in the making and unmaking of expert knowledge. In particular the book maps the mediation, or 'medialisation' as the author calls it, of day-to-day interactions between ordinary readers, journalists and scientific institutions to demonstrate the presence, and an ever growing influence, of a "scientific public sphere" in the South Indian State. Rich in empirical details and crisply edited, *Contested Knowledge* shows how the Malayalam press has emerged both as a site for establishing expert hierarchies as well as an arena for negotiations among the various stakeholders in the scientific domain in Kerala.

But for all its insightful and thoughtful nature, the book falls short of answering a very important question, one that is clearly alluded to even in the sub-title of the book 'Science, Media and Democracy in Kerala'. The idea that no matter however much it becomes an object of popular attention, that in itself need not be read as a sign of democratization of science. It is almost disappointing that in a book that gives access to such detailed descriptions and carries such linguistic nuance, the idea of democracy should be used so casually. Barring a very late course correction, in the concluding chapter, the idea of democracy and in turn of the subaltern and marginal participation hardly features in the discussion elsewhere. While such an omission would have been less galling in the context of any other sphere of human activity, it is simply impossible to overlook it in the context of science which is a frontier domain of the modernist promise of democracy; science's promise is of civilizational and ethical advancement and nothing less.

Secular democracies like in India, nurtured science precisely for this worldly ideal it promises; the possibility of peace and social justice that was simply impossible to imagine through any other means. And in turn science, and scientists, drew a lot from Indian society and much of it rested on the goodwill and trust of the ordinary citizen.

Science symbolized in modern India a social contract of modernity which was so appealing because it removed the other worldliness from the equation. The promise of the sciences as an ideal worked because it offered an alternative that combined this worldliness with principles of human dignity and equality. In its attempt to locate science as just another realm for enhancing public participation, the thesis in *Contested Knowledge* thus limits itself to specific events and controversies and falls short of exploring how, if at all, the substance and consequence of this opening is serving the universal promises of peace and progress which made science so appealing in the first instance.

The reason for such complacency is actually not very hard to pin down, after all Kerala is home to such a rich intellectual culture and journalistic sphere that there is always a chance of missing the woods for the trees. The theoretical framing used here to explain the richness of scientific debates could very well be deployed to explore any other domain of human activity. After all the Southern Indian State's contemporary social and cultural milieu provides us with an astonishing array of public controversies that the theorists of public sphere would never run out of cases studies. And in each instance the role of the press and mass media would seem more central than perhaps anywhere else in the world.

To demonstrate this point, let's take the domain of faith for instance, which is often
subject to routine and increasingly mediated controversies. From the question of Salafism among young educated Muslim youth, to the issue of entry of women in sacred Hindu shrines debates, themes of religious moralities appear to be part of its public culture in the State. Consider for instance the controversy surrounding Dan Brown’s fantasy novel The Da Vinci Code. Not only did the religious authorities engage with the press and mass media in a way that is unheard of elsewhere, it was indeed quite unique that Kerala’s Christian religious leadership relied on professional emissaries to argue their case in the public arena. Amidst the litigations and public agitations surrounding The Da Vinci Code, the church also deployed its own ‘Media Commission’ to campaign against the ‘unholy combination of fact and fiction’ against the novel (The Hindu, 27 May, 2007).

The argument, one that the thesis should have addressed more empathically, is that mediation or mass mediation to be precise, is central to any public issue in Kerala and that it might not be considered to be a sign of democracy in every instance. Be it in the sciences, politics, the arts or even faith for that matter, the polysemic within each domain in Kerala’s public culture makes it ready fodder for media consumption and diverse opinion is bound to be amplified by the presence of a steadily rising number of new media channels. Contested Science should tell us why all this constitutes an advancement and progress of democracy, and why this is not simply a case of cultural embeddedness of science like any other sphere of human creativity. Without placing the story of science within the wider history of secularism in India this isn’t possible.

Hence Contested Knowledge should reconsider the theoretical framework to put questions of marginality and inequality as its central concern. Is it not possible that the elites who engage in the public controversies are moved not so much because they care about democratic ideals but perhaps for their own material and personal benefit? This needs to be considered even in the selection of the cases, something that is not fully explained except for the fact that they all take place at a particular period in time. The first controversy under study in the book relates to the case of randomized trials of cancer vaccines that were carried out in Kerala by a scientific institution in partnership with international academic collaborators in the late 1990s. The second case study covers a wider debate, one that did not need a conflict among the scientific bodies to become an object of public attention and contestation; the occurrence of tremors in many parts of Kerala soon after an earthquake hit another State of the country.

A third case study develops the argument that media is central to the evolution of scientific authority using the episodes of mysterious red-rains which were reported from many parts of the State in early 2000s and debated widely in the press.

While empirically meticulous, Varughese does an excellent job of giving the reader a blow by blow account in each case, the throw-away references to democracy could perhaps have been rendered better through a clearer theoretical and analytical focus on history of ideas and politics of identity which has grown rapidly in the neoliberal era. The focus on seemingly spectacular cases seems a bit jarring too, this reviewer found it to be a case of circularity where events like red-rains and tremors become news, but of course, while something more mundane gets under-reported and in turn never getting debated with similar vehemence. Had the underlying conceptual and theoretical framework been more focussed, perhaps this selection could have been more justifiable.

After all, this book-length monograph about the democratization of science has come at precisely a time when science, and more broadly modernity’s universal claim to this-worldly progress, are increasingly under pressure from anti-secularists. It is surprising that in a book about democratization there is not a single reference to religion, caste, gender or any other sociological frame to give the reader a sense of the socio-political make-up of the civil society in contemporary Kerala. Are the mediated debates more or less inclusive of marginal and minority voices, how does caste and class intersect in the making of news reports about scientific controversies, and to what extent does literacy, and more broadly education, reinforce and reproduce the barriers faced by members of socially and economically marginal groups? In short, the question this book should have asked, and answered, is that if there is a mediated public sphere for science related debates, who are its counter-publics?

All this apart, the best part of the book comes in the course of a brief discussion about ‘the backstage’, where using Goffman’s theatre analogy, the author discusses the social and literal dimensions of science news and identifies the framing strategies adopted by different outlets. Finally, we hear the voices of the journalists and activists, and the incisiveness of the discussion shows the high quality of field work which is otherwise casually referenced in all other chapters. The interlacing of the theoretical concerns about democracy and civic participation with the themes of sociology in the Conclusion again brings forward the conjectural, strategic and elite aspects of mediation of scientific knowledge. While this gives us a tantalizing glimpse of how marginal groups like Dalits and women often end up as subjects of elite discourse, there is certainly scope to develop this approach further and use it to rethink the selection and nature of public contestations around science and its politics in a modern secular republic, as it should be and as it really is.

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In Search of Secularization of Civil Society and Alternative Politics

Kamal Nayan Choubey

HINDUTVA RISING: SECULAR CLAIMS, COMMUNAL REALITIES
By Achin Vanaik
Tulika Books, Delhi, 2017, pp. x + 458, ₹1200.00

There is no doubt that Hindutva politics has established its dominance in the vast terrain of Indian politics, particularly post-2014 general elections. Its dominance is not just limited to the political victories, but the Sangh Parivar has created acceptability and respectability in different social spheres. In the book under review, Hindutva Rising: Secular Claims, Communal Realities, the author Achin Vanaik has presented an insightful analysis of the different facets of Hindutva politics and dilemmas associated with the theory and practice of the concept of secularism, secular state and secularization. Vanaik not only persuasively argues for an alternative Left politics to counter communal politics and neoliberal policies, he also discerns many complex issues like Marxist analysis of religion, fascist elements in Sangh politics and the shallowness of Congress politics against communalism.

Indeed this book is an extension of Vanaik’s earlier work The Furies of Indian Communalism (1997). The author has not only followed the same framework presented in the earlier book, but has also revised many chapters and added a new chapter to explore the events related to the emergence of the Right Wing in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This book is divided into three parts, after the Introduction, Part One contains Chapter 1, which outlines the communalization of the Indian polity between Independence and the 2014 general election. Part Two (Chapter 2 and 3) constitutes the theoretical heart of the book.
In Part Three, Chapter 4 addresses how not to perceive the forces of Hindu communalism, and deals with the perspective of the Indian Left and the Indian Marxist about the nature of Hindu communal Right, while Chapter 5 discusses how to situate it within the overall context of economic, political, and social changes in India.

The book provides a capsule survey of the Sangh Parivar's parent body the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or RSS, and of some of its major affiliates. Vanaik underlines that Sangh Parivar has spread the idea of a homogeneous Brahmanical version of Hinduism, which has certainly prepared the ground for mass receptivity. Following Independence, the Sangh Parivar culturally implanted itself among sections of Dalits and Adivasis, despite its upper caste doctrinal basis. The foundational ideology of the Sangh has been based on the exclusion and demonization of Islam and Muslims. The identification of Islam and Muslims with terrorism has strongly reinforced their propaganda against Muslims. The Sangh Parivar focuses on a distinct idea of nationalism, which is based on Hindu identity and hostility to the Muslim ‘other’ and their exclusion. Vanaik, however, also asserts that ‘the danger represented by the Hindu Right is not just cultural or directed only against Muslims or other religious minorities, but mobilized politically against the majority of ordinary Hindus themselves’ (p. 16).

Even though the book does not investigate the colonial period, Vanaik stresses the fact that the Congress’s struggle for Independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi had a Hindu nationalist dimension of considerable weight, even as it also had a secular dynamic. In his analysis of post-Independent India, Vanaik accepts that the advance of political ‘Hindutva’ had been relatively slow, its acceleration started from the mid-1980s, and in the 1990s—following the ‘Ram Janambhoomi’ movement, it emerged as the central force in Indian politics. Vanaik shows brilliantly that the consolidation of Hindu communalism was not simply an outgrowth of the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies, but was significantly fuelled by the ‘secular’ Indian National Congress. ‘Though the Congress was in power for ten years, from 2004 to 2014, it made little progress on the matter of communalism. Neglect and indifference are what have most marked the attitude of the Congress-led UPA governments’ (pp. 87-88). He strongly criticizes the Congress politics relative to secularism and underlines that, ‘it is the futility of placing any hope in the prospect that the Congress—in large part responsible for Hindutva’s rise—might effectively confront the BJP/Sangh Parivar’ (p. 6).

Vanaik has also presented a critical analysis of Marxist understanding of religion as ideology. He, however, clarifies that he had not felt particularly beholden to that tradition in his effort to ‘understand religion’. Religion always has an ideological function, and it has thus become something of a Marxist convention to invoke Gramsci’s remarkable insights into ‘hegemony’ and ‘ideological domination’. According to Vanaik, the strength of the Marxist approach is also its weakness. Religion has an ideological function, but it goes far beyond that (p. 7). He argues that in the religion—culture-society relationship, culture is the pivot. Vanaik emphasizes that ‘Cultural essentials is a basic assumption of those who would contrast the value of secularization and secularism for India, and must be opposed and refuted’ (p. 8). Indeed Vanaik goes beyond the traditional Marxist understanding of the question of religion by his acceptance of differences between spirituality and religiosity. He accepts that it is even more difficult to theorize the spiritual than to theorize the religious or the religious experience. Vanaik asserts that it is not for Marxists to deny the existence of the spiritual experience, but only to point out that its sources can be, and are, many; and that a positive and healthy modernity enhances the sources and possibilities of the spiritual. He accepts that ‘It (Spirituality) can be experienced in a religious form, so a fully Marxist Utopia is neither necessary nor desirable’ (p. 25).

Vanaik has made an attempt to deconstruct and evaluate the work on secularism by Bhikkhu Parekh, T N Madan, Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee. He criticizes pre-modernist indigenousness and post-modernist arguments and underlines that the way to counter the false claims of both of them cannot be a simple argument in favour of an unproblematic modernity. It has to be the defence of a critical and modest modernity, in which a critical and modest Marxism assuredly has a place (p. 10).

It is also important to note that Vanaik strongly questions the dominant view within the Indian Left and among the Indian Marxists which claims that in the Hindu communal Right, we have been witnessing the rise and growing danger of an Indian fascism. It can hardly be denied that the Hindu Right has certain fascist characteristics, but it would be a theoretical blunder to say that actually India is witnessing its own version of fascism. ‘The spectre that now haunts India is not the prospect of anything like a fascist dictatorship, but of a much more authoritarian and controlled Hindutvaized polity... There is no need to restrict or eliminate electoral process’ (p. 424).

Vanaik challenges this common understanding that if a state is following the policy of toleration for all religious communities and if there is mutual tolerance among religious communities, there would be no danger of majoritarian domination and violence. He persuasively argues that even in such a situation a simultaneous and ever-widening process of secularization of social life is important for the long-term struggle against communalism and fundamentalism. Indeed the electoral success of the BJP and the growing influence of the Sangh Parivar only underlines the weakness of the secularization process in civil society. There are contending notions of the secularization. Vanaik has sought to defend the classical notion of secularization—relative decline in religious influence—as a fact in modernity everywhere. He strongly feels that secularization’s deepening in societies like India is a definite possibility, but one that would have to be fought for.

Vanaik presents a critical analysis of the BJP win of 2014 general election and many other State Legislative Assembly elections after it. He presents the idea of shorter term and longer term goal in the fight against the communal politics of the BJP/RSS. The shorter term goal is to halt and reverse the fortunes of the BJP/Sangh Parivar in the arena of electoral politics. The longer term goal is to counter it (the wider transformative project of installing a Hindu Rashtra) by the invocation of an opposing transformative project and vision.
There is, however, an inherent confusion in Vanaik’s treatment of the issue of minority communalism. On the one hand, he claims that no practical perspective for combating majority communalism can be complete without insisting simultaneously on combating minority communalism, particularly Muslim communalism (p. 4). However, on the other hand, he does not present any deep analysis of this issue and indeed he underlines that he is leaving ‘aside the unnecessarily defensive attempt to establish appropriately liberal credentials’ and adds that ‘by “balancing” my preoccupation with majority communalism with a study (and condemnation) of minority communalism...India cannot become an Islamic state; it can certainly become a Hindu state’ (p. 3).

Again it seems that Vanaik is not clear in his views regarding the relationship between religiosity and spirituality. On the one hand he accepts that religion could be an important component of spirituality and on the other he criticizes figures like Vivekananda and Gandhi by arguing that while ‘such figures (Vivekananda and Gandhi) never subscribed to Hindutva’s full chain of reasoning, they did implicitly or explicitly endorse some links in that longer chain’ (p. 194). Indeed there is need to present a more comprehensive account of spirituality and clarity about its relation with religion, but Vanaik does not present any such analysis.

For Vanaik the most important thing is the creation of an alternative politics against the communal mobilization of the Sangh. Thus he argues that ‘a beginning has to be made to construct a broader anti-neoliberal front or platform for which a newly rejuvenated left needs to emerge as one of its most consistent elements’ (p. 438). This work has underlined that to counter communal politics it is necessary to mobilize the masses on the issues related to social justice and protection of civil rights; nationalism should also be used with emphasis on the point that there are different ways of being and feeling Indian; and there must be a concerted campaign and mobilization to show that the neoliberal policy framework has been a comprehensive failure on economic, social, political and ecological grounds.

Undoubtedly, this book is essential reading to understand the complex issues related to the dominance of Right Wing politics and dilemmas of secular discourse in India.

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**Dissent In The Time Of The Cow**

Akhil Katyal

**INDIA DISSENTS: 3,000 YEARS OF DIFFERENCE, DOUBT AND ARGUMENT**

Edited and with an Introduction by Ashok Vajpeyi

Speaking Tiger, 2017, pp.560, ₹499.00

Last year, when PM Modi launched the now infamous Goods and Services Tax at an expensive event in Delhi, he was invited to the podium by an over-enthusiastic compere, who welcomed him with these words: ‘GST yaami ek rashtra, ek kar, ek bazaar, (GST as in one nation, one tax, one market) yahi hai ek bharat, shreshtha bharat (this alone is one India, great India), rashtra swabhimaan ke upasak (the worshipper of national self-respect), manabina pradhanmantri se ham sab vinamra anunay karte hain ki [we humbly request our respected Prime Minister to etc., He came out waving to the crowds.

It is one thing to sell an unbaked government fiscal policy under some PR gloss. It is another to aggressively push the dubious and fairly dangerous symbolism of one nation. Across government fora, hoardings and websites, you can find this slogan of one nation repeated ad nauseam. This is more than some whimsical patriotic fluff to oversell an unthought through tax regime. It is misguided and portentous.

Ever since 2014, the BJP government has been criticized for imposing its own narrow social, political and cultural vision on various unsuspecting entities, whether they be dissenting university students or the non-BJP ruled States, whether they be dissident caste and tribal groups or bodies of intellectuals. Whoever is seen strongly disagreeing with the government have been termed ‘anti-national’ pariahs. Reminiscent of the anxieties of the Indira Gandhi’s Emergency regime, the BJP regularly voices concerns about a mythical ‘destructive conspiracy’ to divide the nation whenever a strong opposition to its policies gains traction.

The present government has been condemned for imposing its totalizing vision—which is overwhelmingly upper-caste, Hindutva-driven, peculiarly North Indian and conservative-jingoist—onto those who do not subscribe to it. But the symbol is beginning to fray. People have started to see the plan behind the PR, have started questioning it. Buying into one is beginning to fray. People have started to

Against this backdrop, comes this timely book, India Dissents: 3,000 Years of Difference, Doubt and Argument which notes plurality to be the defining framework throughout Indian history, one which has time and again resisted its totalizing, Brahmanizing forces. Its central argument, according to its editor the Hindi poet Ashok Vajpeyi, is that there has always been a strong and multi-layered tradition of disagreement and debate in the fields of thought, conduct, knowledge and morality in pre-modern and modern India and that this dissenting tradition is resilient even in our times in which it is threatened. In a nutshell, the dissenters aren’t going anywhere. They’ve always been around, they’ll survive this too. Here is 3,000 years of them.

As is evident from the ambitious sweep of its title, the book brings together the examples of dissenting voices from the three millennia from our part of the world. The anthology argues that dissent has always been a liberating social-political force. That it loosens orthodoxy, questions brute force, makes the world liveable. That dissent is crucial to make the world liveable, across millennia, from Buddha to Ambedkar, from Lal Ded to Ismat Chughtai, from Bhagat Singh to Soni Sori. The book creates an elaborate tapestry of Indian thought and politics across centuries, in which no one tradition can claim supremacy, or remain uncontested when it does so. The book is done with the one, and how.

Consider an example. In the winter of 2016, the Indian Parliament was log-jammed over what is at heart a question of plurality vs. singularity of tradition. Of what we consider to be the story. The then HRD Minister Smriti Irani, in responding to the criticism of her government’s abysmal response to the ‘institutional murder’ of the
Dalit student-leader Rohith Vemula and the crackdown on Delhi’s JNU students over a cooked-up ‘sedition’ controversy, found herself quoting a pamphlet on the ‘Mahishasura Martyrdom Day’ issued two years earlier in JNU by ST, SC, OBC and other minority students. Her lips trembled as she read the words, her anger soared as the stringent Brahmanical scaffolding of Hindu mythology came crashing down in the face of tribal counter-narratives. She was incredulous as she read. ‘And may my god forgive me for reading this’, she said, and then quoted the pamphlet—‘Durga Puja is the most controversial racial festival, where a fair skinned beautiful goddess Durga is depicted brutally killing a dark-skinned native called Mahishasura...a brave self-respecting leader, tricked into marriage by Aryans...Durga, who enticed Mahishasura into marriage and killed him after nine nights of honeymooning, during sleep.’ The BJP cabinet minister called it ‘depraved mentality’, questioned the students’ ‘freedom of speech’ and threateningly proposed, ‘who wants to have this discussion in the streets of Kolkata? I want to know.’

A book like India Dissents should be compulsory reading for the BJP Cabinet. It would calm them down. It would ask them to hold their horses. It would say that your story—whether about Durga or about cow-worship, whether about the dubious Vaman Jayanti (Amit Shah’s name for Kerala’s Onam) or about that one Ramayana—is only one of the many stories that exist. What India had vilified in Parliament is the story held dear by many Indian citizens. Eastern India’s Asur tribe, in present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal, denoted as a ‘Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group’ claim lineage from Mahishasura itself and consider him their hero. For them, Mahishasura was a wronged tribal king. ‘The devas are the culprits. Our lineage from Mahishasura...a brave self-respecting leader, tricked into marriage by Aryans...Durga, who enticed Mahishasura into marriage and killed him after nine nights of honeymooning, during sleep.’ The BJP cabinet minister called it ‘depraved mentality’, questioned the students’ ‘freedom of speech’ and threateningly proposed, ‘who wants to have this discussion in the streets of Kolkata? I want to know.’

A book like India Dissents would argue that these fundamental differences in our iconic stories is not a cause of concern, it should not be flattened out, instead, it should be actively celebrated. That the arc of justice would emerge only from a healthy debate between differing stories. That our ability as a nation to be a source of justice to its citizens depends on taking into account these differences and working actively to heal the wounds that they reveal.

For instance, the book includes some of the Constituent Assembly Debates which resulted in drafting the Constitution of India in the late 1940s. Reading those debates, it becomes clear that the fabric of this nation has to acknowledge differences to ensure its well-being, not follow the trumpet sound of any one man or any one story. Jaipal Singh Munda (1903-1907), for example, fiercely represented the Adivasis of India during these debates, and when the Gandhians threatened that Prohibition be added to the list of Directive Principles, Munda made a persuasive case against it (included in this book) by arguing that such an act would encroach on the life-practices and rituals of the Adivasis. Speaking ‘on behalf of the millions of unknown hordes’, Munda turned the worlds of some of his contemporary Brahmanical Congressmen upside down when he said, ‘I am proud to be a Jungli...Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years. The history of the Indus Valley Civilization, a child of which I am, shows quite clearly that it is the newcomers—most of you here are intruders as far as I am concerned—who have driven away my people from the Indus Valley to the jungle.’ Smriti Irani and her Party members would have done a somersault. The story she was decrying turns out to be an old, resilient one of a people refusing to be silenced.

This is the power of this book. It does not let you comfortably settle into a singular, orthodox vision for this bumbling new nation of ours. It keeps the debates alive at a time when they’re most threatened. It forces you to consider whether a leader like Bhagat Singh, for instance, who is appropriated so spectacularly by political parties of every hue and colour, would have survived today without a sedition case being slapped on him every weekend. He is someone who in an essay ‘Why I Am an Atheist’, included in this book, could call the tenets of Hindu Brahmnic scriptures ‘unutterable trash’, or B R Ambedkar, also included in this volume, who asked us to ‘destroy [our] belief in the sanctity of the Shastras’. Imagine the fate of these figures in our times. Imagine their Facebook time-lines or their Twitter feeds, and god, their trolls. Imagine what charges they would have been put under. India Dissents is a clarion call to save the promise of this nation and its Constitution. We would do well to heed it.

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Mixing Business With Patriotic Veneer

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay

GODMAN TO TYCOON: THE UNTOLD STORY OF BABA RAMDEV
By Priyanka Pathak-Narain
Juggernaut, 2017, pp.236, ₹299.00

Three bearded men, between them, occupy a major part of air time on Indian television. The first gets on TV mainly because he often generates the news of the day and also because his face is used for hard-selling government programmes—recycled or re-invented, feasible and unachievable, successes or failures.

Yet these go on air because there is no one to question why. The second adds to his coffers with every image telecast, save those which are required to promote the image of a philanthropist, necessary to retain existing political ties and build new ones. He models for every conceivable product—from the proverbial all-purpose pins to luxury homes. Unlike the first two, the third has a shaggy unkempt flowing beard but matches the two in megalomania. Not much is known about him save routine news reports of his various activities. He is also brand ambassador, of an extremely wide range of products—ranging from FMCGs to beauty products and of course, medicines, all of which is produce from his kingdom. I will leave the identity of the first two for readers to decipher though it is certain that there will be little trouble in the exercise. The third man, Baba Ramdev, has an unchanging image of a person draped in saffron robes but is also eternalized as one who abandons followers when faced with a moment of crisis and that too in the clothes of a woman. But, what is Ramdev—is he a smart yoga Guru, a business tycoon, someone who lives in the nether world of business, politics and spirituality, a person who has often got on the wrong side of law but has immunity because of his influential friends and followers, or a bit of all these and maybe, much more? Priyanka Pathak-Narain provides a gripping tale—captivating, sordid, worrisome—and weaves together a portrait of a man who is anything but inspiring for those not in his sway.

Pathak-Narain, being a journalist whose ‘beat’ allowed access to Ramdev, his followers and people who worked at different points at varying levels in his empire, provided opportunities to track how his empire grew phenomenally, enabled a sound under-
The Book Review

The third stream of Ramdev’s rise is as that of a media tycoon, how he began presenting a yoga programme after buying time on Sanskar TV in 2002 and later when he realized the power of the media, took over the channel and thereafter the Aastha channel too, which together control almost the entire spiritual sector in broadcasting. This stream has its share of smartness and treachery about how Ramdev eased out existing promoters at times by use of questionable means and this makes for absorbing, also off-putting reading. This just goes to demonstrate that Ramdev is anything but a spiritual guru.

Like it happens in the case of most people with a larger than life image, including one of the other bearded men mentioned earlier, stories about childhood are often more mythical than factual and Ramdev is no exception. But more important is the author’s narration which establishes how Ramdev’s medical empire is built on deceit and by circumventing law. His trusted aide, Balkrishna, who owns most of the shares, Ramdev does not hold a single share because he is a sanyasi (sic), maybe managing the affairs of a massive medical empire, but he does not possess a single ayurveda degree.

The story still remains ‘untold’. Clearly, it is not difficult to imagine why the book must have angered Ramdev and his confederates, but it is impossible to fathom why the judiciary should become a party to this and pronounce an ex-parte order restraining immediate distribution and sale of the book.

In August 2017, a Delhi court restrained publication and distribution of the book on the basis of a complaint alleging defamation filed on behalf of Ramdev without hearing either the publisher or the author of the book. This raises serious issues as ex-parte orders go against the principles of natural justice and these codes include the right to be heard and the right to an unbiased referee. The Supreme Court has time and recognizes the importance of these rights not being encroached in the process of examining issues in a judicial manner but the lower courts routinely pass such verdicts. Over the past several years, numerous instances have surfaced when similar gag orders have been issued against books and media reports and such incidents point to the rising threat to the democratic spirit and rule of law.

It is not difficult to comprehend which portions would have worried Ramdev the most. Three chapters, unambiguously titled—Mystery 1: The Ally’s Murder, Mystery 2: The Guru’s Disappearance and Mystery 3: The Mentor’s Sudden Death, though not fresh investigation, recapitulate grisly episodes in the rise of Ramdev and that investigations are still underway in the cases, is indication that there is a seamier side to his rise. The author makes several points, the narratives of which run parallel to each other. One stream of the making of Ramdev is political and in that there is both story and analysis: how he mixed, and continues to do so, business with nationalism—or how his business is wrapped in a veneer of patriotism. Most TV or radio commercials of Patanjali products, in direct competition with those of other FMCG companies, make the point that by patronizing Patanjali products, consumers will safeguard the ‘economic independence’ of the country. By purchasing Ramdev’s products, people are told, they would contribute their two-bit to the nation’s or Bharat Mata’s cause! On the story side is a simple narration of the sequence of events since the last years of the previous decade when Ramdev first ho-hobbled with the Congress Party and later with the Anna Hazare movement and eventually the Bharatiya Janata Party and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. From a nobody, Ramdev’s rise to a stature when he can secure the presence of the Prime Minister to launch one of his projects and / or products, is no mean feat. But this is no achievement, the author suggests, without resorting to use of ‘campaign tools’.

The success of the book lies in its being a stickler to facts and by steadfastly avoiding affixing of labels. This is not a book that can in any manner be considered academic or scholarly but besides being a window to contemporary India, it is a splendid reference manual. Another stream in the Ramdev story is his business growth and how he set up the enterprise and began growing by leaps and bounds: by 2010-11 he had a turnover of Rs. 317 crore and this had risen to Rs 5000 crore in 2015-16 and Rs 10,000 crore till May 2017. The author makes two valid points that is proof that this is a book as balanced as one can be with the subject. Firstly, she says Ramdev brought in a new category of consumers and secondly, he forced other companies and even the world to sit up and take notice of Ayurveda, both for its therapeutic capacity and business potential.

There are shocking revelations—for instance ‘cow ghee’ being sold is actually made from white butter acquired from farmers and this is turn is made from the milk of various animals: cow, buffalo and even goat! Ramdev in fact, has mastered like other companies, the expertise of repackaging products—honey for instance—manufactured by smaller companies and marketing these after just affixing the Patanjali label. The extent of quality check is dubious. Despite use of such ‘dubious’ methods, questionable because pretence of ‘purity’ is an essential part of Ramdev’s business model, his empire does not run transparently and the bulk of decisions are taken opaque. A former CEO, a top-gun in the corporate world joined and left because his insistence on ushering corporate transparency was resisted.

Among other issues, workers’ rights continue to be squashed and questioning the management is dealt with a vindictive hand. It is a travesty that this book has been proscribed and remains unavailable to readers. The story still remains ‘untold’. Clearly, Ramdev is scared of ‘facts’ and probably he has more skeletons in his cupboard than those the book points to.

Nilanjana Mukhopadhyay, a Delhi-based writer and journalist, is the author of Narendra Modi: The Man and The Times and Sikhs: The Untold Agony of 1984.
Panjab: Whetstone Of India’s Democracy

Amandeep Sandhu

MASTER TARA SINGH IN INDIAN HISTORY: COLONIALISM, NATIONALISM AND THE POLITICS OF SIKH IDENTITY
By J S Grewal
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.776, ₹2595.00

For half a century (from the 1920s to the 1960s), like a colossus, Master Tara Singh straddled the region, the society, the community we call Panjab. His life had immense highs and lows and his role in the making of modern Panjab and the history of Sikh politics elicit diverse opinions. For a long time now there has been a need for a comprehensive book that portrays his life and times. Given this background, eminent scholar, historian, J S Grewal, under the aegis of Punjabi University, Patiala, has finally offered us a study of his life: Master Tara Singh in Indian History: Colonialism, Nationalism and the Politics of Sikh Identity. For a personality so much larger than life, for a book almost equally large in size, it is impossible to do justice or even summarize in a short review. At best, I can offer a few impressions.

The biography is four lakh words, 700 plus double column pages. It has a foreword, a preface, and introduction detailing the methodology, twenty-six almost equal sized chapters, one conclusion and ten appendices, forty photographs and three maps. Grewal puts together a comprehensive portrait of Master Tara Singh’s life, at many places even day-to-day records, from hundreds if not thousands of sources. He sketches out the period in which Master Tara Singh was born, his childhood experiences, his switch from a sehajdhari family to becoming a keshdhari Sikh, his becoming an Akali leader who participated in the Gurdwara Reform Movement, how he shaped the Sikh vis-à-vis the Congress stance during the freedom struggle, witnessed the mayhem of Partition of India and Pakistan through Panjab (and Bengal), raised the voice for Azad Panjab, how he translated into the struggle for Punjabi Suba—a recognition the Centre, paranoid about the Sikh minority, kept denying until 1966. When finally Panjab was trifurcated and became a State, it inherited issues such as Chandigarh and the river waters which still stand unsolved. Grewal has penned a non-hagiographic biography that humanizes Master Tara Singh and the book is as much about the person as it is a history of Panjab, the land and people, and Indian politics.

As I pored over the pages, aware of what has happened to Panjab and India fifty years after Master Tara Singh’s death, what stands out both in terms of understanding Panjab’s unique position in history and Master Tara Singh’s role in the making of the history is that: Panjab and the Sikhs are the whetstone of Indian democracy. In a democratic system the hardest aspect is how the idea of equality, even uniform nationhood, deals with those who are minuscule in terms of numbers, by those who stand for themselves and have not joined the majority and minority camps. The position of the Sikhs in Panjab is one such test even before the nation’s modern inception: at 13 percent, the Sikhs were a minority in every single district of the larger pre-Partition Panjab. There was no way they could get representative power. Without representation, how would the nation address the concerns of the Sikhs?

Grewal’s tome highlights two important facts: first, the Congress started as a people’s movement against the British which mutated into a political party. While doing so, the Congress sought to be the sole voice of the diverse people of the subcontinent. Pre-Independence, the Party’s response to the Sikh demand for representation was a prototype of what the Right Wing in the country now employs: either you are with us or you are anti-national. Second, the national leaders, both before and after India’s Independence, harboured a misinformed view: Sikhs are a part of the Hindus. In the later part of the 19th century, during Master Tara Singh’s childhood, the revivalist Hindutva organization the Arya Samaj projected this view and even Mahatma Gandhi bought into it in spite of supporting the Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920-25). The Nehru Report (1928, Motilal) did not recognize the Sikhs as a separate identity and provide separate electorates for them. The point to note is that the Sikh demand was the same as the Muslim demand. Like the Muslims were a minority to Hindus, the Sikhs were a minority to Muslim dominated Panjab.

Before Independence, Master Tara Singh opposed the creation of Pakistan. When Pakistan seemed like an eventuality, he raised the demand for Sikh homeland. The Congress ignored it. The book shows that more than any other national leader including Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad, who were stunned by the mayhem of Partition, Master Tara Singh was acutely aware of Panjab’s reality. All his life he remained steadfast in projecting the Sikhs as a religious but nationalistic people. Yet, the Congress leadership misjudged, maligned, and vilified him. Post Independence, Sikhs formed 35 percent of East Panjab and were still a minority. Master Tara Singh raised the voice for Azad Panjab which meant neither Sikhs nor Hindus dominate the representation from the region. It did not mean that Panjab or the Sikhs wanted to break away from India. At best, given the unique Sikh identity, it was a demand for a semi-autonomous region within the nation. The central leadership, which had earlier even considered banning the Akali Dal, kept viewing Master Tara Singh’s demand as communal. Ironically, it is when the Congress in alliance with the Akali Dal, tried implementing the Regional Formula (1956) that it discovered it was opposed by Hindus who were raising the pitch for ‘Save Hindu’.

Master Tara Singh’s eloquent discourse on the merits of Punjabi language is fascinating in both its rootedness and scope. His theorization of the Sikh nonviolence
The Little Known Ambedkar

Suhas Bhasme

**AMBEDKAR: THE ATTENDANT DETAILS**
Edited by Salim Yusufji
Navayana Publication, 2017, pp. 192, ₹295.00

India is still par excellence the land of idolatry. There is idolatry in religion; there is idolatry in politics. Heroes and hero-worship are a hard if unfortunate, fact in India's political life.

—Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches—Vol-1

Ambedkar's observation made about India almost decades ago applies equally even now to modern democratic globalized India. The unfortunate part is that over the period Ambedkar himself could not stand indifferent to the practice. Today, a diverse section of people cutting across caste, class and ideological backgrounds appreciate Ambedkar for his ideas. Over the period Ambedkar followers and now joined by Ambedkar's traditional critics consisting of Hindutva groups have raised his stature to the status of a divine figure.

The process of apotheosis of Ambedkar has a political explanation: for the marginalized section the entire process of the celebration of Ambedkar (Birth and Death Centenary) is part of claiming their existence in public spaces that as usual discriminates against them; and for the Hindutva brigade its way of co-opting Ambedkar and interpreting his ideas narrowly to justify their communal agenda against the religious minorities. The former is the outcome of sociological condition and the latter is the political necessity for the Hindutva brigade.

However, both acts by followers and opponents diverse in their origin might lead to a similar fate of eventual and slow death of Ambedkar's ideas. At this precarious situation, we need to save Ambedkar, particularly his revolutionary ideas for transforming our society.

*Ambedkar: The Attendant Details* edited by Salim Yusufji appears at this critical juncture of our time. As claimed by the editor, it is an attempt at intimacy with B R Ambedkar by aiming to attend 'the ephemera against them; and for the Hindutva brigade its way of co-opting Ambedkar and interpreting his ideas narrowly to justify their communal agenda against the religious minorities. The former is the outcome of sociological condition and the latter is the political necessity for the Hindutva brigade. However, both acts by followers and opponents diverse in their origin might lead to a similar fate of eventual and slow death of Ambedkar's ideas. At this precarious situation, we need to save Ambedkar, particularly his revolutionary ideas for transforming our society.

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Saima Saeed

TWITTER AND TEAR GAS: THE POWER AND FRAGILITY OF NETWORKED PROTESTS
By Zeynep Tufekci
Yale University Press, 2017, pp.361, $ 26.00

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twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protests by Zeynep Tufekci is a brilliant account of the organization, mobilization and spread of dissent in a digital age. The over 275-page description of protests in the ‘networked public sphere’ (p. 19) is a riveting account of the role of the internet in movements ranging from the Zapatista uprisings in Mexico, the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement in New York. ‘Thick descriptions’ of protests and ethnographic details of informal communities of friends and connected protestors from varied locations: Gezi Park in Turkey, Tahrir Square in Egypt and New York’s Zuccotti Park create a narrative which presents a convincing argument about the power of the internet, especially the social media and their ability to inspire, organize, share, disseminate and archive protests calls, messages and videos which governments find increasingly difficult to control in the transnational world of the web.

Tufekci springs no surprise when she argues that leaderless revolutions find success as they reach out to people through Twitter mentions and pins. However, the strength of her propositions lies in their substantiation. Participant observations and conversations with employees from Facebook, like with Richard Allan on the ban of Kurdish content by the social media giant add layers of meaning to the text—the logic behind Facebook’s design of its algorithms and the fact that users were unaware that an algorithm was determining what they saw or read. It this approach and methodology that distinguishes Twitter and Tear Gas from somewhat similar arguments made by her predecessors, like the much acclaimed Transnational Protest and Global Activism: People, Passions and Power edited by Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow (2005). In her conversational and easy-to-follow style, Tufekci introduces key concepts of digitally mediated communication with alacrity adding a scholarly dimension to her work. She applies these concepts to the narrative to study how they impact the success or failure of social movements. For example, in her insightful description of what she calls ‘an algorithmic spiral of silence’ attributable to the opaque, proprietary and personalized nature of algorithmic control on the web, she enunciates how it is difficult for activists to ascertain what drives visibility on the web. Therefore, they can never figure out whether it is their cause that is not finding traction with the public or the algorithmic filtering that is suppressing the story. This ‘algorithmic governance’ (p.162) is the ‘new overlord that social movements must grapple with’, the author sums up.

Tufekci enumerates the affordances of Facebook and Twitter for political organization, drawing on the strengths and weakness arising out of their specific design and architecture. Minute details of how @TahrirSupplies created by four young people, acquired more than ten thousand followers in one night, generating supplies worth ten field hospitals, go a long way into
making the narrative convincing and sharper. Not only does Tufekci examine protests from varied perspectives—political, social and organizational, she is a part of most, sharing books, cupcakes, coffee and even the tear gas suffocation; blurring the boundary between an activist and a scholar, between an involved participant and objective observer. However, this journalistic on-the-ground reportage of protests across locations does not prevent her from applying a range of concepts from the literature on social movements making it a compelling commentary on the politics of protests in a world of tablets and smartphones. The motley examples of—Occupy protestors in Oakland, California chanting an Arabic slogan; Zuccotti Park’s library resembling those in the Plaza del Sol protests in Madrid and the digital solidarity and connectivity of Hong Kong’s democracy protests, evade national contexts and cultures making the canvas of the work large. Moreover, it proves to be a significant documentation of networked protests and their democratization and proliferation among disparate online communities of users. Further, it brings together all stakeholders—governments, corporations, mass media, NGOs, political activists, dissenters, women and minorities.

What adds to this work is its particularly engaging humanistic appeal and the author’s own unwavering faith in the power of participatory practices and democratic processes. This is why the key terms that she uses to depict the digital movement cultures are participation, horizontalism, ad-hoc organization, leaderlessness which are described as the hallmark of the ‘global antiauthoritarian protest culture’ (p. 83). Besides using concepts like ‘signaling’ and ‘movement capacity’ to analyse social movements and their impact; freedom of speech remains a central motif against which online platforms are judged in terms of the quality of deliberations they permit in the face of rampant trolling, abuse and organized harassment especially on pseudonymous platforms. The case of ‘Amina’ is presented as more than a cruel hoax; it underscores the judgment which most internet studies seem to agree with, namely, that there is no 100 percent perfect, trustworthy, credible, neutral, ethical and impartial online platform for social movements.

It depends on their designs, algorithms and policies. Another major concern with Tufekci is how regimes and governments try to wrestle back power using surveillance and censorship which online communities manage to circumvent. However, it doesn’t end there as she draws up a comparison between a past when there was too little information and very few means to broadcast it, to a present, when there is too much information but few means to test its verifiability, especially, given that information can be suppressed under a surfeit of ‘ever-bigger glut of mashed-up truth and falsehood to foment confusion and distraction’. This, one would think, is an important conclusion that opens up questions for critical inquiry in the future.

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Political Economy of Capital Accumulation

Arindam Banerjee

STATE AND CAPITAL IN INDEPENDENT INDIA: INSTITUTIONS AND ACCUMULATION
By Chirashree Das Gupta
Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 315, ₹795.00

The book under review undertakes and accomplishes the daunting task of laying bare the relationship between the capitalist class and the state in Independent India and its consequences for the specific trajectory of capital accumulation that emerged. The task is challenging as the state-capital relationship is often made invisible through laws and customs and obfuscated with the aid of faulty or irrelevant economic logic. Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* as early as in 1776: ‘We rarely hear [...] of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines [...] that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject.’ (Smith, 1976: p. 84)

Smith’s concern was that while the labour unions were conspicuous in newly industrializing Britain, the associations of capitalist employers and their machinations in collusion with the authorities often received inadequate attention within the traditions of political economy. Nearly two centuries later in newly Independent India, the story is unsurprisingly similar. The dominant economic analysis highlights industrial labour militancy and militant movement for land reforms by rural labour and heavily exploited tenant farmers (the other component of the under-classes). When it comes to the policy regimes against which such protests were occurring, the role of the ruling classes are not so much highlighted. Rather those economic policies are justified by ‘good economics’, or sometimes by ‘good customs and traditions’.

Das Gupta in this book follows an alternative tradition of economic thought, embedded in Marxian political economy, to investigate the political economy of capital accumulation in Independent India. Focusing largely on the first three decades after Independence, the author documents and analyses the major strategies of Indian business houses and associations to facilitate the entrenchment of capital, and subsequent accumulation, in the Indian economy. In this, the economic narrative that emerges and is subsequently used to mould the relationship of Indian business with the state is succinctly delved with and critiqued in the book.

High corporate tax rates after Independence, planning and licensing policy and stringent labour laws preventing the expansion of business are three important narratives that have dominated the mainstream economic analysis of India’s development trajectory after 1947. The author draws attention to the fact that the post-tax earning ratios in India in the early sixties were higher compared to developed countries (except for New Zealand) in spite of such high tax rates. On the other hand, the author demonstrates how ‘indicative planning’ was a consensus within the Indian Marxist class at the time of Independence. The latter envisioned the planning process as a tool of establishing and entrenching the power of capital within the Indian economy. With no agrarian reforms and furthering of labour rights, the plan process expectedly ran into contradictions, could not fulfill the purpose of rapid capital accumulation and is thence undermined since the late sixties.

On the third narrative, which is also the most vociferous under the contemporary neoliberal order, the fallacy could not be more glaring. With labour costs forming a miniscule percentage of value-added in manufacturing and large-scale informalization where labour laws do not apply, high costs of hiring leading to restriction of capital accumulation hardly seems to be a plausible argument. The book has critically examined the validity of such common economic narratives that cascade the real political economy processes facilitating capital accumulation. With comparable rigour, the author unveils the evolving state-capital relationships in Independent India.

The property rights regime installed by the Congress government after Independence served as an assurance to the capitalist class. But more importantly, the author argues that institutions like the HUF tax entity, justified by religious customs and traditions, acted as an effective vehicle for tax evasion for the corporate sector. This was buttressed by a systematic narrowing of the definition of a ‘worker’, thereby excluding significant sections of the working class from the ambit of labour rights. This allowed a long-term cheapening of labour within the Indian economy, no less helped by the lack of land reforms in rural areas. The latter prevented any substantial relaxing of the ‘agrarian constraint’, perpetuating the large masses of underemployed population, inherited from the colonial period.

The combination of the above policies and processes were crucial for Indian capital to strengthen their foothold within the economy immediately after Independence and enhance their ‘class power’, which went on to serve enormously the cause of capitalist accumulation in the subsequent period. The deep analysis of constitutional debates, policy documents and speeches of various political leaders illuminate these processes. The book identifies the fundamental departures that occurred from the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle in the interests of the capitalist class. Needless to say, the myriad and complex political processes including the populism of the 1970s, does not make these developments obvious to the researcher. The excellent application of the Marxist method of inquiry and presentation by the author however reveals the systematic march of Indian capital, no doubt mediated by conflicts with labour.

The political economy analysis is further supported by an empirical analysis of Indian economic growth after Independence. The period of stagnation in the seventies and the subsequent growth in the eighties led by the growth of the tertiary sectors has been linked
through the identification of the continuities with regard to the regimes of capital. The very early movements towards diluting monopoly regulations and foreign capital controls in the late seventies aided the faster growth of capital accumulation in the eighties.

The eighties though were more complex in the Indian growth story. With regard to agriculture, the author noted the contribution of the GR and the consequent enrichment of capitalist landlords and rich peasants. While this is a correct analysis of the trend of the agrarian question, it is not always reflected by agricultural growth figures. The high agricultural growth of the late sixties were more of a recovery from the earlier agrarian crisis and less due to the new technology and institutional arrangements of the GR.

The GR, which started with serious crop-bias (towards wheat) and resource-bias (towards big farmers) continued with those biases well into the 1970s. The 1980s provided a structural break for agriculture, given that the GR effects went into new regions and penetrated the Indian peasantry more deeply. The eighties therefore had the highest agricultural growth rates in Independent India with a drastic reduction in the variation across regions. These developments in the agricultural sector are significant for increasing growth experience by the Indian economy in the eighties. The signing of the WTO subsequently and adopting export-oriented agriculture metamorphosed this process substantially. This re-interpretation of the agricultural growth process though does not alter or affect the central arguments made by the author with regard to capital accumulation and the evolving state-capital relationship.

One must note however that wrong and missing references, missing words and unfinished sentences have reduced the publication quality and militated against the reader’s engagement with the subject. Nonetheless, this book is a brilliant academic exposition of the journey of Indian capital and its negotiation with the state and the processes and to comprehend the dynamics of the regimes of capital. The need to address structural causal processes and to comprehend the dynamics of multi-layered networks of different actors in the garment industry is discussed in the second section of the volume. There are three articles in this section, titled ‘From Structures

References:

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Insights Into Global Supply Chains
Maya John

UNMAKING THE GLOBAL SWEATSHOP: HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE WORLD’S GARMENT WORKERS
Edited by Rebecca Prentice and Geert De Neve
University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2017, pp.304, ₹6,699.00

Unmaking the Global Sweatshop is a volume that brings together a rich collection of ethnographic studies which focus on the deplorable safety conditions at work and the poor status of health and well-being of workers employed within current garment production regimes. The overarching context of each of these studies is the interesting conjuncture of increasing corporate self-regulation and enforcement of newly formulated voluntary labour codes defined by the ‘first world’ for ‘third world’ garment sweatshops. In this regard, two such codes that are critically discussed by several of the contributors are the ‘Accord on Fire and Building Safety on Bangladesh’ and the ‘Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety’ of 2013. The collection represents a much needed and well timed intervention in the ensuing debate about the perils of the current form of globalization and the spread of highly NGO-ized transnational activism.

By mapping garment workers’ health on a quotidian level, as well as fleshing out the aftermath of large-scale factory disasters on workers’ well-being, the contributors successfully highlight that the poor conditions of garment workers is the systemic result of outsourcing and subcontracting that produce conditions for intense physical work for long hours, continuous compromising of workers’ safety in order to meet production deadlines, and competitive cost-cutting which depresses wages.

The first section of the volume comprises three articles that provide a detailed sketch of changing labour standards in an increasingly ‘global’ garment industry. A dense review of the historical context of regulation in the garment industry following early twentieth-century factory disasters and workers’ struggles is provided in Jennifer Bair, Mark Anner and Jeremy Blasi’s chapter. The chapter examines the regulatory regime and stability that jobbers’ agreements created in the American garment industry post the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in 1911, and proceeds to contrast it with the limitations of the regulation embodied in the Bangladesh Accord against the background of a stymied Bangladeshi labour movement. Florence Palpacer’s chapter in this section provides an insightful view on the emergence of the model of corporate self-regulation in the garment industry, and the spread of the hegemonic discourse of human rights over the past three decades. Palpacer notes that lobbying by the European anti-sweatshop movement and International Labour Organization (ILO) on the issue of multinational corporations safeguarding human rights has consciously sideline the essential question of individual states safeguarding labour rights of their working population. Caitrin Lynch’s and Ingrid Hagen-Keith’s chapter provides an interesting micro-level analysis of parallel initiatives by smaller brands to enforce ‘ethical’ garment production norms, and how the imperatives of the capitalist market system dominated by giant corporations curtail such initiatives.

The need to address structural causal processes...
The collection represents a much needed and well timed intervention in the ensuing debate about the perils of the current form of globalization...

Maya John teaches in Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, Delhi.
Travelling Through Spaces

Jasbir Jain

AOSENLA’S STORY
By Tensula Ao
Zubaan, 2017, pp. 203, ₹495.00

Tensula Ao, a poet and a short story writer, is the recipient of several awards, among them the Padmashri and the Sahitya Akademi Award. Her works include These Hills Called Home, a collection of stories and Laburnum for My Head, her memoir, about her growing up years. And now Zubaan has brought us this refreshing novel. It is one of those very rare unputdownable books, primarily because every experience finds a response in the reader—and I include men also in the category of readers for Ao has much in this which compels the male reader to introspect. On the face of it, it is the story of a young girl who is unwillingly pressurized into a marriage which ends all her own dreams of further education. But in reality it goes much beyond an individual life with all its psychological probing into a young woman’s mind and later her constant struggle with the pulls of tradition as well as critiquing of patriarchy and the compulsive changes it is forced into in response to a number of things—modernity, relationships and need for the male to step out of paternal domination. The writer’s understanding of both the security and the bondage of clan traditions is very sensitively and subtly interrogated, dominantly traced in the manner in which the family manoeuvres to push Aosenla into a space from where she cannot escape.

Space is another factor that is woven into the telling with its multiple meanings. The novel begins at midpoint with a woman lost in thought sitting all alone by herself of an evening. ‘Amidst the gathering interplay of fading light and threatening darkness, an evening, ‘Amidst the gathering interplay of fading light and threatening darkness, a first-time visitor could make out the outlines of a big estate, which appeared gradually to be coming to life. The two houses within were still visible: the big one with its imposing façade and the smaller one, almost demure, in the country-cottage serenity’. And throughout the first half of the novel the imposition of the big house—Aosenla’s in-laws’ house—persists, intervening in their lives at every critical juncture but gradually it falls into decline as the ‘little house’ carves its own life with all its daily battles and display of power. A part of it is also the battle over the conflict between love and sexuality. Is the human being divided—into body which yields as a counter of power and a mind which observes it with despair? The strategic use of space is also present in the corresponding change in the emotional transformations of the characters as the power struggle that began on the bamboo platform where a meeting between the groom—Bendang—and the bride-to-be—Asen was contrived by her scheming grandmother. The epigraph (from Toni Morrison’s Beloved) placed right at the beginning indicates the real direction in which the narrative is engaged in unfolding itself, ‘Freeing oneself was one thing: claiming ownership of the freed self was another.’ Thus physical spaces of rooms, hospital, landscapes form a consistent pattern in the work as illnesses, accidents, mending of bones and minds goes on, as the past revisits to remind one of moral lapses and the burden of setting things right falls on others.

An interesting aspect is also of the spirit of charity and of personal integrity, which the doctor, Kilang, has in plenty, the role the church and other sponsors play in supporting the home which he runs for children. A healer in more than one way, a part of it is also the battle over the conflict between love and sexuality. Is the human being divided—into body which yields as a counter of power and a mind which observes it with despair? The strategic use of space is also present in the corresponding change in the emotional transformations of the characters as the power struggle that began on the bamboo platform where a meeting between the groom—Bendang—and the bride-to-be—Asen was contrived by her scheming grandmother. The epigraph (from Toni Morrison’s Beloved) placed right at the beginning indicates the real direction in which the narrative is engaged in unfolding itself, ‘Freeing oneself was one thing: claiming ownership of the freed self was another.’ Thus physical spaces of rooms, hospital, landscapes form a consistent pattern in the work as illnesses, accidents, mending of bones and minds goes on, as the past revisits to remind one of moral lapses and the burden of setting things right falls on others.

Aosenla’s Story is in some measure a three-generation novel as one traces the narrative from Asen’s cowardly mother, afraid to fight for her daughter, Asen who manages to retain some sense of independence, and then her daughter Chubala, who goes on to complete her studies and find her own husband. Bendang’s real transformation becomes evident in this connection. But towards the end the novel moves a little too rapidly, refusing to dwell in detail on sensitive moments, unwilling to subtract from Asen’s story or dilute its poetic quality, a little reminiscent of Virginia Woolf, in the manner that each world is weighed and expands itself into visual images.

Ao’s novel travels through many spaces—tribal, emotional, moral—towards the impossibility of recovering a fully independent self. And even as it deals with several gender issues, it nowhere gives one a sense of loaded victimization; instead it is an individual’s journey of desire, rebellion and partial victory. A simple narrative, honestly told.

Jasbir Jain is the Honorary Director of the Institute for Research in Interdisciplinary Studies (IRIS), Jaipur. She was Sahitya Akademi Writer-in-Residence (2009) and Emeritus Fellow (2001-2003), both at the University of Rajasthan and recipient of several awards.

The Guru Who Came Down from the Mountain: A Novel by Roshen Dalal is a gripping psychological interplay of murder, sex, and drugs, of exploitation and conflict, and yet of friendship and empathy. Speaking Tiger, 2018, pp. 286, ₹399.00

Fraterhouse by Bhaskar Ghose is a novel about a college originally for men but now co-educational, founded in the 1880s by a group of scholars from a monastic order based in Oxford. In Independent India the links with Oxford inevitably grew more tenuous. As the seasons that make up a year change, so do the stories of the persons linked to Fraterhouse; some end, but are renewed in other forms, like the seasons. Only the college endures. Notion Press, 2017, pp. 374, ₹395.00
Travels and Trails of Lucknow Cooking

Saba Bashir

THE LUCKNOW COOKBOOK
By Chand Sur and Sunita Kohli
Aleph Book Company, 2017, pp. 252, ₹499.00

There is a change in the manner in which cookbooks are being written now. Earlier, they were mere recipes. The transformation that has come about is that a related history about the dish, or about the concerned region, from where the recipes have been chosen are now added. Of late, there has been an upsurge of recipe books of various kinds. If there have been books from royal households, there have also been books from the kitchen of popular film stars and other famous personalities. Cookbooks from chefs have an unending list. So, when you lay your hand on yet another similar book, the first reaction is to see how different it is from the others available.

On this parameter, The Lucknow Cookbook is fascinating as the authors, the mother daughter duo—Chand Sur and Sunita Kohli, have chosen dishes which have travelled with them from different parts of the world. Chand Sur, with her husband, Inder Sur, came from Lahore to settle in Lucknow after the Partition. She was from Balochistan, though her family was originally from Multan but had settled in Quetta. From the young age of eight, she had come to Mussoorie to study in the Wynberg Allen boarding school (as her father was in the Indian Railways, and always on the move). Due to this travel, and many others, there are recipes which have also travelled from different parts of the world, and the history of these dishes are briefly mentioned. For instance, the different recipes trace the interesting history as the ‘dahi ka shorba’, the yogurt soup has its roots in Istanbul, the use of pomegranates and dried fruit in Lucknow has come from Afghanistan, and the original kebabs have come from Persia.

The other part of the book is the vast range of recipes, from kebabs to soups to potatoes to vegetables to mutton and chicken and fish to biryanis and pulaos to rotis and parathas to meetha and puddings and finally to coffee, high tea, chutneys, pickles and murabbas. However, some dishes and recipes seem too mundane to feature in a book. On the other hand, there are some recipes which sound so exotic that one wonders if they are really related to Lucknow in general. With the travels that Sur and Kohli have done, these specific dishes might be common in their homes but does one really find them in other Lucknow homes? That is a tricky question! As one can see, the title of the book is misleading. The dishes go beyond Lucknow and are more about what the family has picked up during their travels and trails.

The recipes are largely easy to follow with ingredients commonly available. The love for the dishes, of the mother and daughter comes through, not only in the choice of dishes to be included in the cookbook, but also in a strange nostalgia which seems to brim through the book—nostalgia for the places they have lived in, visited, and brought back with them.

Saba Mahmood Bashir, poet, author and a translator, is the author of a collection of poems, Memory Past (Writers’ Workshop 2006) and I Swallowed the Moon: The Poetry of Gulzar (HarperCollins 2013), her PhD thesis (IIT Delhi).

She has translated Gulzar’s screenplays of Premchand’s Godaan and Nimma and Other Stories (Roli Books 2016) along with a short story ‘Fear’ which came out in the anthology Pigeons of the Dome (2015). Her forthcoming book is by HarperCollins which is an analysis of the 1975 film, Aandhi.
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