

Book Reviews

Pratiksha Baxi. 2014. *Public Secrets of Law: Rape Trials in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. liv + 433 pp. Notes, appendices, bibliography, index. ₹1150 (hardback).

Since December 2012, it seems that everyone wants to talk about rape as an index of worsening times, a call for stentorian State attention, a warning to further protect women. Alongside, we hear a popular thread (the likes of Akhilesh Yadav, only the most extreme of its proponents) that rape charges are extreme, spurious, motivated by the desire for money, revenge or political advantage. These latter claims often rely on National Crime Records Bureau statistics that while reported cases have vastly increased, only about 20 per cent of chargesheeted cases end in convictions; the gap is interpreted to call 80 per cent cases ‘false’ by conflating non-convictions, unprovable cases and (the much smaller figure of) made-up charges. Pratiksha Baxi’s book offers a meticulous genealogy challenging such discourses, explicating why rape prosecutions pervasively fail despite the roaring of the State.

‘Falsity’, we should become convinced, is constitutive of rape law—police procedure, forensic investigation, scrutiny of testimony and legal reasoning operate through narratives of doubt, rather than framing responses through emotional or material support to survivors. Rape trials are ‘public secrets’, in Michael Taussig’s sense of ‘that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated.... Knowing is essential to its power, equal to its denial’ (p. xxiii): trials are not elaborate conspiracies hidden from public view, but produce failure in plain sight, in their very ordinary use of documents, evidence and testimony. Such technicalities may be characterised as ‘jurispathic’ in their tendency to valorise processes over moral concerns, to ‘hollow out state law of its normative content’ (p. 350). The difficulty of proving caste-based hatred based on utterance, or indeed caste identity through certification, in order to obtain a conviction under the Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989) even among well-disposed judges, is an illustrative example (chapter 6).

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This is a very erudite, evocatively argued book located at the intersection of the jurisprudence of law, feminist legal theory, studies of sexual violence and analyses of discourse. Its theoretical skill lies in interweaving the concerns of each of these fields and bringing them into conversation with each other, to demonstrate the ways in which everyday adjudication foils the grand ambitions of law and feminism. Detailed, lucid narratives of appellate case law on various aspects of sexual violence provide a reminder both of horrific histories and the frames through which they have been read (chapter 1 traces the broader arc of Indian case law while later chapters feature topically relevant overviews).

The exceptional contributions of the book lie in highlighting the role of ethnography to diagnose gaps, failures and excesses in law. We become aware of ineffable moments in courts and corridors and labs and offices which shape jurisprudence: the child who cannot tell time but must meet the testimonial requirements of accounting for temporality in her rape (chapter 3); the 'hostile witness' in a 'compromise' solution who must deny her own narrative of violence in order to preserve the dignity of natal and affinal kin (chapter 4); the woman who cannot narrate her own experience of love in law but is charged instead by her natal family as a co-conspirator to her own abduction and rape (chapter 5); the psychologist who uses 'relaxation methods and audio-stimuli' (p. 100) to help rape accused fantasise and ejaculate in order to collect semen samples for evidence (chapter 2); the Dalit father who resists compromise attempts and bears witness to the ways in which police delays, report-writing techniques and cash demands deliberately vitiate his daughter's case (chapter 6); the defence lawyer triumphant that he scared a rape victim enough to ensure she never returned to court (Introduction). *Public Secrets* reminds us that testimony and evidence are constructed through the messiness of comportment and affect, obligations and exchange.

How do we know when a rape survivor is telling the truth? Are there any better techniques than taking them at their word? Is there a way to read the woman's body against her speech, to use Veena Das's evocative phrase? Baxi traces the ways in which medical textbooks from the colonial classic by Chevers to Indian versions from 1922 to 2002 are grounded in colonial suspicion of 'natives', especially women (chapter 2). But when, in an incredible smoking gun moment, a lawyer takes Pratiksha aside to patiently explain why 'a woman can't really be raped', relying on the cultural construction of the vagina based on a combination of

social, moral and biological logic, rendered in pornographic mimesis (p. xxxix, Introduction), we graphically understand the power of medical jurisprudence to put forth an ethnosexology of behaviour and morality.

Baxi's analysis scales up from everyday encounters in Ahmedabad courts to broader readings of appellate cases to the stark mass violence affecting in Khairlanji (chapter 6) and Bilkis Bano in Gujarat (Conclusion). It becomes manifestly evident that these latter cases are not represented as exceptional violence, not only because they are quotidian deployments of caste and religious hegemonic power, but also because they are litigated through the 'ordinary' discourse of rape trials. Despite the grossly sadistic slaughters and rapes, they are presented through ideas of uncontrolled lust of perpetrators rather than violence; of depicting the rape survivor's body, life and love as cause for doubt; in the deliberate vitiation of First Information Report (FIR) and forensic protocols to shield the accused. The onus falls upon destitute people with few support systems to pursue justice despite formidable discouragement.

Baxi suggests that feminist ethnographers too are complicit in probing about bodies and feelings, similar to forensic techniques which 'must mimetically do to a woman what the particularized aggressor did' (p. 348) in order to establish its particular version of truth. As this riveting investigation of the life of the law shows, however, ethnography also destabilises and exposes the processes of legal knowledge production. It helps us understand the dynamic, though fraught, relationship between law, feminist advocacy, judicial activism and elusive justice.

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Akhil Gupta. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan. xiii + 368 pp. Notes, references, index. ₹895 (hardback).

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Why is it that 'a state dedicated to development appears to be incapable of doing more to combat the violence of chronic poverty' (p. 279)? In addressing this concern, Akhil Gupta in *Red Tape* questions the ontic status of the state and interrogates the construction of the unitary state and its reification by piecing together in fine ethnographic detail, the everyday,

routinised practices through which state officers construct the boundaries between state and society—each site not necessarily connected to the other in a grand super structure, but each creating a regulatory system and protocols that define the characteristic of the state at that level.

As a stark point of departure, witness the deaths of millions of poor people in India. Witness the violence of exceptional poverty that annihilates entire communities. Rather than seeing this as an inevitable situation from which the poor have no escape, Akhil Gupta argues that the death of the poor is a form of thanatopolitics¹—and that ‘extreme poverty [is] a direct and culpable form of killing made possible by state policies and practices’ (p. 6). While it is not possible perhaps to identify a single perpetrator, human complicity and agency are clearly identifiable in the perpetration of extreme suffering; despite being preventable, these deaths are not prevented; and these deaths are seen as outside the orbit of violation—the extremely poor represent bare life—life that can be killed without it being considered a sacrifice. Unlike the context within which Agamben locates his writing, the poor in India, Gupta argues, suffer state arbitrariness even while they are included in projects of national sovereignty and are killed despite their centrality to democratic politics:

If the state in India were ideologically opposed to redistributive measures...it would make the lack of urgency in eradicating poverty much easier to understand. It is this commitment to equality, to the redistribution of dignity, and to the inclusion of the formerly marginal in the national project that makes the continued violence enacted on the poor so paradoxical (p. 222).

Investigating the juridical and social conditions that make the violence of such exceptional poverty normal through ethnographies of state practice, Gupta approaches the question of structural violence through three intersecting themes—corruption, inscription and governmentality; through ethnographic accounts of state practices; and through narratives of state practice ranging from public culture to creative writing.

Folklore around corruption abounds—and stories of corruption circulate incessantly, embellished in each successive cycle. Sidestepping stereotypical representations of corruption as a characteristic of Third World

¹ Simply put, the politics of death where, Foucault argues, the modern biopolitical state exercises sovereignty through its power to ‘make live and let die’ (2003: 240).

nation-states, Gupta approaches this subject by combining ethnography with an analysis of texts—and the task at hand is specific: ‘investigating the wide range of meanings attributed to the term in the context of structural violence’ (p. 80). The relevance of this lies in the fact that corruption serves to exclude the poor from access to free and subsidised services even while they are included in the national developmental project—enabling ‘the very gestures of inclusion to produce an outcome that is its opposite’ (p. 110). The recognition by ordinary people of the multiple layers and centres of the state, their consciousness of the relative habitations of corruption across these layers and their absorption of representations of these habitations in public culture speak of a common understanding of the state as a disaggregated, multi-layered institution. The multiple, simultaneous, intersecting locations of the state—local, regional, national, transnational—and its multiple, simultaneous protocols is a theme Gupta returns to often and demonstrates through his ethnographic journeys across bureaucratic habitations in Uttar Pradesh.

Inscription is at the core of bureaucracy—the file, registers, memos, notings, reports, complaints, petitions, ‘paper work’... The proliferation of writing that is labyrinthine, repetitive and mundane, far from being a substitute for bureaucratic action, is bureaucratic action in itself and constitutive of states. What are the specific ways in which writing functions as a key modality for the perpetration of structural violence by the state? What are ‘the consequences that forms and styles of state writing have for poor people?’ (p. 143). In a society where the curtailment of access to public goods by the poor is the norm, literacy—the ability to read and write—vests power in the bureaucracy and is a source of domination over the largely illiterate poor. Yet, as Gupta argues, the relationship between literacy, education and poverty is complex—literacy by itself cannot mitigate structural violence. The distinction between political literacy and functional literacy merits serious attention—what is important is not literacy itself but the political contexts in which it develops (p. 218).

Drawing on Foucault’s work on governmentality, Gupta uses *global governmentality* to index a different approach to the question of regulation that ‘acknowledges that transnational linkages in the movement of ideas, material resources, technologies, and personnel are critical to the care of populations’ (p. 239). Looking closely at two programmes (ICDS and Mahila Samakhya) that belong to different moments of globalisation and had vastly differing design, objectives and ideologies, he demonstrates

continuities in biopolitics and violence through this entire period. The attempt is also to underscore the specificity of neoliberal global processes by mapping the different impacts at different levels and in different state sectors, complicating thereby overarching notions of state reform based on Western liberal democratic policies.

A careful examination of these anti-poverty programmes, Gupta argues, demonstrates that '[t]hanatopolitics... is built into the design of government programmes to the extent that the "difficulty" of removing poverty is normalized in the discourses of political and bureaucratic elites', leading to 'a bureaucratic culture in which failures of implementation are not merely tolerated but expected' (p. 275).

We return to the point of departure with a twist. The casual reference to failures in implementation that perpetuate the violence of poverty—of legislation, policy, schemes, entitlements generally—splice the realm of state action into two parts that never meet: the realm of the proactive state that has everything good and desirable already written into the books of government; and the realm of the implementing agencies (as if this were not also the state) that use every trick from corruption to coercion to subvert the good of the written word. Gupta provides a refreshing analysis rich in detail and one that dismantles these separations. The book both enables a more nuanced and productive understanding of the habitations of structural violence and points to different possibilities of theorising the state.

REFERENCE

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KALPANA KANNABIRAN

Jinee Lokaneeta. 2011. *Transnational Torture: Law, Violence and State Power in the United States and India*. New York: New York University Press. x + 291 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$55 (cloth).

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This is an innovative, closely argued and empirically rich account of a crucial aspect of the study of violence in modern societies: torture.

Its point of comparison, the US and India, is innovative, since intuitively at least, in comparisons of the west and ‘non-west’, one may reach for spaces that have historical linkages as metropolis and colony as counterparts. Yet, Lokaneeta stages her comparison between the US and India on the shared concept and practice of ‘liberal democracy’, and also the appropriation of US case law by the modern Indian Supreme Court.

Theoretically, the great importance of this study is its argument with, and attempted displacing of, the pervasive formulation taken from Agamben that the practice of torture in the US, for example, is a ‘state of exception’. Lokaneeta wants to locate the propensity to torture far deeper in the heart of liberal democracies, than the place of an ‘exception’, and to do so, revives and then attempts a relocation of Foucault’s concept of ‘excess violence’.

As she argues, for Foucault, modern governmentalities are an ‘economy’ that operates as ‘the bumble bee who rules the bee hive *without needing a sting*’ (p. 100, quoting Foucault; emphasis is Lokaneeta’s). ‘Excess violence’, in Foucault’s argument, has been dispensed with the regime of modernity that occupies his central analytical work. Lokaneeta’s argument is that, to the contrary, ‘the state, in its own quest for legitimacy and control continues to find ways of accommodating acceptable levels of excess violence with an art of government’ (p. 99).

While this formulation does have great power, it also, even though in a revisionist way, retains the Foucaultian concept of ‘excess violence’. Lokaneeta is able, given a rich set of ethnographic examples, to locate instances of ‘excess violence’ in both modern societies: the US and India. In relation to the US, her analysis of the TV serial *24* is telling as is her framing of the opening scene of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* set in Mumbai. We see that in both instances, ‘acceptable levels of excess violence’ differ, given the socio-historical difference between the two moments.

Yet, in the argument of the book, both instances have to be accommodated within the given Foucaultian framework. Perhaps, this is the vulnerability of Lokaneeta’s theoretical argument: for even as the given quotation explicates her argument, it also demonstrates the impossibility of stabilising analytically the place and province of the concept of ‘excess violence’ nationally, let alone transnationally, as it were. Indeed, in Lokaneeta’s argument, ‘excess violence’ appears to inhabit both the possibility and limit of liberal government, even though I am not certain

that this is her formulation and if it would sit in comfort with an argument that attempts a critical enlargement of Foucaultian concepts.

Nevertheless, these theoretical worries aside, this is a laudable and important volume that does considerably enrich our understanding of multiple histories of torture, and reopens and enlarges the effort to find conceptual clarity in the study of violence in the social sciences.

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Amita Baviskar and Raka Ray, eds. 2011. *Elite and Everyman: The Cultural Politics of the Indian Middle Classes*. New Delhi: Routledge. xii + 468 pp. Tables, plates, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. ₹895 (hardback).

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This considerable volume brings together a range of scholars, who have published on the Indian middle-class for some time. It therefore provides an in-depth view of its cultural politics and a kind of stock-taking. As Baviskar and Ray state in their insightful, if short, introduction that whilst internally highly differentiated, it is the hegemony of values and trajectories that contributes to the formation of a new middle-class under conditions of post-liberalisation and globalisation, its diversity notwithstanding. It is this common awareness of being middle-class as a project involving castes, communities, households and individuals, which comes into focus throughout the book.

The first set of chapters provides insights into the historical processes of middle-class formation with Sanjay Joshi's chapter detailing the singularity of middle-class emergence within the colonial context, whilst Leela Fernandes analyses very recent new forms of middle-class hegemonies which are based on the ideological tenet that 'everyone can join in'. Susanne H. Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph provide a detailed case study of how a Rajput elite moved from farming to become heritage hoteliers, utilising new middle-class imaginations. Finally, this section also contains a re-print of the seminal paper analysing the Indian middle-class in economic terms by E. Sridharan. In this chapter and in the following chapter, intergenerational differences and the way they indicate and mediate ongoing social change are taken up. This is fleshed out in the chapter by Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey who document

how various sections of the farming Jat community employ complex household strategies to gain access to middle-class lifestyles. Here, as in some of the other chapters, the importance of collective (re-) positioning in relation to caste and locality is demonstrated, as education is only one of the means by which Jats reposition themselves. Whilst caste is mentioned in some of the chapters in this section, it would have been helpful to include a chapter on the politics around status and affirmative action and Dalit dilemmas. This would have brought the issue of caste, absent in the following chapters, into focus.

The second section is concerned with the reproduction of class, strictly speaking socialisation and a shared habitus, which explains how in the face of obvious and significant differentiation in shared values, aspirations and narratives, they still constitute a recognisable social field. There are globally three arenas most obviously associated with being middle class, namely work and the workplace, domesticity and consumption. These are explored in chapters ranging from the most conspicuous indicators of middle-class status in contemporary India, employment in the information technology (IT) industry to the reorganisation of middle-class homes across lines of gender and class, towards an analysis of education and middle-class investment in children, surveys of sexual habits and lower middle-class assessments of recent processes of public sector privatisation. In this section, the ideological underpinnings of ‘middleclassness’, that is, the everyday reproduction of intra-class subjectivities as well as inter-class relations are addressed with ethnographic detail. Carol Upadhyia discusses the iconic status of software engineers and the way the ideological underpinnings of such workplaces have become the most powerful symbols of post-liberalisation India. Here, the quality of middle-class discourse to become hegemonic, to shape reality on the level of individual and family aspirations as well as politics is most poignantly reflected in media discourses and transnational cultures. This discussion of the IT industry and its far reaching consequences is expanded in the chapter by Smitha Radhakrishnan. She shows how employees buy into and enact strict gender ideals, justified in terms of a ‘gender-neutral’ ethos based on professionalism and meritocracy by reinventing a discourse on Indian femininity.

Nita Kumar’s article on the role of schooling and the Indian middle-class child offers a glimpse into the rarely discussed domestic practices of contemporary middle-class families. Looking at the all-consuming

passion for academic success, she argues that the family, rather than the school or workplace, is the main site of remaking 'middleclassness'. This position is strengthened by Seemin Qayum and Raka Ray's exploration of servants as a real-life marker of middle-class status across a wide economic spectrum. The question of managing and imagining what it means to be middle-class is further explored by Patricia Uberoi, who via an illuminating comparison between surveys on the sexual lives of a middle-class separated by 70 years argues that a new, encompassing interest in managing domestic affairs in accordance with 'modern' values is evident in the recent spurt of 'sex' talk. In comparison, Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy Scrase's analysis of lower middle-class views on work in the public and private sectors draws out differentiations within the middle-class, rather than treat them with a common discourse. Where these subjects were concerned, the rhetoric of a new era feels threatening as opportunities are, realistically, viewed with much scepticism. Here as in the following section, it would have been extremely useful to have examples of how discussions pan out in various communities, including explicitly non-Hindu collective representations, institutions and practices.

The last section deals with the public sphere and the role middle-class morality plays in shaping the public discourse on India today. This is exemplified in William Mazzarella's chapter on the politics of censorship which showcases the complex moral contradictions that tales of new freedoms and the need for its containment bring about. As Sanjay Srivastava's chapter exemplifies, such contradictions are also powerfully implied in new consumption practices, even where these consist of religious experiences or state-facilitated leisure activities like festivals. Amita Bavişkar's chapter on environmental discourses as a struggle over rights to urban space shows that hegemonic claims to superiority are often only partially realised. This section implicitly references politics, but it would have been a great place to explore some politics on the ground and the complex way this realm is interdependent with middle-class cultures of non-metropolitan origin.

The chapters in this collection provide a stock-taking of sorts and point towards the variety of approaches that have been employed to discuss the Indian middle-class as a cultural category, specifically in relation to education, consumption and neoliberal politics. It appears that scholars have finally moved beyond the largely futile discussion of whether we

can speak of an Indian middle-class, to instead analyse the multiple sites, representations and practices that bring it into being. It is hoped that more studies of how the privilege of a few is turned into political clout and common sense will be added to the study of this self-conscious elite posing as ‘everyman’.

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Sanjay Srivastava, ed. 2013. *Sexuality Studies*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xii + 320 pp. Figures, notes, references, index. ₹825 (hardback).

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After carping and complaining for years, it may be said with some degree of satisfaction that there is now a substantial body of academic writing on sexualities in India. Mary E. John and Janaki Nair’s edited anthology of essays, *A Question of Silence?* (1998), and Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai’s edited collection of readings from literature and history, *Same Sex Love in India* (2000), marked, in a way, the beginnings of this era. It may be fruitful, now, to think about what the trajectory in this field has been in the last decade and a half and what milestone Sanjay Srivastava’s new edited volume, *Sexuality Studies*, flags for us. I would suggest that the titles of the first and last collections named here serendipitously point towards a mapping of this journey. John and Nair broke bread in some significant sense when they shattered the ‘conspiracy of silence’ that they saw as shrouding sexuality studies in India; Srivastava’s volume marks that moment, then, when ‘sexuality studies’ can finally be named as a discipline in Indian scholarship. Is it a (re)birth or a coming-of-age? Is it normative or is it a queering, we may well ask too.

Srivastava’s cogent introduction lays out the volume’s inheritances and chosen foci that draws upon, as well as distinguishes it from, the contents and approaches of the clutch of books he cites as predecessors to *Sexuality Studies*. Foremost is the fact that ‘all chapters employ methods that are drawn from sociology or historical sociology’ (p. 2); using these tools, the 12 essays of the volume explore ‘relationships between the “mainstream” and its others, in order [to]... more fully understand the making of the former’ (p. 2), seek to figure out why we talk about sex now in the ways we do and why knowing histories of sexuality is

imperative to this project of apprehending the contemporary. It may be demurred that the volume's greatest strength—its clarity of vision and range and methodological unity—also results in some self-imposed limits that then eschews exploring a greater range of sexuality studies: that is, by identifying the sociological as the primary tool of inquiry, it curbs the volume's freedom to pursue connections in sexualities with non-sociological/historical disciplinary tools—such as the aesthetic, for example. What it achieves instead, however, is a flow and ebb between essays that is unusual in anthologies that map a range of 'studies' organised around a theme. And it perhaps benefits from this unity, if scholars can use this focus to best advantage without forgetting that sexuality studies in India also forays into other areas with methodological instruments that are not necessarily all cited here.

The sociological approach that binds the essays, in fact, allows for a visible thread to run through and between them that is rare to such anthologies and proves the advantage of editorial clarity and control. An impressive range of social, cultural and political 'texts' of sexualities in contemporary India are identified as significant targets of social science study: why and how sexual behaviours, artifacts, symbols, taboos, obsessions, regulations and articulations can be read to make greater sense of how human systems of society and polity function. It is equally important to know which frames and tools are deliberately absent, and why, as Srivastava points out:

... none of the chapters included here make use of psychoanalytic (or psychologised) frameworks that have found favour in studies of Indian sexuality. Rather, the idea of 'sexual culture' is scattered across a number of domains that both implicitly problematise it as an independent (or self-referential) arena as well as force us to think about the various ways in which different domains (the law, the state, 'middle-class' opinion, science and 'sexual-health' programmes, for example) contribute to its construction (p. 2).

Additionally, as Srivastava notes, contributions to this volume extend the discussions of individual and group experiences of sexuality that are generically true of sexuality studies through 'explorations of multiple sites of modernity within which individual lives are enmeshed' (p. 3), thereby providing pointers not just to meanings produced about contemporary

sexual ‘nature’ and cultures but to ‘why sex and sexuality constitute significant topics of discussion’ (p. 3).

The 12 essays in *Sexuality Studies* are testament to recognised and promising scholarship associated with these specialisations: colonial sexualities—in medical journals (Sanjam Ahluwalia), in old Calcutta pornographic booklets (Hardik Biswas); the sexed body, language and violence—in law, specifically family courts in Kolkata and Dhaka (Srimati Basu), in development discourse in Kerala (J. Devika); queer subjects, spaces and their politics—in Hindu nationalism (Paola Bacchetta), in sodomy laws (Jyoti Puri), in prostitution, sodomy and minoritisation (Svati P. Shah), in small town same-sex subjects (Paul Boyce), in the outing of gender, race, caste and class in ethnographic fieldwork (Diepiriye Kuku); and romance, porn, voyeurism, risk—in the pornography of footpaths and gated communities (Sanjay Srivastava), in the globalised Valentine’s Day card market phenomenon (Christiane Brosius), and in debates on consent and condoms in the globalised lives of young women in Mumbai (Shilpa Phadke). Of course, each essay is a product of consummate research and perception, employing the finest historical–sociological methods of analysis and expression, invaluable to both those already invested in any (or many) of the specific areas of investigation or those stepping gingerly into the vast and heady field of Indian sexuality studies in socio-cultural–political contexts. This is not surprising; one would hardly expect any less from Srivastava’s acute scholarship as he edits the pantheon of ‘gender/sexuality’ experts on India included here. What is further, and importantly, to be taken away from this volume is, I suggest, how its chosen areas of scholarly focus map the concerns that are foremost in thinking about and around sexualities in contemporary India.

Srivastava rightly emphasises the question of why we are talking about certain aspects of sexualities in contemporary India now, as this holds crucial pointers for understanding how sexualities circulate in and shape our everyday existences in both private and public domains. Not astonishingly, an overwhelmingly large number of essays in the volume are about queerness; the battle against 377 has turned into the defining paradigm for sexualities in India since the 1990s—a decade which also flagged the emergent globalised sexual subject, whose ‘new’ lifestyles and habitats and investments then generated fresh targets for sociological analysis. Violence, violation, voyeurism, risk, pleasure, commodity, heteronormativity, LGBTQKP—all vie for space in sexuality studies

today, so charting our past, present and future lives and our concomitant intellectual pursuits.

That this field is as flaming, inconstant, mutant as its object of (intellectual) desire is proved by the fact that what the volume last records in queer politics is a 2009 Delhi High Court victory against the draconian colonial law 377 that criminalises non-normative sexual behaviours—being published, of course, before 377's huge setback at the Supreme Court in December 2013. Here is a distinguished collection of scholarship that speaks urgently of and to our potent and fraught contemporary sexualities, and that marks the coming-of-age of a field of inquiry in the social sciences that is yet continually re-birthing and re-identifying itself. Srivastava's anthology shows the way, and demands and merits more research and writing in Indian sexuality studies that range further afield by way of methods, tools and foci.

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Sumi Madhok. 2013. *Rethinking Agency: Developmentalism, Gender and Rights*. New Delhi: Routledge. xvi + 237 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. ₹695 (hardback).

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A fair amount has been written about the unique initiative of the Women's Development Programme (WDP), Government of Rajasthan since its inception in August 1984 and more since the beginning of its collapse in 1992. Yet, Sumi Madhok's book provides an interesting insight into the project embedded as it is in the theoretical framework of developmentalism, agency and rights. The book takes the reader through not only a journey of the various stages of the programme since inception but also the role of the various players: the *sathins* (change agents), the WDP bureaucracy, the non-governmental organisation (NGO)/academic community and feminist trainers.

Madhok uses the term 'developmentalism' to refer to the changed meaning and impetus of development rather than simply employing the term 'development' or 'developmental'. Moving away from the standard accounts of development that tend to minimise in favour of an excessive economic analysis of development, she strongly argues for modifications

in our conventional thinking on agency and empowerment within development programmes. She asserts that this is essential for any serious thought about agentival practices in oppressive contexts.

In the crisply written and well-researched 200-plus pages, Madhok draws the linkages between development, agency and rights and between agency and oppression. She explores the conceptual problem of conceiving agency of persons in severely oppressive and subordinated contexts, and thereby builds on the existing feminist thinking on agency which pays serious attention to oppressive contexts and their impact on agency. She examines the impact of individual rights and developmentalism on the subjectivities and self-representation of sathins (chapters 1 and 2). She then moves on to describe the structure, processes and ideology of the WDP of the Government of Rajasthan and locates the sathins within this. In tracing the entry of developmentalist ideas in a social context such as Rajasthan marked by stringent gender subordination, Madhok highlights that such contexts of subordination are manifested both in the visibly coercive practices of the state as well as those of the communities within which the agents of change or sathins live and are a part of. Madhok notes that the developmentalism of WDP directed its energies towards changing subjectivities and creating new values and patterns of behaviour. The gamut of this developmentalism included individual rights, self-empowerment, self-improvement and the performance of individual agency. She however critiques the development vision of both—the state to create committed development workers and feminist organisations/ individuals that were responsible for conducting the experiential training of sathins through feminist consciousness-raising methods. The latter led to processes of greater articulation and self-reflection/improvement. According to her, this opened up spaces of both agency as reflected in the sathins' transformed selves and in their actions as well as coercion by state and non-state actors who resisted this transformation and actions (chapter 3). She then highlights a distinct pattern in the sathins' thinking on the issue of rights, plots their political rights participation post the 73rd Amendment into three distinct stages and draws attention to the impact of this political discourse on developmentalism (chapters 4 and 5).

Citing concrete examples of developmental and individual rights, Madhok provides illustrations with an analysis of the empirical life trajectories of sathins, all along emphasising that foregrounding women in development programmes like the WDP necessitates looking at the

socio-political and economic contexts within which change agents are created. Ignoring the socially embedded contexts, she asserts, results in catastrophic consequences for both the women involved and the projects/programmes of change in which they are engaged. This is particularly problematic in oppressive contexts because they do not get the support of the state or the community. She cites examples of sathins as change agents by picking out a few in only two districts of the WDP: Jaipur and Ajmer. She chooses to emphasise voices of several sathins and specifically highlights the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi to demonstrate the lack of support from institutional structures including the family, state and community at critical junctures.

Madhok, however, fails to provide an answer to 'how' to bring about change in oppressive contexts. Besides, she seems to have overlooked two critical issues. Firstly, there is a dire need for development programmes with change agents in oppressive contexts, such as where stringent patriarchy is observed. Here, there is little support for processes that encourage women's agency, precisely because they are so oppressive. Also, what cannot be ignored is the fact that today many of the sathins have emerged stronger and have continued to take cudgels with the dominant patriarchal practices, whether they are part of the WDP or outside it. They have also been able to negotiate spaces by garnering the support of their family or community to come out of the oppressive situations they were in. These include creating educational opportunities for girls in the village despite resistance (Munni), enabling girls in the family to study (Kailashi), putting up a fierce struggle for fair wages (Batto) and using creative means to talk about seemingly difficult issues (Mohini). They have on several occasions also stopped child marriages and supported women who are subjected to violence. Even Bhanwari Devi who herself was denied justice continues to live in Bhatari and work on women's empowerment issues. She has refused to move out of her village boundaries despite the land allotted to her outside the village by the state government. Her struggle for gender justice goes on unabated, as does her determination to counter forces of women's oppression and exploitation. She has regained her dignity and respect within the village, community and neighbouring villages and many women cutting across caste lines approach her when they need advice, especially over issues of domestic violence. Surely, this merits a mention.

Secondly, the learnings from the WDP and the gaps in programmatic structure and ideology (for example, the single change agent model and the

lack of long-term training and support) have in fact gone into the making of other well designed and well thought of innovative programmes for women's empowerment in the country, especially the Mahila Samakhya programme in 10 states. Here too, women as change agents are operating in oppressive contexts but the state in partnership with the NGO and academic community and feminist trainers has ensured support through the formation of *mahila sanghas* (women's collectives). This is an important fallout of the WDP which needs to be appreciated when considering its impact.

The book makes a valuable contribution to both feminist and development literature and to ongoing debates pertaining to the conceptualisation of gender, agency and development. It will also be of interest to those designing and implementing programmes and policies related to women's empowerment.

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Indrani Chatterjee. 2013. *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xiv + 451 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, index. ₹1025 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966714556416

This book is a refreshing reminder of the often forgotten significance of monastic institutions in the construction of the political and economic geography of the Himalayan region and the surrounding plains. Chatterjee presents several interwoven narratives of early modern India to explain how these 'pasts were forgotten' in modern historiography. According to Chatterjee, it was with the colonial invasion that these narratives disappeared from public consciousness. Her project can, therefore, be seen as an important contribution to the reconstruction and remembrance of forgotten pasts.

A discourse on 'forgetting' of these pasts is quite revealing in itself. It tells us much about the ideological structure of the Raj and its inherent desire to impose a hegemonic morality in order to establish an exploitative economy based on agricultural cultivation. Chatterjee's work makes a rich contribution to this discourse by bringing into prominence three aspects. First, she draws attention to the texture of monastic communities and how they came to play an important role in the establishment

of shared cosmographies within the order and the plains, creating a monastic geographicity. Second, she tells the story of how these subjects were deemed 'savage' and unimportant by the Company State with its imperial demand for territory. She contends that herein emerges the act of 'forgetting'. This also became essential to overriding the existing gender code of the monasteries and the geographicity it created, which gave much agency to women who were amongst the patrons of some monastic orders and were also involved in the pastoral care, services and cultivation of the monastic lands. Third, she scrutinises the effect of the tradition of forgetting in postcolonial histories, which, she argues, was lamentably unable to recognise the monastic subjects and their role in the larger political economy. She elaborates that such 'State amnesia' was unfortunately carried on by postcolonial scholars including feminist historians and was also evident in subsequent writings on 'tribes', which in overlooking the importance of monastic subjects and especially the role of women, sustained 'the devaluation of particular relationships initiated by colonial economies' (p. 359).

An important contribution of this work is its insistence on a re-envisioning of the monastic order: from simple ascetic abodes to instead principal centres of administrative, military, economic and pastoral functions. Here, monastic signifies not only the architectural unit in which monks belonging to different traditions inhabited physical spaces, but is much rather understood as an entire lifestyle which holistically structures the everydayness of the monastic subjects. Chatterjee also draws attention to the important rôle of *dakshina* or donations in the creation of such monastic governments. The monastic residences soon came to become important centres for trade, pilgrimage and local markets, which bound together different monastic assemblages. This monastic geographicity bestowed a commonality of life-ways, thus creating a shared cosmography amongst the spread-out monastic residences.

Chatterjee's work supports the view that the institution of marriage ought to be understood in its complexity, not merely as a set of performative religious rituals and ceremonies but also in its capacity as a component and medium for political and economic dialogue across geographical spaces. She establishes with rigour that marriage was the most important form of monastic diplomacy as marriages were arranged between clans 'loyal to a common teacher and spiritual-ritual lineage' (p. 56). This was a relation that proved useful in the alignment during

military combat. To ensure that these ties were not dissolved with the death of the man involved in a conjugal bond, plural forms of marriages existed, such as levirate marriages in different variations as well as marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters. This is not to say that women were regarded as mere objects in an economic transaction, but in many cases, women held monastic estates, gave patronage to monastic institutions in the form of donation, held authority and cultivated their own land. However, these realities were ignored by the British who, in order to expand their territorial control, had very little interest to continue the tradition of widow inheritance and further banned levirate marriages as incestuous. The Company State declared the agricultural cultivation by women as a savage practice, while simultaneously utilising their civilising mission as an alibi to expand their economic control. As the Company was unable to comprehend the legal and political complexities of the native population, they categorised them as ‘tribals’, ‘savages’ and subjects that had to be civilised. Native attempts made by the Ahom-Bengali literati to decipher the societal structure of monastic orders were then systematically excluded, as they could not be accommodated within the colonial narrative. Through the establishment of a new administrative order, they found willing helpers to legitimise the narrative of a discovery of a ‘backward’ and ‘savage’ society.

What is most disconcerting to Chatterjee, however, is that postcolonial historians have carried forward this colonial legacy and ignored the multiple narratives that surrounded the monastic pasts. She also points out that anthropologists studying the Northeast viewed marriage as a simple apolitical institution and have thus completely neglected the pivotal role of marriage in dictating the political and economic order. Chatterjee states that the ‘Ontologies of “tribal” being, “backward” livelihoods and cultures, once created by imperial fiat, now become foundational to a postcolonial scholarly consensus, especially in the historiography of Assam’ (p. 359).

Chatterjee’s book provides a rich and valuable contribution, especially to a still understudied region of Northeast India, and her work will be beneficial to scholars focusing on religion, marriage and postcolonial histories.

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Frederique Apffel-Marglin. 2008. *Rhythms of Life: Enacting the World with the Goddesses of Orissa*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xii + 292 pp. Notes, index. ₹750 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966714556417

Frederique Apffel-Marglin's *Rhythms of Life: Enacting the World with the Goddesses of Orissa* is a collection of nine, minimally revised anthropological essays published between 1985 and 2007 that focus on vernacular religion and female sexuality in Orissa. The edition's essays combine multidisciplinary theoretical nuance with subtle ethnographic insights culled from years of immersive research in Orissa to produce new conceptual frameworks based on ecological rhythms, principles of complementarity, regeneration and renewal. Apffel-Marglin argues against the dismissal of popular ritual practices as unthinking re-enactments of outmoded traditions and affirms the 'agency of parts of the non-human world' (p. 11), the ritual performances that are necessary for the 'regeneration of the world' (p. 11) and 'the entanglement of humans and the cosmos' (p. 21).

'Are goddesses real?', Apffel-Marglin asks, drawing the reader's attention to the question of alternative ontologies. Her response is that they are, however, 'the nature of this "real" is quite different from the notion of the real bequeathed to us by the scientific revolution and the enlightenment' (p. 4). She argues that because the discipline of anthropology is wedded to a modernist ontology that views 'deities, gods and goddesses as either anthropomorphizing aspects of nature or society, or as metaphors referring to some reality to be found elsewhere' (p. 11), anthropologists have been thus far unable to sufficiently comprehend the cultural and ritual experience of people in coastal Orissa. To correct anthropology's problematic ontology, the volume's essays ethnographically detail two sets of rituals and their attendant myths—*devadāsīs*' rituals at the Jagannātha temple and the Raja Parba festival in Bali Haracandī.

The essays in the first section of the volume treat ethnographic data from the beginning of Apffel-Marglin's career, yet demonstrate the author's movement away from structuralist anthropology which characterised her earlier work. To overturn the Dumontian axiom that all forms of social hierarchy in India derive from the binary opposition between purity and impurity, close ethnography in 'Types of Opposition in Hindu Culture' details the co-extant axes of purity/impurity and

auspiciousness/inauspiciousness in devadāsīs' rituals (p. 35) and the simultaneous existence of birth/death present in the *Naba Calabra* ritual of the Jagannātha cult (p. 49). Continuing this line of thinking, in 'Female Sexuality in the Hindu World', Apffel-Marglin argues that a modernist binary paradigm 'coloured by Western and Christian belief in the danger of uncontrolled female sexuality' (p. 71) inhibits realisations about the co-existence of apparently contradictory moral valuation of the same phenomenon and is subsequently unable to apprehend that female sexuality in the context of Hinduism, although possibly impure, is an auspicious and powerful source of regeneration and renewal.

In one of the volume's most striking essays, 'Smallpox in Two Systems of Knowledge', Apffel-Marglin challenges both the entire project of modernisation and claims that western science is a superior form of knowledge able to render obsolete more traditional systems of knowledge. The author argues that knowledge of smallpox variolation, a vernacular form of medical practice incorporated into the worship of goddess Śītālā, enabled Edward Jenner's discovery of vaccination, showing that, in fact, these two practices are continuous. Apffel-Marglin's observation that the goddess Śītālā, 'who is both the presence and the absence of the disease' (p. 108), is not simply a metaphysical entity but is, in fact, 'a continuation and refinement of the natural' (p. 120) and erases distinctions between natural/supernatural and nature/culture that have long troubled anthropologists. Despite the similarity between variolation and vaccination, vaccination was resisted by Indians because, the author argues, it was viewed as the 'government's mark' (p. 124) which embedded an 'opposition between man and his culture on the one hand, and the environment on the other' (p. 149). And further that displacing native practices insulted goddess Śītālā. The author concludes that colonial hierarchies of knowledge prevented the dispersal of useful technologies and destroyed local patterns of knowledge and practice which, along with associated people, were demonised.

The second section more closely deconstructs modernist categories widely used in the study of popular religious practices in India which, the author argues, impede the realisation of alternative ontologies—the 'subaltern', the 'third world woman', the 'sacred' and 'history'. Apffel-Marglin's close ethnographic study of the Raja Parba in 'Gender and the Unitary Self: Looking for the Subaltern in Coastal Orissa' foregrounds the need to contextualise studies of women in India by considering the

degree to which communities are enmeshed in the market economy. The search for a dominated 'subaltern' assumes a hierarchical society where categories of market commoditisation have already enclosed individualised persons. In societies that are less enmeshed in market economies, such as those in coastal Orissa at the time of writing, the social structure is dynamic and the relative positions of women and men shift according to the position of the listener/interlocutor: there is no 'subaltern' to be found (p. 206). 'Feminist Orientalism and Development' turns to paradigms of development to suggest the need to move away from a 'Women in Development' model which posits the existence of the 'Third World Woman' and privileges a development expert's construction of reality to a 'Women, Environment, and Development' model which opens possibilities 'for the voices of non-modern, non-commodified, and usually non-western women to be heard in a new way' (p. 211). The author finally takes aim at temporality and the notion of linear histories in 'Rhythms of Life: Ritual Time and Historical Time'. In a striking, yet not fully developed, turn towards creating a new paradigm for thinking about ritual and sustainability, Apffel-Marglin argues that seasonally reiterated ritual performances enable village communities to actively 'make' a new kind of time which promises the continuity of 'the good life' (p. 271).

I would like to point to a few areas of the volume where additional exposition might have drawn out important implications. First, the arguments which focus on aspects of ritual regeneration and renewal might have engaged questions about the role of ritual in cultural preservation and sustainability practices. As development projects continue to unroll themselves across India, putting pressure on the survival or improvisational continuation of local communities and cultural patterns, the author might have said more about how her work is useful in addressing these increasingly important anthropological issues. Second, the introduction could have benefited from an elaboration of the political stakes underlying the arguments, especially with regard to the author's gesture towards the importance of rescuing the worlds of gods and goddesses from the dogmatic realm of Hindu fundamentalists. Finally, although the volume's essays, when taken together, claim that vernacular ways of enacting the world are frequently more conducive to regeneration and sustainability than modern developmental methods, indeed that 'moderns' have largely lost the way, the volume seems to produce uneven ethnographic analyses that prioritise a particular construction of vernacular Orissa as un-modern.

This overall arc of argument risks reifying the familiar antinomy of modern versus un-modern without attending to the many ways in which vernacular worlds produce their own modernities and the ways in which ‘modernity’ harbours subterranean currents of traditionalism.

Overall, this volume is a brilliant addition to knowledge about vernacular religious practices in Orissa and to understanding the broader anthropological questions about female sexuality and religious praxis.

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KARLIE FOX-KNUDTSEN

Geetha B. Nambissan and S. Srinivasa Rao, eds. 2013. *Sociology of Education in India: Changing Contours and Emerging Concerns*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. x + 277 pp. Tables, notes, references. ₹750 (hardback).

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How does one characterise the health of a sub-discipline? Would the number of years of existence be a reliable measure of its vigour or would a more correct assessment emerge by tracing its expanding range of interests and mapping its influence across disciplinary boundaries? Or is the vitality of a sub-discipline complexly connected to institutional structures including university departments, specialisations and students who not only help generate new areas of enquiry but also guarantee disciplinary longitude? This edited volume candidly lays bare the short history of the sub-discipline of the sociology of education in India (SoEI), inviting us to join an ongoing conversation on what ails the discipline as well as the difficulties and promise of charting out a new research trajectory while fully aware of current epistemological constraints. More than half of the essays in this volume contain a refreshing reflexivity in their historicising, mapping and critically analysing the past and present contours of this sub-discipline, while the remaining highlight emerging research that steadfastly attempts to move beyond existing frameworks.

As a result, what emerges is a portrait of a sub-discipline, which while quietly coming into its own, still seeks to break out of the parenthetical status usually accorded to sub-disciplines. This parenthetical status is indexed in a complex web of reasons as discussed by the editors in their introduction and then further developed separately in articles by Suma

Chitnis, Geetha Nambissan, Karuna Chanana and Padma Velaskar. Their honest appraisal of the sub-discipline's origins brings to mind Plato's pharmakon, both poison and cure. As Nambissan and Rao discuss in the introduction, the parent discipline of Indian sociology with its focus on 'village studies' through fieldwork remained anxious about not being viewed as 'applied' and therefore paid less attention to education which it believed lay within the more normative vectors of psychology. As a result, this sub-discipline emerged from research tied to policy-making. More specifically, sociologists were requested to contribute to the first Education Commission (1964–66) around key areas of education and helped produce the foundational volume titled *Papers in Sociology of Education in India* (Gore et al. 1967). M.S. Gore, I.P. Desai and Suma Chitnis amongst others formed part of this initial group which then went on to generate research on issues such as stratification and mobility, the influence of education on modernisation, the role of education in democracy and the like. But this initial entanglement with policy-making became within a few decades a detracting weight that increasingly tied research in SoEI to studies that were limited to generating empirical evidence on issues such as discrimination, stratification and hierarchies in education.

The weight of disciplinary perspectives including structural functionalism and the modernisation paradigm which read schools as social institutions worked to both understand schools as key sites of forging the nation's new modern citizens while also raising parallel concerns around education and social stratification. Both viewpoints had the combined effect of diminishing the importance of studying formal educational institutions and its attendant sites as dynamic spaces worthy of study. This focus on applied research along with existing historical, structural and institutional constraints not only sedimented SoEI's limitations, but also resulted in its academic theorising largely relying on conceptual frameworks made available by theorists such as Bourdieu, Bernstein and Goffman. As Velaskar notes, the larger absence of a theory of social structure and stratification in effect means that SoEI fails to properly grasp the encoding of power including caste, class, patriarchy, economy, culture and the state within education.

But these workings of power are well brought out in the essays written by Amman Madan, Nandini Manjrekar, Srinivasa Rao, Arshad Alam and Leena Abraham—all of whom are more interested in the details of its embedded everyday workings. Madan's broad interest in the everyday

unfolding of the ‘reproduction of inequality’ leads him to Fatehabad in western Haryana where cattle-rearing coexists with practices of schooling. Similarly, Manjrekar studies children in a government school in the industrial city of Baroda focusing on how textbooks and classroom transactions help reinforce existing stereotypes of gender and class. While Madan ties his analysis to broader theorising around inequality, Manjrekar’s focus is on childhood, with both essays allowing their field research to open up current theorisation around both issues.

To return to the question I began with, how might one characterise the current health of SoEI. Quite clearly, the book’s critical introspection when combined with the dynamism reflected in new research can only bode well for this sub-discipline. However, the continued normative weight exercised by a policy-driven imaginary on research requires to be further unpacked not only as a part of the sub-discipline’s past but also as that which remains as the central thrust. To be able to continually deepen the questions that policy-directed research asks, while also being able to exceed its self-conscious disciplinary and welfare imaginary remains a challenge, bringing to mind the *pharmakon* as that which not only captures this sub-discipline’s uneven past but also keeps alive its poison-remedy dialectic as a future caution.

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SARADA BALAGOPALAN

Yasumasa Sekine. 2011. *Pollution, Untouchability and Harijans: A South Indian Ethnography*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications. xxvi + 390 pp. Tables, plates, map, notes, references, appendix, glossary, index. ₹995 (hardback).

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This ethnographic study provides a refreshing perspective on caste society, even challenging some of the structural certainties that characterise Dumontian sociology. In a voluminous text that explores

in great ethnographic detail, the field view of caste in Kimingalam, a village in Tamil Nadu, Yasumasa Sekine makes a strong case for a processual understanding of pollution from the vantage point of its Harijan inhabitants. Working from a perspective identified as 'common ground anthropology' (CGA), Sekine claims to have unearthed ethnographic insights that challenge the reductionist and substantivist representations of the Indian caste system. CGA, he observes, freezes the discourse of caste from both the consensus theories as well as those emphasising exclusion. The author suggests that CGA is a way to de-centre the boundaries of caste pollution, such that what then becomes important is an understanding of the processes and meanings, by which boundaries of pollution get erected and maintained in a given social ground. Arguing that there is no independent work on caste pollution outside the binary framework of purity-impurity, Sekine develops a theory of caste that seeks to understand Harijan culture by looking at the boundary areas of purity-impurity. It is within these boundary locations, he believes, that an understanding of pollution as it actually represents itself in the context of Harijan society becomes possible.

In doing so, both at the level of observation and analysis, there is a reversal of the Dumontian representation of the Brahminical Hindu caste society. Sekine attempts to understand how, within the village, the Harijan comes to deal with the stigma of untouchability in a variety of contexts, both traditional as well as modern. Ethnographic data is collected on both traditional Harijan life on aspects such as religion, rights of passage, deaths and puberty as well as the modern context. Observing the Harijan on these boundary locations of pure-impure, Sekine observes that the Harijan outrightly rejects the stigmatising character imposed on him by the non-Harijan castes. Both within the traditional ritual setting as well as in the modern context, Sekine brings into his analysis the structure of power relations within which the Harijan functions. Thus, within the traditional ritual context such as puberty and death, the Harijan emphasises the importance of his presence and his role within these ritual settings, ensuring thereby the success of the ritual. This ritual role of the Harijan is a fact that is acknowledged by all the non-Harijan castes. Similarly, within the modern context of the cooperative, the Harijan is able to take advantage of the privileges acceded to Harijans in order to emphasise their leadership role within the cooperative. It is in this way that the author observes, how in both these domains, the Harijans are able to use the advantages from

within different situations to level out disadvantages that may persist within a ritual context.

Observing the village as a habitus, Sekine examines customary, rational and reflexive rule-oriented behaviour to make a case for developing a distinction between pollution and impurities. While the Dumontian binaries of purity–impurity took recourse to an ideological rendering of textuality, Sekine reorients his ideological representations towards ongoing processes in the sphere of work, cultural reproduction and struggle. Through such an engagement, the author distinguishes pollution from impurity, pointing out that pollution behaviour distinguishes between a dirt-rejecting philosophy and a dirt-affirming one. Making a case that Harijan behaviour is centred upon a dirt-affirming philosophy, Sekine observes that pollution is not an innate attribute of a carrier, but rather an interpretation of a particular subject in a particular socio-cultural context. By privileging the Harijan's standpoint, Sekine de-centres the imposed dominant caste view of them, opting instead to understand the inner values that Harijans themselves subscribe to within the larger context of caste society. Through his processual ethnography, Sekine rejects the uniqueness of Harijan culture, pointing out that they are very much part of the same kind of caste system which oppresses them. To that extent, they share in the same world view of the dominant caste. While acknowledging the existence of multiple ideological interpretations within Kimingalam, Sekine makes an important distinction between these ideologies. While a centripetal ideology with an 'off boundary viewpoint' is constructed on the basis of the pure–impure binary, the de-centripetal ideology with an 'on boundary viewpoint' is a paradoxical ideology which provides for a moment of escape from itself. It is this ideology of pollution with its de-centring character and its potentiality for escape that provides Sekine with a processual understanding of how Harijans in Kimingalam come to engage with their status of untouchability within the larger caste system. No doubt, competing ideological interpretations may illustrate the existence of an ideological struggle deployed in an asymmetrical power relation between the caste Hindus and the Harijans. Even so, the cultural gap between the caste Hindus and the Harijans is thus a quantitative difference of fragmented cultural traits, historically reproduced by institutionalised compulsions. In exploring the ideological interpretation deployed by Harijans in Kimingalam, Sekine observes that the underlying motivation for such an interpretation must be sought in the

notion of self-esteem rooted in volition and functioning as a motivational strategy. Thus, both accepting the system and blaming the system can be seen as the strategy for seeking self-aggrandisement. Such strategies may be borrowed from either the dominant Brahmin or non-Brahmin ideologies in the village or the dominant ideologies outside the village involving modernisation and westernisation.

Within Kimingalam, Harijans distinguish in Tamil between pollution known as *tittu* and impurity known as *acullam*. Sekine identifies three categories concerned with folk terms associated with pollution. The first is a group of words denoting sin or crime or fault such as *pavam*, *kurram*, *tappu*, *tavaru*. The second is *tukkam* which means sorrow and mourning, which is strongly related to death pollution. The third is *tosam* which is an astrologically inauspicious situation in which people behave as if they were in *tittu*. All caste groups, Sekine observes, shared the common meaning that *tittu* was associated with the lifecycle of birth, puberty, menstruation and death. Sekine is keen to point out that in these rights of passage, pollution is not just a rejection of dirt but rather a dirt-affirming process that is focused on the polluting person rather than the pollutant itself. *Tittu* is thus regarded as the indispensable disorder for regenerating a new order. What is of extreme importance here is the successful management of *tittu* in order to achieve a good result. Bad management or even insensitivity to *tittu* could lead to negative or even harmful results for those involved. Sekine notes how through the various aspects of everyday life, the villages perceived *tittu* as connecting a this-worldly incident of misfortune with the other-worldly sphere. It was both a way for the villagers to become conscious of their cosmology as well as a way to evolve strategies to deal with pollution. Such an understanding of pollution seriously undermines the prevailing Dumontian binary of pure and impure. For Sekine, pollution sacredness is more fundamental than purity sacredness, because sacredness has to be originally acquired through sacrifice, marking a cyclical movement from this-worldly to the other-worldly. Even though *cuttam* and *acuttam* are concepts associated with the pure and the impure, Sekine observes that the concepts of *acuttam* and *tittu* are differently used by the villages. Thus, while the higher caste would look upon the Harijans as *tittu* and *acuttam*, the Harijans themselves do not see themselves as such, but instead, they only make use of these categories in festivals and other religious occasions to understand the extent to which one is pure and clean

in front of god, clearly indicating that these categories have no relevance in the context of everyday social world.

Throughout his detailing of CGA concerned with religion, puberty, menstruation, rights of passage as well as the cooperatives, the Harijan is constantly negotiating both tittu and acuttam, thereby rejecting the stigma of ritual untouchability as well as taking advantage of constitutional privileges made available to them within the cooperatives to undermine the status of the pure–impure binary. Clearly, such an ethnography brings to light how such negotiations of tittu and acuttam are part of the everyday life activity of the other caste groups in the village as well. For them, to the extent that they also subscribe to the ideology of pollution, they too function from a de-centripetal ideology with an ‘on boundary viewpoint’. Thus, an animal sacrifice from within a centripetal ideology with its ‘off boundary viewpoint’ would be seen as being impure, however, within a de-centripetal ideology, it could be seen as not just a rejection of dirt but rather a dirt-affirming process that is focused on the process rather than the pollutant itself. Tittu is thus regarded by the villagers as the indispensable disorder for regenerating a new order. It has to be managed successfully in order to achieve a good result. On the contrary, bad management of tittu could lead to negative, even harmful results. Tittu thus establishes a connection between this-worldly and the other-worldly. It was a way for the villagers to become conscious of their cosmology.

Notwithstanding the vast varieties of criticisms that have highlighted the limitations of Dumontian structuralism, Yasumasa Sekine’s work is an important contribution from the standpoint of field-based ethnography that seriously undermines the textual rendering of the binaries in *Homo Hierarchicus*. Not only does such an ethnography illuminate the richness of ideological negotiations that underlie the surface distinctions of pure and impure in a crucial way, but it also signals the intrinsic place of a dirt-affirming ideology in the construction of the Hindu social order. Such a view not only challenges existing conceptions of dirt in Hindu society, above all, it shows the impossibility of the existence of a caste consciousness without at the same time embedding such a consciousness in an ideology of dirt.

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Gyanendra Pandey. 2013. *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press. xv + 243 pp. Figures, bibliography, index. ₹595 (paperback).

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As I started writing this review, the news of Gary Becker's death came in. Becker was the foremost economist who explicitly addressed the issue of prejudice. Becker's simple, but powerful, point was that among the many factors that affect an individual's actions in a market economy is a 'taste for discrimination', when one's actions towards another person are not motivated by an 'objective consideration of fact'. An admission of prejudiced behaviour, or prejudiced preferences dents the notion of rationality solidly, yet the belief in objectivity pervades not just individual self-perceptions, but also the way the field of academic inquiry views itself. This is true not just of economists, but all social scientists.

Gyan Pandey explores prejudice through a historian's lens by focusing on two key subaltern groups—Dalits in India and African-Americans in the USA. This volume is lucid, compelling and extremely readable and offers glimpses into the specific histories of the two groups with a great deal of insight. In doing this, Pandey makes several important propositions.

One, prejudice always appears as 'common sense' (p. 2). In societies with sharp group divisions, the subaltern status of some groups, their stigmatisation and the consequent beliefs about their innate inferiority are taken for granted. Social attitudes, individual behaviour, institutional response, operations of both the state and markets, all intertwine to produce and reproduce not just prejudice, but also the hierarchies that need the prejudicial world view to exist.

Two, we need to pay attention to the prejudice of the modern, where the 'modern' is seen as the 'quintessentially normal, rational and "unprejudiced"' (p. 2). This produces the unmarked citizen—the representative, universal citizen, supposedly not trapped by social identity. The construction of the 'unmarked' citizen (p. 3), marked only by modernity, obfuscates the fact that this representative citizen is typically male, of the dominant race/religion/caste and is, therefore, as much marked by a social identity as anyone else. Thus, for instance, all non-white individuals are labelled 'coloured' when white is, in fact, as much of a colour as black or brown is.

In India, the notion of the unmarked citizen is repeatedly invoked in the context of caste, as discussed in the latter part of the book. Pandey writes about a (Dalit) journalist who is asked by a reader why he does not think/write like an ‘Indian’? The fact remains that castelessness is a luxury of the upper castes, who can lead their lives oblivious to caste divisions, *if they so choose*. This is possible because they already enjoy all the privileges of being upper caste. That this implies that caste does, in fact, matter is rendered invisible. Ironically, despite this, several upper castes actually do not choose to be casteless and the fact that they blatantly, consciously and actively use their caste privilege to secure favourable outcomes for themselves does not dent the myth of castelessness.

Pandey uses his expertise as a historian to provide several telling examples of this two-facedness in the Indian context. Among the historical examples, I will mention two. The first is a set of experiences that Ambedkar had to face as India’s law minister at the hands of fellow parliamentarians, especially when dealing with reforms in the Hindu Code Bill. His untouchable and outcaste status was repeatedly invoked and he was asked to refrain from commenting on ‘Hindu’ matters. Invoking Ambedkar’s caste by upper-caste members is not seen as casteist behaviour, but any reference by Ambedkar to the inherently inequalitarian nature of Hinduism is labelled casteist. Pandey discusses how this experience is shared by Dalit officers in the government, where their Dalit identity is seen in opposition to a supposedly neutral and impartial administration, which, in fact, is explicitly upper caste.

The second, personally the most fascinating for me, is the whole account of the invocation of caste identities in the context of rehabilitation of settlers in the aftermath of partition in Punjab. Pandey highlights how in the ‘received historical account of the famed Punjab village community... the place of the Dalits has gone largely unacknowledged’ (p. 72). In the aftermath of partition, about 6–7 per cent of Hindus and Sikhs who migrated from West to East Punjab were from untouchable communities and they saw, in the partition, an opportunity to correct historical wrongs. Several voices put pressure on the East Punjab government to rehabilitate Dalit refugees as full citizens, but in the end, the premier Gopichand Bhargava took the view that Dalits could not ‘legitimately be allotted land’ (p. 76). In addition, there was an attempt to push several Dalit communities into the status of criminal tribes, adding to their stigmatisation and placing severe restrictions on their mobility.

The book captures several important dimensions of prejudice and is not blind to gender divisions within the subaltern communities. It is a testimony to the author's engaging inquiry that one wishes for more. While the chapter on Dalit autobiography focuses on two important narratives in the context of the broader literature, the one on African-American autobiography relies on a single narrative and despite the justification that the author provides for his choice, one is left wondering about other alternative narratives that the author could have chosen. Also, one would have liked a more substantial discussion of the anti-race, civil rights movement in the USA, going beyond the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), and of the state of the anti-caste movements in India post-Ambedkar.

The book has a great deal of discussion on representation and a rescripting of the Dalit body (seen through the portrayal of Ambedkar with its emphasis on modern attire, education and cleanliness). It would have been interesting to see a comparison between Ambedkar's desire for 'the need to look and act like upper castes and classes' (p. 89) as a means of emancipation, with the different/differing strains within the African-American discourse on 'acting white', that is not necessarily viewed as a desirable trait by African-Americans. Also, a juxtaposition and comparison of 'acting like upper-castes' with the notion of Sanskritisation would have been interesting.

Becker showed that prejudice was greater against older and more educated blacks. This could be interpreted as a validation of the 'turf protection' argument, as they were seen in spaces that were hitherto occupied solely by whites. In other words, as long as blacks are in spaces that mark them as inferior (where they supposedly belong), they face less discrimination, but their entry into spaces of privilege increases prejudice and discrimination. It would have been interesting to see more discussion of the changing contours of discrimination, especially its intersection with social mobility *within* subaltern groups. There is some reference to these issues in the autobiographical accounts, but a fuller discussion of the Dalit and African-American middle class would have made for a richer account.

Overall, this important book persuasively lays bare a contradiction in contemporary, modern societies: how the invocation of social identity is seen as completely compatible with modernity and neutrality when done by those with a privileged identity. Yet, a similar invocation by the subaltern, the stigmatised, those who bear the real, negative consequences of such identities is immediately dismissed as racist or casteist. Ironically, in a

complete inversion of motives, those who decry casteism are accused of keeping caste divisions alive, and those who would prefer no discussion, but a quiet continuation of the status quo, are seen as the modern, the unmarked and the casteless.

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