

Book Reviews

B.S. Baviskar and D.W. Attwood. 2014. *Inside–Outside: Two Views of Social Change in Rural India*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications. xv + 451 pp. Notes, references, bibliography, index. ₹950 (hardback).

In the volume under review, both authors have attempted to draw up trajectories of their respective careers as sociologist/social anthropologist. They do so by blending their autobiographical narratives with their fieldwork experiences. Both Baviskar and Attwood confess that they have landed in the sociology profession by accident. Nonetheless that accident led both of them to their laudable achievements. Baviskar is known for his pioneering work: *Politics of Development* (1980), which was the first ever study of a sugar cooperative factory in Maharashtra. It provided us with an authentic as well as insightful understanding of intriguing political manoeuvres of various factions that practically controlled state politics in Maharashtra between 1950 and 1990. Attwood did his first major fieldwork in two villages—Malegaon and Supe in Pune district—and tried to compare them in terms of the difference irrigation facilities make to land control and social structure in rural Maharashtra.

Both authors began their journey in sociology with some preconceived notions about ‘joint family’, caste hierarchy, *jajmani* (patron–client) relations and self-sufficient village social system in India. Their fieldwork experiences, however, revealed to them that these have been myths systematically built by colonial administrators, travelogues and even some historians (pp. 15, 257–58). In explaining why the institution of the joint family has been declining, Baviskar has emphasised the fact that sociologists have so far ignored certain demographic changes and facts. The number of brothers in a household and the size of landholding they inherit from their parents are inversely related. In the third generation, the status of the two branches would differ, since some cousins will own more land than others, depending on the number of brothers each has.

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These observations have also been endorsed by Attwood. Further, Attwood found that a widow's share of a family's agricultural land was generally usurped by male members in her family, although in very rare cases, she succeeded in getting her land rights restored to her through court litigation (pp. 257–70).

While planning a study of village, family, caste, tribe, factory or any such type of social reality, researchers often face the dilemma of whether to choose the method of survey research (that involves questionnaires and analysis of quantitative data) or adopt an intensive study of selected cases for an in-depth analysis. In either method, a researcher requires access to the field of study, rapport with respondents and patience to listen to them without any haste to note down what is being said. Baviskar and Attwood opted for the latter more appropriately. Invariably, a researcher manages to get entry to the fieldwork area through an acquaintance, friend or relative or some well-known politically influential personality. Baviskar secured access to the Kopargaon sugar factory through some of the shareholders—sugarcane growing farmers (from his own Mali caste) from his village Pilkhod. He has admitted that he was treated as a guest at the guest house of the sugar factory and whether that influenced Baviskar's favourable and empathic attitude towards politicians he knew remains an open question, because some of them were deeply involved in factional intrigues in that factory; this often made Baviskar uneasy (pp. 213–14). In this respect, Attwood has also admitted that he was introduced to the people from the two villages he studied by Sharad Pawar (former Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Union Minister for agriculture). Therefore, he was identified as Pawar's ally (p. 245). In this context, many readers will find Attwood's observation, 'Sharad Pawar as a leader was above petty politics,' quite amusing! This raises the question as to whether researchers in the social sciences could remain free from any biases and whether any claims to objective analysis could be made in absolute or in relative terms. Neither of the authors addressed this basic problematic in methodology.

The description of Pilkhod village by Baviskar (published earlier in *Sociological Bulletin* and reproduced in this volume) has certain similarities (pp. 21–33) with the portrayal of villages we find in Aatre (1995) and Chapekar (1934) that are legendary works in Marathi, unfailingly read by students of rural sociology in Maharashtra. However, being an insider, Baviskar has added valuable insights while bringing

out the most distinguishing feature of Pilkhod, as his village has two, not one, dominant castes, namely Marathas and Malis. He has further clarified that unlike in other villages, Malis are economically wealthier in Pilkhod, while the Marathas have been politically stronger (p. 27). In this respect, Pilkhod is far from an atypical village; rather many villages in south Maharashtra, not just north Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada do show a similar pattern of shared dominance by landowning castes.

Unlike Baviskar, Donald Attwood came from a highly disciplinarian upper middle class family from Oak Park (near Chicago) where attending symphony orchestra was an unmistakable symptom of one's belonging to an enlightened community; it also reflected a high level of consciousness about class distinctions and hierarchy within (pp. 91–105). With his shy temperament though, Attwood got involved with the militant Black movement and also in the anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States (pp. 137–47). Although a science (Geology) graduate, he drifted towards anthropology primarily to escape getting drafted into the US army for the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s (pp. 148–57). His interest was always in studying Indian villages and rural development in particular. But his initial placement at the Rural Institute at Bichpuri (near Agra, in Uttar Pradesh), where he spent a year, was to teach spoken English. According to him, it turned out to be a futile exercise (pp. 158–62). He has confessed that having been raised in a culture that always exalted individualism, he had to repeatedly go through cultural shock, anger and moral confusion during the initial year (pp. 179–83).

For researchers, it is always a challenge to get over stereotypes about an alien society they study and Attwood was obviously no exception. But then a sociological researcher has a tendency to get excited and jump to conclusions from simple micro-level observations. For instance, any discussion of class and class politics in the Delhi School of Economics, where Srinivas's legacy has been a dominant orientation, was taken as a Marxist obsession. Baviskar believed that it was not always necessary for a researcher to start sociological investigation with any theory or hypothesis. In contrast, initially Attwood was practically hypnotised by the dependency theory that until recently was making rounds in sociology, especially after he came across writings of Andre Gunder Frank. But he has hardly made use of that perspective consciously in his writings or even in his autobiographical narrative in this book. However, Attwood

found that in rural Maharashtra, there are cases like the Khomne family that display the truth contained in the 'rags to riches' idiom.

Attwood also attempted to refute Lenin's premise (law or prophecy) that 'under capitalism, rich get richer and poor get poorer' on the basis of his micro-level data obtained from in-depth interviews with families in his villages, like Khomne, Chawre and Jadhavrao. Attwood argues that the tendency of the structure to remain stubborn is countered by anti-structure (pp. 257–78). Here, Attwood definitely has a point; however, if this assertion is used to refute Lenin's theory of agrarian capitalism, then his argument sounds too naive because 'exceptions prove only the rule' as goes the adage. Now one does not have to refer back to Lenin's law. Even recently, Angus Deaton, Nobel laureate in economics (for 2015), who surveyed village households near Udaipur, partly using anthropological methods of intensive interviews with people on health, consumption and poverty-related issues, confirmed that in any system where productive assets are controlled by a handful of people, the gap between rich and poor widens at an incredible rate. It is only in exceptional circumstances that such a trend is seen reversed.¹ In a sense, Deaton's finding reiterates Lenin's view and has further explicated it.

Both Baviskar and Attwood seem to argue that the Green Revolution does not seem to have unleashed forces igniting major protest and rebellion against rich peasants who have primarily benefitted from it. Rich farmers took the initiative to set up cooperative societies that made rural credit available to everyone, undertook sugarcane production and set up sugar factories, consequently leading to increased irrigation, rural electrification, roads and other infrastructure developments from which everyone, including poor peasants and the landless, was benefitted (pp. 364–82). Such observations amount to refutation of Marx's views on peasantry, tacitly reinforcing a status-quoist position that might invite some criticism from a section of Indian sociologists.

Nevertheless, the authors' autobiographical narratives and fieldwork experiences are pointers to the sensitive and sensible issues that young researchers in agrarian sociology and development studies must attend to. The book is full of insightful observations and hence it will be quite useful not only for those who look forward to follow the path the two authors have traversed but also for all students and faculty of sociology and social anthropology.

¹ *Times of India*, Pune ed. 13 October 2015, pp. 1, 17–18.

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C.J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan. 2014. *Tamil Brahmins: The Making of a Middle-class Caste*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. x + 278 pp. Tables, maps, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$30 (paperback).

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The Tamil Brahmins (literally meaning ‘Tamil-speaking Brahmins’) constitute one of the small groups in India. Almost a quarter of all Tamil Brahmins are settled outside Tamil Nadu, in other parts of India and overseas (p. 6). They are segmented into larger sections and further divided into smaller ones, with endogamy followed at the levels of these sections and subsections, for which the term *jāti* is almost ubiquitously used (p. 6). However, when looked at from outside, they constitute a monolithic group, as if they were ‘one caste’. As is well known, the identity of a caste is understood in juxtaposition with other such categories, the same could be said of the Tamil Brahmins; their contrast is with the other similarly heterogeneous categories, Non-Brahmins and Adi Dravida, each comprising a myriad of *jātis*. Indubitably, the system is highly complex, with the groups being segmented into smaller groups in ‘relations of opposition and equivalence’ to recall words from the segmentary theory (Evans-Pritchard 1940). There are castes within castes, having ceaseless and unresolvable disputes about their respective statuses. Against this backdrop, whether the Tamil Brahmins can be termed ‘a caste’ or a ‘cluster of castes’, which acquires an ‘animated identity’ in opposition to other similar groups, is an interesting question challenging established theories on the abstract or concrete reality of caste.

In India, so much emphasis is laid on the study of the subaltern, the marginalised, the tribal and peasants that the study of the affluent, elite,

power holders and decision-makers is hardly taken up. The answer usually given is that the dominant groups are impervious to study. This book, however, is an exception. Written by C.J. Fuller, the reputed scholar of South Indian anthropology, and Haripriya Narasimhan, it is about the transformation of Tamil Brahmins over a length of time when they have become one of the leading middle classes (especially upper-middle classes) of India and have comfortably moved into a galaxy of new and professional jobs, in India and abroad, which has made them upwardly and geographically mobile. They have conveniently bent and transcended the rules of purity and pollution, without incurring any serious opprobrium, to adapt to new occupations such as in medicine and engineering (pp. 71–72), and the norms of travelling abroad to ‘non-vegetarian worlds’. Their community has easily learnt the maxim: ‘When in Rome, behave as Romans do’ and thus have adjusted to all situations smoothly. In this way, they have become the harbingers of modernity, thus blurring the distinction between caste and middle class.

Against this ethnographic and historical background, a central argument here is that ‘Tamil Brahmins have become a middle-class caste’ (p. 17) and are one of the prominent ‘representatives of modernity’ (p. 228). This is not only what the anthropologists have found out from their studies, but unsurprisingly, the highly reflective Tamil Brahmins consider themselves the creators of the middle-class and upper-middle class values and lifestyles; thus, one may propose an ‘isomorphism of Tamil Brahminhood and upper-middle classness’ (p. 17). Following Max Weber, the Tamil Brahmins may be said to be both ‘social class’ and ‘status group’.

Needless to say, in much of Indian sociology, castes and classes are regarded as opposite principles: one based on the ‘system of consumption’ and the other on the ‘system of production’. Caste is a ‘status group’, defined in terms of a set of symbols, transmitted over generations, consumed and displayed collectively, which decide its position in a hierarchical order. By contrast, class, an open system of stratification, has an economic referent. Status and economy, following the works of many Indologists, have been viewed in a matrix of tension, almost irreconcilable. In this stream of thought, the Brahmin is viewed as ‘flagrantly poor’, to recapitulate Madeleine Biardeau, but spiritually exalted.

An outcome of this thinking was (and is) that the studies of caste and class were (and are) conducted separately, without exploring the possibility

that classes exist in caste and castes in classes. Caste and classes are heuristic categories; in reality, great fluidity and interpenetration exist between status and economy, the systems of production and consumption. This is what the book convincingly argues while submitting that ‘social class’ is also a ‘status group’. Middle class is more a ‘way of living’, a cultural category than just an economic stratum. Also, not to forget, in common parlance, the term ‘middle class’ (or ‘middle-class mentality’) is used pejoratively for a style of living and aggregation of values that the upper classes loathe. One of my respondents once told me: ‘Kitty party is totally middle-class!’

The book is divided into seven chapters with an appendix on the demography of Tamil Brahmins. The first chapter delineates the conditions that led the Tamil Brahmins to migrate from villages to urban areas and to eventually sell their agricultural land. The Brahmin landlords abstained from actual cultivation. The manifest reason they gave was religious, for ploughing meant destruction of the organic life in soil, an activity incurring loads of sin. An important reason throughout India has been that upper castes have considered manual work as demeaning and status lowering (pp. 49–50). Thus, they leased out their land to Non-Brahmins, enjoying the privileges of absentee landlords, sending out their children, particularly male, to towns and cities for education and then encouraging them to take up employment therein and settle down for good. The case of Satyamurti Aiyer, with which the book opens, is a typical example of the migration of Tamil Brahmins. The book explores the changes in the position of women among them and the continuation of gender inequality, notwithstanding their modernity (p. 151). The role of Brahmins as ‘custodians of Sanskrit Hinduism’ has been examined with respect to their contribution to religion, music and dance (p. 209), although now many would not like to take up temple and domestic priesthood as an occupation.

Lastly, most of the jointly written books do not let their readers know the specific contributions of each of the authors. This book is an exception. It succinctly describes the collaboration between an ‘insider’ (Narasimhan) and an ‘outsider’ (Fuller). Fieldwork was largely done by Narasimhan who spent time in a Vattima village for about six months. She also conducted semi-structured interviews with people in their offices and homes almost for one year, and also visited several American cities, speaking to the Tamil Brahmin professionals. In these visits, sometimes Fuller also

accompanied her, but he largely did the library and archival work and also wrote up the text of the book. The merits of the collaborative research between one brought up locally and the other a foreigner, although one who has studied South India for decades, are clear in this work, which is eminently readable and scholarly.

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VINAY KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

Abhijit Dasgupta, Masahiko Togawa and Abul Barkat, eds. 2011. *Minorities and the State: Changing Social and Political Landscape of Bengal*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications. xxii + 214 pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, bibliography, index. ₹795 (hardback).

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This collection of essays is distinctive in its discussion of minority status in both sides of divided Bengal since 1947. The nine essays, four on West Bengal and five on East Pakistan/Bangladesh, respectively, are placed in two sections, back to back. The format hints at commonalities and shared predicaments, rather than making direct cross-border comparisons. The chapters, although of uneven quality, bring original insights to the subject.

In Part I, on West Bengal, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's essay on minorities in post-partition West Bengal underscores 'the painful entanglement of the fate of minorities in the two Bengals' (p. 14). Abhijit Dasgupta's 'On the Margins' points to the West Bengal government's poor record in producing lists of Muslim Other Backward Castes (pp. 24–25) and its failure to ameliorate their condition (p. 26).

While highlighting the fact that Muslims have engaged actively in panchayat and local politics (p. 29), the essay shows that this has failed to raise their socio-economic standing. The essay raises important questions as to why West Bengal's record has been so poor on these fronts, which it does not adequately answer—but it certainly sets the agenda for future research.

In ‘Wrestling with my Shadow’, Samir Das argues for the shifting imaginary of the nation, from ‘civilisational’ to ‘territorial’ to ‘securitised’, and for a parallel shifting policy towards (Muslim) ‘undocumented migration’ (p. 40). This is a stimulating essay and the author draws on evocative stories (of vanishing snake charmers [p. 56] and Mumbai *zari* (gold thread embroidery) workers [p. 59]) to develop his thesis. There are, however, problems that arise from assuming that ‘the (Indian) nation’ and West Bengal were one and the same. In fact, policies towards cross-border migration and property ownership in West Bengal and Assam were distinct from the rest of India, as much recent scholarship has shown.

Tetsuya Nakatani’s ‘Partition Refugees on Borders’ challenges the assumption that Hindu refugees from East Bengal were assimilated seamlessly into the West Bengal society. Nakatani, a pioneer in the study of low-caste rural refugees, points to the sustained, indeed intensifying, distinctions between Mahisya *sthanialok* (locals) and Namasusadra refugees, as reflected in their ritual practice.

Abul Barkat’s ‘Political Economy of Deprivation’ is a searing account of the impact of the Vested Property Act on Hindu minorities. It stands out in this collection for the rigour of its research and the passionate clarity of its argument. While some of the links drawn between cause and effect might be a little overstated (e.g., between the causes and effects of emigration [p. 97]), the overall argument is compelling. In a shocking statistic, Barkat estimates that approximately 1.2 million Hindu households across Bangladesh, 45 per cent of the Hindu population, have been affected by the Act. This is stunning research and it is a pity that very little like it has been done in India where, contrary to Barkat’s assertion, Enemy Property ordinances also came into force during the 1965 war, targeting Muslims, and have stayed in force ever since. Here again we see how the volume’s tight focus on Bengal, and its reluctance to engage with the rest of the subcontinent, has led to factual and analytical errors.

The role of Hindu religious organisations as pressure groups in Bangladesh politics is the focus of Togawa’s essay. He argues that while Hindu voters have been relatively unsuccessful in registering their voice through voting, religious organizations such as the Hindu Kalyan Samiti have been successful in pushing through demands (p. 155)—for instance, for religious holidays—and he also notes the fascinating rise of Durga Puja ceremonies across Bangladesh even as Hindus flee the country.

Each of these essays brings a new angle of vision to the debate about minority rights and opens up new fields for research. The editors are to be congratulated for bringing together scholars who work on both Bengals in one of the first 'transnational' studies of South Asian minorities. However, the book has some weaknesses. First, there is a lack of a comparative perspective—none of the authors actively compares both Bengals and the lack of comparison is accentuated by the two-part structure of the volume, mirroring the two parts of divided Bengal. This might have been obviated by a strong introduction and conclusion, but these are missing. The introduction is descriptive rather than analytical and there is no conclusion at all. Second, the tight focus on Bengal (and the lack of awareness displayed of the wider histories of India and Pakistan) has led to significant errors of fact. Finally, it is a pity that the volume did not include a study of what Papiya Ghosh memorably called 'Partition's Biharis'. Minorities come in all shapes and forms, but most are the products of nation and nation state creation. By failing to analyse the particular resonances of 'Bihari' minority status in Bangladesh, this book has missed a crucial opportunity.

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Jayanti Basu. 2013. *Reconstructing the Bengal Partition: The Psyche under a Different Violence*. Kolkata: SAMYA. xlii + 249 pp. Notes, index. ₹650 (hardback).

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Memory forms an afterlife of Partition. The stories of uprooting and violence are never the same. They are narrated in different forms. The language of narration is laden with contradiction and ambivalence. It is at times incoherent and at times silent. There is not a single Partition narrative but many, not always complete or resolved. The official archive and the nationalist commemoration, however, make the British partitioning of India into a political certitude. As a commanding event that forever changed India's boundaries and constructed a definite political identity, Partition becomes in the mainstream political narrative a moment of closure. Reams have been written about the 'why' of this vivisection. Dominant historiography engages with the high politics of Partition and

probes the tripartite manipulations of the colonial state, the Congress and the Muslim League in the 1940s. In major historical accounts, however, the truth(s) of popular memory is somewhat silenced.

It is through memory alone that we understand the emotional history of Partition. Significantly, Partition's memory remains as elusive as ever. It stays unresolved and incomplete. Memory often eludes historical narration, as it is indeed difficult to fathom the depths and layers of subjective experience. The complexity of memory and its palpable dimensions complicate the project of writing a history of Partition and violence, precisely because we do not always have the language to narrate the multiplicity of memory and its variegated structure. Language has its own limits. Experience is never captured fully in words. Gestures, tone and silences also make the story and there are memories that resist representation.

Jayanti Basu's interpretive book crafted mainly through her interviews with the victims, perpetrators and witnesses from upper caste Bengali Hindus, who experienced the events of 1946–48, helps us come close to the complexity of the Partition story and the impossibility of its narration. Inspired by Ashis Nandy's pioneering methodology and path-breaking interventions on history and memory, Basu offers a psychological and subjective history of how the trauma of violence and uprooting has shaped the individual and collective selves of Bengali Hindus. The multivocality of the memory of Partition's afterlife is represented in her work.

As a psychoanalyst, Basu offers the 'psychological truth' and a psychoanalytical understanding of Partition by exploring the memory of those who were dislocated from east Bengal. She is sensitive to the play of the unconscious. Listening is a crucial part of her strategy. Central to her analysis is her engagement with the nature of memory and narrative form. She relates more to the truth of memory and reflects less on actual political and mainstream events that happened. She takes into account the particular self of people leaving east Bengal; she talks about how this affects their memory of Partition, their trauma and the different ways in which they dealt with it.

Basu assesses the rich complexity of the human experience in response to the anguish of Partition. Emotions of fear, anger and guilt repeatedly appear in the selected narratives. Basu's work shows that Partition is not a story of victims alone. It is also a story of perpetrators. Many of her respondents identified with both victims and perpetrators. The binary of victim and victimiser is blurred in their narratives shaped

by the unconscious. The shifts in individual memory reflect the myriad experiences within a life history in which Partition and violence appear as metaphor rather than event. The memory of violence did not form a crucial part of their reminiscences. Many of her subjects spent hours talking glowingly about the pre-Partition days and the glorification of their homeland, a kind of an idealised past. Their stories were partial. But the question is: is the blurred memory of Partition a denial of violence, as Basu suggests, or is it a forgetting of trauma? Does it reflect a reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting in shaping the historical experience and narrative, as Paul Ricoeur would argue? Even if the Partition violence is not germane to individual memory, it undeniably and profoundly underpins the collective consciousness of the Bengali *bhadralok*. I am reminded of Jeffrey Alexander's work which is concerned with traumas that become collective. Drawing on an interplay of history, psychology and sociology, Alexander points out that although individual experiences of pain shape the cultural construction of collective trauma, it is, however, a threat to the collective rather than individual identity that defines the suffering.

Basu's work suggests that a psychological understanding of Partition does not always affirm stereotypes and prejudices. The multiplicity of selves is reflected in the ways Muslims are perceived in the upper caste Bengali narratives. For instance, in her reading of two active supporters of 'Hindutva', she brings out the ambivalent feelings towards Muslims. Her informant Shashanko oscillated between condemnation of Muslims and sympathy for their plight. He also confessed that he had been saved by Muslims in Noakhali. The inconsistency and contradiction in such complex accounts show that there is no one truth of Partition violence and that stereotypes are reworked differently in an individual self. Basu also reveals the ambiguities in the migrants' decisions to flee from east Bengal.

Unlike other works on the Bengal Partition, Basu's focus is on the memory of Partition through life stories. She seeks not to give a closure to the Partition story. But instead, she tries to situate Partition in an individual life history. In this sense, hers is not an oral history of Partition, as she herself states. Her principal concern is to focus on understanding the non-linear intricacies of memory in life histories in which Partition is ambiguously entangled. Basu's oblique yet significant and sensitive engagement with the texture of memory makes her project stand out among other works on the Partition of Bengal.

Basu makes a distinction between what she terms the ‘soft violence’ of Partition in Bengal, where there were relatively few attacks and killings, with the ‘hard violence’ of the Punjab, where there were multiple deaths and the extent of violence was more horrific and immediate. She focuses on the nature of ‘soft violence’ with its repercussions. Yet, the question remains whether Bengal’s violence was indeed soft. It could be that Basu’s respondents, as she herself explains, came from a particular section of upper caste Bengali society and were not brutally hit by violence and carnage. The complexity of violence is a crucial aspect that requires further engagement. Nemai Ghosh’s film *Chinnamul* captures the horrific violence of Partition refugees in Bengal and powerfully represents the experience of the marginalised and dispossessed. Joya Chatterji’s work shows the contrast drawn by the officials between the Bengali and the Punjabi refugees. Does this official distinction feed into the dominant Bengali perception at the expense of the popular and subaltern?

Ashis Nandy says that the violence of Partition has remained invisible. Jayanti Basu seeks to break the silence of Partition memory. The inexplicability and uncertainty of the Partition experience is evoked in Basu’s telling phrase emanating from her family memory, *Kisui bojhos na* (You understand nothing). It meaningfully reveals the difficulty of writing a history of traumatic memory and disassociated feelings.

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NONICA DATTA

Soma Chaudhuri. 2014. *Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press. xiii + 193 pp. Figures, plates, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. ₹695 (hardback).

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Soma Chaudhuri examines the interrelationship between witch-hunting and violence against women in the context of the changing political economy of the plantation system in the Dooars tea belt, located in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. In the monograph based on her doctoral thesis, Chaudhuri argues that the way adivasi identity is related in the plantations is radically different from the adivasi identity in the places of their social origin such as Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha. In the places of their social

origin, adivasi identity is a dominant identity with claims for being indigenous to the land they inhabit. In contrast, those who were brought to the colonial tea plantations were identified more as plantation workers than adivasis. Chaudhuri further observes that these workers were kept outside the popular and bureaucratic imagination of indigeneity in West Bengal. These plantation workers were reduced to be workers only. This misrepresentation of adivasis as reified workforce has important political and sociological implications for the workers. According to Chaudhuri, the witchcraft accusations in the tea plantations should be understood in relation to this historical shift of this workforce from being agricultural workers back in the villages of their social origin to being alienated wage labourers in the capitalist system of plantations. Chaudhuri also traces out the generation of legitimacy for witch-hunt through analysing the web of social relations in the Dooars tea belt.

Chaudhuri's major argument is that it is the social stress created through intense exploitation in the tea fields and factories and improper payment of the wages that contributes to witch-hunting. The plantation system and its management have substantially contributed to the way witch-hunting is made in the Dooars. In her words, 'witchcraft accusations are a way for the Adivasi workers to get control over their lives within the exploitative nature of the plantations' (p. 11). Therefore, the witchcraft or witch-hunting in the plantations cannot be seen simply as a relic of the past; it is thoroughly a modern practice linked to capitalist forms of labour relations.

Chaudhuri makes important observations about the lack of welfare measures in the plantations and the likelihood of witchcraft accusations. For example, she describes how when workers fall ill due to the lack of sanitation and water facilities, they attribute their ill-health to malicious witchcraft. Therefore, witchcraft becomes a function of how the workers engage with the uncertainty and humiliating life conditions in the plantations. It is the men who take charge of attacking women accused of witchcraft, and the plantation management does little to stop them. The management, in turn, uses these situations to further suggest that these workers are uncivilised and therefore need to be tamed. This reproduction of the adivasi workforce as 'violent and primitive' then justifies the management's own violent interventions to suppress labour unrest and resistance.

Chaudhuri builds her argument after a careful consideration of relevant literature in the study of witchcraft among adivasis in central and eastern

India. Her point is that most of the related studies had focused on how witchcraft accusations operate in three major contexts: (a) land disputes where women are accused of witchcraft to keep women away from land ownership; (b) epidemic crisis where the women will be accused of witchcraft and causing illness for the group; and (c) gendered conflicts where men try to reproduce their dominance and control over women. These three situations of witchcraft accusations and witch-hunting, she says, are not so helpful in understanding their occurrence in the plantations. This is because the historical and social conditions of adivasis in the plantations are radically different from the adivasis in the villages of their social origin. For example, being landless, there is no reason for plantation workers to fight among themselves for land ownership.

In the plantation context of witchcraft, Chaudhuri introduces two categories of witch-hunting called calculated and surprise attacks. Calculated attacks are when ‘witch hunts were preceded by clearly defined motives on the part of the accusers’ (p. 64). On the contrary, surprise attacks refer to the witch-hunts in which ‘the victims (the accused) and their families were unaware of the witchcraft accusations against the accused women prior to the attack’ (p. 67). This categorisation is done from the perspectives of the accused. It would have been fruitful to think about the categorisation from the perspective of the accusers as well. One useful categorisation in this regard would be to think of the attackers as those who genuinely believe in witchcraft and those who have vested interest in witch-hunting.

Chaudhuri does not seem to provide much benefit of the doubt to those who make accusations of witchcraft. The genuine faith in witchcraft—that is what drives a large group of people—should have been given due attention. While Chaudhuri does mention this aspect (pp. 71–72), she does not proceed on the line of understanding how witchcraft accusations are rooted in ideological and cultural values of their social life beyond the plantations. In other words, Chaudhuri has not addressed the relation between persistence of witchcraft and the sturdy ideological values whose roots are located in villages of social origin in Jharkhand and Bihar. Attributing precarious life in plantations to extremely violent witch-hunting is extremely important, but it is not the whole story. For example, the alienation from the stigma attached to a migrant adivasi identity should be considered as seriously as the alienation from production relations. One of the preliminary assumptions for Chaudhuri’s take on

witchcraft is that the frequency of social conflicts (therefore witchcraft) is inseparably correlated to the supply of resources accessible for the group. This assumption reduces the deep-rooted ideological values in perpetuating witch-hunting.

Despite few disagreements, I think that this excellent book is in the genre of those studies that deviate from the established framework of economic history and political economy, and stress on the importance of issues outside, yet linked to, production relations such as rituals and kinship. Therefore, there is no doubt that this book is a very useful contribution in the increasing sociological and anthropological research on Indian plantations.

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Daniela Berti and Devika Bordia, eds. 2015. *Regimes of Legality: Ethnography of Criminal Cases in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xviii + 333 pp. Notes, references, index. ₹995 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966716635441

In *Regimes of Legality: Ethnography of Criminal Cases in South Asia*, Daniela Berti and Devika Bordia open out an anthropological approach for examining the trajectories of criminal cases in South Asia. Focusing on formal and informal interactions between the various actors in the criminal justice system, the volume draws on 'rule-oriented' court records as well as narrative constructions and stories that provide contrasting versions of 'facts' at issue—relation-oriented versions embedded in social ties, material considerations and emotions. The latter is particularly evident in the two cases from West Bengal, presented by Srimati Basu, where '[w]hile domestic violence was undeniable, and the formal position was to condemn the violence in the strongest terms ... the primary focus was on social and economic issues, enforced through professed outrage' (p. 40). The success of domestic violence as a tool of negotiation, she notes, 'lies mainly in its own erasure, in the interest of material needs' (p. 48).

There are other enactments in relation to marriage—notably the right to marry. Pratiksha Baxi traces 'masculinist juristic genealogies' (a term borrowed from Peter Goodrich) through a close look at one case from

Gujarat, which demonstrates the manner in which state law holds in custody a young woman who categorically denies rape by the man she was in love with and ultimately got married to him (p. 54). Providing a graphic account of the court, the prosecutor's chambers, hospital narratives and experiences of custody, she sets out a complex discursive frame that travels between good love and bad love, rape and marriage, desire and seduction, criminal accused and victim and the repetitive narrative of custodial violence that represses love dispersed at various sites—the family, police station, hospital, jail and state-run home for women (p. 73).

The juxtaposition of the written and the oral, and the contradictions between judicial and extra-judicial deliberations and discussions set off Daniela Berti's account of a narcotics case in Himachal Pradesh. The interplay of truth and untruth, truth and lies and the lack of fit between the written record and informal discussions seem to suggest that 'the perception of truth and lies in such contexts relies partly on the performative skills of the legal professionals . . . as well as on the witnesses' guile . . .' (p. 123) and underscores the importance and range of fictions in the judicial process (p. 124).

The chasm between social, cultural and religious contexts on the one side and the rule of law on the other has been the subject of much deliberation. It is important, however, to examine the precise ways in which the social and religious contexts influence legal procedures, if they do. The essays in this volume, each in its own way, address precisely this question—of the separation of law from society and the ways in which nevertheless the latter bleeds into the former. Chiara Letizia's examination of the case of a Hindu, anti-secular activist in Nepal opens out to view the disjunctures between the political avowal of secularism by the party in power and its undoing in investigations, appeal and the operation of criminal justice through quasi-judicial bodies that technically must operate within the formal framework of public law.

The other side to this is the cascading of dalit assertion, anti-caste philosophies, legal activism and legislation in combating the violence of caste on dalits. Nicolas Jaoul locates his essay in Kanpur and attempts to describe how dalit assertion is expressed through popular engagement with the law—through a close look at the multiple sites and strategies (legal and political) that are mobilised in presenting a case under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The stakes involved in following these cases through, in his view,

are deeply political in two ways—resisting disenfranchisement engineered by the dominant classes and politicisation by infusing broader ideological meanings into individual struggles against untouchability (p. 198).

It is true that dominant cultures disable legal spaces and usurp them in many different ways or *because* of this misrule of law, resistance has often involved attempts to ‘occupy’ the law and turn it around. In either case, the boundaries between the outside and the inside of law are constantly blurred, although the distinction itself is never completely displaced—the inside of the law has formal frames that mark it apart. Devika Bordia discusses the ways in which the formality of the law is constituted through its appropriation of the outside—a competing formality that is illegally lawful. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in a police station and a panchayat meeting in a tribal region in Rajasthan, she discusses the case of an adivasi woman accused of spousal murder and demonstrates how ‘the historical co-emergence and co-production of panchayat and police practices [results in] panchayat meetings [being] influenced by the ideas and language of state law, while tribal leaders and decisions of panchayat meetings influence police practices’ (p. 223).

The ‘panchayat’ has been troublesome for the formal justice system—its ubiquity, its un-definability, its proliferation at several levels with multiple meanings and its unexplained longevity and absence render any folklore on the history of the panchayat as an adjudicatory system particularly problematic. Investigating the trial of the katta panchayat in Tamil Nadu by the formal courts, Zoe Headley discovers that there are villages where the panchayat has adjudicated continuously as far back as the oldest villagers can remember. There are other villages where no panchayat has been convened for 30 years and where they are convened, the meetings are open and a wide range of disputes are settled through this institution. Yet, the formal courts in Tamil Nadu have taken the view that katta panchayats are an evil that mete out bad justice and therefore must be eliminated, making any assertion of the validity of institution a criticism of the court. This trial *in absentia*, Headley argues, reveals very little of the character of the different legal orders at the village level.

The recognition of persons under modern public law in the subcontinent has been largely in terms of the binary male–female. This has been contested by historiographers and activists who have resurrected older histories of gender regimes that could not be contained in this binary classification. Yet, despite the historical presence of transgender persons

and communities, the figure of the transgender in law has been liminal, criminalised and stigmatised. Jeffrey Redding traces the reconfiguration of the category of transgender in the law in Pakistan by examining a case that travels from the institutional jurisdiction of the police (raid and arrest) to that of the Supreme Court ('mainstreaming' and welfare).

Opening out the French inquisitorial system to view, Veronique Bouillier presents a case of murder against a woman of Sri Lankan origin residing in France at a court of assize. The intractability and incomprehensibility of alien cultures, passions and emotions as also suffering, invests a specific character to the criminal trial—'You said you drank cognac at 9 a.m., in France we don't drink cognac at 9 a.m.' (p. 303).

What are the fields of the law, the regimes through which laws rule and the experiential categories/sites through which they might be comprehended? Given the 'performance' of law in the courtroom and 'counter-performances' outside, what is the place of the ethnographer in unravelling its codes and rendering it intelligible in more ways than one? How does one understand 'the official representation of South Asian legal traditions and the everyday practice of justice-making?' (Anthony Good, p. xvii). This volume ruptures the monolithic edifice of formal law and courts through its rich detail and little stories about the life of the law.

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Michele Friedner, 2015. *Valuing Deaf Worlds in Urban India*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. xv + 196 pp. Appendix, notes, references, index. \$ 28.95 (paperback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966716635448

As suggested by the title itself, this book explores how deaf selves and deaf socialities are produced through perceptions of *deaf deaf same* as deaf people circulate through institutions like schools, workplaces and churches. Adept at signing herself, Michele Friedner is able to move between the worlds of deaf and hearing subjects, giving the work an ethnographic depth that might not be possible to achieve otherwise.

Signing is a politically charged act and there are controversies worldwide regarding the mainstreaming of deaf people by oral modes of

learning through lip reading versus the development of deaf subcultures with distinct languages based on signing and forms of sociality. Deaf people occupy a unique position within the category of the disabled in that unlike the visually and physically handicapped, they *look* 'normal'. It is difficult to distinguish a deaf person from others in public spaces unless she/he is there with other deaf persons and they are talking with each other through a sign language. Deaf activists claim that deaf people are not disabled, just different and the onus of adjusting to the non-deaf should not lie solely with them.

One of the interesting themes that emerges in the book is that while there has been a progressive decline in public sector interventions to support disabled populations, the valorisation of 'diversity' in neoliberal ideologies has led to the greater visibility of deaf people in the private sector as business process outsourcing (BPOs) and multinational corporations make claims to greater inclusiveness in their hiring practices. Detailed descriptions of how deaf persons negotiate with these forms of value making are among the most interesting features of this book.

Based on intensive fieldwork in Bangalore, successive chapters in the book explore the different spaces that deaf people access, learning social, moral and economic practices not so much from the institutions themselves but rather from other deaf people by sharing information, skills and other resources. As Friedner shows, deaf sociality involves a kind of *deaf deaf same*—a minimising of conflict and competition while maintaining social harmony based on the realisation that deaf people are seen as a collective by prospective employers and not as individuals with different skill sets. Inefficiency or slackness on the part of one deaf employee may have negative repercussions for his or her deaf colleagues and for future employment of other deaf workers in an uncertain job market. More accomplished deaf persons may spend considerable time and effort in helping their less accomplished colleagues precisely because the deaf are perceived as a homogeneous group by the outside world. A positive aspect of this perception is the mutual solidarity and cooperation that may build up within the group in the interest of overall deaf development. Sometimes such practices may seem rather ridiculous if one was not aware of the context in which they emerge, such as the practice of copying curriculum vitae (CVs) from each other. Such details serve as a damning indictment of our educational institutions that are largely insensitive to the special needs of deaf children—from schools that do not have teachers with the

necessary skills to teach deaf children such as signing but also who are unaware that classroom seating arrangements must be deaf-friendly. Such acts of omission act as obstacles to learning. Deaf children go through school and college when they can but learn nothing apart from what they pick up from deaf classmates. Such re-orientations away from ascriptive forms of learning like the family or formal institutions towards other forms such as the newly emerging communities around churches that actively recruit deaf members and non-governmental organisation training and placement programmes allow deaf people to engage with and learn from each other. Such non-formal spaces cut across caste, class and religious lines, creating alternate hierarchies in the deaf world, based on skills in communicating in sign and so on.

One of the chapters that I found really interesting discusses ‘church going as a social fact’ across religious lines. There are at least eight deaf churches in Bangalore and many deaf young people circulate between them, as these provide spaces where they can be with each other—a crucial feature for *deaf development*. Another novel feature is the innovative use of italics and quotation marks to give voice to Indian Sign Language—indicating its autonomy and place among the many different languages that belong to India. This is a pioneering work and will, I am sure, soon become part of the disability studies syllabus in many Indian universities.

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Usha M. Rodrigues and Maya Ranganathan. 2015. *Indian News Media: From Observer to Participant*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications. xiv + 240 pp. Table, plates, notes, references, index. ₹895 (hardback).

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Indian News Media: From Observer to Participant comprises eight essays on the Indian news media industry, tracing its transformations under liberalisation and globalisation since the 1990s. Using seven case studies to illustrate their central thesis, the authors argue that a significant shift has occurred in the role of news media, entailing movement ‘from an observer (reporting on events and issues in the field of politics, economy and culture) to that of a partaker (reporting events and issues as a participant rather

than an onlooker of the events and issues)' (p. 2). The essays discuss how political and economic networks have shaped the patterns of Indian news media ownership, organisation, practices and content.

The case studies analyse specific events (paid news, Mumbai attacks of 26/11, Anna Hazare and the Jan Lok Pal agitation, and the protests against rape in 2012–13) and track longer trends (the rise of Sun TV as a regional powerhouse and the ethical implications of sting journalism) as instances of the news industry's transformation in the past 25 years. By privileging analysis of media's political economy, combined with a secondary attention to news discourse, the authors have an opportunity to offer a unique glimpse into the contemporary state of Indian news media. There is, to date, no comprehensive sociological or communications/media study that brings together a study of political economy with an attention to form and content and its implications across electronic, print and digital mediums. The essays are rich in detail; however, the material exceeds the conceptual frameworks of the book, which thus understates the significance of the paradigm shift we might be witnessing in Indian news media.

First, in separating observation and participation, the authors set up an untenable dichotomy—so far as news media are systems of communication, they are necessarily semiotic systems that generate meaning and hence are already participants in the reality they claim to represent. Instead, it might be more productive to distinguish between *media ideologies* of observation and participation wherein the political, economic and social beliefs and values that we hold of media and their role as shapers of our reality could be distinguished. For instance, objectivity in journalism, which has been extensively studied in various Euro-American contexts, is a medium-specific ideology that emerges under particular social, political and economic conditions rather than a neutral ideal or practice that exists outside of social norm-building.

With the changing discourse of neo-liberal politics and the globalisation rhetoric of human rights and transparency, states and governments are seen as entities that can be made to be answerable to domestic or global publics. This ideological shift is embodied in 'new' media technologies—electronic and digital media—that are exalted for their powers of immediate access, instant information and transparency. Locating concepts of 'observer' and 'participant' within a longer analysis of these media ideologies over time would have strengthened the

theoretical intervention of the collection. In addition, attention to distinct media ideologies across mediums—newsprint, television, mobile and social media—would highlight the different values and beliefs we invest in different media, enriching our understanding of how these ‘intramedia’ sites produce a rich terrain of information gathering, dissemination and opinion building (Chapters 6 and 8).

Second, although the methodological framework of political economy (itself unsatisfactorily theorised) is potentially very productive, it limits the extent to which the essays are able to articulate how the news, as a productive force in its own right, is wielded as a form of politics. Overall, the authors cleave to a fairly traditional understanding of political economy as concerned with questions of access to information and its relationship to measureable outcomes during elections (e.g., chapters 2 and 5). This obscures the fact—now a widely granted limitation of the political economy approach—that audiences or readers do not always respond to manipulation in the ways that corporate, political or scholarly interests anticipate. This qualification the authors themselves admit in chapters 2 and 6, when they say that there are no conclusive studies to show that there is an adverse relationship between the democratic (electoral) process and media capture by political–corporate interests (pp. 48, 135). The political economy approach, thus, obscures newsmaking and disseminating as forms of actions that might be political in their own right.

Taken together, the essays reveal a fascinating terrain of competing struggles of political, corporate and citizens’ access to *publicity*, in which the media is both instrument and agent. Within a framework of critical political economy, publicity might be thought of as a resource that manifests as visibility and a voice through which power might be wielded—through struggles over ownership, narratives, imagery and the effects to legitimately control the effects of this publicity once unleashed. This material calls less for a framework of deliberative democracy leading to (potential) consensus, but more for a reworking of power and publicity as dynamic along Foucauldian lines. Committed to a picture of the Habermasian public sphere (pp. 2, 223), the authors are ambivalent in their assessment of the unpredictable and, at times, unstable media terrain they have detailed. For instance, in tracing the rise of Sun TV and the ‘media-politics nexus’ in Tamil Nadu, the authors offer contradictory evaluations, stating that ‘partisan television, thanks to its agenda, limits the scope for debate and dissent’ (p. 48) and yet that

'the growing number of partisan channels has pluralized the public sphere' (p. 55) in Tamil Nadu. In this terrain of competing narratives of exposure and publicity and the dual-edged promise and threat of exposure, the Habermasian public sphere is an insufficient framing. The essays instead call for a more robust theorising of publicity—as a resource and a productive force through which struggles over political, economic and social values and capital are waged. The essays offer good material for the relationship between news, politics and participation, but are constrained by an insufficient conceptualisation of publics and publicity.

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AMRITA IBRAHIM

Subhadra Mitra Channa. 2013. *The Inner and Outer Selves: Cosmology, Gender, and Ecology at the Himalayan Borders*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xv + 318 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. ₹995 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966716635450

The book under review is a detailed ethnographic account of border people—the pastoral tribal community of the Jad Bhotiya, living in the upper reaches of the Himalayas in Uttarkashi. It attempts to understand their lives and issues of identity as it transformed with changes in government policies. Further, the book explores the issues of gender and ecology and transformations therein. The author argues that in order to situate the Jad Bhotiya community, one needs to understand how the Jads constantly reorient themselves and negotiate their identity. In trying to understand their identity, the author argues that the Jad Bhotiya community is an entity by the process of 'becoming' rather than 'being' and this is part and parcel of their cosmology and the ideas of gendered personhood (p. 3). Sexuality and gender roles for the Jads shift over space as well as over their life cycle. Here the author tries to show the interlinkage between the inner and outer selves. Through the book, the author has highlighted the 'shifting identities' of the Jad Bhotiya community that captures the complexity of actual social institutions and ground realities. These have been superimposed by government literature that identifies and labels them as a tribe. The official identity as a tribe is marginal to their

self-conceptualisation and they use the tribe label for getting government benefits. Instead, the group identifies itself as a Hindu Rajput caste.

Gender identity is another important aspect highlighted by the author in the book. The Jads have been demarcated as a ‘primitive community’ and women play a central role in the social life of the community while men play a marginal role in all village-based activities. Unlike the Western worldview, women are associated with culture or society and men with nature and the wild; and nature is considered more powerful and superior to culture. Women are considered ritually inferior to men and the work of men as shepherds is the crux of their identity and symbolically more valued than the work of women that is centred on the social. The book tries to understand Jad identity in terms of a shift rather than in terms of fixity. It attempts to understand their agency and their ability to negotiate and transform their identities with the minimum amount of inner conflict, given the changes imposed on them due to political, economic or ecological transformations.

The book is divided into seven chapters with an introduction. The first chapter sets the context and in that it situates the Jad Bhotiyas of Uttarkashi in a historical context and sets out the conceptual ideas. The Jads are border people, a pastoral community who straddle different cultural zones and nations due to their activity as traders and this gives them a different sense of belongingness. Through the work, the author tries to show how the question of public identity remains a political enterprise that is uninformed by the cultural realities and the construction of personhood at the ground level. As reality transforms, the Jads have redefined themselves and their sense of self as recognition to the fact that change is an inherent part of their lives. The book focuses on the nuances of this contested identity.

The second chapter looks at the field site, that is, the village Bhagori and describes the village setting in spatial terms. The chapter further describes the relation of the Bhotiyas to other communities and settlements. An important aspect highlighted is the significance of ‘difference’ rather than dominance in Jad Bhotiyas’ relation with other communities. The author points out that the Jad identity was tied to the village identity. This identity was now being nurtured by other political and demographic circumstances.

The third chapter focuses on the landscape and cosmology amongst the Jads. Landscape is seen as a central concept that links together the

concept of time and space as well as the sacred and secular. The Jads have an integrated belief system that looks upon life as a continuous process in which humans are involved as a shared project. One may take recourse to anything and it is accepted. This layered cosmology and the shifts are central to the layered identity of the Jads.

The author then goes on to look at the 'Sacred' in the next chapter. The Jads have a mixed belief system that has elements of both Buddhism and Hinduism. Their deities are not enshrined in sacred temples but actively interact with the villagers on a daily basis. The village god of the Jads, *Me Parang*, keeps its distance from other local gods, thus indicating that like the Jads, there is a lack of total integration with the sacred Hindu gods of the mountains. For the Jads, 'sacrifice' plays an important role in the Jad cosmology. Their ritual calendar has a number of rituals involving the entire village.

One of the most interesting chapters is the chapter on gender identity and the meaningfulness of space. Here the author argues that for the Jads, the universe is itself a gendered space. For them, there is no dichotomy between the sexes and there is no separation of nature and culture. The gendered being is not a static state of male or female. Rather, humans go through a cycle of being non-gendered and then fully masculine or feminine and then again a non-gendered state as they grow older. Unlike Western thought, according to Jad cosmology, men are associated with the wild/nature while women are associated with social life. However, the patriarchal Jad ideology associates men as being pure and hence superior to women, who are considered impure and ritually inferior to men. Women are the boundary markers of society. The bodies of women and what they wear, eat, drink and the way they conduct themselves are scrutinised to grant the community a status. Spaces are also gendered and imbued with meanings of purity and impurity, safety and danger, and accessibility and non-accessibility, given the harsh realities of everyday existence. By virtue of the gender division of labour, men and women experience the world differently. Jad women have some agency in the matter of their marriage. There is no pressure to marry early or marry at all. Motherhood and childcare were not considered the sole responsibility of the mother. Children were taken care of collectively or mostly by the grandparents. However, there have been slow changes in the values of Jads due to the influence of the dominant Hindu culture that surrounds them. Now, the role of the mother is considered highly important and the

institution of ‘magpa’ husband—one who stays in the wife’s home—is slowly declining.

The chapter on ‘Women’s Lives’ lays down the immense responsibilities that are borne by Jad women within the village. There exists a separation of the world of women’s work and men’s work. While the women are responsible for agriculture, men are responsible for grazing and tending of sheep and trading. The men have control over the main source of income generation, that is, raw wool of the sheep. Women have control over most of the day-to-day activities, while paying only lip service to the ritual superiority of men. Women’s agency is reflected in all the tasks related to work within the village, ranging from cultivation to wedding rituals that are all taken care of by the women.

In conclusion, the author points out that in the construction of the Indian nation state, a number of communities have not been recognised and written about and some do not exist in the official documents. In some cases, the communities like the Jad Bhotiyas did not recognise the official designation given to them; or did not like the way they were referred to by many people as ‘jungle’ or ‘primitive’; or they did not want the official classification of their community as ‘tribe’, since their conception of themselves was of upper caste Rajputs. In trying to reconstruct the identity of the Jad Bhotiyas that was acceptable to them, the author tries to distinguish between the inner and outer selves that have an acceptance of the community. For the Jads, the construction of selves and also personhood is more in relation to their landscape and environment than in terms of other people. The concept of spatial location and the idea of shift are central to their identity construction. This ‘inner self’ can have many outer selves that are rooted in the self, though not identical to it. To realise an ‘emotional community’, the Jads must return to their upper altitude village where they can realise full self-expression around their village, their gods and cosmology. Their ‘outer selves’ are built up around social personhood and are conditioned by movements and shifts both spatially and temporally. The author highlights the fact that the Jads act as individuals only in their own villages where they are comfortable and have a name and identity for themselves. The Jads project themselves as a border community that is always on the move and hence their identity and sense of self is based on movement. A more stable relationship with respect to the Indian nation state is yet to evolve.

On the whole, the book is an interesting and in-depth account of the Jad Bhotiya community and its fluid sense of identity. It is an important contribution to the study of border people and the question of identity from a gender perspective. However, the author would have done well to try to understand the underlying patriarchal ideology that exists even amongst the Jad Bhotiya community of the hills.

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Roma Chatterji, ed. 2015. *Wording the World: Veena Das and Scenes of Inheritance*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan. vii + 481 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, index. ₹1295 (hardback).

DOI: 10.1177/0069966716635452

The book is an academic portrait of the anthropologist Veena Das through the words of an array of most accomplished fellow practitioners of the craft. Besides engaging in a conversation with Das's writings, the concerns and characters in the volume also speak with each other in a way that the ethnographic resonates, somewhat unnervingly, from one culture to another. In addition to the editor's introductory summary essay to the book, one may further introduce a fourfold register through which the book can be approached.

The first feature is the salutary academic acknowledgement, at the beginning of every essay, to one or many of Das's writings that have been formative for the particular author in terms of opening a new way of thinking or persuasion to study the ordinary.

The second feature is the way three books by Das (1977, 1995, 2007), are brought up for vital analytical clues of constancy and departures. In this respect, the most overt engagement is found in the essays by Roma Chatterjee (pp. 1–20), Bhriqupati Singh (pp. 84–104) and Anand Pandian (pp. 258–72). Chatterjee and Singh invested in locating the place of structure and event in Das' books from Structure and Cognition (SaC) to Life and Words (LaW), keep alerting the reader to not think of this as a linear shift of focus in Das's work from the determinable structure to the half-elusive event. Instead, they suggest that differing versions of structure and event become available through these books. It is in Pandian's

essay that one finds a bold illustration of how SaC can be approached at many levels within the history of anthropological thought. These levels lay firm on questions of textual ethnography, excavation of new modes of thought against the existent ones and more specifically on what is the relationship between ‘time of narrative’, ‘social life’ and ‘anthropological understanding’ (p. 261). Pandian also enigmatically postures a relatively unstructuralist anthropological wordscape of ‘hope’ from his reading of SaC as one of the key contributions of the said text to the craft.

The third feature is that the large range of Das’s essays from the obscure to the world famous finds expression in the writings of the volume, providing a singular weft to the discussions.

The fourth and final feature is Das’s own response to the essays of the volume as postscript. How is one to understand the subtitle of the book, the coming together of ‘Veena Das’ and ‘Scenes of Inheritance’? How does this peculiar inheritance work? Das in a different context talks about ‘repetition’ inherent to social structure and posits how this repetition is not a general re-run but a constellation of specific affective, magical and ironical enactments of the social (p. 383). An essay in the volume that perhaps captures this to its illustrative best is the account provided by Mani Sekhar Singh of young, aspiring Maithali art students miming and altering the available corpus of Maithali paintings framed within a discursive materiality of tradition(s). Singh lucidly conveys that the young who roam the city and are attentive to friends’ conversations—ever looking for ‘nutrients’ to change the received mise en scene (‘compositional strategy’, p. 330) of the canvas—are reflexive and playful serious learners. Thus, to Das’s list of irony and magical wonder, the ludic can be tagged as how this social inheritance is received and relayed forward. A young one in Singh’s account puts this ludic element to tall practice, removing all important main borders within which the Maithali paintings are generally nestled and wonders quietly, why not? Are there contributors in the volume who are playing in the same mould? There is Andrew Brandel who is trying to get Cavell’s every day to meet Heidegger’s every day and arrive at a romantic denouement in all seriousness and there is Yasmeen Arif, nudging lightly, based on a reading of Roberto Esposito’s rendering of *communitas*, towards a variant reading of the community than the already nuanced one available in Das’s work.

With this background, let me attempt impossibly brief depictions of the essays in the volume. What better examples to start with than Sylvain Perdigon and Lotte Buch Segal's essays that revolve around *shahada* (witnessing) and *sumud* (endurance), respectively as if they are venturing into the hidden, non-heroic side of these words. There is the question of life as an imaginary of pedagogic burden exemplified through 25-year old Katrina by Aaron Goodfellow. There is vivification, through words and images, of many attempts to have bodily translations of pain by EinLall and Roma Chatterji. The question of pedagogy returns in Pratiksha Baxi's ethnographic account of a courtroom setting of rape trial with a child as victim, witness and possibly, pupil of the events. Don Selby locates human rights as Buddhist event(s) in Thai 'moral and political life'. Sameena Mulla's essay brings us back to the scene of rape and sexual harassment in family, although law becomes a site of affective solidarity in this case. Clara Han provides an all-new account of the old, classical and anthropological insistence about the inner life of domestic cycle. Sangeeta Chattoo listens to children of immigrants in the UK and provides narrative glimpses of their worlds. Rita Brara dispatches numbers from a series of wedding jamming sessions in real time while whispering through the essay that these songs are meant to run immanent over life itself. The songs then evoke another instance of a pedagogic scene. Deepak Mehta shows in the case of Ayodhya dispute precisely the temporalised concatenated profile of 'status quo' as against law's imagination of it as parodied empty time. Naveeda Khan proposes, in the context of climate change discourses, how the pairing of change and evocations of death may help one anthropologically access socio-environmental shifts. Fittingly, given that this is a book which is deeply reflective, mirroring many cross-references, Roma Chatterji's essay on folk art of Bengal relies on the concepts of *bimba-pratibimba* (image-mirror image) and *mise en abyme* (self referential) to present a visual understanding of the contemporary.

What of the oedipal scene itself revealing marks of embodied chance legacies? How do giving and inheriting come together in an asymmetrical matrix of contest, grace and attack? Das herself brings that into conversation by positing a ruinous portrait of an anthropological self while embracing 'melancholy' (p. 372), 'mutilated condition' (p. 373) and 'ressentiment' (p. 377) as constitutive elements.

The greatest contribution of a book of this kind is its ability to condense the magnitude of the writing scope of a scholar like Veena Das into one volume. We can see here that Das and the contributors have meticulously enlivened what was perhaps incipient in anthropology always, a move off-transcendence, a not-all but not-nothing belief in the ethnographic testimony, a call for a manifest latento on how to have recordings of life made possible within the sleeves of the ordinary.

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