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This review is being written six years after the publication of the book and almost nine years after the conference (hosted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation at the Neemrana Fort Palace) that produced this volume. Time, and the tide of academic publications, have since moved on. Yet, in many ways, this remains an important volume because, although some significant analyses of the middle class have appeared in the interim (books or essays by Leela Fernandes, Prashant Kidambi and Sara Maza come to mind immediately), scholars have not really made explicitly comparative studies of the social category of the middle class. Other than the several valuable individual contributions, the comparative element remains the most significant potential strength of this volume, and indicative of the directions in which analysis of the middle class must move, beyond the parameters of this collection.

With an introduction and twelve substantial chapters, the collection has a lot to interest a variety of scholars across disciplines. History, sociology, political science and education, as well as other professional fields, inform the points of view of the authors in this collection. Given the extent to which a variety of historical and contemporary perspectives are necessary to understand the middle class, and because social, political and economic factors are critical to its formation and operation, this interdisciplinarity is welcome, indeed essential. But even more than interdisciplinarity, potentially, the comparative endeavour could have been the greatest strength of this collection. As a concept and as a descriptor of a social group, the middle class emerged in Europe. In colonial India, groups of Indians appropriated the label to make it their own, deploying it effectively against colonial rulers and for their own empowerment. Simultaneously, the colonial experience shaped the contours of metropolitan middle classes, even as post-colonial migrations continue to mould middle classes in both locations. A comparative analysis could thus have yielded...
fascinating insights for scholars of both India and Europe. Yet, it is in this critical respect that the collection falls short.

Helmut Reifeld’s preface to the collection repeatedly promises a dialogue between Europe and India centred around the notion of middle-class values. The introduction (co-authored by Imtiaz Ahmad and Reifeld) begins with a useful, albeit simplistic, historical background to the evolution of the middle classes in Europe and India. Following Eurocentric paradigms, the evolution of the European middle class is seen here as *sui generis* (the usual suspects, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, etc., playing leading roles in its emergence), and the Indian middle class is seen to be a product purely of British colonialism. Thus, the section titled ‘Comparative Perspectives’ makes it disappointingly apparent that comparisons are going to be left largely for the reader to undertake herself.

In fact, other than Margrit Pernau’s thoughtful contribution at the beginning of the volume, and André Béteille’s survey of the modern Indian middle class, few of the essays make a serious attempt at comparative study. Some, such as Heinz-Gerhard Haupt’s essay on the German bourgeoisie, make a cursory attempt by stating at the start that ‘[t]he German experience may be of particular importance for the understanding of the Indian situation’ (p. 56); however, it then proceeds to make the rest of its argument about the German bourgeoisie without ever returning to the comparative theme. The other two essays on European themes, by Christian Baudelot and Winfried Gebhardt, don’t even make this token effort. Lest this appear to be singling out the Europeanist contributions, let me hasten to say that the same can be said for almost all the essays that deal exclusively with India. None of the essays, by Pavan Varma, Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar, Gopal Guru, Zoya Hasan, Suhas Palshikar or Gurcharan Das really take up the task of understanding the middle class in terms of comparative history. Rather than an effort at systematic comparative analysis or dialogue, then, the volume as a whole comes across as a series of monologues. The one difference between the approaches of the two area specialists is that while scholars studying India draw their paradigms of an ideal–typical middle class from scholarship on Europe, the compliment is seldom returned. Sadly, this is because, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, Third World historians inevitably have to
be comparativists as the histories they relate, explicitly or otherwise, are read against a putatively normative account of the European past, presented almost always as an already understood history.

The foregoing critique should not detract from the value of many of the individual essays. Claude Markovits’ essay in the volume contains a masterly summary of the historiography of the middle class in colonial India, and makes a convincing case for looking beyond the intelligentsia to understand the people we term middle class. Essays by Zoya Hasan and Suhas Palshikar illustrate the contradictions of middle-class politics, while Gopal Guru opens our eyes to the conundrum of middle-class dalits. All these together help to better understand the relations between the middle class and emergence of the politics of Hindutva (Hindu supremacism). Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar’s essay explores middle-class hypocrisy in gender relations, themes that have been subject to a considerable analysis by many other feminist scholars. Even the more impressionistic contributions of Pavan Varma and Gurcharan Das are readable and thought provoking. Most importantly, the fact that a single volume brings together essays on the middle class is in itself an important contribution to scholarship, for this juxtaposition will allow future contributors to push for a more explicitly comparative approach which is absolutely crucial if we are to understand the middle classes in Europe and India as critical to each others’ constitution.

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SANJAY JOSHI


This volume illuminatingly explores the processes involved in creating an ethnic identity among the culturally distinctive people inhabiting an area of the Himalayan foothills—the Tarai—once known for its dense forests, swamps and endemic malaria. Stretching from west to east, across approximately 1,500 kilometres between the district of Nainital and the border with the state of Assam in India, it serves as a buffer zone between
the hilly areas of the modern state of Nepal in the north and the Indo-
Gangetic plain in the south. Its original inhabitants are the Tharus, who
have lived in this narrow patch of land for centuries, and adapted eco-
logically to develop a functional biological immunity against tropical
malaria, always a threat in the dense rain forest.

An outcome of extensive anthropological fieldwork conducted be-
tween November 1989 and May 1991 while the author lived in a village
called Papariya in Chitwan, the book also draws on interviews with Tharus
from diverse social strata undertaken during this period when the author
also travelled extensively through the Tarai zone. Guneratne’s analysis
of the formation of Tharu identity offers an implicit theoretical critique
of primordialist and instrumentalist perspectives, *contra* which he argues
that ‘ethnicity is neither primordial, nor is it simply the product of elites
manipulating the consciousness of subaltern classes and inventing trad-
itions’ (p. 3). Proceeding from case studies of Tharu groups from across
the region, he shows how, in a short span of four decades, they succeeded
in forging an ethnic identity that went beyond cultural and linguistic dif-
fferences. Despite focusing on a narrow geographical zone, this study
offers bold evidence to challenge the existing dominant views in the
field, and argues for an approach that is adequate to the complexities and
the inevitably contextual nature of the processes of identity formation.

Up until 1950 or so, dense forests and the threat of malaria were im-
portant factors that prevented migration from the adjacent areas of hilly
Nepal and the Indo-Gangetic plains into the Tarai. Having remained
oblivious to happenings outside of the region even through the two hundred
years of British colonial rule in India and the period of Rana rule in
Nepal, the Tharus had retained exclusive control over the Tarai region.
The absence of external interference and the Tharu adaptation to the
local environment allowed them to be classified as a separate tribe, both
by the British and the royal Nepali state. As an ethnonym, the term Tharu
included culturally and linguistically differentiated groups (for example,
while the Dangaura Tharus of western Tarai speak Awadhi, Saptari Tharus
of the eastern areas speak Maithili) scattered over the Tarai zone, who
apparently lacked any sense of a shared ethos of a common past. However,
with the successful implementation of the malaria eradication programme
in 1950, there ensued a mass migration of hill people comprising largely
upper-caste Hindus such as Brahmins, Chettris and Thakuri from the
central hilly areas of Nepal. Within a period of approximately three
decades, this unprecedented migration resulted in significant demographic shifts that reduced Tharus to a small minority relying on the new migrants for their livelihood. Through all this, and particularly through land reforms introduced by the Nepali state in 1955 during the reign of King Mahendra, the illiterate but honest Tharus, now also described as ‘backward’, lost control of land to the more worldly-wise migrants, who were well served by their shrewd connections to state bureaucracies.

The present work elaborates on the success of Nepal’s oldest ethnic organisation, the Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha (translated, Tharu Welfare Society; henceforth, TKS). Formed in the 1920s as a broad-based front to instill a sense of ethnic identity, but gathering momentum only in the 1950s, the TKS was propelled by a small group drawn from the segment of Tharu large landowners, government bureaucrats and the newly educated elite, now seeking to project Tharus as a united people inhabiting the area between the rivers Mechi and Mahakali (p. 1). Despite such class differences, these elite Tharus succeeded in bringing Tharu groups under the umbrella of the TKS and thus, eventually, Tharu ethnic identity emerged through negotiation of class and the distribution of material forces in the context of modernisation. Besides, and in contrast to the TKS, another organisation called Backward Society Education (BASE) has been engaged in grass-roots activity in the Dang area of the western Tarai. Through its action-oriented programmes, BASE has sought to alleviate the problems of the Dangaura Tharus, who found themselves vulnerable to exploitation as bonded labour and forced into indebtedness at the hands of non-Tharu migrants. Both organisations have emphasised education as an important means for Tharu betterment.

In all, the book is an effort to comprehensively understand the formation of ethnic identity vis-à-vis a geographically isolated group such as the Tharus. Emphasising that shared symbols or cultures are not a prerequisite for the formation of ethnic identities, this work persuasively shows how ethnicity works to mask confrontation between politically self-conscious and materially opposed groups (p. 6). Thus, besides contributing to the anthropological and sociological study of a neglected region in South Asia, the book is also a significant addition to the literature on ethnic identities.

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Contributions to Indian Sociology (n.s.) 43, 2 (2009): 325–50
Alongside a number of powerful ethnic movements that emerged in the last century, Assam witnessed the Tai-Ahom movement, whose antecedents go back to the early years of the 20th century. In this volume, Yasmin Saikia examines the rise of the Tai-Ahoms, around whose identity this movement crystallised. It is believed that the Ahom had ruled Assam since they migrated there from Upper Burma in the 13th century. Plagued by civil disturbances as well as Burmese incursions in the early 19th century, this juncture marked a break in Ahom political history, until finally, the Anglo-Burmese war resulted in the absorption of Assam into the colonial polity of British India. Echoing the resistance from pre-colonial Ahom ruling elites against the rule of the East India Company, a strong Tai-Ahom identity movement came back to haunt the Indian nation-state in the 20th century.

The emergence of the Tai-Ahom movement ran parallel to the mobilisation of a larger modern Assamese identity around the issue of language. Asserting a distinct identity for the Ahoms, the movement claimed a separate political space for them within the Assamese political body. In contrast to the latter, Saikia claims that through using the memory of connections to regions outside India, particularly Upper Burma and Thailand, the Tai-Ahom movement challenged both the concepts of being Assamese and being Indian in Upper Assam (p. 40). This movement derived its cultural and intellectual legitimacy from the migration narrative, which became central to Ahom identity politics. It is in this context that it becomes important to understand the epistemological origins of this narrative. Here, Saikia argues that the Tai-Ahom migration narrative has been popular since the beginning of the last decade of the 18th century, when colonial ethnography began to lend it authoritative sanction, which was then re-affirmed by anthropological and linguistic accounts in subsequent decades. Thus, Saikia asserts that Ahom identity acquired a meaningful ethnic dimension only with the increasing legitimacy of the migration narrative which, in turn, provided the foundation for the consolidation of a strong and separate Tai-Ahom identity within the emerging
political space in Assam. Facilitated largely through the careful scholarship of Assamese historian, Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, the availability of Ahom *buranjis* (historical chronicles) in the public domain also fed into the popular imagination. However, Saikia claims that besides assigning a discursive presence to the buranjis, their colonial transformation silenced all other possible readings of the chronicles (pp. 124–25). In the second half of the 20th century, rituals and various social customs were invoked to lend an additional dimension to this identity.

Further, Saikia reminds us that the pre-colonial regional polity assisted both the admission of Assamese caste Hindus into its political system, as well as the process of Ahomisation, through which members from other tribes and communities could aspire to become Ahom. Nevertheless, relying too much on colonial sources and readings, Saikia’s painstaking ethnography misses the fact that both Hinduisation and Ahomisation did not always work as powerful forces of assimilation in Assam, as they did elsewhere. Similarly, her work does not provide any substantial historical empirical evidence to substantiate a key claim she seeks to make for a close linkage between the circulation of the migration narrative and the trend towards Ahomisation. Subsequently, critical questions remain unexplored. How popular was this migration narrative amongst Ahoms in the 20th century? Does this narrative resonate with Ahom memory and identity in pre-colonial times? Who were these people who aspired to become Ahom? How easy was their adoption of Ahom identity, or again, did others resist the Ahomisation process? For instance, the Morans, who aspired to become Ahom, went on to advance the most serious challenge to the foundation of Ahom monarchy, which eventually led to its downfall. While Saikia sweepingly explains the growth of the concepts of Assam and Assamese as emerging towards the end of the 17th century after repeated violent encounters with the armies of Delhi, she ignores the processes of contestation that also, no doubt, played a crucial role in the making of the regional formation.

Similarly, Saikia’s claim for buranjis as the only chronicles of Assam’s past seems questionable; for instance, since the 16th century, the Ahom state drew heavily on the *Katha Guru Charit* corpus (life narratives of Vaishnavite preachers) as a mechanism for deriving its legitimacy. Further, recalling the efforts of Lakhinath Bezbaruah, the doyen of the 20th century Assamese literary scene, to seek alternative readings of these chronicles, it is debatable if one can speak of any singular reading of the
buranji texts. Equally, in seeking to assert the distinctiveness of Assamese culture vis-à-vis the regional hegemony of Bengali, Ahom scholars have contributed significantly to the body of Assamese literature. Further, one cannot ignore evidence of Ahom politicians who, despite their strong endorsement of Tai-Ahom culture, have strongly resisted the Tai-Ahom movement. A stellar example would be that of Khagendra Nath Barbora, a leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), an elected member of the Assam Legislative Assembly and a legend in his own lifetime for his popularity amongst the Assamese peasants. Another aspect that begs explanation, evidenced by the poor response to institutional attempts to revive the learning of the Tai language, is the fact that the political significance of the Tai-Ahom movement has dissipated considerably in contemporary times.

However, for many such unexplored aspects of the place of Ahom identity within Assam, the publication of Assam and India: Fragmented Memories, a study simultaneously informed both by historical and anthological perspectives and methodologies, is a welcome addition to the growing body of research on Assamese identity and politics.

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ARUPJYOTI SAIKIA

Guwahati


This is a collection of ten historical essays focusing on Bihar between 1910 and the 1940s. However, interestingly, much of the empirical material presented here seems to illuminate the realities of contemporary Bihar, or indeed, of present-day India. Without providing a serial account of the book’s contents, the rest of the review will offer an overview of the author’s chief concerns here.

Through the first half of the volume, Ghosh is able to show how Muslims in Bihar were far from being a homogenous social or political constituency. In doing this, Ghosh points out the several hiatuses across divergent axes of differences that separate political and ideological groupings within the Muslim community. Take, for instance, the differences
between the *razil* (labouring classes) and *sharif* (cultivated elite) or the Bihar Muslim Independent Party (MIP), the Muslim League and the Momin Conference; or again, those stemming from the ideological divergences of the Aligarh school and the theological allegiances of the Deoband seminary. In each of these cases, ‘rivals’ remain suspicious and uncomfortable—if not mutually hostile—vis-à-vis each other. However, Ghosh contextualises this discussion against the contrasting existential possibilities embedded within the ‘opposite’ scenarios that had confronted South Asian Muslims not so long time ago, namely, that of being a political majority, as against the prospect of living as a religious minority within a nation (pp. 166–84). While the Muslim League had a clear answer vis-à-vis the former possibility, arguably, it failed to respond to the second question, despite seeking support from Muslims across divergent political predicaments. Given this line of reasoning, mass migration seemed the only available logical corollary. Consequently, as a Muslim, one was either lucky enough to be absorbed within the ambit of Pakistan, failing which, the only remaining consolation was to aspire to being a member of an abstract universal brotherhood, hardly an adequate answer to the problems of being caught in urgent local conflicts. Significantly, Ghosh’s argument about Muslim heterogeneity is built not around divisive categories of her choosing but upon self-perceptions amongst groups that constituted the not-always-overlapping social and historical formations at work in Bihar. Quite appropriately, she is able to show how, far more than any monolithic sense of Muslim identity (even when this was a wishful construct projected amongst a narrow elite segment comprising a few leaders and intellectuals), it was these graded distinctions that weighed significantly upon the society and politics of the day.

Moving on, Ghosh is able to clearly demonstrate that the widespread ideological overlaps between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, often borne out on the ground by dual memberships of both organisations, greatly alarmed common Muslims who, nevertheless, gravitated towards the Muslim League only as late as the 1940s (p. 168). As a political fallout of communal riots, this period often saw several second-rung Hindu leaders of the Congress engage in violence against Muslim masses at remote rural sites. Thus, clearly, even while the creation of Pakistan served neither as a temporary or lasting solution to a vexed issue, almost prophetically, the fears projected by the Muslim League have proven to be
the most unexaggerated and enduring result of the Partition for Indian Muslims. One can easily infer how this has led to an emotional and political trap in contemporary times for Indian Muslims who had rejected the idea of Pakistan as a possible solution but are, nevertheless, persistently forced to admit the validity of the fears on which it was founded. The stereotyping cliché that every Muslim who was ‘left behind’ longs for Pakistan, now long reproduced by Hindu communal elements, fails to acknowledge the fact that, tragically, the same Muslim subject might feel equally abandoned and betrayed by Pakistan.

What emerges strikingly from Ghosh’s work is the informal ease with which the Congress–Hindu Mahasabha nexus operated during the 1930s, ostensibly on the premise that the broader rubric of secular tenets projected at the national level need not necessarily contradict majoritarian communalism at the local level. On the other hand, ironically, any political mobilisation—howsoever secular—among Muslims is seen as communal in intent. Quite incredibly, a majoritarian ideology could invest itself with an immanent value, almost as a matter of right. The potential for the numerical majority of Hindus to dominate was turned into an aggressive assertion that they ‘must’ dominate, a proposition that any numerically significant minority would justifiably see as threatening. Against this logic, Ghosh is able to show how the ‘Congress Muslim’ stereotype came to represent elements from within the community accused of betraying its interests and selling out to the Congress (pp. 34–55). A major victim of this stereotype was the visionary Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, whose groundbreaking theological exegeses on a covenant of Islam with other religious groups were tragically obliterated by communalist perceptions, and never got the attention they deserved (p. 3). Such historical insights shed important light on several regressive features that continue to characterise present-day Indian democracy, particularly, the everyday manner in which a number of social groupings such as Muslims, Christians and dalits find themselves at the receiving end of an aggressive majoritarianism, depending on local demographics.

Third, and importantly, the study also explores the fate of the Muhajirs or Bihari Muslims who, in 1947, first migrated to East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), and then after 1971, to Pakistan, only to find themselves figuring both as perpetrators and victims of a major political problem
in Sindh. A unique saga of displacement that extends in its diasporic reach to Europe and America, and despite the large numbers involved, the Muhajir story remains an as-yet unresolved case of a minority within a minority that was equally betrayed by the states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The obverse of this latter fact has meant that Muhajirs have never succeeded in casting off the image of being the ‘perennial’ traitors in every context in which they have found themselves (pp. 185–211).

Fourth, the author’s analysis of communal riots in Bihar details the workings of territorial aggression at a micro level (pp. 11–17). Enacted chiefly through violating ‘rival’ injunctions pertaining to animal sacrifice within Islam and ‘high’ Hinduism, and the ever-contentious issue of determining itineraries for religious processions through city lanes, communal riots have functioned, both as a metaphor through which the balance of power between communities gets played out as well as the symbolic ground upon which the rigours of nation building are enacted through a choreography of gestures, postures, advances and retreats that form an ongoing theatre of surrender, violation and re-negotiation. Lastly, if the successful defence of womanhood and simultaneous display of manliness remain essential ingredients of all nationalist and communal ideologies, in a brief paper, Ghosh dwells upon the gender dimensions of communal violence, whereby the violation and forcible appropriation of the human body through acts such as rape appear as the ultimate weapon to inflict damage upon the ‘enemy’s’ collective dignity, sense of self and morale (pp. 102–20).

With an excellent introduction by Biswamoy Pati, this collection of essays pertinently explores some enduring aspects and key ambivalences of the social conflicts characterising this regional formation, marked in contemporary times by great economic backwardness and political ferment. Although Ghosh’s material and focus pertain to Bihar (rendered in the book’s title as Eastern India), her analysis and argument compel one to refer to similar patterns stemming from the national movement as it was shaped in other regional contexts. Above all, the present work remains illuminating because it straddles both past and present. In conclusion, however, one may point to the somewhat synoptic flavour of many of Ghosh’s essays, resulting mostly from the large social canvas she seeks to cover. Clearly, future researchers will find in her writings a mine of
ideas to potentially sustain several worthwhile M.Phil and Ph.D. theses seeking to analyse the region.


The human ability to modify the physical environment they live in and form part of allows them to function simultaneously as environmental subjects. As such, a non-humanised environment represents an exceptional scenario; further, the making and emergence of environmental subjects can also be most fruitfully historicised. Working with these premises, Agrawal’s brilliant study under review here shows how, across organisational and social contexts, the remaking of the environment always remains intimately linked to the allocation and distribution of power pertaining to the management of various components of the physical environment such as land, water and forests. The book views the humanised environment not simply as a static collection of world views and cognitive categories but rather as a dynamic and shifting scenario registering the impact of human agency. An important distinction made between ‘environmentalism’ and ‘environmentality’ in the literature in the field of environmental studies indicates that the former refers to a philosophy of viewing the world through the lens of nature, while the latter term emphasises, not a specific world view, but an analytical highlighting of human agency, both in the form of the active role of the state and/or the community in shaping the environment. The latter term in the book’s title epitomises the distinctiveness of the volume’s approach and methodology in marshalling an impressive array of historical and anthropological data on forest management in Kumaon.

In this context, a key phrase used in the study is ‘environmental government’, and the two parts of the book explore the emergence of strategies and techniques of forest governance as they evolved in colonial India
through approximately a century between 1850 and 1930. The first part meticulously traces the first silvicultural operations and the use of statistics as part of the colonial government’s efforts to exercise centralised control over Indian forests for commercial purposes. The second part explores the new technology of environmental government that relies primarily on local communities as partners in the successful regulation of forests. Three chapters in this second part examine the decentralisation of forest management processes by the colonial government. Exploring two different strategies of forest governance, the study also implicitly raises the question of the possible historical connection between them. In fact, the new technology of forest governance grew in the aftermath of the series of widespread protest movements in Kumaon district after 1860. When the colonial state reclassified nearly 80 per cent of Kumaon’s forests into reserves between 1911 and 1916, these protests took the form of deliberately kindled forest fires (p. 3). Agrawal’s book further provides excellent quantitative data from the annual reports of the forest administration in the United Provinces during 1911–35 on the protests through the violation of forest regulations (p. 6). This widespread discontent led to the formation of the Kumaon Forest Grievance Committee, whose recommendations were accepted by the colonial state, and allowed the villagers to take formal control over most of the reserve forests and govern them under a general set of guidelines.

This second phase thus showed how a highly centralised, bureaucratic and powerful state, backed by current silvicultural knowledge and design, was pressured to transform itself into a decentralised and participatory form of government. Chapters 4–6 brilliantly describe the politics, institutions and new forms of subjectivities that emerged within this new realm of environmental governance in colonial India. Chapter 4 examines the first facet of decentralised environmental regulation through the formation of a number of forest councils composed of residents. Significantly, while the first phase of colonial forestry had seen the region unite in protest against an apparently omnipotent forest administration, this latter process introduced internal divisions amongst localities in the region. The forest councils enabled the government to ensure the penetration of forest regulation on an inexpensive yet more precise and extensive scale. Directed our attention to ‘the processes embodied in the regulatory community that comes into being side by side with the governmentalized

locality’ (p. 92), Chapter 5 also stimulatingly interrogates Foucault’s well-known metaphors to describe the mechanisms through which disciplinary power is operationalised. Agrawal argues that Foucauldian models of coercive institutions do not adequately explain the working of regulatory forest councils in Kumaon, which rely on intimate knowledge about the activities of each member to check violations within a system of tolerability: ‘Regulation was more comprehensive but less costly, more modulated but less visible, more autonomous but more continuous, more precise, and, perhaps for that reason, more humane’ (p. 93).

The interesting phrase, ‘Intimate government’, used as the subtitle of the penultimate chapter (Chapter 6), then, epitomises the core insights of this fine study. Using anthropological methods, the author unravels the transformations that have produced new environmental subjects through participatory practices. Unpacking these processes not through the classic categories of caste, class and gender, Agrawal’s analysis of his detailed interviews with forest council headmen, non-participating villagers and participants in state-generated forest management practices reveals significant variation in the formation of environmental subjects across Kumaon, ranging from villagers indulging in illegal extraction of forest produce to forest council leaders willing to sacrifice their personal and familial interests to achieve greater communal goals. Ultimately, it was the latter, as the successful subjects of the ‘intimate government’ in Kumaon, who helped the state to govern its forests, though at a distance. Using the official language and idioms of forest protection but, interestingly, often viewing state officials as inefficient, unsupportive or corrupt, these leaders derived their inspiration from an imagined autonomy of the village councils to follow conservation practices mandated by the state and crucial to the success of decentralised protection (pp. 195–98). Additionally, we may note that the study could have benefited from looking at the role and influence of regional and national political parties in creating environmental subjects in Kumaon, both during the period of forest council formation as well as at the contemporary time during which the author conducted his field investigations.

Focusing on a region of India which witnessed one of the earliest forest-related peoples’ movements and successful community forest management efforts many decades before the modern post-independence joint
forest management movement, Arun Agrawal’s current study is a genuinely significant contribution to the field of environmental history and politics.

Vidyasagar University

ABHIJIT GUHA

Midnapore, West Bengal


Sanjay Srivastava’s extremely enjoyable interdisciplinary study is disarmingly crafted in scripting temporal and spatial narratives to mark the non-official–public urban and sexual cultures of modern India, and their linkages to commerce, footpath capitalism and the making of middle-class consumption. Removed from the psychoanalytic approach to the subject by scholars like Sudhir Kakar, the book, instead, offers an analytical framework based on the notion of the ‘social’. It also challenges Foucauldian perspectives on sexuality, surveillance, and Freudian views on repressive hypotheses. In the process, *Passionate Modernity* expands the analytical horizons of what we may term sexuality studies in new directions. It traverses a vast range of themes, including—but not limited to—eugenics, metropolis, economic planning, free market, sexual self-rule, local and global identities, urban spaces, masculine anxieties and feminine desires, heterosexual relationships, etc.

The book begins by exploring the writings on sex by Pillay and Phadke who, as writers of ‘serious’ sexological literature, sought to combine nationalism with a scientific understanding of family, as a part of their commitment to the sexual reform of Indian society. Srivastava perceptively shows how their writings contain instances of counter-knowledge that break the surface of ‘acceptable’ middle-class modern identity and its supposed ‘truths’. For instance, Pillay spoke of the masturbating woman as well as of homosexuality as potential avenues for achieving satisfaction. And Phadke could admit to the possibility of a ‘union’ between brahmins and shudras (p. 73). Many of the themes explored here have been the subject of at least two other significant studies, namely,
Sarah Hodges’ *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce* and Sanjam Ahluwalia’s *Reproductive Restraints: Birth Control in India, 1877–1947*, which offer a richer gendered analysis.

Chapter 3 investigates the female singing voice of Lata Mangeshkar, and how it has come to be expressive of gender identity in India. For me, this chapter is problematic. Srivastava argues that the woman figure conjured by Lata’s singing voice is the product of certain developments peculiar to the processes of Indian modernity (p. 81). He sees in her voice the language of ‘home’ and controllable domestic space. Throughout his book, Srivastava questions neat, singular explanatory frameworks; yet, while studying Lata Mangeshkar, he seems to fall into the same trap. In stating that Lata’s voice undermines an ambivalent femininity, he seems to deny any recalcitrant possibilities or contradictions that may exist. He refuses to acknowledge that her rendering could be controlling and subversive, contained and passionate at the same time. The next section then discusses the male hero of the post-Independence film era, whom Srivastava refers to as the Five Year Plan hero, a figure replete with the signs of modern scientific knowledge. Both these chapters deal with the making of a set of relatively uncontested and more or less settled middle-class identities within the nationalist framework of the 1950s.

The rest of the book dwells on the post-liberalisation era. Thus, the next two chapters provide ethnographies of street life and sexual thresholds by focusing on economically and socially marginal urban populations, termed here as the city’s ‘floating’ classes (p. 30). For me, these two chapters remain the most eloquent and insightful in Srivastava’s book. They explore the landscape of urban sexualities by focusing on sex clinics and their clients in Delhi and Mumbai, and on ‘footpath’ pornography, that includes cheaply produced advice booklets. Both these sites index the mobile and displaced populations of the city to explore subaltern masculinities, sexualities and illicit cultural economies within an urban milieu. In these highly readable and fascinatingly delineated chapters, Srivastava is concerned with the making and un-making of subaltern masculinities as they come to terms with their marginal position in an urban political and cultural economy.

The book moves on to study *Sexology Darpan*—a Hindi magazine on sex and health—and compellingly shows how such publications mediate
between the footpath and the pucca (long-lasting/stable) house. Further, Srivastava investigates the efflorescence of ‘sex talk’ and desire in Hindi language commercially-successful women’s magazines like Meri Saheli, Grhlakshmi (sic) and Grhashobha (sic). This chapter adds to the significant work of Patricia Uberoi on the subject. Finally, Srivastava discusses the nature of sexual claims, aspirations and negotiations made to assert a middle-class identity in the city. Taken together, these chapters make for astute reflections on the meanings of being ‘middle-class’ in India. The book is further enriched by its exposition of many interesting illustrations and expressions of sexual desire. ‘Instruction for Utopia’ and ‘Pedestrian Desires’ are intriguing titles for chapters that often link together seemingly disparate themes. At times, it may appear that the author is attempting to deal with too much, causing a quick jump between themes that complicate the attempt to grasp a central argument in various chapters, sometimes making for an impression of clutter or of trying to make connections that remain elusive. Thus, for instance, the book attempts to simultaneously investigate ideas of eugenics and sexual swarajya (self-rule); metropolis and province; economic planning and free market; the ethic of thrift and cultures of consumption; masculine anxieties and feminine desires; local and global identities; legal and illegal urban spaces; reformulation of heterosexual relationships and varied contexts of being middle class in India.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the landscape of this study is vast, and Srivastava’s mind seeks to delve into, and works with, various complex registers. One of the book’s many strengths is its effort to unravel and illuminate the mundane and the everyday. Srivastava brilliantly questions simplistic assumptions about the hegemonic role of the state, by emphasising the moral disruptions and disorder within its framework (pp. 2–3, 330–31). Simultaneously, he also highlights the fluid and variegated nature of discourses and their subversive possibilities, thus decentering any dominant homogenous paradigms around an assumed core of values pertaining to the realm of ‘Indian’ sexualities. For instance, while acknowledging the importance of celibacy and semen control discourses, Srivastava sees them as only one among many social topographies, by also bringing to us ‘sex for pleasure’ narratives. He shows how the public sphere in India is saturated with sex talk, in order to stress ‘the grounds upon which the viscous structure of sexuality seeps and spreads’ (p. 329). Overall,

Wife or a whore? Chaste or sexually permissive and perverse? Rarely have such antinomic categories been construed as complementary models within a conceptual framework in studies on a specific community. Anuja Agrawal’s work deals specifically with the fascinating phenomenon through which communities evolve structural and ideological mechanisms to negotiate and uphold such dichotomous tenacious social ‘deviations’. Critically exploring issues of prostitution and patriarchy among the Bedias, an erstwhile nomadic group and presently classified as a scheduled caste, this work delineates the unique model of femininity encapsulated by the provocative title, *Chaste Wives and Prostitute Sisters*. Based on a systematic and detailed analysis of data drawn from fieldwork in Bedia hamlets in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the author explores the complex community kinship structure to understand the basis of the sexual economy of the Bedias. The fundamental characteristic of this economy is the engagement of unmarried Bedia women in prostitution, often the primary means of subsistence among Bedias; thus, as noted by the author, prostitution constitutes the ‘family economy’.

Chapter 1 uses memories and genealogical evidence to briefly trace the origins of prostitution among Bedias in a historical frame. Far from being a choice of individual women or even a traditional vocation of the community, the book argues that prostitution is a phenomenon that is central to the Bedias’ transition from a nomadic to sedentary life style. Prostitution was strategically adopted during the later colonial period by the Bedias as a ‘criminal tribe’ seeking to escape state persecution. The second chapter offers a detailed analysis of several aspects of the social
context of Bedia prostitution, including the norms and values that determine femininity amongst them, the rites of passage into prostitution, notions of masculine responsibilities and specific privileges available to Bedia women. The next chapter addresses the internal and external dimensions of prostitution as the primary subsistence mode of Bedia existence. Interestingly, the only potential for exploitation seems to lie in contexts where non-kin female members are acquired for sex work at times of economic crisis within the community. Internal mechanisms to preclude exploitative conditions through a moral economy that prohibits sexual relations between Bedia women engaged in sex work and Bedia men are juxtaposed with the lack of external structural constraints, whereby non-Bedia men can exercise control over Bedia women.

A significant issue discussed in the next chapter is that of masculinity. Unlike conventional approaches to gender that generally focus exclusively on women, Agrawal engages with themes of femininity and the sexual economy holistically by simultaneously addressing issues of masculinity and juxtaposing distinctive models of Bedia femininity and masculinity within the analytical framework. The text highlights the distinctiveness of the dual model of femininity at work among Bedia women, and how that intersects with the almost superfluous economic role of Bedia men. The Bedia kinship structure and economy thus reproduce a model of masculinity under apparent duress, which may be categorised as distinct from dominant masculinities. The study interestingly illustrates how the engagement of Bedia women in prostitution makes for relationships with non-Bedia men that are seen as desired and valued. Ironically, this reinforces the superiority of non-Bedia masculinity, while also helping to reproduce indolence and inertia among Bedia men that is primarily caused by larger structural influences.

The chapters on the morality of the Bedia marriage economy simultaneously delineate in detail the broader Bedia social identity and their relations with kindred communities. A fundamental characteristic of the Bedia moral economy is the prohibition of sexual relations within the kin group as also the non-engagement of married women in sex work. These prohibitions are integral to an economy sustained primarily on the sexual labour of its unmarried daughters; conversely, they help avoid what the author describes as ‘insurmountable contradictions and irrevocable practical problems’ (p. 193). It is in this context that the custom of bride price becomes crucial. Significantly, this structural positioning of
married women is ideologically countered by the economic role of unmarried Bedia women, ironically resulting in an excessive concern for purity and chastity in acquiring a wife. In contrast to dominant social groups, Agrawal argues, Bedias have internalised this division between these two socially-constituted categories of womanhood both at the ideological and structural levels. Eventually, a fervently-maintained ideal of chaste femininity ‘gives considerable leverage in dealing with the stigma to which they are invariably susceptible’ (p. 209). Despite the coexistence of matriarchal and patriarchal elements within Bedia social structure, the author consistently and commendably argues that ‘[i]deologies that perpetuate male privilege do not automatically disappear where material conditions are altered substantially’ (p. 215). In explaining why prostitution in this context is ‘actually and apparently a superior option’ for Bedia women and the community, the study raises a number of significant economic and social issues. In particular, it highlights the relationship between caste and the modern economy, especially the mode of negotiation available to a nomadic, officially-criminalised community such as the Bedias, and the challenges encountered in their efforts to evolve newer modes of subsistence.

And yet, despite efforts to marshal sufficient historical support for the transition argument, it remains fraught with ambiguity and appears problematic. Narrativising the research problem within the ways in which the larger caste context was redefined through the colonial period would have opened ways for the study to explore the structural constraints encountered by a community—namely, the Bedias in the present context—in evolving an occupational identity at variance with their past or customary role. Thus, while the study makes references to the traditional vocation of Bedia women as singers–dancers patronised by princely courts and feudal lords, sadly, this crucial dimension does not enter Agrawal’s frameworks in analysing the phase of Bedia transition to the modern economy. A brief account of their traditional roles as performers, embedded in the pre-colonial regional cultural economy, would have enabled the reader to appreciate the qualitative transmutation in gender and collective identities that the Bedia experienced in losing their vocation as professional performing artistes. An account of erstwhile Bedia performance forms and how these may have impinged in concrete or mythic ways in shaping their collective identity and consciousness as performer–artistes are
questions that could have been useful in understanding the contemporary Bedia social context. Seemingly, the lack of clarity on this score results in the author’s reticence in discussing the symbolic/cultural significance of the rites of passage that initiate young Bedia women into prostitution. Lacking a lucid delineation of the community’s socio-cultural profile, then, the present study leaves us with only a very partial and one-dimensional view that largely presents the Bedia personality as subsumed within the group’s sexual economy.

However, in the final analysis, in raising issues of larger significance, Anuja Agrawal’s undoubtedly stimulating study will remain of interest both to the academic community and to policy makers.

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Particularly in a world where violence is an integral part of everyday experience and life-worlds, its study marks an important field within current social science research. Until recently, the dominant approach had comprised a macro-analysis of the nature and causes of political violence; however, Veena Das’ path-breaking work on the anthropology of violence has proved influential in focusing attention on the negotiation of crisis precipitated through violent events in the everyday lives of victims. Drawing on essays previously published separately as journal and anthology contributions, this volume opens with an insightful foreword by Veena Das to highlight its critical interventions, from the unique perspective of the local and everyday, to debates around issues of communalism, secularism and the role of the state, both in the public domain and in the social sciences. Taken together, the essays mark an attempt to delineate and theorise responses of ordinary people inhabiting and acting within a historical time-space, to mediate between the (frequently violent) ramifications of participating in generalised imagined communities that often function as territorial entities, on the one hand, and a recuperation...
of the particular in negotiating governmental or non-state interventions such as rehabilitation efforts, on the other.

Chapter 1 offers a detailed conceptual discussion woven around debates about communal violence in the context of nation-building and the role of the state, as a means to contextualise the present study and the events that preceded the Dharavi riots of 1992–93. At the outset, Chatterji and Mehta seek to differentiate their methodology from ‘accounts of historians, who have produced, perhaps, the canonic view of violence between Hindu and Muslims’ (p. 21). The book is based on ethnographic narratives, collected through interviews conducted with approximately forty informants in the course of individual and joint fieldwork trips over a ten year period between 1995 and 2005. The opening chapter presents an overview of the argument and insights of subsequent chapters, and also highlights the key notion of ‘voice’ invoked in different contexts in the volume.

Chapter 2 is a skilful reflection upon the Srikrishna Commission Report (SCR) and the colonial lineages of its categories, particularly, in its attempts to figure the communal riot as a disease that awaits (and is susceptible to) diagnosis. The authors draw attention to the SCR’s usage of generic categories like ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’, its representations of riot geography through the alphabetic listing and enumeration of riot-affected localities alongside the attempt to validate an available temporal sequence into a cause–effect paradigm. Further, with the help of a case study, they show how individual voices then assume irrelevance because they do not ‘fit’ into the structural pathologies described in these expert reports.

Chapter 3 stands apart in the volume to offer the reader a thick narrative on the themes of violence and rehabilitation that are basic to understanding the responses of ordinary people. These are juxtaposed with great skill to convincingly ‘capture the dense fabric of life in Dharavi, its heterogeneity and complexity’ (p. 61). Highlighting the importance of ‘walking narratives’—a term used by the authors to distinguish their methodology from face-to-face interviews—they seek to show how, while particularities expand to assume the status of generalities, within narratives of violence, interestingly, narratives of rehabilitation seem to demonstrate the reverse process at work. Also emphasised here are the important ways in which orderly relief work is sought to be posed as an antidote to ‘disorderly’ violence emanating from riot scenarios, even as, ironically, the restoration
of normalcy helps foster a culture of impunity as was demonstrated, for instance, when a leading perpetrator of violence in Dharavi was admitted as a member of a community-based organisation involved in rehabilitation efforts.

Entitled, ‘Communal Violence, Public Spaces and the Unmaking of Men’, Chapter 4 addresses the complicated figuring of otherness, gender and nationalism within scenarios of riot violence. The narratives included here describe the transformation of public spaces of the neighbourhood into zones of instability and insecurity that bring back the memory of violence in the aftermath of the riot. Alongside, they also suggest how, during such times, a neighbourhood works as metaphor for the nation, wherein fragmented bodies function as commodities to make for a geography marked by ‘the proliferation and circulation of signs’ (p. 118). Raising questions on how citizenship is alternately granted to some and withheld from others, the authors observe that, in the process, ‘the lives of the latter are not necessarily destroyed, but neither are they allowed entry into the life of the nation in a way that permits standards of recognition for the attaining of humanness’ (p. 126).

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 acquaint us with forms of diffused violence in everyday life situations. By tracing the history of slum development programmes and other key issues pertaining to housing, the authors draw our attention to the plethora of multiple rules and regulations that keep relationships between ‘slum-dwellers’, civil society, political society and the state in a constant flux. While instances of mixed religious housing societies may mark the success of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) movement, the larger issue of how the politics of riots and subsequent rehabilitation processes impacts the space a community inhabits emerges as a key theme here.

The book offers several valuable insights both to social scientists researching the contemporary and sociologists/anthropologists engaged in the study of violence. On the whole, it is a stimulating text that confronts the reader with uncomfortable facts about how communal violence, born out of alterities, eventually gets entrenched into the lives of the subjects involved.

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This valuable edition brings together many important essays on South Asian Islam and Muslim identity in the subcontinent. In examining the diverse contestations, debates and dialogues that emerged within South Asian Islam in the colonial and post-colonial contexts, the author’s in-depth knowledge of the subject allows for new insights that question many existing stereotypes and assumptions within the field.

The collection successfully reflects the diversity of issues that have attracted Metcalf’s attention as a scholar. The foremost of these is her nuanced analysis of the Deoband *madrassa* and its *ulema*. The ulema played a critical role in the field of education, in the shaping of social debates and the evolution of new literary forms in Urdu. Metcalf has also examined the impact of religious reform movements such as those associated with the Deoband school and the Tablighi Jamaat, particularly, on the lives of Muslim women. Their impact resulted in the opening up of new spaces for women, while simultaneously strengthening new patriarchal norms through a reassertion of prescriptive norms. Metcalf’s study also brings to light redefinitions and shifts within the Urdu literary sphere. She specifically explores diverse literary texts and genres, ranging from reformist works like *Bihishti Zewar* to the rise of autobiographical writing and pilgrimage narratives, to highlight the diverse understandings of self and community in these literary expressions.

This volume is a very welcome addition to the scholarship on South Asian Islam at a time when, yet again, the diverse traditions within Islam are being reduced by many generalisations and stereotypes. Showing how internal contestation within South Asian Islam highlights the need to appreciate its plurality and diversity, Barbara Metcalf’s magisterial essays will continue to inspire future scholarship that seeks to engage in study of the subject on its own terms.

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