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Gandhi As Journey, Traveller, And Baggage

Salim Yusufji

CATCHING UP WITH GANDHI

By Graham Turner
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2010, pp. 329, ₹350.00

GREAT SOUL: MAHATMA GANDHI AND HIS STRUGGLE WITH INDIA

By Joseph Lelyveld
Harper Collins, Delhi, 2011, pp. 425, ₹699.00

TIMELESS INSPIRATOR: RELIVING GANDHI

Conceptualised and edited by Raghunath Mashelkar
Sakal Publications, Delhi, 2010, pp. 370, ₹490.00

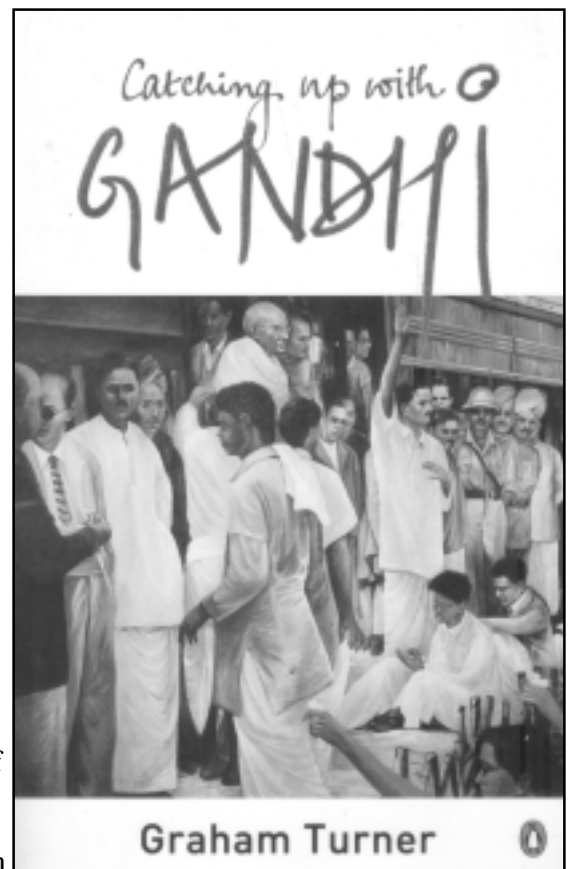
Graham Turner, a British journalist, comes to the Mahatma after cutting his biographer's teeth on a life of Queen Elizabeth, 'based on intimate conversations with many of her family and friends.' Conversations with another friend, Rajmohan Gandhi, yielded the present venture: a journey in Mahatma Gandhi's footsteps, 'standing where he stood, seeing something of what he saw, talking to some of the people who knew him,' in India, England and South Africa. Turner's grasp of P.G. Wodehouse is of an order that enables him to recall the precise context in which the Gandhi motif surfaced in *Right Ho, Jeeves* but he makes no claims to learning on his immediate subject, admitting that at the outset he 'did not even know he [Gandhi] had spent twenty-one of his most formative years in South Africa'. This is where Turner's preferred mode of research, intimate conversations with family and friends, comes into its own. His guides along the journey—Rajmohan Gandhi in India and England, Ela Gandhi in South Africa—keep up the supplies of erudition and ensure that doors everywhere fly open for him. The result is a book without footnotes or a bibliography that yet secures a most privileged access to Gandhi's life. 'Behold the lilies of the field', Wodehouse might have murmured, and Turner would concur, playing up his modest Bertie Wooster to Rajmohan Gandhi's Jeeves.

The limpid and absorbing prose of this book conceals, as with the best of Wodehouse, a good deal of craft. Turner's flip choice of title—worthy of a Drones Club raconteur—covers a many-threaded narrative combining biography, travelogue, interviews and a vivid account of what it is like to be a descendant of Gandhi. But his dependence on word-of-mouth also makes Turner a peculiarly susceptible and credulous reporter. When a dalit informant in Delhi claims that, post-Independence, the Mahar Regiment of the Indian Army has continued to be employed in sweeping up after the Republic Day Parade, a shoc-

ked Turner promptly spreads the libel. In fact, the Mahar Regiment is neither dedicated to the occupation of sweeping nor has custody of the sanitary arrangements on Republic Day. It consists of trained soldiers and no more than the usual regimental complement of tradesmen—cooks, barbers, washer-men and sweepers. At least two chiefs of the Indian Army have come from the Mahars. Lesson: Turner is at his most reliable when in the company of his Jeeves.

Echoes of Wodehouse, though, are not the only extraneous factor in evidence. Like the Attenborough movie, the book opens and closes with Gandhi's death. Salman Rushdie had slammed that device, accusing Attenborough of pandering to a morbid strain of Christian sentiment, of life presented as a waiting on death and murder as a moral triumph for the victim. Its reuse here is an equally questionable aesthetic choice, though the particular resonance that Christ's example did have with Gandhi is one of the running themes of the book. Here is Rajmohan Gandhi citing an admonitory letter from Rajaji to Gandhi: 'He wants to reach him at his deepest, so he invokes Jesus.' The invocation worked, arresting Gandhi's slide into a dangerous involvement with the educated and accomplished Saraladevi Chaudhurani. Gandhi's love of Christ is, of course, well documented and the book is replete with instances of his pleasure in hymns, the New Testament and the company of his missionary friends.

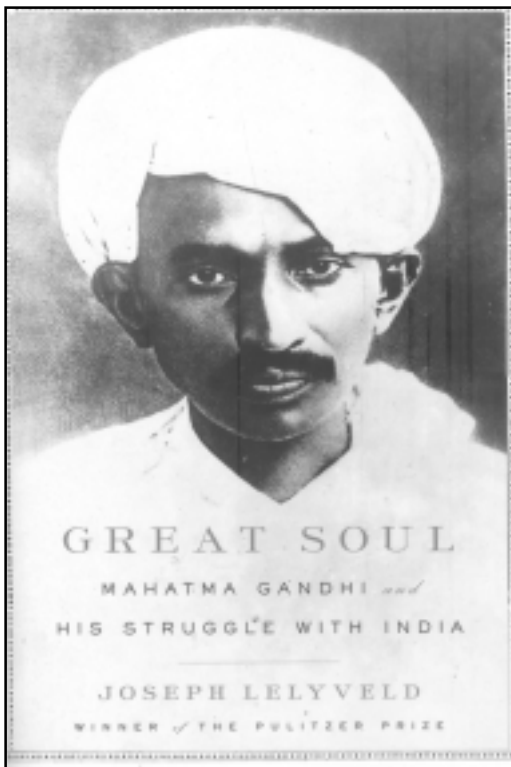
On a more quixotic note, Turner shows a surprisingly abject regard for the putative virtues of birth and inheritance. It emerges that 'Gandhi had the genes of a ruling class in his veins,' a statement all the more feudal in singling out veins for the proper conveyance of genes. Can this be an infection caught on the Queen Elizabeth project? An attempt to explain affinities between the Mahatma and his high-minded grandchildren? Or an effect of the transferred affection, even obeisance, that Rajmohan Gandhi attracts on their travels



together? As for evidence, Turner speculates on whether Gandhi desisted from topping his class at school out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*—'given his family's elevated status, he may have felt that striving too hard would have been bad form.' Moreover those genes meant that 'he constantly surprised his opponents by the stylishness of his behavior.' Likewise, Rajmohan Gandhi, descendant alike of the Mahatma and C. Rajagopalachari, 'is—so to speak—of the blood royal by two different inheritances.'

This outlook holds up better on English ground, as when Turner carefully distinguishes Gandhi's Inner Temple training for Law from the mere Middle Temple—of inferior architecture, antiquity and, it follows, intake. The pace set by the 'wealthier if not aristocratic pupils' at the Inner Temple may have inspired Gandhi to splash out on his Bond Street evening suit, chimney-pot hat, those lessons in dancing—lurid and baffling gestures from one intent on a teetotal, celibate and vegetarian existence, painted by his own hand into a corner. Gandhi's later disbarment from legal practice—in 1923, for sedition—was not revoked by the Inner Temple till 1988 (or 1983, as it becomes a hundred pages later). Entirely in pompous character, that. And it may be why—in another of Turner's finds—when Gandhi returned to England in 1931, his passport gave out his occupation as 'farmer'.

Rehabilitating Gandhi with his own flesh and blood is one of the original contributions of this book. Seen through the eyes of his grandchildren he comes across as an attentive and benign figure, quite the opposite of how he was with his sons ('the ultimate control freak,' in Turner's crisp summation). Another



significant contribution is Turner's itinerary of visits to the physical landmarks of Gandhi's life: from state-managed sanctified sites at Porbandar and Delhi ('all sock occasions'), to those in neglect, such as the house in Rajkot where he nursed his sick father and where the room Gandhi occupied no longer exists, to forgotten ones like the Rajkot Residency (now regional railway headquarters) from where he was ejected in 1893, so forcefully that he was to land in South Africa, and the newly erected memorials of his stay in that country.

Gandhi's lionization in South Africa could not begin till the post-Apartheid period, when the need suddenly arose for a whole tranche of statues. These were supplied from India, where Gandhi is only ever sculpted in his vintage look. And so, all but one of the Gandhi statues in South Africa that Joseph Lelyveld observes in *Great Soul* show him not as he was at the time but as he later became in India: the bald man in the loincloth. This universal image of the Mahatma has also proved the more politic one to remember him by. This has to do with what Lelyveld, a gifted phrasemaker, describes as the expediencies of producing 'a teachable heritage.'

Alighting in South Africa, Gandhi spontaneously ignited into a political figure. Turner attributes this to his still smarting from the humiliation at the Rajkot Residency—where he had gone to seek an irregular favour and been shown the door; Lelyveld, to the piquancy of his situation as a London-trained Indian professional plunged into a racist 'frontier society'. But the young man who, back in India, had meekly undergone purificatory rituals, bare-chested, to re-enter the Modh Bania fold upon his return from England, now begins to stand up for his dignity. He walks out of the Durban Magistrate's court a day

after his arrival in the country, insisting on the right to retain his turban within, and writes a letter to the press on the subject three days later. He kicks up enough of a fuss to be reinstated to a first-class berth on the very train from which he had been ejected the previous night at Pietermaritzburg.

Lelyveld traces the expanding arc of Gandhi's life as a public figure: from notching up a series of protests and vindications for himself, to representing the interests of Indian traders in South Africa, till his final leadership of a mass movement—just months to the end of his stay—on behalf of indentured labourers. What makes Lelyveld possibly the best available source on this period is his attention to context and eye for the telling detail. In mapping the enlargement of Gandhi's public role he also captures the shifts, hesitations, the in-built redundancy and problematics of Gandhi's political outlook and programme, all of which meant that while South Africa became a theatre of Gandhian action—and spectacular as such—it acquired little by way of a bankable legacy from him.

Gandhi could not conceive of joining forces with black South Africans in a common struggle against racism. While bridleing at the use of the word 'coolie' for Indian settlers, he blithely used the equally derogatory 'kaffir' for indigenous South Africans through the greater part of his stay in that country. What's more, 'In the several thousand pages Gandhi wrote in South Africa, or later about South Africa, the names of only three Africans are mentioned. Of the three, he acknowledged having met only one. And when it comes to that one African, what documentary evidence there is covers only two meetings—seven years apart...' None of this restrained him from holding forth on 'the raw Kaffir' in more than one instance, nor from representing himself and his people as votaries of the principle of racial purity.

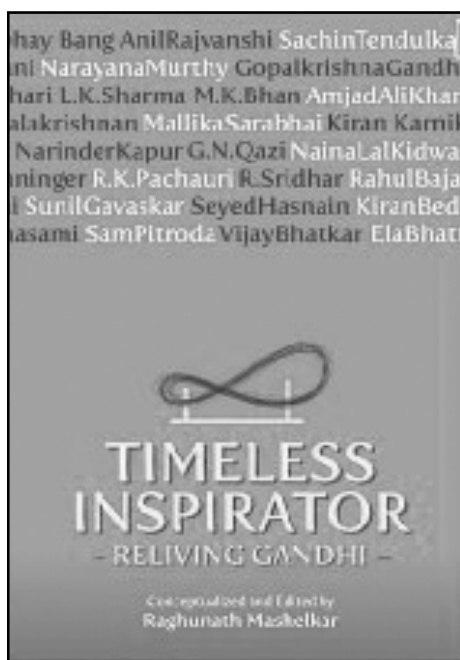
He misread the political situation there, counting on Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 as a 'magna charta' to Indian subjects throughout the empire. Buttressing this proposed partnership was how he saw his role, little realizing that white South Africans and not London would determine the terms on which Indians were to exist in South Africa. The loyal units of Indian stretcher bearers he led in the British cause during the Anglo-Boer War and the Bambatha Revolt of later would accomplish little for Indian interests in a South Africa where defeated Boer generals were increasingly co-opted into government. Nor were any thanks forthcoming from the Zulus who saw Indians side with the genocidal government and drew the obvious inference. It was only in 1952 that the South African Indian Congress formally made common cause with the African National Congress, three years after a Zulu riot targeting the Indian community.

This is the Gandhi who today makes up a homoousian 'Inanda troika, if not trinity', along with John Dube and the Prophet Shembe as joint fathers of the post-Apartheid South Africa. Not that he was a complete stranger himself to the ways of realpolitik. He was politician enough to buy up the complete first run of Rev. Joseph Doke's admiring biography of him, distributing copies among members of British Parliament. He could also evince the demagogue's self-serving memory on occasion, happy to convey the impression that his stretcher bearers had endured hazards on the front-line of which he did not wish to boast. Lelyveld supplies a fact that speaks for itself: amid the great carnage of the Anglo-Boer War, Gandhi's unit of eleven hundred men did not sustain a single fatality. Similarly, in the *Autobiography* and specifically Gandhi's account of the help he had given Balasundaram, the indentured Tamil labourer and victim of abuse, Lelyveld discovers a 'full movie treatment' that is at considerable variance from Gandhi's own earlier recollection of the episode. And of the subsequent stream of distressed indentured workers pouring into Gandhi's office (again, a later assertion) Lelyveld finds no evidence.

One of the attractions of biography as a form is that it gives us history on a plausible scale, the scale of an individual life in the world. This is the outstanding service Lelyveld renders Gandhi, coming to him not after the fact—when Gandhi is an icon—but recapturing the shifts and turnarounds, the ephemera that attended his life. In doing so Lelyveld makes Gandhi difficult again, not the planed and smoothed phenomenon of moral transcendence (retrospectively applied) who predominates in the popular mind.

The well-selected pictures accompanying the text show the continual and dramatic personal transformations that marked the passage of Gandhi's years. In addition Lelyveld's method of drawing into close focus certain individuals and events that get underplayed in most contemporary telling, brings a fresh perspective to this much-told story, revealing new paradoxes. An exemplary case is the chapter on the Vaikom satyagraha, where Gandhi is seen to 'pursue whatever tortuous logic comes to hand.' He warned off George Joseph from undertaking a campaign for temple entry because Joseph was a Christian and this was an affair between Hindus; this at a time when he expected Hindus to get exercised about the Khilafat. He wanted the Vaikom campaign to be kept local after having himself put untouchability on the national agenda. He castigated the idea of a protest fast for temple entry as it would pit Indians against Indians, before going on to fast—barely a decade later—against Ambedkar's advocacy of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes; a fast on behalf of *savarna* interests.

Herman Kellenbach, P.S. Aiyar, Swami Shradhanand, Mohammed Ali, B.R. Ambed-



kar, Shaheed Suhrawardy, are some of the companions and opponents who refract the Mahatma for us, showing him in a varied but intimate light, in different phases and places, facing different situations and questions. The method is a triumph, revealing Gandhi—via these shifting scenes and vivid cameos—in relation to other figures. The kind of immediacy and understanding on offer here is not unlike that afforded by a dead man's personal effects, discrete and chaotic as they may seem, but which no unifocal account of his life could ever hope to encompass.

For all these strengths the one place where the book falters is oddly enough its central premise, indicated by that preposition of the subtitle: 'His Struggle *with* India.' Lelyveld draws on V.S. Naipaul's pronouncement that Gandhi was the least Indian of Indian leaders. Naipaul, and Lelyveld after him, takes as his basis Gandhi's lonely crusade for hygiene and sanitation, his dismay at the refusal of Indians to share it, and his repeated castigation of the Indian attitude towards excrement, denouncing it as a great medical, social and cultural evil. In the end, the Indian attitude prevailed. Very true, and it may be added that Gandhi's time abroad was the making of him to no small extent: from his introduction to Hinduism and vegetarianism as intellectual pursuits in London, to his emergence as a political leader in South Africa. There was also that strong Victorian influence on his moral vision and sense of self.

By this token, would Mao, who actually waged war on China's past, become the less Chinese for it? He had even tried to reboot Chinese society in accordance with an alien ideology of state. Was Mustafa Kemal the least Turkish of Turk leaders? Where is the belongingness of a leader to be found if not in the scale of identification s/he attracts at the place where s/he operates? Especially in the case of a Gandhi who never wielded coercive powers. And if Gandhi the pre-eminent Indian leader

was not pre-eminently an Indian leader, what does that make of his followers?

The third book before us, *Timeless Inspirator*, is exactly what the title gives away, an idealization of Gandhi. The cover promises no less than '45 masterpieces' within, by '45 iconic achievers.' It breathes the command: 'Find your Inspiration, Find your Path, Find Yourself!'

Raghunath Mashelkar, the editor, had given away the Baa and Bapu Awards for 2009. On the occasion he had also delivered an address, titled *Gandhian Engineering: More from Less for More*. This proved the catalyst. A few months later, he was approached by the office bearers of the Gandhi National Memorial Society (GNMS)—organizers of the said award and people who take 'pride in doing projects with a soul.' The 45 iconic achievers were duly listed and then, 'the emails flew out of Dr. Mashelkar's office. One positive response after another, and very soon his mailbox was trembling with excitement.' The book had to be assembled in a matter of months, to meet its 'non-negotiable' deadline of 2 October 2010, when its release would 'mark 30 years of a glorious journey for GNMS' and the centenary year of the Gandhian, N.K. Firodia, whose Trust subsidized this venture.

While the editorial team's elation at having met their target is understandable, we might pause to consider the hurry. There is a calculus of neatly dovetailing interests at work here, of reciprocity and mutual endorsement, the book's celebration of Gandhi fast-tracked to reflect credit on the celebrants themselves: the GNMS and Shri Firodia Trust. A feat of Gandhian engineering? More from less for more? This principle of orchestrating parallel applause operates within the book as well. Each of the 45 submissions comes accompanied by a polite pencil portrait of the iconic achiever in question and a page of acclaim for the writer: 'a leader among thought leaders,' 'true son of India,' 'living legend,' and so on. Once again the undertone is inescapable: Gandhi dual-tasking as a source of inspiration, and as a celebrity platform, a certifier of the clubbable. A memorial to Gandhi that also redounds to the glory of the contributors. That these signals may have been unwitting does not detract from the point; nor does the fact that many of the contributors do have admirable records of public service.

In all their artlessness and zeal—ending this book with the fervent hope that it may 'spur a powerful movement of contagious inspiration'—the editorial team miss the central issue. A Gandhi no longer drawing (let alone expelling) breath is not an inspirator in the sense of exercising any control or agency of his own. He is a passive and pliable foil, available to all comers. The purported object of the inspiration takes over, becomes the subject in all but name and has limitless powers of adaptation. This may explain how

the book got prepared so quickly. When Ustad Amjad Ali Khan writes here of composing the Raga Gandhi Kauns, Gandhi's own knowledge of music is immaterial to the project. Mallika Sarabhai puts it across bluntly, in describing 'a performance of mine, *Sva Kranti: The Revolution Within*. Set as a conversation between Gandhiji and me, it dwells on many of my questions about his practice, about where I, as a modern woman in a shattered world, stand on these issues.' And Kiran Bedi edifies us with how she might have gone about being a Gandhian commissioner of police, had she made the rank.

The icon can equally double as the ventriloquist's dummy. Mark Tully, firing from Gandhi's shoulder, delivers a homily to the media on how it should conduct discussions. Arun Firodia lectures the State on how to revive the rural economy. GM crops are a big part of his vision, and if by contrast, Ela Bhatt in her entry views Gandhi's economy-as-community in direct opposition to globalization's economy-as-corporation, let's call that *her* version, shall we? This is the anything-goes Gandhi, after all.

Sunil Gavaskar gamely wonders if Gandhi had any interest in cricket, and what moral view he might have taken of the game. Sachin Tendulkar cherishes the memory of a meeting with Nelson Mandela and a childhood viewing of Attenborough's film. (As elsewhere in celebrity-stan, the sportspersons tend to be cricketers here.) Vijay Bhatkar employs the *faux naïf* epistolary conceit: 'Dear Mahatma,' he begins. 'I do not know if this mail will reach you. But why not? You are a Mahatma...'

Buyers of this book may consider shelving it with their collections of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

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Thank You

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Decentring the Nation in Writing History

Malvika Maheshwari

PLAYING THE NATION GAME: THE AMBIGUITIES OF NATIONALISM IN INDIA

By Benjamin Zachariah

Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 314, ₹495.00

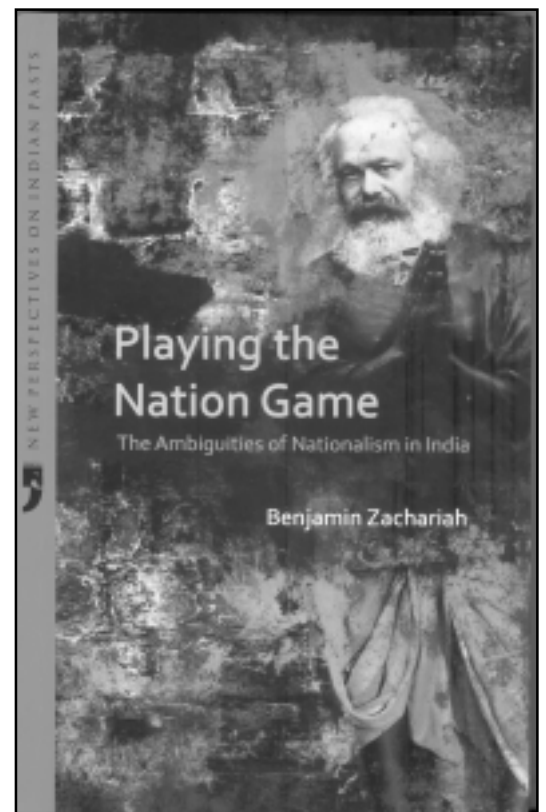
The question of the nation—its presence or absence, expansion or stagnation, exclusivity or everydayness, or its accuracy and ambiguity, has quite often rendered the concept difficult and unyielding. However, the extensive inquiries and the variety of propositions put forth by social scientists over time has made its occurrence and experience less threatening, more bearable and engrossing. Certain dominant ways of understanding the phenomenon that find their mainspring across disciplines and regions, which have been efficacious in the study of the Indian nation as well, illustrate sharply the academic discourses for containing and taming its manifestations. One important way of approaching the concept, the most dominant in social sciences, is to regard the nation as a form of identity that challenges other forms of collective identities like class, region, gender, race and religious community. While the acknowledgement to differentiate these identities remains relatively unquestioned, there is little consensus on the role of the ethnic, as opposed to the political, components of the nation. Although national identities and loyalties often assume primacy over those of class, gender and race (religious attachments may at times rival national claims), national attachments can intermingle or oscillate in power and prominence with other forms of collective identities. This deliberation is also mirrored in the rival scholarly definitions and debates on origins of the nation-like the primordialist interpretations stemming from the 'givens' like religion or language, strongly put forth by Geertz, against Gellner's thesis of objective, practical necessity where nationalism 'invents nations where they do not exist.'

A second position, increasingly problematized, looks at the ideological construction of nationalism as a form of blight, as an indication of a discord with a predisposition to violence between individuals but more often between collectives, stressing on the cultural rather than the political aspects of nationalism, although a synthesis of the two might be possible as well. The doctrine that was first associated with popular freedom and sovereignty prompted various social, political and intellectual developments that found powerful and explosive expression in radical politics. The 'people' must be liberated; masters of their own destiny and homeland—a historic

territory, sharing a single public culture that is theirs as heritage, and therefore an expression of their authentic identity. The third aspect, relevant for our review, sees the nation, and its related concepts like national identity and nationalism, as an import, characteristic of the twentieth century 'anti-colonial' movements that were waged to end the imperial rule and to establish new states in the ex-colonial territories. Though this again has not been devoid of tensions and fusions, for instance, between a civic, territorial, anti-colonial nationalism in India on the one hand and various ethnic and pan-cultural movements like Hindu nationalism exerting great influence on the other.

Each of these three ways of approaching the nation have their characteristic strengths and weaknesses that have been continually debated, argued and counter argued by social scientists. Alongside these the birth of new nations (at least fifteen new states have been created since 1990) and increasing instances of violence being designated as ethnic conflicts and secessions, 'nations' and nationalism remain the most pervasive, frenzied and intractable issue at the end of the twentieth century, and pose as one of the greatest challenges to both—an international order based on justice and equality and a domestic environment sans intimidation and threats. With the 'national question' often taking the centre stage in its various manifestations, can we realistically anticipate a retrenchment, let alone its rejection? Can we, 'the people,' narrate our history and the present by looking over the nation and beyond nationalism? More interestingly, what could be the importance of such an endeavour? The book under review puts on the line some of these questions and literatures on nations and nationalism in an intriguing and challenging manner.

The author is a Reader in South Asian History at the University of Sheffield, and has for long been associated with exploring South Asia's social and intellectual history along with mapping connections and gaps between 'academic historical scholarship and popular historical consciousness.' His earlier works include a biography, *Nehru* and *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History c. 1930- 1950*. Carrying forward his deep interest in these subjects, with his characteristic irreverent style of writing, the plot of his new book *Playing the Nation Game* introduces and



revolves around a proposition of reviving and revisiting a project that he believes 'has so far failed: of decentring the nation as a central focus of history writing in and about India.' Even while advancing his concern to restrain history writing in India without letting it be subsumed within 'an obligatory history of Indian nationalism,' Zachariah suitably combines the considerations over the structural preconditions of nations, its positioning *vis-à-vis* issues of power and emotions, with a reasoning based on the ideological and symbolic repertoire that makes nationalism, national identity and nationhood possible. Of course, this then is also the inescapable paradox of such an endeavour—a deliberation over nation and nationalism in an attempt to decentre it. But the book is not about nationalism; rather it is about ways to move beyond it. The author is convinced of the necessity of the work, 'not just nationally but internationally' as well. He clarifies that it is an 'attempt at writing histories of various Indians' attempts to provide themselves with a nationalism, and of the inevitable exclusions and failures of such attempts.' Thus in a distinctive manner much of the author's focus is on modern Indian history and historiography—what it has inadequately interrogated and overlooked and what it has over-obsessed about. In the process he extensively and unavoidably engages with, appraises and critiques the works of some of the more notable historians of India, like Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Sumit Sarkar and Sudipta Kaviraj among others. A substantial part of the Zachariah methodology to deal with the category of the 'nation' reflects a comment made by Michel Foucault (whose other works Zachariah cites often) in *On the Genealogy of Ethics* that, 'my point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is

“ *Playing the Nation Game* introduces and revolves around a proposition of reviving and revisiting a project that he believes ‘has so far failed: of decentring the nation as a central focus of history writing in and about India. ”

dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad...I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make everyday is to determine which is the main danger.’

The first half of the book is spent on interrogating Indian historiography as a tale of ‘selective remembering and strategic forgetting.’ The outcome of this historiography, the author states, is its alignment with the ‘official’ historical consciousness—that intends to ‘control people’ who have interests different from that of the state. Zachariah then goes on to ‘reconstruct’ the narrative of the Indian nationalist movement by determining who the ‘people’ are—Gandhians, the Left, the Right, the outcast(e)s—including women, Muslims among others. It is at this point that the reader might be troubled enough to seek refuge in Guha’s or Kaviraj’s distinguished writings on the subject. But these for the author are unfinished projects. For instance he states that

in Guha’s writings, though he speak of abandoning History as imposed by the West, he does not say the same about nationalism. The Subaltern Studies project appears to the author ‘as the peevisish therapeutic attempts of a traumatized elite’ (p. 66).

In the next part the author continues his argument of writing histories of India that need not be encircled within the history of the nationalist movement by exploring three instances: a regional variation that looks at the Bengali encounters with ‘progress’ and the British rule; a religious premise of ‘inventing’ Hinduism as a category for national use; and the third, an ideological Nehruvian stance. Through all of this, Zachariah concludes that ‘nationalisms are not matters of scholarly endorsement or rejection. They are most often tied up with official remembering and forgetting.’ He provokes when he states that, ‘the separation of the scholarly and the popular is not as clear as may be thought, and the rhetoric and style might be the one thing that distinguishes the two versions of understanding nationalism and nations.’

The curious and troubling aspect of Zachariah’s arguments is that while it began with the proposal to decentre the ‘nation’ in history writing, it ends up accusing historians of being nationalists; historians’ failure to perceive or admit their own statism leads them to naturalize nationalisms of one or another form, and to normalize the ‘nation-state’. He

cites this as the major impediment in the attempt to look beyond the nation. The overlap between different discursive frameworks and the historians’ alleged attitude does not really then help the project move forward conceptually. Moreover, one gets a feeling as if there are no discordant voices within the academia and popular consciousness. What about those who have precisely struggled (and suffered) to speak of an alternative conceptualization of Indian history different from the official history? Finally, despite Zachariah’s assertions that the difference between scholarly and popular perceptions of nation and nationalism might not be as clear, are there no instructive lessons to be drawn from areas and works where there are differences or where they have indeed escalated? The relatively little attention to these areas and sometimes a slight lack of nuances on such aspects of his arguments could well be a design of his methodology.

However, in unique ways this book could encourage historians and political scientists to think about nations and nationalisms in a more compelling and conscientious way. For a decisive decentring, the ‘nation’ demands an even more astute inquiry. Zachariah undoubtedly provides the laudable initial steps.

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Why Won't We Get Along Better?

Ankita Pandey

ACCOMMODATING DIVERSITY: IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

Edited by Gurpreet Mahajan

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2011, pp. 340, ₹750.00

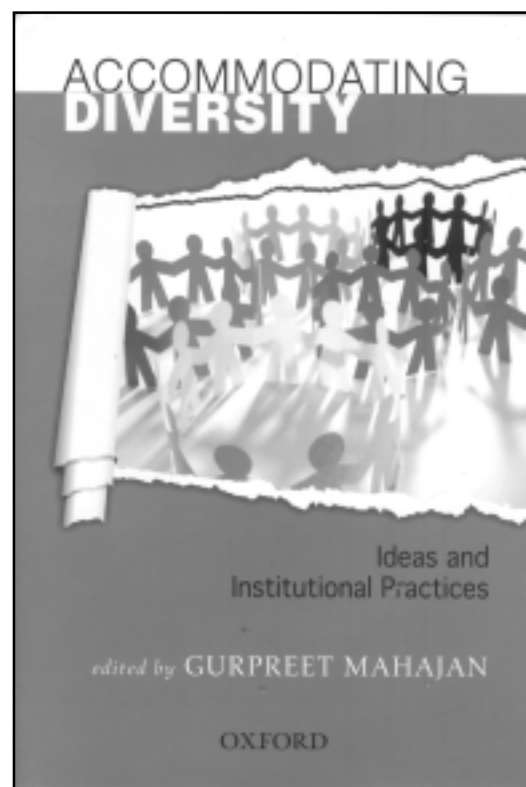
Peter Ronald de Souza in his foreword sees the book's central contribution in providing a 'frame within which to understand the troublesome question as to how a democracy should respond when a group acquires a voice, when that voice becomes louder, and when it perhaps grows to be a cacophony?' In the introduction to the book, Gurpreet Mahajan states that the objective in this volume is to revisit the often asked questions and the often given answers within the multicultural paradigm. 'Why should we care about diversity? How should we deal with cultural diversity? Should these diversities be accommodated? This volume returns to these questions and the answers offered by multiculturalism, in the process of understanding how India responded to some of these concerns.' The essays in the volume fulfil the above stated purpose. While they do revisit some of the key questions within a multicultural debate, they also critique aspects of it. These elements of critique prod me to approach the issue of accommodating diversity from the bottom. While the editorial intent could be to look at policy alternatives and options before a democracy it cannot be divorced from identifying why the question of accommodation emerges again and again. Looking at the issue from bottom up the reviewer asks, what prevents the accommodation of diversity? Why do people find it difficult to get along?

Two lines of critique emerge as key themes when one navigates through the essays. First is the recurring idea that the very conceptual domain of dominant multicultural thought is not equipped adequately to understand the political and sociological realities of identity formation and cultural politics. Secondly that some multicultural articulations fail to understand the power relations within which the State works. They seem to not give enough attention to the structural inequalities that are intimately tied up with the demands of cultural minorities and citizens. In this review I shall map these two themes which may be understated in the text yet are very crucial to know what prevents the accommodation of diversity.

The first theme that emerges from the essays seeks to fortify the conceptual tools social sciences have to make sense of 'diversity'. While acknowledging that multiculturalism has travelled far from its once dominant liberal variant, there are profitable suggestions that

emerge in some of the essays. Peter Emberley's essay examines the idea of 'diversity'. He proposes that we steer clear of a fossilized notion of culture as we frame policies of preservation of this diversity. His essay highlights that a nuanced understanding requires us to situate diversity within its historical location and integrate the changes it may have gone through. Cultures go through transition, they reinvent themselves, but this should not be a source of anxiety. The task of preservation can happen alongside the renewal, transformation and reformation of cultures. Citing the examples of the Baul musicians in West Bengal as well as Dhokara metal casters, he notices how their lives and crafts have changed over time and yet it has not lost its unique cultural identity. Here one is reminded about the ways in which States and political establishments almost always prefer to deal with a static, self-contained notion of culture and a select few who claim to be its representatives. In his essay Anil Bhatti argues that given the state of transition that all societies are always in, it may be productive to abandon 'bounded multicultural' conditions in favour of 'pluricultural conditions' that are open and fluid. He demonstrates solidarities of thought between Europe and the former colonized world by navigating through the thought of Herder, Goethe and Tagore. He believes that this cultural dialogue can in fact propose radical solutions to the problems that afflict our societies. To him these 'pluricultural' formations will sharpen people's sense of commonness instead of a heightened sense of self and other. Both these essays persuade the readers to think of diversity not as a museumized artifact but in dialogue, alive and ever transforming.

To these two voices recommending conceptual caution, Rinku Lamba adds her concern. She challenges the dominant ways in which liberal multiculturalism is thought about. Are liberal thought structures necessarily to be located outside thought processes in modern India? She gives us evidence from the thought structures of two thinkers/social activists from India, namely Ranade and Phule, of reflection on their own socio-religious practices, where both Phule and Ranade in their own ways seem to appeal to the liberal instruments of change to be incorporated within the law and state for the protection of the marginalized. Her essay thus opens up the conceptual space of an Indian variant of liberalism and possibly



multiculturalism. Often liberalism is considered western and a cultural community reminds one of the indigenous groups/ natives; Lamba's essay unsettles this practice.

In a similar vein, two essays which open a refreshing conceptual domain for multicultural politics are those contributed by K.K. Kailash and Vinay Lal. Both of these essays point to non-formal or more appropriately, semi-formal non-institutional domains of cultural politics. Most often the dominant characters of this story have been State policy, cultural minorities, legislative debates, constitutional provisions, and judicial decisions. However, these essays bring in electoral mobilization and popular strategies. K.K. Kailash's article locates the process of accommodation taking place through electoral practices. Documenting the electoral strategies in Kerala he tries to give evidence of the existence of unique non-formal or semi-formal processes of recognizing as well as accommodating diversity. It seems the NRI Hindu community is also actively invested in cultural politics outside the formal spaces. Vinay Lal states the anxieties experienced by North American Hindus as a group. He argues that the middle class NRI Hindu experiences 'a self aggrandizing rather than self debilitating—anxiety of influence'.¹ He mentions several strategies which the Hindu NRI community deploy, to transform themselves into a political force. These are a noticeable transition from recognizing Islam as world religion to treating it as an unquestionable liability and source of conflict. There have been many attempts made to build solidarities between Hindus and American Jews. He also observes an increase in the usage of digital technology for the purpose of forging the new Hindu identity which is monotheistic and less

“ Essays in this volume argue that state policy is flawed in the provisions it makes for minorities of different kinds. The essays are generous in their assessment of state policy as it could have been also argued that the state has vested interests/political compulsions which prevent a real accommodation. ”

tolerant of the other; also many more NRI voices are seen sympathizing with the conservative communal minded Hindus in India in pursuit of a certain political interest. All of these are ways in which the community tries to overcome this anxiety and make its political presence felt in America. We see in these two essays that cultural politics is not just a result of deprivation/marginalization. Despite the presence of economic comforts and rights acknowledged, cultural politics can become a strategy for political accommodation or political influence.

Sarah Joseph's essay echoes many of these earlier recommended cautions. She argues that it is too innocent to assume that cultural accommodation and political recognition is sufficient to manage conflicts within South Asian societies. She believes that class inequality cannot be kept out of any serious attempt to understand inequality in South Asia. Despite a stated attempt to accommodate, the policies of the Indian State have intensified competitiveness among groups. She also cautions against two practices that make multiculturalism the refuge of right wing forces. One of them is to think of culture as self-contained reified objects. Second is to think that mere recognition of the cultural groups will take care of their historical disadvantage. Therefore, it is important to account for power relations within which the State is embedded, and structural inequalities which are not altered.

The second obstacle to accommodation of diversity is political not philosophical. Essays in this volume argue that State policy is flawed in the provisions it makes for minorities of different kinds. The essays are generous in their assessment of State policy as it could have been also argued that the state has vested interests/political compulsions which prevent a real accommodation. There are a set of essays which identify several shortcomings in State policy. The essay by Anne Phillips seeks to

evolve a better policy of group representation. Even though she thinks that group-based mechanisms are broadly apt, they suffer from three specific problems as the States implement them. Firstly, this mechanism becomes self-perpetuating and ends up creating enclaves of vested interests, resulting in more and more groups demanding these mechanisms.

Secondly, these policies assume that the group is indeed a unified one and that some within the group can represent the others.

Thirdly, it is quite tough to evolve criteria to ascertain which groups qualify for these mechanisms. Often enough group-based mechanisms of representation end up creating grand narratives of cultural difference that may not coincide with the existence of the group on the ground. Thus group-based mechanisms need to be refined for them to avoid such pitfalls. Two other essays in the volume are sceptical about group-based representations, though their reasons are different from Phillips's. In the context of the deliberations in the Constituent Assembly, V. Srinanjani points out that the Indian Constitution prioritizes the group over the individual. Srinanjani's essay demonstrates that the Constituent Assembly's efforts to recognize the identity of a religious group has somewhat neglected the individual citizen's rights. While formally one is free to not choose a religious identity for oneself, the State discourses concerning personal law as well as UCC make it difficult for people to opt out of their group identities. She demonstrates this by citing debates of the Constituent Assembly as well as the judicial pronouncements. To her, the problem seems to be that the Indian State's conception of rights is prior to the interest it serves and not dependent on it. Giving a possible explanation to this priority accorded to group identity, Rohit Wanchoo argues that perhaps it is a characteristic feature of all non-western societies. He agrees that in India it is group rights which have found ready acceptance not individual rights unlike the West. He sees this preference present not just in the Constitution but in colonial administrative discourses too. While this mechanism has its advantages and one can see why the Constituent Assembly opted for it, he regrets that within the discourse of group-based benefits, the Indian State is losing its grip over some fundamental changes that need to be brought about to address the disadvantage of various groups. A viable political choice to him would be to amend the way affirmative action is conceptualized in India. "Therefore the real political choices are about determining the extent of reservations and the groups that are eligible for such benefits. A viable option that tries to cater to both the needs of disadvantaged groups and to those of individuals would be to provide an extensive system of state funded education, but with limited and declining reservations in employment".²

Asha Sarangi's contribution to the volume is a very detailed narrative of the process of linguistic reorganization of the Indian State as well as the categories like 'official language', 'national language', 'mother tongue' that the State was utilizing to make sense of the dispute. In her judgment, 'The process of State formation in independent India had to be carefully carried out ensuring the due balance between geography and polity, and culture and State to accord with the democratic survival of collective representation and recognition of cultural and social diversity'.³ She also believes that the state carried out this delicate exercise with much care. While Sarangi looks at the State doing the tight rope walk between political compulsions of a federation on the one hand and regional demands on the other, Vasanthi Srinivasan credits statesmen like C. Rajagopalachari 'who struggled to find the golden mean between imposing uniformity and inhibiting synthesis while addressing linguistic and communal diversity'.⁴ Gurpreet Mahajan in her introduction adds a crucial missing piece to this narrative of language politics and linguistic reorganization. 'The creation of language identity based States meant that groups that had been a minority in the country became majority in a region. The creation of language-based States created new minorities, and groups that were on grounds of religion a dominant community suddenly reduced to a minority'.⁵ Also missing in this narrative is that 'in several states the emergent linguistic majority began to follow a politics of majoritarianism as well as exclusion'.⁶ The various avatars of the sons of the soil movements would be an example of this. Thus Mahajan makes it clear that State policy does not just deal with an already present minority or majority, but that State policy creates majority and minority in the first place.

Bijen Meetei's essay conforms with Mahajan's observation in the context of Meghalaya's cultural conflicts. He points to the ways in which the policies of the Indian State have produced competition between different minorities. Instead of the debate between minorities and majority, the politics of recognition has emerged among competing minorities. State policy in India is highly unequal in rendering social justice and recognition to various minorities. The author examines language as well as land rights provisions among the three dominant tribes in Meghalaya to demonstrate that instead of recognizing diversity the policy adopted by the Indian State actually decreases the tolerance levels among communities.

The last two essays in the volume posit an altogether novel domain where State policy has compelled multiculturalism to consider the anxieties of majorities in the wake of large-scale migration. The essays of Vidhu Verma as well as Shefali Jha's essays remind us about the

many ways in which the praxis throws ever new conceptual problems for the theory to re-conceptualize itself. Both of these essays are about the fear, real or perceived, of the majority community, feeling a sense of threat in their home country. Vidhu Verma writes about the Malaysian case in detail. She argues, 'While enabling a significant number of non-Malays to acquire legal citizenship, the Constitution accepted provisions for affirmative action for the Malays. By accepting this notion, the ideas sketched out in the constitution were riddled with internal tensions and contradictions. Some of these tensions emerge in the preoccupation with special rights for the Malays which have left little room for the cultural rights of the minorities'.⁷ Plagued with fear of cultural suicide also are citizens of the Gulf states. Despite being the majority and nationals in their home country, Shefali Jha describes the fear of the nationals that their public sphere is dominated by foreigners. This fear is also strengthened by the fact that many gulf monarchies do not allow a participatory role for their citizens within the country's political sphere. The question that both these cases raise is: what is the perspective within which these claims, strategies and fears are to be understood? Are they just mechanisms to dominate over the foreigner? Or is there a need for accommodate these within institutional spaces?

This set of essays remind me that any serious attempt to accommodate diversity cannot be separate from understanding how power relations produce disadvantage and sustain inequity. One reads about cases of young people from various minority communities who face threatening attacks on the roads, in their hostels, in workspaces and in the police stations. Looking at the political violence against minorities in India, the question of equity and accommodation seems a long shot.

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- ³ Sarangi, Asha, *Linguistic Diversity in a Federal Polity*, p. 158
- ⁴ Srinivasan, Vasanthi, *Prudence and Statesmanship in Managing Diversity*, p. 257.
- ⁵ Mahajan, Gurpreet, 'Introduction', p. 35.
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Studying Elections

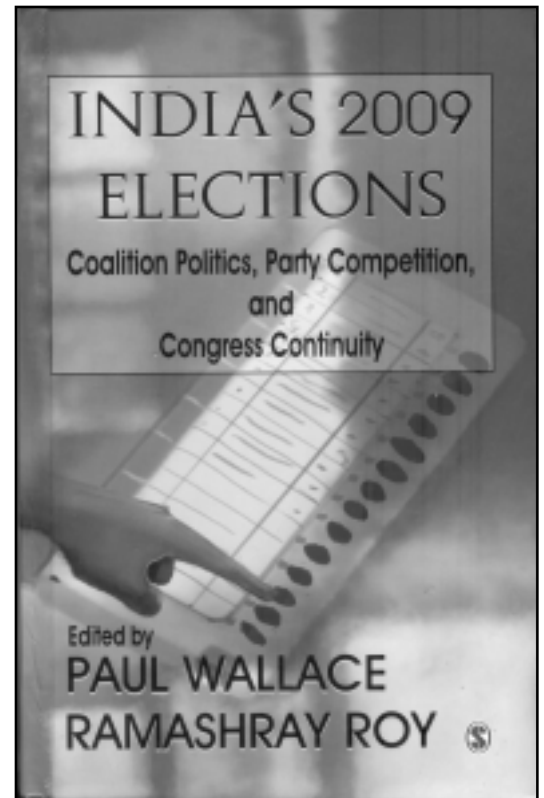
K.K. Kailash

INDIA'S 2009 ELECTIONS: COALITION POLITICS, PARTY COMPETITION, AND CONGRESS CONTINUITY
 Edited by Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy
 Sage, New Delhi, 2011, pp. xviii+412, ₹995.00

Given the centrality that elections have come to occupy in the political fabric of this country, it is not surprising that election studies are one of the prominent and oldest research traditions in political science in India. Almost every election has been followed by a number of publications analysing its different dimensions. These studies have employed a variety of approaches, besides the now dominant survey research approach, others include case studies, anthropological studies, single-election studies and also interpretative and descriptive accounts (Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2009). *India's 2009 Elections*, the book under review, is the fourth successive election study by two renowned and respected experts on political parties and elections, Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy. Like their previous collective volumes in which they analysed the 1998, 1999 and the 2004 General Elections, this study is also primarily located in the interpretative and descriptive studies tradition.

As in the previous volumes, the Lok Sabha election is analysed by examining the political stories in different States. Compared to their previous study on the 2004 elections, this is a relatively larger volume and covers more States. The three new States are Karnataka, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir. While Orissa and Assam have been dropped, Kerala is analysed in a separate chapter unlike in the previous volume. Meghalaya received separate treatment in 2004; however in the present study it is part of a chapter which covers six of the North Eastern States. The 17 chapters that comprise this volume are arranged in two parts. The first part deals with thematic studies and the second part focuses on analytical State studies. In the second part, the States covered are analysed under three categories based on party system types; these include one favoured (dominant) party system, alternating two-party systems and multi-party States.

The volume brings out rich details of almost the entire panoply of political activities on display during an election including candidate selection, caste and community calculations, alliances and non-alliances, mergers and defections, sub-State political considerations, election campaigns and policy agendas, issue dimensions and axis of competition. The editors have however left it to the reader to draw not only the similarities and dissimilarity-



ties among States but also the generalizable conclusions.

Paul Wallace's introduction as in the earlier volume merely highlights some of the main talking points of elections 2009. If it was poverty and India shining in 2004, it is governance, stability and dynastic politics in 2009. Though it does raise key questions, among others, about the success of the Congress and the decline of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it does not go on to answer them. The main task of the introduction has been limited to summarizing the key issues in the chapters that follow. A framework for analysis or even a general argument setting the tone for the contributions that follow would have been most useful.

The thematic section of the volume is dominated by the federal dimension with four chapters discussing almost closely related issues. The other issues that find space in the section include alliance making and coalition politics, gender discourse in elections and an analysis of the BSP's performance. While, Ramashray Roy turns our attention to the nature of alliance formation in terms of their composition and character, Pramod Kumar examines the interface between the national and the regional in the context of coalition politics.

Jyotirindra Dasgupta brings to the fore-front a rather old issue which one thought had been settled with the formation of federal coalitions; regionalism and its implications for national cohesion. Dasgupta examines the issue historically with examples from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Punjab and argues that the 'disintegrating anxieties' often attached to the 'regionalist turn' are unfounded (p. 65). Similarly, Maneesha Roy's analysis of federalism, party system and structural changes does not bring anything new to the table. This is probably because Roy ignores the existing corpus of work as well as debates on the issue of federalism and the party system in the context of India. One fails to understand the logic of discussing the historical background to federalism in India as well as the institutional features of a federation in the context of the 2009 elections.

Rainuka Dagar's gender discourse in elections is an interesting subject for analysis but has been handled unimaginatively. It spreads itself thin by attempting to cover too many dimensions and also slips in numerous impressionistic assertions. It abruptly reports a result from a survey of teachers across the northern region regarding their perception of women's issues raised by political parties in 2009 (pp.123-4). Details about the survey and its context were however not reported in the study. The study would have been enriched if it engaged with similar studies on previous elections. In the final thematic essay, analysing the Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) performance, Christophe Jaffrelot observes that notwithstanding its *Sarvajan* strategy, the 2009 elections show that the BSP is primarily a dalit party. While it has consolidated its position among the dalits in Uttar Pradesh, it has not gone beyond the State. He concludes that the near absence of an organizational structure makes it likely that it will end up like other dalit parties that preceded it.

The importance of State-specific factors in shaping the election verdict comes out distinctly in many of the chapters. Ghanshyam Shah's study found that despite the voters being satisfied with the performance of the UPA, they preferred to vote for the BJP in Gujarat because of the performance of the State Government. Interestingly he observes that the Gujarat BJP had become a 'regional party' (p.189). Contrastingly, in Kerala the voters preferred the Congress alliance. Gopa Kumar explains that this is because of 'ticket splitting' (p. 242) where the voter makes a distinction between elections to the assembly and parliament. The Congress in this framework is perceived by the voters to be better equipped to deal with issues at the all India-level. Both these chapters are primarily based on survey-research.

Amiya Chaudhuri's study captures the decline of the CPM and the Left-front in what was undoubtedly a critical election for West

Bengal. Praveen Swami's essay on Jammu and Kashmir grapples with the issue of how electoral democracy plays itself out in a State characterized by ethnic and religious crisis. Karli Srinivasulu's examination of Andhra Pradesh and Binoy Shankar Prasad's study of Bihar reveal that though on the surface there appears to be a movement towards developmental and governance issues, identity issues continue to drive politics in the two States.

Maharashtra and Karnataka are examined by Raghavendra Keshavarao Hebsur in two separate chapters. While a historical approach is useful to contextualize a study, going far back in time is unnecessary. Hebsur's discussion of the historical past in the case of both States could have been covered in a paragraph or so with appropriate references. A more rational allocation of space would have given the author more leverage to focus on the issue under discussion in the two States.

Bhawani Singh and Vibhuti Shekhawat's study of Rajasthan not only has an exciting title 'Silent Tsunami in Rajasthan' but has even more fancy sub-titles within it, like 'Varun Venom' (p. 230) and 'Deglamorized Queen Goes Berserk' (p. 231) among others. With its freewheeling style it reads more like a journalist's diary. The paper makes no attempt to relate to the larger changes that have taken place in Indian politics over the last decade. While Rajesh Dev's brave attempt to cover the many States in the North East is admirable, the flipside is that the analysis suffers in terms of its depth. The 'intra-regional diversity and plurality of political claims' (p. 362) that Dev refers to is not sufficiently captured in the study.

This was a rather unexciting volume compared to the previous Wallace and Roy contributions. Given that this is their fourth successive election study, the editors have the advantage of a longer and broader perspective and could therefore have gone beyond looking at 2009 as a stand alone election. Having accumulated insights from a series of elections, there always exists the possibility of questioning existing paradigms and developing new theoretical formulations. The editors may have missed an opportunity, but this does not take away from the painstaking efforts involved in putting together this volume. This study will be useful to those who missed out the action during the 2009 General Elections.

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Marginalizing Panchayats

Mark Schneider

UNDERMINING LOCAL DEMOCRACY: PARALLEL GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH INDIA

By Lalita Chandrashekhhar
Routledge, Delhi, 2011, pp. 225, ₹695.00

With the passing of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution which empowered a three-tiered local (self) government system or panchayat raj, attention has been focused on the success of decentralization in India. Millions of local politicians have been elected with constitutional authority into the panchayat raj system since 1993. The heavy use of reservations for women and members of marginal castes has changed the face of descriptive representation, with important consequences identified by scholars in the United States and India. Despite the scope of these reforms, observers have begun to doubt the potency of these reforms. In Karnataka the term of the president of the zilla (district) panchayat has been reduced to 20 months which is also the case for the gram (village) panchayat president. The range of development policy issues over which elected local politicians have control are limited and are often indirectly influenced by State politicians or bureaucrats. And the rise of outsourcing of State development initiatives to NGOs and other parallel bodies have further weakened the degree to which local self-government is a reality in India that has a substantive impact beyond its well-documented descriptive impact.

The argument taken up by Chandrashekhhar takes off from this point. She argues that panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) have become marginalized by a trend toward outsourcing development policy to parallel institutions that do not consult with elected local politicians and are not accountable to voter approval. The exception is Kerala where PRIs

are given important powers over education policy implementation and are consulted by NGO-sponsored self-help groups. Here expert panels are established only to ensure technical feasibility. In Karnataka, PRIs are subservient to State bureaucrats, panchayats have no power to recruit, transfer or discipline staff, and MLAs (or State legislators) have been winning the battle for preeminence *vis-à-vis* the zilla panchayat president. Moreover, committees overseen by bureaucrats at the district, block, and village levels are directly linked to the State and side-step the gram panchayats. These commissions set up by the Central Government are financially autonomous and not accountable to the PRIs although some members of the PRIs sit in committees outside the formal arena of PRIs themselves. Beyond these commissions, the author focuses her argument on the effect of Societies and State-instituted User Committees (CBOs) that have taken the functions assigned to PRIs outside of their purview. The most striking example is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Karnataka, which is a centrally sponsored scheme with the goal of universal primary education. Meeting minutes of the Zilla Panchayat show that elected members of the PRI are not consulted on the activities of this scheme within the PRI deliberative bodies. The author also finds that NGO capacity building efforts use the PRIs to help them with obstacles to their agenda but are financially autonomous from the PRIs and make decisions that are completely autonomous from them.

In Chandrashekhhar's account, supported by a considerable level of evidence from field-

work in Karnataka as well as close study of government documents, this effort to remove the PRIs from development has a major cost to the deepening of democracy. By circumventing the local institutions, marginalized groups are sidelined as there is no institution of reservations in these parallel institutions outside the PRIs. Moreover, voters are likely to be less aware of development policies because elected politicians do not need to sell development initiatives to the public.

While this book launches a compelling complaint against parallel organizations that avoid the messiness and benefits of local self-government, its main weakness is that it does not provide an explanation for why PRIs should be better than parallel organizations. Is it simply the case that State politicians won the battle to keep panchayats weak or is it their capacity issues that make success in development initiatives elusive in the short-run? Do politicians from the PRIs have the level of training necessary to take on the responsibilities that NGOs have taken on and does the leaky bucket of local corruption prove too much of a risk for outside funders or central governments to bear when it comes to their development priorities? I agree that local elective institutions must be strengthened to bring development closer to the people—particularly in rural areas where elite capture is a major risk. The question, though, is whether or not government efforts to sideline local institutions are no more costly than efforts to bolster these representative institutions. This of course depends on the will to reform these institutions, provide for needed training in the policy area that have been outsourced to NGOs and bureaucrats, and the time it will take to get the point when panchayats have sufficient capacity to take on this responsibility in India as a whole.

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Communication

The Rudolphs' review (*TBR*, Vol. 36, No. 3) of Volume I of my *Politics of Northern India: 1937-1987*, which focuses especially on the early life and career of Charan Singh, is the tenth review of the book. All the others have been highly favorable, so I have little to complain about. However, I find the Rudolph review rather out of place and misleading, both in its account of my purposes in writing it and in its assessment of the purpose of the project as a whole. Moreover, they have wasted scarce space on paragraphs containing irrelevant comments on India's preeminent former leaders, as well as unnecessarily long quotations from the book, not all quite relevant to their points.

The whole thrust of the review from beginning to end is that I am seeking to provide a place in some 'pantheon', as they put it, for Charan Singh. On top of that, they suggest I am seeking to 'establish an alternative master narrative of post-Independence politics' to replace those devoted to Gandhi, Nehru, and other exemplary figures. This is not at all my purpose. I am no hero-worshipper nor was Charan Singh. If there is a pantheon for honest and decent men and women, then fine, let the Rudolphs place him and any heroes of theirs of similar caliber inside it.

However, the Rudolphs have chosen instead to join the ranks of his ill-wishers by repeating twice in the same review the statement that Charan Singh had 'feet of clay'. Somehow, they seem to think I have suggested as much in part of a paragraph from which they quote concerning the entirely different matter of the scarcity of jobs for youths outside of government. Moreover, they have focused entirely on what they consider to be his defects, not his strengths.

The Rudolphs also seem not to have fully grasped Charan Singh's views on several matters, including his attitude toward satyagraha. I can assure them, however, that he would not have appreciated Anna Hazare's campaign, despite his own life-long battle against corruption.

Paul Brass

Trans-cultural Perspectives

Krishna Swamy Dara

THE COMMUNITY OF RIGHTS: THE RIGHTS OF COMMUNITY

By Daniel Fischlin and Martha Nandorfy
Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 328, ₹850.00

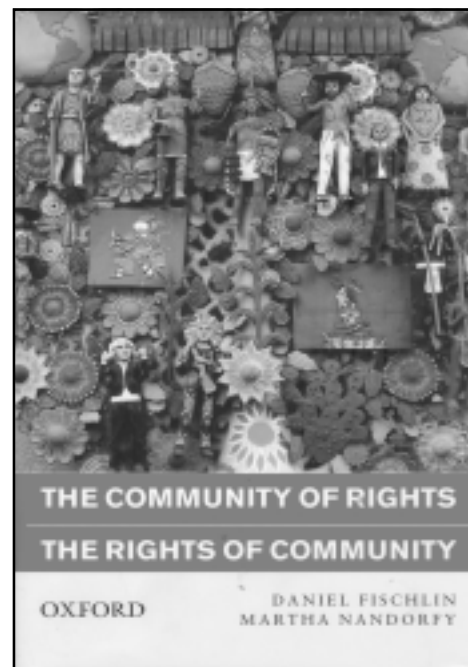
Sociality is a fact of human existence, however, not an unproblematic one. Even after centuries of contemplation, it is still as enigmatic as ever. With the advent of modernity, tension surfaced between the individual and the community to which the individual belonged. Socio-political thinking has been varying as to which aspect should be given prominence over the other. The dominant narrative of 'human' 'rights' largely recognizes the individual as the bearer of these rights with some concession to human collectives or groups. This epistemic bias has resulted in excluding certain conceptions and problems of marginalized communities from the mainstream discourses on human rights. Even when collectivities are recognized by the dominant discourses it is to accommodate the interests of the dominant collectivities in the name of national, religious and other cultural identities. Large, multinational business corporations are using the idea of community to articulate and promote their business interests rather than the interests of their employees or workers. The book under review, a third volume by the authors, attempts to offer us a comprehensive and critical understanding of the concept of 'community'.

Interdisciplinary and trans-cultural perspective is what the authors employ to understand the complex issues that surround the problems of the rights of the community. Their intention is to challenge our academic, theoretical, western, white conceptions of 'community'. This 'resistance to theory', as Upendra Baxi calls it, is a Foucauldian strategy for destabilizing the discursive domains that normalize and stabilize historically contingent and fluid practices. For this purpose, the voice of the subaltern is valued and prioritized over the standard academic discourses. The dominant conception, according to the authors, pays scant attention to the environmental conditions making humanity possible. They take Alan Gewirth's insight that human rights articulate social/community relation rather than juridical and normative distinctions which was put down by Gewirth in his popular text *The Community of Rights*. Storytelling is given importance in order to challenge the dominant discourses of power and the State, that tend to homogenize and promote 'monologic' in the pretext of community. The writings of Thomas King, particularly his 1995 collection *One Good Story, That One* is a major inspiration for the authors and they draw heavily on

it to make their central concern for the book. Storytelling, here, should not be understood as just exchanges of fairy tales or horror stories for entertainment, but should be seen as collective biographies of the communities as well as the resistance against various forms of colonization. Storytelling also represents dialogue and 'multi-logue'. This complex form of speech gives rise to a complex code in which 'communities emerge, develop, disperse, and at times also disappear in the flux of narrative time and space.' Storytellings are an alternative source of information for indigenous group linked to land and comes from the land. From this perspective, 'life is contingent upon a collective relation to the ecosphere and the stories that the ecosphere gives up through its embodiment offspring, human and other.'

Citing the theatre historian Alan Filewod the authors comment, 'the word "community" has become as bankrupt as its rhetorical predecessor, "the people", had by the end of 1930s.' They are also highly influenced by the work of French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy, particularly his *The Inoperative Community*. In this work, Nancy writes, 'the gravest and most powerful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer.....is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community'. Giorgio Agamben's work, *The Coming Community*, has also influenced the authors. Speaking of the state's inability to tolerate that, '....singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging... the state ... is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution, the unbinding it prohibits... a being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the state. That is what, in our culture, the hypocritical dogma of the sacredness of human life and the vacuous declarations of human rights are meant to hide.' The above critiques of the concept of community and the state's usurping of the human rights discourse while denying the same to marginalized communities is the inspiration for this particular work.

The book is divided into four parts with a typical post-modern/colonial style of labelling. The socio-political conditions of several of the marginalized communities spanning from Mexico to India are dealt with. Blacks, Romas, dalits, indigenous populations from North and Latin America, Chinese workers, women, children, animals, environment etc., and their problem with rights is the main concern of the



authors. The main argument of the book is that the rights of the community are shaped by the 'ethics of encounter' in which our 'relational contingences' (the community) stand mediated by values of civil rights and justice. 'Equality of difference' should be the guiding norm in a more subtle, fair and ethical conception of 'community'. The authors are critical of the newly floating communities like the 'facebook communities' on the internet as promoting egotistic and narcissistic behaviour among its members in the interests of business revenues. Google, Apple and other corporate labels are criticized for invoking the notion of 'community' which is distorting our biotic relation to others and land. The authors comment upon how Apple products made in China by Foxconn have been reported to have violated the rights of the workers. The book all through emphasizes the inter-relatedness of social collectives and individuals across cultures all over the global.

Since the authors cover a broad range of issues, it is difficult for a reader to critically evaluate and appreciate the problems facing many communities. For example, the problem of dalits is picked up in the later half of the book but is dealt with in a manner that fits the over-arching argument of the work ignoring much of the complexity and specificity of the dalit predicament. The ambitious goal of the authors to capture the common problems of many disadvantaged groups has resulted in a fragmented narrative. However, sociologists, political scientists, social activists, legal scholars and human rights advocates must read this work in order to acquaint themselves with the latest arguments offered by critical theorists, philosophers as well as the lessons that can be learnt from the struggles taking place all over the planet.

Krishna Swamy Dara is Post Doctoral Fellow at the Juristische Fakultet, Humboldt University, Berlin.

Taking Shi'ism to the Masses

Faisal Devji

SHI'A ISLAM IN COLONIAL INDIA: RELIGION, COMMUNITY AND SECTARIANISM

By Justin Jones

Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 276, ₹795.00

The existing vast scholarship on collective identities in India, whether it deals with caste, creed or nationalism, is dominated by a concern with their modern 'construction', a process generally seen as having occurred during the colonial period. So in the last two decades historians have carefully described the way in which communities of all kinds are invented or reinvented through a set of debates, practices and, most important of all, 'reforms'. They have shown us how certain narratives of collective belonging end up defining the terms of debate on any given identity, thus closing some avenues of thinking while opening others in the process. In one sense Justin Jones's important book extends this 'constructivist' argument to the Shia of northern India. For example, he tells us in meticulous detail how the fall of the court in Lucknow during the Mutiny forced a community that had heretofore been defined by its aristocratic allegiances to remake itself.

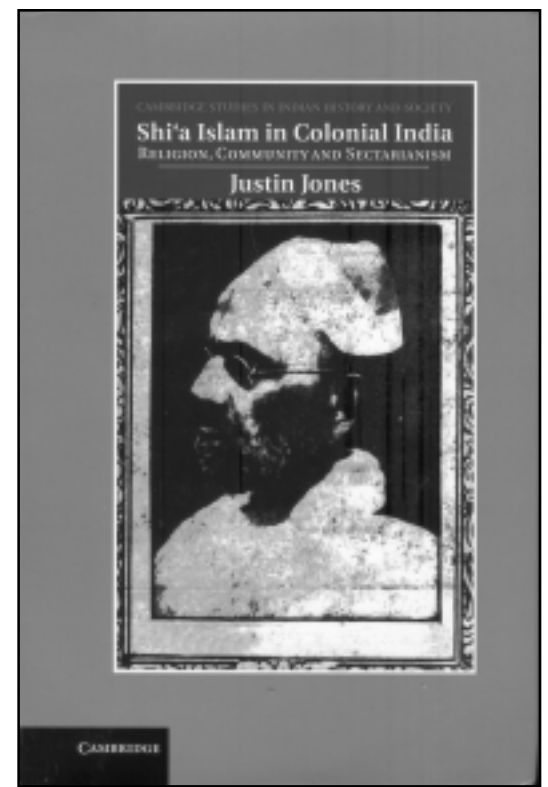
Thus the *ulama* or religious scholars of the sect not only found themselves bereft of aristocratic support, but also freed from the control exercised by these great magnates in the past. Compelled to turn for patronage to ordinary believers, these men were able to consolidate themselves into a corporate group for the first time (just as their peers in the great shrine cities of Iraq were doing) while trying to manage what was now their most important relationship, that with the sect's ordinary laymen, to their best advantage. In the meantime these laymen were similarly institutionalizing themselves as Shia representatives, each group turning to the colonial state from time to time in order to stake its claim to speak on behalf of the Shia as a whole. And Jones very effectively describes the way in which the gradual emergence of electoral and then mass politics in twentieth century India further shaped the character of the Shia debate and activity, as it did that of every other group in Indian society.

The emergence of mass politics, Jones argues, led to an increase in the contestation for Shia representation internally, while externally also putting Shias on a competitive footing with the much larger community of north Indian Sunnis. Indeed one of his chief claims is that what other scholars have referred to as the 'construction' of the Muslim community in this period was consistently undercut by Shia-Sunni rivalry, itself a sign not of weakness and tradition so much as of vibrancy and change.

For the Shia, therefore, as well as for many Sunnis, says Jones, Hinduism did not figure as Islam's great competitor in colonial India, with the struggle to reform and represent the 'Muslim community' being largely an internal one. And in fact it is remarkable how little reference there is to Hinduism in 'reformist' Muslim texts of this time, especially given the large role that Islam plays in the simultaneous revival of Hinduism. The tendency of north Indian Shias to vote for Congress against the League in colonial times, and then for the BJP against the Congress more recently, is as much a sign of this unconcern with Hindus as it is of a rivalry with Sunnis.

Yet it is clear from this book that the more divided they became, the closer to one another did Shias and Sunnis move, with their forms of argumentation and institutionalization converging so strongly that one is tempted to describe the rivalry between them in Freudian terms, as the narcissism of minor differences. Jones is at pains to make the case that the many and important Shia figures who rose to intellectual or political prominence during this period, ranging from the jurist Ameer Ali to Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, were not representative of north Indian Shi'ism in the explicitly ecumenical form of Islam they propagated, though he might have considered the possibility that this apparently non-sectarian religion was if anything more Shia than the mirroring acts of sectarian contestation that his book describes so well. For these men's generic Islam did not preclude sectarian identification, only keeping it for one's inner life in a good example of the crucial Shia doctrine of *taqiyya*, often wrongly translated as 'protective dissimulation' and seen by the sect's enemies as nothing less than deviousness and hypocrisy.

Given that *taqiyya* was often prescribed even in a Shia country like Iran, to regard it as 'protective' is not very helpful. Instead we may want to follow up on a comment made by the poet-philosopher Mohammad Iqbal, himself a Sunni, who responded to a question about the difficulty of establishing secular principles in a religion like Islam, which apparently drew no distinction between religion and politics, by referring to the occultation of the twelfth Shia Imam and the consequent necessity of practising *taqiyya*. European societies, said Iqbal, defined secularism in spatial terms, by confining religion to private life and, he thought, giving over the public arena to unprincipled



opportunism. Shi'ism, however, conceived of a temporal division between the contemporary world, in which religion could not become dominant without denying the absence of the Imam, and the reign of the messiah himself when *taqiyya* would finally come to an end.

I mention this example so as to point out the remarkably imaginative ways in which Shi'ism was thought about in the very period upon which Jones focuses. Surely whether or not such men as Ameer Ali or Jinnah were representative of the Shia in a purely numerical sense, the ways in which they were able to think about modern life and society in distinctively 'Shia' ways is of great and even crucial interest. Otherwise we must resign ourselves to thinking that in the play of mirrors that Justin Jones offers us, there is no fundamental difference between Shi'ism and Sunnism. And so we come back to the very thing he denies, the 'construction' of a Muslim community in colonial India. Can we suggest, then, that the 'generic' and non-sectarian Islam retailed by so many Muslim leaders of the time, both Shia and Sunni, represented not a unified religion so much as a form of *taqiyya*, a simulacrum that nobody was actually meant to believe in but rather assent to only as a courtesy? Fragmentary as it is, this suggestion opens up an unexplored vision of 'secularism' as a Muslim category in modern times.

Jones does in fact make an important point about secularism as a colonial enterprise, arguing that the British policy of (relative) non-interference in religious matters allowed Muslims in general as well as in their sectarian milieus to make Islam into a closed system. More than a defensive mechanism in the face of colonial rule, Jones claims that it was the elimination or enfeeblement of Muslim rulers and aristocracies in British India that offered

“...so it was actually colonial secularism that, like all forms of the secular in Euro-American societies, ended up making religion possible as a closed and autonomous field. One implication of this process, Jones tells us, was that Shi’ism and Sunnism now came to be thought of as closed and alternative systems, precisely as religions in the modern and indeed Protestant sense this word has.”

both the *ulama* and lay people the opportunity to turn religion into a totality, whereas the dynasts of the past never allowed either of these groups to consolidate themselves or Islam in this way, with royal law, for instance, constantly interrupting and limiting the exercise of divine law. And so it was actually colonial secularism that, like all forms of the secular in Euro-American societies, ended up making religion possible as a closed and autonomous field. One implication of this process, Jones tells us, was that Shi’ism and Sunnism now came to be thought of as closed and alternative systems, precisely as religions in the modern and indeed Protestant sense this word has. Their very closeness to each other, therefore, made these competing systems into the bitterest of rivals. Secularism, we might say, lies at the root of all religion, which is why it can never supplant the latter.

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Book News Book News

Poetics and Politics of Sufism & Bhakti in South Asia: Love, Loss and Liberation edited by Kavita Panjabi tries to bridge the gap through a comparative approach on the evolution and cross-fertilization of ideas between Sufism and Bhakti. The book focuses on the range of influences across different linguistic and cultural divides. Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2012, pp.305, price not stated.

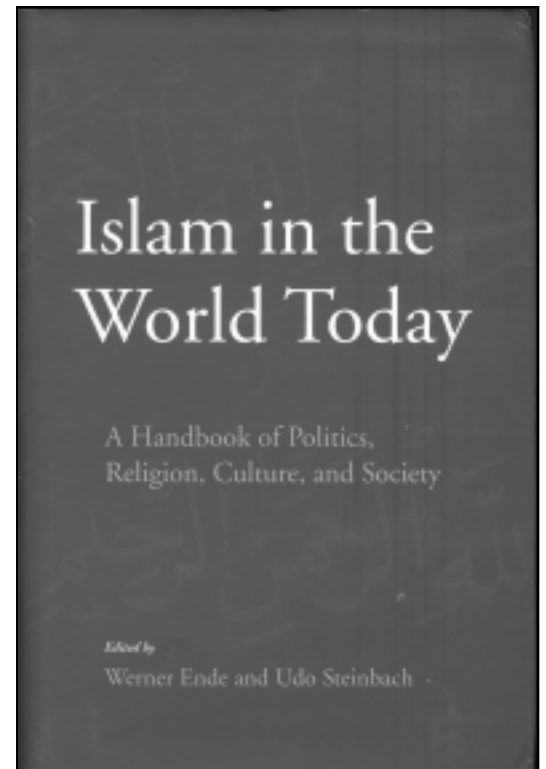
Global Faith/Tradition

Tahir Mahmood

ISLAM IN THE WORLD TODAY: A HANDBOOK OF POLITICS, RELIGION, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY
 Edited by Werner Ende & Udo Steinbach
 Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 1114, ₹1795.00

Islam is the predominant religion of contemporary Africa and Asia and has a large following in Australasia, Europe and North America. According to reliable demographic sources in as many as fifty-one nation-states scattered over the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe followers of Islam are in a majority—in as many as forty of them the Muslim population being above 80%. In many other countries of these continents Muslims constitute from a quarter to one-half of the population. And, then, there are several Muslim-minority states in Asia and Africa where the headcount of Muslims is much higher than in any of the Muslim-dominated countries—India with its 160 million Muslims being on top of such nations. In the West, while Europe is home to nearly 45 million followers of Islam, there are another about ten million in the United States. A cautious estimate puts the total Muslim population in the present-day world at 1.7 billion. According to some unofficial estimates the aggregate of Muslim population in Muslim-minority countries on the globe exceeds the total number of Muslims in all the Muslim countries taken together. In the present-day world thus Islam remains a force to reckon with and Muslim presence on the globe is indeed enormous.

The West has always taken a keen interest in this global faith/tradition and has been since long producing theoretical studies and empirical works presenting various facets of Islam in its own way. Besides Britain, which has in the past ruled a large number of Muslim countries for long spans of time for which reason its interest in Islam is understandable, Germany too has been in the forefront in bringing out all sorts of books on Islam and the Muslim world. The book under review here is a recent addition to such literature. It was first published in the German language in Munich in 1984. Edited by two German professors, it is a bulky anthology of articles and country reports contributed by a large group of authors hailing from various back-grounds and covering the entire gamut of Islamic affairs including the situations in the contemporary Muslim world. The book when published was well received in the academic circles in the West as a storehouse of ideas and information about all aspects of Islam and the Muslim society and went into five editions in a short span of about two decades. An English version of the fifth edition published in 2005—various parts of



the book translated by different bilingual scholars—was brought out five years later by the Cornell University Press in the United States; and it has now been reprinted in India for distribution in South Asia.

The over 1100-page work is broadly divided into three parts titled (i) Historical Expansion, Political and Religious History, (ii) Political Role of Islam in the Present and (iii) Present-day Islamic Culture and Civilization. Part I, under five heads, contains 16 articles encompassing a brief history of Islam from its origin in the 7th century AD till the present, the Sunni and Shi’a divisions in Islam, major revivalist movements of 18th to 20th centuries in different parts of the world, and statistical data on the Muslim presence on the globe. The section on Sunni Islam speaks of its history, theology, law and mysticism; and that on the Shi’as of the majority Ithna ‘Ashari group and the Zaidi minority. The Isma’ili Shi’as are not dealt with here—which would have been more appropriate and just—but, bracketed with the Ahmadis and Bahais, under Part III among the ‘Sects and Special Groups.’ The chapter on revivalist movements is quite selective, speaking, besides some Arab reformers, of South Asia’s Jamaluddin Afghani, Shah Waliullah and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. The continent-wise statistical data at the end of Part I briefly covers 38 countries each of Asia and Africa,

“ Muslim population in Muslim-minority countries on the globe exceeds the total number of Muslims in all the Muslim countries taken together. ”

12 of Europe and a few countries of Australasia and the two Americas.

Part II of the book first deals, under three different heads, with Islamic social systems, economics and law in general. Chapter III in this Part titled 'Developments in Law' attempts to deal in a short space of about thirty pages with the legal system of Islam covering its history and state in the present age. A brief note on sources and methods of law is followed by a cursory look at constitutional law, criminal law, personal status laws, civil laws, commercial laws and economic laws. This general discussion is followed by brief country reports. While major Arab states like Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan (pre-Partition), Syria and Yemen are dealt with countrywise, there are clusters on the Muslim nations of the Gulf and North Africa. Separate sections on Sub-Sahara and what the book calls 'Horns of Africa' provide

information on many other countries of the African continent. Country reports are found also on the Muslim States of Central, South and Southeast Asia, as also on four Muslim-minority states—China, India, Israel and Russia—whose citizenry includes large Muslim populations. The section on country reports ends with a chapter on 'Islamic Diaspora : Europe and Americas.'

Part III of the book opens with an article on what its author calls 'orientalistics and orientalism' and later talks of Islam and cultural self-assertion, local traditions, linguistic sphere and reflections of Islam in contemporary literature. It ends with brief accounts of a variety of Islamic arts and architecture in their historical perspective and modern forms. This last part of the book is followed by end-notes for all its chapters, authors' short biographies, a sixty-page comprehensive bibliography and three indices—names, subjects and geographical references.

The book is repeatedly described in its blurb as 'comprehensive' but the treatment of many aspects of Islam in all its parts is rather scanty. It is surely comprehensive in its coverage but the treatment of every subject is not necessarily so. In an attempt to produce a *multum in parvo* on the 1400-year old Islamic faith in its historical and modern settings the planners of the book, it is evident, had to

unduly restrict the scope of several entries. While the blurb further describes the book as 'most authoritative' and its contributors as world's leading experts on Islam, it is mainly a work of 'outsiders'—of its forty-four contributors only five are Muslim by faith. Of course their impartiality and objectivity is beyond reproach. I personally know quite a few of them and have hosted some of them here in India at my university including the young German scholar Monica Wohlrab-Sahr who has attempted to cover all aspects of Islam in the two vast continents of North and South Americas in a brief five-page piece.

The book is now about three decades old and the factual information given in it is obviously not up to date. The tabular statement of Muslim populations found in it dates back to 2004. Yet as a single-volume encyclopedic work touching upon all aspects of Islam and its followers it may well cater to the needs of the English-speaking seekers of a general reference book.

Tahir Mahmood, Member, Law Commission of India, is a renowned jurist specializing in Islamic Law, Hindu Law, Religion and Law and Law Relating to Minorities. He has been Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, Member, National Human Rights Commission and Jurist-Member, Ranganath Misra Commission.

A Socio-Historical Outlook

Muhammed Haneefa

THE MALABAR MUSLIMS: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

By L.R.S. Lakshmi

Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 200, ₹530.00

Mappila Muslims constitute more than ninety percent of the Muslim population in Kerala. The majority of these Muslims live in the northern part of Kerala, called Malabar region. Historians and sociologists like Roland E. Miller, Stephen F. Dale, K.N. Panikkar, Hussain Randathani and many others have written about the socio-political and cultural world of Malabar Muslims from various perspectives.

L.R.S. Lakshmi examines the social, political, educational and cultural life of Malabar Muslims under the colonial administration from 1870. At first glance, there is no detail left unexamined. The seventh and last chapter discusses the educational progress, women's empowerment, religious development and the political life of Mappila Muslims in the twenty-first century. By discussing a wide range of issues on the Mappila community, she has made a sincere effort to satisfy both sociologists and historians alike.

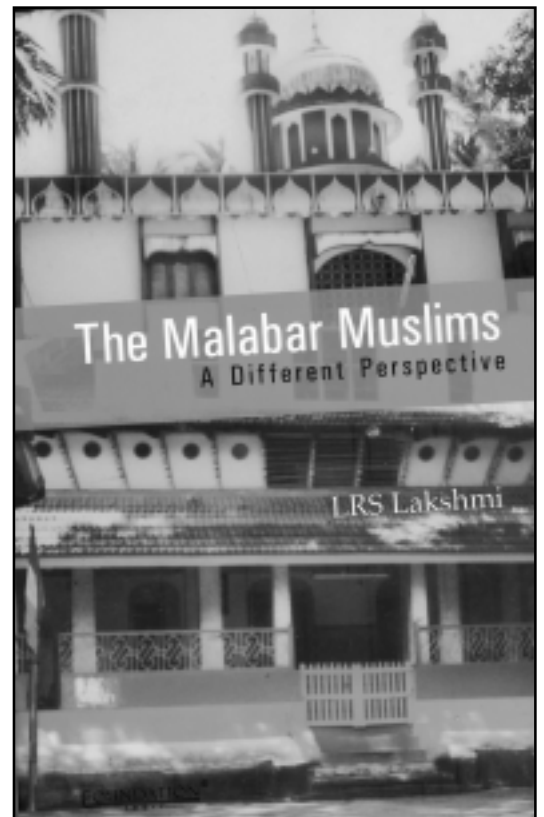
Lakshmi argues that Arab trading and the intermarriage between Arabs and the local women, economically motivated religious conversions by 'low castes'; this and the egalitarian nature of Islam are cited as the main reasons behind the Islamization of the Malabar region. However, many will have a problem in using the politically loaded word 'Islamization' to describe the peaceful expansion and conversion of locals to Islam in the region. The hierarchical social order of the Mappilas is a notable one. The hierarchy is formed not only due to the conversion from the Hindu religion, but also due to the Hadrami influence in the region and the hierarchical social order that prevailed among the Hadramis. The hierarchical order was also strengthened by the economic domination and control of the port by the *Keyis*, *Koyas* and *Baramis*. As a critique to the egalitarian nature of Islam in Malabar, she sees that 'the *Thangals* were spiritually superior whereas the *Keyis*, the *Koyas* and the *Baramis* were economically superior. The *Pusalar(n)s* and *Ossans* were occupationally inferior' (p. 28). When analysing the familial, educational and other aspects of Malabar Muslims, her work is completely silent about these so-called socially, occupationally and economically 'inferior' communities.

This is a lucidly written book without jargon. But, a native reader like me, cannot read the book without making comments on

some serious errors due to the author's lack of familiarity with the local language, names of persons and places. To begin with, the community 'Mappila' is wrongly spelt throughout the book as 'Mappilla' which in Malayalam means 'unpardonableness', and the word has nothing to do with the community. The first paragraph of the introduction begins with a factual error when she writes 'Jews arrived in Cochin as early as 68 AD and a small town exists even today in this region surrounding the oldest Jewish synagogue in the world' (p. XV). The author overlooks the fact that Cochin came into existence only in the 14th century. The Paradesi synagogue, built in 1568, is one of the many synagogues in the world, but not the oldest.

Throughout the book, Vakkom Moulavi is erroneously called Vaikkom Maulavi. Jamaludeen Mankada is wrongly written as Jamaludeen Makkad (p. 164), and Sayyid Munavvar Ali as Sayyid Munnaftali (p. 165). Some of the Malayalam words should be correctly written as '*nikudi*' instead of '*nihudi*' (p. XXVIII), '*pusalans*' for '*pusalars*' (pp. 26, 28, 81), '*kabarsthalami*' for '*kavarasthalam*' (p. 65), '*Kerala Sarvakala Shala*' for '*Kerala Sarvakala Shaka*' (p. 164).

The popular notion in academics is that the Malabar Muslims are matrilineal and that they follow the *marumakkathiyam* system. However, it is just a dominant ideology in academics and an unjustifiable generalization. Around 14-16 percent of Muslims in Malabar follow the matrilineal system, and they are mainly from areas like Kannur, Thalassery and some parts of Kozhikode. Existing sociological literature on the Malabar Muslims have discussed mainly the affluent and educated communities like *Thangals*, *Keyis* and *Koyas*. This work sadly is not an exception. She has referred to previous works on and interviewed people mostly from the above communities (p. 190). Lakshmi fails to incorporate the familial and marital life of the people from economically poor and educationally backward Muslim communities in the Malabar region, where the dominant form of family system is patrilineal. Like some other previous works on the Malabar Muslims, this work also shows the outsiders' failure to reach and connect with the poor and 'inferior' people of the Malabar region. It also shows how the affluent and economically superior communities influence knowledge production.



The excessive and uncritical dependence on secondary materials have resulted in flawed arguments. Somewhere she argues, 'Unlike the *Nayars*, the *Mappillas* were basically traders and shop owners in the coastal belts and agriculturists or petty traders in the interior. They did not normally go to distant places in search of education and employment' (p. 61). However, this finding is contradicted as she herself says that 'there were a handful of Mappillas who went to Deoband' (p. 87) and that some of the Mappilas travelled outside the region for higher education. For instance, they went to the Al-Baqiyat-us-Salihah College, in Vellore. In the twenty-first century, Muslims form the single largest group of the Keralite workforce abroad.

Similarly, while analysing the educational role of Himayathul Islam School in Kozhikode, she points out that 'a characteristic feature of the school was that it was the *only* institution, which imparted free secular and religious education' (p. 105; emphasis mine). However, while analysing the educational system of Mappila Muslims in the colonial period and after Independence, we can see that *Dars*, *Madradas* and *Othupallis* played an important role in imparting both secular and religious education to them. In addition to free education, *Dars* and *Othupallis* provide free food and shelter as well for Mappila students in the Malabar region. The author herself points out elsewhere that 'the Municipal council of Kozhikode maintained sixteen elementary schools in the city, out of which seven were for the "Mappillas" and seven for the Hindus. In all the "Mappilla" schools, education was free' (p. 116). In such a context, Himayathul Islam School was just one of many

schools, which imparted free secular and religious education for Mappilas.

The strength of the book is that it highlights many relevant political and social issues that should get an urgent attention. Questions regarding the state's role in Muslim education and refugee issues are important. As she says, Mappila Muslims 'were displaced in 1921 when they were driven out as victims of the British excesses in Malabar. Many Mappilla men went to Karachi ... their women lived in Kerala...but post partition period, these displaced Mappillas, whose numerical strength in Pakistan is around 10,000 are facing visa restrictions from the Indian Government to visit Kerala' (pp. 168-169). She suggests that, 'The refugee issue is a serious matter of social concern and their grievances need to be redressed without further delay' (p.169). In the area of education, the lacklustre response from the State and Central Governments has resulted in the rise of many self-financed educational institutions in Malabar.

Call for Papers

Indian Association of International Studies (IAIS) is holding its 1st Annual Convention in collaboration with the Institute for Research on India and International Studies (IRIIS) on 10-12 December 2012 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. IAIS invites papers for the Annual Convention on the theme: *The Dawning of the Asian Century: Emerging Challenges before Theory and Practices of IR in India.*

Proposals for papers and panels are invited on the following sub-theme:

1. Pedagogy of IR in India.
2. Peace and Conflict Studies
3. Resurgence of Asia, Global Governance and IR Theory
4. Indian IR Engagement with IR Theory
5. Political Geography and Geo--Politics
6. India and its Neighbours
7. India and the Great Powers
8. South East Asia: New Neighbours
9. Ethnicity, Nationalism and Violence
10. Gender Studies and IR
11. Political Economy
12. History and IR
13. Domestic Politics and IR
14. IR Theory and the War on Terror
15. Changing Conceptions of Security/ Sovereignty
16. Sustainable Development and Climate Change
17. India's Strategic Thought/Praxis
18. Political Theory and IR Thought
19. Non--Western Perspectives on IR

Deadline for Submission of Proposals:
June 15, 2012

All proposals should be submitted
online at: indianirconference@gmail.com

Like Muslims in India, Malabar Mappilas are also lagging behind in education when compared to other communities in the region. However, they are much better and higher in educational achievement in comparison with Muslims in other parts of India. Lakshmi's detailed study of Mappila education throws light on the State's neglect and bias in allocating funds and resources to the educational institutions in the region. Her discussion of female educational development and the self-effort of the Malabar Muslims are illuminating. In academics and at the policy level, there is an urgent need to give attention to some of the 'dark sides' of self-financing institutions. Behind the banner of community service, able and qualified graduates are demanded lakhs of rupees for being appointed to various teaching posts, higher fees and donations are extracted from students and the poor are exploited.

Lakshmi also shows how the few economically and socially 'superior' elites had controlled the political authority of the Mappila community in Malabar region. Discussing the native representation in the Municipal Board in Kozhikode, she argues, 'What is significant is that the Muslim seats in the Municipal Board were being filled by wealthy Mappilla landlords and merchants' (p.134). Even before Independence and after that, the ultimate leadership and authority of the Muslim League, one of the major political parties in the region, has been in the hands of the Thangals. They claim to be the descendants of the Prophet and are therefore granted a superior status in the hierarchal social order.

The book makes for an interesting read, giving an overall understanding of the Mappila community from colonial time to the present. One weakness of the book is that, it is too descriptive and it generalizes some aspects of the community like the family structure, religious conversion and status of the women in the community by analysing a few select sections and groups of Muslims in the Malabar region. For instance, she argues, 'women are as always, highly respected in Mappilla society' (p.162). However, in many parts of Malabar, dowry and child marriage still pose serious threats to women's progress in education and social development. As the book makes it clear while analysing education, family and social structure, there is a lack of homogeneity among the different sections of the community. It is a well-researched work, quite informative and meaty too but it fails to impress a native reader as the book abounds in mistakes and fails to give an alternative to the dominant views. This book will be useful for sociologists and historians, as well as scholars working on religious studies.

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Strategic Relationship

Rahul Mukherji

THE EAGLE AND THE ELEPHANT: STRATEGIC ASPECTS OF US-INDIA ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

By Raymond Vickery, Jr.

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 352, ₹695.00

The *Eagle and the Elephant* is the best book on Indo-US relations written by an insider in the US administration. Vickery holds a bipartisan American view largely sympathetic to Indian concerns. It surpasses Denis Kux's magisterial book—*Estranged Democracies*. There is a remarkable commitment to historical detail to buttress the argument that Indo-US economic relations after 1991 were pivotal for its strategic relations. Positive economic inducements rather than sanctions or military considerations will be the harbinger of friendly ties between the two countries. The relationship between the world's two populous democracies of considerable economic significance will be the most significant one for the US in the twenty-first century.

The chapter on civil nuclear cooperation is central to the argument about economic and strategic relations. India's nuclear tests in 1998, like the one in 1974, should have brought the relationship to a new low. But the 1998 sanctions were reversed quickly. The United States India Business Council (USIBC), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE) led by Swadesh Chatterjee played a stellar role in turning conflict into cooperation. This was reflected in the Joint Statement made by Manmohan Singh and George Bush in July 2005 and the final passage of the bill acknowledging India as a nuclear power in October 2008. The chapter provides a graphic account of how commercial interests helped trump political opposition. This agreement laid the foundation for robust Indo-US relations. Civilian nuclear cooperation since 1959 has been signifier of trust between the two countries.

The Indo-US economic engagement has far-reaching ramifications. First, sixty percent of the fortune five hundred companies outsource their work to India. Commercial ties

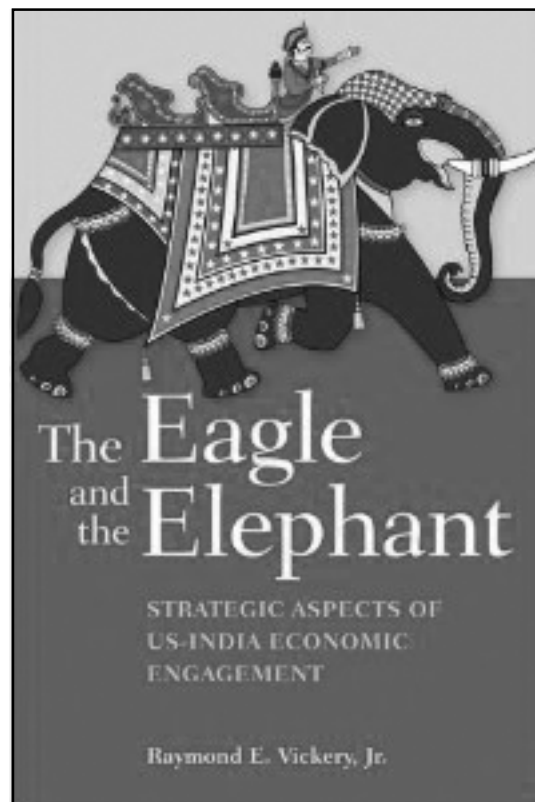
“...the book presents India as a country whose interests have veered closer to that of the US after its tryst with globalization and deregulation since 1991. Cooperation has replaced conflict in many areas.”

between American and Indian companies may have restrained India from taking an aggressive posture in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. The US Government travel advisories and pressure from General Electric considerably reduced the prospect of Indian aggression. Second, outsourcing created cooperative possibilities among Indian and American companies. This political economy has secured service trade, despite many attacks on the American H1-B visa by the US Congress.

Third, both India and the US are dependent on imported oil. While they differ on the propriety sanctions on Iran—the nuclear deal may have played a role in scuttling the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project. The Indo-US nuclear deal was clearly delinked from specific Indian foreign policy commitments with respect to Iran. But civilian nuclear power was to be the substitute for dependence on oil. Could the nuclear deal have discouraged the Indian Government from pursuing the pipeline? This case study fails to analyse other reasons for rejecting the pipeline.

Fourth, Indo-US cooperation on multi-lateral economic issues did not receive a significant boost till the WTO's Information Technology Agreement (1996). The Indian software industry and American hardware manufacturers overcame opposition from Indian hardware manufacturers to forge a cooperative front during the Singapore trade ministerial. Thereafter, lackluster cooperation ensued till Prime Minister Manmohan Singh supported President Obama's stimulus package in the G-20 forum. Indian and American approaches to dealing with the financial crisis have found resonance—a factor that affected the tenor of Obama administration's approach to India. This is not a well known insight.

Fifth, India's transition from a process patent to a product patent regime is a significant evolution of cooperation heralded by the rise of Indian companies like Ranbaxy, Dr. Reddy, CIPLA and Sun. These companies developed ties with their American counterparts in the early 1990s. But the Indian patent law drafted in 2005 did not satisfy American companies. To make matters worse, Indian companies like CIPLA defied the WTO regime and supplied cheap AIDS drugs to South Africa on public health grounds. Over time, these bold actions received support from the US Government, non-governmental organizations and American foundations. This nar-



rative suggests that the world is coming around to the Indian view regarding the rapacious nature of the WTO patent regime.

Indo-US cooperation in energy and agriculture face significant challenges. Neither could project on clean energy and power take-off after substantial investments had been made nor did the two countries share a common approach on climate change. And, the second Indian green revolution is not likely to be an easy transition. The first one in the late 1960s is a saga of substantial Indo-US cooperation. Rural distress in India continues to pose a development challenge. Indian Agriculture supports more than half the population on 14 percent of the GDP. And agricultural GDP is growing less than 3 percent per annum when the economy grows at 7 to 8 percent. Rural uplift demands cooperation between Indian and American companies. It is imperative to de-control the foodgrain distribution system in India. These are politically challenging tasks. Companies like Pepsi and Wal-Mart are nevertheless making a small difference by bringing the farmer closer to the market in India.

Overall, the book presents India as a country whose interests have veered closer to that of the US after its tryst with globalization and deregulation since 1991. Cooperation has replaced conflict in many areas. The US Government needs to accord greater priority to positive economic engagement and policy coordination. Indo-US relations have been portrayed as an emerging and powerful relationship among two large independent minded countries that can work together without becoming allies.

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Role of Civil Societies and Its Limitations

Manjrika Sewak

CONFLICT SOCIETY AND PEACEBUILDING: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Raffaele Marchetti and Nathalie Tocci
Routledge, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 321, ₹795.00

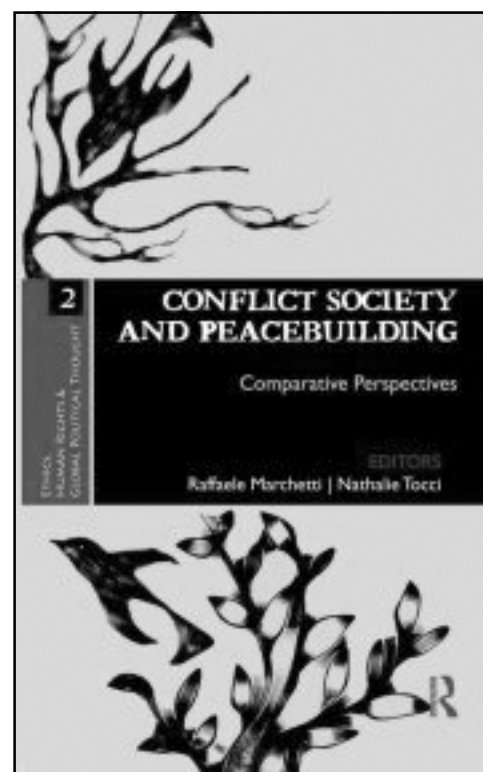
C*onflict Society and Peacebuilding: Comparative Perspectives* is an edited volume of eleven essays, which explores the linkages between civil society, conflict and peace, drawing on empirical studies from regions in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. The book opens with the recognition that civil society plays a significant role in building sustainable peace and security in contexts of armed conflict, particularly those driven by identity and located within states. The central space that it has come to occupy in peacebuilding discourse is based on the fact that individuals and groups, from a variety of backgrounds, have demonstrated their skills and expertise in this area. It is now recognized that official, government-to-government interactions between instructed representatives of states are insufficient in themselves to build sustainable peace in divided societies. In this context, the book seeks to delve deeper into how civil society and government actors can partner with one another to increase the efficacy of peace interventions and to initiate long-term processes of conflict transformation.

The editors, Raffaele Marchetti and Nathalie Tocci, note that while there is sufficient evidence to point to the positive contributions of civil society, what has perhaps received less attention is the ability of such groups to also work towards entrenching inequitable status quos and, worse still, exacerbating conflict in already tense and fragile situations. The civil society space is not always filled with progressive politics, and collective action is not always directed towards the common good. Civil society can also be a space that fuels discord and it can be captured by vested interests. Thus, on the one hand some groups voice dissent to make democracy real and substantive, but on the other hand, some might work towards the subversion of democratic and pluralistic ideals. The authors advance the theory that the influence of civil society in a conflict situation depends on certain variables. The first is the context within which a civil society organization operates. For instance, how does the larger political context of authoritarian rule, ethnic nationalism, underdevelopment, overbearing international presence, or a failed state affect the function and role of civil society groups? Further, how do prevailing cultural and societal beliefs influence

the purpose and functions of a civil society organization, which is rooted in that society?

Thematically, the chapters fall into three categories. The first category titled 'Theoretical Reflections' engages with the composition of civil society in the context of peace and conflict processes. Civil society constitutes the space between the state, the family, and the market—interacting with these sectors, influencing them, and being influenced by them. The term civil society refers to a complex web of actors who employ myriad strategies and play diverse roles at different stages of conflict escalation and de-escalation. It includes actors who initiate short-term and long-term processes, ranging from humanitarian assistance and ceasefire negotiations to the more long-term efforts of conciliation, relationship-building, peace education, nonviolence training, conflict-sensitive development, and restorative processes for justice and reconciliation. A key strength of this book is the attention that the authors draw to how conflict shapes the identity and actions of civil society organizations. They define them as constituting a 'conflict society' and label them as 'conflict society organizations' (CoSOs). In this definition, local civic organizations as well as third-country, international and transnational civil organizations involved in the conflict in question are included. Adapting the Multi-Track Diplomacy model, originally conceptualized by John McDonald and Louise Diamond of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy in Washington DC, Marchetti and Tocci list the following actors in their definition of CoSOs:

- professional conflict resolution specialists (including technical experts and consultants);
- business groups (including trade unions and organized crime networks);
- individual citizens, families and diasporas (acting on their own);
- research, training and education (academia, special interest research centres, think tanks, universities);
- activism (NGOs, lobby groups, grassroots social movements, nonviolence trainers, human rights groups, combatant groups);
- religion (spiritual communities, charities, religious movements);



- funding (foundations, individual philanthropists); and
- communication (media operators)

They state that the ability of civil society to influence peacebuilding depends on the context—social, cultural, economic, and political—within which it works. This, along with the identities and frameworks of action of CoSOs and the political opportunity structure in which they operate mix together to determine whether these groups contribute to conflict exacerbation or conflict transformation. In fact, Neera Chandhoke in the chapter titled 'What Are the Preconditions for Civil Society?' states that such organizations can act as a positive force in peacebuilding 'only if exclusionary identity-producing processes are mediated outside the boundaries of civil society, and if the State possesses rigorous control over the means and the use of violence and does not define itself through any particular identity'. As a first precondition, she points to the significant role that social interaction in mixed neighbourhoods (comprising members of different communities) can play in building solidarity among members of civil society groups. Related to this is also the existence of robust workplace and trade union politics, which can forge unity among people divided by religion. 'The second precondition for civil society is that religious identities should not become a constitutive aspect of a State-making project. The State should grant equality and freedom to all citizens irrespective of their religion, favour none, and discriminate against no one', writes Chandhoke. In this context, she cites the case study of Ahmedabad in Gujarat whose Muslim inhabitants were the victims of gruesome, mass violence in 2002 in what has been

“... while there is sufficient evidence to point to the positive contributions of civil society, what has perhaps received less attention is the ability of such groups to also work towards entrenching inequitable status quos and, worse still, exacerbating conflict in already tense and fragile situations. The civil society space is not always filled with progressive politics, and collective action is not always directed towards the common good. Civil society can also be a space that fuels discord and it can be captured by vested interests.”

described as a ‘near pogrom’. Most civil society organizations either participated in the violence or remained silent. With a few exceptions, the institutions that represent civil society took no action at all, with some actively participating in the violence against the Muslims. Chandhoke notes that even though some civil society organizations mobilized legal, psychological and material aid for the victims, they did not protest against the violence or the failure of the government to protect its citizens. In this context, she poses the following questions: What shape do civil society organizations take if their members ‘think and act in terms of their primary identities rather than as bearers of individual rights’; or, if they emerge as ‘closed ascriptive groups rather than inclusive and voluntary social associations; or if the state codifies the aspiration of one ethnic group...?’

The second section of the book explores the role of international civil society in processes of peace and conflict. Laura Zanotti in the essay titled ‘Protecting Humans, Governing International Disorder: Integrated UN Peacekeeping and NGOs’ looks at how the reformulation of the problematique of security and the concomitant changes in the strategy of UN Peacekeeping towards ‘integrated missions’ has created not only a regulatory script for NGOs but also a new space for earning visibility as well as increasing opportunities for manipulation and contestation. The second essay in this section by Daniela Irrera titled ‘The Roles of NGOs in Humanitarian Interventions and the Peace Support Operation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’, notes that international non-governmental

organizations have featured both in processes of policy formulation and policy implementation. ‘They are engaged, through consultations, in the definition, affirmation and dissemination of the principle of the “responsibility to protect”.’

The third section of the book analyses the role of local civil society within specific conflict areas. Through analyses of civil society participation in regions as diverse as Kashmir, Bosnia, Turkey, Colombia and South Africa, the chapters bring out with deep clarity the distinctions between international civil society organizations and local, grassroots civil society groups. While the latter have a more nuanced understanding of the conflict as well as a bigger stake in its peaceful transformation, they can also serve as a potent seed for aggressive group mobilization, which in turn could create the necessary ‘opportunity’ for conflict escalation.

This section opens with a journey to Colombia where the author Miguel Barreto Henriques examines the practices and impact of ‘peace laboratories’ in the violence-ravaged Latin American country. The ‘peace laboratories’ represent an innovative and grassroots approach to peacebuilding that traces alternative paths of promoting peace at the micro and regional levels. Based on a participatory methodology and working with the historically excluded sectors of the Colombian population (such as peasants, indigenous peoples and women), the peace laboratories seek to transform political, socioeconomic and cultural exclusion, which lie at the roots of the conflict.

Moving to the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, Ayesha Ray in the chapter titled ‘The Politics and Identity of Kashmiri Women’s Organizations’ examines the nature and the role of the Kashmiri women’s movement in India. While there is no doubt about the disproportionate impact of the conflict on the lives and livelihoods of Kashmiri women, this study cautions against essentialist generalizations about *women and peace* or the existence of a *sisterhood* that transcends the markers of religion, ethnicity and language. The politicization and divisions within a good number of Kashmiri women’s groups that sought to come together in the first decade of the 21st century mirrored the inherent contradictions of Kashmiri society. This has resulted in a fragmented women’s movement, which is yet to grow beyond the Kashmir Valley to include the voices of women from Jammu and Ladakh, or those of displaced Kashmiri Pandit women.

Problematizing the assumption that civil society plays a vital role in the promotion of democracy and human rights, the chapter titled ‘Civil Society and Human Rights Protection in Iraq since 2003’ by Melek Saral points to the detrimental impact of unstable state institutions and a divided society on the ability of civil society to play a constructive role. Iraqi CoSOs have been unable to foster a

democratic culture and protect human rights within a context rife with human rights violations and torn apart by ethno-sectarian conflict. The study on civil society in Turkey titled ‘The AKP, Civil Society and Turkey’s Kurdish Question’ by Ekrem Eddy Guzeldere establishes the link between democratization and the ability of civil society to play a constructive role, highlighting the importance of the political, social and cultural context in shaping the nature and impact of CoSOs in the country.

Also included in this volume is an interesting article on the ‘Role of the Associations of the Victims and Relatives of Missing Persons in Bosnia-Herzegovina’ in the years following the signature of the Dayton Accords (by Valentina Gentile). The contributions of these civil society associations are analysed in the context of their common pursuit for justice and truth. The study explores the diversity of approaches as also the tensions between the different associations, and brings to the fore a different understanding of ‘civil society’—which is understood as a civilian, non-military society, reflecting a unique form of pluralism and tolerance.

Looking at how civil society reinvents itself in a post-conflict context, Veronique Dudouet, in ‘Surviving the Peace? The Impact of War-to-Democracy Transitions on Human Rights Organizations in South Africa’, poses a pertinent question: ‘In view of the importance of conflict in determining the nature of civil society, when a conflict transits from one stage to another, what are the implications for civil society?’ In other words, ‘what happens to organizations striving for peace and democracy after they have achieved their goals? How do they react and reinvent themselves?’ Through interviews with local South African human rights activists, Dudouet concludes that structural changes towards greater institutionalization and professionalization have been observed, as also relational shifts whereby previously adversarial civic actions, such as public mobilization against authoritarian and violent state practices, have given way to collaboration with, and at times even cooption by, the government.

This edited volume provides rich insights into the diverse purposes, functions and contributions of CoSOs in countries experiencing violent conflict. While generalizations are difficult, what is clear is that local political and cultural contexts influence civil society organizations. They impact the identities of individual members of these organizations who are stakeholders to the conflict as well. These in turn determine the motivation and ability of the organizations to work towards pluralism, inclusivity and the greater common good.

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Population Management: A Political Issue?

J. Devika

MARKETS AND MALTHUS: POPULATION, GENDER, AND HEALTH IN NEO-LIBERAL TIMES

Edited by Mohan Rao and Sarah Sexton

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 350, ₹795.00

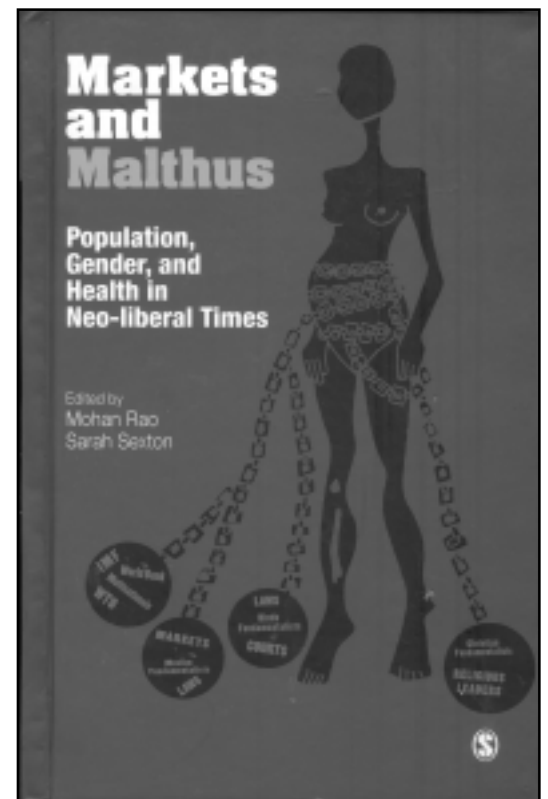
In 2004, I went around the research institution where I work in search of a discussant for a paper on the historical shaping of public consent for family planning in 20th century Kerala. This was interdisciplinary work which reexamined some of the received wisdom of demography pertaining to Kerala from a critical historical perspective. Many senior colleagues skimmed the title, and finding 'family planning' in it, suggested, 'Find a demographer!' So I sought out demographers, who read snatches from the paper and stared at me in disbelief, as if it was blasphemy to historicize hallowed ideas such as the 'demographic transition'.

It is readily apparent that the authors who have contributed to the volume under review do not subscribe to such piety. Therefore, to me, it represents more congenial company. Academic research on population management had travelled, even in 2004, far from the once-unshakeable statist, quantitative, Eurocentric truths, but large sections of the academia are yet to acknowledge this shift. This volume is indeed capable of forcing a rethinking, as it reveals the advantage to be reaped by critical scholarship from adopting interdisciplinary perspectives and methodological and theoretical pluralism. Many essays in the volume interrogate global discourses of population management dominant within currently-hegemonic neo-liberal conceptions of development; others focus on specific countries in the South to reveal the complexities of the unfolding of the new population management agenda. The methods used range from statistical analysis to textual analysis and anthropological fieldwork. Most essays do not stay within conventional disciplinary boundaries. And each offers useful insight into the ways in which many of the familiar certainties of population management have not only continued to stay entrenched within national and global policy, but also how they now inform the discourse of radical social movements—specifically, feminism.

The volume includes eleven essays connected by a common focus on the unfolding of contemporary global biopolitics, besides the introduction which discusses the significance of critical inquiry into the complex links between the stubbornly-persistent imperatives of population management, the global crisis in

public health triggered off by neo-liberal welfare reform, and the transformation of the feminist discourse of reproductive rights in a world under neo-liberal hegemony. Some of them look back critically at a much-celebrated moment of feminist 'victory', the Cairo Consensus of 1994, which is supposed to have decisively altered the course of population policy globally, setting it away from demographically-driven population management imperatives towards women's empowerment and reproductive rights. The argument that the neo-liberal destruction of public health systems in poor countries and the intensification of their exploitation through structural adjustment have effectively rendered the promises of Cairo defunct is now common—and powerfully demonstrated by Meredith Turshen's essay on health in Africa after Cairo in this volume. However, the volume goes beyond that insight and probes deeper into the multiple ramifications of contemporary biopolitics.

The three essays by Sarah Sexton and Sumati Nair, Betsy Hartmann, and Marlene Fried are especially important in the current context in which the Cairo Consensus is severely threatened by both the rise of fundamentalisms around the world and the intensification of neoliberal depredation of public health—as Hartmann remarks, this is a time when 'there is a tendency to remember only the positive aspects of Cairo and to forget the negative' (p. 53). Both reveal how, despite tall claims, neo-Malthusianism was never unseated; in fact, feminist concerns were reframed within its terms, with grievous effect. Hartmann's essay throws interesting light on the shrewd deployment by actors and interests in the US of theories of 'environmental conflict', which rested on neo-Malthusian assumptions and furthered US security interests, in ways that drew in both environmental and feminist actors. Fried's essay focuses on abortion politics in the US, with special attention to the internal fractures within feminism, between feminists who emphasize reproductive 'choice' and women of colour, who uphold reproductive 'justice'. The latter offer an implicit critique of the Cairo Consensus framework's subservience to neo-liberalism, and hence aim at 'achieving the broad set of conditions necessary for reproductive and sexual freedom and health', which would mean that human rights



and economic justice are inseparable from reproductive rights (p. 97).

Fried's essay also speaks to Rachel Simon-Kumar's analysis of neo-liberal development and reproductive health in India, which too poses hard questions to positions that glibly assume that feminist political goals around reproduction are attainable through neo-liberal states and within neo-liberal frameworks. From the Indian experience, Kumar demonstrates that while market-oriented economic policy has been proceeding apace, and though India's commitment to the ICPD process is now evident in its population programme strategies which emphasize reproductive health, these do not seem to have dislodged the imperative of population control. Both Fried and Kumar critique the 'choice framework' which plays too easily into the neo-liberal rhetoric of individual responsibility and remains blind to inequalities and the dangers of the unregulated market-place of reproductive technologies.

The essays by Martha Rosenberg and Suzanne Schultz represent two key positions in the feminist debate about the waning of the promise of Cairo. Rosenberg argues that Latin American feminists, who often had to confront pro-natalist population policies, did make significant gains through the Programme of Action that emerged through the ICPD; but this does not mean that there is consensus about working with the neo-liberal state among feminists there. However, the destruction of livelihood and state welfare in the wake of neo-liberal policies in countries of the region has considerably limited the actualization of the promises of the ICPD. Schultz, however, argues that the problem is deeper: while the march of the neo-liberal economic order is

significant, equally important is the march of the neo-liberal political order. As she points out, the problem is that 'the mainstream discourse of gender NGOs has become tied to an analysis that no longer refuses biopolitical State intervention in general' (p.191). Therefore their critique of the world economic order is necessary but not sufficient. Schultz, importantly, alerts us to the fact that in the post-Cairo variety of neo-Malthusianism, the 'population problem' is reframed less aggressively in terms of 'biopolitical racism', a fact that remains undisturbed by the acknowledgement of gender sensitivity in the Programme of Action.

Other ramifications of this expanding biopolitics are brought to the fore in Mohan Rao's and Kamran Asdar Ali's essays which explore population politics and fundamentalisms in times of neo-liberal welfarism in India and Egypt respectively. As Rao demonstrates, drawing on contemporary communal politics and discourse in India, neo-Malthusianism offers dangerously simplistic explanations to discomfiting social changes, which in turn leads to virulent, majoritarian communal biopolitics, which is almost invariably misogynist as well. Ali's essay, which uses material from anthropological fieldwork, explores how 'impotence', widely feared by the Egyptian poor, is more importantly an effect of the deprivations and structural inequalities which the structural-adjustment dictated privatization policies have deepened. Indeed, family plan-

ning, which supposedly produces a 'lean family', is considered the natural concomitant of the neo-liberal 'lean state'. The 'civil society' of family planning NGOs is fully complicit with the latter and their efforts are perceived by the poor as a form of violence. Their anger is often couched in the language of Islam—in a context where simplistic media representations continue to attribute Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, and immigration to 'overpopulation'.

A particularly interesting essay in the volume is Lisa Ann Richey's analysis of the intersecting of the biopolitics of population and that of HIV/AIDS in Uganda and Tanzania. She shows how entrenched gender-constructions that strictly separate 'lover' from 'mother' continue to underlie the HIV/AIDS programme from the family planning programme, which compete rather than collaborate. However, unlike in the population programme, AIDS has forced questions of sexuality and gender into discussions of the problem—which may also be a reason for the success of Uganda's HIV/AIDS policy in contrast to the dismal state of reproductive health there. There seems little reason to doubt that despite the international commitment to reproductive health that Cairo aimed at, the fate of reproductive health is still strongly linked to priorities and perceptions of particular states—even though they might have endorsed the ICPD goals, like Uganda.

The volume ends, fittingly, I think, with Susan Greenhalgh's essay on the shift from

Leninist biopolitics to neo-liberal biopolitics in China. Besides the fascinating detail, what the essay powerfully brings out is the futility of large-scale and coercive social engineering, or the vital significance of its unintended consequences. Also, it demonstrates the complexity of the cultural entanglements of family planning when deployed as an instrument of State power—the strange sight of a 'hard-edged, competitive, Chinese modernity' (p. 326) produced through the exacerbation of traditional forms of misogyny.

The only critical observation I wish to make is a minor one. While the introduction does offer a detailed and careful overview of the chapters and the context, it may have been useful to also include some discussion on the methodological and theoretical pluralism that it employs so effectively. It might have also been useful to draw more closely into the introduction some of the theoretical formulations that have informed the most insightful essays in the volume—specifically, those which focus on the unfolding of a renewed regime of biopolitics through post-Cairo population policies. This would have definitely strengthened the single biggest insight of the volume: that population management is primarily a political issue and must be analysed as such.

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The Cult of Masculinity

Anjali Arondekar

MASCULINITY, ASCETICISM, HINDUISM: PAST AND PRESENT IMAGININGS OF INDIA

By Chandrima Chakraborty

Permanent Black, Delhi, 2011, pp. 263, ₹695.00

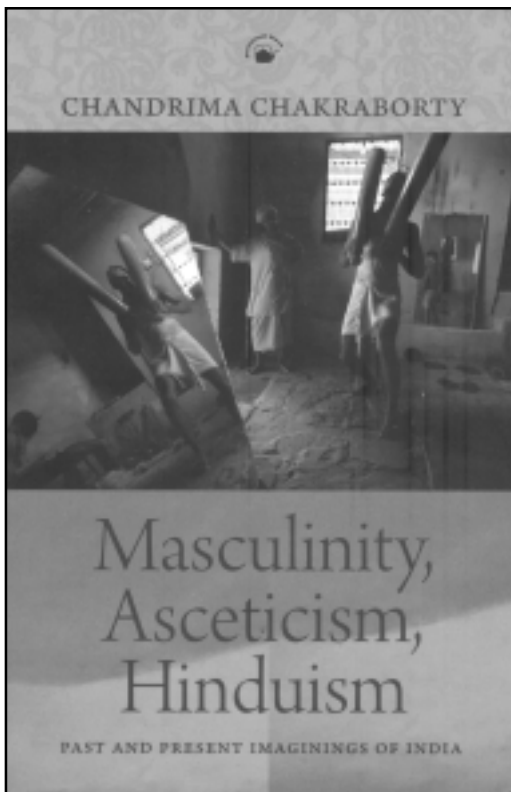
This book highlights a conceptual and political impasse that is at the heart of the most recent postcolonial scholarship on India. On the one hand, much effort is expended at exposing the contradictions and limits of British colonial rule (scholars tend to mostly ignore the Portuguese colonial presence!) and its reliance on orientalist epistemologies of rule. On the other hand, such a deconstructive move is equally countered by a scholarly desire to recover those very epistemologies for evidence of India's (lost) past and (found) present. Colonialism, most scholars wearily admit, cannot simply be expunged from India's post-Independence history; rather we must ceaselessly work to recognize colonialism's role in constructing that very history. No two issues are more central to our recuperative projects than the thorny questions of gender and religion, marked repeatedly as potential spaces of peril and possibility. Even as one needs to

rescue Indian religious practices and beliefs from the flattening and/or pathologizing legacies of British colonialism, such efforts have to be equally weighted alongside an emergent and virulent form of postcolonial and masculinist Hindu nationalism.

It is thus timely that the linkage between gender and religion founds the conceptual focus of Chandrima Chakraborty's book under review. For Chakraborty, any understanding of India's past and present historical and political landscape necessitates a closer look at the interconnectedness between religion, masculinity and asceticism, or what she calls 'the *conjunctural* alignment of ascetics and masculinity in Indian political history.' More specifically, she argues that representations of masculinity and Hindu asceticism have been and continue to be instrumentalized for cultural and political purposes. Within the colonial period, Indian male asceticism (falsely

“ Colonialism, most scholars wearily admit, cannot simply be expunged from India's post-Independence history; rather we must ceaselessly work to recognize colonialism's role in constructing that very history.”

conflated, she writes, with Hinduism) plays a central role in the British imperial imagination. Ascetics are seen as paradoxical exemplars of a failed and detached Indian masculinity that is wilful, mendacious and overall dangerous to the 'humane', civilizing mission of the British empire. As figures who 'wander' aimlessly and without practical purpose, Indian ascetics are reduced to bodies that escape colonial technologies of mapping and surveillance. Stripped of their spiritual significance, the Indian ascetics of the colonial imaginary emerged as shadowy robed figures, capable of murder, crime and worst of all, political unrest and revolution. Chakraborty is quick to point out that such a damning iconography of the Indian ascetic is shared by the Indian agrarian elite of the colonial period who saw the ascetic as actively engaged in resisting feudal oppression (pace Sri Aurobindo and Swami Viveka-



nanda), even as a small number of Indians continued to revere the Indian ascetic as a Hindu *sannyasi* working towards self-liberation and enlightenment.

Refusing such western/colonial notions of Indian ascetic practices, Chakraborty advocates a more heterogeneous understanding of the religious figure of the male Hindu ascetic that bypasses our commonsensical understanding of Hindu ascetics as a monolithic group marked by their renunciation of worldly practices. Instead, she calls for a renewed attentiveness to how colonial ascetic masculinity transformed itself into a strident symbol of Indian nationalism, providing us with a nuanced 'telos of selfhood and nationhood.' By erasing the opposition between nationalism and religion, 'ascetic nationalist masculinities' emerged more as spaces of negotiation, contestation and advocacy for preachers, the literati and nationalist leaders who 'sought to contest and alter colonialist views of Hindu masculinity and religion as weak and degenerate.' Rather than see ascetic renunciation, celibacy and restrictions in diet as evidence of an effete Hindu male body, Indian nationalists celebrated such traits as indicative of the colonized male subject's self-control, courage and independence. In doing so, Indian nationalists, the book argues quite persuasively, broadened the category of Hinduism and religion in general to a divergent (and often contradictory) landscape where the traditional notion of religion as unchanging often clashed with a more secularized version of religion as mutable and flexible.

However, Chakraborty cautions against any facile celebratory revival of a nationalist ascetic masculinity, especially as the concept of nation in postcolonial India clashes with a differentiated understanding of sexuality, class,

caste, gender, to name a select few issues. What interests her more is the exploration of ascetic masculinity as a productive site of tension in the continued articulation of Indian nationalism from the colonial to the post-colonial moment. Chakraborty focuses, for example, on the spectacular ascendancy of the Hindu Right (or the Sangh Parivar) and addresses its concerted revival of public ascetic figures who are seen as moral and corporeal stalwarts of the body-politic. As is well-documented, the success of such revivals of public ascetic figures has aroused considerable concern among the Indian left that often views the participation of any religiously affiliated body (individual or collective) as a source of shame, fear and even atavism. For Chakraborty, such negative readings of contemporary ascetic figures (while partially warranted) refuse the variegated historical and political genealogies of the male ascetic as a figure of anti-colonial possibility and change. To cede this colonial history of dissidence and protest to the current hegemonic mobilization of Hindu male ascetics as religious bigots and jingoists is to precisely miss the point. Chakraborty's insistence on a history of India that grapples with its own fraught relationship to a gendered ascetic past is by far her most incisive and politic intervention. In so doing, Chakraborty forces a much-needed and difficult dialectic between the strategies of the Hindu Right and those of the nationalist struggle (Simona Sawhney's wonderful book, *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, makes a similar argument about the complex legacies of Sanskrit that are erased by its current over-privileged attachment to the Hindu Right).

In order to trace the variegated history of ascetic masculinities and their multiple representations, Chakraborty reflects on four key moments in Indian nationalist history: anti-colonialism, swadeshi nationalism, Gandhian nationalism, and Hindutva. Each chapter (by the author's own admission) focuses on elite male figures, from Bankim Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Rao, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and tracks the mobilization of ascetic masculinity as a means for recovering and/or igniting nationalist sentiment. In the case of Chattopadhyay and Tagore, the failed Bengali babu is revitalized through his linkages with an asceticized martial and revolutionary masculinity, emblematic, for example through representations of the Swadeshi struggle. Gandhi provides ample fodder here for the brandishment of the male ascetic body as the site, par excellence, of corporeal excess and containment. Chakraborty covers an admirable range of sources, ranging from literary texts, speeches and autobiographies, to provide us with a rich and often dizzying analysis of how and why ascetic masculinity assumes the kind of critical importance it does, from the colonial to the postcolonial moment. The book's last chapter

on 'Hindutva's "Angry Hindu" and the Rewriting of Histories,' is by far the book's most ambitious and reflective section. Here, the author engages deftly with Hindu Right propaganda that centers the muscular Hindu male body as the repository of the Hindu community-nation. Through such readings, Chakraborty draws her reader's attention to the 'epistemological methodology' of the Parivar that allows it to routinely borrow, rewrite and plunder historical archives at will to serve the interests of the Hindutva project. While many historians have warned us about the Hindu Right's predilection for historical reconstruction, few scholars have attended to the specific nuances of gender and religion as a nexus of historical authority.

That said, the book's theoretical ambition (in the best sense of the word) is both its strength and its weakness. In one of the most telling sections of the book, Chakraborty writes that her main contribution to current discussions of gender and masculinity is principally a theoretical one. By proposing to deepen what she calls the under-theorized field of colonial/postcolonial masculinity studies through the grid of religion and asceticism, she hopes to extend the question of how 'ideas of nationhood inscribe themselves onto specific gendered bodies.' Yet even as the references to the 'crisis in masculinity' and the emergence of multiple 'masculinities' abound in the text, the representations of masculinities remain ensconced in a relatively crisis-free mono-gendered framework. In other words, the reader is presented with a wide array of representations of ascetic masculinity yet most cleave firmly to the norm of heterosexuality. Surely to say that a theoretical approach to ascetic masculinity brings to light 'the crisis of masculinity' seems limited as that would be a claim that most cultural studies scholars working on any aspect of gender in India would equally make. For example, the book's conclusion clearly grapples with the gender trouble that ascetic masculinities unravel (specifically in the author's excellent reading of Swami Ramdev's success). Chakraborty exhorts the reader to attend to the 'anxieties' underwriting national/nationalist productions of masculinity, only to end with a bland call for masculinity as social construct, eschewing more complex theorizations of gender and sexuality.

Overall, *Masculinity, Asceticism, Hinduism* is an engaging and inventive book, and there is much to learn from its pages. It will appeal not only to scholars of South Asia, but also to historians, anthropologists and literary scholars working within postcolonial cultural studies.

Anjali Arondekar is Associate Professor of Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Orient Blackswan: New Delhi, 2010).

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Matters of Discretion: An Autobiography by I.K. Gujral is his life story penned in a forthright and candid manner. He entered the political fray as a freedom fighter in the British era and after the tumultuous events that rocked the Indian subcontinent in the wake of Partition crossed over from Pakistan to India, where he had to begin life from scratch.

Hay House, New Delhi, 2011, pp.19, ₹795.00



A Shot At History: My Obsessive Journey to Olympic Gold by Abhinav Bindra with Rohit Brijnath is the story of a man who fought valiantly to make his own history and with it, his nation's.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 229, ₹399.00

A Drop in the Ocean: An Autobiography by Padma Sachdev, translated by Uma Vasudev and Jyotsna Singh is a bitter journey of a Dogra girl of Jammu who fought with the orthodox and men-oriented society. She lived in an era in which women were subjected to suspicion and torture. Despite a number of turns and twists that came her way she achieved success by her dedication and love for people.

National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 347, ₹180.00

**BIOGRAPHY**

Betrayed by Latifa Ali with Richard Shears is a terrifying true story of a young woman dragged back to Iraq by her parents to live under threat of death from ancient family customs.

Mehta Publishing House, Mumbai, 2011, pp. 257 ₹400.00

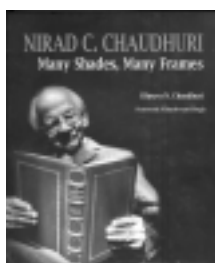


The Kiss of Saddam: Fascinating, Heartbreaking, and Above All, a Story of Courage by Michelle McDonald is based on the life and experiences of Selma Masson. Her memory of events, and takes the reader on an incredible journey, drawing an evocative picture of life in Iraq. It shows just what one woman will do to save the people she loves.

Mehta Publishing House, Mumbai, 2012, pp. 243, ₹350.00

Nirad C. Chaudhuri: Many Shades, Many Frames by Dhruva N. Chaudhuri covers Nirad Chaudhuri's early years, his struggle to find work, his stint at All India Radio, and goes on to highlight his years in Oxford, where he died at the age of one hundred and one.

Niyogi Books, Delhi, 2011, pp. 180, price not stated.



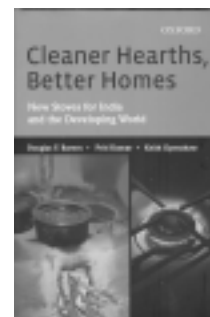
My Father Baliah by Y.B. Satyanarayana is a detailed delineation of the different facets of the unique world of untouchables—the inviolable societal boundaries and attitudes, the social, economic and cultural landscapes, the norms and patterns of intercommunity and interpersonal relationships.

HarperCollins, Delhi, 2011, pp. 211, ₹299.00

ENVIRONMENT

Cleaner Hearths, Better Homes: New Stoves for India and the Developing World by Douglas F. Barnes, Priti Kumar and Keith Openshaw draws on case studies from six Indian States—Maharashtra, Haryana,

Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal—and other stove programmes around the globe. It discusses India's best improved biomass stove programmes and suggests policies and practical ways to promote the use of cleaner burning, energy efficient and affordable stoves. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2012, pp. 170, ₹595.00

**FICTION**

Bali and the Ocean of Milk by Nilanjan P. Choudhury reimagines the eternal conflict between the gods and the asuras in a whacky thriller littered with bad jokes and corpses.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 306, ₹199.00



Opening Night by Diksha Basu is the story of Naiya Kapur, a Princeton University graduate who comes to Mumbai to chase his big Indian dream—Bollywood.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 279, ₹250.00

Sorrow of the Snows by Upendra Nath Ashk, translated from the Hindi by Jai Ratan is a satirical yet compassionate account of the penury and deprivation that began setting in in Kashmir after Independence. It is also the larger story of every farmer in India who rests the responsibility of his happiness and sorrows on God's shoulders.

Harper Perennial, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 118, ₹250.00

**MANAGEMENT**

Parenting the Office by Doris S. Davidoff, Philip G. Davidoff, Donald M. Davidoff, and Douglas G. Davidoff provides realistic solutions to management (and parenting!). In this book the authors have done a wonderful job of weaving the similarities between home and office together. It is a modern guide to understanding and implementing proven parenting principles in your office to increase your personal and your organization's success.

Mehta Publishing House, Mumbai, 2011, pp. 228, ₹350.00



Brick by Red Brick: Ravi Matthai and the Making of IIM Ahmedabad by T.T. Ram Mohan tells the story of how IIMA was conceived, its distinctive governance structure, its unique culture and how a highly gifted manager created the conditions for its enduring success. Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2011, pp. 281, ₹495.00

MEMOIR

Confessions of a Serial Dieter: Secrets from 43 Diets and Workouts that Took Me from 100 to 60 by Kalli Purie demystifies the process of living a healthy, fit and fulfilling life. The book will make you believe you can do it whether it is losing stubborn weight or chasing your dream.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 225, ₹250.00

**POETRY**

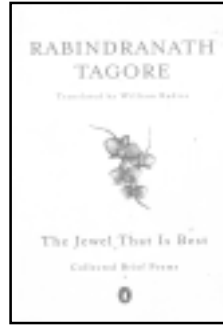
The Jewel That is Best: Collected Brief Poems by Rabindranath Tagore, translated by William Radice comprises three volumes of Tagore's poetry, 'Particles' (Kanika), 'Jottings' (Lekban) and 'Sparks' (Sphulinga).

The poems are quiet, philosophical observations that carry as much meaning as mystery, as much sensitivity as objectivity.

Penguin, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 203, ₹250.00

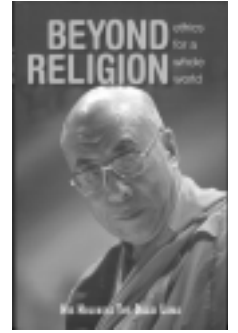
Seven Leaves, One Autumn: Poems edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Savita Singh have collaborated in creating a symphony of diverse voices. Each poem is rooted in its own milieu; and yet, these poems easily cross linguistic and national divides to call out to the reader anywhere in the world.

Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 159, ₹195.00



Lama is an essential statement from the Dalai Lama, a blueprint for all those who may choose not to identify with a religious tradition, yet still yearn for a life of spiritual fulfilment as they work for a better world.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 188, ₹399.00



The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus by Colin J. Humphreys poses an intriguing detective story. The author lays out clearly the apparent contradiction in the description of Holy Week events as given in the Gospel of John versus the Synoptic Gospels, and he proposes his own solution to what he believes is no longer a contradiction.

Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 244, ₹395.00

POLITICS

Anna: 13 Days that Awakened India by Ashutosh, demanding the enactment of a strong Lokpal Bill, was a watershed moment in post-Independence India. Coming soon after a slew of corruption exposes, the movement galvanized an increasingly disenchanted middle-class like nothing had in decades.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 226, ₹199.00



Portraits from Ayodhya: Living India's Contradictions by Scharada Dubey which studies the barricaded Ram Janmabhoomi site, travels through temple alleyways, visits the residents, ordinary and prominent of a town that has known no peace, is a startling compilation of oral history, a mighty jigsaw puzzle of voices from across the town.

Tranquebar, Chennai, 2012, pp. 272, ₹295.00

RELIGION

Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World by His Holiness The Dalai

SPORTS

Out of the Blue: Rajasthan's Road to the Ranji Trophy by Aakash Chopra is the inspiring true story of the players' motivation, their passion for cricket and of a cricket association that changed the rules of how domestic cricketers are groomed in India.

HarperCollins, New Delhi, pp. 262, ₹299.00



TRAVEL

Hot Tea Across India by Rishad Saam Mehta is the story of honey-and saffron-infused tea shared with a shepherd in Kashmir and a strong brew that revives the author after almost getting lynched by an irate mob in Kerala, Rishad takes you across the length and breadth of India from Manali to Munnar, from the Rann of Kutch to Khajuraho, with wit, sensitivity and insight.

Tranquebar, Chennai, 2011, pp. 191, ₹195.00

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A Non-Take on Kannada Cinema

Chandan Gowda

BIPOLAR IDENTITY: REGION, NATION, AND THE KANNADA LANGUAGE FILM

By M.K. Raghavendra

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 209, ₹695.00

In 2002, the Government of Karnataka prohibited the sales of a massive two-volume history of Kannada cinema published by Hampi University Press. It apparently had factual errors and, more importantly, had misrepresented Dr. Rajkumar, the Kannada film superstar. The prohibition still holds. And, well-documented work on Kannada cinema continues to be unavailable. A scholarly book on Kannada cinema, therefore, would normally be an occasion for cheer.

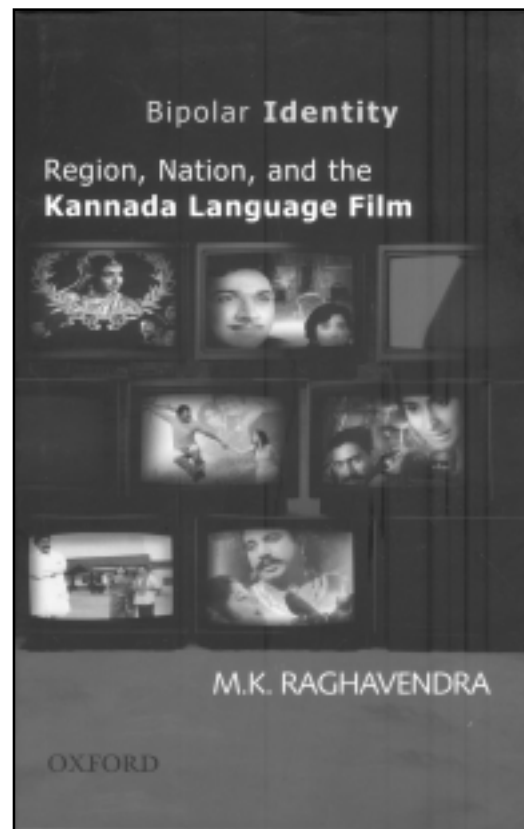
A dominant tendency within film studies has been to track the effects of social power and ideology in cinematic texts. Here, the emphasis is less on the aesthetic properties of cinematic images and sound and more on their institutional coordinates in social space. *Bipolar Identity*, too, intends to explain Kannada films as texts reflective of and engaging with local socio-political realities of their time. More specifically, its author, M.K. Raghavendra, notes: 'This is an inquiry into how local/regional identity is addressed in regional language cinema and also whether regional identity can conflict with the national identity/other identities' (p. xii). A few pages later, he says: '... the purpose (of the book) is to chart out the way Kannada cinema responds to both the region and the nation, or, to phrase it differently, how it negotiates the space between the two' (p. xivii). He does not consider 'Kannada art cinema' relevant for his discussion since it was closer (especially after the late 1970s) to the 'pan-Indian art film' promoted by the National Film Development Corporation, and free from the compulsions of addressing a geographically circumscribed audience, and had 'little local appeal' (p. xii).

A brief summary of the book's argument: Since the Mysore State was not directly ruled by the British, it experienced colonial rule differently than British India. It was a 'Hindu' kingdom. And, science and modernity came to Mysore much before Nehru introduced it in India after Independence (I am only summarizing the book here). All of these account for the differences in 'film conventions' (and 'not form') in Kannada and Hindi cinema in the pre-Independence era (p. xv). In the decades following the unification of Mysore State (later Karnataka) in 1956, the strong symbolic association of Kannada films with Mysore society began to wear off, especially post-1980. The changing economic, social and political

trends in the newly unified State explain the shifts in Kannada film conventions. And, throughout this process, Kannada cinema managed to retain its local identity vis-à-vis the ideology of the Indian nation. A parallel point to note is that Kannada films have all along been ambivalent about Bangalore's status as a Kannada city since it was initially identified more with the British than with Mysore and later became home to many central government public sector enterprises.

Bipolar Identity never clarifies whether the Kannada films themselves strove to manage their regional self-identity within a national frame. Retaining Kannada cinema's distinctiveness and autonomy appear to be ever-present motivations for the Kannada film makers. A few historical facts should complicate such a view. Two Bombay-based producers set up the Surya Film Studio, the first studio in Bangalore, in 1928; and, their Surya Film Company produced numerous silent films in Kannada. Indeed, many of the landmark films of the talkie era were directed by non-Kannada speaking persons from outside Mysore. *Sati Sulochana* (1934), the first Kannada talkie film, was directed by Chamanlal Dongagi, a Marwari. And, *Jeevana Nataka* (1942), a popular 'social' film, was directed by Wahab Kashmiri, a native of Kashmir. Until the early 1960s, most Kannada films were made in studios in Madras. In other words, myriad non-local elements have mediated the making of Kannada cinema. Raghavendra simply presumes that the identity of Kannada cinema derived from the chief features of Mysore culture without showing how that might have been achieved within the complex field of film production.

What are the 'constituent elements', to use Raghavendra's phrase, of Mysore society that made Kannada film conventions unique? First, the widespread practice of endogamy in Mysore society, whereby same-caste marital alliances were sought within geographically delimited areas, explains the presence of arranged marriages in Kannada cinema plots. Second, 'early Kannada cinema is a non-Brahmin cinema', wherein the identities of non-brahmin characters are used to suggest their vocation whereas the figure of the brahmin symbolizes caste hierarchy itself. Third, Kannada film narratives adhere to dharma more strictly than Hindi films since



they came 'from a space relatively insulated from the colonial encounter' (p. xxxii).

The sociological factors Raghavendra holds relevant for understanding Kannada film conventions are not convincing. Caste endogamy obtained in most parts of India and was not unique to Mysore. Further, by examining caste through the enumerative logic of census in cinema, he misses out on the powerful work of caste in the aesthetics of representation. His thin understanding of caste allows him to conclude, incorrectly, that caste hierarchy weakens in Kannada cinema after 1980 (p. 95-96). A scrutiny of the metaphysics of caste underlying the cinematic assemblage of image and sound can better explain the imbrication of Kannada cinema with local caste realities. Regarding the stricter embrace of dharma in Kannada films, I wish that the book also explained how that became manifest in 'a non-Brahmin Kannada cinema'.

Raghavendra's attempts to read Kannada films as an index of ongoing socio-political events stay tenuous. A sample illustration should suffice. After noting that women's dignity was not always secure in films in the 1990s, he explains:

... the demeaning of women in the Kannada films in the 1990s was caused by a lowering of the self-image of the Kannadiga, which also reflects in the lowering of the language. The lowering of the self-image may have been the result of local politics in which politicians openly disgraced themselves without being made accountable to the constituents of the region, who remained helpless. This *perhaps* led to public cynicism over whether the political choices that the public was

“ A dominant tendency within film studies has been to track the effects of social power and ideology in cinematic texts. Here, the emphasis is less on the aesthetic properties of cinematic images and sound and more on their institutional coordinates in social space. *Bipolar Identity*, too, intends to explain Kannada films as texts reflective of and engaging with local socio-political realities of their time.”

making in the region had any significance at all. Was their characteristic tolerance such a good thing, they *may* have wondered, or were they merely pliant’ (p. 109; emphases mine).

How and why popular disgust with state corruption translates into popular self-loathing, which then necessitates the negative portrayal of women in films is not explained.

Again, speaking of Kannada films in post-1990 era, Raghavendra notes that ‘the state is perceived to be withdrawing from the public space’ (p. 135). This conclusion does not hold. Beginning with *Om* (1995), many of the biggest commercial hits in the subsequent fifteen years have belonged to the genre of extremely violent films. Most of the violent youth heroes (or anti-heroes) of these films are arrested after enjoying a free hand at violence against the evil-doers. In other words, the narratives of virtuous young men’s violent confrontation with systemic evil close with an affirmation of faith in state-sanctioned law. Another feature of these violent films is their high-decibel symbolic designations of Bangalore (and Karnataka) as a Kannada space, which should qualify the book’s view that Kannada films have never been certain of the linguistic status of Bangalore.

Identifying allegorical connections between cinema and society is another mode of historicism seen in *Bipolar Identity*. None of those allegories seemed plausible. For instance, the relation between Krishnadevaraya, the ruler of Vijayanagar, and his vassal in *Vijayanagara-da Veeraputra* (1961), we are told, allegorizes, respectively, the relations between India and Mysore, wherein ‘the Indian nation... deserves more loyalty’ (p. 17). It is difficult to imagine how Krishnadevaraya, a major Kannada icon, could represent the ‘Indian nation’ and his

vassal the Mysore state. Another illustrative excerpt:

The metaphysical agent rewarding virtue in early Kannada cinema was god—in mythological films like *Harishchandra* and *Bedara Kannappa*. If ‘king’ was a way of representing Mysore, then ‘god’ became a way of allegorizing the Indian nation after 1947 (p. 19).

Just how did the nation take the place of god? We will never know from this book.

Most conclusions in *Bipolar Identity* are not self-assured: ‘Early Kannada cinema... appears a largely Shaivite cinema perhaps because (*sic*) of the dominant influence of Veerashaivas in Mysore’ (p. xxxv). Again: ‘The motif of Bangalore gaining importance is perhaps because (*sic*) of the city’s position as the state capital and not due to any developments within the city’ (p. 33). (The very many grammatical and typographical errors in the book show the publisher’s editorial indifference). Yet again: ‘Many heroines today are from Punjab, Gujarat, or Bengal, *as though* the constituents of the region have an indeterminate identity’ (p. 158; emphasis mine).

An important claim in *Bipolar Identity* pertains to how the single-party rule by the Congress in Mysore and the absence of a strong anti-brahmin movement (like the one seen in Tamil Nadu), which did not polarize any other political constituency, help explain the iconic distinctiveness of Dr. Rajkumar, the superstar of Kannada cinema. Noting that the superstar became the ‘voice of conscience’ in the late 1960s, Raghavendra writes: ‘... his adversaries are not identifiable as traders, landowners, the upper castes, or servants of the state, etc. (which are all political categories) but simply as “bad people”, who do things that are not legally and ethically correct’ (p. 38). This line of reasoning, which could found a valuable argument, remains, however, under-elaborated.

Bipolar Identity is silent on how the issue of Kannada identity was managed in film music. Kannada music directors have smuggled in sounds from Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Hollywood films and brought newness to the local soundscape without overwhelming the integrity of the latter. Moreover, popular playback singers in Kannada films like P. Susheela, S. Janaki, L.R. Eswari, S.P. Balasubramaniam and Yesudas, to name a few, are from neighbouring states. Notwithstanding their occasional mispronunciations, Sonu Nigam and Shreya Goshal are singing sensations in contemporary Kannada cinema. All of this is public knowledge. Since music and voice are important authenticating signs of identity, examining the film-makers’ cultural diplomacy *vis-à-vis* Kannada identity in their movie soundtracks would have been valuable.

Bipolar Identity has been ill-served by its ready resort to de-contextualized analytical

categories such as ‘caste’, ‘nation’, ‘region’ and ‘modern’. Despite its consideration of a wide range of Kannada films, its aim of showing how the history, politics and culture of Mysore /Karnataka mattered for Kannada cinema is not backed by careful research and analysis.

For instance, in order to understand how Kannada film conventions evolved, Raghavendra chooses *Harishchandra* (1943) and *Gunasagari* (1953), which he thinks ‘may’ share in common ‘features characteristic of early Kannada cinema’ and then adds another film, *Vasanthasena* (1941) to this list (p. xxi). For him, these films also explain why early Kannada cinema was a ‘non-brahmin cinema’:

Gunasagari appears to have no place for a brahmin character, although there are caste indicators and the protagonist’s family can be identified as Veerashaivas. In *Vasanthasena*, although Charudatta is a brahmin the film plays down this aspect—although his comic friend Maithreya is often vocal about being a ‘poor brahmin’ (pp. xxxi-xxxii).

Referring to *Harishchandra*, the only film among his chosen films which depicts a brahmin as an evil person, Raghavendra offers an incredible suggestion: ‘Considering that the director of the film R. Nagendra Rao was himself a brahmin, the wicked or comic brahmin was perhaps a convention of early Kannada cinema’ (p. xxxii).

Indeed, there is an exciting story to tell about the formation of Kannada cinematic identity. An engagement with Kannada cinema that allows the intellectual problematic to emerge from within it, as it were, can help ensure it will be worth listening to.

Raghavendra’s bibliography consists almost entirely of publications in English. The exciting archive of Kannada film magazines and the memoirs and biographies of Kannada film industry personalities might have enabled a satisfying engagement with the issue of Kannada identity.

Chandan Gowda is Professor of Sociology, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

Book News

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Highway 39: Journeys Through a Fractured Land by Sudeep Chakravarti attempts to unravel the brutal history of Nagaland and Manipur, their violent and restive present, their uncertain and yet desperately hopeful future. The author’s journey introduces the readers to stories that chill, anger and offer uneasy reflection.

Fourth Estate, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 388, ₹450.00

Pluralism and Diversity in Social Traditions

Arshia Sattar

KSHEMENDRA: THREE SATIRES FROM ANCIENT KASHMIR

Translated by A.N.D. Haksar

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp.155, ₹250.00

KAMA SUTRA: A GUIDE TO THE ART OF PLEASURE

By Vatsyayana. Translated by A.N.D. Haksar

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp.209, ₹450.00

AN.D. Haksar, that prolific and diligent translator, offers us two small but potent little volumes—one, the tried and tested and much translated *Kama Sutra* and the other, relatively unknown, Kshemendra's satires from tenth century Kashmir. Both are a pleasure to read and add to our knowledge of the secular aspects of our literary heritage and our social traditions, reminding us of a time when pluralism and diversity were commonplace. An interesting aspect of these texts, which is subtly revealed in these translations, is the scepticism with which our ancestors regarded human nature and behaviour. Kshemendra seems unconvinced of any real good in humans and Vatsyayana, the celibate who wrote the manual on sexual behaviour, is gently mocking of the practices that he himself suggests.

In *Three Stories from Ancient Kashmir* Haksar presents Kshemendra's satires, *Narma Mala*, *Kalavilasa* and *Desopadesa*, all of which are startling in their resemblance to our contemporary situation and our attitudes to functionaries of the state. Although his tales are littered with corrupt individuals of all professions and persuasions, Kshemendra saves his special venom for the bureaucrats, a breed singularly without redemption, in his view. As Haksar points out, these stories are written rather baldly, with few rhetorical flourishes or ornamentation. And that serves to highlight the unsavoury characteristics of the people that Kshemendra describes with such relish. Neither the doctor nor the Buddhist nun are spared Kshemendra's barbs, the doctor being, '...not a remover of people's ailments but of their money...' and the nun nothing less than a 'procuress'. Kshemendra also lavishes details on his character's appearances, clothes as well as features, and one does get the impression that he is having a lot of fun when he is painting these word pictures. But his own voice

“Haksar's lucid translation draws out the charm of this text, wrongfully famous only for its suggestions about sexual positions and options.”

breaks through the narrative and the descriptions and it is one of censure and moral condemnation. He judges those that he writes about. For example, women are all over these stories and like everyone else, there's not a lot to recommend them—wives are promiscuous, courtesans are greedy, widows will do anything for a little sex, even '...devotedly (placing) her pelvic region in the guru's hand.' Kshemendra's last words for the lustful widow are thus: 'May she give pleasure to all lechers.'

A perfect antidote to Kshemendra's world of deceit, hypocrisy and greed is the wonderfully idealized lifestyle presented by the *Kama Sutra*. No one needs to work here, men and women are equally of leisure with little to do other than adorn themselves and develop the good habits and skills that will make them attractive to each other. There is no cheating or deceiving or bad feeling—even adultery is cheerfully permitted and the wheres and hows of it are laid out in great detail. Apart from the material it contains, this new edition of the text is made all the more seductive with its superb production—beautifully designed pages, thick creamy paper and a soft rose pink cover.

Haksar's lucid translation draws out the charm of this text, wrongfully famous only for its suggestions about sexual positions and options. Of course they are there: the whole of Book Two is devoted to what an intrepid sexual explorer might do with his or her partner—how to kiss, how to bite, how to slap, how to have intercourse and how to behave after you're done. And in a rare moment of equality from the Sanskrit universe, a woman's pleasure is as important as a man's. That alone should make this a text worth reading.

For me, the charm of the *Kama Sutra* has always lain in the books that surround Book Two—the descriptions of the daily routine of a gentleman, for example, which include spending some time teaching his parrots and mynahs to talk. After which, he should take a nap. There's also an absolutely marvellous (and surely tongue-in-cheek) section about how to enhance one's penis size involving anointing the penis and letting it hang down through the gaps in a string bed. A courtesan, too, has many skills and tricks that she needs to develop



if she is going to be good at her job. When she needs to get rid of a lover, she might 'talk of things he knows nothing about' or 'want to sleep' when he wants to make love. Similarly, our gentlemen friends are guided through affairs with the 'wives of others' and tutored in how best to approach both maidens, courtesans and their own wives. What is particularly touching is how insistent Vatsyayana is about tenderness towards a virgin girl, how she must be eased into a sexual union over three nights, preparing her both emotionally and physically for a new relationship.

The *Kama Sutra* sees itself as a shastra (a compendium of knowledge and a manual of rules written by an expert), which accounts for its taxonomic proclivities—classifying men and women according to the size of their genitals and working out permutations and combinations on the basis of mathematical possibilities rather than any physical realities. But Haksar's elegant translation reminds us that the *Kama Sutra* is nothing so much as a treatise on manners—encouraging courtesy, generosity and politeness at all times and to as many people as possible. Although restricted to the social and sexual lives of an urban upper class, it is remarkably free of caste and creed prejudice—unlike Manu's *Dharmasastra*, where everything is predicated on the potential for pollution, determining whom one can interact with and to what degree. It is always a pleasure to be reminded that there was a time when we were less moralistic as well as less prejudiced towards each other and had a sense of humour about ourselves.

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An Editor's Editor

Aasim Khan

LUCKNOW BOY: A MEMOIR

By Vinod Mehta

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 325, ₹499.00

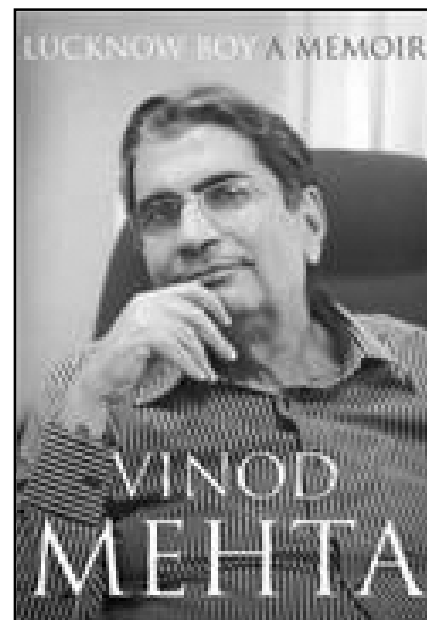
Poet and essayist W.H. Auden once remarked that every autobiography is concerned with two characters, 'a Don Quixote, the Ego, and a Sancho Panza, the Self'. Vinod Mehta's literary self-portrait *Lucknow Boy* fits the description quite well. Only that in this memoir the two characters never appear together, at least not on the same page. First we are introduced to the Self, the boy from Lucknow who spends his days loafing or *ganjing* around Lucknow's busy *galis* and bazaars, and before long he finds himself on a flight to London with nothing more than a 'BA Pass Third Class' degree in hand. And then this boy, the Self, disappears from the stage, and we meet the Ego, the editor, who is at home in the company of the nation's power elite, a good-humoured chronicler of the life and times of the metropolitan 400 of the financial and political capitals of India. In that sense, there are two books in *Lucknow Boy*, it is one part memoir, an account of the wonder years of Mehta's life in Lucknow and London and one part political diary which covers Mehta's experiences in Bombay and Delhi as a professional *mediawallah*.

Perhaps inspired by American writer Ernest Hemingway's romantic memoir of his years in Paris, Mehta has quite literally laid out his life's story in the form of a (moveable) feast. And ideally it should be consumed with a bottle of crisp *Chenin Blanc* in hand, one that matches the author's cut and dry wit. Mehta begins his story by serving delicious canapés and *amuse-bouchés* from his days in Lucknow and London in the 60s, giving us a taste of innocence of an era gone. In these initial chapters of *Lucknow Boy* Mehta also indulges his readers with revelatory personal tales including the home-grown recipe of his 'pseudo-secularism' and other such admirable eccentricities. And if one may stretch the metaphor, this fiesta is sure to leave quite a few, including Mehta's multiple girlfriends, feeling like they have been egg-devilled! But this exuberance of his salad days may not suit everyone's palette, after all magazine editors are not public figures, at least not in the way politicians, social activists, public intellectuals and film stars are. And hence, their private lives might not be of the slightest interest to many, may be with the exception of the sizeable readership of the *Outlook* magazine. Commenting on this part of the book makes little sense, this is personal stuff and it could

have remained just that. We can only go so far as to say that the story is written with maturity, the language devoid of all sentimentality, and not prosy. It would be enough to say that Mehta tells *his* own story without exerting himself too much.

It is in the second part of *Lucknow Boy*, after we are through with the hors d'oeuvre of his personal life, that Mehta moves the menu to contemporary politics, and serves us a delectable selection of *haute politics*. And it is evident that his loyalties lie firmly with his readers, and not the ruling classes whose story he tells. In these pages he fine roasts the bold and the beautiful for us, among them are some of his 'friends' from the media. His ability to narrate national events as private moments in the lives of real individuals sets Mehta apart as one of the most competent political editors of our times (or should one say outlook). In one episode after another, Mehta gives us a ring-side view of the political theatre of India's democracy, regaling us with tales of the coercive lions and cunning foxes engaged in a daily battle for survival. A real heir to the mantle held by the Khushwant Singhs, Nihal Singhs and Kuldeep Nayars of another era, Vinod Mehta is quite clearly tomorrow's editor's editor!

In this part of *Lucknow Boy* there are rough edges sure, but no hard feelings as Mehta recounts his journey from being an amateur chronicler of Bombay's low-life to a professional diarist covering New Delhi's high politics. Reading these passages, one is reminded of the classic tale of power and politics serialized in the Lewis Eliot novels by the British writer C.P. Snow. In the most celebrated novel of this thirteen book set, *Corridors of Power*, the main protagonist recounts a golden rule given to him by his mentor, 'Always be on the spot. Never go away. Never be too proud to be present.' This, the protagonist admits, was perhaps only the second of the golden rules, the first being 'Keep alive'. As Mehta reads straight from the pages of his secret diary it becomes evident that he has lived his life standing true to both these golden principles. Now he is sitting in the high offices on Raisina Hill, then he is courting a terribly disorganized Nobel laureate. One moment he is hosting a newly crowned Miss Universe, and next he is exchanging pleasantries (and chocolates!) with Sonia Gandhi. Atal Behari Vajpayee is bent on consoling him, '*aaj aap*



bahut chup hain' he asks our hero after almost shutting down his magazine. And in the middle of all this, Mehta manages to set off several 'atom bombs', a phrase he uses to describe the explosive stories that have scandalized and provoked the nation over these years.

The book is also concerned with the inner life of the press, the political economy of the news media as well as the changing 'professional ethic' in Indian journalism. For anyone interested in understanding the relationship between press, politics and power, both in pre- and post-liberalization India, *Lucknow Boy* is recommended reading. Mehta's trade-mark sagacity as an editor is in fact quite unique and there are hints in this book that it might have something to do with the absence of a victim-complex that colours the professional ethic of many of his 'Emergency years' contemporaries. As he himself asks, 'Did I defy the Emergency? Did I try and oppose Gandhi's repressive regime? Not much.' By giving an honest account of his failures and successes in getting along with the business tycoons, oligarchs and upright businessmen who employed him as the editor of their publications, Mehta has firmly put the ball in the reader's court.

With much candour and sincerity Mehta succeeds in humanizing his professional choices ever since he entered the media as the editor of *Debonair* in the 70s. As Mehta recounts how he lurched from *The Post* to *The Independent* (both now shut) to *The Pioneer*, before he managed to pull himself 'out of the gutter' and ignite the atomic inaugural issue of *Outlook* in the mid-90s, the reader feels that he is in the company of a 'decent man'. Earning this compliment of decency, as Mehta states at the beginning of the book, is the real purpose in writing this book. At another level, the singular focus that Mehta has set for himself in *Lucknow Boy* is to prove that despite what is often said and written about him, including on

“ Mehta has not only established himself as the conscience keeper of the Indian liberal, but also the man who sets the Indian liberal outlook.”

the ‘Letters to the Editor’ pages of his own magazine, he has not allowed himself to be co-opted by the Establishment. Incidentally, the term ‘Establishment’ was also coined by another journalist who first used it in 1955 in the London magazine, *The Spectator*, and in sociological jargon anyone who does not join the Establishment is considered as ‘the outsider’. Mehta’s insistence in calling his book *Lucknow Boy* is perhaps to further prime his own image (Quixotic?) as the quintessential outsider in New Delhi’s corridors of power.

None of this is to say that the book has no omissions. In fact judging *Lucknow Boy* only in terms of its candid account of India’s power elite, it can hardly match Raj Thapar’s *All These Years*, a memoir posthumously published in the early 90s. In comparison to Mehta, Thapar was herself part of Delhi’s *higher circles*, an quintessential insider who was also, though we discovered this only after her death, a meticulous diarist. While *All These Years*, which was published by her daughter Malavika Singh two years after Raj’s death, is a completely personal story, *Lucknow Boy* is mostly the work of the Ego, the editor. This argument needs no further proof than to look at the fact that Mehta has dedicated his autobiography to his long-time paymaster at *Outlook*, the opening page of the book reads ‘For Rajan Raheja, the prince of proprietors’.

Early in the book Mehta tells us that ‘more than the *Guardian*, a journal that shaped my thinking was the *New Statesman*’ and adds that ‘It was in the *New Statesman* that I first looked carefully at the nuts and bolts of political commentary.’ Much like the *New Statesman* in Britain of the 60s, *Outlook* today sets the *line* for the silent majority among middle-class Indians. And with *Lucknow Boy*, Mehta has done a remarkable job; he has let his readers know the personal context for the particular editorial line that defines *Outlook*’s journalism. And that is the final triumph for any editor, to bring his publication’s editorial line (and also his proprietor’s ego) in harmony with his own personal experiences. With this book, Mehta has not only established himself as the conscience keeper of the Indian liberal, but also the man who sets the Indian liberal outlook. And he validates this claim with his own life story.

Aasim Khan was educated at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, Jamia Millia Islamia and St. Stephen’s College in New Delhi. He has worked as a broadcast journalist and a press officer in South Asia and currently lives in London.

Of the Centre and the Periphery

Kishalaya Bhattacharjee

LOOKING BACK INTO THE FUTURE: IDENTITY AND INSURGENCY IN NORTHEAST INDIA

By M.S. Prabhakara

Routledge, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 286, ₹795.00

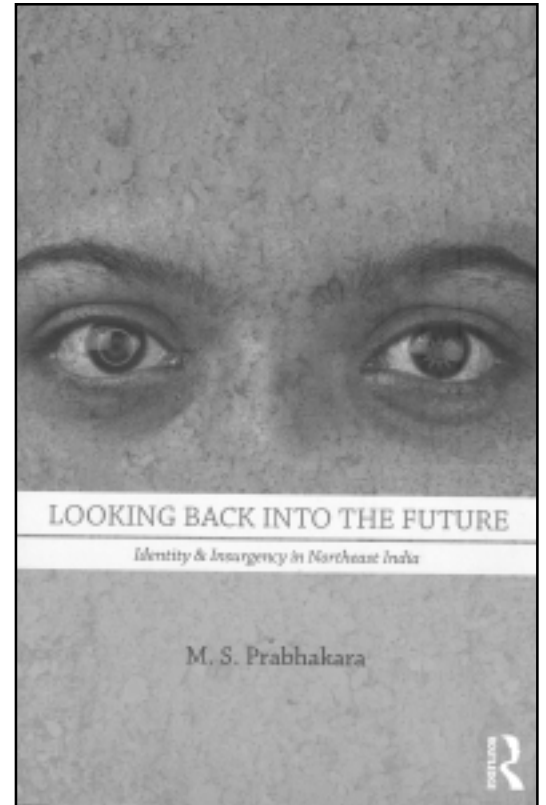
Just when journalism in India is going through a transition of sorts, when values and ethics lost in the process are being questioned, M.S. Prabhakara’s book *Looking Back Into The Future* helps restore some faith.

The book is a collection of Prabhakara’s dispatches over the last few decades from India’s North East. It is almost fashionable to tag places and situations as complex and multi-layered particularly when the understanding of that place or situation is inadequate and North East India infamously wears that hat. This book breaks that ‘complexity’ down and offers a window of opportunity to look back and pick up the answers which the present and the future will surely be asking.

It is interesting that Prabhakara divides his reportage into neat sections that in his view follows the story of this region. I am in agreement with him when he starts with the ‘politics of a script’ because language we forget has been a means of great political upheavals whether Bengali versus Urdu in East Pakistan or Bodo language in Assam. That’s where the book takes off and rightfully so. Refer to the title again and the immediate future of Assam resonates in this first chapter. There is news that along the North Bank of the Brahmaputra preparation is underway for a renewed agitation demanding a separate Bodo state. Prabhakara had written this article in 1974 where he ended on an ominous note; ‘It is not at all certain that the present agitation (if it ever goes beyond the demand for a script of choice), the incipient demand for Udayachal and an Ujani Assam state and other equally frivolous demands are not part of the whole Ne region, weakening the constituent units into heavily subsidized little bureaucratic empires, with an army of officers and policemen and contractors bloated on good things of life, keeping things in shape and maintaining Law and Order. But to divide is also to multiply.’

Prabhakara does not merely report on the language agitation of 1974 or the perceived hegemony of one script over another. He goes much deeper explaining the origin of Bodos underlining the social and cultural pegs to what is emerging as Assam’s future conflict. All the articles compiled in this book go much beyond the mere ground report.

Academic studies on conflict in India is woefully weak on primary sources and field work and books such as this can be valuable with its intensive, laborious and credible



information which is explained in the context and not left as a stand alone.

From the language movements the script moves to the Census of Assam, a document that has had far greater impact than just a data on population. Assam’s political landscape has forever been the backdrop of these census reports. Alleged illegal migration from Bangladesh and the ethnic and religious divide that drove a wedge into the social fabric of the State has been discussed with historical and empirical details.

However, the heart of Prabhakara’s book really lies in his exploration of ethnicity and identity, the two planks from which this region’s volatility is generated. Chapters like ‘Reinventing Identities’ and ‘Manufacturing Identities’ explain the search for ‘identity’, a search that has decided the course of Assam and North East India over the last five decades. This is not a discourse on identity politics but it is in these articles and columns where the genesis of a history made out of a quest for assertion of identity finds its first tell tale signs. In short chapters the history of a repressive State versus hostile ethnicities has been captured and documented.

I was, however, left wondering why the book focuses on Assam more than the other States because the subtitle to the book is about

“ It is almost fashionable to tag places and situations as complex and multi-layered particularly when the understanding of that place or situation is inadequate and North East India infamously wears that hat. ”

identity and insurgency in North East India. Tripura for example doesn't even find a mention. Manipur has been touched upon but for a book published in 2012 I expected Manipur to have stood out given that it is the most insurgent State in the region today. Nagaland has been the driver of insurgent movements across the region but the book surprisingly pushes that aside with its focus directly on Assam. Though a section of the book dwells on Nagaland and Manipur it comes much later and departs without the erudition and analysis which Prabhakara is known for. At least I for one would await another volume from him which sees the region from the end of the spectrum rather than from Assam. Manipur is certainly one of the mistakes of history that explains the assertion and aggression of a sustained armed movement. All the parameters used to explain the region's predicament echoes in Manipur.

I am not sure what the author's views on the concept of a 'North East India' is but I would like to assume that he sees it as separate entities rather than a 'patchwork quilt', a phrase he himself uses to describe the Indian State's policy towards the region. So while the Naga insurgency set the tone and tenor for insurgencies across the States, each one actually has a different story which must be told. So if you are looking for an exhaustive account of the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) in this book then you may be disappointed but the leads, linkages and context of militancy in Assam are provided meticulously and in a manner which is easy to make sense.

In the Epilogue the author presents the idea of a nation in its 'birth-throes' and sub-national assertions (or in other words insurgencies) as churning of a national State trying to sync with its own self. But like a true journalist he refuses to take any one side in this nation versus identity debate. But is sitting on the fence a dangerous course? If answers to the future can be found looking back as it were then the book provides footnotes to one of the most tumultuous times in the formation of this nation which is still grappling with the centre as well as the periphery.

Kishalaya Bhattacharjee is Bureau Chief (North-East India) NDTV.

Doyen of Delhi's Cultural Heritage

B.G. Verghese

JASHN-E-KHUSRAU: A COLLECTION

By Shakeel Hossain, Irfan Zuberi et.al.

Roli Books, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 224, ₹1995.00

Even as Delhi has been celebrating the centenary of its restoration as capital of India, a proud fragment of its built heritage and history, it is fitting that we remember the doyen of Delhi's lived cultural heritage, Amir Khusrau (1238-1325), the most loved acolyte of the great sufi divine, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya who, like his master, lies buried in Nizamuddin.

Sufi origins go back to Persia and the tradition was established at Ajmer Sharif in India by Moinuddin Chisti whose lineage is traced back to the Holy Prophet. The fourth in his *sinsila* or spiritual family was Nizamuddin Auliya, following Bakhtiyar Kaki and Baba Farid. Sufi humanism found supreme expression in poetry and music, finding ecstasy in the imagery of the beloved. This was greatly popularized in the Rubaiyats or quatrains of the Persian polymath and mystical poet, Omar Khayyam. If Firdaus, Rumi, Nizami and other Persian masters gave the world a range of poetic metre, Khusrau exploited the confluence of Persian and Hindavi (the Hindi spoken around Delhi) literary styles to break new ground with ghazals and, in musical form, qawwalis, a mix of lyricism and love in a yearning to unite with the divine.

Khusrau was court poet to the Khilji and Tughlak rulers and is said to have given a brush off to a curt summons from Mubarak Shah, among the last of the Khiljis, with the remark '*Dilli durast*'. After a celebrated life he was laid to rest near the *mazhar* of his spiritual master, Hazrat Nizamuddin. Nearly 750 years later, the shrine and *basti* around it still resound to his undying qawwali compositions. Qawwali verses were transmitted down the generations by oral tradition through descendants of the original family known collectively as Qawwali-Bachche. Though mostly congregated around Ajmer and Delhi they are scattered elsewhere too.

The history of this great tradition is well told and, more so, splendidly illustrated and even recorded on three DVDs, in this fine volume sponsored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The publication is part of a larger project to restore and conserve both the built and cultural heritage of Hazrat Nizamuddin and the Basti around it, a warren of fascinating monuments and resting places of so many of those that breathed life into Delhi over centuries, Ghalib among them. Supported by the



Ford Foundation, the larger project also includes restoration of Humayun's Tomb and gardens and revival of Sunder Nursery, which was established in 1911, and urban renewal of the Basti.

However, the focus is on the poetry and music of Amir Khusrau and the evolution of the Qawwali. Variants and innovation are bound to creep into any tradition over time. Qawwali was no exception. Lighter music began to intrude into the classical *ragas* and *talas* to be followed later by the introduction of popular foreshortened versions of qawwali in Bombay cinema and still later, by the introduction of newer electronic instruments such as the synthesizer. Qawwali was introduced to film in 1944 with 'Zeenat' and, with subsequent developments, now follows the market.

Howsoever this be, the veneration and reverence in which Hazrat Nizamuddin and Amir Khusrau were held has remained. Successive monarchs and noblemen embellished the mausoleum. The music lives on not only in the annual *urs* but in regular invocations and supplications at the *dargah* every Thursday and on other special occasions. The institution is managed by twin branches of the family, the Sajjadanishin and the Pirzadagan, rival claimants to representing the true line of succession. They maintain the shrine and receive the *nazrana* and other offerings and distribute this among the Qawwali Bachche and other *biradari* numbering some 550 to 700 members spread over different venues.

Amir Khusrau and the inclusive, humanistic sufi tradition of divine love he represents as a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya remains relevant for our times when more radical, fundamentalist forces seek to impose their will and ideology on all. The refurbishing of his memory through his verses and music provides nourishment to our plural society. The present volume and the larger project behind it constitute a valuable contribution to that cause.

B.G. Verghese, a columnist and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, was a former editor of *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* and Information Adviser to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Pleasures and Profundity of Food

Sucharita Sengupta

THE WRITER'S FEAST: FOOD AND THE CULTURES OF REPRESENTATION

Edited by Supriya Chaudhuri and Rimi B. Chatterjee

Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2011, pp xvi + 238, ₹ 525.00

As summer looms upon us, a Gujarati friend living in Calcutta becomes more and more disgruntled. Her complaint is the lack of *kesri ker no ras* (*aam ras* or mango pulp) in her city. Upon a suggestion that she purchase mangoes and make it at home, came a most painful shriek: you don't understand! In Gujarat right now, everyone is talking mango, buying mango, selling mango, cooking mango. It's the ambience! In another part of the country a while ago, students hold a Beef Festival on a university campus to assert their right to make dietary choices, and intertwined with that, assert their distinctive identities. There is a lot of food for thought here, and *The Writer's Feast*, edited by Supriya Chaudhuri and Rimi B. Chatterjee, opens up the reader to both the pleasures and profundity of food (the two not being mutually exclusive).

Food is so central to our existence and society that when one picks up the book, the first thought is: why was a book like this not written any earlier? *The Writer's Feast* negotiates the culinary terrain through a variety of texts and an equally rich set of perspectives. Although the book is organized into four segments, one each dealing with culture, gender, diaspora and the lack/ limits of food, the ideas discussed in one part often segue into and enrich other parts, creating a delightfully unbounded reading experience.

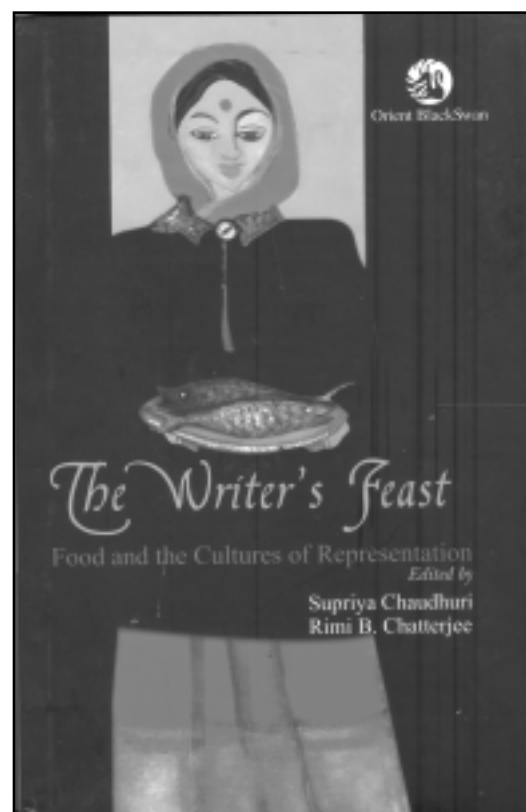
Food represents as well as constitutes culture. So do literary tropes. The book discusses the interactions between food and literature under the rubric of culture. A very interesting take is how the written-recipe or the cookbook is the most basic textual representation of food. Given how elaborate food rituals are in India, the written recipe was a fairly late entrant. Recipe books not only preserve knowledge and techniques of cooking, but also signify the riches and wealth of those who could afford food made out of exotic, expensive ingredients, and hence, those who were at the pinnacle of power. We get a sneak peek into how Indian women were incorporating the cuisine of the colonizers into their own cuisine, an inevitable fallout of the mixing of cultures, and of the hard fact that the colonizers had the upper hand.

Cuisines are markers of identity, but what the writers here explore is how diets become articles of faith to the extent that they can cause a fair bit of conflict. Notions of holy and

unholy, clean and unclean, and therefore permissible or non-permissible were received mostly through religious texts, and played themselves out through the medium of food, sharpening social cleavages, particularly those of religion and caste in the Indian context. Some myths are dispelled too. For instance, there is a tendency to stereotype Muslims as voracious meat-consumers, perhaps a legacy of Mughal rule in India. But Sufi Islam explicitly encourages vegetarianism.

A refreshing perspective of the political economy of the early spice trade between the East and the West forces us to think about how the gastronomic desires of western gentry 'drove shiploads of desperate men to sail right round a continent and found an empire'. Italian nationalism is interrogated through culinary cultures. The pizza, a favourite food worldwide today and an instant marker of Italian identity, was looked down upon within the country as a confused gastronomical experience associated with the dirty south of Italy. On the other hand, an enterprising writer travelled the length and breadth of Italy, compiling recipes and projecting the final result as a symbol of the unification of the country.

The book presents an excellent gendered reading of food. From a discussion of the writings of food columnists in early 20th century Malayali magazine, it appears that at the time when matrilineal family norms prevailed strongly in Kerala, women led free lives and were getting educated, columnists attempted to circumscribe their roles and duties as understood under patriarchy by doling out advice on how it is a woman's duty to cook, and take care of her husband and household. These norms become rigid over time, and we also note how such norms are not the preserve of Indian society. Through an analysis of novelist Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, and the works of William Faulkner, we understand that not only was the act of cooking the responsibility of women, but the burden of maintaining social relations fell upon them. Men were in a position of dominance by dint of 'bringing home the bacon', as also because greater attention was paid to the nutritional needs of the male child. Even when men took to cooking, it was mostly for outdoor cooking such as barbecue, which required the use of heavy equipment. Rebellion comes through the



consumption, by female protagonists, of forbidden food items.

The engagement of the diaspora with cuisine is explored at length. The migrant's sense of loss and nostalgia for the homeland is most acutely expressed through the food that he or she is accustomed to, that was available with ease and abundance. The memoirs of the diaspora and novels based on diasporic life represent the life gone by as one of prosperity and affluence. The present, with its limited food options, comes with the trauma of pauperization, of loss of stature. In Jhumpa Lahiri's works, the female protagonist ends up hurting herself physically in a bid to recreate the Bengali kitchen in the United States. The male protagonist heaps indignities upon his American wife by forcing her to recreate Bengali cuisine to perfection. Acquiring a taste for foreign cuisine, as we see through Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, is no guarantor of acceptance in foreign society. While the migrant's travails are genuine, there is another, more positive process going on simultaneously. When migrants monetize their cuisine by setting up restaurants, it enriches the culinary culture of the host state. The question then arises is, is this celebration of food cosmopolitanism or culinary multiculturalism genuine? There is a danger of assuming that the mere presence or enjoyment of various cuisines, or in case of the specific example from the book, the enjoyment of Asian cuisines by white Australians, may be a genuine sign of appreciation of hitherto undervalued cultures. It could merely be the objectification of such cuisine so that the badge of cosmopolitanism can be proudly worn.

So far, we have discussed a scenario where food, irrespective of preference, is available.

“ Food is so central to our existence and society that when one picks up the book, the first thought is: why was a book like this not written any earlier? *The Writer's Feast* negotiates the culinary terrain through a variety of texts and an equally rich set of perspectives.”

What happens when the individual encounters limits on access to food? Certain 19th century medical manuals, written from Bengal, played a role in prescribing diets, linking them to masculinity, community and, if one reads between the lines, the nation. These manuals made a case for general physical debility or 'weakness' (as opposed to widespread disease) among Bengali males and prescribed dietary codes to overcome this condition. These diets were also pitched as markers of civility, since it excluded what the lower-castes ate. In this case, the restrictions were man-made. But what if nature were to impose restrictions, and force one to adhere to certain foods? In an exploration of how food is not a matter of choice but a question of survival for humans, this question is explored. Accounts of mountaineers reveal that even when their body did not desire food or water, they had to keep eating and drinking, in order to fulfil their goal of reaching the summit. However, imposing such a tough test of endurance was, in the ultimate analysis, a choice that the mountaineers made when they decided to climb. Famine, on the other hand, affords no such luxury. There is endurance without dignity, as we read fiction based around the Bengal Famine of 1942-43. Literature poses the tough question: why did people starve if there is food before them? Added to the injustice was the fact that the weaker the people became, the lower were the chances that they would be able to find recourse.

Many of the themes touched upon in this volume will resonate with what we see around us even today. Literature succeeds in gleaning the politics, history, sociology and economics of food, shorn of jargon, allowing the reader to think and interpret freely. This book is highly recommended.

Sucharita Sengupta teaches in the Department of Political Science, Indraprastha College, Delhi.

Vanished Days Never Come Back

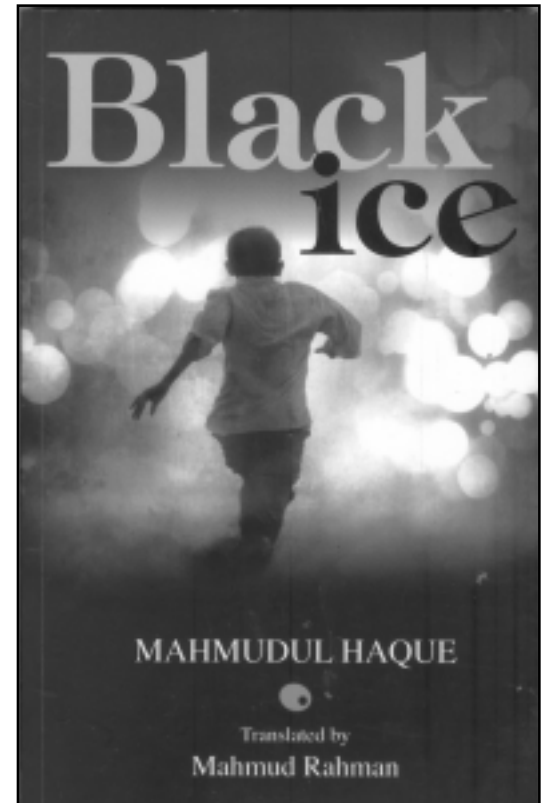
Rakhshanda Jalil

BLACK ICE

By Mahmudul Haque. Translated by Mahmud Rahman
Harper Perennial, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 123, ₹199.00

‘Everything becomes a story one day.’ So begins the PS section of this Bangladeshi contemporary classic. Its writer, Mahmudul Haque, is credited with fashioning a new idiom and a distinctly modern sensibility in the post-1947 writing coming out from what was once East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. Haque (1941-2008) belonged to the ‘twice-born generation’, those, that is, who experienced the trauma of birthing a new nation not once but twice over. Moving from Barasat on the outskirts of Calcutta to Dhaka as a small boy, he was assailed by not only new sights and sounds, but an altogether new sensibility. Being slapped by a school teacher for failing to wear the Jinnah cap, he struggled to find meaning in an irrevocably changed world. Later, during the siege and fall of Dhaka in March 1971, he witnessed the looting, killing and destruction that preceded the birth of a new nation that was expected to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the old. Each event, each new phase in his life and his country’s, each new milestone spurred him to write. Everything *became* a story one day.

Black Ice, first published as *Kalo Borof* in 1977, is quite evidently the work of a child of Partition. It carries the scars of leaving behind people and places once so dear and familiar but now accessible only in dreams. The relentless nostalgia of its protagonist, Abdul Khaleq, brings to mind another young man, Zakir, who too had to leave his home in India in search of a new one across the border in Intizar Husain’s seminal work, *Basti* (written in 1979 but set in 1971 when the war clouds loomed large over the subcontinent). But Mahmudul Haque is not Intizar Husain and *Black Ice* is not *Basti*. Despite the detachment of the protagonists, the tone of quiet aloofness of the narrator, the dream-like motifs, the ceaseless journeying into the past, the invoking of an innocent childhood free from bias and fear and the sullyng of that innocence, *Basti* and *Black Ice* are as unlike as apples and oranges. *Black Ice* has none of the allegorical richness that leavens Intezar Hussain’s narrative, nor the directness but haunting simplicity of Husain’s elegant prose. Possibly, there is something about Husain’s prose itself that remains intact and unharmed by translation. Not having read Haque in Bangla, I cannot tell, but I am struck by the comparison and the fact that it is an unfavourable one.



Vanished days never come back and time past is forever. While Khaleq, and perhaps Mahmudul Haque himself might acknowledge this, everywhere in *Black Ice*, the past hangs heavy, threatening to overwhelm the present. Why is this so? The answer is provided partly by Mahmudul Haque himself in an interview with the young Bangladeshi writer, Ahmad Mostofa Kamal, appended at the end of the novel in the PS section. The writer’s mother, he confesses, had not wanted to leave her home outside Calcutta to come to Pakistan; she had, in fact, even begun to build a new house in West Bengal. Her (two previous) visits to Dhaka had led her to conclude that only barbarians lived there, for she had seen no women moving about in public and, in her opinion, a place where women were not allowed to move freely could only be inhabited by barbarians. Yet, the communal tensions grew to such an extent and it became difficult to even step out of her home that she was forced to move to the new Muslim homeland with her children, leaving a part of their being behind. Decades later, while ostensibly claiming that there can be no love for ‘a birthplace that forces its children to leave’, Haque breaks down and his voice ‘cracks with anguish’. The hurt, evidently, is too deep. In Intezar Husain, there is no hurt; just a bewilderment that

“ Vanished days never come back and time past is forever. While Khaleq, and perhaps Mahmudul Haque himself might acknowledge this, everywhere in *Black Ice*, the past hangs heavy... ”

something as grotesque as Partition happened. Round and round, like a kite with a cut string, Husain's story drifts and soars, backwards and forwards, flitting between then and now but with no trace of bitterness.

Khaleq, a teacher in a mofussil town, finds time hanging heavy on his hands as he copes with the ennui of living in the backwaters and coping with the harangues of a demanding wife. He sits down to write about his life, especially his childhood. He remembers Puti, the girl who spoke to fish and birds, his friends Jhumi and Pachu, the vendors who came by selling *shonpapri* and *dalpapri*, the Hindu neighbour who bought him *roshmonjori* and *pantua*, his elder brother Moni Bhajjaan

who loved Chhobi Di and had left, taking with him her ribbon as a keepsake, promising to return but never did. Khaleq remembers, also, leaving his home in West Bengal, taking a ferry, setting off on a *hijrat* to a new land when life became impossibly fraught in the old one.

Years later, travelling with his wife deep into the countryside, he revisits Louhojong, the spot where he had boarded the ferry and is reminded yet again of that fateful night of migration:

Everything becomes a story one day.

Louhojong, Louhojong! For the first time in his life, that cry had pierced his ears in the deep of the night. Beside him stood Moni Bhajjaan, in his pocket a ribbon, on the ribbon the fragrance of hair, in the fragrance such sorrow, in the sorrow so much love, in the love so much of their childhood.

In the PS section, Haque recalls how Bikrampur, beside the Buriganga, fascinated him. When the monsoons flooded the low-lying plains and the river became a vast expanse of glimmering water, he would take long boat trips down the river, exploring nooks and crannies of the lush countryside. His friendship with boatmen, sharing their simple but deli-

cious meals, meeting people who travelled from one house to another by boat, as well as the lush green forested hamlets beside the river soon became a recurring motif in his novels. In *Black Ice*, the area around Ichapura appears as a fantasy world, an escape from the rigours of a humdrum meaningless life. The doctor with whom he took some of these boat trips, appears as Doctor Narhari, the conscientious, hard-working country doctor, an idealized yet human figure.

Khaleq is able to find intellectual companionship in his adult life; the emotional connection with people and places, however, seems to be missing. The generosity and wisdom, the freedom and innocence, the pluralism and syncretism of his childhood was destroyed, forever, by Partition. What came in its place — aloofness and rootlessness—is the only legacy for these midnight's children. Boat rides on the river allow an occasional escape but not a return; there is no going back, at least not forever. The only certainty, *Black Ice* seems to be suggesting, is hopelessness and alienation.

Rakshanda Jalil is working on a book-length study of Dr Rashid Jahan, communist, doctor, writer and founder-member of the progressive writers' movement.

The Dark Underbelly Of Shining India

Abdullah Khan

BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY: STORIES FROM ANOTHER INDIA

By Syeda Hameed and Gunjan Veda

HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 365, ₹399.00

On the cover of this elegantly written reportage-cum-travelogue is a shabbily dressed teenage girl holding a toddler. In the background we see the thatched houses and many tell-tale signs of extreme poverty. From the cover photograph itself you have a fair idea what this book is all about. At the top of the cover it reads *Beautiful Country: Stories from Another India*. The title is apt because the stories here are, of course, from another India; an India which is different from the India portrayed by the worshippers of mindless consumerism and votaries of crony capitalism. This India doesn't shine and remains unaffected by the impact of double digit growth. This is, in fact, the dark underbelly of one of the world's fastest growing economies where majority of Indian citizens live. They are 'resilient and courageous women and men of India whose ordinary lives and extraordi-

nary spirit inspired the author duo, Syeda Hameed and Gunjan Veda to write this book.

Beautiful Country chronicles the journey undertaken by Syeda Hameed, the social activist and member of Planning Commission, and Gunjan Veda, journalist, to that another India, the India of villages and small towns. And what they observed during their visits was quite disconcerting. From a river island of Assam to the tribal areas of Andaman Nicobar, from the freezing valleys of Ladakh to the backwaters of Alleppy in Kerala, they criss-crossed the entire country taking notes of the daily lives of the people living away from the glitz and glamour of the big cities. During their voyage they encountered the people and visited the places which rarely appear in the mainstream media.

Somewhere in this book the authors take us to Daniyalpur, Varanasi, and we are intro-



duced to Maimun Nisa and her son. And it goes like this: 'Thin face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, a frayed light pink dupatta covered her head. Her son, Imran, was tiny and had the face of an old man—shrivelled and shrunk. His feet were so thin that we wondered if he would ever be able to walk. His head seemed too big for his small frail body'. These lines speak volumes about the so-called growth that

“What strikes me most in this book is the tone of the prose which is laced with empathy and honesty.”

our country has witnessed during the last two decades. Clearly, much applauded Manmohannomics has failed to bring any noteworthy change in the lives of the people on the margins. Across the country there are many Daniyalpurs, there are many Maimun Nisas and many Imrans. If we move further, we see a school being run under the open sky in Kashmir, thousands of people going untreated on the river islands in Assam, the men and women working on handlooms from dawn to dusk for meagre salaries in Malegaon, women and children dying in the tribal areas of Maharashtra and elsewhere for want of basic medical facilities. Go further and more stories of misery and deprivation will pour in.

Are we, as responsible citizens of this country, doing our bit for our less privileged fellow Indians? Or at least are we giving voice to their concerns? Perhaps not. But, there are many individuals whose selfless services are changing the lives of the millions. In Assam we

have Sanjoy Hazarika, a former *New York Times* correspondent who is managing trustee of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES). C-NES is the agency behind the idea of boat clinics which reach out to thousands of people living on the different islands of the Brahmaputra River. Then, there are a group of doctors who have left their lucrative jobs and comfortable lives in the metros to serve the poor tribals of Chhattisgarh. Syeda and Gunjan tell us about many such courageous men and women who, in their own small ways, are making a difference.

What strikes me most in this book is the tone of the prose which is laced with empathy and honesty. The authors don't hesitate to accept that as a nation we have failed to take care of our people on the margins. This fact is generally not acknowledged by our politicians and bureaucrats. For example, in the foreword to this book, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission, lauds Syeda and Gunjan for their remarkable work but at the same time he is reluctant to accept that the bureaucracy has failed when it comes to taking governance to the downtrodden and poor people. At the very end of the foreword, he attempts discreetly to dilute the seriousness of the book. This has been the biggest problem with our bureaucratic set up that they never

accept the reality and try to brush the truth under the carpet of statistical data.

About this book, Khushwant Singh says, 'The truth about India's development, as told by those who know it, makes for a compelling read.' I can't agree more but would like to add that it also makes for a disturbing read. At the end of this review I would like to quote four lines from Allama Iqbal's *Bal-e-Jibrail* (Gabriel's Wing) which the authors have quoted at the beginning of the book.

*Khol ankh zamin dekh falak dekh fiza dekh
Mashriq se ubhartey huey suraj ko zara dekh
Iss jalwa-e-beparda ko pardon mein chhupa dekh
Ayyam-e-judai ke sitam dekh jafa dekh*

Open your eyes, look at the earth and the sky
Look at the sun rising gloriously in the East
Look at its unveiled glory hidden behind veils
Suffer the pain and torture of days of deprivation.

This offering, undoubtedly, is going to be an eye opener for those who have not seen the real India, yet.

Abdullah Khan is with Axis Bank Ltd., New Delhi.

Book Talk

Nita Berry

LIGHTHOUSE IN THE STORM : A COLLECTION OF 24 SHORT STORIES

By members of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC/ Indian section of IBBY: International Board on Books for Young People). Cover design and illustrations by Jagdish Joshi. Translated from Hindi by Toofan Mein Jyoti. Ponytale Books, Kolkata, 2012, pp. 256, ₹225.00

SEARCH FOR THE SACRED GEM

By Nilima Sinha
Ponytale Books, Kolkata, 2012, pp. 183, ₹175.00

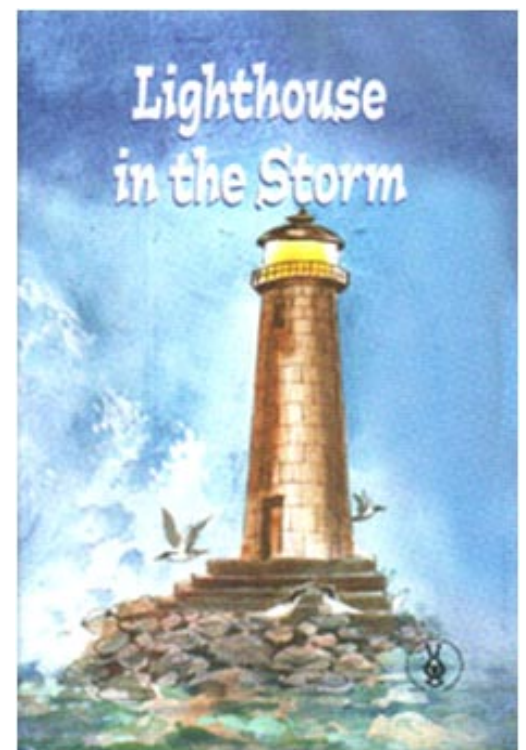
Deadly gases that fill the night air...a killer wave that washes away all...parents who go away, sometimes forever...the shadow of guns and suicide bombers...earthquakes, sickness and riots—heartbreaking tragedies, when a child's worst nightmares come true, turning his world upside down...

Here are two dozen heartwarming stories on love and loss, disaster and personal grief, abuse and aggression, sensitively written by well-known children's authors.

Whatever happened to those idyllic childhood years of innocence and carefree aban-

don, one wonders—when life was an endless playground and all was right with the world?

Maybe those wonder years never really existed, after all. Personal and domestic turmoil, unrest in the neighbourhood, everyday stresses in school and the world beyond have almost always shadowed the lives of the young, in one way or the other. What is more, terror and conflict today along with natural and man-made disasters everywhere, seem to have put childhood on the fast forward track towards adulthood. These sensitive years that oscillate between childhood and maturity beyond one's years, can be lonely and unsure, and are often devastated by physical, mental



and societal worries.

Stories have proved to be a time-tested way to help children cope, heal and adjust to adverse situations. It was with this in mind that AWIC launched its Book Therapy Project, which believes in the potential of literature to soothe traumatized young minds and radiate hope. Some of the stories in this collection, *Lighthouse in the Storm*, were developed

initially at a creative workshop on Book Therapy conducted by Manorama Jafa, the Secretary General of AWIC. Subsequently, more AWIC author members picked on a variety of themes reflecting turmoil and trauma in young lives to weave their stories around. This collection of stories—written in an array of engaging styles, is a result of that effort. Every story strikes a chord somewhere, to make the young reader reflect.

The turmoil of young years, as with the breakup of the traditional family unit, the loss of a beloved parent, suicide, sickness, AIDS, child abuse, disability, death—all subjects once taboo in children's stories, find a place in this book. These are all stories of sadness, of loss and despair. Yet they bring with them hope and recovery too as new dimensions open, opportunities come by, and the threads of life are picked up again.

The suicide bomber changes Shabir's world forever, but he finds an unexpected new friend. Ashis Mittal's American twang makes school in India an ordeal—till his prize-winning pictures make his class proud of him. The killer fumes wipe away Taabish's family, but he finds a new mother and together they vow to make a thousand smiling suns. Gauri realizes to her dismay that she is adopted—a 'Hanuman Baby', but her mother's deep love wipes away her trauma.

We meet Shankar who is lame and the butt of ridicule, but he uses his crutches in the flood to emerge a true hero. The Latur earthquake buries Amit's family, but a helpless orphan exorcises him of his nightmares. And the new brick wall that divides Neera's family brings her world down, but eventually the children knock sense into their elders.

We also witness how the creative arts effectively diminish trauma in some children. Amit is gravely ill, but he transcends his suffering through his poetic creations. And Sunil's father was brutally killed by Naxals before his very eyes, but the young boy finds his catharsis in art. His drawings incidentally, also help to track down the killer.

When it is dark enough you can see the stars, it has been said. This book was put together in the hope that the young victims of various traumatic situations could identify with some of the characters in this book. And find courage and hope through these different stories—to find answers, and weather their own storms.

Book News	Book News
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The Bogoli Phut Days: Pitki's Adventures in Assam by Tara Goswami is a book for children of all ages—to read alone or to read along with their parents and grandparents. Children from Assam will find a new way to connect to their cultural heritage and children from other places will find themselves introduced to a compelling and rich world.

HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 60, ₹299.00

The cover design and stories of *Lighthouse in the Storm* have been illustrated by Jagdish Joshi, one of India's foremost illustrators. His endearing figures and exquisite pen and ink sketches give the book a new dimension. Well produced by Ponytale Books, Kolkata, with clear fonts and printing on good paper, this is clearly a book for every thinking child.

Search for the Sacred Gem has been penned by Nilima Sinha after a long sabbatical from writing full length fiction for children. A seasoned writer of adventure and mystery stories set in Indian locales, apart from short stories, historical fiction, plays and picture books, her published fiction includes well-loved prize winners like *The Chandipur Jewels*, *Vanishing Trick at Chandipur*, *SOS from Munia*, *Adventure on the Golden Lake*, *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* etc. Therefore, one was naturally curious whether she had retained her mastery over gripping mysteries and exciting adventure trails. *Search for the Sacred Gem* does not disappoint. Indeed, one is gratified to find all this and more in this racy adventure story.

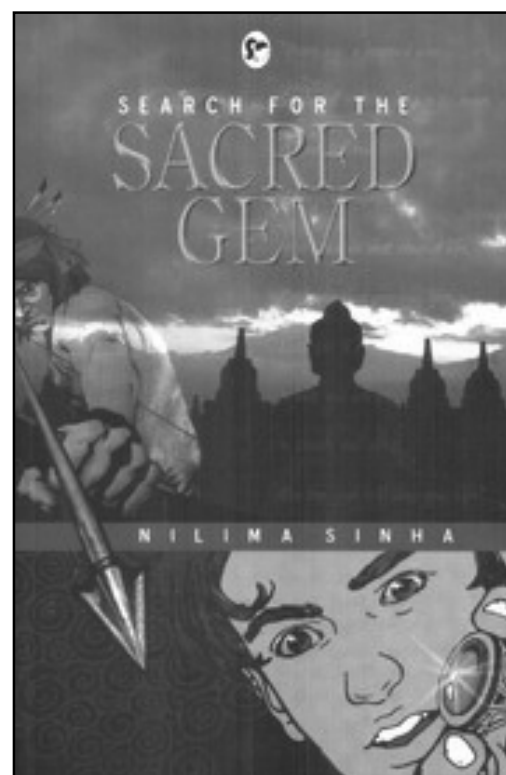
An intriguing Prologue set far back in the past dramatically introduces the mystery that is to follow. The story is set in medieval India of the eighteenth century, at a time when the once great Mughal emperors ruled Delhi. Smaller *nawabs*, *zamindars* and *rajahs* controlled the peripheral states and the *firangees* or *goras*—the European traders, vied with each other for political and material gains in a climate of strife and uncertainty.

Shankar, the protagonist is a gutsy and compassionate youngster who stumbles upon a curious stone tablet following a devastating flood, when the course of River Ganga changes. This tablet has a mysterious message etched on it, which can only be deciphered by monks at the Buddhist monastery in Patliputra, written as it is in the ancient Pali language of 'the days when the Enlightened One roamed the earth'...

*Years ago a learned one
Spoke of a stone known to none.
A beautiful hue,
A tinge of blue,
More valuable than eternal life...*

And so a quest for the precious gem begins as Shankar and his friends embark on a thrilling adventure trail. Travelling by foot, horseback and even steamer, the plucky five encounter grave dangers as they are shadowed by thugs and villains down the river to distant lands. Shankar is helped in his quest by mystical revelations from the past that appear to him from time to time in a strange darkness, when bright stars seem to explode in his head. These messages illuminate his way—till he stumbles upon the amazing truth finally.

Racy and action-packed, the book is an enjoyable, well written read, dotted with poetic descriptions, e.g., 'The golden orb of the sun



was peeping shyly above the horizon. Dawn was about to break. Whiffs of clouds were gathering together in the still grey sky, heralding rain...' History comes alive for the young reader as he reads of English and French traders in medieval India, political rivalries and vendettas, and pitched battles, where the children are often caught in the crossfire. In this uncertain period of struggle and strife in the country, when the central Mughal authority was weakening and Europeans were struggling to gain a political and economic foothold, it was easy for bandits and criminals to roam the countryside. Therefore any search for the sacred gem by the children was a daunting task indeed. The mystical revelations that appear to Shankar give the book an added spiritual depth as he realizes the truth about himself, his past life and destiny.

At a time when Indian urban children today are devouring a diet of western literature replete with macabre plots that often border on adult fiction, action-packed fantasy, unfamiliar myths and values—this book, set so firmly in Indian tradition and ways of life comes as a breath of fresh air. It gives our children something they can instinctively relate to—culturally, historically and spiritually, all through an enthralling adventure story.

Well produced by Ponytale Books, an upcoming publisher based in Kolkata, one sincerely hopes that *Search for the Sacred Gem* will find its way to many school library shelves.

Nita Berry writes short stories, picture and activity books, historical biographies and full length non-fiction for children of all ages. She has won many awards including Shankar's Medal for *The Story of Time* (CBT). She was part of NCERT's textbook team for the development of the 'Marigold' English textbooks for primary classes.

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