

*History in the Vernacular* Edited by Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008

Mohinder Singh

The essays collected in this volume deal primarily with the state of history writing in Indian vernaculars. One important qualification, however, is that those works of history that consciously follow the model of history written by academic professional based on the method of Western historiography have been excluded from 'history in the vernacular.' What then is 'history in the vernacular?' The professional works of history are produced mostly in academic spaces such as universities, research institutes, professional journals etc. and carried out mostly in English language. In the practice of professional history writing, the basic idea is to follow the basic assumptions of the method of modern historiography such as the logic of rational causation and a secular time frame. Such practices were adopted and imitated in major modern Indian languages also. But such works don't constitute vernacular histories according to the Editors of this volume. The book is a collection of essays that seek to explore other works of history writing in Indian vernaculars which were not affected by the methods and assumptions of modern historiographical practice. Some of these essays explore the practices of recording history in different vernaculars during the period that has now come to known as 'early modernity.' Some contributions, such as by Janaki Nair on political history writing in pre-colonial Mysore, by Sudeshna Purkayastha on Assamese *buranjis*, by Sanjay Subramanyam and V. N. Rao on Telugu *karnams*, by Raziuddin Aquil on history writing by prominent Muslim intellectuals, and by Kumkum Chatterjee, engage with works

of history proper in different vernaculars languages. Other contributions have analyzed texts in other genres wherein history appears as the main preoccupation - genres such as autobiography (Udaya Kumar's essay), poetry (Rosinka Chaudhary's essay), history in dream (Pradeep Kumar Dutta's essay).

The notion of 'early modernity' is one of the most interesting developments in recent historical research. While the dominant, Eurocentric concept of modernity - developed in the grand tradition of classical social theories of Marx and Weber - worked with sharp dichotomies such as tradition and modernity, the new approach uses this concept in a much more flexible way. Once the concept of modernity is loosened from its grounding in the specific history of Western Europe, signs of modernity, the proponents of this approach claim, could be found in the other parts of the world as well, just before the advent of colonial modernity, during the period between 15<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Distinguishing early modernity from colonial modernity, Partha Chatterjee, in the "Introduction" to the book dates the latter roughly to 1830s and identifies it with the changes brought about by the colonial regime in the fields of economy, education, law, and administration. According to the Chatterjee, while the category of colonial modernity has a 'fully recognizable shape' as a formation and as a historical period, the concept of 'early modern' is still in its nascent state and can not as yet be identified as a formation, socio-economic or discursive. The 'early modern', according to Chatterjee, 'modern could appear in South Asian historical evidence from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the present.' But as Chatterjee himself admits, compared to 'colonial modern,' the category 'early modern' remains 'ill defined and barely recognizable category'.

A necessary consequence of this shift is that some of the old debates of social theory are being addressed differently now. One of the most significant of these debates is

universalism versus relativism, wherein the central question is: are there universal concepts? This book collects essays that deal with one such concept in many different ways, the concept of history. The old colonial prejudice that Indians lacked works of history before colonialism based on a secular time scale is decisively being laid to rest. The essay by Sanjay Subramanyam and V. N. Rao "History and Politics in the Vernacular" addresses this question of the possibility of universal concepts. They show how the relativists, who emphasize the essential difference of cultures, too share in the old prejudices despite inversion of judgment in favour of celebrating the absence of universal concepts. Through analyzing Telugu texts of 'early modern' period they show that not only is the concept of history to be found in them but also a concept of politics based on secular morality, not *dharma* based but a *niti* based understanding of politics. An interesting paradox in some of these developments lies in the fact that a more universalist and less Eurocentric understanding of modernity is appearing with the emphasis on the vernaculars. In this way, it becomes possible, not only to disconnect the analysis of notions of history and politics in pre-colonial India from Eurocentric assumptions, but also to liberate history writing from its nationalist assumptions also.

The second volume, which is the second of two  
 in the series, contains the first volume of  
 the series. It is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The first volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The second volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The third volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The fourth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The fifth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The sixth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The seventh volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The eighth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The ninth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The tenth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.

The first volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The second volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The third volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The fourth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The fifth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The sixth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The seventh volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The eighth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The ninth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.  
 The tenth volume is a very good book, and the  
 author of it is the author of the first volume.