

editors' comment that the history of the museum in South Asia shows its distance from the popular sphere appears inconsistent with the overall emphasis of the book. Further, this collection is dominated by Indian case-studies. More studies from other South Asian countries, which share so much in common, yet have diverse histories and societies, would have been a valuable and welcome addition to this book.

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Sumit Sarkar, *Modern Times: India 1880s-1950s*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014, pp. xiv + 464, Rs. 535 (paperback), ISBN: 9788178243825.

Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983 (reprint 2007), pp. xvi + 486 (paperback), ISBN: 9780333904251.

In the early 1980s', historians were divided into three schools of historiography- the 'Nationalist', the 'Cambridge', and the 'Marxist'. Most historians were proud of their affiliation to and identification with a particular school. The Marxist and the Cambridge school were often in bitter ideological conflict with each other. In this belligerent environment, for a newcomer, history-writing was not only about learning how well you understand the past, it was also figuring out to which school you belonged. Since the last three decades, however, this era of history-writing is coming to an end. Though a number of historians still cling to the above mentioned simplistic but worn-out world view, a majority does not subscribe to it. The era of 'schools' is over.

This broad change in the Indian history-writing may be situated in the intellectual journey of Sumit Sarkar, a renowned historian of modern India. His two books— *Modern India* (1983) and *Modern Times* (2014)— which are situated thirty years apart, are representative of this broad trend in history-writing.

Since 1983, *Modern India* (*MI*) has remained a very well-known textbook on the theme through a Marxist perspective. Sarkar himself had no hesitation in acknowledging this. In his introduction to *MI*, he wrote, 'No historian can be free of bias, and unstated or unconscious bias is most dangerous of all; it is best therefore to baldly state at this point my principal assumptions' (pp.10-11). He stated four assumptions, which suggest influence of an admixture of Nationalism and Marxism in his work.

In contrast, his introduction to *Modern Times* (*MT*) does not make any such claims. Instead he argued,

Much has changed in the world of South Asian history-writing over the last three decades since I wrote a book entitled *Modern India* (1983). The passage of thirty years having rendered that work thoroughly dated, the futility of any attempt to revise it became increasingly clear to me, especially as over this period my own historical perspectives took new and unexpected directions. (p. xi)

In the following section, through examples, I have shown how Sarkar's approach to history-writing has changed from *MI* to *MT*. In *MI*, the first hundred pages offered a rich commentary on the historiography of modern India. While remaining chapters dealt with political history, these pages discussed social and economic history. *MT*, despite Sarkar's calling it a new work, appears to be an extended, revised, and re-worded version of this section of *MI*, with addition of a few new chapters. In both books, the themes discussed are conspicuously similar, only the interpretation and approach has changed. The discussion on 'deindustrialisation' in both the books is one such example. In *MI*, Sarkar had criticised Morris D. On Morris's article which called deindustrialisation a myth, he had called the arguments of Morris 'more conjectural' and 'dubious'. Against the arguments of Morris, he had cited the findings of Amiya Bagchi, who had then provided new data on deindustrialisation, which seemed very convincing. Sarkar also concluded that one has to be mindful of the 'sufferings of artisans', which he believed was caused by deindustrialisation.

In *MT*, on the contrary, a different understanding of deindustrialisation emerges. The confidence with which he wrote on deindustrialisation in *MI* seems to have waned. He finds this subject 'controversial', 'indeed peculiarly difficult to clinch in either direction'. Whether it took place or not is difficult to establish now. In *MT*, Sarkar writes,

[T]here is still sufficient room for debate, for such a large country, about the overall macro-economic trends...it was also indisputable that artisanal occupations, most notably handlooms, had far from vanished, and were in some cases even expanding. (p.207)

On this theme, his evaluation of the worth of some of the studies has also changed. In *MI*, he had dismissed the arguments of Daniel and Alice Thorner, but in *MT* he agrees with them and states that the statistics would not 'bear the burden that had been imposed on them'. On the contrary, Amiya Bagchi's arguments, which were given significant importance in *MI*, appear unimportant in the light of a subsequent critique by Marika Vicziany. In *MI*, Sarkar had unequivocally written in favour of the nationalist understanding of deindustrialisation, but in *MT* he seems to be indecisive. Though he has stated various positions on the deindustrialisation debate, he has kept a critical distance

from scholarship. In his verdict, Sarkar writes, ‘in the end the controversy [has] generated more heat than light’ (p. 209). In sum, after three decades, when Sarkar has revisited the debate, his approach is more flexible and open-ended.

But not everything has changed in *MT*. For instance, on the question of railways, Sarkar has maintained the core of his arguments. In *MI*, he had argued that the Indian tax-payers bore the burden of the railway construction, as the government had guaranteed to the British capital ‘a minimum dividend even if profits were non-existent’ (p. 37). In *MT* also he has argued so but there is a lot more. He has raised new questions which do not fit into the debate whether railways were harbingers of growth or tools of colonial exploitation, a debate which the early nationalists had begun. Sarkar’s analysis shows, there are other ways of looking at railways. He recognised the ways in which railways might have benefitted the Indian economy. For instance, he mentions the arguments of John Hurd, from a book which had earlier received short shrift from the Marxist historians. Sarkar writes,

Hurd has estimated that the fall in transport costs through railways, as compared with the available data regarding the expenses incurred in transporting goods by pack bullocks, bullock carts, or boats, meant a saving of about 9 per cent of the national income in 1900. (p.182)

In absence of any study which has contradicted Hurd’s analysis, Sarkar seems to be in agreement with Hurd. Also, the introduction of railways had unforeseen consequences. Railways, for instance, Sarkar notes were ‘indispensable for the development of anti-colonial nationalism’. Gandhi, who had condemned railways as ‘one of the worst features of modern civilisation’, when he came back to India, travelled third class for a year to experience the woes of ordinary Indians (p.184). Railways also consolidated ‘brahmanical and Islamic orthodoxies of rituals and beliefs, notably by making pilgrimages much easier as well as enabling their commercialisation’ (p.185). This discussion goes beyond the earlier nationalist debate on railways. One may cite more such examples to show a shift in Sarkar’s perspective.

In *MT*, there are also new themes. These include chapter 2 on environmental history, which shows how this subject has become important in the last three decades. The environmental history has not escaped from the influence of nationalism. Sarkar in *MT* has showed that the subject is complex, and the nationalist interpretation has its limitations. For instance, Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, in an influential work (*The Fissured Land*, 1992), had argued that during the British rule, India witnessed destruction of its forests, as a massive demand of sleepers to lay down railways had led to deforestation. Against

this Sarkar poses a sober ‘counterfactual’: ‘some of the diverse and contradictory implications would have become manifest even had the railways been built in an India not conquered by the British’ (p.179). Another important aspect which was missing in the *MI* was ‘culture’. In *MT*, in a chapter called ‘society and culture’, Sarkar has discussed such important themes as ‘language and literature’, and ‘The Visual and Performing Arts’. This again shows a shift in his perspective. In the 1980s, economic history, as per the classical Marxist orthodoxy, had dominated the research; culture seemed unimportant. On the contrary since 1980s, economic history has lost its charm, and historians have turned to the study of culture—literature, theatre, cinema, and paintings.

Since 1983, several ‘isms’ and the schools associated with them have lost their stranglehold on history-writing. History-writing is no more guided by politics in the manner in which it used to be. In 1983 when Sumit Sarkar wrote *MI*, nationalism had dominated history-writing. The history of India, the nationalist historians believed, had to be salvaged from imperialism. Historians, it was assumed, had an important role in the nation-building; they would narrate the past in ways that would strengthen the nation. A part of their duty was to discredit the neo-imperialist historiography what came to be called the Cambridge school, which denied the existence of the nation and the Indian nationalism during the late British rule.

However, since the 1980s historians have been rethinking their relationship with nationalism. One work which had immense influence on historians was Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). Before Anderson’s book appeared, ‘nationalism’ had acquired an ethereal quality. It effortlessly appeared in the writings of historians. Anderson showed that nationalism was a modern shared imagination, a product of history. Historians became aware of ‘nationalism’ in their writings; it became a subject of enquiry. Though one could differ with Anderson in his interpretation of the history of nationalism, but one could not escape from its impact. Anderson’s work and the subsequent scholarship on nationalism dislodged nationalism from its exalted status and reduced it to a ‘subject’. Historians began to suppress their nationalist feelings in their writings. In the years which followed, nationalism, to a great extent, disappeared from history-writing. The demise of Marxist influence in history-writing was even more extraordinary.

In the 1980s, the Marxist school had dominated history-writing in India. It was distinguished by its emphasis on ‘class-analysis’ and material forces. To a Marxist historian, history appeared to be a struggle between classes. Historians uncritically used terms like ‘feudalism’, ‘mode of production’, and ‘class consciousness’ in their writings.

Since the 1980s, however, most historians reinterpreted Marxist paradigm of history-writing. This has happened primarily because of the massive research which appeared in the subsequent decades; in the light of which it became difficult to sustain the simplistic Marxist interpretation of history.

From the early 1980s, when Sarkar wrote *MI*, history-writing has undergone a paradigm shift in India. In the early 1980s, history was a slogan, a revolutionary programme of action, or a narrative filled with excessive pride. With some element of nationalism in it, *MI* was, and has been, called an exercise in the 'Marxist' historiography; no other description will suit it. On the contrary, *MT* will defy any reductionist label; it cannot be identified with any school. The old rivalries between schools and historians have become redundant. History-writing in India has entered into a new phase, whose nature is yet beyond our understanding.

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Vikas Pathak, *Contesting Nationalism: Hinduism, Secularism and Untouchability in Colonial Punjab 1880-1930*, Delhi: PRIMUS BOOKS, 2018, pp. xx + 266, Rs. 1,495/-, ISBN: 9789386552792 (hardbound).

The book seeks to elaborate on the multiple and contending discourse of Indian nationalism, specifically regarding four issues in the context of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Punjab; covering roughly the period up to 1930. These are: (a) Composite Nationalism (b) Religious Nationalism specifically Hindu Nationalism (c) Secular, Citizenship-based Nationalism and (d) Dalit Nationalism. However, as a caution the writer argues: 'these visions present themselves not as watertight compartments, but as fluid entities engaged in constant dialogue with one another for appropriating the nationalist space in favour of their respective brands of nationalism' (p.2). Perhaps this overlapping nature of the discourses makes him comment: 'This rule of thumb makes me argue that the four visions discussed in this work are nationalist and not merely subnational, communitarian ideas. For all were engaged in a battle for hegemony over the cultural cast of the Indian nation'. (Preface, p. xi)

The book is divided into seven chapters: (1) 'Introduction: Exploring Multiple Discourses on Nationalism in India', (2) 'Cultural Contents and Syncretism in Colonial Punjab' (3) 'Composite Moorings of the Nation' (4) 'Regimenting

the Community: Mapping Initial Glimmers of Hindu Nationalism' (5) 'Hindu Nationalism, The Community as Nation' (6) 'Beyond the Community, Towards a Secular Nationalism' (7) 'Glimmers of a 'Dalit' Vision of Nationalism' and (8) Conclusion. While the overall thrust is to conceptualise and clarify the content and emergence of Indian Nationalism, the author tries to keep a keen eye on the consequences of this very significant socio-political articulation given that it played a significant role in enthusing and sustaining the national independence movement.

In the introduction chapter 'Exploring Multiple Discourses on Nationalism in India', the author explains the four discourses in general. Here he makes a distinction between 'Nationalism' and 'Freedom Struggle', defines 'What is Communalism' and finally reviews the existing literature regarding the four conceptions of Nationalism. The second chapter is a discussion on cultural contests and syncretism in colonial Punjab. The reconciliation of different principles, practices of religions, cultures, or schools of thought in a specific socio-political milieu can be a difficult task. The coalescing of Punjab and India could possibly tend to suggest generalisations which could come with limitations and handicaps; to illustrate, while Lajpat Rai is unencumbered to conjecture both for Punjab and India, Gandhi is restricted to India.

In the third chapter titled 'Composite Moorings of the Nation', the author places both Gandhi as well as Lajpat Rai within the notion of composite nationalism albeit with a difference; while Gandhi for the author is supposed to imagine composite nationalism in religious ways, Rai apparently remains in favour of 'secular governance' derived from 'Enlightenment modernity'. However, by 'religion' Gandhi did not mean Hinduism, Islam or the Zoroastrian religion, but 'that religion which underlies all religions.' What remains unclear is that if religion is vast enough to incorporate every opinion then 'how does it differ from being composite?' The author argues that there were two 'parallel discourses' of nationalism as constructed by the Punjab Press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: (a) composite nationalism and the other (b) religious nationalism. The former stressed on Hindu-Muslim unity not only in the contemporary period but also constructed the theme of Hindu-Muslim harmony in pre-colonial times. The later discourse highlighted the Hindu-Muslim hostility and traced this even in the Indian past thus echoing the colonial historiography. The author in this regard critiques scholars like Kenneth Jones and J.T.F. Jordens who he feels mainly focussed on the discourse of 'community strife' (p. 48). Perhaps the author's focus on the discourse of composite nationalism as constructed in the Punjab Press, restricts his appreciation of the potential