

Book Reviews

Michael Bergunder, Heiko Freese and Ulrike Schroder (ed.), *Ritual, Caste and Religion in Colonial South India*, New Delhi: Primus, 2012, pp. 386.

About twenty years ago, when I had just taken fledgling steps into the world of academic research, I tried to discuss my research topic with a scholar who has an article in the volume under review. While discussing the *Saiva* tradition in early medieval Tamilakam, which was broadly the focus of my work, I was told to revise my entire research agenda, as essentially *Saivism* was and remains a non-brahmana tradition that had been outside the domain of the brahmanical tradition. As such, to trace the evolution of the cult and philosophy of the *Saiva* tradition would require the eschewing of the hegemonic brahmanical construct. I thereafter learnt and read about the parallel traditions of scholarship in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the specific context of the colonial encounter that informed such ideas and opinions, which continue to hold sway in certain ideologically motivated academic circles. The book being reviewed here fills some gaps in the existing scholarship on the theme and addresses some very important issues related to colonial south India. Also, by focusing on caste in tandem with religion and ritual, has drawn attention to the way in which social and cultural identities have been informed and constructed in the recent past. It has thirteen chapters, which are arranged broadly into two sections on the Tamil and Telugu contexts respectively, the former subdivided on the basis of three themes pertaining to *Saiva Siddhanta*, ritual and caste. In addition, there are two appendices and a short introduction.

There are six essays that focus on specific individuals and their contribution to the framing of religious identity, reform and conversion in the region. J.M. Nallasvami Pillai (1864-1920), a lawyer by profession, was an active member of the *Saiva Siddhanta* revival movement, and editor of the journal *Siddhanta Deepika* from 1909 onwards is the subject of the first chapter (pp. 30-88). However,

the author of this essay, Michael Bergunder, believes that justice has not been done in assessing the contributions of Nallasvami Pillai because of the teleological understanding of his ideas as moderate and incoherent in comparison to the later radicalism and political articulation of the Dravidian identity (pp. 31-2). In his 1909 essay on "The Saiva Religion and the Saiva Advaita Siddhanta Philosophy", Nallasvami Pillai agreed with the view of scholars like Monier-Williams and Max Muller who saw *Saivism* as rooted in the Vedas (pp. 33-34). The 'neo-Hindu' claim that *Advaita Vedanta* was central to Hindu philosophy was rejected to argue that *Saivism* was a universal religion on the basis of the *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy, at once pointing to its eclecticism and its universality (p. 50). On the other hand, he was greatly influenced by the western debates on Universal religion that were premised on the latter's transnational reach and missionary activity, but appropriated these ideas within his understanding of the inclusive nature of *Saiva Siddhanta* (pp. 52-54, 56). Another misrepresented and marginalised figure, again because of the later day Dravidian movement's ideologues and historians, who projected a similar modernist reworking of Tamil Saivism was Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950), who was christened as Vedachalam Pillai at birth (pp. 89-105). According to Ravi Vaitheespara, by invoking the Tamil Saiva identity, essentially Adigal was configuring the Tamil nation by reconstituting it within the primordial association of caste; hence, the equation reads: Tamil Saiva – Tamil nation = Tamil caste. Vaitheespara draws a lineage for Adigal's use of caste as the 'principle interpretive tool' in the missionary and other Orientalist anti-brahmanical or pro-Dravidian discourses (pp. 90, 92). The privileging of the Tamil Vellalars vis-à-vis the Aryan-Brahmans, the conflation of myth with history and the inversion of historical material as a tool for subversion of the Brahmanical hegemony in social and cultural life are recounted by the author. By positing caste as a Tamil invention and placing the Tamil Vellalar above the

Brahman, clearly Adigal was asserting the status and trying to establish the hegemonic control of the entrenched agrarian elite on contemporary society. However, what is curious is that other than a tepid half-line criticism of Adigal's uncritical use of early Tamil literature (p. 104), there is no analysis of the historical fallacies that form the bedrock of Adigal's radical politics.

Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879) lived in Jaffna at a time when British colonial interests were seen as tied to the propagation of Christian educational institutions, leading to the creation of a super-class of Tamil elites among the Vellalar caste (pp. 113-5). The author suggests that Arumuga Navalar's reaction and response to this perceived exclusion reveals the *Saiva* Vellalar xenophobia, which manifested in his opening of Saiva schools, his upholding of *Agamic Saivism*, his uncritical acceptance of caste hierarchies, his anti-colonial and anti-modernist views, etc. However, his school textbooks to instruct the Tamils about ritual behaviour and its significance within the *Saiva Siddhanta* tradition are seen as a Gramscian hegemonic device, which allowed him to selectively align with colonial modernity to foster the interests of the Tamil Saiva Vellalars (p. 123). Peter Schalk, unlike the previous authors, does not shirk from criticism of the ahistorical, casteist and traditionalist biases of *Arumuga Navalar*, which makes this a refreshing read. But it also makes one reflect over the inability of those working on similar figures within Tamil Nadu to be critical and, in fact, to gloss over inadequacies in ideas and political articulation of these reformers. The essay on Kasibhatta Brahmayya Sastri (1863-1940) posits his anti-reform posture as the failure of a brand of cultural nationalism in Andhra (pp. 310-11). Like Nallasvami Pillai, Sastri engaged with the contemporary western defining of Hinduism, and disputed the polytheism thesis while invoking the oneness of the god-head and philosophy within the Hindu tradition (pp. 312, 316). The author's argument is weakened in the discussion on the interface between nationalism and colonialism, and on the conceptual categories of political and cultural nationalism (pp. 325-27).

The next two essays form a set, with their focus on individual Christian missionaries in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Tamil Nadu. Ulrike Schroder's study of Robert Caldwell and his *magnumopus*, *The Tinnevely Shanars*, is well known, and the focus in the essay in this volume is on the conversion of this community that allowed it to claim a trans-regional identity. That this was not something that happened out of the blue nor was this because of an external agency is an interesting point (p. 135). On the other side, Caldwell's own understanding of the ritualism and particularly what he terms

'demonolatory' is placed within the larger Evangelical missionary discourse of the 19th century (p. 138). The construction of demonolatory as a prototype of pre- and non-Brahman Tamil religion in south India was based on a confused reading of various deities and cults belonging to a single "genus demon", which in turn reinforced the claim that the Shanars/Nadarsheld a separate social entity (pp. 143-44). But this was not a one-sided identity ascription; some voices from within the community claimed a superior *varna* status—as *ksatriyas*, descendants of the Pandya kings of Madurai, as the canror or nobility of the Sangam period (pp. 152-53). The other essay focuses on Grace Stephens, an American Methodist missionary who proselytized among the women of elite Hindu and Muslim households, with the *zenana* representing the uncolonized interior space inhabited by the latter that needed to be breached by the Mission (pp. 162-63). Spencer's biographical narrative of a Brahman convert, *Sooboonagam Ammal*, allowed the counter-positioning of the Hindu female body and domestic space with the western Christian ones (p. 177). The distinctive Hindu life led by Sooboonagam, her gradual, inevitable catharsis and subsequent conversion, the "resignification of Hindu artifacts as Christian", the introduction of *zenana* parties to provide a space for the 'coming out' of the secret Christians, form the bulk of the narrative (pp. 178-82). Strangely, the author Mary Hancock concludes that "conversion may be theorised as an embodied performance that is situational, transactional and negotiated and that contributes to the formation and sedimentation of relational subjectivities" despite her own assertion that the account of Spencer presents a virtually voiceless convert (pp. 185, 171).

Torsten Tschacher's study of spatially and socially defined ritual practices which gradually began to occupy a fixed ritual imaginaire in the life of Tamil Muslims in colonial Southeast Asia (pp. 189-209). The veneration of Shah al-Hamid in the Nagore Dargah by the Tamil speaking Muslims resulted in the spread of his cult and 'branch' shrines coming up in Penang and Singapore around the early 19th century (pp. 195-96). Interestingly, in Penang, there was a tradition of throwing offerings for the Nagore saint into the sea, in the belief that these would wash up on the shore at Nagapattinam! The rich Tamil poetry exalting saints and pilgrimage centres provided a bridge across ideational and temporal boundaries, resulting in transactions between the local, regional and trans-regional sacred and cultural networks (pp. 196-97). This essay is significant because it redresses two glaring omissions in contemporary scholarship—the study of the Muslim community in colonial south India and the specificity of Islam in the early modern period

(although the primary focus here is on Southeast Asia).

There are a set of articles that focus particularly on caste, denunciation or upholding of a particular religion to reinforce caste identities and the ambivalence of colonial policy. G. Aloysius raises issues in relation to the early 20th century that continue to have a resonance today – can the subaltern evolve an identity consciousness in isolation, or does she have to address the social whole in the process of self-identification (pp. 272-3). The journal *Tamilan* started by IyotheeThassar in 1907 was predicated on the search for an identity that did not use casteist terminology, and by focusing on the language culture as an identity marker, it eschewed the reformist groups who were waving the *paraiya* identity for mobilisation of the non-brahman community (pp. 241-42). Fuller and Narasimhan focus on the other end of the caste spectrum, with the *agrahara* or Brahman residential space as the site and symbol of oppression, caste identification and affirmation (pp. 219-20). While this is more of a descriptive study of the single settlement of Tippi Rajapuram, in the fertile Kaveri delta and close to Kumbakonam, it presents the spatial transformation of a symbol of exclusion and discrimination. It is surprising that in their conclusion, the authors merely enumerate possible causes such as the migration of rural Brahmans to urban centres, their inability to bring modern agriculture to the villages (!), the non-Brahman movement and the secularisation process, as if all of these were unconnected (p. 235). But most glaring, given the title of the volume is that the colonial context in which the transformation may be set is simply missing, something that Aloysius had tantalizingly dangled before the reader. Heiko Frese's study of the bilingual (English-Telugu) journal *Satya Samvardhini*, reflects on the use of print culture for the consumption of Brahman identity (p. 307). Although motivated by the reformist zeal of one of the founders, the well-known social reformer, litterateur and journal editor Kandukuri Veeresalingam, this mouthpiece of the Prarthana Samaj in Rajahmundry took the safe path of retrieving tradition, particularly religion, for the reader and apparently received tacit support from the colonial authorities (p. 295, pp. 297-99). Venkatachalapathy adds an intermediate dimension to the discussion on caste by bringing into focus the *ksatriya* claims of the Vanniyar vis-à-vis the Nadar community in 19th and early 20th century Tamil Nadu (p. 275). He clearly demonstrates how colonial forms of knowledge production, through the census records, invocation of texts and philological and linguistic excursus, contributed to the negotiation of caste identities in the region.

V. Narayana Rao focuses on the many and varied lives

of a particular text, with specific reference to a 19th century retelling of an earlier collection of verses upholding *niti*, which the author translates as wise conduct of life (p. 332). Drawing upon his formidable expertise on Telugu literature, the author seeks to implicate colonial education for the epistemological shifts that occurred with regard to the reification of texts and authors, which sought to undermine far more sophisticated indigenous understanding (pp. 356-7). The *Sumati Satakamu* (100 verses to *Sumati*), originally a manual for upper caste men, was reinvented in the 19th century as a text of instruction for children in particular. To my mind, this excellent article sticks out in the collection because it is neither concerned with ritual nor caste nor religion in the specific context of colonial south India and, perhaps, the attraction of having the name of a scholar of Narayana Rao's stature may have motivated the authors. But it certainly doesn't justify its presence in an otherwise well-knit set of articles in this volume, a very challenging task for any editor.

It is difficult enough to organise a conference on themes that are as complex as caste, ritual, religion or colonial contexts. But to actually bring together papers that more or less weave these disparate issues together to make for a coherent publication is often almost impossible. The editors have to be congratulated for this. However, the language and in some cases the theorisation appears too abstruse and convoluted, and draws attention away from the substance of the argument. Needless to say, I felt the need to spend so much time and effort on this review because I think it is a valuable contribution to the corpus of studies on south India.

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Radhika Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast: Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, New Delhi: Primus Book, 2012, pp. viii+137, Rs. 695, ISBN: 978-93-80607-25-2.

The book under review is an extensive revised version of a doctoral thesis submitted many years ago at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The work is a study of the connection between trade and politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with special focus on Madras. Largely, it questions the uncontested view that trade and traders in pre-modern India were disconnected from the world of politics and the state, arguing instead that the

south Indian merchants depended on, and functioned within the structure and stability provided by the state. It also addresses the breakdown of the political structure within which the merchants operated, and the impact of the arrival of the Europeans, especially the English. In so doing, it explores the transitional nature of the seventeenth century and the ways in which the European trading companies, Indian states, and merchants interacted with each other.

In the introduction, Seshan very clearly states the aim of her work and makes a brief survey of the old statements regarding the position of merchants in north India. Like, the Indians were into matters spiritual. The concept of money was obviously alien; next, the contraction that India had numerous merchants but were treated outside the society and the merchants isolated themselves from the political world. The change in terms of closer links between trade and politics came with the Europeans. They did come as traders, but in the Indian context, found trade and politics to be two different entities. So, as with Britain after the Industrial Revolution, the final form of the trade-politics link emerged, in the shape of a country ruled by a trading company (pp 2-4).

The author attempts to answer these questions in her work: (i) what was the trading world of the south Indian merchants?; (ii) to what extent did it continue to include the Bay of Bengal littoral, as a whole in the seventeenth century?; (iii) what was the hinterland within which they operated?; (iv) what were the networks of trade, of connections (trading, political or any other), or society, of general access and accessibility?; (v) to whom or what did they have access, or vice versa?; (vi) what changed in all this, and to what extent, in the course of the seventeenth century and so on? The author discusses the legacies of the Cholaempire, Vijaynagar as Golconda kingdoms and of course the Mughals taking into account the works of the modern scholars on the arrival of the Europeans and their method of functioning (K.N. Chaudhuri, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Holden Furber, S. Arasaratnam, N. Steersgard, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others) and she takes up the debate with other scholars (pp. 6-7).

The main feature of the 'Introduction' is to identify the geographical region known as the 'Coromandel Coast', a corruption of the word 'Cholamandelam', a part of the Cholaempire. The region covered almost the entire stretch of the coast of modern states of TamilNadu and Andhra Pradesh, between Point Calimere in the south to Ganjam in the north. The river Pennar separates the coast into the north and the south. Seshan shows her concern with the southern part and mentions the major ports of

Bimlipattinam, Narsapurpeta, Masulipattinam, Petapoli, Armagon, Pulicat, Fort St. George or Madraspattinam (modern Chennai), Mylapore, San Thome. South of Madras was numerous ancient ports—Sadraspattinam, Pondicherry, Devanamapattinam, Porto Novo and Nagapattinam, etc. These ports tapped the weaving villages of the modern day Nellore, Chingleput and north and south of Arcot districts. The major items of trade were the Coromandel cloth, rice, diamonds, handicrafts, which were the main source of income in the south. The author has shown in Map 1 the ports of Coromandel (south of Pennar river) on p. 9, but where are other maps? The copy under review has only one map.

Chapter 1 deals with the trading world of pre-seventeenth century Coromandel. Seshan makes a survey of the of pattern and network of Asian trade long before the seventeenth century, governed by the demand for spices, houses, textiles in which Coromandel textiles played an important role in contrast to the silk of south India. It is worth mentioning that weaving communities were enjoying many privileges, which continued in later centuries. Mention has also been made by the author about the position of the different communities of the weavers in the pre-seventeenth century and their settlement. With the coming of the Europeans, their skills adopted new designs of the foreign taste; different varieties of cloth, block-printing, dyeing-process, etc. She also mentions different trading castes, import and export, different routes to distant islands, merchant guild, activities of the Ainnurruvar (or 500) group of itinerant merchants, travelling all over the south and the role of *nagaram* (pp. 17-18). The seventeenth century was the period of individual traders like Malaya Chettior Kasi Viranna; of merchants in politics, like Malaya Chetti and Mir Jumla and finally, of merchants and East India companies like Kasi Viranna and Ananda Ranga Pillai. The advances were given to the merchants, to in turn be given to the weavers to get the required quantity of cloth. New technology in the form of large ocean-going warships, assertion of power over the sea and the competition among the different Europeans for greater access to India's produce—these were the new features that the Europeans brought. The Portuguese, rightly observed by Seshan, imposed a monopoly on the existing Asian shipping through a system of strategically located forts (like Ormuz and Malacca), by using passes called *cartazes*. This was a clearly assertion of their control over the sea and sea routes. They became content with controlling the shipping, and their mixture of sword and Bible in establishing their empire was rather different from that of other Europeans.

By the time the Dutch appeared on the scene, the Portuguese had already begun to decline. They were successful in signing treaties with various local princes, which enabled them to have the exclusive right of purchase of certain specified commodities i.e. spice. The English continued to settle factories at Sumatra, Bencoolen and Priaman but their main focus remained India and her textiles. This meant on the one hand, greater attention being paid to selling European goods in India, and on the other, in the interests of profitable trade, developing a demand for Indian goods in Europe. Therefore, the seventeenth century was definitely a boom period for Indian textiles, and Indian artisans in particular were functioning in extremely favourable market conditions i.e. whatever they wove was bound to find a buyer (pp, 24-5).

Chapter 2 begins with a well-known view that the fall of Constantinople opened a new chapter in the history of commercial relations between Asia and Europe. The immediate effect was the closing of the land route and a search for the sea route to India to get Indian goods. The chapter deals with the conflict in the Deccan between Bijapur and Golconda, rise of the Nayaks. The entry of the Mughals, rise of the Marathas, role of the Brahman brothers Madanna and Akkanna has also been discussed.

The author, for most of the events given in this chapter, depends on the records of Fort St. George and blindly quotes from this primary source. For example, "the factors of Fort St. George reported that Shivaji was entertained in the king of Golconda service, and had marched through the country 'with an army of 20 million horses and 40 million foot". She did not bother to substantiate this statement with other works available to us. At least she could have consulted and compared this statement with either Jadunath Sarkar or A.R. Kulkarni's works on Shivaji and Marathas. Jadunath Sarkar in his *Shivaji and His Times* (Calcutta, 1961, p. 359) states that at the time of his death, Shivaji's army consisted of 45,000 paga (cavalry) 60,000 mercenary horsemen and one lakh infantry. A.R. Kulkarni in his *The Marathas* (New Delhi, 1996, p. 48) states that Shivaji's army was 2,08,260, including his bodyguards. Of these were 60,000 *silahadars*, 45,000 *pagas*, 10,000 *mavels* and 1,260 elephants. However, the chapter contains all details of the political event in the Deccan as how these affected the coastal areas. Relations between the companies and states was rightly characterised by extortion. Masulipattam, Pulicat and Armagon remained the bones of contentions among the Europeans. Role of the Nayaks has been highlighted at length. Disintegration of the Mughal Empire resulted in smaller kingdom, which added further chaos in the

coastal areas. The European fort acquired more importance. The companies got mint facilities and other privileges. Rivalry among the European companies, Dutch replacing the Portuguese power on the Coromandel Coast, bringing Anglo-Dutch rivalry and the late Anglo-French wars of the eighteenth century which saw the results in Europe and Asia as well have been taken care of by the author.

There was a general decline in the trade of Coromandel in the closing years of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. Keeping the eighteenth century debate alive, Seshan has rightly concluded that the seventeenth century was in the south a period of multiple political shifts. The entire debate of the eighteenth century regarding continuity and change, or prosperity and decline, can equally be applied to seventeenth century south India. A century of paradoxes, it saw both closer ties of the Indian economy with the world market, and the beginning of the process of decline. Much more than earlier, the Indian economy tied into world market conditions and so was susceptible to its fluctuations (p. 52).

Chapter 3 focuses on the different merchant communities prominent in the coastal trade. The main were the Chettis, who were part of the unique vertical division in the south India of the left-hand and right-hand castes, the *indingai-valangai* (see Appendix I). The author also explains different professional castes who were involved in intense social conflict (p.58). Further, Seshan discusses about the different categories of merchants dealing in long-distance and country trade, import and export, money lending and the role of *dubash* and brokers. Regular attempts were also being made to get the weavers to settle in the vicinity of the forts. They, along with the painters, were given advance. In the following pages, the role of multiple prominent merchants such as Mir Jumla, member of Malaya and the family of his brother Chinanna has been discussed. The Khan-i-Khanan of Bijapur has been reported to have ships. Others include Muhammed Taqi, Mir Kamaluddin and Mir Muhammad Murad who were participating in the trade. Further south, Malaya's family-Chinanna, Sasadri, Koneri and Lakshmana continued to be important (pp. 62-65).

A discussion about the chief merchants of the East India Company points to how these trustworthy merchants became very powerful and ran their private trade. Here, the role of Timanna and Viranna has been highlighted. It also throws light on the experiences of the companies and their changing hands with local rulers and the Indian merchants. A brief description of the joint stock has also been made (pp. 72-75). In the end of the

chapter, the author deals with the Philippine trade in which Makhdum Nina and his sons were playing an important role. The others were Americans, the single major group trading to Manila. The third group was of the Portuguese and the fourth was the East India Company merchants trading in their private capacity. Finally, the British succeeded in monopolising the Manila trade and firmly established the colonial rule in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (pp. 77-79).

In 'Our Fort and City', the last chapter of the book, we are told how the English headquarters at Armagon was short-lived due to certain factors. The primary interest was textiles and their exports. Therefore, the choice of place had to be (i) availability of textiles, (ii) reasonable port facilities and after that (iii) a local ruler who did not place too many hindrances in way of trade. Ultimately, they were allowed to build a fort (Fort St. George) close to the historic port of Mailapur, charges for which would be borne by the Nayak, repaid later by the English. The Company's goods sold at Fort St. George were to be entirely and permanently duty-free and in addition, the company was to pay only half the regular inland tolls in the Nayak's territories. The company was also granted mint facilities in the town (pp. 84-85).

The development of the city of Madras is, perhaps, illustrative of the way in which the English began to provide an alternative to the Indian merchants in more than one way (p. 85). The author mentions the White Town and Black Town meant for English and Indian settlements (pp. 85-87). The Black Town was divided between the two castes with the left-hand caste being given the eastern side of the town, nearer the sea, and the right-hand being given the western side. The division, according to the author, can still be seen in the older parts of Chennai (p. 99 note 21). The caste disputes were common not only in the Black Town but also at other places along the coast, including Porto Novo, Nagapattinam or Tranquebar (pp. 88-9). The role of Peddanayak in the coastal town has also been discussed as he was responsible for maintaining peace. The same way an important functionary was the conicoply (usually a Brahman) who was in charge of maintaining the account at the Choultry (an important part of administration of Madras). He began functioning after the establishment of Fort St. George (91-92). The population of Madras consisted of Telugu, Beri Chettis, Tamil Komatis, Portuguese, Armenians, Moors, a few Frenchmen, and of course Englishmen, both free men and company servants. In 1687, a charter established a Mayor and Corporation for Madras besides twelve aldermen of whom three were to be Englishmen, three Portuguese and seven 'Moors' and soon (p. 94).

The primary concern of the English was always trade. Their treaties with the Indian princes, on the grant they received from them, were directed as much towards freedom of trade in India, as security of trade in competition with the Dutch, and later, the French. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch came to be the real inheritors of the Portuguese system that had been superimposed on the Asian trading network. Both the Dutch and the English continued the system of passes, and concentrated on India and her textiles. The Dutch tried to impose a monopoly of spices through a stricter control of Asian trade keeping the Asian merchants out. And soon the Dutch earned the hostility of the merchants and the rulers, particularly of Malabar. The English, adopting some Dutch methods in raising revenues, improved their position in India. They were steadily shifting the scene of their operation to Bengal. The focus was now on rivalry with the French, which manifested itself in the Anglo-French wars. Seshan rightly concludes that with increasing rivalry with the French, the emergence of the Arcot Nizamat, and the growing private trade, Fort St. George became more important in the political, and perhaps less so in the economic scheme of affairs of the company (pp. 97-99).

'Running in the same place', the conclusive chapter, is a good survey of the whole book and deals with the findings of the author. Repetition is naturally unavoidable as the nature of work is such. In a nutshell, we are told the rise of the British power in India through sea, leaving behind her opponent Europeans in the race.

Appendix I furnishes the details of the left and right-hand division of the castes according to F. Buchaman's *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar in the year 1800*, London: Cadell and Davies, 1807.

Appendix II deals with the increase in rates sought by the washers: 2 April, 1706. They are based on the *records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Books*.

Appendix III is a copy of Cowle given to Pedda Nague [by Chambers in 1659], entered in Diary of 1686 and Appendix IV gives custom rates and prices in separate four 'Tables' based on the *Records of Fort St. George*.

Seshan has mostly relied upon the *Records of Fort St. George* as we find that in chapter II, out of 120 citations, she has taken 50 from the RFSG. Chapter III has 43 citations out of 119 and chapter IV, 59 out of 76 citations. She has also utilized the other sources such as published reports, correspondence, inscriptions, census of Madras Presidency in addition to the translated Persian sources and travellers' accounts/diaries. A detailed bibliography of secondary sources includes almost every work by the

modern scholars. Sir Jadunath Sarkar's other works could also find place. A detail index is very informative and useful. Remarks by Professor Michael N. Pearson, Emeritus Professor in History, University of New South Wales, seems to be valid: "Though much of the information here is familiar, this is still a lively and well researched account" (back cover page of the book).

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Ashok Kaul, *Kashmir: Contested Identity*, Rawat Publications, pp. 257, Rs 750

A frozen life is how people in Kashmir define their daily routine. But things are improving, many would reiterate; for some the improvement is too slow, while others wouldn't find the headway to be consistent. And, still others would completely disagree that things have changed for the better. When the present doesn't have a single interpretation or understanding, can the past have one? In Kashmir, the past and present blur, they are contested and with it the discourse of Kashmiri identity continues.

When a plethora of literature on Kashmir is available, what new does Ashok Kaul bring to the shelf of books on Kashmir? A quick reading of the preface would offer the answer: "the work tries to unfold the knots of subjectivity—the common narratives, the self-ridicule, the humour, the tales and stories—filling the cultural details and providing a swing from an epistemological perch to a hermeneutic one."

Kashmir: Contested Identity, thus, attempts to provide a perspective through a different trajectory. A Kashmiri Pandit himself, Ashok Kaul has the advantage of being an insider. This, however, does not make his work prejudiced or even one-sided. Rather, his Kashmiri identity helps to grasp the changing socio-cultural edifices and political structures better.

While underscoring the significance of Kashmir to the nation-building project of India and Pakistan, Kaul also accentuates the sense of estrangement among the Kashmiris, courtesy the idea of Kashmiri nationalism. The book, in fact, goes a step further than tracing the cultural and political history of Kashmir and tries to understand the language of history. It is too simplistic, Kaul maintains, to state that since political unification preceded cultural integration in case of the Indian nation, hence

the state of Jammu and Kashmir, like a few others, has problems. The basis of a distinct Kashmiri identity, referred to as *Kashmiriyat*, becomes debated in view of not just Kashmir's past but also its present.

In a comprehensive manner and a lucid narrative style, the book tries to identify, within the sphere of cultural studies, what ails Kashmir. Among the nine chapters in which the book is divided, the first two attempt to understand the formation of social capital and its argumentative stride. Kaul explains how Lal Ded and Habba Khatoon redeemed the Kashmiri identity within the process of shaping it. Interspersed with their verses, the narrative flows in a story format without either burdening the reader with academic jargon or putting him off with its dreariness. Moreover, Kaul finds the sentiments of the poetry of Khatoon akin to the sense of estrangement that the Kashmiris have felt over the decades. "Limiting her poetry to her personal tragedy is akin to the disempowerment of Kashmiri culture and its nativity. It is a common tragedy which has created the schism between cultural nativity and confessional religion, the two opposing but parallel line," writes Kaul.

The book goes on to trace the break in the process of continuity with non-native actors working on the fusion of religion and culture and shows how the rupture in public realm causes the power shifts to the non-native sphere. Kaul, while discussing the emergence of a native movement and its possibilities and limitations, shoes how the debate is blurred in the mist of religion and the pace of capitalism. "The new epoch marked a shift from world capitalism to global capitalism. The failure of ideologies and the collapse of functionalism made confessionals believe more strongly that religion would replace political ideology.... The search for the material weakened all the institutional structures of the nation-state.... God that was killed appeared again for jihad, this time."

More than detailing the chronological order of things, the work explores the phenomenon of people drifting apart and contains reflective observations of the author. The case studies that the author presents substantiate his arguments and also offer a better understanding of the ground reality. While trying to find the missing threads in the story of Kashmir, Kaul wonders if nativity and universalism can co-exist in case Kashmir. "Nativity is not 'mechanical standardization' of homogenization in codifications. It is about an immersion of time and space, where an epochal shift does not leave the interregnum open to be interpreted from sources unknown to it.... The efforts should bring about a viable cultural capital that can hold nativity without any complicity together," maintains Kaul.

Moreover, the reader tends to share the eagerness of

the author to understand why, despite enjoying religious choice, political freedom, dominant status, Kashmiri Muslims easily get provoked by the slightest touch to their sacred sensitivities anywhere in the world and feel their existence threatened in the Indian nation-state.

The book would not just interest academicians or researchers working on Kashmir, but will offer a coherent and comprehensive study of Kashmir conflict for common readers. It is insightful, and yet not opinionated.

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Nilendu Sen, *Sonar Gaaon*, New Delhi: Fusion Books, 2012, pp. 207, Rs.150, ISBN: 978-93-5083-151-9.

Sonar Gaaon, a narrative, depicts the journey of a doctor from his idealised idealist moral world to a socially stigmatised and labelled immoral world—a wholesale market for paid sex. His journey is itself marked by life's paradoxes: unknown parentage always haunting him, being brought up by a priest who found him in a basket kept outside the church, and post-graduating in London with support from an agency. He is called upon by the agency to join an organization engaged in community help against AIDS, rehabilitation and affirmative action at *Sonar Gaaon*. Thus begins the journey, not a smooth sail, greeted by the satire and provocatively hurled abusive laughter of the sex workers, pimps and idlers the moment his cab enters and he starts enquiring about the place he is supposed to be putting up at. However, nothing can deter him and with conviction he continues to reform the sex workers.

The book reflects on not only the mental conflict and resultant contestations in the minds of the social workers working in the area to promote healthy practices, but also the tensions due to the perceived threat to livelihood in the minds of the women in flesh trade. The continuous dialogue—open and dialectical—attempts to rationalise the working of prostitutes and to counter the arguments of the moral society. The book reflects on human follies and the contradiction-entrenched human society (not wrong to say Hindu society). What is labelled as immoral is indeed natural, what the *Tantrik* philosophy terms 'the great original throbbing in the vast empty sky manifests itself in the human beings in the form of erotic urge'. Historically, responding to the natural, the human society devised the institutional mechanisms—system of

marriage, for *Kama* also constituted one of the four *Purushartha*, essential for a Hindu to attain *Moksha*. The linking of *Kama* with higher goals of life also suggests that the state recognised the basic human needs. Outside marriage and for the men who lived away from their families due to various reasons, for their sensual pleasure, the society institutionalized the practice of prostitution. However, there is a moral dimension to it despite it being also recognized as a bio-political concern related to economic and political problems requiring regulation (Michael Foucault).

Since morality, sexuality and need satisfaction mechanisms are socially constructed under certain conditions, there exists the likelihood of the process of social reconstruction, and reconciliation between the forces of change and the change resistance. Apart from being a story of initial resistance to outside interference due to the perceived threat to livelihood, to authority structure of the head woman managing bastions of sex workers, the predicament of a doctor with a baggage of morality to live in a house of women in sex trade, served and looked after by them, the police-brothel nexus, the encounters between the pimps and the lead character, the book raises numerous issues revolving around how a society inflicts immorality on the poor women whose basic survival needs the society, ironically, fails to meet, and consequently for their livelihood they are forced to become prostitutes. Once in their existence and survival, especially those who in the process also give birth to children, the emerging critical questions raise concern for children who play outside the dingy rooms when their mothers indulge to earn, not directly for themselves but for the head prostitute. The predicament of sex workers is 'lack of power to enforce protected sex, for it would mean starvation for them'. The challenge confronting Dr Joy, on the contrary, is how to answer the livelihood questions with a philosophy that appeared to threaten their livelihood, for the so-called immoral sex-workers had not landed into prostitution of their own choice.

Interestingly, going by the history of prostitution in Bengal, as highlighted in Sumanta Banerjee's *Under the Raj: Prostitution in Colonial Bengal*, the prostitutes had a place and role to perform during the medieval times. However, eighteenth century wars, rural anarchy and economic dislocation drove them to the metropolis to earn a living through sex work. The most intriguing fact according to Banerjee is that the clientele included 'members of Raj and the new class of Bengalis serving the empire, the Bhadrakul cultivated a new set of moral codes and codes of duties but themselves remained more ambivalent than the British authorities in their reactions to the prostitutes. Paradoxically, they rented their

properties to the prostitutes but worked to drive them out of respectable areas'. In the given backdrop of historical contradictions and ambivalence characterising the relationship between the prostitutes and the society and morality dualism, the reactions of the prostitutes to noble men coming for their well-being often involved satirical remarks downplaying the moral society and its moral codes. However, the journey of reform and rehabilitation has been continuous and the lead character in *Sonar Gaaon* enters into the campaign unfazed.

While the contestations between the group of reform organisation and the union of the prostitutes remind of what Howard Becker in *Outsiders* refers to as the conflict between a set of rules of the society at large and the underworld, the persistent efforts of Dr Joy and others, despite odds at work, bring in a state of reconciliation. The latter refers to the emerging consciousness and sensitivity among the rank and file of *Sonar Gaaon* residents involved in paid sex. The story, in between, also unfolds other stories of indulgence by the lead members of the reform group with prostitutes and landing into high-risk category. Such depictions bring in the fundamental human emotions, tendencies to emotional identification with the sufferer, physical and psychic needs that culminate in passionate relationships manifested through expressed sexual relations. Even Dr Joy's encounters with the sex workers at whose place he lives; he remains, largely, unmoved like a monk to any attraction. But at a certain point of his working with them, he reaches a moment making him feel torn between his idealism and the actual events in life, indulged in consciously or unconsciously. This situation, in the environment of *Sonar Gaaon*, also reminds of V. Shantaram's *Pinjra*, the story of caged idealism, highly moralist, and the stubborn school teacher opposed to even the traditional modes of rural entertainment *Nautanki*. However, due to the turn of events, although he hates *Nautanki*, but when the dancer has a fall and resultantly a knee dislocation, he prepares a paste to apply on the knee. The moment she pulls her skirt up above the knee, the doctor's idealism and morality sink into the deep repressed sexuality and he falls for her even when he is to face indignities. Dr Joy does not suffer social indignity but at his own personal level and leaves for his home. But he is loved by people of *Sonar Gaaon* so much that ultimately he is brought back. This moment is historic in the sense that it brings in a notion of change which the group has been trying to usher in. A place known for paid sex now turns into a place of an 'indigenous model of prevention and rehabilitation of global fame'.

Author Nilendu Sen's presentation of *Sonar Gaaon* in a journey form, linking its people with outside

interventions from time by the men and women of repute, at time full with dramatic turns and the reader enabled to visualise scene after scene, the turn of events is virtually taken into a new world. Sometimes, suspense overtakes the expected event to follow, at other time the moments of grief, court trial and at times reaching an anti-climax with the lead character caught up in his idealism and secret sexual crescendo. Towards the end, it depicts the change in the attitude of sex workers, who join the endeavour to make the profession safe. What is termed immoral by the idealists, perhaps, needs correction by putting things in a wider perspective. The book, sociologically, presents a structural analysis of society with a focus on social construction of reality and reflects on the contradictions, which also in a way act as an impetus for change.

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Sabsyasachi Bhattacharya, (ed.), *Approaches to History: Essays in Indian Historiography*, ICHR Monograph Series, New Delhi: Primus, 2011.

In most Indian universities, students are almost never taught the craft and process of history-writing and much less the kind of history-writing being practised by the professional historians. Most of the writings are published and discussed in limited pages of journals which may not be accessible to all. This process of writing of histories and the analysis of the craft and findings are further limited to the practitioners of the craft. This is not a healthy sign for the growth of history writing as such. A few journals that carry book reviews do a routine job and many book reviews are done by the fellow scholars of the authors, further endangering the prospect of a fair review. The most serious problem with book reviews is that they are never objective or fair. They are done by people who may have vested interest in the book and these people (and there are hundreds of them) do more serious harm to gullible readers than the plagiarists, for they sow false seeds of knowledge and information. The job of a reviewer is to inform and educate the readers and scholars, but a reviewer with vested interests makes a mockery of the exercise and turns a serious reading into a fake exercise of intellectual falsehood.

In this sense, a survey book like the one under review helps locate the subject as it takes a long and serious look at history-writing and puts things in perspective.

Taking a closer and yet long look at the process of writing of a discipline makes the whole process

intelligible and easy to see in its whole intellectual and pedagogical context, making it a usable buy for the multi-layered users. The book reviews help us locate writings in a more individual effort and review essays take the discourse further to form a fuller picture. But many times, book reviews and review essays are written to demolish a book or line of research. It then fails to serve the larger goal of educating the potential buyer and the possible reader. Such are the ideological divides that reviews are regarded more as a case of plant than independent and impartial scrutiny of the book.

It is in this scenario that such books like the one under review serves the larger goal of making sense of writing in the larger context of discipline; the related discursive discourse is manufactured and shared. In a discipline or research micro area, all the writings have to be located and explained for easy dissemination. This book contains survey essays on different areas of research in Indian history and is edited by one of the most erudite (I never use eminent) historians who has shown a growth trajectory that inspires younger generations. Sabyasachi has been known for his serious research and good teaching skills by generations of students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) where he has taught for many years. And when he became the Chairman of ICHR, he made this body a real academic one, a real transformation for a funding agency. This book is one of the many that he helped produce to guide newer generations in the reading and writing of Indian history.

The ten essays in the book cover a wide range of areas. The essays are: "Tribal Societies and History Writing in India" (Archana Prasad), "Writings on the Maritime History of Ancient India" (Himanshu Prabha Ray), "Approaches to the Study of Ancient Technology" (Shireen Ratnagar), "Indian Labour History" (Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay), "Historiographical Survey of the Writings on Indian Military History" (Kaushik Roy), "Christian History as Indian Social History" (John C.B. Webster), "Gender and the Writing of South Indian History" (Vijaya Ramaswamy), "Contesting Exclusion, Resisting Inclusion Contradictory Trends in Historical Research in North-East India" (1800-1900) (Sajal Nag), "Study of Sikhism, Sikh History and Sikh Literature" (J.S.

Grewal), "Dalits and History Writing in India: Some Historiographical Trends and Questions" (Yagati Chinna Rao). One can easily see that the essays have covered many important areas of history-writing and lucidly present to the reader all the trends of writing in the areas. I find this remarkable for some inclusions and exclusions. Inclusions first—it has taken note of the body of work in newer areas like military history, dalits and history-writing, Christian history and gender in South Indian history. These areas are there for all of us to see but were waiting to be taken note of in a systematic and thematic manner, which the book has attempted. We needed someone to tell us all that was happening in the areas and how to read them. That is exactly the job of historiographical essays. The book has done yeoman job in that. Exclusions—the book has inexplicably left some newer areas of research and writing to suggest that the established historians are still not prepared to accept new areas as valid and good enough to be covered as part of acceptable and official history-writing. Coming from ICHR, the parent body for history in India, this is demoralising for anyone who is working on history of medicine and disease, cinema, visual culture, popular cultures, printing, business history, and above all popular history written by non-professional historians like Abraham Eraly and William Dalrymple. Like it or hate it, they are the real bridges between the lay reader and academic researchers. It is their books that sell at airport and railway station book stalls and they must be included in the anthologies like the book under review. Similarly, the medieval literature has been given a go by and so have been different schools which are part of unwritten academic and pedagogic folklore like Allahabad School, Aligarh School and so on.

I guess this stems from the reluctance of a professional historian to accept new vistas of change. But what we always forget is that newer schools of history-writing and newer areas of research never look askance at the older schools for approval, they chart their own course. Like it or hate it.

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A Rejoinder to Professor Arindam Chakrabarti's
Review of the Book
The Promise of Time: Towards a Phenomenology of Promise
published in *IIAS: Summerhill Review*, Summer 2012

I

First of all, I must thank Professor Chakrabarti for being kind enough to take up the book to read. The review does not even bring to disclosure what the book is all about, what is its fundamental stake and where does it intervene – a task every serious review ought to fulfil. Instead the reviewer devotes a substantial part of the review to Kantian notion of hope and Indian Karmic theory which do not have anything substantial to do with what the book is all about. Then the reviewer goes on to dismiss the book on grounds that simply convey that he has not even taken care to read the book. A patient, serious reading – a reading that generously opens to a thought that is unfamiliar and different without bringing it back to the familiar, closed ground of oneself – such a responsive and responsible reading discloses the different mode of argumentation and different stakes of the book that one is reading. This rejoinder is a response, not so much to the misreading of the book but to the non-reading of the book. After reading the review by Professor Chakrabarti, I felt that a statement of clarification is necessary concerning the stakes, the content, the mode of argumentation of the book, not so much to determine beforehand the possible readings to come, but to partly to open the book for the reader once more and partly to respond to Professor Chakrabarti himself.

II

The book draws its inspiration from two fold movements of thoughts: on one hand a certain phenomenology wherein the *limit* of the *sense* of phenomenology itself is at stake, a paradoxical phenomenology, that is, a phenomenology based upon a paradox. I draw this paradox from a very unusual notion of phenomenology that occurs in Martin Heidegger's later work which he calls 'phenomenology of the Inapparent', a paradoxical phenomenology in the sense that it evokes a phenomenon which is no phenomenon at all, an impossible

phenomenology in that sense. It is this 'phenomenology of the Inapparent' that has inspired the phenomenological works of Jean Louis Chrétien and Jean Luc Marion among others. To a good extent my work is sympathetic to this phenomenological opening up of phenomenology itself beyond the eidetic phenomenology of Husserl, where the notion of the "phenomenality" itself is raised again as the question at stake. The other inspiration is the messianic opening up of historical reason to a thought of redemption, nourished by the counter-dialectical resources of Schelling. "The promise of time": the title implies that time is the index of a messianic promise and fulfilment. Time is not thought here in Kantian manner as an *a priori* form of intuition, but in a messianic manner in its verbal resonance, time in relating itself to a thought of history in a counter-dialectical mode (hence beyond or outside Hegelian mode). Unfortunately, Professor Chakrabarti does not even touch the most basic problematic of the book, despite this being made clear in the very introductory chapter of the book. Instead, Professor Chakrabarti goes on to speak of 'San Francisco-based feel good guru', immediately after mentioning Kant, avoiding the fundamental intervention that the book seeks to introduce in the discursive world.

Time here is thought neither in Kantian manner as *a priori* form of intuition nor in Hegelian manner as dialectical but in a messianic manner, influenced by Franz Rosenzweig, time as the hinge that opens us to the plenitude of the infinite in its fecundity, allowing the infinity to measure us at the limit of our possibilities. This shows that I am primarily concerned with a promise which is an essentially messianic notion. Promise as I understand here, is to be taken in messianic sense, or rather, messianic non-sense. It is contra-sense or non-sense in the way that the "Inapparent" is paradoxical: it evokes an event that is not supported by concept, a phenomenon that is not exhausted by its actualization. I call it "unsaturated": phenomenon that cannot be saturated by any attributes or predicates. Such an

“unsaturated” phenomenon can only be “tautology” (Heidegger): it occurs only once, as occurring only once, it can be said to be “singular”, for singularity is, thought genuinely, essentially a tautological event.

Such messianic notion of promise is other than one promise among other promises. It is the unconditional which the thought of messianicity is at all concerned with. Messianicity insists on the unconditional, otherwise it is not messianic. What arrives (*’avenir*), arrives unconditionally. The coming of the Messiah is an unconditional arrival. It arrives when all our human possibilities and all our self-foundational acts of assertion and negation do not measure up to the unconditional demand of an absolute event that alone is redemptive. It is this coming whose promise opens the world is the promise of time. The time of this unconditional coming is a time which does not occur *in* time. It is the moment, unsaturated in any predicative structure of language, that seizes us and dispossesses us. What I call “ethics of finitude” here is concerned with an event whose effect precedes its visibility in concept; its event-character precedes its apparition in cognition. Messianic is concerned with such an event. As such, messianicity speaks in the name of an absolute or unconditional eventiveness that refuses to be recognized in any epochal or historical manifestation that can be grasped in the world-historical narratives. To put in a more negative manner, messianicity puts a question mark to the entire domain of the historical, the entire world of human “possibilities”. It interrogates all acts of legitimization on the part of any, each and every worldly power in the profane world. In that sense, messianism is the thought of the “impossible”. It is the distress of waiting for an arrival at the limit of human possibility; or, conversely, it is the hope for an arrival at the extremity of catastrophe. In the face of this arrival which is *to come* from such an extremity of time, all human power loses the force of its justification. Messianism is the suspension of law. Beyond the force of law and the gaze of power, messianism affirms that which never stops withdrawing from us and that, while withdrawing from our gaze, gives us justice at the limit of our possibility, of our capacity, of our force and of our power.

The promise that is without being “this” or “that” promise is not therefore some abstract or empty promise. In order to open up such a thought of the promise of time, it is necessary: 1. to release the notion of event and time from their subjugation to ontology, the classical ontology as that which determines ‘being as presence’, and 2. It would be necessary to put into question the metaphysical ground of history as such. Who but in Hegel such an ontology of history founds their metaphysical fulfilment?

The messianic attempt to open up the closure of the immanence of history, a messianism so very influenced by the works of Franz Rosenzweig, has to be nourished by the counter-dialectical movement. Hence is the importance for me of Schelling’s and Heidegger’s non-dialectical opening to the event of disclosure that is pre-predicative. It is the event of disclosure that is the *donation* of phenomenon itself, the unconditional gift that while granting us phenomenality, withdraws from all phenomena. Can this inapparition be thought, then, other than as “promise”? Now this is the thrust of the whole argument which I took pains to show: ‘the phenomenology of the Inapparent’ is nothing other than phenomenology of promise itself, promise in messianic sense of a structural opening of the world, as the event of disclosure that will henceforth mark all phenomena of the world as a pure gift of being. At beginning of the world lies promise. The whole domain of language opens in this promise at the very moment one opens one’s mouth – even before concept and prior to knowledge – and there is, lo, promise itself! ‘That there is promise’: this is an inapparent occurrence. It is an event before being; an opening before any predicates. Such promise is “there” even before anything is promised; rather, it is the “there” itself with which each entity of the world presents itself to us in language. One can say that such promise promises itself. It promises all presences in advance before anything being presently present. Such promise promises fulfilment which is not fulfilled in the worldly powers of the profane order, or in the immanent self-presence of our history. In the world that is constituted by “law positing and law preserving violence” (Benjamin), the promise is not yet fulfilled. Hence is the necessity, promised by promise itself: that there must remain a time *to come* beyond the work of death, beyond the violence of history, beyond the gaze of law. This remainder of time is time always *to come*. It comes from an extremity of time, as the *Eschaton* of history, from a future in an infinitive sense of the verbal. The promise of time is this promise: that there will be time after each and every end, because it is at the very opening of the world, because it has begun before any beginning. Only then may there be justice which is not possible within the immanent world of the historical reason. To have time means to have time for justice, time that justice itself demands that everything is not yet finished, that there is always a remnant – a ‘not-yet’, *Noch Nicht* (Bloch) which is not yet a *topia*, *being deprived of habitation and a name*, hence is utopian. This is the crux of messianic notion of the promise and hope that I am attempting to think in the book.

III

The question of history is one of the fundamental concerns of my work. Against the immanence of history which is grounded metaphysically by Hegel's speculative dialectics, messianism rises up with the promise of an eternal remnant of time. Hegel's speculative-dialectical understanding of history, history that is led by its immanent, irresistible force of the negative to a determinate *telos* is only a secularized version of the theological, a theodicy of history. Reduced to an immanent, determinate movement of history, eschatology loses here its tremendous intensity of inspiring the oppressed. In fact the eschatological intensity is here made to serve as finalism in the name of which sufferings, injustice and oppression in the past are passed off as necessary for the sake of, and in sight of its finality that never arrives. Messianism is a refusal of such finalism; instead it evokes, in the name of justice for the oppressed, of an eschatology or messianicity without finalism, an *Eschaton* that would not be part of the immanence of history. Now this is an impossible idea conjured up by messianism: it demands, in the name of justice, an end which is without finality and without end; or rather, it is the end after each and every end; or, even better, it is the hope of an *Eschaton* that must open up time beyond the work of death. It is the apparition, then, which is truly and genuinely inapparent, in the sense that it is not visible *in* the time of time, and *in* the time of history. Messianism is this demand of a wholly otherwise notion of event than the dialectical version of the event that occurs in the immanent plane of history, belonging to human possibility and marked by the violence of law.

In this book I have attempted to think such a notion of the event with the help of Hilderlin. The non-dialectical notion of the event is a "monstrous copulation". Instead of thinking the event as belonging to the speculative unity of the Subject, such event must – in its sudden eruption – bring together in an agonal manner the end and the beginning, hope and melancholy, time and eternity, simultaneously and at the same time. What I am, then, trying to think is not events that are periodic breaks belonging to the metaphysical principle of identity whose unity is guaranteed by the historical becoming of a speculative subject. For me, such an impossible event is the event of the messianic arrival that seizes us while disappropriating us and exposing us to our finitude. That eternity may arrive today, even now, just at this moment when I am reading this line: this possibility is an impossible possibility. Only messianicity realizes this unrealizable, and makes possible the impossible. Messianism de-formalizes time as succession of instants,

so that the eternity, which is nothing but an extremity of a radical future, may erupt *here and now*. Professor Chakrabarti does not see that here is an attempt to think of promise and hope that can't be thought on the basis of Kantian formalism at all. Hope is not here a mere 'future fruit of action' (Chakrabarti). Unlike what Professor Chakrabarti thinks, hope here is rather a messianic possibility which is the very possibility of justice that demands de-formalization of time. The past injustice that demands messianic justice must conjure up an impossible event that must erupt contra all the believable logic of time as a series of successive instants. That past may come again and may be lived again in a time to come: this alone may render justice to the past sufferings of the vanquished. It does not belong to the determinate order of the necessary and inevitability of the succession of quantifiable instants. This ethics is the unconditional ethics of redemption. It is redemption that invisibly, *inapparently* passes through history as a secret password, or as a secret index that alone can justify the historical reason. It is in this sense promise is essentially ethical which is to be thought neither on the basis of the Kantian regulative principle nor the basis of Hegelian dialectical theodicy of history. The task here is *not* to construct a theodicy of history (Professor Chakrabarti laments that I don't even hint at such possibility), but rather to open ourselves to a true eschatology evokes the ethical as delegitimization of each and every attempt of sovereignty in the profane order of world-historical politics. Born out of deepest catastrophe, it is given to the distress of those who are oppressed by history and by the world-historical politics. This thing called 'promise' is also a suspicion. It keeps insomniac vigilance over each triumphal cry of victory that is heard in distance or near. They all for such promise fall short of the absolute and the unconditional. The insufficiency of all that is a human possibility, and *that redemption does not occur at the level of world historical politics*: this is the presupposition of messianism. While this is the source of messianic distress, and this is also the very same source of messianic hope.

IV

Professor Chakrabarti laments an absence of thesis and absence of conclusions in the book. The serious reader would notice that the notions of "thesis" and "method" are put into question at the very beginning of the book and are re-affirmed at the end of the book once again. Professor Chakrabarti wants us to philosophize out of Indian context, but he himself never ceases to think in terms of "thesis" and "method" – concepts that have their historical origin in otherwise than "Indian" context. What

sad self-refutation! The word “thesis” came from the Greek Thémis who is a goddess of law, therefore is connected with *nomos*. A rigorous attention to the problem of “thesis” cannot be extracted from its connection to the problems of law, power and violence. From Heidegger onwards to Derrida and Jean Luc Nancy, the question of “thesis” is therefore problematized. The reader should therefore be left to decide for himself who is more Eurocentric here, rather than Professor Chakrabarti deciding for us. Similarly the problems of “method”, “premises” and “conclusions” need to be interrogated and re-thought. The word *methodos* came from the Greek word (not Sanskrit) *hodos* which means actually “way” or path and not “method” in the sense that has subsequently come down to us during the aftermath of René Descartes (and so also notions such as “premises” and “conclusions”). Professor Chakrabarti continuously adheres to fundamental “western” mode of reading, of argumentation and of method to engage with “Indian” philosophy – modes of argumentation and of method that themselves are already subjected to deconstruction - but he wants us to do what he does, that is, to think out of one’s ‘lived reality’ (Chakrabarti) uncontaminated by “western” discursive practices. Moreover what does one mean by “Eurocentrism”? One reads Schelling, Rosenzweig, Derrida and Benjamin: does it mean one has become Eurocentric thereby? Is it not that these thinkers themselves, in so many various ways, are confronting, deconstructing and going beyond certain dominant Eurocentrism, which make them infinitely more interesting than a philosopher who philosophizes out of ‘lived reality’ in a “methodical” manner and by positing “theses” which the European thinkers themselves have gone beyond? One is born in Algeria, lives in France and writes philosophy books that have travelled across the seas and lands: perhaps, this is the most beautiful and profoundest thing about this strange discourse called “philosophy”, that it travels beyond, exceeds the given, and welcomes the *Atopos* (namely, the “placeless”) – what is not yet lived, and what is not yet (*Noch Nicht*, as Ernst Bloch says). To name such thought, simply because these philosophers lived in a “west” (but thoughts themselves, however, never lived “there” only), as Eurocentrism and to think that to think along with such thoughts would amount to be Eurocentric is a sad judgment coming from such an important philosophers like Professor Chakrabarti. It is as if thoughts can be possessed by certain people, certain race, certain closed and immobile tradition, a certain pure lived experience. The book, however, opens to another, albeit unfamiliar and strange thought: we may be rather dispossessed by thought, as we are dispossessed by language. Far from

being pinned down to the enclosures of a given, identifiable, localizable and determinable “lived” experience and reality, philosophical language dispossesses us and opens us thereby to something new, something yet *to come*, for to live a life itself means to be freed to a journey that exposes us to other shores not yet seen. We are always already in exile, and hope is born in this desert.

In this essential sense philosophy is hope, which is a hope for not yet. It has to pass through suffering and mournfulness, because there is a violence of *topos*: space inscribes itself upon us and forces us to think in a manner that is already there. Against such abuses of history, philosophers like Nietzsche ask us to think in an “untimely” manner, opening philosophy beyond the violence of *topos*. Socrates himself, so unlike Nietzsche in other respects, is the thinker of *Atopos* par excellence, for he conjured up concepts which are not available at that time in that “space”, in that ‘lived reality’. That does not mean that philosophy thereby becomes an empty air, unless hope itself is an empty meaning for us, unless not yet of hope is pure, vacant, empty nothing. And we know that hope is not nothing, and that justice, even if not yet lived, must be hoped for, despite all mournfulness and precisely because we are mournful being oppressed by the violence of history. This is the connection of mourning with hope that Professor Chakrabarti cannot think together. We must hope precisely because what we hope for is not yet fulfilled, and precisely because there is a lament in this un-fulfillment, calling for an infinite, patient affirmation of a time *to come*, which is I call messianic, not as a particular traditional theological concept but as a philosophical opening, as structural opening of any discourse as such, a ‘messianicity without messianism’ in Jacques Derrida’s phrase. At certain place in *Republic*, Socrates says to his interlocutors: justice does not exist in the world, for all that seems to exist is suffering and injustice, but that should not be an argument against the necessity of justice, but precisely for it – for a justice *to come*, for a promise immemorally given to us as the very possibility of all and each politics and ethics and of any socially meaningful existence. Justice is the *Atopos* – which is not yet a “space”, not yet a ‘lived reality’ (Chakrabarti) – but it is not nothing, but rather condition of possibility of any *topos* as such, any space as such. This universality is the passion of philosophy par excellence. It is the promise of philosophy as it is the task of philosophy which does not have to be indifferent to cultural-social specificity (being “Indian”, to live in “Indian reality”) and to be blind to the idiomatic expressions of singularities. It is the uniqueness, the singularity and meaningfulness of the task and the promise of philosophy that it always exceeds the various

enclosures of events, existences, thoughts and readings into closed particulars and to the given, fixed, determinate identities. It is the task of philosophy, in the name of the promise of universality, to release the singularity character immanent in all events and existences and which are repressed, by philosophers themselves, into closed particularities determined by the laws of a fixed tradition. Otherwise Plotinus would not have read Indian philosophy, Japanese should not read Nagarjuna, Schelling should not have read Bhagavad Gita and Professor Chakrabarti himself, important philosopher that he is for us, should not read Kant. That they read in such manner, it only shows indirectly what philosophy is: that it is without passport; that it is the fate or rather freedom of philosophy that it travels; and that it refuses to confuse singularity with particularity.

V

Professor Chakrabarti laments that the book neither has a thesis nor a method (absence of clear premise and obvious conclusion). It indeed does not have one, which has its reason discussed in the book itself. But that does not mean that everything is in an empty air in the book. Instead of a method, the book puts into a movement certain gesture of reading, a style of disclosure which is phenomenology in a new sense. Phenomenology here is a certain mode of presentation (*Darstellung*): differential presentation of singulars in a movement of constellation, an idea that links this work with the philosophical orientation of Franz Rosenzweig. Professor Chakrabarti will not find here a conceptually and logically generative principle running through the text to an obvious conclusion. Therefore the traditional methodological principles of distinguishing praxis and theory, content and form, and a progressive movement of knowledge production, deductive or analytic, that concludes with a determinable result: all these are set aside for the sake of a mode of presentation where differential pathways of

opening to truth is displayed, in a gesture of repetition, in a constellation or configuration. The reader is invited to read each essay in its own right, in its independence, freed from an overarching "thesis" and yet to see that these essays are different, renewed mode of thinking the Same from different perspectives – the question of the promise of time. Therefore it is not "book" in the sense that the book is a totality of relations with an underlying *hegemonikon* or thesis. Instead, it is an invitation for a discontinuous reading. The rigor of such constellation thinking is a different rigor from the methodical rigor and from the rigor of a thesis. Thus, in the very introductory chapter itself, this kind of rigorous reading, thinking and presenting is named as "way" or "path" – an idea that I borrow from Martin Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig.

Professor Chakrabarti refuses to call this book "philosophical", because it does not adhere to his own principles of thesis, of premises and conclusions, of his own specific mode of argumentation. If his specific mode of thinking, arguing and reading is the only philosophical one, then I will be happy to withdraw the book from its claim to be a philosophical work. But who decides and for whom – is it Professor Chakrabarti? – What is philosophy and who is a philosopher? If it is not yet decided once for all, then it is better to leave this question open, at least for the time being, since there are obviously other modes of rigorous thinking and argumentation without having to have a thesis, a premise and conclusions. But to keep open to such a possibility without closure demands that we really learn to read a book rather than pre-emptying such possibilities by hasty judgments. This means that we learn to open ourselves to the unfamiliar, to the strange, to the not yet space of the book without bringing it back to the familiar self-grounded and self-validating enclosures of thought.

SAITYA BRATA DAS