

Book Reviews

Urvi Mukhopadhyay, *The Medieval in Film: Representing a Contested Time on Indian Screen (1920s-1960s)*, New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013, pp. xiv + 318, Rs. 790/-, ISBN: 978-81-250-5098-8.

The book under review examines the representations of the 'medieval' era in popular 'historical films' produced during the five most vibrant decades (i.e., from 1920s to 1960s) of modern Indian history. Through the study of these cinematic renderings of the medieval, Mukhopadhyay tries to demystify the relentless conflict between the communal and the secular political forces of the time with each trying to interpret the medieval to legitimize its political stand and to proliferate its "idea of India." As a result, the medieval emerged as a "contested" period of Indian history. In this book, Mukhopadhyay attempts to explain how cinema negotiates these contesting perceptions of the medieval.

The 'Introduction' of the book lucidly sketches out the theoretical and thematic framework that the author intends to explore. Of late, argues Mukhopadhyay, visual media and film narratives have emerged as important documents to understand the past. She analyses the complex relation between cinema and history, and elaborates on the techniques and sources employed in cinema to recount a past that is different from an academic or an official one. She asserts that historical films assimilate diverse perceptions of the past, such as collective memories, legendary tales and folk literature and others, prevalent in the "wider popular arena."

The first chapter of the book focuses on the construction as well as the representation of the medieval in nineteenth and early twentieth century historiography, and offers a valuable historical, cultural and political background to the origin and growth of "historical films." In the first section of this chapter, Mukhopadhyay gives a succinct intellectual history of the process of historiography in India. She elaborates how colonial historians initiated the process of history writing in India and laid down the

tripartite framework (the ancient, the medieval and the modern) to approach and to interpret the past. However, with the beginning of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in the late nineteenth century, argues Mukhopadhyay, history (mainly, the medieval past) emerged as a vital instrument to engineer a nationalist identity and to generate a collective political consciousness. Further, Mukhopadhyay traces the origin and development of the historical genre and its relation to colonial and nationalist historiography. She briefly illustrates how novel, theatre, painting and various other creative and bazaar arts invoked the "medieval" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These imaginative and creative renderings of the "medieval" prepared ground for the future rise of historical films in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The corresponding four chapters of the book are chronologically driven. Each chapter focuses on a particular decade, and explores and examines the dominant thematic trends and narrative styles prevalent in the historical films of that period. Chapter Two, 'Revisioning the Medieval Past: The Silent Era of Indian Film,' analyses the cinematic representations of the "medieval" in the silent films of the 1920s. Mukhopadhyay notes that Baburao Painter's *Sinhgarh* (1923), based on the heroic capture of the Sinhgarh fort from Mughals by Shivaji, was the "first recorded full-length historical" film of India. The phenomenal "commercial success" of this film ushered in a tradition of Shivaji films. Most of these films, argues Mukhopadhyay, offered glorified accounts of Shivaji's "militant resistance" against the Mughals, and projected him as an icon of Hindu nationalism. In addition, a host of other films were made during the later years of the 1920s that explicitly used Hindu nationalist images. These films contributed to the rise of "communal interpretations of medieval conflicts, where Rajput and Maratha resistance was represented as a 'sacrifice' for the cause of India's freedom from 'foreign' 'Islamic' invaders" (83).

Celebration of the "courtly romances" of the "Indo-Islamic" royal courts (in films such as *Nur Jehan or Light of the world* (1923), *Razia Begum* (1924), *Mumtaz Mahal* (1926), *Anarkali* (1928), and others) was another powerful thematic trend that dominated the historical films of the 1920s. These films cut across all social hierarchies and communal boundaries, and gained immense popularity as they "kindled feelings of 'otherworldly' fantasy among film-going audiences" (89). However, Mukhopadhyay proclaims that even these films spawned communal feelings as they portrayed a stereotypical image of "medieval Islamic culture."

The arrival of the Talkies in the 1930s marked the beginning of a new era in Indian cinema. The introduction of sound in films divided Indian cinema into various linguistic and regional zones. Mukhopadhyay reflects upon these significant transformations and explicates the influence of the same on the cinematic perceptions of the medieval. She argues that the rising dominance of Gandhian discourse in the socio-political milieu of the time immensely influenced the cinematic portrayals of the "medieval." It was the decade of "Sant Films" such as *Chandidas* (1932), *Sant Tukaram* (1932), *Meera Bai* (1933) and others. These "cinematic hagiographies," affirms Mukhopadhyay, portrayed the medieval as an emblematic of the syncretic and composite "idea of India" and strongly "undermined the established image of the medieval age, represented elsewhere as characterized by restless political strife, or by the despotic, decadent opulence of Islamic court culture" (125). While the Bombay based "Hindustani" film-industry championed the secular image of the "medieval" as propounded by Gandhi and his followers, regional film centres of Maharashtra continued to cater to Hindu nationalist sentiments through the production Shivaji-films. Nevertheless, these films never managed to move out of "the peripheries of regional towns and mufassils" of Maharashtra (133). Mukhopadhyay concludes this chapter with a detailed critical analysis of Sohrab Modi's *Pukar* (1939), a super hit Hindustani film of the 30s (137-140). She considers it as a benchmark film of the decade that beautifully portrays a secular image of the medieval.

Chapter Four, 'The Medieval in a Time of Communal Polarization, 1940-46,' looks at the representations of the "medieval" during a "highly vitiated and communalized socio-political milieu" of the early 40s. Mukhopadhyay states that the increasing dominance of the Bombay based Hindustani film-industry during this period immensely influenced the thematic trends and narrative modes of Indian cinema at large. She argues that Hindustani films played a constructive and responsible role in subverting

the "intense communal polarization" of the times. During this period of intense hatred and distrust, Bombay's films continued to screen secular narratives and strove to inculcate a sense of religious harmony and Hindu-Muslim unity through films like *Sant Kabir* (1942). Even the "Shahenshah" films of this period, a series of films on the life and times Mughal emperors such as *Shahenshah Akbar* (1943), *Shahenshah Babar* (1944), *Humayun* (1945) and *Shahjahan* (1946), argues Mukhopadhyay, challenged the "communally coloured Mughal myths" proliferated and propagated by Hindu nationalists and creatively invented new "secular myths" by depicting the Mughals as the architects of "a secular idea of India" (174-184). Furthermore, the rise of social melodramas as the most popular narrative mode in Indian cinema, around the mid-40s, hugely marginalized the production and popularity of historical films in India. Mukhopadhyay contends that the "growing popularity of social melodramas rather than historicals during this decade" can be viewed as "the popular rejection of communal politics in Indian films" (191). She rationalizes this shift in popularity by noting that the audience seemed to have supported "the composite culture that found its ultimate expression in the newly formed cinematic language of the 1940s" (192). Unfortunately, "the nationalist leaders of both the congress and the Muslim League," observes Mukhopadhyay, paid no heed to this "popular opinion" (193) against the 'two-nation' theory.

The fifth chapter, 'Contesting Visions of The Medieval in Independent India, 1947 to the 1960s,' provides a perceptive analysis of the cinematic portrayals of the "medieval" produced during the "Nehruvian" era. Mukhopadhyay avers that these cinematic representations of this period were deeply informed by the Nehruvian vision of a modern India. Most of the historicals of this era showcased the rich musical tradition of the medieval period. Films such as *Baiju Bawra* (1952), *Rani Roopmati* (1959) and others beautifully portrayed the "medieval" as a period of cultural interaction between the two communities. However, the most striking development of this era was the metaphoric portrayal of the medieval as the backdrop for many social melodramas often invoking "feudal cultural stereotypes of the *haveli* (palaces in western India)" and the *khandan* (aristocratic lineage)" (212). Finally, Mukhopadhyay offers a detailed critical analysis of K. Asif's cinematic marvel, *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) (236-247), and declares it the last most successful historical film to feature the medieval times. "The charm of invoking history," claims Mukhopadhyay, "remained current as long as history was necessary to justify the present of the nation" (248).

Since the aspirations for a modern India grew stronger in the larger socio-political domain, she observes, historical films also began to lose their charm, and soon got relegated to history.

The book's conclusion, subtitled 'The "Medieval" in Post-Nehruvian India,' elaborates upon the changing function and relevance of history in popular imagination. She asserts that the mounting emphasis on the future and the changing political exigencies of the modern nation-state led to the dissolution of representations of the "medieval" in cinema. In fact, Indian cinema, claims Mukhopadhyay, divorced itself from the "medieval" past, and began to concentrate "on contemporary conflicts and contradictions of the modernizing Indian state."

In summary, through detailed examination of the cinematic portrayals of the "medieval," the book provides an impressive analyses of the history of historical films, of the differing cinematic interpretations of history (especially, the medieval), of the socio-political background in which these historicals were produced, and of the "politics" of cinematic representations of history. It is a trailblazing work that broadens the horizon of history as it incisively shows how cinema can be used as an alternative source of understanding the past. The book is a valuable addition to the gradually growing corpus of films studies in India, and is an insightful study that deserves to be read by anyone interested in the history of India, and of Indian cinema.

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Vijaya Ramaswamy, *The Song of the Loom: Weaver Folk Traditions in South India*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, pp. 154 + 28 plates, Rs. 795, ISBN: 978-93-80607-46-7.

The present book is the result of the author's long research involvement with the weavers of south India and is the outcome of many years of painstaking work among them. Her earlier book on weavers was — *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India* (2006).

The centrality of oral history and oral traditions as a valid and integral part of history proper is an important concern of the author. (Her earlier book — *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives* is evidence of her continuing concern.) The account of folk traditions of the weavers of south India is therefore viewed in *The Song of the Loom* both as a legitimate concern of history giving voice to the subalterns and not just that of anthropology or folklore.

The first chapter, 'Oral Traditions as Alternative Histories: the Need to Map Community Memories,' discusses the issues and debates around textuality and orality and the rationale for doing oral community histories. The earlier perception of viewing textuality and orality as polarities has given way over the last few decades to a more nuanced position of a continuum wherein there is constant movement between text and oral categories. Likewise, the author recounts, how the facile equation of oral with 'folk' and 'rural' and the 'written' with 'urban' which was part of a certain dominant conceptual paradigm is no longer tenable given the prevalence of community 'folk' traditions in the urban milieu (p.2).

Indian history, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, provides ample evidence of how print medium gave life and voice to folklore which was crucial in moulding community identities, gender representations and also shaped nationalist consciousness. According to Ramaswamy, evidence of the blurring of lines between folklore and text is available from the 11th c. onwards with the Kammalar craftsmen (who were Vishwakarmas) who while engraving inscriptions also included panegyric references to themselves in the records.

Community histories (of weavers), oral traditions and folklore comprise a complex weave. Any process of documenting this, as per Ramaswamy, would include an account of the process wherein administrative and professional titles got transmuted into caste names over a period pointing to an underlying process of transformation of caste and community identities. The examples of Mudaliars and Chettiers are cited. Ordinary Saliya weavers became 'Saliya Chetti' with economic affluence and involvement in trade. The use of poetry and ballads and origin myths also served the broader purpose of both inventing and reconstructing community identities in a changing historical and social context reflecting self representations and are an important source of history.

Another important source employed is the various caste sanghas and their publications at the end of the 18th c. The author refers to a series of such publications many of which were not available to outsiders. "The purpose of these publications was two-fold: a) to reinvent their own identities and b) to claim social parity with Brahmins and sometimes even superiority to the Brahmins" (p. 5). Thus tales, legends and origin myths seeking to establish their claim to Brahminhood abound in the printed folklore of the Devanga community, as in the Devanga Puranam published in 1893. Similarly the Saurashtra weavers of Madurai affirm their Brahmin status due to the conferring of such status by Rani Mangammal, Queen

of Madurai in 1704.

The author points to the significance of this long cherished dream and desire amongst weavers to achieve Brahminical status suddenly losing its relevance with the rise of the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil country. Since the principal thrust of the self-respect movement of Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker was to craft an identity based on Tamil language and a Dravidian past uncontaminated by Brahminism many of the weaver castes articulated another identity for themselves. Thus, many of the weaver castes like the Senguntar, Nadar, Kammalar found space for political and social articulation and even a degree of recognition in the Justice Party and the Dravida Kazhagam.

While underlining the importance of folk narratives in writing the history of the subalterns, Ramaswamy makes two points: one, that the narratives are important not because they conform to norms of verisimilitude, but because they express the imagination, symbolism and desires of subaltern groups; and two, that while salvaging collective memories, it is necessary to map women's histories separately from that of the dominant male narratives.

In the second chapter, 'Situating Handloom Weaving and Weaver Community Traditions,' the author attempts to deal with the current crisis of the handloom weavers, the threat from the powerlooms, government policy on the handloom sector and various efforts by individuals and voluntary organisations to revive the handloom sector along with the role of the cooperatives. She discusses the 'New Textile Policy' of 1985 as also the more recent 'Satyam Committee Report' of 2000, (which is mistakenly dated at 2007) along with the 'Tamil Nadu Government's Textile Policy' of 2000. The threat to traditional designs and the skills of the weavers from computer aided design technologies is highlighted. However, the crisis since the 1990s is also about the availability of yarn, export-import policy as also the problems arising out of adherence to the WTO norms. The present bout of crisis is an integral part of the neo-liberal paradigm. While the threat to the handlooms has been in existence since the early years after independence, this last round has virtually rung the death knell of handloom weavers. Attempts to revive handlooms and traditional designs will have a very narrow social base among the weavers and will cater to a small elite section of the population.

The author is aware of the acute and agonising dilemma of the weaving community when she writes: "No weaver today weaves to the rhythm of the loom songs" (p.16). The need to preserve handlooms "as the cultural signifiers of India" is, according to the author,

indispensable, as also the need to preserve the cultural and social memories of the weaving communities.

The third and fourth chapters of the book dealing respectively with the 'Traditional Weaving Castes of South India' and 'Origin Myths of Weaver Castes', provide a fascinating account of the four major weaving castes in South India, their social histories and origin myths. The four major weaving castes – the Saliya of Tamil Nadu, the Sale of Andhra Pradesh who later on migrated to Karnataka and Kerala, the Devanga who are both from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and the Kaikollar or Senguntar who replaced the Saliyar as the dominant weaving community of Tamil Nadu. The Saurashtra or Pattunulkara (those who weave with silk thread) are immigrants having migrated from Gujarat in the seventeenth century and settled in Madurai. The author also refers to the various sub groups among each of these castes, the migratory patterns, practices of intermarriage and more interestingly, the distinction between right hand and left castes among the Sale weavers in Kerala.

The Saurashtras or the Pattunukara are the most unusual, with a long history of migration out of Gujarat, firstly into Mandasor (around 437 CE) and later into the Tamil country. They claim Brahmin descent and support their claim on the basis of certain inscriptions. They speak a language called Patnuli which has no script and is a mixture of Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. The author states that every oral tradition of the Saurashtras has its basis only in Tamil Nadu and their narratives trace their migration from Dasapura or Mandasor to the Tamil country. A ballad called *boula* traces their historical migration and is sung at marriages.

Interesting details are pointed out by the author. The origin myths amongst the weaving communities vary with some, like the Senguntar/Kaikollar of Tamil Nadu claiming that their hereditary profession was soldiering. There are also claims to links with royal lineages among the Senguntar. The claims to Brahminhood are strongest among the Devange and the Saurashtra.

The fifth chapter deals with technological traditions in the weaving industry, while the sixth and seventh deal with weaving traditions and weaver design traditions, respectively. All the three chapters are evidence of the author's deep knowledge and attention to detail. These would be a very valuable addition to the literature on our traditional textile technology and also designs and weaving traditions. These chapters also contain plates, drawings and samples of different designs. The chapter on 'Weaver Social Traditions' principally deals with songs that speak of the centrality of weaving in their lives; caste and community organisations that regulate the lives of

the weavers; caste divisions among the weaving communities (like the left hand and right hand); caste disputes and social justice issues, questions of ritual status and also processes of upward and downward mobility. The emergence of caste as an important political category and the claims of the various subaltern castes for a share in the social cake has had an impact on the weaving communities and their perception of mobility. The majority of the weaving communities figure in the 'List of Backward Classes' approved by the Government of Tamil Nadu as on March 2011. The author refers to the fact that some of the weaving communities (e.g. the Senguntar) even converted to Christianity in an attempt to improve their status (p.108).

As concluding observations, the present reviewer has some questions. While Ramaswamy has dealt with the question of community and folk narratives as legitimate sources for the history of the subalterns, the question of internal differentiation of the weaving communities is her analytical frame. The author has referred to traders and entrepreneurs among the weaving communities; she also refers to the plight of ordinary weavers. But this is not a significant enough question that pervades her analysis. The differentiation is taken for granted or mentioned when she discusses the various movements for upward mobility. There is once again a reference to it in her concluding remarks when she quotes Nalli Kuppaswamy Chetti who states that every home had a loom and the weaving of the sari was a collective family enterprise with a family based division of labour based on age and gender (p.112). The above observation assumes the category of a self-employed weaver. The entire process of differentiation between and within the different weaving communities surely began with the colonial period and perhaps even before. Thus, narratives of the 'community' must be affected by these processes. Just as Ramaswamy refers to the need for studying women's narratives separately since their collective memories would tell a differently story, likewise the story of the ordinary indigent weaver is likely to be different. Exemplifying this problematic is the question of conversions. Almost at the end she refers to the conversion to Christianity of some weaver groups to improve their economic status. This is an important part of the story of the weavers of South India and required a little more discussion.

Related to the above mentioned issue is the social organisation of production. What were the different layers in the production process? Needless to say the kind of layers in the production hierarchy that existed and even now exist in northern India, are prevalent in South India. However, there are different layers and hierarchies. There

have been important changes during the period when weavers were physically moved from their villages and were alienated from the temple towns and forced to work for the Company agents (p.85). What were the implications of this for the weaving community and its sense of cohesiveness?

Lastly, I would like to add that poor copy-editing has marred a very good book which is a valuable and timely contribution to record the annals of the weavers of South India.

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Ankur Betageri, *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human*, Mumbai: Poetrywala, 2013, pp. 110, Rs. 200, ISBN-13: 9788192225487.

Ankur Betageri's book under review has two explicit images that attract attention: an unnerving cover page and an overpowering title. Yes! The cover design has a well-dressed human torso with a crow perched in place of the human head and a 'black' moon (maybe it is the sun) overhead; the title is *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human*. Both are indicative of the paradox inherent in human existence and so are the poems that speak of "the unfamiliar familiar feel" of the passage of time; wonder at the "game of hide and seek" called life; and puzzle over the persona's "sadness because all are laughing." The total effect is one of the poet's efforts to grasp the essence. Using paradoxical statements, vivid imagery and subtle symbols Betageri is able to convey the higher truths of existence through everyday realities. The validity of H.S. Shiva Prakash's remarks in his 'Introduction' that the poems evoke "strange resonances" with their "deluge of self-proliferating images, sounds, smells, sensations and fragmented messages of consumerist seduction..." cannot be debated. The poems are, indeed, defiant and perceptive at times; at others, witty and hitting; at still others, meditative and profound. Ankur does not propound spirituality but his subtle touches do not leave any doubt either that it is the spiritual 'self' that he is constantly searching for:

Hiding to be found,
Hiding to hide,
Looking to find,
Looking not to find,
I often lose myself

among the trees (p. 2). Choices always pose problems. In 'Fishing' (p.46) he sits near a lake and wonders if he should pay attention to the cawing of the crows, symbolic of worldly demands, or attend to the fishes, signifying the inner urge. Quest for the self is like fishing – one has to wait patiently before one gets a catch: metaphorically, before one catches the exact moment, the glimpse of the ethereal light, the sudden flash of revelation.

Betageri's style is marked by subtlety of expression and visualization. For example, "footfalls crunching the leaves," "the sparkle of shrubberies" (p. 38), the tang of "gooseberry" on your teeth (p.12) and "days dripping slowly on the earth" (p. 48) deftly incorporate sense perceptions – auditory, visual, tangible and the rest. Small poems in Haiku style eloquently convey the poet's ideas. For example, 'You' is his smallest poem but also his most expressive:

Oh,
Poetry
Is not the page
Please,
It's you
On the page (p. 58).

Indeed, poetry does not signify the words scribbled on paper, it is the quintessence of the man scribbling it and it is 'us' he is writing about. Poetry is prayer; it is reaching out to God; marvelling at His creation. In 'Mother Poem' he reiterates that poetry born out of the words of the workers became so strong that it prevented the earth "from falling apart" (p.7). Betageri, however, is annoyed with all those poets, including himself, who fail to address the pain and suffering of the poor. Seeing the treatment meted out to a frightened, stammering canteen 'boy', the poet vows to "speak for all those/still stammering" (p. 32-33) and make his poetry meaningful. Likewise, he is enraged at those Indian English poets who read their poems in air conditioned conference halls to over-fed, uninterested audiences and fail to see that "poetry is a voice against injustice" (p. 56).

Betageri is a man in search of a meaningful life – of values, love and identity. Whether it is his love poems or his reflective ones, the basic urge is to come to grips with his inner world. His longest poem 'The Grasshopper and the Ant', running into 15 pages brings out his philosophy vividly. The dignified and controlled dialogue between the two is marked by simplicity and depth. Even when the ant and the grasshopper counter each other they maintain decorum reminiscent of the highly refined discussants of yore. In 'Getting Naked' he uses the strong

metaphor of "nakedness" as a prerequisite for getting in touch with the "self"; for discovering your "I"-ness" (p. 20). One remembers Akka Mahadevi's *Vachanas* about the need to be naked to reach God.

Some of Betageri's charming nature poems pertain to the seasons and the cycle of change like: 'After Rain', 'Summer Under the Trees', 'Spring' and 'Summer.' His poem 'Lifetimes' written in January 2006, at Kathgodam Railway station has the "relaxed" ambience of the hills, the quiet valleys and the swift rivulet. The few hours spent there become as rewarding as a lifetime of rich experience. He captures the flow of time through natural beauty and feels fulfilled for "living through lifetimes/ in one crazy existence" (p. 48). Nature is primeval and soothing; it gives you an identity whereas the city disintegrates man, deadens his finer feelings and makes a mannequin of him/her. The poet feels ill-at-ease in Bangalore where he was born; alien in Delhi, where he is working; throttled in the modern Malls where consumer greed reduces human desire to brute hunger. The city has a "brute" heart, says the poet, but the music born out of poetry is comforting, "Poetry simplifies/The humdrum, amplifies/The hum".

Amid all his philosophical preoccupations and serious concerns with existence, Betageri displays childlike unpretentiousness and curiosity in poems like 'Alphabets,' 'Stones, Trees and Birds' and 'If Love Is the Most Natural Thing.' Though rebellious and angry at times, Ankur has the knack of keeping his tone even. Consequently, his poetry is not morose or grotesque yet it is intensely evaluative of the world he inhabits.

Betageri, a bilingual young poet and short fiction writer who writes in English as well as in Kannada, is also a visual artist; no wonder he combines the artist's sweep of imagination with a litterateur's feel for words and sounds in his writings. The book has been well-brought out for which the publisher deserves our compliment. Though a couple of editing errors came to my notice, I would not hold it against the work as such and would gladly recommend it to lovers of poetry as a book worth reading and enjoying.

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G. D. Gulati, ed., *Mewat: Folklore, Memory, History*, New Delhi, Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2013, pp. 256, Rs. 750, ISBN 978-93-81406-26-7.

Mewat: Folklore, Memory, History is yet another contribution to the regional history of the North Western

part of South Asia by Dr. G. D. Gulati. It is a collection of essays or papers presented at various seminars and conferences and published as part of their proceedings. The author has put them together in one place in the form of this volume. Mewat is a loosely knit sub-region covering parts of Haryana, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh. It includes the districts of Gurgaon in Haryana, Alwar and Bharatpur in Rajasthan and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. Mewatis have enjoyed a distinct identity for centuries and have created a niche for themselves in folk tradition based on their heroic deeds at different stages of history. The volume contains eleven essays and eight appendices. The appendices include three articles in Hindi, 'Hindu Muslim Ekta ke Pratik Sant Lal Das', 'Mewat mein Jang-i-Azadi', and 'Samkalin Granthon mein Mewat: Tehraavin se Solhavin Shati'. These could easily have been included in the main body of the book, thereby, making it a bi-lingual volume. Such an endeavor would have been welcome, but Dr. Gulati seems to have the impression that the book is meant primarily for readers in English language.

The author has woven a web that begins with folklore, moves on to focus on the village Baniya, the Bhakti movement, political developments in Mewat during the 13th century and then the role of the Mewatis during the uprisings of 1857. Some twentieth century episodes and their impact on the folk traditions of the twentieth century have also been touched upon by the editor. The book has also tried to extract information from *Tuzuk-i-Babari*, *Muraqqa-i-Mewat* and *Arjang-i-Tijara* about the people, flora and history of the area. The cult of the Laldasis is highlighted. Each region of the sub-continent contributed in the reforms during the Bhakti movement. The story of Sant Lal Das and the tradition associated with him adds further to our understanding of the depth of the Bhakti movement. The subject is yet to be fully explored. It has been pointed out that the Meos fought on the side of Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal emperor, against the oppression of the British. The oppression, in the specific case of the Meos, however, needed to be spelt out. An important paper, which should have found pride of place in the volume is in Hindi and placed in the appendices: 'Samkalin Granthon mein Mewat: tehraavin se solhavin shati'. It is based on contemporary and near contemporary accounts of Persian chroniclers including the *Tuzuk-i-Babari*. This article highlights the activities of Meos, particularly the Khanzadas or the local leaders and their relations with the Mughals, rulers of Bharatpur and Jaipur states, and the British. The article on the observation of Muharram highlights the tradition of communal harmony among the Meos.

Dr. Gulati has, with the limited resources available,

tried to weave a history of the society and culture of Mewat. One would agree with him that there is a dearth of resources having direct bearing on the history, society, culture and religion of this region. In this context, Dr. Gulati deserves appreciation for successfully developing a reasonably comprehensive picture of Mewat from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. There are, however, repetitions which distract the reader again and again. Moreover, the papers have been organized in the sequence of their presentations; it would have been far better had they been arranged in a chronological order so as to provide a historical overview.

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Andre Beteille, *Democracy and Its Institutions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 214, Rs. 595/-, ISBN: 9780198080961.

Professor Beteille has written extensively on various issues in the last five decades. This book is actually a collection of his essays, focusing on institutions. It is an outcome of his increasing interest in the contradictions between the ideas of equality and the practices of inequality in the modern world (p. 3). The need for this book, as he rightly says, is due to the failure of public institutions and the engagement of sociologists with social analysis and social policy. He has focused on institutions of the state or institutions closely associated with the working of the state. Nine chapters deal with the existence and co-existence of various institutions across different societies in the world.

One of the central arguments of the book regarding institutions of democracy is that each democracy evolved in its own historical conditions and therefore citizenship was also shaped accordingly. For instance, while democracy emerged out of confrontation with the colonisers in India; democracy and industrial revolution emerged together in the West. The Indian state, therefore, needs to map out various institutions, their nature, scope, functioning and interactions in different setups and on different issues. In each chapter, the author, therefore, keeps tracing historical routes to democracy, comparing different forms and functionings of democracy in different countries, and linking them to Indian institutions and their peculiar characteristics and operations.

In this book review, I have focused on two chapters

which discuss rights and citizenship — 'Can rights undermine Trust? How Institutions Work and Why They Fail' and 'Caste and the Citizen'. The literature on citizen's rights, mainly written by political thinkers in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the evolving literature in the last decade by political scientists the world over have focused on three aspects: institutional mechanisms, international Declarations or Covenants and the Indian Constitution as the source of citizen's rights; and the bargaining powers of citizens. Writings on the situation of Human Rights in India have highlighted three points. First, the increasing use of the language of rights, which highlights its close linkages to the "right to justice"; second, a shift from first and second generation human rights, i.e., from freedom of expression, arbitrary imprisonment and custodial violence to group and community based rights, such as, rights of workers, right to employment, etc.; and the third, prevailing ambiguities in the India Constitution regarding second generation human rights, which were not incorporated in its fundamental rights as enforceable and justifiable through laws.

Professor Beteille brings a new dimension to the discourse of rights with concepts such as "Trust" and "fiduciary basis of society", in the context of the increasing use of the language of rights. He argues that "rights and trust are both indispensable constituents of collective life... As excessive emphasis on trust may lead to the right of some members of society being ignored and hence repeatedly violated...the continuous assertion of rights by the members of society undermines the fiduciary basis of society" (p. 99). The sociologist's observation and line of argument is remarkable, "the balance between rights and trust is a complex matter" (p. 100) and rarely stable in a changing society. An institution, as an enduring arrangement of roles and relationships, when examined from the perspective of rights and trust reveals a dialectical relationship between the two. The increasing use of the language of rights "is becoming a matter of politics than of law, a subject more of political contest than for legal resolution" (ibid). He takes the known route of the Indian Constitution for discussing citizen's rights "as a shield against the arbitrary use of power by the state and its functionaries" (p. 101). He further refers to the Emergency of 1975-7 as a watershed in the life of social movements and civil rights, and takes note of the emergence of the category of "rights activists". Here he makes a distinction between the rights of an individual as a citizen and the rights claimed on behalf of particular sections of the population, such as minorities, backward castes and women. "The ascendancy of identity politics has given a new focus to

the language of rights" (p. 102), which has led to the deepening of mistrust in public life. "Most social transactions take place without any rights being invoked" (p. 109). He weaves together social transactions, the role of sustainable duties and morals in institutions, the social significance of trust and its interface with rights in particular institutions, and the dual role of law that comes into play for creation as well as dissolution of an institution. Family and university as institutions are discussed to bring out the nuances of rights and trust in their functionality.

The chapter 'Caste and Citizen' discusses the representation of India as a society of castes and communities, and as a nation of citizens (p. 124). The chapter maps out the emergence of new institutions, associations and professions and their role in developing the ideals of citizenship and nationhood. The divisions of caste and community did not disappear despite efforts of leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Sardar Patel. The author focusses largely on historical factors and processes to explain how caste has continued to remain a living category in India. He discusses the role of administration, Census and classification, ranking of communities, animosities created among castes and communities (referring to Dumont's term — "substantialisation of caste"), the role of the middle class, limitations of various institutions in promoting secular values, and how a close association between caste and occupation played a role in the maintenance of caste identities. Another remarkable observation of the sociologist is that "citizenship is not just a matter of rights, it is also a matter of attitudes and values...the habits of citizenship are not gift of nature; they are a product of history" (p. 138).

The author has described the nuances of democracy, covered a wide range of institutions and has interlinked constitutional framework and state-run institutions such as universities, social movements and civil society, and the increasing use of the language of rights across institutions, though in a scattered but illustrative manner. His observations and analysis of institutions revolve around ideals, failures, operational aspects and the role of trust and rights in each institution vis-à-vis the politico-jural domain. These ideas are embedded in his analysis but not presented evenly in each chapter, mainly because the nine chapters were written at different points of time, reflecting different contemporary contexts. His observations and analysis thus take a historical route to explain and examine various issues related to democracy and institutions, which are very brilliant and insightful. Overall this is a very enriching book.

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