

The book opens up a range of scholarship for the reader interested in English, or History or both, and is definitely worth a close and careful reading.

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Lata Singh and Biswamoy Pati eds., *Colonial and Contemporary Bihar and Jharkhand*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. viii + 256, Rs. 995/-, ISBN: 978-93-80607-92-4.

Here is a book that attempts to bring together disparate ideas and perspectives on Bihar and Jharkhand in the colonial and contemporary context. The introductory chapter attempts the difficult task of trying to tie the strands of variegated themes together. Each chapter singularly deals with an issue that may be of some interest for readers who have been following up on the socio-political processes unique to Bihar and Jharkhand. I will focus on a few articles in the volume which caught my eye for the interesting subjects that they deal with and the manner of exploring these, and even if there are problems with these at some levels. These are the papers which give the book an edge

Imtiaz Ahmed's 'Bihari Muslims, Communal Riots and the Diaspora: Gleanings from Contemporary Urdu Writings', is a short, yet fascinating discussion of Partition (1947) and the Bihari Muslims, located in Urdu literature, more specifically in the writings of Kalim Aziz, an Urdu poet from Patna and his first collection of verses, titled *Woh jo Shairi ka Sabab Hua*; and his letters (1971-1991) in the collection, *Pahlu na Dukhega*; Abdus Samad's *Do Gaz Zameen*, Kalimuddin Ahmad's *Apni Talash Mein*. Kalim Aziz was apparently a witness to and victim of the communal carnage at Telhara; his mother and sister apparently "plunged into a well to save their honour, while 21 other relatives were butchered" on November 4th, 1946. (p.153) Imtiaz Ahmed quotes some of the lines from *Woh jo Shairi ka Sabab hua*:-

*Yeh Kahaan se Aayi hai Surkhroo, hai hare k jhonka Lahu Lahu
Kati jismein garadan-e Arzoo, ye usi gali ki Hawaa hai kya?*

This he translates as, "from where has it come with a bright face, each whiff soaked in blood, is the breeze coming from the lane where the throat of desires was slit?"

Kalim Aziz's family apparently got divided post-Partition in 1947. Aziz's writings, for Ahmed, reflect a sense of nostalgia for the "Ganga-Jumna culture" that dominated the social life of Bihar; when neighbours on either side of the divide caused by religious denominations, lived

as a family; when members of the two communities celebrated the festivals and observed the rituals of one another with equal enthusiasm and conviction; and when this harmony was not merely an ideal preached by a few, it was a practice observed commonly by the elite and masses. So, there is a sense of sorrow at the collapse of this bond, but there is no bitterness. The pain is there but its expression is restrained (p.155).

'Imag(in)ing Traditions: The Contested Canvas of Mithila Paintings' by Sandali Sharma is an interesting analysis of the making of a marketable culture (in this case the Mithila paintings) and its propagation while, as a sub-text, giving prominence to the upper castes that practise this tradition. In this sense the tradition is by itself a contested canvas. Madhubani paintings (endemic to the region of Mithila, comprising of nine districts of Bihar and some part of Nepal) as they are called, after the Madhubani region, "which is considered the epicenter of their evolution", are renowned the world over and have been given a boost with heritage tourism and exhibitions supported by the state and by several organisations in India and abroad. An Englishman named W.G. Archer of the Indian Civil Service apparently brought attention to these paintings in 1934 "after chancing upon them" in an earthquake debris in Bihar. "In the 1960s the India Handicrafts Board of the Central Government stepped in with the aim of providing alternative livelihoods for the people. This welfare measure led to a major transformation that took the paintings from the walls and floors of homes onto a new medium: paper, and led to their commercialisation" (p.181).

Gradually, Mithila paintings became popular across the country and abroad through exhibitions. But Mithila paintings, says Sandali, is a generic term and there are several styles of paintings in the region, some of which are closely linked to social groups. For instance, she says, the style locally known as "bharni"—with many colours—is employed by Brahmins and the themes depict gods such as Krishna, Durga and the theme of the dasavatara, the ten incarnations of Vishnu, and so on. The line style called *kachhni* is used by the Kayasthas and the *gobar* (cow-dung-style) was evolved by the Chamars (dalits), particularly by Jamuna Devi of Jitwapur village. Jamuna Devi's style depicts themes of everyday life. After her demise her family has continued that style. The *godana* (tattoo) style has been employed by women of the Dusadh (dalit) community, which was evolved by Chano Devi of Jitwapur, with depictions from their own folklore of the adventures of Raja Salhesa, their hero and their own gods, Rahu and Ketu, who are apparently not associated with the negative connotation given to them in mainstream Sanskrit religion. "In Dusadh cosmology, the sun is seen as the symbol of 'upper' caste dominance and Rahu

as an entity which eclipses the sun." (p. 189). The article discusses elaborately the method of popularisation of Mithila (hegemonic) painting tradition. It would have been better if it had made some reference to the diversity of expressions, especially of the lower caste women in the region. Jamuna Devi had received the National Award from the Government of India and her paintings had been displayed in an exhibition at Japan. Sandali points out that there is a strong nexus of Brahmin middle-men in the Mithila painting market but at the same time there are the well-off painting experts who have begun to use the internet as a source to sell their paintings. And at the other end are dalit artists like Jamuna Devi and her daughter-in-law who lack access to information, network and finances, and people like Gulabi Devi whose paintings were sold in the name of the upper caste Rupa Devi, who was also awarded by the central government. In essence, the author underscores the fact that the art and the artist need to be located within the social context of caste and Mithila paintings must be seen within deeper culture-politics.

An interesting paper that looks at ideas of land in Chotanagpur in the late medieval period is P.K. Shukla's "'Communal Property' to Private Property and the Tribal Struggles for Customary Land Rights in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas (1767-1850)'. The paper looks at changes within the tribal villages on questions of land rights and property with the coming in of what Shukla terms as "Hinduised" tribal chiefs known as Nagbansi Raja, who transformed the land tenures with introduction of *khas bhandar kharposh*, *jagirs*, and tenancies and leases. There was also the immigration of communities such as the *ahirs*, *kumhars*, *jolahas* into the tribal regions and entry of the brahminical rituals further complicated the Munda land system (p. 31). The Mundas were "reduced to the position of serfdom" (and) "their status from village proprietors to an inferior raiyat in the village life was a big blow to them..." (p. 32). With the Permanent Settlement of 1793, private property was institutionalised and introduced in the tribal areas where the immigrants had already set up base. Tribal peasantry, says, Shukla, was affected severely with the creation of land rights vested in zamindars and the real tillers of the soil were reduced to wage labourers. Several rebellions happened in this larger context of impoverished peasantry against the increase in land revenue and contradictions of land ownership (the Chuar Rebellion-1767), Tilka Manjhi rebellion (1780-5), Kol Ulgulan rebellion (1831-2) and so on. The paper urges one to look deeper at the changes within tribal villages from the perspective of changes in the intra-tribal relationships following from socio-political changes in land tenure.

Dev N. Pathak tries to press for an alternate reading of the women "in the veil" through his study of a few songs of Mithila that women sing on occasions (Singing in the Veil). One is left wondering if in the name of looking at the possibility of subversion within confined spaces, the paper also establishes that confined space as the only available space for women's expression (of desires, angst, and other feelings—basically, only emotions, at least in the songs he has selected). In "re-examining the notion of *pardah*" (p.163), he writes, "the possibility of rethinking women's position warrants a realisation of the significance of their stock of knowledge (their belief and practices)... power of women has to be noticed in the domain other than political...The props of feminine performance may or may not have obvious economic or political bearings. But then, they are instrumental in cosmic and transcendental terms, and it is significant to pay attention to their roles" (pp.163-4). Thus, it is in the non-economic and non-political or the "cosmic" and "transcendental" that the paper finds women's agency. We have Pathak's reference to several Mithila songs sung by women on occasions such as "Childbirth", "Mundan" (the first ritual shaving of the child's head), "Marriage", "Janeyu" (wearing of the sacred thread), "Everyday Life", but he does not critically examine that all of these "spaces" (which he calls "performance") are confined within both patriarchy and brahminism and even while a few songs may seem subversive on the outset, their deeper story is that of a woman tragically bound within the confines of patriarchy. The set of songs reveal limited elements of rebellion or revolt. In that sense, perhaps, the author's worldview is the worldview represented in the songs—of the home and the hearth, without much political or economic meaning.

On the whole, the twelve chapters—of lengths varying from 7 pages to 31 pages in some cases—of the book seem varying and disconnected. A central thematic or the idea behind a book of this nature could have been defined better. But the more interesting writings within the book are reviewed here.

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Martin Kampchen and Imre Bangha eds., editorial adviser Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2014, pp. 692, Rs. 1195/-, ISBN: 978-81-250-5568-6.

The first Asian to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, Rabindranath Tagore, has always been seen as an icon