

(p. 99). This interpretation retains an exclusive secular space for non-religious art in the Orissan temple art, and asserts its flow from the manner in which such scenes are placed in the decorative programme of statuary. Independent evidence from Orissan texts as well as from the widely distributed reliefs offers some ground to identify motifs which may be purely non-religious in character. We may randomly refer to two such depictions. Of these, one is from Konark and it portrays the catching of a wild elephant and also quartering the tame ones within a temporary enclosure. Similarly, a (wooden) ramp for moving construction materials from ground level to the upper levels of a structure is depicted on a slab reused in a recently constructed temple near Puri. These scenes represent purely secular motifs with little suggestion of any ritualistic or religious context. In addition, there are grounds to believe that the craft tradition in India was quite independent of religious control. The Shilpa texts from Orissa have sometimes forcefully asserted their freedom from orthodox systems and advocated an alternative spiritual domain in their craft. Such assertions, along with the depictions mentioned above, give reason to underscore the validity of a secular space in the art traditions in Orissa and elsewhere. The sources from Orissa, especially texts like Baya Chakada, contain significant information on that count.

There is a chapter on the stylistic development of Orissan sculpture (pp. 34-42), where style is interpreted in terms of formats comprehended in the general layout of figures on a stele, or in the accessory details, or even in the manner in which the images were placed on the niches provided on different parts of a temple. The consistency with regard to variance in the patterns of carvings has been used to trace the evolution of style. The discussion tends to show a very rudimentary conceptualization of style. Interestingly, the decorative devices do indicate continuities of the same patterns on several images, regardless of their sectarian affiliations. There are hints in these modes of the same artist or the same workshop producing works according to the same layout and design but varying their sectarian affiliations mainly by sewing the required iconographic details, obviously to meet the demands of the patron.

R. N. Misra teaches at the Department of Ancient History and Culture, Jiwaji University, Gwalior.

A journalistic possibility

Tridip Suhrud

A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism

by Partha Chatterjee

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997; xii+301 pp; Rs. 495

Partha Chatterjee begins this collection of essays with an explanation. An explanation about so far not having written 'a single volume study of Indian politics, despite the fact that, over the years, many people have reminded me that this was entirely expected of me as an Indian political scientist.' He provides an answer to why he has not undertaken such a study: 'to put it plainly, the reason was that I did not know how to write such a book.' This inability arose out of the difficulty of defining his own location in relation to the institutions and processes of Indian polity. Having obtained the 'analytical language that was derived — unabashedly — from Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong,' Chatterjee has, in this book, attempted to speak on behalf of the ruled. He is uncertain about the authenticity of that voice, but is glad about the freedom from any party line that was available to him. If the imposition of Emergency in June 1975 raised serious doubts about doctrinal understanding, it also confirmed beliefs about the nature of the ruling coalition, and the necessity of electoral democracy for maintaining that balance.

The Missing Book

In this ideological terrain, there was no framework which could provide a ground from which to view the Indian polity. 'There was no position I could truthfully occupy from which I might claim to provide a panoptic view of Indian politics.' But he continued to write a weekly column for *Frontier*, 'not as a journalist would...but as a critic trying to match structure to event, institution to process, claim to fact.' It is these essays which form the core of the present collection. Apart from them, it contains book reviews, editorial comments, journal entries and polemical writings. I offer this volume in place of the book on Indian politics that I will never write.' According to Chatterjee, these essays, written over more than twenty years, are governed by a theoretical concern. Concern about the 'politics of the governed'.

The two substantial essays which form a part of this collection are 'Secularism and Toleration' and 'Talking of Modernity in Two Languages,' both of which have been commented upon and discussed for many years now. The rest of the essays comment on the drama of Indian politics as it unfolds. Despite their topicality and journalistic tenor, the concerns of a very thoughtful intellectual are evident. The short lived Janata experiment, the drama of the curious government of Charan Singh, the final years of Indira Gandhi, the rise and fall of Rajiv Gandhi, and the NF/UF experiments are all commented upon. Many a time, his analysis has the capacity to see the form of things to come.

Despite his great analytical sensitivity, and the ability to see the present and in some cases the future clearly, the collection remains anchored in contemporary political events. The critic responds to these events as they happen. The journalistic mode looms large. These do not allow for a theory of Indian society, polity or governance to emerge

Commenting on the possible election strategy of the Congress in the November 1989 elections, he says that the campaign would include a 'saturation campaign of glorification of the assassinated leader, coupled with patriotic fervour and a subtle undertone of Hindu chauvinism.' And predicts the long term fall out of the strategy conceived by the 'computer boys of 1, Akbar Road.' If they are proved right, warns Chatterjee, 'they will then embark on their cherished project of giving a new look to India's economy and polity. For a vast majority of the people of this country, that can only be a change for the worse.' When the nation was celebrating the emergence of a new, dynamic, clean and efficient leadership, Chatterjee

was able to perceive, as early as February 1985, the hollowness of the claims and the lack of any long term vision. 'The new government has done remarkably well in its first two months in giving the impression of undertaking wholesale changes in policy without actually doing any thing....except for a vague profession of intent nothing concrete has emerged.'

Even while being polemical, Chatterjee has the remarkable ability to capture the inherent logic of structures and processes. This allows him to look into the future. Discussing the intra-party democracy in the Congress, he says, '....we will have sufficient number of PCC resolutions urging Mrs. Sonia Gandhi to become Congress president!'

In Lieu of Theory

Despite his great analytical sensitivity, and the ability to see the present and in some cases the future clearly, the collection remains anchored in contemporary political events. The critic responds to these events as they happen. The journalistic mode looms large. These do not allow for a theory of Indian society, polity or governance to emerge. What emerges is a sharp, incisive critique, an untiring spirit of inquiry in the tradition of Nikhil Chakravarty and Romesh Thapar. This undoubtedly has a place in our intellectual life, in our endeavours to study and understand the institutions, the processes, and the structures of the Indian state.

What we also require is a theory (theories?) of Indian polity. Partha Chatterjee's collection does not fill that lack. We have a right to expect a much more cohesive study from one of our most perceptive intellectuals. We cannot, however, accept this collection in lieu of a larger study that he 'does not know how to write.'

Tridip Suhrud is on the faculty of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

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Reading undecidabilities

Franson Manjali

Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments

in Ethics and Politics

by Thomas Keenan

Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997

(Series: Crossing Aesthetics); xii+251 pp; \$ 11.95

Ever since Jacques Derrida embarked on a doctoral thesis in philosophy on 'the ideality of the literary object' about four decades ago, the relationship between literature and philosophy has been reconfigured in increasingly novel and sophisticated ways. Keenan's book, which began as a Ph.D. work at Yale University, takes us to what may be one of the frontier zones of contemporary preoccupations with what has now become the twin field of literature-philosophy. It undertakes to read some of the seminal texts in European culture with a view to unravel, reinvent and work into the difficulties situated at the interstices of literary comprehension and ethical/political action. The authors of these texts, who had appeared in widely varying historical periods and intellectual contexts, are Aesop, Sade, Marx and Foucault.

(For those who like to think that deconstruction is a mere fin-de-siècle aberration in western thought, or a passing fog of Parisian intellectual fashions, a note of warning: it may be one, both, or neither of these, but it is certainly a technical enterprise requiring substantial competence in matters linguistic, literary, and of history of ideas.)

Twilight Zones

Keenan's idea, well in tune with much of the postmodern writings, is that there are no secure grounds to enter the cognitive interiority of texts from where one can obtain a vantage point for praxis. Nor is there an already present and fully formed subject to whom 'meanings' are addressed. Reading must shun whatever totalizing ethico-political grids we have been used to, be they liberal or communitarian, and render itself to the indeterminacies and the infinite responsibility that precedes and exceeds the act of reading. Illustrations come by way of analyses of the directly narrative texts ('fables') of Aesop and Sade, as well as by demonstrating the rhetorical structure of the political/philosophical works of Marx and Foucault. The author takes us on an expert

conducted tour of the innumerable folds of undecidability that lie beneath their uneven textual surfaces, while going on to emphasize that there is no easy or non-political way out of the predicament. But then, politics is differently—and rather immanently—defined.

Ever since the light of the Lumieres—which had banished god and placed man at the centre—appeared to diminish, careful (philosophical) readers have preferred to withdraw from the dazzle of luminosity to relatively twilight zones where the world and the subject's role in deciphering it no longer make clear sense. The retreat, as well as the leap, at least for Nietzsche, was away from 'the human, all too human.' Undermining the subjectivity of man within a determined totality, divine or rational, opens up endless aporias. The subject's recognition of the fact that she has no authority to turn to, not even her own self, introduces, as Levinas has shown, the question of her unlimited responsibility for the other. Before any sense of the being can be had, before any cognitive material or signification appears in a linguistically sedimented form, it is the call of the other that the subject must respond to. Does it mean that reading demands an eternal vigilance, wherein the reader constantly unveils and never lets to rest the rhetorical structure of texts? How can a theory of literature contribute to the unfolding of the endless folds of textual articulation in language, which refer not to a semiotic scepticism or a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that finally add up to or derive from a Reason but to the pragmatics of the singularity of reading the story?

As if in answer to such questions, Keenan has attempted a sustained de-topologization, if not a whole-scale dramatization of reading (texts). At the frontier of reading, which is also that of language, the encounter between one and the other begins with a question which is itself a response to the already present, but

unnamed, other. What passes between the two is nothing but words, often the password. The interlocutors are unknown to each other, but the recognition of their (generalized) mutual identities takes place in and through duly licensed performative acts: 'Long live the king!' For the unknown interlocutors, meeting in the dark, the responsibilities to the undetermined other(s) are always in excess of their knowledge, and their vigilance is to the mark or trace (in the 'elsewhere' of language) that calls for the initial response.

Keenan invokes Sade's fables of 'immorality' only to further underscore the difficulty of reading. Sade, the 'first of the modern écrivains maudits,' had told the fable of nature only to usher in an animality that would free man from his 'captive' humanity which supports such man-made and thus despicable institutions as family and marriage.

Aesop's fables are read here to subvert and destabilize the relationship conveniently assumed between literature and philosophy. The latter's predicament is of 'responding in a language that is not one's own, in language both literal and figurative' (p. 53). It is said that when Xanthus, the Greek philosopher, indicated his desire to buy the Egyptian slave and storyteller Aesop, the latter warned him of the great risk he was taking. So too, the fable of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' tells us that 'appearances are deceptive'. But, the fables pass from an unknown source to an unknown target, and hence it is difficult to pin their moral to a conscious agent or a self-present situation. Thus the moral of this fable can stand in for the fable of the fable: 'appearances are deceptive.' It is this socially constituted rhetorical structure that the fable hides and at the same time reveals that Keenan shows us how to deconstruct so that the generality of the fabulist moral can be thwarted. Which also means that the moral of responsibility of the singular reading subject now exceeds that of the fable. In the author's words, '[r]esponsibility, like the fable that teaches it, must be an invention or it is nothing at all' (p. 58; emphasis added).

The author analyses the fable of 'the Raven and the Eagle, via Sheep', on the lines of Nietzsche's remake of the 'lamb and the birds of prey' story, to show that in language the morality of the victor displaces that of the victim. A raven tries to steal a lamb by imitating the eagle, but ends up getting stuck in the fleece of a wether. It is caught by the shepherd who disfigures it by removing its wings and gives it to his children as a plaything. The raven confesses the moral of the story: 'I am only a raven. I should not have compared myself with an eagle'. Here again, along with false comparison, false identification is forbidden. Keenan's point is that language assigns a 'proper name' which the individual assumes. The path traced here is from a nameless bird to a birdless (since disfigured) name that accepts the responsibility for its action. The fable asks the reader (in second person) 'to compare yourself with raven, to assume its name and follow its example in order to learn not to compare with what you are not' (p. 66).

Desistance

'Desistance' is the term that Lacoue-Labarthe has proposed for this linguistically dispersed and endlessly deconstituted subjectivity. The subject as desistance is responsible for the other before the categories of knowledge can unify it on any preexisting ground. Unlike the Lacanian (and Althusserian) subject who is interpellated into an imaginary (or ideological) world by way of misconception, desistance takes into account the possibility of the subject's 'peeping into the other's mail,' and hence its greater exposure to risk, greater responsibility. After Derrida's difference, desistance may be the deconstructionists' most important theoretical invention.

Keenan invokes Sade's fables of 'immorality' only to further underscore the difficulty of reading. Sade, the 'first of the modern écrivains maudits,' had told the fable of nature only to usher in an animality that would free man from his 'captive' humanity which supports such man-made and thus despicable institutions as family and marriage. Freedom is seen as freedom from these 'fables,' and thus he exhorts the French revolutionaries to *encore un effort*, or effectively, a renewed reading of the given political situation(s). Blanchot has argued that Sade's texts, and therefore his 'reason', feature a 'demand for excess,' on the basis of

the principle that '[n]ature exceeds humanity as the general rules the particular' (p. 87). Sade later found unbearable this need to always compare man's freedom with the sole model of the state of nature. Reducing particularity to a general law of nature on the basis of comparison became loathsome to him. He began to favour a radical singularity characterised by 'no stable identity' and devoid of the possibility of comparison. The opened reading mode that Sade finally recommends, according to Keenan, hovers between 'nothing' 'no ground,' 'no foundation,' 'no law') and 'everything' (for Sade had asked: 'Have we not acquired the right to say everything?') (p. 93).

Marx and fable? The spectres that lurk in Marx's works (e.g., the *Manifesto* begins by referring to the 'spectre of communism' that is haunting Europe) have fascinated the deconstructionists (see, J. Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, 1994). Keenan's effort, with regard to the *Capital* is to show that, from the comparison of wealth in capitalist societies, to a 'monstrous collection' of commodities, via the 'ghost' that comes as a residue when the exchange value is 'abstracted' from use value, to the fetishisation of commodities and human relations, Marx goes about solving the riddle of 'humanity' by broaching tropes which are more or less directly linguistic. (Remember, Althusser had claimed that Marxism was a 'theoretical anti-humanism.') As the differentiation between the use and the exchange value unfolds in Marx's text, the role of the undefinable, iterant residue, of the ghost, increases. The commodity form gives rise to the 'prejudice of common humanity' which makes possible the decipherment of the likenesses and equivalents of all kinds of labour. It is this prejudice, or the ghost that founds capitalism, which is at the root of the exchange of commodities. The endless chase of the man-become-ghost is the central element of Marx's fable. It is the same ghost that haunts exchange in general, or language. And hence the enhanced task of interpreting the undecidable before a general law of 'change' can be instituted.

The Hyphen

Foucault's numerous critics (these include philosophers Alain Renault, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas) have blamed him for not setting up a 'norm' in relation to which political actions, 'fights', can be conducted.

Foucault refused to oblige them. In his power-knowledge articulation, the hyphen remained internal and neutral, a source of great paradox, not permitting a safe external ground from where one could define the relation as one of these terms determining the other. Keenan's attempt is to give sense to this Foucauldian paradox.

If power and knowledge are coextensive in discourses, where is political action to be situated? Though Foucault persistently rejected the 'discourse of right' (which was linked to the sovereignty, of the king or of man), in 1981 he participated in a 'human rights' initiative in support of thousands of stranded Vietnamese 'boat people.' In the text of his speech at Geneva which was posthumously published as a newspaper article under the title 'A New Declaration of Human Rights,' we find Foucault urging the 'international citizenry' 'to rise up against every abuse of power, no matter who the author or victims' and 'to make an issue of people's misfortune' (p. 157). The new right that he sought to establish was outside all delegational possibilities. It was an 'asabsolute' right, a right wrested from the governmental and other powers, and arising from a sense of responsibility in the wake of the people's misfortune which 'must never be a silent remainder of politics' (p. 157). This snatching of right (what Derrida calls *coup de droit*) is, for Foucault, concomitant with his demand to 'cut off the king's head' (p. 161). No one delegates or legitimizes rights, and that is what gives us the right to be responsible. Infinitely. Keenan interprets the meaning of the hyphen in terms of the paradox of rights: rights of the normalized disciplinary discourses have to be overcome, while at the same time the necessity of initiating and constituting new rights and responsibilities remains. What do we have on the side of politics corresponding to the deconstructionists' literary principle of undecidability? Keenan refers us to the political theorist Claude Lefort: 'Democracy is instituted and maintained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty. It inaugurates a history in which the people undergo the experience of a final indeterminacy as to the foundation of relations between self and the other, at every level of social life...' (p. 173).

Franson Manjali is a Fellow at IIAS, Shimla.

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Byron's white crow

Shobhana Bhattacharji

Byron's "Corbeau Blanc":
The Life and Letters of Lady Melbourne
edited by Jonathan David Gross

Liverpool University Press, Liverpool,
1998; xiii+448 pp; price not mentioned

Two years after marrying Elizabeth Milbanke, the almost illiterate Lord Melbourne began an affair with the actress Sophia Baddeley. His daughter Emily wrote that he managed to look 'drunkish' even when sober, and by 1812 he was known as the 'Paragon of Debauchery' (p. 15). His one claim to fame was his membership of the Dilettanti Society, nominal requirement for which was to have visited Italy but the real qualification, according to Horace Walpole, was drunkenness (Porter and Roberts, *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 58). Lady Melbourne followed the Regency code and gave him a legitimate heir before looking elsewhere for companionship.

Clandestine 'Friendship'
Lady Melbourne and Byron began corresponding in 1812 when he was twenty-three and awoke to find himself famous with the publication of *Childe Harold*. Though new to Regency Society, he was welcomed to the homes of Lords Holland and Melbourne which were as important to fashionable London as they were to Whig politics. Byron preferred the Melbourne home presided over by the tall, ambitious, witty, and still beautiful Lady Melbourne who was then a little over sixty years old. Byron was at the end of his turbulent affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, but Lady Melbourne's hysterical daughter-in-law would not accept that Byron was no longer interested in her and did the unforgivable by making a public parade of her feelings, even attempting suicide at a society dinner.

Adultery was permitted in Regency London but had to be kept relatively private, as had been Lady Melbourne's affairs with Lord Egremont and the Prince Regent. The fact that her son William, who became Queen Victoria's first prime minister, looked a lot like Lord Egremont, and George looked like the Prince Regent, was another matter, but Caroline's public tantrums made her very angry. Lady Melbourne did her best

to help Byron out of the mess. She used her influence with Caroline's mother, Lady Bessborough (Byron called her Lady Blarney), sister of her best friend, the duchess of Devonshire, to get Caroline back to Ireland or at least to the countryside.

Gross's notes to each section, the illustrations, and biographies of dramatis personae make all this and more amply clear. But there are some problems with his account of the Byron story.

William and Caroline lived in Melbourne House because they could not afford their own home. Thus Lady Melbourne arranged to meet Byron when they were not at home because Caroline could be relied upon to make unholy scenes on seeing Byron. Jonathan Gross interprets this as Lady Melbourne's 'clandestine' friendship with Byron, saying that William was outraged at his mother's flirtation with a man nearly forty years her junior (pp. 115, 49). Affairs between young men and older women were known in the Melbourne-Byron circuit. Byron was soon to progress to an affair with Lady Oxford who was sixteen years older than him, and Lady Melbourne herself had been thirty-one when she bedded the twenty-two year old Prince Regent.

*At any rate,
Lady Melbourne did not
think Augusta's daughter
Medora was Byron's child.
Leslie Marchand points out
that Byron, who took
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illegitimate children,
did not give Medora any
more attention than he
did Augusta's other
children, and that the
evidence of incest is
circumstantial rather
than legal.*

Byron had said that Lady

Melbourne was 'champagne' to his spirits. Most frank in his journal, he wrote that 'I never met with half her talent. If she had been a few years younger, what a fool she would have made of me, had she thought it worth her while.' Soon thereafter, contemplating a trip abroad with Lady Oxford as a way of escaping Caroline, he asked Lady Melbourne, 'Why won't you go off with me? I am sure our elopement would...cause a "greater sensation" ...than any event of the kind—since Eve ran away with the apple.'

All this notwithstanding, Gross's interpretation is difficult to swallow, and if he wanted us to believe him, he should have mentioned his sources.

In another explanation of Byron's friendship with Lady Melbourne, Gross claims that she was a substitute for the mother he had recently lost. In spite of Doris Langley Moore's utterly convincing recreation of Mrs. Byron's unhappiness over her much loved son's inconsiderateness in money matters which makes us sympathize with her, Lady Melbourne was all that Mrs. Byron was not: vivacious and forgiving of Byron's actions. She did not, after all, have to pay his bills.

No Incest

In one of his efforts to escape from Caroline Lamb, Byron turned to his half-sister Augusta's relaxed and loving friendship. Whatever the truth of the Byron-Augusta relationship, neither Thomas Moore who owned the manuscript of Byron's autobiography — which, in a most notorious literary vandalism, was burnt by Byron's friend John Cam Hobhouse and Augusta in John Murray's famous back room — nor Lady Melbourne really believed that incest had occurred.

At any rate, Lady Melbourne did not think Augusta's daughter Medora was Byron's child. Leslie Marchand points out that Byron, who took interest in all his illegitimate children, did not give Medora any more attention than he did Augusta's other children, and that the evidence of incest is circumstantial rather than legal. Gross, however, refers categorically to Byron's 'incestuous affair' with Augusta (p. 50). Although he adds a corrective endnote, it is small but slanderous details of this sort which make one doubt Gross's book, the manuscript of which, he says, was read by John Clubbe, as impeccable a scholar as Byron's biographer Leslie Marchand who, until he is outclassed, remains

the guru on Byron.

Nevertheless, the closeness of Augusta and Byron, which he hinted was more dangerous than anything he had done so far, alarmed Lady Melbourne more than Caroline's tantrums. In a famous move to wean him from Augusta, Lady Melbourne introduced him to her niece Annabella Milbanke even though, like the very sane Hobhouse, she was exasperated by Annabella's lack of humour and smug sense of her own worth. A mathematician whom Byron called his 'Princess of Parallelograms', Annabella took jokes seriously and analyzed the smallest change in a speaker's mood to death. Even Caroline Lamb, author of *Glenarvon* (1816) in which Byron and her mother-in-law figure as villains, said with great insight that Byron would 'never be able to pull with a woman who went to church punctually, understood statistics and had a bad figure' (Marchand, *Portrait*, p. 180).

Annabella and Byron were married in 1814 and officially separated in February 1816 after living together for less than a year. During this time, Gross says, there was much talk of Byron's madness. There was, indeed. But what Gross fails to add is that Annabella and her mother were responsible for this gossip. They had to prove Byron mad to obtain the separation.

Another indefensible Gross comment is that Byron 'manipulated' the whole Melbourne family. Byron did make a very proper assessment of William to his friend Webster who was hoping to start an affair with Caroline, but Frederick, Lady Melbourne's youngest and beloved son, didn't receive his attention, and he hardly interacted with Lord Melbourne or Emily (whose second husband, Palmerston, was another of Victoria's prime ministers). He was great friends with George with whom he served on the Drury Lane theatre managing committee, but none of this amounts to manipulation. It is unfortunate that Gross has succumbed to the lay approach to Byron as 'mad-bad-and dangerous to know', Caroline's assessment when she first saw him.

Gross Comments

Towards the end of their correspondence, Lady Melbourne said she should always be Byron's 'Corbeau blanc', or white crow, referring to a Voltaire story in which a white crow guides the protagonist through life. And she did indeed try and guide him, but his marriage virtually ended

their correspondence. Annabella and her mother accused Lady Melbourne of gossiping about them. Judith Milbanke had always hated her sister-in-law and now advised her daughter to cut her aunt 'intirely'. In what Gross calls a 'remarkable epistolary campaign', Lady Melbourne eventually won over Annabella, but after 1816 there are no letters to Byron that have been discovered so far.

Byron left England for good in 1816. Two weeks after Lady Melbourne's death in 1818, he told Murray, 'The time is past in which I could feel for the dead — or I should feel for the death of Lady Melbourne, the best & kindest & ablest female I ever knew — old or young — but "I have supped full of horrors" and even events of this kind leave only a kind of numbness worse than pain' (Marchand, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 6, p.34).

Gross maintains that he has published all of Lady Melbourne's letters to Byron to show that his literary imagination was often stimulated by her. Her wit was indeed immortalized in Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1776) where she appears as Lady Teazle, but possibly — and it's an extremely remote possibility — the only influence of this was to give conversational style legitimacy in literature. The huge shift in Byron's writing is from self-conscious literariness to the conversational style of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* (in which Lady Melbourne appears as Lady Pinchbeck). Of course, poetic influence is never a one-to-one affair, and Byron's conversational style was primarily bolstered by his own letters, Frere's *Whistlecraft*, and, as I discovered when working on his plays, radical pamphlets. It was a political statement more than a literary one. But Gross is a little weak on this wider context for his comments on Melbourne and Byron.

On the whole, however, Gross's book is a good addition to the source material for the period. Byron's letters are immensely readable, but they seem like monologues despite Leslie Marchand's excellent notes, many of which direct one to the 1901 Prothero edition which has replies from Byron's correspondents. But even Prothero did not provide all the replies. Lady Melbourne's letters to Byron, most of them published here for the first time, turn part of the monologue into a dialogue.

Shobhana Bhattacharji teaches English at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, and specializes on Byron.

The Himalayas: breaking new ground

Aniket Alam

Natural Premises: Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya, 1800 - 1950

by Chetan Singh

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla,
and Oxford University Press, Delhi,
1998; xx+252 pp; Rs. 475

Few academic works have attempted an understanding of the Himalayan region and of its history that would distinguish them from anecdotal accounts of the hill stations and the dalliances of the British elite. The exceptions were studies by Hutchison and Vogel in the thirties of this century, the works of D. N. Majumdar and G. D. Berreman in the sixties, and of Ramchandra Guha and Shekhar Pathak in the eighties. However, most of these studies confined themselves to specific institutions or processes like polyandry, Begar or commercial forestry, or like Berreman's to an intensive study of one village. After the pioneering work by Hutchison and Vogel, there was no attempt to study this part of the country as an interconnected region with a historicity of its own. After a gap of about sixty-five years Chetan Singh's is another study of this nature.

The focus on the region as an historical unit and the study of its distinct aspects as inter-related parts of the whole enable the author to come up with a host of important insights. Singh brings out minute intricacies of peasant life and its relation with the local environment through detailed descriptions of different activities which were essential in putting together a subsistence and often a surplus produce. All the chapters are heavily footnoted from a wide variety of official documents and have useful subheadings which would make this a base study for future research.

New Ground

While the chapters dealing with the hill region, agriculture, and pastoralism break new ground, those on forests and wasteland are the most important contribution of the book. Singh introduces the concept of 'intermediate spaces' for the land classified as waste in British land settlements. The ecological and economic importance of the waste land to that under direct cultivation is well brought out, showing the dependence of agriculture on the proper utilisation of these spaces. Singh discusses the process by which land

was classified as waste and the difficulties faced by settlement officers in defining it, deciding its ownership, and assessing the government demand on it.

In the chapter on forests and the use of natural resources Singh begins by making a crucial distinction between the type of resources that were used by the hill peasantry and those which were commercially important for the colonial state. This distinction enables him to nuance his account of the impact of colonial forest policy on local peasant economy and life. Singh follows the various shifts in attitude of the British officials towards the forests, specially with regard to the species of trees targeted, the rights of the hill peasantry, and the long term objectives of forest policy. This is in refreshing contrast to the mainstream scholarship on forests, the British forest policy, and the peasant response to it which presents a simple model of the destruction of the traditional village communities and appropriation of their usufruct rights by the colonial state.

Singh continually stresses the need to move away from environmental or geographical determinism and repeats often his claim that the interaction between nature and man in the Western Himalayas was not unidirectional. This understanding of nature-culture relationship does not reflect in the text where there is a greater emphasis on the environmental conditions determining the specificities of human actions.

Singh, in fact, questions the very notion of resources held in common by the village community (he even raises doubts about the existence of a village community on the basis of various official sources). He indicates that there were, probably, land grants to individuals even in the ninth and tenth centuries. These included forests, pastures, and other lands which were later classified as

waste by the British. However, while it is possible to argue that there were individual land holdings, this by itself does not discount either the existence of village communities or their common claim to natural resources.

The author touches important historiographical debates of this nature fairly often but does not carry his argument beyond initial questioning. The discussion on irrigation is set in the context of a larger discussion on the nature of agriculture and its importance for 'assembling permanence' of settlements. Singh presents detailed information about the construction of irrigation water channels, the difference of size and structure in different ecological and topographical contexts, and their importance to agriculture. However, he leaves unexplored its consequences for the structure of social relations and the exercise of political power. Irrigation had a role in the decision about the nature of crops cultivated, in crop yield, and in the manner of meeting the demands of the state and other surplus extracting agencies. These in turn would influence the level of monetization of the area and its composition in terms of economic activities. While many of these issues are discussed in different parts of the book, their inter-relation is not made explicit.

In the discussion on trade routes, there is no attempt to analyze the importance of river valleys in providing traders from the plains access to the interiors of the mountains. This is despite an abundance of information on the methods of transport and the different types of roads and tracks that were used. Singh talks of the populations of the agricultural belt of the lower hills and of the trans-Himalayan cold desert, with little agriculture, as being more integrated with the market than the populations of the middle Himalayas where agriculture was combined with pastoralism and the taxes were paid in kind. But this does violence to the historical reality of the region. The Sutlej river valley was one of the most important trade routes, and was quite monetised. It was in regions just above the Sutlej, in the Saraj region of Kullu district and in what came to be called the Simla Hill States by the British, that one finds the most 'natural' of economies and least monetization, combined with a lack of development of state institutions. It is not possible to understand or explain this phenomenon only in terms of the interaction of the environment and society.

Feeble Framework

One notices here the weakness of the interpretative framework that Singh uses. Throughout the book there is an attempt to use historical tools and concepts which owe their origin to the Annales historiography, specifically to the works of Fernand Braudel. Singh continually stresses the need to move away from environmental or geographical determinism and repeats often his claim that the interaction between nature and man in the Western Himalayas was not unidirectional. This understanding of nature-culture relationship does not reflect in the text where there is a greater emphasis on the environmental conditions determining the specificities of human actions.

In any attempt to use the framework of historical geography developed by the Annales school, and specifically by Braudel, two things are imperative. First, a careful definition of the 'region', and, second, a selection of a 'long duree' and a comprehensive use of sources.

The geographical factors which determined the formation of the state

in the hills are looked at closely. These definitely add to our knowledge of the hill state, but do not fully explain the origin of the states in the region or illuminate their distinct structures. The area south of the Dhauladhar range did not only have relatively small states garnering a surplus from agricultural yield due to milder monsoons enabling two harvests a year. It also had large areas where lineage based clans controlled undisturbed political power, and state structures were quite under-developed. These came to be called the Simla Hill States by the British, but the use of that term was a legal figment. One can find similar exceptions in other areas: Dodra-Kawar in Bashahr, 'Poondur' on the borders of Jubbal and Bashahr, and Saraj in Kullu. These showed marked differences in their political organization from the dominant forms in the same climatic, environmental zone. It is surprising that Singh uses the works of Karl Polanyi and Andre Gunder Frank, apart from Braudel and E. LeRoy Ladurie, to understand the relation between 'environment, territoriality and the state' but ignores work closer home, like that of Romila Thapar, D. D. Kosambi and D. N. Majumdar. There is an unfortunate absence of involvement

with anthropological and political theories on the origin and functioning of the state which leads to confusion over the use of concepts like political power, government, and state. A form of environmental determinism has crept into the text because of Singh's primary reliance on environmental factors in understanding and explaining historical processes.

In any attempt to use the framework of historical geography developed by the Annales school, and specifically by Braudel, two things are imperative. First, a careful definition of the 'region', and, second, a selection of a 'long duree' and a comprehensive use of sources.

The title of the book defines the region of study as the Western Himalayas. Though there are differences among geographers about the correct definition of this region, Singh reduces it to the political boundaries of the present state of Himachal Pradesh. There is no basis for including low lying areas of the Kangra valley in the Himalayas, either geographically or historically. The trans-Himalayan regions of Lahul and Spiti are again by no stretch of imagination part of the Himalayas.

Singh states that he has attempted

to understand the dialectic of continuity and change in the relation between environment and the peasant life. The period of his study corresponds broadly to the British rule. This is not long enough to achieve his objective, specially in a region where the sheer magnitude of geography makes historical changes tortuously slow. But this is not an impossible task. For that one has to use a wide array of sources. Unfortunately, much of the book revolves around official British records, which in their present state of maintenance are scattered thinly over the historical ground. The use of anthropological sources, oral traditions, whether recorded in official documents or available in songs and rituals, would enable one to reconstruct a fuller account of the interaction of man and nature.

All this does not take away from the merit of the book. It is closely argued, is attentive to details, and recovers for scrutiny and interpretation a whole region of our country, ignored for too long by 'mainstream' historical research.

Aniket Alam is a research scholar at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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Of written and oral histories

Archana Prasad

Subalterns and Sovereigns :

An Anthropological History of Bastar, 1854-1996

by Nandini Sundar

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997; xxiii +296 pp; Rs. 495

In this book, Nandini Sundar makes a brave attempt to write a long-term history of Bastar by combining archival and oral sources. The focus of the book, in the words of the author, is to understand processes by which 'other peoples' definitions of Bastar become authoritative, whereby the people of Bastar have become strangers in their own land' (p. 263). Her analysis of this process in different chapters reaffirms, to a great extent, the thesis that colonialism led to the integration of the tribals into a global capitalist economy. In this way, her work substantiates the existing scholarship on forested and tribal societies. For example, Sundar differs with the pioneering thesis of Ramachandra Guha on the nature of kingship, rather than on the nature of changes in forested societies (p. 88). As she argues, Guha has only discussed the nature of political power in kingdoms in theoretical and abstract terms. And indeed, her work is most persuasive in explaining the history of the changing symbolic meanings of the motifs of power and authority. This is done through an analysis of the perceptions of the people of Kukanar, the village from where she had collected oral histories in 1992.

Changing Symbols

Through these histories, Sundar attempts to recreate the precolonial past for us. In the first part of the book, she shows us how the people of Kukanar viewed the forests, the fields and their homesteads. The perceptions of/on the king and kingship are also elucidated through these histories. The narrative, entitled 'Recreating Pasts', aims at giving us an idea of the precolonial past through the 'ethnographic observations' of the author. These observations are used not to recreate or document the past but to evoke it, i.e., to capture the Dhurwa sense of history and contrast it with the present (p. 25). In this context, Sundar discusses the ritual basis of power and authority in the kingdom of Bastar, and the significance of the Dassehra festival as

an occasion for legitimizing the power of the monarch. Her discussion on the changing symbols of power from the precolonial and colonial to postcolonial times is interesting, as it demonstrates to us, in a partially explanatory way, the manner in which state structures get altered in the case of tribal societies.

Another problem with the book is the way Sundar attempts to combine oral sources with the written archival records. While most of her written evidence is for the entire district of Bastar, the oral evidence is collected for just one village, Kukanar. She herself acknowledges the dangers of extrapolating from such oral evidence for the entire region.

The second part of the book attempts to discuss the specific impact of colonialism on the tribal society of Bastar. It also seeks to show that the actions of the state were partly framed in response to the peoples' protests that took place in the years 1876, 1910 and 1966. According to Sundar, there were three distinct features with regard to the nature of colonialism in Bastar. The first was the fact that the primary impulse for the extension of administration into these areas came, not due to the exigencies of the local society, but from the colonial authorities themselves. The second main significance of colonialism was that it changed the terms of integration of tribal people into the larger, mainstream society. It is in this context that Sundar considers the capitalist exploitation of these tribal societies in the colonial era (p. 4). Finally, she says that the most fundamental aspects of the exercising of colonial power and authority was in the creation of social and epistemological categories, which outlived colonial regimes and influenced the thinking of future researchers as well as of the tribals themselves (p. 10).

Within this framework, the author discusses the broad changes in the polity and socio-economic fabric of colonial and postcolonial Bastar. Her analysis of scientific forestry and its impact is not very different from that of Mahesh Rangarajan and Ramachandra Guha, and shows how the colonial forest department marginalized local communities and centralized forest administration. She also focuses on periods of protest as the *defining moments* of policy and law. But her failure to discuss the impact of the movements in 1910 and 1966 in any comprehensive fashion leaves this discussion incomplete. For example, Sundar does not tell us the impact of the 1910 rebellion on the administration in Bastar. Instead, she switches to the broad discussion of the 'tribal question', and the nature of the postcolonial Congress government which, in its treatment of tribals, was no different from the colonial regime. It would have been fruitful to document the evidence (on how similar they were) before passing judgement.

Cursory Analysis

The way Sundar looks at the interaction between law, policy and the state institutions, on the one hand, and the local tribal society, on the other, is problematic, and has a bearing on the overall structure and argument of the book. By ignoring the ways in which the nature of local ecology, economy and polity delimit colonial action, she tends to treat the material aspect of tribal life in a cursory manner. This is especially evident in her discussion of the precolonial regime, relating to the local people's perception of fields and forests, where she says that tribal communities in precolonial India were not isolated in character. But she does not discuss the nature of precolonial administration and the position of the tribals in this system. Conse-

quently, she is not able to make clear and convincing linkages between her analysis of the colonial and precolonial political machinery, thus weakening her own argument about the significance of colonialism as a centralized system of administration. For this reason, her analysis suffers from the same drawbacks as earlier historiography on colonial forestry.

Another problem with the book is the way Sundar attempts to combine oral sources with the written archival records. While most of her written evidence is for the entire district of Bastar, the oral evidence is collected for just one village, Kukanar. She herself acknowledges the dangers of extrapolating from such oral evidence for the entire region. As she says: 'there is always danger, of course, that subaltern groups too can lead to chauvinistic and nativistic sentiments... But rather than take these accounts literally in every case, we need to understand the way in which they also articulate a particular stance on history and a particular type of claim' (p. 261). Yet, her evidence is primarily drawn from the stories of Dayaro Pujari or a few women, and is supposed to represent the tribal people of Bastar as having a collective and undifferentiated memory. She does not analyze the competing claims of different groups on their historical heritage, nor does she take into account the competing visions of outside interventions in the state of Bastar.

Despite these problems, Nandini Sundar's book is a good experiment in combining oral and written sources in the writing of history. Its limitations only serve as a pointer for the need to invent new ways for recording oral history in a more reliable manner and for giving it a prominent place in history writing.

Archana Prasad is at IIPA, New Delhi.

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Reason and religious attitudes

Manidipa Sen

Hume on Religion

by Edward Craig

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla,
1997; 78 pp; Rs. 80

David Hume (1711- 1776), in some of his major works, poses a systematic challenge to the dominant philosophical tradition of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. Edward Craig's monograph presents a lucid exposition of this debate and brings into the forefront Hume's unique way of explaining how religious beliefs come into existence. As Craig points out, philosophy of religion is a topic on which David Hume wrote the most, apart from his writings on the history of England. Why did Hume devote so much of his work to this area of inquiry? The answer is that he was opposing a particular picture of the human nature which the dominant philosophical currents in Europe received from such influential sources as the Aristotelian and the Judeo-Christian traditions. At the very beginning of the monograph Craig remarks that the whole of Hume's philosophy is about religion. Be it his theory of causation, his theory of self, or the doctrine of impressions and ideas, the main target of attack is this dominant view of the nature of man.

God's Image

The period immediately preceding Hume saw such important thinkers as Descartes, Galileo, Leibniz, Spinoza and Berkeley, proposing what may be termed as the 'Image of God' doctrine (what is sometimes called the 'Similarity Thesis'). Advocating an attitude of confidence in the powers of human individuals, this doctrine says that man is made in the image of god and thus shares certain fundamental features with him. Though this idea of man as being similar to god has its origin in antiquity, the particular version of the doctrine that Hume challenged attributed this similarity to certain areas of human knowledge, namely, knowledge of logic and mathematics, and knowledge of the present states of one's own mind. These are cases of infallible and certain knowledge, and thus are areas where the human mind approximates the divine mind. As opposed to this way of understanding the nature of human beings, Hume puts forward his

naturalized conception of man — a conception that highlights the fact of the humans being a continuous part of the animal kingdom.

In the first chapter 'The Image of God?', Craig provides an account of Hume's argument against this view of human nature. The Image of God doctrine not only has a well-defined epistemological component telling us what can be regarded as human knowledge, it also has a significant ontological component regarding what the world is really like, based on that epistemology. The first part of Hume's attack questions this epistemological programme, that is, the very idea of having certain beliefs which enjoy a cognitive security. Neither the faculty of reason nor the faculty of the senses can ensure infallibility and certainty of knowledge. As regards Hume's ontology, Craig argues that instead of viewing him as a skeptic, as has often been done, it is appropriate to call him an agnostic.

Given the psychological history of religious beliefs, it is not possible to attach any intrinsic value to religious beliefs, and, so, their value lies in the consequences of having such beliefs, and their consequences are, according to Hume, always negative.

Hume's positive thesis about the formation of certain beliefs consists in providing a psychological explanation of how beliefs—religious beliefs in particular—are formed. Taking the psychological make-up or the animal component in man to be more basic—as opposed to reason or the divine element of human nature—Hume introduces a complete shift from the theological conception of human nature to a secular and naturalistic one. On the question, what are our *reasons* for accepting religious beliefs? two rational sources of religious beliefs have traditionally

been identified: revelation and natural theology. In order to argue for the claim that religious beliefs are entirely founded on psychology, Hume needs to first confront the thesis that religious beliefs have some rational basis. In the second chapter 'The Rationality of Religious Belief' Craig considers Hume's argument against these two ways of accounting for such beliefs. He presents rich and solid arguments to show that for Hume neither revelation nor natural theology can account for religious beliefs. By pointing out that even revelation has to be based on some reason or the other (evident from the fact of trying to answer questions like 'what reasons may we have for thinking that a particular revelation is genuine?'), Hume observes that genuine revelations are those that are certified by miracle. But reasons for denying that a miracle has happened being always stronger than reasons for believing it, reason can never be the basis for miracle and therefore for individuals' belief in revelation. Religious beliefs based on revelation, thus, are dependent on the elements of the psychological make-up of individuals and cannot have a rational validity.

Order and Design

In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume painstakingly criticized the Argument from Design, which is one of the key arguments—coming particularly from natural theology—for our belief in the existence of god. The argument is that natural objects are like human artefacts in respect of the order and adaptation they display; the order and adaptation in human artefacts are due to intelligent design; therefore, the order and adaptation in natural objects are also due to intelligent design. This argument, however, does not work unless one presupposes that order and adaptation have only one kind of cause, that is, intelligent design. The main line of Hume's attack is that the assumption of order and adaptation having only one cause can be justified neither *a priori* nor by experience, and hence the Design Argument fails to account for our religious beliefs.

The third and final chapter 'The Psychology of Religion' is an exposition of how psychology gives rise to the religious beliefs that human beings come to possess. Craig's clarificatory remarks on the following points are extremely helpful to understand the rather discursive approach that Hume takes in discussing the origin of religious beliefs.

Firstly, by 'psychology' Hume means nothing more than 'commonsense and age-old experience'. By drawing upon the traditional wisdom about human thought and emotion, he provides us with a detailed description of how religious beliefs come into existence. Secondly, instead of wanting to provide us with the causes of the origin of religious beliefs in individuals, Hume is primarily concerned with its social causes. Furthermore, he does not confine himself to the causes of these beliefs, but also tries to specify the effects of having such beliefs.

According to Hume, the earliest religious beliefs are polytheistic in character. The merit of Hume's discussion on the origin of polytheism lies in the fact that without referring to any historical data (which can, anyway, merely establish that the earliest records tell of polytheism, not that the earliest religion was itself such) he traces the development of polytheism in human psychology. For Hume it was unlikely that primitive man should have first had the thought of an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent god—an abstraction so very far removed from anything in his own experience—and then gradually lost that belief and substituted it with a variety of finite and limited gods. The psychology behind polytheistic approach to religion is really the universal tendency among human beings to conceive all other entities in terms of having the same characteristics as themselves. But later on, by giving importance to only one of the gods, polytheism slowly transforms itself into monotheism. So, explanation of both the origin and the transformation of religious beliefs can be given in psychological terms.

About the effects of religious beliefs, Hume was extremely pessimistic. Given the psychological history of religious beliefs, it is not possible to attach any intrinsic value to religious beliefs, and, so, their value lies in the consequences of having such beliefs, and their consequences are, according to Hume, always negative. If it is natural for the human psychology to have religious beliefs, as Hume thinks it is, it is not obvious that it will always have negative effects on human nature and society. Craig shows that this is an area where Hume's argument loses rigour because the psychological explanation of religion clashes with the pessimism concerning its effects.

Manidipa Sen is an independent scholar based in New Delhi.

History for the non-academic

Amiya P. Sen

Srivaishnavism and Social Change

by Kandadai Seshadri

K. P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1998; 180 pp; Rs. 240

In India, until quite recently, religion as a field of study has appealed more to the cultural anthropologist than to the historian. This has often produced brilliant theoretical insights and empirically rich studies of religious belief or practice, albeit within a narrowly defined framework of time and space. But the unfolding of the historical narrative does not figure as clearly in these presentations.

Seshadri's study of Srivaishnavism, a Vaishnavite sub-sect going back to the twelfth century theologian Ramanuja, appears to somewhat redress this imbalance. However, it is difficult to situate the work within the domain of finely crafted historical writing. Nor does it carry valuable theoretical inputs of the cultural anthropologist. Within the specialized field of the history of Vaishnavism, Seshadri's work is certainly not as comprehensive nor empirically as rich as the researches of Joseph T. O'Connell, Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal or Ramakanta Chakravarti, all of whom have worked on Bengal Vaishnavism.

The book does not rely as much as one would have expected on what is traditionally called primary sources. Seshadri might have used with greater profit the older source material in the vernacular and more recent official census reports or ethnographic surveys of British India which offer a wealth of information on the subject. It appears as though the author has found no use for the more academic journals, or periodicals specific to Vaishnava history or culture. This is unfortunate as some of the earliest research and reconstruction of our cultural and religious history appeared in the popular vernacular journals of the previous century.

Tendentious Reading

The study leaves us clueless about its exact time-frame: medieval legends and modern interventions are arbitrarily inserted at places. There is a teleology here that tends to read older legends or anecdotes not within their specific historical or cultural contexts but only as a political ideologue would do in our times.

Nevertheless, Seshadri's avowedly Marxian framework reveals

much self-reflexivity and ideological revisionism. It is, for instance, burdened with the belief that 'many Indian Marxists... have unconsciously become satellites of the western intellectual establishment' (p. 3). There is, besides, some valiant soul-searching as reflected in the argument that 'modern-secular' postures need not be contingent any longer on intellectual apathy to religion.

In choosing to work on Ramanuja and Srivaishnavism, what seems also to have enthused Seshadri is the as yet unexplained phenomenon of Advaita Vedanta being socially privileged over other schools of Vedanta (pp. ix and 20). This polarity gets sharper in modern India when, perhaps beginning with Ram Mohun, there is a clear intellectual partiality among the educated classes for the non-dualist philosophy of Sankara. But surely, this had its premodern roots and by handling this question Seshadri would have only further enriched his analysis of the relative success of the Srivaishnava movement. He is quick to notice that this particular sub-sect of Vaishnavism is relatively less successful in Kerala (p. 87). One wonders why. In the later half of the book, there is a collapsing of the categories of 'Vaishnavism' and 'Srivaishnavism'. This might seem no less a prejudice than the conflation of Advaita Vedanta and Vedanta.

Startling Conclusions

At various places in the book, Seshadri comes up with startling conclusions quite unsupported by evidence. On page 111, there is the suggestion that the 'Vaishnava sect has appeared to be mostly Tamil oriented.' Did Seshadri really mean the Srivaishnava sect? One would hope that this was indeed the case, for it is otherwise difficult to claim some regional exclusivity for what was truly a pan-Indian movement. His perspective on the past suffers from a bias that was characteristic of colonial historiography in this country. Seshadri writes thus of the 'medieval' period in Indian history: 'As in every country the medieval days in India were dark and exploitation was rampant and perhaps there was no consciousness among the masses

that they were being exploited' (p. 24). One wonders again if it would be historically accurate to call Harsha and Kaniska 'Hindu kings' (p. 27). However, a bolder and more speculative remark is made with respect to the interrelationship between (Vaishnava) *bhakti* and feudal relations of production and social structuring. By suggesting that the spread of Srivaishnavism actually weakened feudal relationships (p. 29), Seshadri offers an interesting rebuttal to Veluthat's older, somewhat deterministic thesis of *bhakti* being an ideological growth of feudal relationships.

On the other hand, this work cannot be used very effectively to counter Marxist determinism. Is it really true, as Seshadri claims (p. 29), that Ramanuja allowed untouchables to read the scriptures (and, one may ask, exactly which scriptures?), and that this newly acquired access to esoteric knowledge then made space for considerable upward mobility? I see in such arguments a logical leap which confuses broad, part-time unity within a body of religious followers with a radical or meaningful restructuring of social relationships. Even in Bengal where, I imagine, caste relationships were never as rigidly structured as in south India, low caste and female recruits to Vaishnavism were always socially despised by upper caste society, whether Vaishnava or non-Vaishnava. The leadership of the Bengali Vaishnava community, as the important researches of Biman Behari Majumdar have statistically proved, invariably belonged to upper (though not necessarily Brahmin) castes. Here, relating changes in ideology to the theory of dominant castes/sub-castes may be quite useful. As Seshadri himself seems to suggest (p. 31), the new identity connected with a more humanistic religious belief may have been most effectively appropriated by the economically more affluent (landowning) strata within the lower castes.

It also appears as though at places Seshadri falls a victim to his own ambivalences. On pages 38-39, evidently to bring out the radical potentiality of Ramanuja's message, Seshadri alludes to his defiant public proclamation of an esoteric mantra meant exclusively for higher castes. The historical authenticity of such episodes, however, will always be under some cloud. Curiously, there is a similar legend about the arch-conservative Sankara being instructed in Vedantic non-dualism by socially as despicable a figure as

a Chandala. In any case, further down the book the author himself turns back on this argument: 'It should not be thought that the Vaishnavites fought against the caste system as such. Not even Ramanuja tried to eliminate caste nor was it at any time his intention.'

Tenuous Interpretation

I would like to conclude this review with a few brief references to the more theological aspects of Ramanuja's teachings. Seshadri does make the important point that unlike his intellectual predecessor Sankara, Ramanuja does not treat the world as a mere illusion (pp. 44-45). From this, he goes on to conclude that this qualifies the latter as a 'materialist or a spiritualist with a materialist orientation' (ibid). This is a rather tenuous interpretation of the term 'materialism'. Within the overall framework of Indian religious thinking, non-denial of the world does not necessarily lead to either of these positions. For the materialist, the laws of material causation are absolutely crucial in explaining any phenomenon and all changes occurring within it. No theological/philosophical school, whether identified with Sankara or with Ramanuja, seems to have operated with this paradigm. To both, human intention or effort is overridden by divine will, making man a mere instrument of some inscrutable cosmic purpose.

Secondly, it is useful to remember that historically some sub-sects or cults within Vaishnavism have shown greater flexibility with regard to their social attitudes. This would certainly be truer of the pastoral Krishna cult than of the more ritually constructed deity Vishnu, the icon worshipped by Ramanuja. At least in north India, Krishna cults, essentially a religion of the *grihi* (the domesticated), allowed for greater humanization. The devotees could relate to god as they would relate to their fellow beings — to a socially superior, a friend or even a lover. Perhaps because of this reason, these cults also allowed greater space to socially marginalised groups like low castes and women. Within Srivaishnavism, on the other hand, connected as it was with a complex ordering of social and ritual life centred on the temple, theological adaptations of this kind appear to have been far less possible.

Seshadri does not address these questions in any depth.

Amiya P. Sen is a Fellow at IIAS, Shimla.

On home ground, again

Satish C. Aikant

'Of Many Heroes': An Indian Essay in Literary Historiography

by G. N. Devy

Orient Longman, Mumbai, 1998; ix + 213 pp; Rs. 290

The most contentious aspect of the study of literature is its relationship with history. This problematic relationship can be best understood in terms of Philip Sidney's views on the distinction between the 'probable truth' of poetry and the 'particular truth' of history, and Frederic Jameson's edict to 'always historicize'. A study of literature inevitably involves a study of its history and a determination of their respective sites and modes of discrimination. But the definitions are determined by an authorizing culture, so that the course of literary history is bound to be affected by systems of domination and control.

Since institutionalized history is of western origin, it is not unusual to view historical consciousness as a specifically western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of the modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated. The universalist claims of western epistemology have generally operated to appropriate and control the 'other', and in subsequent colonial constructions of history the subjectivity of the native voice has been obliterated. Fortunately, the postcolonial resurgence in the non-western societies has contested these invidious representations by unmasking the hegemonic pretensions of the west. G. N. Devy's book emerges out of this concern to espouse the already existing, alternative approaches that would restore native agency, a task that he had begun with his earlier, provocative and keenly debated book, *After Amnesia* (1992).

Diversity of Tradition

Devy begins by questioning western historiography's basic assumption regarding the linear notion of time as opposed to the cyclic one of the nonwestern cultures. The former valorizes progressivism over a supposed retrogressive cycle to which the 'other' is doomed. The notion of time in the Indian metaphysical thought is beautifully captured in Bhartrihari's metaphor of time as the bird catcher, suggestive of a duration entrapped within eternity. This notion combines with his *sphota* theory of meaning which maintains the preverbal and eternal nature of

meaning.

Devy's approach to literary historiography is thus grounded in Indian epistemological concerns. In the chapter 'The Conventions of Literary History', he considers whether there was any history in India prior to India's contact with the modern west. India's past, he notes, has a diverse literary tradition that can be classified into: *suta*, *mantra*, *shastra*, *akshara*, and *prakrit*. Our literary heritage encompasses forms and movements from the earliest oral traditions to the later written critical commentaries which scrutinize the vast corpus of literary production. The basic attitude to historiography is formulated in the *suta* texts which recognize the 'presence of the past' but not the 'pastness of the past', and explain the persistence of tradition in the face of modernity. However, Devy tends to confuse traditional authority with historical authority when he portrays the *puranas* as historical records. The *shastras*, with their human authorship, had a clearer historical perspective, and they engendered the principles of linguistics and poetics. The book emphasizes that along with mainstream literary texts, which were governed by conditions for canon formation, there was a simultaneous growth of *prakrit*, the parallel stream of literature, which followed its own lines of noncanonicity, remaining unaffected by conventional scholarship.

While outlining precolonial historiography, the author refers to the awareness that literature and history did not coalesce, and that literature could be seen as an alternative to history. He refers to Al Badaoni, the medieval literary chronicler in Akbar's court, who does not use such categories as 'genre', 'canon', or 'language' as principles of classification. His literary history is based on the notion of 'sect' referring to a literary community. Devy feels that such chronicles, though avowedly centred around Islamic texts, reflect the pluralistic approach that characterizes Indian critical thinking.

In his discussion of the concepts of literature, culture, and history in the Indian tradition, Devy cautions against employing western models which are basically derived from the

idea of 'progress'. He cites the example of Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774-1790) which pursues an agenda, in complicity with Orientalism, based on the idea of a uniform advance from 'barbarism to refinement', 'rudeness to elegance', placing nonwestern 'primitive' races on the lowest scale of civilization. Orientalism itself was a part of, what Devy calls, 'Savageology', which introduced the dichotomy of imagination and reason. The former was mainly an attribute of the 'primitive' people, capable of destabilizing western 'reason'. Such distinctions are altogether absent from the Indian quest. Warton also used space as a metaphor for imagination, so that in his perverse cartography the south and the east represented imagination whereas the north and the west represented reason. Subsequently, Warton promoted the introduction of the rhetoric of literature as a civilizing force that was later to become part of Macaulay's mission.

Bhasha Literature

The Orientalist scholarship followed a similar agenda but employed a different methodology, and froze the essential and the Indian *puranic* tradition to advance the thesis of a progressive deterioration of the Indian society. To counter this discursive practice Devy highlights the role of Aurobindo, who revitalized the Indian critical thinking, by offering an original historiography of Indian literature. Aurobindo undermined William Jones' enthusiasm for India's past, and criticized his failure to reckon with the rise of the *bhasha* literature, as well as Macaulay's dismissal of the entire tradition of Indian literature as being of no consequence. He redefined the poetics of Indian literature, fully taking into consideration the enabling strain of tradition. Yet, he did not shy away from a nationalist critique of Indian literature.

The central chapter of the book entitled 'Postcolonial Indian Approaches' is devoted to a diagnosis of the impoverishment of the Indian critical sensibility within the institutional context of the teaching of English literature in India. He dissects the critical 'amnesia' of the colonial period. Devy highlights such crucial issues as 'local' versus 'universal' literature, modernity, national convergence, etc., on the basis of which a framework for modern historiography can be built up. Aurobindo's *The Future Poetry* had shown the way by harmonizing the culture specific constituents with a

certain kind of universalism. Thus, we have the *Marga* view of culture and history that also rests on the congruence of divergent streams. According to U. R. Anantha Murthy there can be no clear affiliation with either tradition or modernity. But we find a less reifying view of tradition in Balchandra Nemade who considers it as an essentially foreclosed system and maintains that since literature is a subsystem of culture, tradition in postcolonial societies is a 'means of recovering the nativistic self-awareness.' Such 'nativism' could perhaps be demystified in the light of current postmodern and postcolonial approaches. A redeeming historiography would take into account the subaltern and feminist discourses and incorporate issues hitherto marginalized. Marginality is not only a site of deprivation, it is also a site of radical possibility. Unfortunately, Devy does not pay much attention to the intervention of feminist criticism in the field of modern literary theory, which however needs to be freed from the western hegemonic discourses that ignore the social realities specific to the third world nations, particularly the oppressive conditions faced by women.

He concurs with Salman Rushdie who questions the 'false category' of 'Commonwealth literature', but perhaps misses the point that Rushdie himself has a patronizing attitude towards the new literatures and berates the *bhasha* literatures, even though some of them have longer traditions than what is taken to be the mainstream English literature or the Indian writing in English.

Any simplistic nativistic theory would flounder if it merely fetishizes national origin and denies historical production of subjectivity. While reexcavating the original terrain of precolonial forms of a cultural domain, we cannot ignore the ruptures that colonialism has created in that domain. Devy follows an ineluctable historical logic that aptly raises the issue of institutional dominance, since representational practices always implicate positions of enunciation. Such cultural strategy is useful for the retrieval and creation of an independent identity, which does not, however, diminish the ardour for a plural/secular society. The book refers to various other topics such as para-literature, self and the other, translation, nation and narration, which pertain to the field of literary historiography.

Satish C. Aikant teaches English at H. N. B. Garhwal University, Pauri.

Development at subregional level

P. R. Panchamukhi

Facets of Development: Studies in Karnataka

edited by Vinod Vyasulu

Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1997; 382 pp; Rs. 650

The process of economic development of a nation can be better studied if we take a close look at how sub-regional economies are undergoing change in their different sectors. Policy prescriptions for socio-economic transformation have to be regionspecific and not country specific, particularly in the context of India, a country of continental size and of large intra- and inter-regional variations. In this background, the study under review is a significant contribution. It is one of the very few studies available on the facets of development of a subregional economy in India.

Complex Linkage

The study discusses cogently some of the salient features of development in Karnataka. The papers touch upon the historical aspects of the legacy of thinking on planned subregional development. Issues relating to urbanization, unemployment, poverty alleviation, developmental programmes, socio-political changes emerging in the background of Panchayati Raj, changes in the cropping pattern, in manufacturing industry and in small scale industry have all been analyzed. Though these do not exhaust the list of the major issues of importance, the study deserves the attention of keen students of the developmental process at the subregional level. For, it also raises certain conceptual issues relating to the sectors chosen though the focus is primarily on empirical analysis than on conceptual generalization. The message of the study seems to be that each sector in a subregional economy has its own character and identity and has to be handled *as such* by the policy makers and theoreticians alike.

Nevertheless, I wish there were some logical link among the various contributions. The developmental process surely has different facets. But it also appears that different sectors and facets of each sector have an interesting but complex linkage which needs to be unravelled in a research study, taking an overview of the process of socio-economic transformation. Just as there is an inter-temporal continuity, there is also a cross-sectional continuity.

Karnataka has a tremendous R &

D potential, particularly with regard to information technology. The challenges of education and health are unique in the case of this semi-developed state. Environmental issues are becoming more complicated. Housing situation and water supply problems, both in urban and rural areas, have reached a very difficult stage. Intra-regional disparities between north and south Karnataka are coming to the fore. Though all these issues could not have been covered in a single volume, it appears that these should stand very high in the priority listing.

Multi-disciplinary Approach

Though it leaves the reader with this feeling of unease, the study provokes him to think about the various problems of development in a sub-regional setting. The first essay by Vinod Vyasulu rightly traces the origins of socio-economic planning to M. Vishveshwariah's pioneering ideas and thus highlights what Karnataka has given to the country in this particular field. A paper on Bangalore city and its growth, a study of its structure during the nineteenth century, and another of the urban situation in Karnataka, all of which figure in this book, should be read together. Similarly, papers on employment situation, poverty alleviation, and developmental programmes may be read together though these are placed at different points in the volume. Two papers on industrial sector, placed sequentially, provide interesting information regarding the various aspects of the industrial sector at the district level.

The unique contribution of the volume should be seen in its use of the micro and district level information, both published and unpublished, for the purpose of analysis of the developmental process. On the whole, Vinod Vyasulu and the other scholars who contributed to this volume should be complemented for their insightful analysis. It is hoped that they would continue their interest in the micro aspects of developmental process at the subregional level using multi-disciplinary perspectives.

P. R. Panchamukhi is Director of Centre for Multi-disciplinary Development Research (CMDR), Dharwad.

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The less-than-absolute authority of the law

Swapna Liddle

A Despotism of Law:

Crime & Justice in Early Colonial India

by Radhika Singha

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998;

xviii+342 pp; Rs. 550

Radhika Singha has been exploring the arena of colonial criminal law over the last few years. Her latest contribution on this theme is a polished and readable book.

Over the course of six chapters Singha takes us successively through several related subjects. The transition from precolonial agencies and forms of administering criminal justice to colonial ones is seen as a complex process. The British avowedly strove to eliminate what they considered the venality and arbitrariness of the native judicial systems. Yet, the imperatives of pacification led them to adopt certain measures that could hardly be justified under the principles of a universal rule of law. The examples of harsher sentences being prescribed for 'notorious' criminals, and the tailoring of penalties according to the rank and caste of the offender are two of such anomalies pointed out by the author. A constant strain running through the book is how the colonial state strove to make some adjustments with its subjects, even in its aggressively reformist phases. The reactions of the people to these reforms and adjustments, and how these in turn impacted upon state policy are also illustrated.

Ambiguous Positions

Chapter two *inter alia* discusses the changes in the powers and functions of the officials who were inherited from the earlier regimes. Their powers were made more formal, their rights of discretion were decreased, and this led to a greater bureaucratization of their offices. Similarly, while principles of Islamic law continued to be applied, these were modified and reinterpreted. The author creatively analyzes changes wrought in the underlying principles of procedure. In paragraphs replete with illustrations, she describes how the state strove to distance considerations such as the wishes of the heirs of a murdered man from the process of awarding punishment. The underlying assumption

was that punishment meted out for criminal offenses was essentially a prerogative of the state, rather than a means of satisfying the aggrieved party.

An engaging third chapter describes how popular sensibilities about honour and sanctity were translated into certain forms of 'murder' and 'suicide', which the British termed barbaric and inhuman. Here again, there was a tendency towards the monopolization by the state of the right to violence, particularly when it involved the extreme case of the taking of a life. Yet, as Singha points out, the British were reluctant to go too far, especially with regard to infringing upon religious sentiments. This is evident in the ambiguous positions they took on *sati* and the passing of death sentences on brahmins.

A similar duality characterized the state's approach towards the domestic sphere. On the one hand, the state was permitted to take the strong arm of the law into the Indian household. One factor that applied here was the need to interfere in cases of extreme violence, such as infanticide. Yet, the desire not to burden the Company's courts with domestic disputes, particularly those that might tend to upset patriarchal controls within the family, led the state to declare that many areas of family life were outside the courts' jurisdiction. An area in which contrary pressures were in evidence was that of slavery. Here, on one side there was pressure from the anti-slavery movement within Britain (the term 'anti-abolitionist' that appears in this context on pages 128 and 158 can perhaps be attributed to a typographical error). Conversely, British officials believed that as slavery in India was mostly of a relatively mild domestic sort, it should not be interfered with. Again, exceptions would arise in the cases of extreme violence committed by masters over their slaves, or in the kidnapping of women and children

for sale into slavery or prostitution.

Chapter five deals with the anti-Thuggee operations in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The author sees the particular nature of the anti-Thuggee law (not only the Act of 1836, but the practice as it developed in the early 1830s) as tending to go against the principles of 'rule of law'. The state used the arguments of 'notoriety', membership in a gang, and 'professional criminal' for conviction, more than it did the proof of actual participation in a specific crime.

The author is perceptive in seeing the development of anti-Thuggee operations against the backdrop of the assertion of paramountcy over Indian rulers. No doubt the need to protect the movement of opium and bullion, and that of the Company's soldiers on leave, was an important interest. However, this had to be done, preferably, without assuming more responsibility in the internal affairs of the states of Central India than was absolutely necessary. My own research in this area shows that in the face of determined opposition from a powerful state, a retreat of the arresting parties was ordered. Thus, the advance of paramountcy was not unbridled, a contention that is in keeping with Singha's thesis that the colonial state continuously had to make adjustments with Indian agency.

Conflicting Imperatives

An important part of the fifth chapter centres around the dichotomy between the administrative and judicial systems of the 'Regulation' provinces (where the Company's formally enacted regulations or laws held sway) and the 'non-Regulation' areas of the Company's territory. The author analyses Thuggee legislation as arising also out of the particular problems faced when anti-Thuggee operations were carried out of the non-Regulation provinces into Regulation territory, where rules of evidence and conditions for conviction were more stringent. She points out that anti-Thuggee operations in their initial phase had developed in the context of the looser judicial systems that characterized the areas of the Company's territories which were independent of the Regulations.

The sixth chapter of the book deals with penal structures and practices. Here again, the different imperatives that shaped official thinking and actual practice are in evidence. The desire to make punishment universal was undercut

by the need to give some consideration to the sensibilities of the 'respectable' classes of prisoners. Likewise, the rhetoric of 'humanization' of punishment and its orientation towards the reform of the convict were watered down in the face of the need for economy, which precluded the construction of modern penitentiaries and the provision of disciplined indoor labour rather than on public work outdoors.

In this context, it might have been interesting if the author had discussed the prison regime that developed in the context of the anti-Thuggee operations in Central India, the subject of her fifth chapter. Singha touches briefly on the subject by saying that W. H. Sleeman does not appear to have thought much of the idea of reform through a regime of prison discipline. She, nevertheless, refrains from any description of the large prison for Thugs that was actually set up in Jabalpur, the colony of Thugs' families that adjoined it, and the large and productive manufactory that thrived on the labour of such prisoners and their families.

The Epilogue draws together the threads of argument presented throughout the book. By the 1830s the Company had come into its own as the ruler of India. Along with the formal shedding of the symbols of Mughal sovereignty (such as the name of the Mughal emperor which was only removed from the Company's rupee coin in 1835), also went the need/role of Islamic laws and law officers. On the other hand, certain attempts were being made to assert a positive and distinct racial image for the British in India. At a slightly later date, there were moves to bring 'respectable' Indians into the process of adjudication and within liberal legal reform, thus hoping to create a modern, 'enlightened' Indian public (though Singha points out that this must be seen in the context of the considerable *de facto* power already enjoyed by the native lower bureaucracy in the actualities of criminal adjudication). All the while, the rulers could not help but make concessions on the basis of caste and rank, which were important to the 'traditional' Indian public. These, the author says in conclusion, set the stage for the contradictions that were to crystallize in the post-1857 period.

Swapna Liddle is an independent scholar based in New Delhi

Mirror the original as closely as possible

Thupten K. Rikey

Jnanagarbha's Commentary on Just the Maitreya Chapter from the Samdhinirmocana-sutra. Study, Translation and Tibetan Text

by John Powers

Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1998; 156 pp; Rs. 250

The major part of this book is an English translation of Jnanagarbha's commentary on the 8th (Maitreya) chapter of *Samdhinirmocana-sutra*—the chapter that recounts Buddha's discussion on how to develop *samatha* and *vipasyana*, the two foundations of Buddhist meditation. The translation has copious notes based on the author's thorough study of the *sutra* and its commentaries which have come down to us in Tibetan translations. The book also includes the particular edition of the Tibetan text which the author has used for his translation.

Definitive Meaning

Samdhinirmocana-sutra is a set of Buddha Sakyamuni's teachings belonging to his third *dhamacakra-pravartana* and is classified as the teaching of definitive meaning (*nitartha*) which transcends all argument. Also, it is an important source of the Vijnanavada school. Down the centuries, this *sutra* has been one of the most influential Buddhist scriptures central to all Buddhist practices and philosophy, and has been translated into several Asian languages such as Chinese and Tibetan. Today this *sutra* is available only in translations as its Sanskrit original is no longer available. An English translation by John Powers was published in 1994 by the Berkeley-based Dharma Publishing, under the title *The Wisdom of Buddha*. Divided into ten chapters, this *sutra* recounts a series of questions and answers between Buddha Sakyamuni and his highly advanced Bodhisattva disciples, penetrating deep into matters such as 'non-duality' and 'ultimate' (chaps. 1-4); the secret of consciousness including *alaya-vijnana* (chap. 5); the threefold character of *dharma*, namely 'imputational', 'other-dependent' and 'thoroughly established' (chap. 6); the three types of 'lack of own-

being' of phenomena, viz., the 'lack of own-being in terms of character', 'the lack of own-being in terms of production', and an 'ultimate lack of own-being' (chap. 7); the ten bodhisattva stages (chap. 9); and the characters of Dharmakaya (chap. 10).

*Most probably, Jnanagarbha wrote this commentary with a specified class of readers in mind—one well versed in Buddhist philosophy in general and the *sutra* in question in particular. It would be wise if one reads this commentary along with the *sutra*, as the passages from *sutra* quoted in the commentary are often full stopped in the middle with the term 'etc.', and hence are incomplete*

The present translation of Jnanagarbha's (8th century AD) commentary is a welcome contribution in the field of current Buddhist studies. It demands a tremendous skill to translate into English a text of Indo-Tibetan classical literature like this one. 'When I translate into English a Tibetan text, my translation appears to be somewhat the commentary to the Tibetan original' is what one of my colleagues said when he once came to me with one of his translations. Perhaps this kind of translation is what the author, John Powers, means when he says, 'a paraphrase is often helpful as an interpretation of a difficult text, but it is not a translation' (p. 11). His present work definitely is a translation—a translation based on a methodology somewhat in line with those of the famous eighth century Tibetan translators Ka, Chog and Zhang. It is beyond doubt that

Powers has taken all possible measures to bring his translation close to the Tibetan original, which is again a translation from Sanskrit. Tibetan translators in the past had given priority to preserving the originality of the Sanskrit style and its flavour. Such attempts seemed to have often affected to some extent the natural flow of Tibetan language; hence some of the translations made for a turgid reading. However, the authenticity of such translations has now become evident as the Tibetan translations have proved closest to the Sanskrit original. Those engaged in restoring Tibetan versions by tracing them back to the Sanskrit ones have found them surprisingly easier than they had expected.

Misreading the Original

The English translation presented in this book does mirror the style of the original Tibetan text. In my opinion the author has been successful in fulfilling his goal: 'my goal has been to prepare a translation, one that mirrors the original as closely as possible given the differences between the original text and limitations that English grammar, vocabulary, and syntax place on the translator.' However, I came across some passages where the Tibetan version read slightly differently from what the author has understood it to be. The rendering 'profound' (p. 29:22) for the Tibetan term 'za ba po' (p. 101:5) is perhaps a result of misreading the Tibetan word. One of the possible Tibetan equivalents of the English term 'profound' is 'zab pa' or 'zab po'; but in the above context it is simply 'za ba po' meaning 'one who enjoys'. 'Suffering' (p. 40:15) for 'sdug pa...' (p. 120:14), I think, is an incorrect translation. 'sdug pa' here has a meaning equivalent to the Tibetan term 'yid du ong ba', that is, 'desirable', '...Rag laspa'o' (p. 123:17) has a meaning somewhat equivalent to 'depend on' rather than '[produced] from coarse...' (p. 42:2). The full sentence is 'gzhang yi dbang gi mtshan nyid ni rgyu dang rkyen la rae las pa'o', and it means 'other-dependent phenomena are [the ones that] depend on causes and conditions. The Tibetan passage '...las snyam pa la' (p. 125:13) is translated by the author as 'The functions...are similar' (p. 43:4). The 'las' in the passage in question is a case-ending indicating 'source' according to the Tibetan grammar. And the term 'snyam pa la' has a

meaning somewhat equivalent to 'on wondering'. Hence, the passage 'ching bu rnampag nyi po de gang dag las snyam pa la' reads somewhat like this: 'on wondering from [where do] these two bonds [originate] ...' Most probably, Jnanagarbha wrote this commentary with a specified class of readers in mind—one well versed in Buddhist philosophy in general and the *sutra* in question in particular. It would be wise if one reads this commentary along with the *sutra*, as the passages from *sutra* quoted in the commentary are often full stopped in the middle with the term 'etc.', and hence are incomplete.

The book is basically free from serious print errors. However, I would like to note two errors that have crept into the text. The word 'fluctuating' (p. 49:32) should be read as 'non-fluctuating' ('mi gyo ba', p. 136:5), and the first appearance of the word 'vipasyana' in the passage '...singly dedicated to vipasyana, or is singly dedicated to vipasyana' (p. 27:41) should be read as 'samatha' ('zhi gnas', p. 98:9).

Finally, the big question mark that this commentary has left behind in the minds of modern scholars of Buddhist studies regarding Jnanagarbha's philosophical position and the authorship of the works attributed to him still remains unanswered. The author of this book has preferred to leave this job for future research by saying that it is 'too complex to settle here and requires further research' (p. 9).

Thupten K. Rikey heads the Research & Translation Department and is editor of *The Tibet Journal* at the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala (H. P.)

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Protecting the state

A. S. Narang

Defenders of the Establishment:
Ruler-supportive Police Forces of South Asia

by K. S. Dhillon

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
1998; 289 pp; Rs.300

A significant aspect of policing in democracies is democratic policing. This notion is grounded in the concept of rights of citizens. The police can be seen as facilitator of political rights, enabling people to enjoy them. This means securing the correct balance between public order and the exercise, by individuals and groups, of rights. Crucial to democratic policing is the accountability of the police to the public it serves. This requires police to be responsive to public needs and expectations. But in the Indian subcontinent the police has never been held in high esteem by the people. It has not been able to win their trust and confidence. It has mostly aroused feelings of unease, fear, insecurity, contempt and hostility. Why is this so?

Old Culture

K. S. Dhillon, a retired police officer, who has been a witness to vast changes in policing practices in the country, tries to look for an answer by going into the history of the sub-continental police from ancient times to 1947. He finds that the gulf separating the police from the public is not a new development. It has been a part of its tradition and culture. The primary role of the police continued to be ruler-supportive throughout the ancient and medieval periods and almost totally unconcerned with the interests and welfare of the citizens. The British colonial rulers did not materially change that model though they did succeed in imparting organisational unity to the police and clothed it in modern juridical terminology by promulgating the Indian Police Act in 1861.

Dhillon traces the evolution of Indian police in the context of the emergence of that institution in the world civilizational development. He points out that during the growth of institutional police over several centuries two distinct types of police emerged in different times and environments. In one situation,

when a tribal chief — or some other authority vested with power to rule — discovered that he could not effectively exercise his regulatory functions on his own, due mainly to the sheer size and spread of his clan, he conferred on the members of the community as a whole his responsibility for securing and maintaining the observance of laws. This practice appears to have been common in prehistoric tribal societies in Asia and Africa as also in some clans and communities of central Europe at the time of the Roman empire. Modern police systems of the United Kingdom, the USA and the white Commonwealth countries have descended from this. The other type of policing mechanism was the product of a different situation, where a tribal chief, confronted with an identical crisis, appointed individuals as representatives of his person to exercise against law breakers his own power of punishment as well as to investigate violation of law. These representatives were few in number, but the latent and known repressive power of the chief's armed contingents was enough to inspire fear of themselves and of their master. This category of regulatory system would later evolve into the bodyguard law enforcement mechanisms of many of the great empires of the past including those in the Indian subcontinent.

The Indian police continues to be governed by a piece of legislation enacted in 1861 in a totally different context even in the closing years of the twentieth century

This age-old belief in the efficacy of force as also its traditional legitimacy has given to the police on the Indian subcontinent a 'military' character which cannot but detract from its civilian responsibilities. While the 1861 Act created for the

first time in India a properly organised, well superintended and uniform law enforcement agency, it retained, even strengthened, its military character. It was this phenomenon of increasing militarization of the Indian police, rather than the enhancement of its civilian character even after the termination of the colonial rule, which became a subject of frequent debate in the decades following independence.

Colonial Period

Dhillon traces in detail the developments in the police system in the socio-political context of the colonial period, particularly in view of the fact that it was almost the same period when police reforms were taking place in Britain. Out of the Nine Principles of Police prescribed for the new police of London, after its creation in 1829, as many as seven pertained to police-public relations and the duty of the police to actively seek and secure public cooperation, goodwill and support. But the Indian police was perhaps not expected to emulate its British counterpart. Whereas the former served the imperial interests of a colonial government, the latter catered to a nation of freedom loving people, long used to enjoying some basic civil and individual rights. Moreover, the Indian police was an imposition which the large mass of the people considered as hostile and offensive, while the British police had developed from below as a natural process of evolution.

Dhillon takes note, in the last chapter of the book, of the police system in the subcontinent after independence. He finds to his dismay that the rulers continued with a suppressive system, which they had criticised during the freedom struggle. They even allowed the system to further degenerate. Even today the police in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh continues to be constituted under the Indian Police Act of 1861. Though of colonial origin, by the 1930s the administrative system in India had acquired a paternalistic, even benevolent slant in its functioning. The period after independence, with a new generation of politicians becoming more assertive while a process of change in the relationship between politicians and civil servants was set in motion, did not lead to the establishment of a responsive administration. Rather, there was an erosion in civil service and functional neutrality.

Even though no formal alteration was made in the laws and procedures laying down the work and conduct of the bureaucracy, a marked change in its outlook, attitudes, values and approach had occurred by the mid-1970s. By 1997 the civil service had become almost fully politicised and demoralised, and had lost its operational confidence and efficiency. Dhillon suggests that the civil services had surrendered their functional autonomy and the commitment to objectivity, neutrality and the rule of law.

It will perhaps not be incorrect to characterize the civil services 50 years after independence as a pale shadow of their pre-independence cousins, in all of South Asia. The Indian police continues to be governed by a piece of legislation enacted in 1861 in a totally different context even in the closing years of the twentieth century. Even the extended labours of a National Police Commission, presided over by an eminent civilian and comprising a top social scientist, a well known judge and two of India's respected police leaders, failed to make a dent in the attitude of the anti-reform lobbies in the civil service and the no-changers among the politicians.

Pertinent Questions

Dhillon's purpose is not to find fault with the police personnel or their ability to perform or change. In fact, he appreciates the fact that in the given socio-political situation of the country, the police has worked rather well and helped keep the democratic process on. However, with the emergence of the police as the main protector of the state, its proven utility to the new political classes in the independent countries of the sub-continent was soon realised and was further buttressed by various administrative and operational strategies.

Though Dhillon does not make many recommendations to reform the police system, he raises pertinent questions that the rulers have to ponder. The book is not a chronological history of the police in the subcontinent. It is an analysis of the police system in a context. Thus an added attraction of the book is the interesting reflections on the nature of the political process — both pre- and post-independence.

A. S. Narang teaches political science at Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

Updating M. N. Srinivas

Susmita Dasgupta

**Social Structure and Change,
Volume 5: Religion and Kinship**

edited by A. M. Shah, B. S. Baviskar and E. A. Ramaswamy

Sage Publications, New Delhi,
1998; 212 pp; Rs. 195

The articles in the volume examine the role and function of religion and kinship in preserving the social structure or accommodating change. The concept of a social structure refers to the stable relations which obtain among groups in a society. The stability of the relations rests upon the individual's compliance of the social order in terms of adhering to values, ethics, morality, and so on. Religion is a moral order which upholds the social ideology. Kinship systems organize the individual into family—the group between him and the society. Hence, religion and kinship are associated with the continuity of the social structure. The essays in this volume reveal how important social changes are supported by religion and kin groups.

JPS UBEROI's paper 'Sikhism and Islam: A Structural Analysis' gives an account of how Sikhism united three features, material production, state, and spiritualism, in order to emerge as a political power. Substantial material gains led to economic and political power, and mystic spirituality gave a reason to defy the established social system of caste which was supported by the imperial jagirdari system. Their concept of the state made it easier for the Sikhs to fuse material gains and a spiritual ideology into political power.

Jayaram in 'Sikhism and Caste', on the other hand, shows how the Sikh community sank back into the age old caste system when the immediate concern of the Sikhs, i.e., fighting the Mughals, lost priority. Sikhism failed to sustain its social ideology when the period of crisis, in which the faith had crystallized, was over. The Jat Sikhs maintain their social position as well as exclusivity by keeping land among kin groups and marrying closely among agnates. The Mazhabis Sikhs remain at the lowest rung of the hierarchy, and the intermediate castes of water carriers and others exist in much the same way as they did before Guru Nanak's discourse of equality.

Legitimizing Social Order

Both these essays vindicate M. N. Srinivas' thesis that religion is used to legitimize social structures. While religion served as an important tool in the Sikh's struggle for power, it aided in maintaining the superiority of the Jat Sikhs and of the ecclesiastical order which supported an increasingly graded society in the later days of the consolidation of that power.

In all these forms of marriage, we find the expression of a desire for lineage and hence of upward mobility, the need for the maintenance of land relations and ancestral property, and the emotional and sexual requirements of women and men

Veena Das' 'Narrativising the Male and the Female in Tulasidas' *Ramcharitamanas*' discusses the religious text of the *Ramayana* where a divine order is propagated by the male voice and the worldly doubts about that order are expressed by the female voice. In the end, by the usual construction of woman as the 'other' and the 'inferior', the male voice retains precedence. The legitimacy of the social order is established through its divinization by the male.

Emrys L. Peters expresses a similar view in 'Divine Goodness: The Concept of *Baraka* as Used by the Bedouin of Cyrenaica.' *Baraka* means 'goodness' bestowed by the divine, and is found principally in the wool of sheep. The wool is sheared off ceremoniously in sharp contrast to the rather routine and mundane activity of clipping goat or camel hair. What the author does not mention is that the wool has exchange value and constitutes a major source of income for the Bedouin tribe. It is the economic importance of wool perhaps that leads to its being treated as sacred.

Mary Douglas appears to continue this argument in her paper 'Pollution Ideas: Ancient and

Modern.' According to her, social constructions of divinity, or purity or pollution arise from the social perception of dangers facing the individual. As *baraka* protects an individual from violence, thus protecting the social order, ideas of pollution mark off interaction with unknown social groups or natural elements that are considered as being risky for the individual. This social construction of risk continues in the modern times, under a different garb. The rules of the market in modern economies and the hierarchically organized bureaucracy in the modern state seem to follow certain pollution categories, staving off the individual from interacting with larger but unfamiliar social or natural terrains.

K. D. Gangrade, in 'Social Networks and Crisis Management in Indian Families: A Personal Account', argues that the emergence of the nuclear family is an outcome of the rise of the individual in modern times. The essay is an exposition of how individuals create their social networks and how they are repeatedly created by the later in turn. The role of family as a buffer between the individual and the larger social system has increased in modern times. Modern institutions are extremely impersonal, and they address the individual only as an individual. In order to sustain this increased individuation, the nuclear family has to take up the responsibility of equipping the individual with a support system.

Material Concerns

Leela Dube's article starts off with the premise that kinship rules under customary law have enough space for the maintenance of social cohesion and fulfilling individual interests. Her study is based on the matrilineal Muslim tribes of Kalpeni Islands of Lakshadweep. There is a constant strife in these tribes over the property belonging to the kin group and that earned by purely personal effort. There is also a conflict over property inherited through a will and one received as gift.

These conflicts often take the form of a dispute between customary law and the Islamic law. The dispute invariably involves the common property of the *taravad* protected by customary law and personal property, earned through investments and efforts of the individual, upheld by the Islamic law. Since Islamic law does not recognize ancestral property, personal property devolves as gifts rather than through will. Under

Islamic tenets, a person who is in his senses can make a gift to anybody provided he does so publicly and in his lifetime. Among the islanders, gifts are registered like a will, not made public before the death of the person, and the gifted property is bequeathed rather than parted with during the lifetime of the individual. One must also note that when personal property is inherited and is to be converted into or converged with *taravad* property, individuals may revert back to customary law. In this way there is a constant switching between systems of law, not to speak of modifications in these laws in order to suit the situation.

Leela Dube's article reveals how customary law and the *sharia*, or even the modifications in the *sharia*, are instances of exigencies shaping religious laws and customs. The paper throws light on the apparent rigidity of social structures to show that social rules have an in-built flexibility, and that ideology is influenced by material concerns rather than the other way about.

A similar argument may be found in 'Hypergamy and Hypogamy in Premodern Kerala' by Paul Hockings and W. D. Merchant. The article reveals a clear connection between the specific form of marriage and lineage, and the relationships among the agrarian social classes. Of greater interest is the simultaneous existence not only of hypergamy and hypogamy but also of various forms of marriage like *tali* tying or *sambandhan*, polyandry and polygyny, and also temple prostitution, itself arising out of the practice of hypergamy. In all these forms of marriage, we find the expression of a desire for lineage and hence of upward mobility, the need for the maintenance of land relations and ancestral property, and the emotional and sexual requirements of women and men.

The volume contributes greatly to the work done by M. N. Srinivas. In *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* Srinivas had established a clear functional connection between social structure and religion. In another book, *Social Change in India*, he showed how religion is appropriated, modified, and even positioned so that it provides an ideological base to a group's upward social mobility. All the articles in this volume work between these two axes and substantially add to Srinivas' vision.

Susmita Dasgupta specializes in social psychology.

Fiction's women: uneasy mix

Sreedevi K. Nair

Women in Indo-Anglian Fiction:
Tradition and Modernity

edited by Naresh K. Jain

Manohar, New Delhi, 1998; 226 pp; Rs. 450

This book captures one's attention at a single glance. On the cover, against the deep blue shade of the clear sky, are figures of three women. Quite symbolically, one, with her head covered, looks back. Another, who is sitting, looks straight at the reader—neither smiling nor dejected but with a questioning look in her eyes. The third almost leans forward, has a cheerful smile on her lips and looks to the far distance.

Most of the articles in the book are markedly different from the usual scholarly discourses of today. They are refreshingly clear and make use of simple, unambiguous language though all the contributors, with the exception of Shashi Deshpande, are academics.

Past and Present

Naresh K. Jain begins his introductory essay with the remark that '... in any society women are the chief preservers of tradition and in a sense no change, howsoever momentous, becomes complete or real unless it involves them and carries them along.' Though one may find this complement (?) to women a bit intriguing, the fairness of his intention cannot be doubted.

Shashi Deshpande in her essay 'Of Concerns, of Anxieties' judiciously mingles deep, personal feelings, casual comments and serious contemplation. She frankly admits that she writes in English simply because it is the only language in which she can express herself. She thus challenges the popular notion that one writes best in one's mother tongue. Another issue she raises is her categorization as 'a woman writer'. Her plea to call her just a novelist and a short story writer makes sound sense.

Some of the points T. N. Dhar raises in his analysis of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *Music for Mohini* are questionable. According to Dhar, there is an uneasy mix of tradition and modernity in the novel. Mohini's father stands for modernity and her husband for a fusion of the

past with the present. But Dhar finds fault with both of them as they allow the continuation of some superstitions and fruitless rituals for the sake of their mothers. This is in line with Dhar's evaluation, in another essay, of Mulk Raj Anand's contribution to the social and cultural reorientation of society so that women can find a place in it. Dhar appreciates the picture of the liberated woman Anand projects through Gauri, but he ends his essay with a thought provoking question: 'We see that Gauri's anger against Panchu is approved by Anand because she has been able to maintain her "purity". [But what] if Gauri had not succeeded in defending her virtue?'

S. R. Taneja's is a perceptive study of Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Her assessment of the novel is based on a set of parameters which are quite different from those used by avowed feminists. She appreciates Rukmani who responds to the drama of life in its entirety and whose response reveals a finer perception and a higher, even idealistic level of existence.

Aping the West

Neena Gupta, in 'Knocks of Modernity in Jhabhwala's Novels', points out that Jhabhwala has never been able to become a true insider in the Indian community. And as an 'outsider' she fails to depict Indian women convincingly. Her women try to be modern but their modernism turns out to be nothing more than an indiscriminate aping of the west. She identifies in Jhabhwala an instinctive appreciation of the west but believes that her novels succeed only in skimming over the surface of urban life in India.

Sarla Palkar's article on 'The Politics of Gender in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*' writhes with indignation at the author's way of relegating women to a subservient position and at the rather simplistic way in which he believes that 'Man finds life natural with a woman.' Also, Rama's so-called objectivity

and detachment in the face of his children's death rouses only consternation and aversion in Sarla. She describes his responses as 'unnatural and callous—in short, inhuman.'

Joshi succeeds in presenting only a gallery of women, devoid of any life. Bande correctly diagnoses the reason for this blemish in his novels: 'First, [he] depicts his women as types and sees them exclusively from a male angle. Second, like his protagonists, he too is puzzled by the mystery called "woman" and does not know whether he would like to see his women as traditional, modern or primitive.'

R. K. Narayan's Daisy, the protagonist in *The Painter of Signs*, a radical feminist, fails to move Usha Bande. In Daisy one finds Narayan's concept of Indian womanhood coming of age. She is undoubtedly a liberated woman and is quite at peace with herself. But she is different from other woman characters in Indian English fiction who resolve to stay unmarried, in that she doesn't need affection nor can appreciate it in others. Bande rejects her because there is nothing tender about her. Arun Joshi's women, on the other hand, meet Bande's rejection because they are just an appendage to their males. Joshi succeeds in presenting only a gallery of women, devoid of any life. Bande correctly diagnoses the reason for this blemish in his novels: 'First, [he] depicts his women as types and sees them exclusively from a male angle. Second, like his protagonists, he too is puzzled by the mystery called "woman" and does not know whether he would like to see his women as traditional, modern or primitive.'

Uma Parameswaran's article on women in Rushdie's *Shame* impresses one with the range of her knowledge and her ability to weave into her analysis various strands of mythology and history, etc. She rates Rushdie's women as strong, individualistic characters who make space for themselves. All the same, her appreciation for them is tinged with the realization that they offer

no model for the modern Indian woman who wants to both marry and have a career.

Questioning Modernity

In her analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* Usha Anand rightly refers to the novel as 'a fairy tale more in the nature of a wish-fulfilment than grounded in the harsh realities of life.' She questions the validity of a modernity which is based on an absolute surrender to the western ideal of individuality even when it involves an insensitive switching over from one man to another.

In both of his essays on the fiction of Nayantara Sahgal, Makarand Paranjpe lays claim to rigour. Nevertheless, he irritates one with his endless quest for even the minor omissions made by other critics. According to him, the first book on Sahgal, one by A. V. Krishna Rao, did not define exactly Sahgal's position in the tradition versus modernity debate. And Jasbir Jain does not add anything significant to what Rao has said. He makes the 'startling' discovery that Sahgal's response to the tradition-modernity issue is not clear in her own statements 'though she does provide some clues.'

Malashri Lal's 'The Feminization of a Hero' in *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a fascinating essay. However, by categorizing certain traits as characteristically 'feminine' and by speaking of the feminization of Baumgartner, she commits the mistake of re-affirming the distinction between the so-called feminine qualities and masculine traits.

Naresh Jain's article 'From Purdah to Polo to Politics', an analysis of Geeta Mehta's *Raj*, describes how adultery in some cases is not only a means to sexual gratification but wipes away the humiliation a woman has suffered at the hands of her husband.

Jaiwanti Dimri, commenting on Shama Futehally's *Tara Lane*, doesn't seem to be happy with Tara's expression of trust in her husband towards the end of the novel, though she appreciates the bond of sisterhood that Tara feels for Katreen.

Overall, a praiseworthy book that problematises tradition and modernity vis-à-vis issues of feminism.

Sreedevi K. Nair teaches English at N. S. S. College for Women, Neeramankara, Trivandrum.