

Julia Leslie, *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions: Hinduism and the Case of Valmiki*, (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003) x + 241 pp. including 1 colour and 8 pages of black and white plates, ISBN 0 7546 3430 2 (hb), £49.50, 0 7546 3431 0 (pb), £17.99.

‘On Monday, 21 February 2000 . . . Vikram Gill . . . presenting the Panjabi phone-in programme, “Eck Swal”, [on Radio XL, Birmingham, UK] . . . referred obliquely to the widely believed story that the great saint Valmiki was once a “dacoit”. . . (*daku*). . . . The shock wave felt throughout the British Valmiki community was tangible’ (p.1). So opens Leslie’s book. The quest which she pursues was started by the ‘deceptively simple question’ subsequently asked by her MA student, Lekh Raj Manjhadria, “Was Valmiki a dacoit?” (p.192, *cf* p.4).

Yet, as Leslie points out, describing Valmiki as a dacoit is ‘of little consequence to most Panjabis, or indeed to most Hindus’ (p.1). Is this book, then, of interest only to ‘self-styled “Valmikis”’ (p.1), those who worship Valmiki both in manifest (*saguna*) form and as the unmanifest (*nirguna*) Ultimate Reality (pp.179-185) and are members of a community still often regarded as ‘untouchable’ in the Punjab and its diaspora? The answer is an emphatic no.

In an extraordinarily painstaking yet lucid study, Leslie examines the evidence of a wide range of Sanskrit and vernacular texts, archaeological remains, colonial records and community documents to unravel the strands of tradition which have accumulated around the figure of Valmiki. Deftly, she argues that there is indeed some evidence to suggest that Valmiki had princely tribal non-Sanskrit-speaking origins (pp.80ff, p.193), that these are effaced in the Valmiki Sanskrit *Ramayana* where his brahminical ascetic poetic status is stressed (pp.94f, p.193) and that the popular dacoit legend of Valmiki as a fallen *brahmin* - later bandit untouchable - redeemed by saying the *mara mara* mantra, only gradually accumulated out of north Indian *bhakti* traditions (ch.4), reaching full expression in the seventeenth or possibly eighteenth century (p.151). Leslie also demonstrates that, while there is evidence for Valmiki worship from the seventh century AD (p.173f), its contemporary form emerges in the context of early twentieth century colonial, reformist and nationalist India (p.186).

Behind this precise scholarly investigation lie four crucial issues which give the book its wider relevance.

- (i) ‘How much longer must supposedly “low-caste” communities put up with an identity constructed for them by others?’ (p.1);
- (ii) ‘Can texts be used to validate or invalidate contemporary belief?’ (p.1); (iii) ‘How do we balance the competing freedoms of religion and expression?’ when different groups base their dearly-held views on different authorities and interpretations (p.2);
- (iv) What should be the role of the scholar in relation to the religious community

involved? (*cf* p.2).

Leslie's meticulous response models the scholar's role, carefully distinguishing between the academic's agenda and findings and a community's interests (e.g. p.18, p.172, p.181), yet insisting on the 'engagement' needed by the former to make the study of texts worthwhile (p.193). It is here that the book's relevance to Punjab Studies is most clear as she contextualises the Birmingham radio incident within a UK Punjabi diaspora context, an understanding of *dalit* religion and politics in the Punjab and north India, and a wider consideration of the history of the concept of untouchability (ch. 2).

Drawing on the work of Mark Juergensmeyer and others, Leslie shows how a caste group of Punjabi Chuhras (sweepers) was constructed by the labour demands of colonial municipal systems, a group which, after allying itself with the Ad Dharm movement, progressively redefined itself in religious terms as Valmiki (pp.47-64). To reject the low-caste status seen as imposed through high-caste Hindu purity codes (religion as *dharma*), this group chose religion as the vehicle to assert its own identity (religion as *qaum*). Leslie argues that nonetheless, and partly under the influence of the Arya Samaj, this was done within, and to reform, a Hindu framework (p.60). However her modern informants clearly use their caste-based qaumically conceived Valmiki identity to distinguish themselves from both Hindus and Sikhs (unlike the Valmikis in Nesbitt's studies) (p.71f). By contrasting mentions of Valmiki in the Sikh *adi Granth*, poetry of Ravidas and modern dacoit legend with Valmikis' understanding of Valmiki as God, Leslie traces some other sources for continuities and disjunctions in contemporary Punjabi discourse on religion.

Leslie's book is a testament to the energy of an engaged scholar bringing together religious and scholarly communities, numerous footnotes indicating responses from colleagues consulted. Generously, she suggests lines for further research (e.g. p.19, p.194, n.78). Another fruitful line would be to develop her discussion of Chuhra worship of Bala Shah and Balmiki in terms of the way popular religion in the Punjab functioned differently from a 'world religions' model, which Leslie still tends to employ (see e.g Ballard, Oberoi, Geaves).

The theme of the way religion is variously constructed to suit the ends of particular groups runs constantly through the book, constructions built into the very texts Leslie studies: through ascetic focus, emphasis on brahmin power, bhakti viewpoint defining 'low castes' from a brahminical viewpoint. Leslie also shows how Valmikis use Valmiki's illustrious status and claimed *dalit* ancestry, removed from the late dacoit 'slur', to reverse traditional hierarchies (p.63). While a constructivist approach may sit uneasily with communities' preferences for truth claims, it must not be submerged in seeking understanding between groups contesting issues of religious authority and material power.

A motif to which Leslie has returned time and again is the grief of the *kraunca*

bird as its mate is untimely slain. In the story of the watching Valmiki's grief, which leads to the *shloka* verse form of the *Valmiki Ramayana*, Leslie finds justification for the Valmikis' picture of his compassion and protection of the vulnerable (p.195, *cf* p.154). It would, in turn, be a fitting tribute to the author herself if her untimely death led us all, Punjabis and others alike, to listen to her critical questions and fine scholarship, and act in response.

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Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2003), xvi + 347, 7 £12.99 (pb) ISBN: 1-85065-651-7.

The fieldwork for *Pilgrims of Love* was carried out by the author in the valley of Ghamkol Sharif near Kohat in Pakistan. The valley houses the lodge of Zindapir, at the time of the study, a living Sufi saint of a branch of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*. During the course of the study Zindapir died of ripe old age, and Pnina Werbner had the unique opportunity to observe first-hand the transformation of the lodge from the site of spiritual leadership invested in one man's charismatic authority believed by his followers to derive from his closeness to Allah to a more institutional framework based around the tomb of the saint in the traditional subcontinent *mazar* tradition. In addition, during the saint's lifetime, his movement had extended itself globally from a local geographic base to Britain, Europe, the Middle East and South Africa, largely as a result of Pakistani migration patterns. Thus the author was able to provide us with a more detailed picture of the relationship between the movements of economic labour migrants, the diasporas created by them, new sacred sites and their connections to Sufi centres in the places of origin. In doing so, she

highlights the intricate relationships that exist between economic, social and spiritual capital.

Although his lodge and tomb is located in the North West Frontier region of Pakistan, Zindapir's connections to the Punjab are significant. Although the saint's origins are shrouded in mystery, his family is believed to have lived in Jangel Khel, from where his father migrated to Delhi. However, his spiritual lineage links him directly to Muhammad Qasim Sadiq whose *darbar* was located in the Murree Hills. Historically, the Ghankol Sharif Sufis are reformed Naqshbandis who stay close to the teachings of Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi, the great seventeenth century reformer of Islam and the senior disciples of Zindapir were all familiar with Sirhindi's letters and the teachings they contain. Thus historically, the movement is located in Punjabi Sufism and the significant khalifas, who were sent to establish lodges in different parts of Pakistan, have all established the own successful centres in the Punjab. It is essentially their activities that have established the lodge as a national and international movement. The vast majority of Zindapir's followers are Punjabis and the author notes that in the absence of a charismatic successor in the family and the distance involved in travelling to Kohat, it would not be surprising for the Punjabi satellite lodges to become autonomous centres. However, perhaps the greatest threat of a new centre of charismatic authority which competes with the more institutional patrilineal authority endowed on Zindapir's son, is the activity of Sufi Abdullah in Birmingham who is regarded by his following in England as the spiritual successor of the saint. Until now, Sufi Abdullah remains loyal to the authority of his master's son although his geographical distance from Kohat provides him with considerable autonomy. In providing chapters dedicated to several of the key khalifa, including Sufi Abdullah, the author is able to throw light on the complex relationship of authority and leadership in Sufi organisations.

During the saint's lifetime, Zindapir's movement remained a single viable organisation with a known hierarchy of sacred centres and sub-centres and recognised chains of authority. The author demonstrates how his death has already begun to impact on that even though the tomb remains a unifying factor for all the rivals. Perhaps, significantly, she notes that Qur'an recitation had become a more significant feature of the lodge after the saint's death and begs questions concerning the shifting relationship of authority back towards the *ulema*, the official custodians of Islam, once a living saint's physical presence is lost. Although the rural populations of the Punjab have always been content to accept the remains of a saint (regardless of religion) as a mediator with the divine, Zindapir was that rare figure, a classic directing saint, who although never leaving his lodge, passed hours meeting directly with supplicants and teaching his closest companions. He was thus, in the author's own words, both mediating saint and directing saint, depending on the situation and the disciple's expectations. As Werbner points out, the newly located shrine will retain the mediating role but lose the directing spirit. The shrine

cults controlled by the family successors can rarely retain the 'charismatic aura' (p21) of the original founder. The author's unique timing provided her with a rare opportunity to observe the Sufi lodge at a pivotal moment in its history, thus providing unique insights into the relationship between charisma and institution, the connection between saint and follower, and to supply us with further knowledge of the pattern of waxing and waning, described by Trimingham in 1971 as typical of Sufi orders. Although many shrines have been able to transcend their regional origins and become national treasures, most shrines maintain a cultural space, becoming a centre of pride for local populations who can lay claim to the deceased saint as one of their own, and enhance their own status with the miracle stories and healings associated with the location. Zindapir's connection to West Punjabi migration patterns as demonstrated by the author will impact on that dynamic and the shrine deserves a further visit in the future to observe the impact of the global features of the movement.

Finally, Pnina Werbner reminds us that insiders and outsiders seek different vocations, and, however much empathy and reflexivity may be achieved, the pursuit of truth for each is different. The tensions between these two pursuits of knowledge play themselves out throughout the book and thus the final product is not only essential reading for those interested in contemporary Sufism which remains a vital living tradition in many parts of the Muslim world, but for all those excited by the dynamics of fieldwork.

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Anita Gill, *Rural Credit Markets: Financial Sector Reforms and the Informal Lenders* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2000), 163+xipp. Rs. 300 (hb), ISBN 81-7629-232-X.

This book deals with an important issue in the current political economy of agrarian Punjab though the title ignores and the blurb downplays the Punjab focus of the study. The study examines the extent and significance of the informal credit markets in the rural economy of Punjab. The providers of formal credit in the rural society are banks and other formal financial institutions like cooperative societies, and the providers of the informal credit are mainly the traders of agricultural commodities. These traders or merchants are called commission agents or 'arhtiyas'. The author by focussing her study on the informal credit in Punjab's rural economy has done an admirable job in exploring a relatively unexplored area of study in Punjab economy. She teaches economics at Punjabi University, Patiala and her study is based on sound primary data collected through field work in some villages of Patiala district.

The most significant finding of her work is that not only is a major part of the loans taken by Punjabi farmers from the formal sector for productive purposes but even the major part of the loans taken from the informal sector is also for productive purposes. The importance of this finding can be appreciated if we keep in mind that there is a popular belief, mainly among the urban-based intelligentsia, that farmers take loans from the formal sector for productive needs and from the informal sector for meeting their non-productive or consumption needs. So deep-rooted is this popular belief, or rather prejudice, that even the author has fallen victim to this at one place. In trying to explain the continuing dependence of even the so-called well-off farmers on taking loans from the 'arhtiyas', she makes a claim that the "improved economic status has also encouraged them [the farmers] to *spend lavishly (and unnecessarily)* on social customs and occasions. More often than not, this expenditure extends far beyond their means" (p. 64, italics mine). This claim is not backed up either by providing any secondary empirical evidence or by referring to any scholarly research on this subject. Her own data shows that all categories of farmers take both formal and informal credit to meet primarily their production needs and only marginally their consumption needs (pp.94-101). The proportion of consumption in the formal credit is a mere 4.24% and that in the informal credit is 36.36% (pp. 96-97). This figure of 36.36% of consumption in the informal credit includes expenditure on medicine, education, food and clothing. The expenditure on these items can not be categorised as "lavish" consumption and if you deduct these expenditures from the total consumption expenditure, what is left does not deserve the title of lavishness. Had Gill taken care to read her own data more carefully, she would not have made this claim about the "lavish" and "unnecessary" consumption style of the Punjab peasantry. Since this claim is so often made to explain the growing indebtedness of the Punjab peasantry and of the phenomenon of the farmers' suicides, I wish she had taken care to make a more balanced presentation on such an important issue. This criticism of an internal inconsistency in her presentation is meant to highlight the strength of her main finding and argument that in Punjab the farmers resort to informal credit primarily to improve their production conditions. The importance of this finding can be interpreted to highlight two important dimensions of Punjab economy. One, this shows that the urban based merchant capital is interlocked with the productive capital in agriculture as a part of the process of capital accumulation in Punjab. Two, it also demonstrates that despite the increase in land and labour productivity in Punjab agriculture, the rising costs of production in agriculture have turned the economy of large sections of the Punjab peasants to such a precarious situation that they are forced to borrow from the merchant capitalists even to carry on with their normal cycle of productive activities. The borrowing requirements of the peasants to carry on with their productive activities from year to year are so high that, in addition to their borrowings from the formal sector, they have to borrow from the merchant

capitalists. It is this deepening penetration of capitalism in Punjab which is at the root of growing indebtedness of the peasantry.

This leads me to an examination of Gill's positions regarding politics and debt forgiveness. She is critical of those politicians who advocate writing off or waiving loan overdues in order to seek electoral gains. Her criticism of such self-seeking politicians is well meaning but then she jumps to the wrong conclusion about the need to 'delink credit institutions from politics' (p.139). A radical political economy approach would be to argue that the representatives of the agricultural workers and the farmers should be included in the governing structures of banks and financial institutions in order to make the banking operations transparent and accountable. Provisions for the training of the representatives of the workers and the peasants should be made so that they can attain adequate financial literacy and the state should pay for this training in cooperation with the trade unions.

Regarding debt forgiveness it seems to me that, given the very high degree of indebtedness of the peasantry in Punjab to banks and merchant capitalists, there is no way that this indebtedness can be dealt with without some restructuring of this debt. This restructuring would have to involve almost complete debt forgiveness for the most indebted and the poor sections of the agricultural workers and peasants, and some degree of partial forgiveness for the relatively less indebted. The analogy I have in mind is the situation regarding the global solutions being sought for Third World debt. Even the most conservative sections among the academics and the global financial institutions now recognise that a part of the Third World debt is just not payable and should be written off. At a global level, the rich countries and the global financial institutions have already received payments from the indebted Third World countries that are more than what was originally lent to the Third World. Similarly in the case of Punjab, one can say that the banks and especially the informal money lenders, who charge extortionist rates of interest, have already received from the Punjabi peasants and agricultural labourers many times the sum they had lent them in the past. Any meaningful strategy to deal with the problem of growing indebtedness of the peasantry must include a carefully negotiated and worked out strategy for several layers of debt forgiveness.

I wish Gill had also explored the gender bias of the credit markets in both the formal and the informal sector. The Grameen Bank experiment in Bangladesh of providing micro-credit to poor women households, has revolutionised the debate on gender dimensions of the credit markets and the development projects. For example, Oxfam has put in place a system to monitor the gender dimensions of every project the charity takes up for development work. I hope that Gill is able to pay close attention to the gender issues in the further development of her research.

Anita Gill has produced a thought provoking work. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the economic fate of the Punjab peasantry.

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Lionel Carter, compiler and editor, *Punjab Politics 1936-1939: The Start of Provincial Autonomy. Governors' Fortnightly Reports and other Key Documents* (New Delhi: Manohar 2004), 443pp (hb) Rs. 995 ISBN 81-7304-568-2

The fortnightly reports of the Governors of the provinces of British India to the Viceroy have provided invaluable source material for the history of the key pre-partition decade. Indeed, the shift of focus in the 1980s from the All-India to the provincial level of politics during this crucial period in the history of the modern subcontinent, depended greatly on their availability. Lionel Carter, the former Librarian of the Centre for South Asian Studies at Cambridge University, is thus to be congratulated in making the full records of a vital period in the Punjab's development readily available to scholars. In addition to his own short introduction and the reports of the two governors of this opening period of provincial autonomy, Sir Herbert Emerson and Sir Henry Craik, appendices are enclosed on the controversial Sikander-Jinnah Pact of October 1937 and Sir Sikander Hayat's, Outlines of a Scheme for an Indian Federation, which he forwarded to the Viceroy in June 1939. The compilation also usefully includes summaries of the documents and a list of principal office holders from October 1936- December 1939.

The fortnightly reports attest to the Unionist Party's predominance in Punjab politics at this time. This was the result of its successful binding together of the interests of the Hindu Jat peasantry of what is now Haryana, with those of the large Muslim landlords and military contractors for the Raj of the West Punjab. The Unionist Party also reached out to Hindu and Sikh coalition partners in the form of its coalition with the Hindu Election Board and Khalsa National Party. In all the government formed what might be termed a 'consociational grand coalition' accounting for 120 out of 175 Assembly members drawn from all of the Punjab's communities. This did not mean that communal tensions were absent in this period. There was, for example, the celebrated Shahidgunj dispute over sacred space in Lahore, but such tensions did not threaten the Unionist supremacy.

The close ties between the British and the Unionists are clear from the relationships between the governors and their elected ministers. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the Unionists as British 'toadies' who were feathering their own nests. The governors' reports reveal the incorruptibility of the Unionist leaders. Sir Sikander Hayat, the Unionist Prime Minister emerges as a powerful figure with a

clear vision of what served the best interests of the Punjab's population. Like his later successor, Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, he stood for the concept of Punjab for the Punjabis. The main plank of the Unionist programme was to uplift the backward rural classes of the province and free them from the depredations of the moneylenders. The Unionists opposed the Congress because it represented the commercial castes' interests. They sought to keep the Muslim League at arms' length within the province because of its potential for what they saw as disruption. The British shared this view following the outbreak of the Second World War, when the Muslim League was hesitant in committing its support to the war effort.

The period covered by this volume not only saw the Unionists at the height of their power, but the fortnightly reports in their fullest and most authoritative form. The Governors' information was based on soundings with officials, local notables, members of the Council of Ministers and police and intelligence reports. Some of these sources of information dried up, or became unreliable as a result of both the running down of the wartime administration and the growing communal polarisation. A later Governor, Sir Bertrand Glancy was, for example, to significantly underestimate the Muslim League threat to the Unionist position in the crucial 1946 provincial elections.

Even when the reports as in this volume are at their peak, they should be treated with care by the historian. Each Governor had his own style and outlook. Emerson is revealed, for example, as more reflective, than the matter of fact Craik. The reports are not just records filtered through the Governor's perceptions, but are about those matters that were considered to be of concern to New Delhi and London. Despite the democratisation brought by the 1935 Government of India Act, the Raj remained an administrative rather than a political enterprise. Politicians were not to be trusted, disturbances were viewed as law and order issues with administrative rather than political solutions. Considerable space is thus given up in the reports to 'threats' to stability. There are thus sections on communal disturbances, sectarian violence, the activities of Kisan and communist movements and on strikes and economic problems. Similarly attention is later devoted to responses to the imperial war effort and to its setbacks. The fortnightly reports are thus primarily about what the British considered to be important and are a reflection on their understanding of Punjab politics and society.

Nevertheless, they are as important for standard reference, at the onset of provincial autonomy, as are the later Transfer of Power Series (1942-47) with which Lionel Carter was also involved. Historians will continue to both deconstruct them and mine them for nuggets of information. It is to be hoped that Lionel Carter will produce not only later volumes for the Punjab, but also widen his net.

It would be especially useful to have a volume of the UP Fortnightly Reports for this period, given the significance of Congress-Muslim League relations in the province for the wider course of Muslim separatism.

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Azra Asghar Ali, *The Emergence of Feminism Among Indian Muslim Women 1920-1947*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000) xxi +291 pp. (hb) US\$17 ISBN 0 19 579152 5.

This well researched monograph is based on the doctoral thesis of the author and presents some fascinating insights into Indian Muslim women and their lives in the period 1920-1947. The introduction of the book provides a comprehensive overview of literature on Muslim women in India and more generally about Muslim women. 1920-1947 constitutes a very crucial historical period for Indian Muslims in general and Muslim women of the Indian sub-continent in particular. In many ways, they were propelled into mainstream of national life and the public sphere by socio-political events beyond their control. Erosion of qasbah cultures due to urbanisation, demands for an 'enlightened' woman by men of the bourgeois class, who were products of western education, became a catalyst for women's education and empowerment. But the concept of this 'new' woman was defined along ideological lines as well as requirements of the 'new' western educated Muslim men. Thus her roles were divided into private and public spheres, both limited and defined by what was 'appropriate' for decent Muslim women.

The author presents a coherent analysis of the chain of developments which gradually opened up spaces for Muslim women in public and private sphere of life. The study also offers some thoughts on 'feminism' among Indian Muslim women and how they sifted through western ideas to evolve a feminism that was entirely their own. The book spans the many aspects of women's lives including education, health, political participation, cultural and literary activities as well as legal reform affecting women.

In addition to a substantive introductory chapter, the book has six chapters and a concise conclusion. The first chapter presents a historical backdrop of the structural and cultural features of the transformation of Indian society with reference to the status of women. Muslim reformers undertook serious efforts at regeneration of Muslim society laying strong emphasis on education of women as a crucial imperative in this endeavour. The chapter uses literary material written in Urdu to make this point. Chapter 2 discusses responses of Indian Muslims towards new educational measures introduced for women's education during the period between

1920-1947. Chapter 3 then goes on to highlight measures taken to promote the idea of safe motherhood in India. Chapter 4 discusses legal reforms introduced by the government to alleviate the suffering of women due to their subordinate position within the family in the name of culture, custom and tradition. Chapter 5 touches upon women's civil status and political participation and reflects upon the processes of this period regarding the wider communal agendas based on religion. Muslim women (and Hindu women) became markers of religious identity and were mobilized into public life. Chapter 6 is perhaps the most interesting part of the book. Here the author captures the growth and development of Indian Muslim women's literary culture during 1920-1947. Women's journals in Urdu provide a unique historical source through which the reader is able to listen to women debating issues such as women's role as mother, daughter, wife, sister. In the words of the author:

The recovering of hidden female voices through a study of texts which they produced helps us to understand both the particular conditions of these women's lives as well as the genesis and growth of a distinct feminist consciousness among them. (p. 246)

Dr Ali's research brings to mind similar work on Iranian women's lives reflected through writings and letters to the editor in women's magazines, in particular, *Zan-e-rooz* (woman of today). The analysis of the various literary writings by Indian Muslim women of that period is a truly pioneering work and the author deserves credit for making this rich tapestry of ideas and expression available to us.

The book has an appendix with short biographical details of women writers of the period under study. This constitutes an excellent source of knowledge regarding Muslim women engaged in literary pursuits in the early twentieth century. The book also has a useful bibliography including magazines and writings in Urdu; an important research tool to document for future reference.

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Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities. Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) x + 231 pp. (hb) Rs 545 ISBN 0-19-565648-2.

The main aim of the work of this book is to show how a specific understanding of caste and gender grew in colonial Punjab in the period from the 1870s to 1920. Or, to be more precise, the aim is to show how the notion of being 'high caste', which had been determined by the religious tradition, changed or developed during the colonial period and grew into a middle-class understanding suitable to the new

social and economic demands, but without turning its back on high-caste identity. As Anshu Malhotra writes herself: 'The economic insecurities experienced by high caste Hindus as the colonial regime established its style of function in Punjab, were matched by a feeling that social upheaval was levelling, if not subverting, recognized markers of status like caste or the control over women' (p. 36).

The theme throughout which illuminates this is the way in which the role and position of women, along with the above statement, are changed in a conservative traditional manner. That is shown through the reading of the Hindu and Sikh reformists' writings as well as different journals, official records and novels. The fact that some of these have never been used previously by historians in a construction of a 'social history' of Punjab marks out this work as ground-breaking research. These different sources draw a clear picture of how a new high caste was emerging as a patriarchal middle class, where brahmanical values were highlighted and where such notions as *pativrata* (devoted wife) were emphasized or re-conceptualized. But the idealisation of the *pativrata* not only shows the timeless appeal of the mythological *pativrata* and how the notion was recharged, but how it grew into an ideology on the basis on which a familial life giving due deference to the hierarchies of caste, gender and age according to *varnāśramadharmā* (moral, ethical and social duties according to caste and stage of life) and could be organised in changed circumstances. This is a central and very well documented point, and it shows how the relationship between tradition and modernity work in a dialectical frame. Thus tradition is renewed and emphasized but in a new coat suited to the new circumstances made under the British Raj where it is the women who bore the burden in the high caste men's way of coping with the new situation, finding their new middle class identity different both from the British Raj and from low caste people. Making women submissive *pativratas* helped to secure a perpetuation of caste and class interests.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first, 'Gender, Caste and Religious Identities in Punjab', is introductory but it also gives some very interesting descriptions of how the understanding of caste and gender is expressed in the Hindu reformist movement, the Arya Samaj, and in the Sikh reformist movement, the Singh Sabha, both movements representing the Punjabi elite and therefore very representative of the group which is the focus of this book. And the conclusion is clear and just hits the bottom-line, because both movements are examples of how 'a people marked by the colonial state as casteist, tried to safeguard their caste and class advantages while at the same time [it] sought to deny the significance of caste, giving a new understanding of the institution of caste as perceived by an indigenous elite.' (p. 46)

The next four chapters: "'Killing", "Gifting" or "Selling" Daughters: The Pressures on a High Caste Identity' (chapter two), 'Ascetic Widowhood or Widow Remarriage? Dilemma for the New Punjabi Elite' (chapter three), 'Controlling

Women: Recreating the Pativrata Wife as the ideal Upper Caste Woman' (chapter four), and 'Powerful Women - Fearful Men: Reforming Women's Popular Culture' (chapter five) have, as the titles indicate, the theme of women - especially the description of ideal womanhood but also their self-understanding and their small, mostly private revolts as well. The overall conclusion is already clear in chapter two, and this can give the reader a feeling of reiteration throughout the book, but only if the reader is not interested in digging deep into the empirical background in order to see how the impact of change on the women was following a regressive path. In a rediscovering of tradition, which gave the high caste men who had come along with the colonists and their reorganisation of society a cover against intruding thoughts, the interpretation of the role of the women helped to secure a perpetuation of class and caste interests. At the same time the construction of the pativrata was a way to subjugate women. I myself would not be without the other examples and viewpoints in the other chapters, because they give new and interesting examples on which the women's conditions and how they are used in a wider context is unveiled.

It is clear that Anshu Malhotra's theoretical and methodological bias is mostly historical, and this is also explicit when it comes to the author's use and discussion of other researchers' work. I think a sociological theoretical angle, for example Bourdieu and Foucault's power-relation theories, could have been fruitful and could have opened up an interesting angle on the theme. So too could a semiological theoretical perspective, which the author herself just very briefly touches in the following statement: 'Whether the colonial state wishes to improve the condition of native women, or it colluded with the Punjabi men to extend the latter's power over women, the conversion of women's body and being into semiological markers reached new levels' (p.34). But she does not do much more about this interesting point.

As indicated above, I appreciate and therefore recommend the book - especially for people interested in the history or social history of Punjab, but also more generally for people interested in the understanding of caste and especially in the role and position of women in India. This ground-breaking and very well-documented research gives new and interesting examples on how the position of women was formed under colonisation - the basis on which we must try to understand the position of women in India today.

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John Madeley, *Big Business, Poor Peoples: The Impact of Transnational Corporations on the World's Poor* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), xvii + 206pp. (pb) £13.95 ISBN 1-85649-672-4. (hb) £39.95. ISBN 1-85649-671-6.

This is an interesting and extensively researched book on a vast and important theme. The author, we are told, is 'a writer and broadcaster specialising in Third World development and environmental issues.'

The impact of giant corporations operating on a world scale has enormous implications for all the world's citizens, and perhaps the greatest implications of all for the world's poor. This is the essential argument of this book, and also that the use of tremendous and uncontrolled power by these organisations [which epitomise raw power] is likely to affect those with the least power, namely the world's poorest people. This is, of course, neither a new nor an original thesis; it is nonetheless valuable to have an addition to the literature which is as concerned, and as detailed, as is this volume.

Madeley starts with two chapters in which some theoretical propositions are outlined, and follows these with nine chapters in which numerous examples of the misdeeds of large global businesses are listed. These activities are catalogued in considerable and convincing detail; but it is the two introductory and framework-setting chapters which seem less satisfactory. The author's assertion in his preface that 'the academic community is largely failing to give students a perspective of how TNCs [*transnational corporations*] affect the poor' is not established. The author equates 'the poor' with the Third World, or LDCs; to suggest that academics have not been interested in the impact of TNCs in the Third World seems odd. Madeley is probably correct to argue that less attention has been paid to *the poor* specifically, but then he does not really focus on the poor in this book either, despite the claims of the title, and uses examples of TNCs and their adverse effects on *poor countries* as a proxy for the effects on the poor. Indeed no clear discussion nor consistent definitions of 'the poor' or 'poverty' are given.

Madeley discusses globalisation, liberalisation, and privatisation in the TNC context, and adds a fourth factor that he calls 'corporatisation, as if this is a novel way of describing the operations of big business. JK Galbraith, in his telling and ironic description of the invented Unified Global Enterprises, UGE, (1977, 279) discusses the style of global big business precisely as corporatism, and writes 'the corporation is powerful in the state, - in the very public institution by which it must be controlled'. Madeley's claims to newness in this respect are doubtful.

Transfer pricing is briefly touched on by Madeley, but far too briefly. He states that 'a parent TNC sells materials to a subsidiary.... Such materials are then used in a manufacturing or service industry'. But in reality most transfer pricing by TNCs arises as an entirely paper exercise with no physical transfer of resources or materials at all. The importance of transfer pricing seems to be significantly

understated. In discussion with a senior oil company executive a few years ago this reviewer was told that that the company had paid little or no UK company taxes at all, despite making good profits, all profits having been located offshore thus generating no UK tax revenue. Dicken (1998, 283) refers to a US House of Representatives study showing that zero payment of taxes by companies trading abroad was very widespread. Further an OECD Code of Conduct, in existence since the 1970s, aims to limit the spread of transfer pricing by TNCs. This is a matter of greatest importance for DCs and LDCs alike, losing out on much needed tax revenues. But Madeley underplays the point.

In his discussion of globalisation the author refers, amongst others, to JH Dunning and UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). But he has no real debate of the many and varied interpretations of the term. He gives us the rather vague 'the world as a single market, without barriers' (p. 17), but this is not helpful for analysis. The author is on a clearly declared mission to show the very many ways that big business activities can adversely affect LDCs and the poorest people in them. To this reviewer this is an admirable mission. But how much stronger would be his argument with some analytical framework. Hirst and Thompson (1996, 183-186), argue that it is very significant whether the view taken of globalisation is for example the extreme Kenichi Ohmae position, in which nation states wither away and companies have neither home base nor national allegiance or the other end of the spectrum in which globalisation simply means an ever increasing level of internationalisation of trade and business, population movements, and culture spread. Because dependent on one's views of the nature of globalisation, and the explanations of FDI, and the differences between FDI and international joint ventures [and so on], analysis of TNC operations will vary, and thus the advocated methods for governance of TNCs. But Madeley gives us none of this; what he does do is to provide a huge list of examples of TNC bad behaviour. We would not wish to belittle the bad behaviour of TNCs, and Madeley's litany of TNC misdeeds is extensive, interesting, moving and sad. Amongst other things he tells us of negative and disastrous effects of TNCs on environmental degradation, worker safety, child labour exploitation, and drug companies [pharmaceuticals] mis-selling on an enormous, terrible and shocking scale, driven as always by the profit requirements of the shareholders. The lives of the poorest inhabitants of the poorest countries are adversely affected in so many ways. But even here Madeley sometimes understates his case. The Union Carbide disaster at Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh in 1984 is discussed, but is called 'the worst single disaster involving pesticides'. *The Economist* magazine more accurately called it 'the worst ever industrial disaster' (3 December 1994). No mention at all is made of the role of ATT and other US based TNCs in the destabilisation and military overthrow of the democratically elected Allende socialist government in Chile in the early 1970s. This truly was TNCs versus the poor, but it is ignored, as is the involvement of US

TNCs in Nicaragua.

In the final chapter we come to the question: what sort of things can be done to alter the behaviour and improve the performance of TNCs from the perspective of ordinary people? Madeley has a rather optimistic view. People acting together, he argues, can do something to redress the imbalance of power between people and the corporations. Consumers in particular can make businesses change. The US giant Monsanto has had to change its strategy of trying to impose genetically modified foodstuffs and seeds [including the particularly controversial 'terminator seed'] on rich and poor countries alike, following resistance in western Europe and in India. So much so, indeed, that in the company's UK head office food with any genetically modified contents have been removed from the menu in the company canteen and restaurant. The discussion on Monsanto should be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Environmentally concerned consumers claimed victory following the retraction by Shell of their plans to dump the Brent Spar oil rig in the sea following an informal but very effective boycott of its products at the petrol pumps. But the real answers to 'how to fight back' versus TNC globalisation power depends on how we view the process, and therefore the relevant political levels at which governance may be sought. Can individual nation states acting alone, for example by making market access for TNCs conditional on certain pre-agreed codes of conduct, achieve some degree of real countervailing power? Or could this only be achieved at international level, through the OECD or UNCTAD or the WTO?

This is an interesting, valuable, and readable book. It is a mine of examples on the behaviour of TNCs. It is not however one that informs us greatly as to 'how we can regain control over the powerful forces that are shaping our future' as claimed on the cover blurb. Although we do not learn a great deal about how to manage the power of TNCs from this book it is recommended to all those interested in the use and abuse of power by the TNCs. This is a thorough and very readable catalogue of and critique of TNC misdeeds in recent times.

References

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