

Surinder S. Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India*, (India: Routledge, 2015) xvii +252 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-82243-6 (hb) Rs.695.

This study, *Caste in Contemporary India* is a continuation of Professor Jodhka's ongoing engagement with the subject. This book is the outcome of the comprehensive field survey carried out over the last decade in North-west India – mainly Punjab. The series of narratives represented from socio-cultural, economic and political spheres make this study empirically rich as it brings in fresh perspectives on caste. The book is divided into three parts that comprise seven chapters. The institution of caste has undergone a remarkable change over the last few decades. Even though the traditional and ideological hold of caste has declined, caste hierarchies continue to affect the socio-economic and political spheres of the rural and urban areas (p. xiv). With this basic observation, the author explores caste inequalities prevalent in the daily lives of the people in rural Punjab. The first part of the book covers a broad introduction in which the author challenges the 'popular view' of caste that maintains caste as an old and traditional institution that has reduced its significance in the modern age, and will disappear on its own in the wake of rapid industrial growth (p. 3-4). Notwithstanding this view, the author argues that caste continues to play an important role in the public and private lives of people even though it has reduced the harsh practices of untouchability.

Punjab has witnessed a profound change in its agricultural development owing to the industrial growth. The Dalits are significantly involved in these processes of global markets and modernization. However, as the author observes, even though Punjab stands unique in terms of its agricultural advancement, the majority of land has remained in the hands of upper castes who continued to dominate rural and urban spaces. In short, the agricultural advancement brought about through the Green Revolution in Punjab had largely benefited the land-owning dominant caste and not the landless Dalits (Juergensmeyer, 1982: 232). In this scenario, Jodhka argues that 'the subordination of Dalits in rural Punjab was institutionalized through the prevailing structure of agrarian relations' and therefore, 'caste has neither disappeared nor has it been forgotten' (p. 46-47). The agricultural dependence being a major cause of the caste oppression, Dalits began to dissociate themselves from agriculture while seeking new economic alternatives in the towns and cities and migrating abroad. Moving further, the author observes that caste has played a decisive role in India's democratic politics since its independence. The hold of the upper castes on the political and educational institutions has maintained caste divisions both visibly and invisibly. For instance, referring to M.N. Srinivas, Jodhka argues that the early Indian scholarship on caste justifies caste division in view of the processes like sanskritization (p. 72) which enabled caste mobility. This perspective has, however, been substantially refuted recently by scholars on caste. Gopal Guru, for instance, argues that sanskritization never helped lower castes in their social progress; it is rather the case that a 'pacificatory process of cultural contentment helped the socially dominant class to contain the overflow of dalit consciousness that was potentially subversive of Brahminical social order' (2013: 95). In politics,

too, caste is seen as a vital factor that determines the nature of power. The idea of reservation and quotas is often misused in politics in order to attract Dalit voters (p. 84-91). The author however underlines the significant power shift in politics especially after implementation of the OBC (Other Backward Class) reservation.

In the second part of the book the author examines caste in the context of the 'neo-liberal economy' as a preliminary to Dalit mobilization. There has been a notable change among Dalits in their occupations and this has been mediated by new market economy. Dalits have become independent business owners in several parts of Punjab despite the growing opposition by local dominant castes, and despite the failure of state machinery to offer them any support (p. 118). However, the question here is not merely of an alternative means of survival, as the author points out; it is rather, historically speaking, a matter of exercising the democratic liberty while rejecting the caste-bound occupations. The narratives presented in the book itself indicate that land acquisition or business activities are essentially symbolic to protest against caste hierarchies rather than being merely an economic asset, for the economic growth is crucial but only, in Ambedkar's (1936) words, when it is preceded by social and cultural mobilization of the community. Moving further, Jodhka continues to unravel caste complexities in the corporate sectors where one's merit and ability are said to have a primary importance rather than one's caste background. However, while pursuing the matter closely, the author, on the contrary, observes that the idea of 'merit' is undoubtedly attached to caste when it comes to recruitment (p. 140). In short, the dogma of merit is strongly prevalent in corporate sectors where Dalits are systematically side-lined after intentional enquiry into their social status.

The third and last part of the book explores the organization of Dalits through their socio-cultural and religious movements. Punjab has the highest percentage of Dalits and demonstrates the historical itineraries of lower caste struggle against caste inequality. The colonial era augmented their struggle while providing equal opportunities that solidify their struggle against caste oppression in several ways. The *Ad-Dharm* movement, for instance, which emerged in the early twentieth century organized the lower castes in Punjab. Even though the movement fragmented over political issues during independence, the present Dalit movements in Punjab are strongly based upon their historical roots in the anti-caste struggle, and continue to inspire Dalits from other parts of the country (152-155). Most of the Dalits began to associate themselves with either Ravidasi, Ad Dharmi or Valmiki identity while denouncing the Hindu identity as a result of the foundation laid by the Ad-Dharm movement (Juergensmeyer 1982).

In conclusion, Jodhka observes three major factors that have challenged the caste structure: the social movements that emerged out of Dalit consciousness, the constitutional safeguards and the industrialization/urbanization processes that helped Dalits distancing from the *jajmani* (patron-client) caste relations (p. 216). Caste is also discussed with respect to race on the historical grounds of both realities. Caste atrocities on Dalits and racial lynching of blacks provide a common vocabulary to comprehend the notion of discrimination in a broader manner (Pandey, 2013). As caste atrocities have gained the attention of the Western scholars they too have begun to be discussed in the international context

of human rights (Keane, 2007; Zene, 2013).

This book would have justified its claim of representing caste realities in contemporary India in a comprehensive manner had it underlined the development of the cultural history of western and southern India where the anti-caste struggle led its foundation. Punjab undoubtedly signifies the complexities of caste in different social spheres and its encounter with several socio-cultural and religious movements. However, the book does not mark this important relationship between the historical movements that emerged against the caste system in different parts of the country. Without this it is quite unlikely to grasp the essence of caste in India as a whole as the book claims, and it somehow diverts from the methodological specificity of representing caste and falls into the category of 'abstracted empiricism' (Mills, 1959). But nonetheless, through the quality of the field study and its new approaches of analyzing caste at different levels, the book is important in capturing the peculiarity of caste – namely the ways in which caste is reproduced in different forms and is reinstated while co-opting contemporary changes in the social milieu. It is, therefore, a rich source for comprehending caste realities in their present context, not only for Dalit studies specifically or studies on Punjab but also for the wider sociology of humiliation and discrimination.

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Amardeep Singh, *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan*, (New Delhi: The Nagaara Trust in association with Himalayan Books, 2016) 504pp. ISBN 978-81-7002-115-5 (hb).

Decolonisation through partitioning territories and sundering communities along ethno-religious lines has considerably exacerbated problems in post-colonial societies and states instead of diminishing them. Ironically, the dream of an independent and egalitarian utopia still remains chimerical, since the legacies of new boundary demarcations amidst disorganised migrations, killings, gang rapes, kidnaps and misappropriation of properties have, in fact, unleashed even more intense forces of inter-state and other such hostilities. Post-colonial textbooks and official media celebrate independence by essentialising territorial nationalism, yet they surreptitiously fail to mention the human cost and civilisational schisms that happened in its wake. Occasionally blaming the departing colonial empires, these nations and their affected communities continue critiquing one another for their acrimonious relations while avoiding their own inadequacies to rise above these 'wrongs'. Retrospectively, South Asian independence and decolonisation in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia allow us to reflect on the divisions and even posthumous neglect of the heritage left behind on the 'alien' lands. Migrations, forced or voluntary, have their own ramifications for cultural heritage but, as per historical experience, human adaptability often ends up overwriting such displacements. Eventually, other than some literary pieces penned in nostalgia or spontaneous fondness for some past visual archives, quest for roots becomes a distant and generation-specific pastime.

Amardeep Singh's beautifully produced volume – a pictorial coffee table companion – is based on colourful pictures that he took during his 26-day-long travels in the upper Indus Valley during October 2014 visiting Sikh sacred places and monuments, often dating from the early nineteenth century. He also undertook visits to Pakpattan and Kasur to pay his homage to Baba Farid and Bulleh Shah, and witnessed a steady stream of visitors at Mian Mir in Lahore. However, it is the Khalsa Darbar that he relives with great nostalgia, fondness and esteem and this, to him, is the golden era often hastily described as 'secularist', whereas Partition becomes a holocaust. Born in India and now living in Singapore, Amardeep is from amongst those millions of Sikhs who have been undertaking a visit/pilgrimage to Lahore, Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib, Hasan Abdal and several other such hamlets in between. Often feted by hospitable Pakistani hosts, eager to speak Punjabi with their guests from across Wagah or the continents, *yatris* [travellers] usually feel even more perplexed, given the usual stereotypes about a predominantly Muslim nation routinely maligned on external media along with dumbing down by some of its own arm-chair critics. Pakistan, for the visiting Sikhs especially from the Indian Punjab, turns out to be a home away from home and historic gurdwaras such as Lahore's Dera Sahib and Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal or Sikh collections at the Lahore Museum, and *havelis* in Mansehra, Rawalpindi and Kallar Syedan take them down memory lane. All these edifices still carry the names of Sikh generals, such as Hari Singh Nalwa, or benefactors like Dyal Singh and reverberate a kind of Pakistan that is proud of its Sikh heritage

sites, just as it is comfortable with its own Pashtun Sikhs. Amardeep is conscious of that and experiences spontaneous cordiality from officials and ordinary citizens besides trying his own history lessons on places in Wazirabad, Aimanabad, Rohtas, Multan, Jamrud, Jhelum, Sagari, Kallar Syedan, Rawalpindi and numerous towns across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including a cherished peep into the historic Khyber Pass. He is allowed to venture into the interiors of some of the Sikh schools, gurdwaras, forts and houses that may have new occupants but remain very much in use by the society at large. Quite a few of them are surely dilapidated with their occupants and worshippers long gone. Encircled by new urban outgrowth either they have become invisible, or are overwritten by new demographics. A few of them, such as Dyal Singh Library and Mansehra Gurdwara housing the Municipal Library, continue nourishing generations of Pakistani students and researchers, whereas Dinga Singh building sits as a primary business centre on the Mall - adjacent to several other commercial blocks with their names etched in metropolitan history. His visit to Princess Bamba's grave happened after having documented her personal collection that she had sold to Pakistan before breathing her last in the city of her grandfather, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Her Muslim husband had conducted the funeral rituals of Prince Duleep Singh's daughter since the royal had been happy to be back on her native soil.

But then why call it a "lost" heritage? One can understand the agony of migrations, faced by all the communities in the wake of 1947, and as such Sikhs suffered the way Muslims, Hindus and Christians became vulnerable to all kinds of heinous crimes. What about their respective heritage on the *other* side of the new borders? Of course, a developing country like Pakistan with its own multiple geo-political and internal challenges and a population of 200 million cannot restore all the places – mundane or sacred – nor can anyone ensure the upkeep, especially when people of that creed left a generation ago. A very small number of Pashtun Sikhs are doing their utmost, as are the official and civil society clusters, but it is a gigantic challenge, which needs a substantive involvement by the Sikhs, especially those in Diaspora. India has its own millions of Muslims though in its Punjab, Muslim mosques, shrines, residences, business places and schools have suffered more than their counterparts elsewhere in South Asia, including Sikh monuments in Pakistan. Even the number of Pakistani visitors to the Indian Punjab, excepting those rare and fewer cricketing occasions of the past, would not exceed a few thousands, as compared with an ever-steady traffic of millions of Sikh *yatris* to West Punjab. The almost disappearance of a Muslim factor from the Indian Punjab and Haryana, except for some recent tiny island communities, has certainly obliterated that heritage which has been dealt with even more sternly than its Sikh counterpart in Pakistan.

Amardeep enjoys meeting Pashtun Sikhs whose resilience against all odds is playing a significant role in revamping restorative efforts. They speak Pashtu and are proud of their Pakhtun heritage, and despite Taliban assaults on Pakistanis, they have often opted to stay on in the cities with some moving into Punjab. Their emigration has helped restore several Sikh gurdwaras including the beautiful Bhai Joga Singh Gurdwara in Peshawar and certainly several such places of worship in Nankana Sahib, where *langar* is now solely run by Pashtun Sikhs. Nankana Sahib

has become the centre of Khalsa Unani Medicine and many of the Pashtun Sikhs are *hakimbabas* like the erstwhile tribal mendicants who used to flock to Punjabi villages selling health potions and a *desi* Viagra called *salajit*. The very fact that our author was able to travel thousands of miles within his twenty-seven days – often accompanied, guided and hosted by Pakistani Muslims – itself speaks volumes on the state of mobility on this side of Wagah – something that Pakistani Muslims could never imagine. Perhaps Amardeep needed to be a bit more appreciative of such societal and official efforts where his sudden appearance would always register a quick salaam, *sat sri akal* and surely a cup of milky tea. His uncritiqued defence of Sikh heroes and gurus should not hinder him from accepting the fact that many people on the *other* side do have moral, cultural and historical traditions, often similar to his, and political events have shaken them as much as his family. Dislocated Muslim immigrants from across the borders – even at places like Sawalakh, Mandi Bahauddin, Jhelum, Kattas, Rawalpindi and Gujranwala – came forward to open their doors to him without a single soul complaining of what happened to their near ones or to their heritage left behind in east Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu. This author's own 'new' neighbours in Pothowari Punjab had sordid memories of Kapurthala, Jammu and Kangra and, in hushed voices, narrated the saga of disappeared women, lost children and youthful murders. During our childhood, we also heard about some Muslim ruffians looting the homes of *Khatri*s but subsequently paying a huge price for their immoral acts. Moral equivalence was what came out of those agonising memories.

Of course, Amardeep's narrative begins with Baba Guru Nanak and, going through all the Gurus, it reaches its climax with unquestioned adulation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and then selectively celebrates the heroes who opened Khalsa schools in the twentieth century. In fact, all the four communities engaged in similar restorative and educational activities across the breadth of the Sub-continent and, more so in Punjab, parallel communitarian activities happened often in competition, or in sheer adulation. He is understandably upset over the palatial intrigues and infighting after the Maharaja's death and then the subsequent 'treachery' by the ambitious Dogra Brothers who connived with the East India Company to overthrow the once-glorious Khalsa rule. Other than individual or dynastic ambitions, it may have been the usual war of succession that India often experienced though with dire consequences for all. Amardeep seeks heroes in the European employees of the Lahore Darbar but finds Afghans/Pashtuns thirsting for Indian blood, which may be an Orientalist construct with our author not being aware of it. He is right in assuring us of the valour of the Sikh forces at Chillianwala but does not explain why within seven years of such a big tragedy, no less heroic though, the same troops helped rescue the Company and did not shirk from desecrating and looting Delhi. If Punjabi and secularist ethos were so strong then why such a dramatic switch over and so soon! The Raj always depended upon the loyalty of some Indians, including Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, whose collaboration certainly allowed it to become a global power. Our sundered identities and loyalties, along with our own economic ambitions, did not let us develop some formidable shared ethos that could have disallowed or at least

minimised the extent of agony in the upper Indus lands.

Like the Afghans, Mughals are also the *marauders* for our author even though Sikh architecture of circular domes, rising minarets, *baradaris* and palanquin windows is derived from the Indo-Islamic roots developed under the Mughals and the Delhi Sultanate. In the same vein, the Mughal revenue system, and certainly Persian as the court language, were retained both by the British and by the Maharaja. In fact, the Indian revenue system was immensely indebted to the Afghan King, Sher Shah Suri, who among other edifices built Rohtas Fort towards the eastern end of the Salt Range. Some of these emperors and their officials were certainly rough towards the Gurus but that might have been more of a political wrangling and not a clash of cultures between Islam and Sikhism as such, though respective textbooks do not help either. The Mughals were indigenised like the other Turkic, Afghan and even Aryan tribes that had been migrating into the Indus lands long before them and thus India's civilisational identity has always been more fluid, complex and far reaching than the post-1947 prerequisites of the Westphalian model. Lest we forget, the forts in Lahore, Sheikhpura, Rohtas and Attock housing several eminent gurdwaras and *havelis* were, in fact, built by the Mughals and received Sikh additions only during the early nineteenth century. Certainly, Baba Khem Singh Bedi's *haveli* in Kallar Syedan is uniquely impressive, as is the Rori Sahib Gurdwara, which must be one of the most splendid pieces of architecture in South Asia. Rori Sahib Gurdwara combines diverse architectural traditions even though its eminent Pakistani commentator, Kamil Khan Mumtaz, surprisingly draws an analogy with Gaudi's modernist monuments in Barcelona. One certainly feels the pain that Amardeep went through while visiting Muzaffarabad where his parents were born and turned into refugees. He had grown up listening to the stories of their uprootedness and pangs including the murders of several family members by the bridge that spans the Jhelum in Azad Kashmir's capital city.

Amardeep's whirlwind journey could have benefitted more from a deeper immersion into cultural and historical vistas of the Indus Valley disallowing his narrative to pursue its binary course leaving out a bigger, richer and more munificent grey in-between. Partition did cause several newer issues, fissures and tribulations for all and could have been managed properly if the high politics had come down to the grassroots realities of the region. (A good example is the 1923 agreement between Turkey and Greece on a peaceful transfer of population, but that too transmitted similar stories of pain with cultural heritage left behind for lateral mutilations). The haphazard processes of Partition, dissolution or communalisation of the state machinery and mutual suspicion, often dating from the pre-1947 era, engulfed South Asia in a torment where ordinary people from minorities and often on the move eastward or westward fell victim to xenophobia. It has been impossible to differentiate and even enumerate the perpetrators and victims of this transformative and no less arduous historical development, and the way forward would be to seek out a more positive attitude towards our pluralism. Amardeep left Pakistan with a heavy heart though he is appreciative of ordinary Pakistanis for their persistent help, kindness and guidance, and despite murderous events at Wagah and Peshawar in 2015, he is keen to revisit the country along

with exhorting other co-religionists to do the same. Amardeep will perform a wonderful and no less humane job, if he could produce a similar volume on Muslim places in East Punjab and Haryana not merely for the sake of fairness and equity, but to warn us against a self-sustaining moral upper ground.

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Eleanor Nesbitt, *Sikhism. A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 2nd (ed) ix + 156 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-874557-0 (pb) \$11.95.

This is a welcome second edition addition to introductory works on Sikhism. While the series 'A Very Short Introduction' has a clear mandate to be accessible to a wide-ranging audience, Eleanor Nesbitt's meticulous research and comprehensive grounding in the Sikh tradition is quickly apparent.

The structure and content of the volume remains largely unchanged from the first edition. The volume is composed of eight chapters, each highlighting either an historical era or specific themes pertaining to Sikhism. After a brief introductory chapter, Chapter two offers a substantive historical overview of the period of the Sikh gurus and their contributions to the developing community. Chapter three focuses on the sacred scripture of the Sikhs – the Guru Granth Sahib, its development, structure and uniqueness – alongside a brief introduction to the Dasam Granth. Chapter four explores Sikh identity symbols, giving a well-rounded overview of the 5ks, the development of Sikh militarization and the ensuing ideal of martyrdom, among others. It also introduces the Sikh Rahit Maryada, the latest version of the Sikh code of discipline stemming from the mid-twentieth century. Chapter five examines various facets of contemporary Sikhism, introduced by Nesbitt with a brief focus on the fluidity of the developing tradition in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She also includes an examination of the Sikhs and Sikhism under British rule, particularly with the inauguration of the era of Sikh reform under colonialism, known as the Singh Sabha movement. Important socio-political events are also highlighted, including Partition, the redrawing of Punjab in 1966 and the watershed events of 1984 as they pertain to contemporary Sikhism. Chapter six focuses on Sikhism outside of India, giving particular attention to the various phases of migration to North America, the UK and Ireland and mainland Europe, while also attending to notions of identity formation among Sikhs outside of India. Nesbitt here gives a sensitive overview of the often turbulent development of Sikh Studies within diasporic settings. Chapter seven gives an insightful and candid overview of Sikh attitudes to caste, gender and the relationship of Sikhism to other faith traditions. The volume concludes with the chapter "Sikhism and the third millennium" that includes a focus on notions of authority among Sikhs, ethical issues stemming from technological advances, Sikhs and the WWW, and a discussion of Sikhism having emerged as a world religion.

Changes to this volume include an expanded exploration of groups on the margins of the Sikh mainstream, important given the penchant to present Sikhism

as a relatively homogeneous tradition within 'introductory' volumes. Nesbitt here provides a more precise focus on American Sikh converts from the 1970s, namely, she makes a clearer distinction between 3HO, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization founded by Yogi Bajan and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere which developed out of 3HO. Nesbitt also highlights recent developments among Ravidassia Sikhs, a lower caste-based and marginalized Sikh group, who are moving even further from the Sikh mainstream by installing their own scriptures, Amrit Bani Satguru Ravidass Maharaj Ji, rather than Sikh sacred scriptures as has historically been the practice in Ravidassia gurdwaras. The diasporic focus now also includes a brief exploration of the Ghadar movement as well as an overview of Sikhs in Europe. Canadian Sikhs receive additional attention, and, the Oak Creek, Wisconsin gurdwara shooting rampage of 2012 in the USA by a white supremacist who, upon entering the gurdwara, fatally shot six people. The timeline of Sikhs in North America has thus been extended in this second edition. Importantly, Sikh contributions in the World Wars, increasingly receiving scholarly and media attention, have also been highlighted in this volume.

Nesbitt has also updated current regulations regarding interfaith marriages among Sikhs according to a 2007 ruling by the Akal Takht, the body responsible for Sikh temporal affairs. This issue of interfaith unions has become increasingly contentious in the UK in particular, where protests against such marriages by groups of Sikhs have erupted, sometimes interrupting marriage ceremonies.

Lastly, the volume includes an expanded index and an updated list of Further Readings, reflecting the growing scholarship on Sikhism. Despite including fewer pictures, the images included are pertinent.

The shortcomings of the volume are those intrinsic to all introductory texts, namely, a lack of detail. Nonetheless, Nesbitt does a commendable job of presenting the Sikh tradition with as many nuances as is possible. The volume is steeped in solid scholarship and is an authentic rendering of a tradition that has long been misrepresented, or, excessively steeped in apologetics in its portrayal.

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