Book Reviews


In this collection of essays, the editors ask: What, if anything, is ‘new’ about new sociology in India? In their reckoning, it is the work of the sociological imagination to capture—or even create—the work of transition, the politics that gives birth to the transitional and the new, and the politics that this transition in turn gives rise to. They remind us of the original sense in which C. Wright Mills used the term to speak about the new Cold War American society of the 1950s and state that the time is ripe for a ‘new sociology’ to explain the tumultuous changes Indian society finds itself in the midst of—and indeed, to assist in the rise of a new politics. A quick canter through the recent history of sociology in India and its concerns reveals that this is far from the case. This is because, Bandyopadhyay and Hebbar contend, disciplinary concerns have long stifled the research imagination in Indian sociology, keeping it away from paying attention to new formations and politics underway in India today. According to them, rigid systemic thinking and methods infelicitous for researching the contemporary have prevented fresh perspectives from emerging on enduring problems, as well as newer research questions from becoming available for inquiry.

This volume then is an optimistic response to this crisis or stalemate that showcases new themes of investigation and provides fresh avenues for a politically engaged scholarship. The essays respectively take up terrorism and the maternal (Hameed), molecular and national life (Ray), the politics of friendship and religious violence (Savyasaachi), the (re)assemblage of the social in cinematic edits (Vakharia), expertise and institutions in policymaking (Ahmed) and community arts projects (Goswami). In themselves, these sites of investigation do not necessarily represent the...
newness in the world per se, nor easily articulate the aims of the volume. As the editors state, it is the ability of the contributors to draw from eclectic sources and methodologies that produces new sites and accounts of the social. There is too much going on in contemporary Indian society that does not encapsulate easily within familiar categories and tired schemas of tradition versus modernity, rural versus urban, etc. (p. 42).

In order to produce new accounts of the social, several untetherings are required. The editors identify the methodological purchase of fieldwork, or field of view, as key to the work of untethering. This in itself is not straightforward since fieldwork in Indian sociology, they contend, is tied to village studies—which itself needs an untethering from its pole position in disciplinary attention. Each of the essays in the volume thus is based in not just the Malinowskian method, but is also anchored in newer sites of inquiry explicitly away from—or at least beyond—‘the village’, ‘the caste question’, etc. Even though not all contributions are ethnographically equally rigorous, they nevertheless offer an insight into the new anthropological turn in Indian sociology, while at the same time keeping in mind the challenges and limits of this anthropological turn (see especially the chapter by Goswami).

The volume is a welcome addition to the ongoing conversation on the state of the discipline. Through its critique of existing frameworks, the editorial introduction goes over the ground of different ways of drawing up the history of the discipline in India. The essays raise new concerns—mothers of young Muslim men (Hameed) or the nature of expertise in the making of the security question (Ahmed). They bring to attention new ethnographic sites to study the social—the laboratory (Ray), the editing studio (Vakharia) or indeed the ethnographic method itself (Goswami). By bringing new materials to bear on older, familiar questions of violence and identification, the religious–political is framed anew (Savyasaachi).

At the same time, the book also raises questions about the nature of the newness that is being offered in this collection. For example, even though not every volume of this kind needs to contain an essay on village India, one may question the extent to which ‘the village’ (or ‘caste’, ‘tribe’, etc.) has been exhausted as a subject of inquiry, and the merits in abandoning it altogether, if not in perpetuity, then certainly in this moment of transition. An equally significant omission is any substantial engagement with the economic, especially when an unprecedented scale of transformation of
the economic is afoot. The contributions raise important questions about method, and the sometimes patchy or insufficient ethnographic turn. More significantly, apart from the Introduction and the chapter by Ray, and to some extent Savyasaachi, there is scant or at best thin engagement with the relevant existing scholarship. Most essays engage with less than a handful of readings, and do not frame their work in relation to other disciplinary and/or cognate works, if not from the region then drawn from a wider canvas. This undermines the objectives of the volume, not least because the social, inasmuch as it is local, is increasingly constituted by, and is constitutive of, the translocal. A reading of how the political engagement of their sons and brothers informs the reconstitution of the maternal and the fraternal in Iris Jean-Klein’s seminal work on the West Bank would have, for example, allowed for a conversation well beyond the region. This, in turn, would have enabled a fuller embrace of the anthropological or participative turn that goes beyond fieldwork and takes up the important work of comparison.

One hopes that this clarion call for reinvigorating sociology in India does not go unheeded. But in order to do so faithfully, it will be all the more imperative that the new and the experimental comes about through robust methods and readings, thereby creating firm foundations for the ability to provide new frameworks to interrogate the social under transformation, and set research questions and conversations that go well beyond the region. Only then will it have radically assisted in the formation of a new, politically engaged, sociological imagination that is urgently needed.

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Constantine Nakassis’ Doing Style is the most recent contribution to a growing body of work on style subcultures inspired by Dick Hebdige’s seminal cultural studies work, Subculture: The Meaning of Style, where he traced on the ‘loaded surfaces of British working-class youth cultures,
a phantom history of race relations since the war’ (Hebdige 1979: 56). Following, among others, Ritty Lukose’s work on the youth styles of Kerala’s post-liberalisation ‘consumer-citizens’, Nakassis’ chosen demography is the college youth (primarily men) of Tamil Nadu whose style—sartorial and linguistic—he studies to produce a thick ethnographic description framed within a wide range of cultural and anthropological theory. Resting on the leitmotif of the myth of Icarus whose wax wings melted as he flew too close to the sun, Nakassis’ argument treads the dance between style and over-style, the former as a prerequisite for coolness and even a subversion of hierarchies of class and caste, and the latter as an ‘excess’ that can un-brand the bearer of style from gettu (badass) to uncool in one swoop. Divided into three sections, namely brand, language and film, the book cuts rapidly between intimate accounts of college youth in south India to detailed expositions of the analytics invoked including, among others, ‘iterability’, ‘entanglement’ and ‘citationality’ as well as the meta-categories of ‘youth’ and ‘style’. If ‘youth’ is a liminal status between adulthood and the impending entry into caste-society, marked by peer pressure, intimacies and stylish subversions, then ‘style’ is many things at once: ‘local discourse’, ‘ethnographic datum’ and most importantly, following Judith Butler, ‘iterative’, ‘citational’ and ‘performative’. Nakassis treads precariously between all these abstractions via the concrete surfaces of the ‘mediated and materialized’ practices of the sartorial and linguistic as they are ‘entangled’ with garment manufacture, college rituals, music television and film production.

In the first section that explores the aesthetics of brandedness and style via their design, manufacture and circulation, and the anxieties they produce both for the manufacturer and wearer of the style to achieve the perfect balance between supply and surfeit, style and over-style, Nakassis makes a crucial distinction between ‘brand’ and ‘brandedness’. He argues, through detailed descriptions of college youths’ preferred brands and styles as well as material production of these high-quality and low-priced textiles in the thottams (literally meaning ‘gardens’ and in this context, ‘compounds’) of North Chennai, that when college youth do style, they do not necessarily go for original high-end brands but knowingly sport duplicates that cite the original brands; they ‘flirt’ in a Simmelian sense with global brands, to produce the liminality, ambivalence and precariousness of local styles.
The next section studies the phenomenon of English as the language of ‘wannabes’—of aspirational modernity and development, mobility and access to alternative lifestyles (perhaps even non-caste ones)—via an ethnography of linguistic practices among Tamil Nadu’s college youth and the VJs of Southern Spice Music (South India’s MTV). Nakassis observes that both were often confused about their addressee and the measure of how much was too much English to conduct affairs in. An excessive use of English, rather the wrong kind of English, would alienate them as ‘vellai Tamils’ (white Tamils) or ‘Peters’, and code switching between language registers of chaste English, impeccable Tamil and miscigenated Tamil and English was crucial to produce the right balance between style and over-style. What made a VJ Craig (the longest running host on a popular call-in show on Southern Spice Music) so popular was his ‘performative disfluency’ of Tamil. His flirtation with cosmopolitan English as well as local inflexions of Tamil and English is what made him a stylish and enduring role model for VJs and Tamil college youths.

No account of youth culture in Tamil Nadu can ignore the influence of film, and the final section of the book analyses the mass hero film and the star text of Rajnikanth, the ‘king of style’. Apart from being a subject of conversation, debate, emulation and star-struck devotion or ‘cinepolitics’, Nakassis argues that it is the essential citationality and auto-citationality of the Tamil mass hero film that entangles Tamil youth with film. The screen then is an ‘interface’, a term borrowed from new media analogy to suggest an inter-constitutive feedback loop by which the film becomes ‘entextualised’. In the act of ‘doing’ style, local fans emulate the star; these youth citational acts then entangle the hero-star, who in turn alters the local fan. Focusing on a uniquely south Indian phenomenon, à la Rajnikanth, where the bigger the stars get on screen, the humbler they get in life, Nakassis argues that this is what makes possible the balance between style and over-style—the onscreen excess of style is balanced by the off-screen underplaying of it by the star.

This is a highly readable and timely book that, despite the profusion of categories and an underrepresentation of the relationship of women and caste groups to style, is a rich ethnographic description and theoretical exploration of the entanglements of clothes, brands, language, music television and film with style and youth culture in south India.
Jan Breman’s book is a much-needed corrective to India’s dominant economic growth discourse, politically saturated recently with the so-called success of the ‘Gujarat model of development’. The book engages over five decades of fieldwork in Gujarat from the 1960s, and is painstakingly detailed in its analyses of destitution and immiserisation of those in the lowest echelons of Gujarati society. Breman gives a historical and spatial account of Gujarat’s ‘paupers’ living in conditions of neo-bondage—dispossessed not only of the means of production but also of the freedom to sell their own labour. As the state promotes capitalist growth strategies and callously withdraws from welfare provisions, Breman raises the anxious spectre of an unfolding class-based civil war between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. Capital itself is unable to mop up the surplus population of dispossessed workers, leaving a pauperised mass of people to fend for themselves.

The book is based on Breman’s ethnographic work in four villages around Ahmedabad city and subsequently in the city’s slums, temporary shelters and resettlement colonies. Its comprehensive analyses of rural and urban poverty, told through the historical experiences and lives of migrant workers precariously surviving in the informal economy, offers lessons for understanding the processes of destitution across India.

Breman gives a detailed historical account of the dispossession that compels the landless (often Scheduled Tribes) and marginal farmers from his research area to migrate in search of work. He challenges the idea of mass migration to urban centres as a linear process, emphasising instead circular migration as a prominent feature of the ‘regime of informality’. He argues that there is an influx of temporary labour into villages during seasons when agricultural work is available, or when shelter and work in the city is precarious. This is an understated and understudied phenomenon
in migration studies. ‘Home’ for this large contingent of rural migrant workers thus serves as a resting place to recover and recuperate with family, before the next circuit of migration for sheer survival.

The withdrawal and neglect of state welfare mechanisms in Gujarat has left this large population dangerously destitute and immiserised. With a few exceptions, the rural poor in the villages of his study have not departed from their colonies. The uncertainty of regular and secure employment in the urban economy keeps bringing them back. This population has to stay ready and footloose, available to work as agricultural labourers, construction workers or to take up any work that comes their way. Skilling is avoidable lest they get stuck in a particular occupation; staying footloose is a crucial coping mechanism. Large-scale deskilling and insecurity, low wage rates, poor inspection of labour conditions and the deregulation of labour laws have compounded their situation.

The living conditions in ‘illegal’ urban slums aggravates insecurity as they are prone to evictions and slum demolitions, often losing precious savings and the bare minimum household goods essential for survival. The story of the temporary shelter at Ganeshnagar is illustrative. Close to the city’s largest waste disposal belt, Ganeshnagar is also immediately adjacent to the electricity substation with high tension wires overhead, posing severe health risks for residents. Evicted slum dwellers were dumped here in trucks in 2006 with their meagre belongings to make way for the Sabarmati riverfront development. Given its temporary status, basic facilities have been missing and things have not improved over the years. Breman estimates that over 3000 families lived in Ganeshnagar between 2007 and 2014. Most inhabitants do not enjoy any livelihood security. Some are self-employed as rickshaw drivers, hawkers, vendors and waste collectors. Working conditions entail hard labour; thus, it is often that older men, women, the ailing and sometimes younger men while away time in the camp as work becomes an occasional activity. Income from labour is about a half to a third lower than in the city, while the cost of living is higher. Welfare entitlements have become inaccessible due to high costs of travel to their earlier residences as their entitlements were registered in that locality. All of this reinforces their pauperisation. The situation in the permanent resettlement site of Vatwa at the edge of Ahmedabad is not much better. While two-roomed apartments with a kitchen and a toilet have been allotted to the few ‘eligible’ families with proofs of residence at the time of eviction, the basic facilities are lacking and the construction is poor.
The families are unable to repay scheduled instalments for the premises as the distance from the city and work opportunities is considerable. Vatwa’s residents are mainly low-skilled, and are poorly paid. Conditions in clandestine shelters are worse, marked by extreme deprivation. This is where the poorest—often Scheduled Tribe—migrants find shelter to avoid attracting attention. Any effort at collective mobilisation is fragile, and ‘employers prefer labour from elsewhere because migrants—often attached in a state of neo-bondage—are not only cheaper to recruit and maintain, but also easier to discipline’ (p. 148).

Drawing somewhat awkwardly from Wikipedia for the explanation of the term ‘pauperism’, Breman draws parallels with 19th century English history, when a large population was immiserised as a result of the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Social Darwinists of the time argued against the poor laws providing relief to paupers unable to fend for themselves. Tocqueville, among those expounding the moral hazards of public welfare, nevertheless argued in favour of private charity and sharing of resources to mitigate the wretched inequalities of the time. The processes do not correspond except as different historical manifestations of capitalist development. Yet Breman warns that in the withdrawal of the Indian state from welfare commitments and the disdain of the wealthy towards India’s paupers, there is a distinctly social Darwinist ideology at work that blames the poor for their condition.

Around 30 million migrant workers formed India’s ‘floating workforce’ at the turn of the 21st century. Breman creates a compelling account of the conditions that likely confronts this large majority of the Indian population denied citizenship rights and basic welfare support. A central message of the book is that this immense pauperisation carries within it the potential for intense conflict that threatens Indian society.

Some stylistic issues in the book include large block quotes from reports, other authors and Breman’s previous work. The text frequently shifts from the analysis of particular phenomena in Gujarat to national and global issues without adequately building the flow of argument. There are some summary endorsements of arguments made by other authors that would have benefitted working through in greater detail based on Breman’s historical work. These include the argument of ‘expulsion’ as dispossession that implicitly invokes an ideal historical condition that Breman’s work refutes, and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ as involving
only state force, when the dispossession that Breman chronicles is not always enacted through force. Reliance on Wikipedia definitions for terms such as ‘pauperism’ (p. 4) and ‘smart city’ (p. 155) were avoidable.

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This book is a ‘story’ by a historian in the sense that the author works—within the regulations, allowances and distinctions of her discipline—to conjure up the past. She gauges, compares, speculates on and renders available aspects of a time gone by through fragments of information available. The fictive element manifests itself in the way these fragments are arranged together to paint a picture of a possible social landscape. This is a rare, urgent and illuminating story, well told. Foraging through the past by way of the autobiographical writings of Piro—which are used both as a window and a meter—Malhotra weaves together dispersed threads of the past to present a vivid and telling account of the history of Punjab’s religiosity, gender relations, caste–religion demarcations and the order of the *Gulabdasis*, a solipsistic monistic religious sect in 19th century Punjab. The historical context segues into the study of the ethnographic present of the Gulabdasis, and in the process highlights ways of seeking continuity with the past by evoking and preserving memory through spatial and material aspects in the present. The book is a refreshing elucidation of historical forms of contemporary popular religiosity, which trace the roots of their eclectic and syncretic forms back into a past where religious identities were more fluid, even as gender and caste remained stringently defined and served as structural palimpsests on which the former were impatiently reified under the colonial administration’s influence.

Piro, a low-caste Muslim prostitute, converted and joined the Gulabdasi sect, narrating her experiences with her guru Gulabdas and the woes of her conversion in autobiographical pieces, *ek sau sath kafiyan* (160 verses) and some *siharfis* (acrostic verses). Malhotra underscores that Piro’s position as
a caste, gender and professionally marginalised denizen of the times, trying to cross over into a socially acceptable role and writing about it, renders her an ‘exceptional normal’ (p. xviii), where she is not an exceptionally remarkable woman but is also not every woman; the extraordinariness of her life therefore reflects the ordinariness of her times. Using the autobiographical genre, Piro combines the fictional with the factual, penning an aspirational picture of her life through her writing. It is thus that her perspective on her times, her grievances and laments, and her actions have a lot to tell us about the society she lived in, illuminating its rigid structures as well as some windows that offered flexibility. Concurring with Saba Mahmood’s idea of agency as emergent through the temporal and cultural milieu of the agent, Malhotra convincingly attributes agency and autonomy to Piro for having steered her life in a desirable direction, albeit by conforming to those patriarchal values that are necessary for her context and genre of expression. Piro worked with admirable discernment to navigate through her cultural restrictions and allowances to formulate the expression of her dissent and acquire an alternative path of life.

The mundane fact of Piro’s conversion came to bear weight and carried a social message through her writing about it. It aimed at a public denouncement of her past relations, a confirmation of her present loyalties and an attempt at securing a legitimate entry into her future social environment: to create a new ‘habitus’ as a religious-cultural convert. Both her selection of the writing genre—the ‘Kafi’—and its content, where she talks of herself sometimes as akin to Sita and at others to Hir, demonstrate a heavy borrowing from the cultural milieu of Punjab, to evoke familiar emotions which may have facilitated her acceptance into the new society. The Kafi was a popular Bhakti genre used frequently by the Gulabdas. Appropriating the genre by adding the element of the autobiographical, Piro frequently compared herself with other low-caste Bhakti saints—for example Kabir, and women in Bhakti traditions with promiscuous or undefined pasts like Kubjan and Bhilani or Shabri—to underscore her similarity with these figures and to evoke broader acceptance.

Tracing the life and writings of Giani Ditt Singh, a former Gulabdasi and member of the Sikh Sabha, remembered today as a dalit hero who condemned caste, the author reflects on the intermeshed status of caste and religious identities, and the impossibility of imagining a casteless society in those times. Through Singh’s writings which display
vacillating stances on religious and caste distinctions, the reader is taken back to a period where these categories were not as fixed as they may appear now, having been meddled with by colonial administration. The author calls attention to the intertwining of these religious identities, thus arguing for a more complex and organic picture of their pasts than what is available and remembered as legitimate today.

Recent attempts at reviving Piro’s cultural memory through contemporary theatre try to recreate the past instrumentally for the present. In one such play, the hierarchy between Piro and her guru is reversed, presenting her as a gifted poet to whose skills and spiritual merit Gulabdas kneeled in reverence. Malhotra rightly reads this as an attempt on the part of the playwright to situate Punjab in the historical landscape of the Bhakti movement, especially to make up for the absence of early women poets and to construct a more gender-balanced picture of Punjab’s past. Alternatively, she is remembered as Ma Piro (mother Piro), with either no reference to her past as a prostitute or she is portrayed as a victim, helpless in her circumstances, who became spiritually enlightened through conversion. She is similarly remembered in present-day efforts of resurrecting the Gulabdasi sect by Vijender Das, a Gulabdasi who is attempting to recoup the loss of major Gulabdasi sites—like Chathanwala, where Piro and Gulabdas were buried together—to Pakistan after the partition, through a spatial and material reinvention of myth and memory. The concluding chapter tracks the revival of important sites and rituals mentioned in the hagiography of Gulabdas to popularise and resituate the Gulabdasi sect in Punjab. Translation of the core Gulabdasi principle of tolerance of all faiths and openness to all castes into today’s milieu presents a sect whose religiosity borders on popular Hinduism. A cascading play of the past, present and popular has lent the religiosity of contemporary Punjab a rich and striking syncretism. Malhotra deals with an elusive subject, bringing meaning and significance into the seemingly inconsequential nuances of the history of Punjab’s religious-cultural landscape. She writes with attention to the complexity of her subject and succeeds in arguing her point with an adept use of language and an apposite assembly of text. This book will be of interest to historians, scholars of religion and social anthropologists.

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‘Is demystification still a political act?’—especially when ideological determinations are fully visible and ‘material interests…are cynically…upheld’? (p. 1). Propelled by this question, Sangari activates an unusual kind of hermeneutics. Instead of decoding the obscure and the opaque, she coaxes what seems manifestly self-evident.

*Solid:Liquid* brings together two, seemingly contrasting reproductive practices—(a) the scandal of sex selection and (b) the innovation of commercial surrogacy. The first is seen as a shamefully persistent ‘backward’ practice; the second is touted as an avant-garde initiative overseen by a developmental state. Sangari argues that these disparate fertility procedures, in fact, constitute a single reproductive ensemble. Further, they portend formative shifts within contemporary patriarchal regimes. Through her textured analysis, Sangari highlights the urgency of framing patriarchy as indisputably economic, in addition to being cultural and social.

But, didn’t we know that already? Sangari’s work definitely follows Marxist feminist lineages. However, it would be a mistake to regard it as merely one more reprisal of a well-entrenched thesis. What Sangari details is a new configuration of capital: a new moment in which women, far from being excluded from the market, are vigorously ushered into it as (re)productive labourers and consumers. Problematically, this new acceptance of women-as-market-players is structured ‘through’ patriarchal familial practices. We find therefore that women’s waged labour has increased most rapidly for domestic, care and sex work—each of which refurbishes patriarchy for the market.

This review hopes to highlight two strands of the argument proposed in *Solid:Liquid*. The first is the phenomenon of ‘re-traditionalization’. Sangari demonstrates that sex selection today is thoroughly imbricated in contemporary arrangements of property relations, regulative marriages and technological and labour regimes. Consequently, son-preference is the product of a chilling cost-benefit calculus—profoundly distant from any ritual–cultural practices. Nevertheless, it gets compulsively cloaked in the language of ‘tradition’. Sangari proposes the term ‘re-traditionalization’ to signal how an ‘older lexicon’ (p. 141) is extensively
deployed to legitimate new rationales, even in the purportedly ameliorative policies of the state. When the state institutes insurance schemes and cash rewards for begetting girl children, it re-affirms women as dowry-bearing, financial liabilities. Furthermore, it conjures women’s low status as solely a factor of traditional mindsets and unenlightened perceptions—completely eradicable through awareness-raising without a concomitant material re-structuring.

‘Tradition’ serves as an excuse in other ways as well. In commercial surrogacy, procreation moves into production—albeit partially—engendering several re-significations. Wombs become capital accumulation opportunities; eggs acquire exchange value. These new manoeuvres, instead of excluding reproduction from the market, urge women to shrug off traditional mindsets and transfigure themselves as entrepreneurs. Pointedly, it is only from within hetero-patriarchies that women can individuate themselves as market actors, because only women who have confirmed their fertility—as wives or widows—are eligible to become surrogates.

To argue then that surrogacy confers women with ‘agency’ outside the familial is, according to Sangari, strikingly congruent with the contention that women ‘choose’ male children. In both cases, there is a prompt transmutation of familial pressures into ‘choices’ supposedly exerted by women. By co-reading sex selection with commercial surrogacy, Sangari uncovers other appalling continuities between the ‘backward’ and the ‘avant-garde’. Thus, husbands consent on behalf of surrogates; commissioning parents stipulate the sex of the surro-child; they offer higher remuneration for ‘superior’ social genes (fair skin, caste attributes). ‘Tradition’, we see, continues to legitimate new rationales.

The second strand of Sangari’s argument which this review foregrounds is the movement of labour between family and market. There is a perceptible transition in the contemporary—wherein some of women’s labours (domestic, (re) productive) are free—while others are waged. Sangari contends that this partial migration of women’s labours is neither transitory nor contradictory. The simultaneous existence of waged and unwaged work in fact co-constitute and sustain each other.

Take commercial surrogacy, where commissioning parents and surro-service providers come from vastly different classes. This inequality structures its very possibility. For surrogacy to be viable, the unevenness of developed–undeveloped regions, waged–unwaged labours, emancipated–unfree women has to be seized and maintained. It is therefore untenable to
chart a linear, progressive, simple-minded passage, as we often do, from the familial (traditional, non-waged, dis-individuated, invisible work) to the market (modern, waged, individuated, contractual, visible work).

Expectedly, Sangari is critical of libertarian feminists who celebrate surrogacy. She maintains that their idealisation of reproductive autonomy—often resonating with the state and the market—overlooks skewed distributions of freedom. Her analysis of surrogacy contracts strikingly reveals that it is usually signed ‘after’ the first trimester confirmation of pregnancy, making it something like labour bondage. Further, the contract does not cover ‘externalities’ such as pregnancy loss, post-partum recovery or maternal mortality. These and other asymmetries are customarily normalised. The language of altruism, reciprocity and mutuality serve to reclassify the sale of the surro-child as donation, thereby eliding questions of ethics, remuneration and labour.

There is no doubt that Sangari’s work offers robust analyses of how patriarchies are co-constituted at many levels with other systemic inequalities within contemporary geo-economies. Nonetheless, Solid:Liquid is the kind of book that is likely to provoke divergent first responses. Where one reader sees stupendous possibilities, another is likely to pause sceptically. Thus, readers are likely to be struck, in very different ways, by the fact that Sangari has done no fresh fieldwork, no ethnographic or sample studies. Her work is entirely interpretive-analytical, drawing full-heartedly from already available empirical, exegetical and theoretical works. This noteworthy methodological platform makes for an unusually bipartite format. Nearly as voluminous as Sangari’s arguments are the footnotes through which she elaborates her study. Then again, she traces the contemporary through an extensive lapidary of connections that some will find audacious and revelatory, while others might dismiss as tenuous, even stretched.

Whatever kind of reader we are, we would do best to patiently, scrupulously grapple with this work for the following reasons. Its cascading implications impact not only how we conceive (trans) national reproductive formations but also feminist theorisation and politics at large. And also because Sangari refuses a simple relationship with the self-evident. She provokes a much-needed confrontation with it.

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As a work that delves into multiple disciplinary debates, Dia Da Costa’s *Politicizing Creative Economy: Activism and a Hunger Called Theater* offers a broadly pitched understanding of India’s ‘creative economy’, or the political economy of culture, the arts and creativity, with particular reference to the role of affect in a globalised capitalist landscape. Through a combination of ethnography, theatre history and a sociology of culture, Da Costa weaves together a story of urban histories of Delhi and Ahmedabad respectively, as well as the historical sociology of two different performance troupes: the urban Delhi-based Marxist troupe Janam, active from the early 1970s, and Budhan, an explicitly non-middle class and ‘tribal’ Chhara troupe alive from the late 1990s through the present. With an opening two-chapter section laying out the stakes for her study of creative economy, and two sections of three chapters each on Delhi/Janam and Ahmedabad/Budhan respectively, *Politicizing Creative Economy* engages in debates central to the broader theories of affect and the sociology of culture through an innovative analysis of the lines between theatre and activism in post-1947 India.

Opening with a critique of the UN-led ‘creative economy culture’, Da Costa positions previously under-theorised moments of urban Marxist theatre and performances of the Chhara as sites of creativity and affect, both challenging hyper-modernist emphases on religion and nation as well as citing the limits of these efforts in the present day. In her first section, ‘Politicizing Creative Economy’, Da Costa offers brief histories of the spaces of Delhi and Ahmedabad, emphasising the usually hidden histories of industrial capitalism in these spaces, as well as indexes the ways that a discourse of urban renewal and processes of expulsion and dispossession accompany the rise of creative economies from the early post-Independence period through the present.

Her chapters on Janam (3, 4, and 5) introduce a multilayered analysis of how the group has memorialised fallen artists (like Safdar Hashmi), and focused only on industrial labour, to the exclusion of other sorts of labour (like sex work). Primarily through an analysis of the texts of plays such as *Machine, Weapons* or *Aurat* (woman), as well as interviews with group
members, Da Costa argues that Janam ‘reworks what it means for a class to search for middle-classness, reframing belonging and becoming in Delhi’s consumer, participatory capitalism by harnessing middle class energy toward labor politics’ (p. 99). In addition to a reconstruction of the creative economy attentive to its features, chapter 5 features a detailed critique of the approach to religion and, in particular the rise of Hindutva, by the group, exploring how its strategies of satire and laughter in plays like *Yeh Dil Maange More Guruji* (The Heart Desires More, Guruji), ignores the place of religion as a site of ethics, and also, belonging and piety. The chapters on Budhan (6, 7, and 8) analyse particular individual performers as well as the larger context of Chbara social life and their relationship to liquor production and thievery. In these sections, Da Costa develops and extends Jose Esteban Munoz’s concept of ‘disidentificatory citizenship’, or the ‘the willful critique and transgression of norms of citizenship as a mode of constructing belonging as citizens’ (p. 168). This is shown both through the *longue durée* of oppression in which the Chbaras have lived as well as the specific performative strategies, as in *Another Accident*, an adaptation of Dario Fo’s *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, as well as the social life of their entry into the field of micro-insurance in contemporary Ahmedabad.

As a useful counterpoint to the common focus on religious nationalism and heritage studies, Da Costa critiques both the sentimental capitalism behind the neoliberal present as well as the limits of urban Indian protest theatre as activism. Da Costa’s topic is packed with multiple avenues of historical reconstruction as well as political critique, so much so that her apparatus rests on very brief histories of place and politics, as well as a mix of straightforward textual criticism of a limited number of plays as well as interviews with select practitioners, without a clear methodological apparatus. Much of the reconstructive project remains tethered to a relatively limited source base, whereas her critiques of the political present frequently appear outside a clear grounding in historical, anthropological or text-critical foundations. This shines through in the emphasis in chapter 5 on spaces of piety in contemporary arenas of Hindu religiosity in India, following Saba Mahmood’s well-known study of women’s piety movements in Egypt. Though she emphasises how theatre workers of the future would benefit from attending to religion as an ethical stance (a position that resonates in much of contemporary religious studies), she remains so tethered to a critique of a vulgar Marxist dismissal of religion that it nearly entirely determines her line of vision,
abandoning any positive and substantive account of what such a politics of performance may look like, or if any such historical precedents or critical guidelines exist for such a politics.

The author’s considerable engagement with ‘affect’ offers a welcome critique of available Western theoretical signposts, showing how much of the work on affective labour privileges an abstract optimism reserved for global Northern spaces. Not merely adding an Indian variant to a global model worked out elsewhere, her book aims to substantively revise existing affect theory (her offering of ‘cruel pessimism’, updates Lauren Berlant’s ‘cruel optimism’) with India as a comparative starting point for the exploration of similar cases in North America. Her focus on ‘situated solidarities’ resolutely moves forward contemporary understandings of the meeting points of ideology and aesthetics in post-1947 Indian theatre and performance, without succumbing to a jejune diffusionist theory of globalisation. This contribution is best shown in her unique reading of Janam as both a challenge to, yet manifestation of, globalised discourses of creative economy and capitalism. This is easily the strongest aspect of the work and will likely inspire a new era in Indian performance studies, attentive to the details, the gaps and the ambiguities of particularities in India while never leaving out the conceptual globalisation at play.

Attentive to globalisation’s many hidden undercurrents, Da Costa’s work represents a milestone in the study of India’s place in a globalised commodification of culture. Rather than to simply point to this phenomenon or critique easy targets of religion and nation, Da Costa’s book offers depth, nuance and analytical power. No consideration of India in and of globalisation will be complete without it.

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‘Women hold up half the sky,’ proclaimed Mao Zedong nearly 50 years ago. This is perhaps true, but women certainly do not constitute half the

children born in either China or India. In China, there are only 100 girls for 116 boys; in India, the corresponding figure is 100 girls for 111 boys. These gaps in the sex ratios in the two countries, caused by sex-selective abortion, are further aggravated by neglect of daughters, resulting in higher-than-expected mortality among girls. Surely that is against the laws of nature; as the catchy lyrics from the musical film *Casbah* (1948) would have us believe, ‘for every man, there is a woman’. What happens when this chain is broken wherein social structures and norms create conditions that leave one in six men without a mate? This is the question that the chapters in the book under review set out to answer.

Demographers have responded to this concern by arguing that societies will adjust to these gaps by changing the amount of time that men spend being married. Twenty years ago, noted demographers Mari Bhat and Shiva Halli predicted that a declining female population would result in an increasing age gap between the bride and the groom, thereby reducing the proportion of men who get married and increasing the incidence of divorce. They ended their predictions on an optimistic note, claiming that by the early 21st century, ‘it is almost certain that the demographic trends which contributed significantly to the present state of affairs in the marriage market will be reversed, and thus the marriage bargain will lose some of the coercive character it has acquired over the years’ (Bhat and Halli 1999: 143). The nuanced sociological analyses in this volume point out that these general statements fail to take into account the intricate threads of gender, class, caste and nationality that are woven together to determine which men find a bride, whom they marry and how these marital bargains shape gender relationships in the affected communities.

The various chapters in this volume highlight the factors underlying the decline in the number of women vis-à-vis men in India and China, but quickly move to the impact of this gender imbalance. They cluster around three themes. First, several chapters point out that bride shortages are higher in some regions than in others; one way of coping with this situation involves the import of brides from other regions, and in some cases, from other countries. The chapter by Jin et al. documents the common practice in the richer regions in China of using marriage brokers to import brides from the poorer regions. The chapter by Paro Mishra suggests that pervasive bride shortages in Haryana have opened doors for the import of brides from distant locations, sometimes as far away as Kerala and Assam. Many of these brides are from different castes. Ironically, Haryanvi society,
despite its strong opposition to inter-caste marriage when both parties are from the same region, does not mind overlooking differences between the caste backgrounds of these imported brides and those of the men intending to marry them. These chapters thus foreshadow a potentially profound disturbance in the social relations in the areas affected by bride shortages.

The second observation emerging from these chapters is that bride shortages do not uniformly affect all men. Regardless of the sex ratio of the population, men from richer backgrounds manage to find wives, while it is the poor men who are either left as bachelors (or sometimes resort to polyandry) or are compelled to import brides by paying a bride price. Patricia Jeffrey suggests that there are multiple marriage markets in the same region. One marriage squeeze operates against men without resources or employment prospects who experience a shortage of women, whilst another favours ‘suitable boys’ who are sought out as grooms. This is an interesting analysis that allows us to reconcile escalation in dowry and rising marriage expenditures as parents seek hypergamous marriages side by side with the payment of broker fees and bride price by poorer grooms.

Third, these chapters also examine the role of bride shortages in re-negotiating the patriarchal bargain. Does scarcity increase women’s bargaining power and reduce gender inequality? Here the answers seem mixed. Larsen and Kaur find that in India, women in areas with bride shortages face lower constraints on their physical mobility and are more likely to support their parents. In contrast, Bose et al., using data from the National Family Health Survey–III, find that in areas where there is a shortage of women, more women report being slapped, punched and subjected to controlling behaviours by their husbands.

The unique contribution of this volume lies in its incisive analysis that seeks to link broad societal patterns shaping daughter aversion causing bride shortages on the one hand, with the deeply personal experiences of both men who find it difficult to find brides, and women who fill this gap by migrating long distances to marry these lonely bachelors, on the other. Although imbalanced sex ratios in India and China have for long been researched, their consequences are only now beginning to draw attention and the chapters in this excellent volume not only provide new data but also offer an analytical frame through which the emerging phenomena can be viewed.

One of the challenges confronting the volume, shared by almost all studies on this topic, is the difficulty in disentangling cause and effect. Social
transformations take time to work their way through. Daughter aversion on the part of grandparents leads to bride shortage in the parental generation, and may promote greater appreciation of the value of daughters in the subsequent generation, at least among some sections of society. Long-distance brides in a highly patriarchal area may be vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, but as these long-distance marriages become the new norm, a critical mass may emerge to provide support to these strangers in a new land. While the various chapters in this volume, particularly the Introduction, alert us to an impending tectonic shift in areas facing tremendous bride shortages, it may perhaps be too early to draw conclusions about how these gender imbalances will reshape our social landscape. However, they have at least managed to achieve one thing: we will no longer look for universalised effects without differentiating between the rich and the poor.

REFERENCE


India’s much vaunted explosion in printed newspaper circulation since the Emergency has become thoroughly enmeshed in the dynamics of globalised capital over the course of the last two decades. In her debut monograph, anthropologist Sahana Udupa explores what this encounter means for journalism in Bangalore, a city that is often thought to exemplify, for better and for worse, the radical changes that have swept across the country since liberalisation. Rather than telling a linear narrative about the simple commercialisation of news media, this book argues that market forces have collided with and significantly re-arranged Kannada
language and caste politics in the city. The latest in an important line of ethnographies about newspapers in India, this nuanced and well-argued book has the added advantage of straddling English and vernacular worlds, allowing Udupa to intervene significantly in how we understand the dynamics of interaction between the language of empire and globalisation and the realm the author terms ‘bhasha’ media.

Among the giants of Indian publishing, Udupa could not have done better than to pick the Times of India (TOI) and its entry into the Bangalore market, as a lens through which to examine claims to building a ‘world class city’ through news media. The TOI model of publishing, whereby as much as 90 per cent of revenue comes from advertising, has changed the rules of the game for all players in the industry. In fact, we learn how the Bangalore TOI did not only report on market forces but actively shaped them, playing a key role in the city’s real estate market boom, for example, through its performative powers of narration in the Times Property supplement. This is a cosy relationship with capital indeed. But while we are often prone to thinking about the commercialisation of news media working in strict contradiction to its power of criticism, the picture drawn in this ethnography is somewhat more complicated. Although thoroughly complicit in promoting a privatised vision of development, with very little room for economic critiques of poverty and inequality, the Bangalore TOI did manage to project itself as an activist paper of sorts, where citizens’ criticism of the political class found public expression. In a familiar post-liberalisation narrative, disillusionment with the development state drives a sense of civics around topics like transportation infrastructure that privilege the middle-class property owner as the normative citizen.

If the English language press, exemplified in the TOI’s self-understanding as cosmopolitan and sophisticated, represents one ideological pole in the field of journalism in Bangalore, the Kannada language press finds itself preoccupied with inhabiting the opposite end of the spectrum, emphasising local politics, language and culture. Scholars are accustomed to thinking about the field of cultural production in terms of an English/vernacular binary, but Udupa develops an argument that takes the structural underpinnings of this binary seriously. By paying attention to specific acts of differentiation between languages and how these are intertwined with the forces of market segmentation, this ethnography contributes to a long series of debates on how to conceptualise the emergent relational aspects of cultural differentiation in moments of ‘excess’ that cannot be
reduced to market logics or simple pre-existing ‘cultures’ that have come in closer contact through globalisation. Of particular methodological interest here is the idea that by looking at three papers (Times of India, Bangalore Mirror, Vijaya Karnataka) that are all owned by the same group (Bennett Coleman and Company Limited), the analyst can see the work of relational differentiation in real time as expressed in editorial and journalistic decision making and marketing.

By the final two ethnographic chapters, we land squarely within the world of bhasha media purveying ideas of Bangalore that are often at odds with the world class city narrative emanating from English language, self-styled ‘cosmopolitan’ media outlets. Here, Udupa’s research turns to engage the wider field of language politics, contributing to historical debates on regionalism, caste and literary history that have more often worked with material from the other South Indian languages. Of particular interest to the sociologically inclined reader is the final chapter on caste in the newsroom and in the wider journalistic field. The reader learns a great deal about the forms of contestation that have emerged in the wake of Karnataka’s anti-Brahmin movement, with the rise of Lingayat and Okkaliga journalism for example, in addition to witnessing concrete instances of caste-based discrimination in a world where dalit journalists face innumerable barriers in their quest to access the airwaves of public opinion. I particularly appreciated Udupa’s capacity to draw on her own experience as a journalist, in addition to materials from her more formal ethnographic research, to make the point that the discourse on caste and power in such contexts is always soaked in gender, whether explicitly or in more tacit associations between non-Brahmin assertion and the masculine habitus.

In sum, this book must be read not only by all of those interested in the continuing importance of printed news in a world increasingly defined by digitalisation, but also by anyone concerned with the future of cities as zones of public discourse and conflict. The ways in which urban life is narrated does not only reflect our attitudes to the city; the mass mediation of collective life, as heterogeneous as that category may be in a place like Bangalore, shapes our very capacity to live together. As part of a broader shift in anthropology to consider mass mediation beyond reductionist accounts of technical networks, Udupa’s book has also made a significant contribution to our understanding of globalising cities and the political public sphere itself. These are domains of social theory that we cannot
afford to leave to speculation; it is only through this kind of grounded, long-term research that we can ever hope to develop a conceptual vocabulary adequate to the task of deeper comprehension.

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The book under review is about social change vis-à-vis the interrelated issues of subalternity and exclusion in India. It is an edited volume of 15 essays. Most of the chapters are based on empirical data derived from historical studies or fieldwork. Though the book does not have a singular perspective, it engages critically with the established subaltern perspective. The specific questions that the volume tries to deal with are: Why and how does a society produce and reproduce subalternity? How do subalterns negotiate their social and political emancipation? How do they absorb social and political changes?

The volume is thematically divided into five sections. The first section consists of a comprehensive introductory essay by the editors. They detail the subject matter, critically engage with a structural–functional study of Indian society using insights from dalit, feminist and Marxist perspectives, define subalternity and locate subalterns as the subject of study, deal with processes of their exclusion and inclusion, and present some significant aspects of social change in contemporary India.

Three chapters in the second section deal with subaltern studies. The chapter by K. L. Sharma introduces subaltern studies by presenting its meaning, nature, origin and theme. Sharma claims that subaltern studies, in its initial stage, used Marxism to create a new historiography of subaltern groups, but subsequently dissociated from Marxism and changed its profile under the influence of postmodernism. He argues that so long as issues confronting subaltern groups remain, subaltern studies will continue to thrive even in the age of globalisation. However, the earlier zeal shown by Ranajit Guha and his team is missing now. Dipankar Gupta’s chapter
is a critique of subaltern studies. He claims that subaltern historians have left even the basic concepts of structure or elementary aspects unexplained in their studies, and their attempts to use anthropology ‘to alter the ego in peasant history by bringing the people back in’ (p. 56) falls in the trap of methodological naiveté. Their search for self or autonomous peasant consciousness has remained unrealised and elusive and resulted in establishing a culturological hegemony in the realm of history. V. S. Sreedhar’s chapter argues that the methodology in subaltern historiography has ignored human rights and dalit perspectives while ostensibly presenting facts from below. That is why it is silent about Ambedkar, and does not ‘adequately take into account many strands of anti-caste movements’ (p. 95).

Three chapters in the third section discuss the continuous reproduction of the ‘subaltern’ in India. The chapter by Ashok K. Pankaj observes that when dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were agitating for their empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional upper-caste/class elites fashioned neoliberal politico-economic discourses and agendas that eroded the ideological legitimacy of their movement, defeating their larger objectives, and thus contributed to the long-term reproduction of dalits and OBCs as subjugated subjects. Their discourse argued that problems lay with policies and institutions but not with upper-caste/class policymakers, and claimed that replacement of traditional upper-caste/class elites by dalit or backward class leaders would unleash an era of uncertainty, conflict and criminalisation in the realm of society and polity. Madhav Govind outlines the reproduction of subalternity in India in terms of knowledge production. He argues that there has been a subjugation and marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems controlled and followed by lower service castes through a system of knowledge production fashioned by Brahmins or other upper castes. It has happened by valuing Brahminical knowledge over the skills of lower castes and making the language of knowledge production—such as English or Sanskrit—alien to the lower castes. Nita Kumar reasons that the failure of mass education has been the biggest source of subaltern reproduction in India. This failure is all-pervasive in post-Independence India.

The fourth section is about the exclusion of subalterns and their struggles for empowerment and emancipation. Yagati Chinna Rao focuses on dalit movements in Andhra Pradesh. For Rao, the dalit movement has been trying to establish an egalitarian society by rejecting Brahminical caste hierarchy and reconstructing the dalit self through destroying
derogatory identities imposed on them by the upper castes. Rao argues that there was a general apathy among historians towards dalit consciousness and struggle. However, dalits and other subaltern groups have now established themselves as an important object of history. Rajan Joseph Barrett narrates the failure of the project of inclusion in India. For him, Bama—a dalit Christian—tries hard for an inclusive mainstream space in society but ends up dejected, lost and perplexed. Inclusion has remained a mirage because subalternity has various facets. Barrett finds religious conversion an illusionary attempt towards inclusion. He argues that dalits have to develop their own agency and projects for inclusion. S. Galab and E. Revathi have studied the status of women in different parts of India with respect to their increased access to land and agriculture. They find greater ownership of land by women in Andhra Pradesh compared to their counterparts in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Their chapter also states that women’s participation in agriculture is higher in the less-developed regions and lower in the more-developed ones. It is higher amongst SCs, STs and OBCs compared to upper-caste groups even though upper-caste women have greater ownership over land.

Five chapters in the fifth section deal with social change with reference to religion, caste and class. The chapter by T. N. Madan is about religion, religious resurgence and secularisation in contemporary times. He observes that religiosity and secularisation coexist in modern times. Religion does not only survive as private faith but has also re-emerged as public religion and as an ideology of domination using modern methods of communication and institutional organisation. But it is no longer a constitutive principle of society anywhere. He argues that the problem of religious resurgence in many parts of the world cannot be resolved by the principle of secularisation. Hetukar Jha and M. P. Singh argue in their chapter that right from its inception, Hinduism did not subscribe to an exclusivist disposition, but has rather imbibed a broad liberal tradition facilitating debate, deviation and innovation. An exclusivist image of Hinduism is a denial of history that is being propagated by both Hindu nationalists and dalit activists. Gerry Rodgers examines the changing nature of caste, class and land in the rural social formation of Bihar. He observes that different castes have different occupational strategies and are affected to different degrees by changing production relations. The decline in semi-feudal relations has weakened the dominance of upper castes in villages. But the influence of caste, class and land on human behaviour has continued to remain strong. These three
categories influence different aspects of behaviour differently. Among all the three categories, caste is more influential. K. L. Sharma finds the caste–class nexus still significant for understanding social stratification in India. He argues that the nexus exposes misconceptions about caste and class as antithetical formations. With the weakening of the ritual aspect of the caste system, it has made inroads into the politico-economic domain as an interest group and has accordingly maintained its significance for understanding social stratification. Class has entered into caste hierarchy leading to inter- and intra-caste differentiation. Madhu Nagla’s chapter has tried to understand the tension between tradition and modernity in terms of Jat khaps. Khaps like many traditional institutions have resisted modernity, which has resulted in inter-generational tensions. She argues that as a traditional institution, it is struggling to retain its relevance and authority. Therefore, it resorts to reprehensible practices such as social boycott, expulsion from the village and honour killing.

There are not many data-based works on subalternity by scholars who do not belong to the subaltern studies collective. In this context, this volume is an exception. Though the volume is an excellent contribution to scholarship, helping to clearly define a number of issues concerning subalternity and exclusion, its quality could have been further enhanced by including chapters on tribes, transgender groups and minorities. The volume is also lacking a chapter by a recognised subaltern scholar on the tradition of subaltern studies in India. While the book could have been a little more theoretically engaging, it offers a wide terrain of cases to rethink various issues concerning subalternity. It is a well-written work, and it opens up many areas for research that require our serious attention.

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The best way to summarise the present book is that it has allowed some fresh air to come in. Though the book takes up a much-discussed theme—religion and its relationship with modernity—the editors have extended the
topic and have covered ideas and communities that have not been given due attention in academic renderings. The book has 12 chapters organised around four broad themes: secularism, communities, politics and diaspora. The book, a collection of chapters written by historians, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists, is helpful in reminding us how the two ideas—religion and modernity—need exploration beyond disciplinary boundaries in terms of how the twin ideas impact various communities and practices in various ways. The novelty of the book lies in incorporating new communities in academic discussion: a tribal community from the Himalayas, gay Muslims in a metropolis and an Anglo-Indian community. Another feature that shall attract the attention of the reader is the depth of analysis of the relationship between religion and modernity from colonial to postcolonial times, from north to south, from urban and educated communities to pastoral tribes, and from Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious communities. The editors aptly write that the book ‘does not confine itself to any particular religion or part of the country, or to abstract ethical issues’ (p. 9). The breadth of inclusion of subjects is supplanted by the inclusion of practices—political, communal, ritual and erotic—that require further discussion. The book treats religion as a sociological category and examines its relationship with modernity in its quotidian social experiences, practices, and political representations in a variety of physical and temporal locales’ (p. 9). The book explores dimensions of nationalism, secularism and cultural reproduction. It helps understand the tenuous relationships formed between modernity and religion, and has useful references for further exploration along these lines.

The introductory chapter compresses various arguments around which religion and modernity have been explored. Interestingly, this compression does not reduce or omit important dimensions, whether to do with the universalising and homogenising tendencies of modernity or its multiple and alternative dimensions. Similarly, how societies responded to modernity outside the West, although already well known, has been discussed. Our experience has been that religion and modernity, at least outside the West, are not antithetical. Rather, there is a dialogue and intertwining of religion with politics, the economy and social institutions. Against the imaginations of modernist thinkers, religion could not be written off. Therefore, a book like this helps us further explore various relationships that develop between religion and modernity. The book asserts that ‘there is a renewed interest across disciplines in the ways in

which different groups have negotiated the interface between religion and modernity in India’ (p. 3). Having discussed these, the book, at least in the introductory chapter, should have problematised the idea of modernity and the concept of religion. The reader may ask: why do we need to understand religion, or any other institution, within the framework of modernity? It is well known that modernity itself is a problematic idea and is responsible for much obscurity and the creation of untenable binaries, for example, religious/secular, public/private and so on. Perhaps the editors should have developed a few more insights in this direction. In some ways, the chapters in the book help us remove some modernist obscurities and binaries. T. K. Oommen’s chapter is an interesting addition that helps us broaden our understanding of the practices of secularism and nationalism in India. Similarly, the chapter by Aditya Malik compels us to rethink the place granted to religion by modernity. The flourishing of rituals and practices, that are religious in nature and orientation, questions the very ideas of modern agency and subjectivity. The chapters in Section II illustrate Peter van der Veer’s and Prasenjit Duara’s idea of dialogic relationship between religion and modernity. Alok Pandey and R. Siva Prasad offer an interesting account of how a pastoral community (the Van Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh) is forced to adopt practices that are alien to its religious practices. In fact, sometimes the inclusion of communities in the modernist project disenfranchises them of their traditional practices. Therefore, modernity is not only homogenising but also hegemonic. The incorporation of a chapter on gay Muslims by Pushpesh Kumar is highly appreciated as it establishes how pluralism shrinks under modernity, and simultaneously marginalises groups and practices. Further, the chapters by M. Ravi Kumar and Sudhakar Rao and by B. L. Biju add important dimensions to understand politics that are woven around religion. The arguments in the chapter by Aparna Devare fail to shed light on the partition of colonial India, especially her allusions to Jinnah’s secularity. Jinnah and other leaders, in their demand for Pakistan, might not have imagined it to be a theocratic state, but the demand for Pakistan itself was religious in nature and orientation. Therefore, the intertwining of religion and politics need to be approached carefully in the South Asian context. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay’s chapter offers interesting insights into the Hindu Mahasabha’s demand for a Hindu Rashtra after the partition. The last section on cultural reproduction among the Hindu diaspora and Anglo-Indian community is important as it helps us bring in the importance...
of sites and practices in generating religious feeling and consolidating religious identity. Finally, the book is an important addition to the social scientific study of religion and modernity. The rich bibliography of each chapter provides many important references that would be helpful to a student of religion and modernity. The dimensions of class/caste/tribe/gender as well as locality (spatial and temporal) are very beautifully explored and discussed. Therefore, it is a recommended book for all who wish to have insights on Indian society.

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For quite some time now, there has been a growing interest in the disciplinary history of Indian sociology. In the recent past, researchers have attempted to document institutions, individuals, approaches, methods and ‘schools’ to shed light on the entire complex of scholarly activity that has constituted the contested field of Indian sociology. Of the many debates that have animated Indian sociology, few have been as politically charged and long-lasting as the ones inaugurated by the French anthropologist Louis Dumont—beginning with his programmatic statement ‘For a sociology of India’ in the first issue of Contributions to Indian Sociology to the publication of Homo Hierarchicus in 1970 (1967 in the original French). These debates have had much to offer in relation to various interpretations of caste and Hinduism, the place of Sanskrit in scholarly models, the comparative study of civilisations, the relationship between indigenous categories borne out of cultural particularities and the universality of social sciences, contemporary geopolitics and the global ascendance of the American academy, the once-hegemonic Orientalist and Indological Western scholarship and the subsequent rise of area studies in the United States, and the cumulatively varied outcomes of the changing configurations of scholarly legitimacy and its institutional habitat in the West and beyond. While conversing with such a wide array of concerns, Roland

Lardinois, appreciably enough, accomplishes a meticulously documented and fine-grained analysis of the shaping of the sociology of India in France. In effect though, the book is a social history of the emergence of Dumont’s scholarship on India. Whereas Part III of the book explicitly engages with the Dumontian avatar of scholarship on India, the preceding two sections amplify the focus and present an intellectual history of the emergence of India as a scholarly field in France.

To contextualise Dumont’s methodological orientation combining fieldwork-based social anthropology and Indology, the author tracks the genealogy of Sanskrit scholarship in France and the attendant growth of philology and comparative grammar since the early 18th century. Thus, Part I traces the history of Orientalist institutions from the École spéciale des langues orientales down to the École pratique des hautes études, where Dumont established a centre for the study of India in the mid-20th century. Indeed the first institute—Institut de civilisation Indienne—dedicated to the study of India in a university was founded in 1927 by Sylvain Levy. In fact, in his analysis, Lardinois includes varied actors (not merely academics) in the field of production of discourses on India during the interwar years. He looks at their modes of entry into Indology, their social background, the types of intellectual trajectories they followed and their differentiation in terms of disciplines.

In this sense, Lardinois places Dumont’s work with reference to the specific French national and intellectual context. For instance, we are told that Rene Guenon and Rene Daumal were as formative an influence on Dumont as Marcel Mauss. At the same time, the author relates Dumont’s work on India to the latter’s comparative study of modernity. In this context, the most interesting discussion pertains to a thoroughgoing examination of Dumont’s methodology in relation to the subsequent ethno-sociological project initiated by McKim Marriott in the 1970s in the United States. According to Lardinois, Dumont’s work on India contributed to the historical and social conditions that facilitated the call for the indigenisation of social sciences in the United States, India and beyond. Despite the all-pervasive critique of Dumont’s Indological predilections, much of the subsequent debunking of Orientalism and the postcolonial reason in the North American academic space, particularly by South Asian diasporic scholars, owes much to Dumont’s incessant questioning of Western ethnocentrism. Viewed thus, the author brings about Dumont’s implicit and overlooked influences in the purview of
discussion and thereby initiates a dialogue between the singularity of French national history and the international space of scholarship on India.

Following the sociology of sciences approach outlined by Pierre Bourdieu, the book combines archival work with interviews of what the author calls ‘witnesses’, meaning the select individuals who were associated with the study of Oriental societies in France in the 20th century to delineate their scholarly and class ‘habitus’. While doing so, it reveals how the protocols of certain learned disciplines devoted to the study of non-European societies were forged at the cusp of multifarious interests, not all scholarly. Arguably, the professional–institutional forms acquired by some of these disciplines were marked by the differential capacities of groups and actors to articulate their interests in tune with the ethos of their times. After all, the power relationships between disciplines have never been fixed, nor have their disciplinary identities and goals been stable over time.

Lardinois concludes the book with a fervent call for a detailed historical and sociological study of the reception of Dumont’s oeuvre in India, for ‘Louis Dumont’s work is exemplary of a sociological temptation inscribed in any project of knowledge of cultures, more particularly of lettered ones, which consists of almost spontaneously reproducing the pre-designed discourses of indigenous intellectuals who are socially and culturally invested with a totalisation of meaning over their social world’ (p. 330). To reflect on Dumont’s legacy is a simultaneous invitation to reflect on the epistemic challenges involved in unravelling a traditional society with its own learned tradition and the possibility of a comparative sociology. Through this work, Lardinois helps us carefully think through both the dangers of an anthropology based on Hindu categories and the promise of ‘the feeling of current relativity of our reason’ (p. 448) that Marcel Mauss so perceptively thought that the study of non-Western society brings in its wake.

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