

Book Reviews

Jan Breman, *The Poverty Regime in Village India: Half a Century of Work and Life at the Bottom of the Rural Economy in South Gujarat*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007. ixx + 458 pp. Tables, plates, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ₹ 795 (hardback).

This is a truly impressive work on the exploitation of agricultural labourers in four villages in south Gujarat: Gandevigam and Chikhligam (Navsari district); Bardoligam (Surat district); and Atulgam (Valsad district). It provides a profound explanation of the circumstances that compel the landless in rural India to live in an acute state of poverty and destitution. Though the present monograph is based on the author's fieldwork between 2004 and 2006 in the four above-mentioned villages, it is rooted in earlier field investigations carried out by him in the first three. His knowledge of Atulgam during the latter half of the last century is based on secondary material. Breman's study of the four villages over a period of time unravels, in qualitative terms, the unfolding of capitalist development and its adverse impact on the material lives of landless labourers. The knowledge of poverty he has thus generated excels by far the rather soulless understanding of the phenomenon by economists on the basis of highly variable statistical data.

Breman's research is driven by his great empathy with the tribulations of the rural underclass, which explains his commitment to the standpoint of the oppressed and his conscious rejection of value neutrality as a methodological tool in sociological research. This is evident from the following statement in the Preface to the new edition of the first monograph that emerged from his initial fieldwork in the area: *Coming from a working class background myself, I knew right from the beginning that my study would concentrate on the segment at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and the rural economy (Beyond Patronage and Exploitation, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.vi [emphasis added]).*

The poverty of the rural underclass in the four field sites is a consequence of the interplay between two regimes—one underlying the local

political economy of each village, and the other with that of the Indian state, especially since the era of liberalisation beginning in the early 1990s. While the politico-economic domain of each village differs, as shown briefly below, the predominant thrust of liberalisation is the unabashed promotion of the interests of the employers of labour, compelling the landless in all of them to earn a precarious living in agriculture or in other sectors. The overwhelming power of employers is an outcome of two principal factors: the ‘informalisation’ of labour because of the complete withdrawal of the state from regulating the conditions of employment; and the enormously unfavourable labour market as the supply of labour hugely exceeds the demand.

In both Gandevigam and Chikhligam, Anavil Brahmans are the dominant caste. The landowners in the former have prospered because the favourable ecology enables them to grow high profit yielding fruits (mango and *chiku*). Chikhligam, by contrast, is dependent on the monsoon, and therefore the uncertainties of agriculture have to be met through non-agrarian employment. In both villages the actual tasks of cultivation are performed by Halpatis (a caste of tribal origin), whose relations with their Anavil employers was, in earlier times, subsumed under *halipratha* (*hali* system), a highly exploitative system of bonded labour. The demise of *halipratha* in the course of the first half of the last century did not mitigate the material deprivation of the Halpatis. Due to their large numbers, they earned a precarious livelihood as casual labourers wherever and whenever employment was available—in agriculture or outside it.

Bardoligam, dominated by Kanbi Patels, falls in a region marked by the extensive cultivation of sugarcane and the setting up of cooperative sugar factories. While the agro-industry has brought prosperity to the landowners, the agrarian underclass of cane cutters, comprising local Halpatis and large numbers of migrants from Khandesh in Maharashtra, remain crushed in poverty. As one *khandeshi* reported to an inquiry commission, ‘Even dogs are better off’ (p. 306).

The fourth village, Atulgam, is located near a complex of companies manufacturing dyes, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. The impact of industrialisation on the lives of the residents has, however, been lop-sided. Several Anavil Brahmans, the dominant caste, found employment in the factories among the skilled categories or in the administration. In stark

contrast, the majority of the poorly endowed Halpatis constitute a huge mass of casual labourers, continually drifting around in search of employment in agriculture, in factories or in between these two extremes, such as in construction sites, brick kilns and quarries.

The significance of Breman's work transcends the four field studies that constitute its core. It may be read as a devastating critique of the 'neo-liberal' regime underlying the Indian state that deliberately promotes a capitalist economic order and condemns workers at large to be exploited at will by their employers. It is undoubtedly one of the grim ironies of independent India that steps have not been taken to ameliorate the age-long deprivation of the landless masses. Thus, Breman notes that, as in most other Indian states, the land reform programme in Gujarat has 'systematically excluded' the landless (p. 89). To add insult to injury, even laws designed, in principle, to protect labourers and make them less vulnerable to exploitation by their employers are not taken seriously. This is a trend in which, as Breman pithily observes, 'Gujarat has been resolutely at the forefront...since the end of the 1970s' (p. 411). Some relevant examples are: the repealing of the Contract Workers Act, and the lack of purpose in implementing laws such as the Minimum Wages Act, the Interstate Migrant Workers Act and the Abolition of Bonded Labour Act.

The implicit message of Breman's remarkable work is that the contemporary Indian state subjects labour to a regime that runs against certain core principles of the Constitution, including social justice and equality. Indeed, it is an uncaring regime driven by the collusion between the state and those who control capital and dominate the market. The book is a model of critical engagement with one of the major contradictions in Indian society.

Delhi

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Daniela Berti and Gilles Tarabout (eds), *Territory, Soil and Society in South Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2009. 379 pp. Figures, notes, references. ₹ 950 (hardback).

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This volume comprises contributions by various authors, most of whom are social anthropologists. In the introduction, the two editors trace back

the origin of a widespread stereotype in Indian studies, according to which the notion of territory is of secondary importance for the understanding of Indian civilisation, and has little value as a cognitive category. The arguments which sustain this idea are classified into three groups. The first one sees territory as a mere 'empirical' fact, as opposed to 'ideology', which, according to Louis Dumont, is the fundamental factor in social organisation. The second line of argument tends to devaluate the links between people and 'soil', supposedly because Hindus do not bury their dead. The last group comprises arguments of a political nature, according to which Hindu kingdoms were defined by the relationships between the king and his subjects rather than by territories. Those who believe in the 'absence of territory' in pre-colonial India generally argue that boundaries were fuzzy and that the Hindu king was a universal sovereign rather than a ruler over a specific territory. According to the authors, there is confusion here between the discourse and the practice of power. The other arguments are also confronted by the different papers in the book.

The first part consists of two chapters on ancient India, written by Sanskritists Michel Annot and Gérard Colas. These two contributions are complementary and aim at distinguishing the Vedic period, valuing open space because of the nomadic nature of Gods, and the Brahmanical period, during which deities become sedentary, inhabit temples and rule over territories.

The second part of the book deals with identities and the sense of belonging in relation to land and soil. According to Phyllis Granoff (Chapter 3), sectarian identities in medieval India were grounded on regional differentiation rather than on religious divisions. Caterina Guenzi and Sunita Singh (Chapter 4) study practices of geomancy by Benares astrologers, who are able to predict the future by analysing the soil characteristics, which are themselves affected by the qualities of the inhabitants. Caroline and Filippo Osella (Chapter 5) are also interested in the interactions between land and people, basing their analysis on a case study of central Kerala, where practices of the life and death cycle bind people together with the place they inhabit. This essay is strongly influenced by McKim Marriott's transactionalist theory.

The third and last part of the volume is organised around the central notion of territory, which is studied in terms of religious and/or political

jurisdictions (both may overlap). Death still plays an important role in the analysis of Newar territories in Nepal by Gérard Toffin (Chapter 6). Newar territoriality is defined through various divine jurisdictions and, contrary to Dumont's thesis, kinship and territory are not opposed but tightly bound together. In another essay on Kerala (Chapter 7), Gilles Tarabout considers territorial organisation in socio-political terms. His analysis is based on a case study of a dispute between the former kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore regarding land and ritual rights over a temple. Contrary to the thesis of the lack of territory in pre-colonial India, the author shows that there was an 'excess of territories', which were overlapping and covering different jurisdictions at the same time, thus creating conflicts. Daniela Berti (Chapter 8) analyses the remarkable correspondence which still exists in Himachal Pradesh between divine jurisdictions, administrative divisions and electoral constituencies. Finally, Christiane Brosius tackles the conception of the Indian territory by the Hindu Right through the analysis of propaganda videos by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She shows how the religious construction of the national territory enables Hindutva forces to manipulate the electorate by creating an impression of an external (Muslim) threat.

This book is a welcome contribution to the study of South Asian societies, since it fills an important thematic and methodological gap. As the introduction brilliantly demonstrates, the role of territory in social, political and religious organisation has long been ignored in Indian studies. Though the authors are aware of the contribution of French geography to the conceptualisation of territory, they unfortunately adopt a very restrictive definition of this notion (*we stand by our definition of territory as primarily a notion about jurisdiction*, p. 20). One does not really understand why, from the very beginning, the editors dismiss the identity and cultural dimensions of territory (*territory does not primarily refer to culture or identity, but to right*, p. 13), when most of the contributors deal with these very dimensions. Apart from this slight incoherence, the volume offers a very rich ethnography and a new way of looking at the relations between land and people in South Asia.

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Jennifer Howes, *Illustrating India: The Early Colonial Investigations of Colin Mackenzie (1784–1821)*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. Xii + 269 pp. Figures, plates, notes, references, index. ₹ 2750 (hardback).

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The subject matter of this beautifully illustrated and lavishly produced book are the drawings collected by Colonel Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor General of India during his four decade career in the country. The Mackenzie Collection which is the largest and oldest extant archive of any single European collector in Asia consists of a massive number of manuscripts and drawings that deal with the region's history and culture and is one of the most valuable sources for the study of the historical anthropology of colonial and pre-colonial India. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the Mackenzie Collection particularly as it has been subject to the gaze of critical postcolonial scholarship—this book adds to that body of work by throwing light on its drawings and paintings that have received relatively less attention than the manuscripts themselves. Howes is necessarily selective in the choice of drawings (housed mainly in the British Library in London) being analysed given the fact that the corpus that she draws from is enormous, dealing mainly with south India but also north India, Java and Sri Lanka.

Howes does not look at the drawings in isolation although some of them are singled out for individual treatment. Instead her analysis is based on connecting these drawings with the manuscripts, maps, letters and published sources connected with Mackenzie. The nature of this contextualisation is large in scope and varied—it ranges from Mackenzie's own biography to the political circumstances in which the drawings were created to the social composition (European, Anglo-Indian and Indian) and training of the surveyors, draftsmen and other artists involved in the project. This wealth of detail throws valuable new light on Mackenzie's work—for instance, Howes brings together accounts by Mackenzie published in journals like *Asiatik Researches* and *Oriental Repertory*, with the drawings produced during the Survey of the Nizam of Hyderabad's Dominions carried out between 1792 and 1799. These accounts were in fact originally meant to be illustrated ones, and by reading them together, Howes thickens our understanding of these drawings and Mackenzie's relationship with them. For example, according to Howes, Mackenzie's

main aim in his temple surveys of southern India was to provide information about an underexplored but important geographical region. In her reading, the relationship of the temple survey to the colonial project was less important than the fact that 'it was a hybrid of western and Indian interpretations of temple space, iconography and history' (p. 162). Indeed, it is in this context that she contests a prominent reading of a famous painting of a ruined temple in Karnataka that has been seen by art historians and other scholars as symptomatic of colonialism's gaze that sought to represent India as a civilisation in decline. Instead, Howes argues that the painting needs to be considered not in isolation but as part of the corpus of drawings of temples in the Mackenzie Collection—as well as linked to military surveys in places in Java and Scotland. The painting in question is atypical of the others in the Collection—it was not meant to record the landscape or the monument itself in any faithful detail but was a general picture representing the Mysore survey, painted much after the event.

The high quality reproductions of the drawings from the Mackenzie Collection do a great deal to enrich and animate the existing literature on the subject. The accompanying text however is somewhat inadequate—it makes gestures towards, but does not engage with extant scholarship, and does not make any new conceptual claims. It points out for instance, that Mackenzie went to India as a military engineer and that his collecting activities were therefore closely entwined with the military history of the British in India. But while it locates Mackenzie and his work in a colonial context, it does not adequately reflect on the nature of the early colonial state, or the knowledge complex that underpinned its evolving rule in India. Indeed, an attempt is made through the book to rescue Mackenzie from accusations of bias with Howes claiming that most 'recent research that interprets the nature of the Mackenzie Collection has characterized it as expressing a strong western biased colonial interpretation of India.' (p. 8). This appears to be an over simplification of fairly nuanced arguments. Nicholas Dirks for instance (Chapter Four, 'The Textualization of Tradition: Biography of An Archive' in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton, 2002) claims that while Mackenzie himself was aware of his complicity in the colonial project, he was much more keenly aware of the politics of knowledge, and believed that his collection, read sensitively and contextually

held important historical information, and was not merely the stuff of fantasy and fable.

Similarly no account of the Mackenzie Collection would be complete without a discussion about his Indian informants—the most important being Kavali Venkata Boria and Kavali Lutchmia Boria—who were his translators and interpreters. While Howes mentions their importance, the book account would have been considerably enriched by a critical account of the processes of knowledge collection particularly in the light of recent, important work on the native intermediary. In fact one of the short comings of the book is the frequent inability of the author to step back from the rich material being presented to make larger conceptual arguments. For instance, Howes points out that the Survey of the Nizam's dominions was the last time that Mackenzie provided his subjective views on the material he was gathering. Henceforth, he would provide no opinions on his own research. The implications of his 'sudden aversion to interpretation' is never fully explored. How for instance would this effect the work of future cataloguers of the collection, or the ways in which it would be appropriated and represented by the colonial state, as well as future generations of historians?

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Meenakshi Thapan, *Living the Body: Embodiment, Womanhood and Identity in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009. xxi + 190 pp. Notes, references, bibliography, index. ₹ 550 (hardback).

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The focus on embodiment as different from the exploration of the social construction of the gendered body is now a familiar strand in sociological and anthropological analysis on gender in India. Meenakshi Thapan's earlier work—specifically, her edited collection *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity* (1997)—has been an important initial contribution. The present work seeks to pursue at greater length the possibilities offered by Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of lived practice, exploring the lived experience of two groups of adolescent and adult women in Delhi. The perspective that foregrounds embodiment is indeed welcome precisely because it brings to the fore, in a more rigorous manner, some

concerns which have always been central to feminist knowledge in India as well. A major effort in the book is to hold together lived experience and discursive representations of gender and femininity, both conceived as complex, non-homogenous entities. The book unfolds in six chapters, of which the middle ones contain substantial analysis of interviews conducted with adolescents and adult women of privileged and underprivileged backgrounds and reflections on them. Over and above all the theoretical reflections and empirical insights that it tries to advance, what one carries away after reading this book is the stark contrast between the lived experiences of these two groups which appear as though they lived in entirely different worlds.

The first chapter lays out key concepts which inform the analysis in later chapters and also uses them to sketch the general socio-cultural and political context that frames the analysis, specifically, the emergence of a habitus shaped by a broader force which she calls 'recolonisation'. This she offers as an alternative to the more popular term 'postcolonial' as a general description of the present. While she is at pains to argue that 'recolonisation' is not the simple reassertion of the colonial, it appears that this would require both a detailed critical consideration of 'postcolonial' and a more nuanced elaboration of 'recolonisation'. Without this, 'recolonisation' seems to compress some of the sense of ambiguity that the 'postcolonial' brings. Besides, putting forth 'recolonisation' as a dominant socio-political frame of sorts under which a specific habitus takes shape, it seems to risk consigning to invisibility the many tumultuous political events and struggles of the 1990s. Surely, such events as the anti-Mandal Commission agitations and the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and processes such as the heightening of security concerns and obsession with 'terrorism', may have also been crucial in shaping the postcolonial habitus in and through which her interviewees' bodily experiences are rendered possible?

Here is where a temporal perspective could have been useful, one which could have pursued the divergent histories of the embodiment of women of different social groups. In the substantial analysis that follows, this is lacking. Inter-subjective relations within the family and at school seem to be what most forcefully shapes women's embodiment and their strategies of resistance, such as their investment in work. The analysis of the shifting representations of female embodiment in the women's

magazine, *Femina*, in Chapter 3, does not really compensate for this, though it does gesture at the manner in which the magazine addressed changes in women's issues in the 1990s. And while mention is made of the discourses to which underprivileged women are exposed, there is little discussion of the normative sources which they might be drawing upon. Given the changes in and spread of media and communications technologies that have rapidly accelerated in the post-millennium decade, the discourses of pleasure, desire, and consumption, may be vital to underprivileged women's embodiment now than what the work indicates.

Lastly, it is not difficult to agree with the author's concluding plea that the anti-patriarchal significance of individual struggles and resistance should not be dismissed and that resistance should be viewed as *aporia*—the experience of openness and interminability. However, I do feel that the individual resistance vs. collective struggle debate is fundamentally flawed. Indeed, the valorisation of the struggles of individual women to overcome poverty, fight traditional patriarchy, and so on, so common in the discourse of self-help now and central to neo-liberalised welfare, does point to the dangers of raising the value of individual women's resistance uncritically. For, within it lurks yet another process of 'recolonisation' by which (undoubtedly masculinist) liberal individualism is returned to the centre of the discourse of women's emancipation, and a limited version of liberal feminism is elevated to hegemonic status. While we would still welcome this minimal version of liberal feminism, it is necessary to be critical of it, especially from a feminist perspective. When unconnected to a critique of patriarchy, such resistance often involves an impression of gender oppression as an individual, not structural phenomenon, which women must forever confront as individuals, be forever brave and resourceful. And this is why we still need feminism as collective critical articulation against gender injustice, even in a world in which each woman may strive (and hence compete with other women) to access a share in the social, economic and political pie. So that women can live full human lives without necessarily having to tread heroic, individualised, excruciatingly difficult paths, which often lead not to full lives as women but to a partial and impermanent honorary masculinity.

Henrike Donner, *Domestic Goddesses: Maternity, Globalization and Middle-Class Identity in Contemporary India*. Hampshire (UK): Ashgate, 2008. xii + 215 pp. Plates, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. £ 55.00 (hardback).

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The central thesis of *Domestic Goddesses* is that the domestic space and women's concomitant roles as wives, mothers, homemakers and consumers are crucial determinants in the production and reproduction of class and gender identities, thereby shaping the larger narratives of globalisation, consumption and middle-class identities. Donner accomplishes this analysis effectively by recognising the centrality of the quotidian worlds, kin work, the choice and use of material goods and symbols in the domestic roles essayed by Bengali women of the middle-class neighbourhoods in Kolkata that she studied. Simultaneously, she preempts the obvious critique to this position by accepting the significance of the structural constraints, the world of work and women's roles in the public sphere in the production and reproduction of class and gender identities. She clearly positions this as outside the stated focus of her work. Yet, one cannot help but wonder whether women impact the larger processes of globalisation, liberalisation and identity formation and reproduction through their involvement in the domestic only, through their acts in marriage, homemaking, birthing and raising children as citizens of a modern and globalised world and as mere consumers. Are there not middle class Bengali women who are struggling to engage with these processes in the public realm as well, through their attempts at finding jobs and keeping them, acquiring new kinds of training to fit in with a changing labour market, through their education and the uses they put this education to beyond raising children? It is interesting, and perhaps unfortunate, that Donner in her expansive, yet intensive ethnographic study found few such women, and the ones she did find, are not really addressed in this book.

The strength of *Domestic Goddesses* however, lies in the use of the ethnographic lens to examine what I consider to be a classic sociological problem, taking a cue from C. Wright Mills—the relationship between public worlds and private troubles. However, to my mind, this strength also translates as a limitation as the discussion on public worlds is distinctly embedded in the domestic space. The public world appears in

Donner's book as a grand narrative of globalisation, liberalisation and attendant consumerism that impinges on the private lives of women in the domestic sphere. However, the author writes about women's lives with a quiet dignity and sensitivity, in a lucid and self-reflexive style, that to my mind is a value addition to the urban anthropological literature.

The introductory chapter on methodology, sites and themes addresses issues of location (place, time, gender and context) and connects this to larger disciplinary ideas of research in urban areas, multi-sited ethnography and the metaphoric explorations of city life. The author deftly takes the reader through the complex negotiations and power relations that she confronted and handled, and gives a sense of varieties of terrains and contexts she traversed as a fieldworker. She argues that owing to the multi-sited nature of urban ethnography, anthropologists tend to research the city as a whole as 'their subjects are likely to traverse different terrains, communities and informal and formalised spaces even within the span of a day' (p. 16).

The central theme of Donner's research—the production and reproduction of middle-class identities is explored in the ensuing chapters through the connecting threads of marriage and motherhood. With these themes the book sets up both larger contextual canvases, within which everyday life practices are located and analysed. To begin with there is an engaging and thorough theoretical discussion of kinship, motherhood and reproduction.

The second chapter takes us to the stage prior to motherhood, exploring the processes in choosing a partner, notions of conjugality, intimacy and love and their place in a marriage, the age-old debate of love and arranged marriages and the changes in these. Challenging simplistic explanations of the shifts in the way marriage, intimacy and modern selves are constructed and represented, the author argues, for instance, that rather than seeing them as oppositional categories, 'love' and 'arranged' marriages can, and often are, treated in the same way.

In focusing on motherhood, the author analyses three critical aspects—birthing practices and the organisation of familial relations around them, schooling and parenting strategies in the early childhood years, and women's roles as consumers. With regard to the latter, the author chooses to highlight food consumption and the production of gendered bodies. While women's roles as consumers and their choices in everyday life can offer interesting insights in the making and expressing of identities,

it is unclear why Donner chose to focus on food and that too on the issue of women turning vegetarians. This is not justified adequately, save for the stated intention of representing middle-class consumption through practices in the domestic setting and through women's roles as chief consumers of food. The focus on food, in fact, strengthens what I consider to be an unstable focus to begin with—the focus on the domestic space as delinked from the public. In a lighter vein, Bengalis are often referred to as vegetarian-hating carnivores and the justifications stated in the book, for young women to turn vegetarian would sound rather unconvincing, exotic even, to many middle-class Bengalis.

The chapters on birthing practices and education and early schooling are, in my opinion, the most convincingly analysed, well-articulated and reveal a nuanced and detailed ethnographic canvas. With regard to child birth, the author documents the medicalisation of birthing practices and the changes in these practices with globalisation and the penetration of a neo-liberal ideology. In doing so the author also carefully articulates the differential impact of these changes on women of different class backgrounds. The author shows how middle class women now choose to give birth through Caesarean sections, performed in nursing homes and this ethnographic fact is seen in the context of family structures, class relations and women's agency.

The chapter on education and schooling is significant for the critical analysis of how the family works to groom and produce a certain kind of citizen in a globalised world. What made it interesting was the rather subtle way in which the author reveals the mother not just as an agent in this process of citizen making but also as someone who is being moulded into a 'global citizen'.

The focus on micro worlds and exclusively those of women and the engaging manner in which the author's ethnographic encounters are documented, will no doubt, take the reader inside Bengali middle-class homes. Although, there were moments in the author's analysis which made me wonder whether the book was written largely, with a Western readership in mind. One of the main problems associated with such a focus on an audience, located both in a particular time and space, is that it ends up masking, in some instances, the many nuances, meanings and variations of everyday life.

Domestic Goddesses is important in two senses. First, it reiterates the significance of the neighbourhood in urban studies; a focus that early

urban geographers and sociologists of the Chicago School had begun with, but in the recent past there have been very few ethnographic studies on urban issues through the neighbourhood. Second, such studies are very rare in the Indian context and this book therefore, makes a significant contribution to urban anthropological work in India, specifically in Kolkata, as much of the recent urban studies in India tends to focus on Mumbai.

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Robin Wyatt with Nazia Masood, *Broken Mirrors: The 'Dowry Problem' in India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010. xvi + 244 pp. Index. ₹ 350 (paperback).

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The experiences of growing up as a girl child in a north Indian family certainly shaped my understanding of 'dowry' in a significant way. The cultural and legal discourses on it were often contradictory, as the later regarded it as a criminal offence but the former always referred to it as a token of love, blessings and support provided to the daughter by her natal family at the time of her marriage. Media representations of cases of bride burning, a woman's death under unnatural circumstances and cruelty paint a picture that is in contrast to this.

The discourse on dowry has acquired a new and somewhat complex character. A significant aspect of this is a story narrated by some husbands and in-laws convicted or under trial in dowry harassment cases (under Section 498A), in which they argue that there has been a misuse of dowry related laws by some woman. Comprising six intense narratives and a Foreword by Flavia Agnes, a women's rights lawyer, social activist and coordinator of Majlis, the present book 'Broken Mirrors' deals with this issue. It provides a window to the complex nature of problems that surface in the institution of marriage leading sometimes to a tragic end but misunderstood and misrepresented as dowry related by the social and justice system (police, courts, bride's natal family and relatives). Through their analysis of dowry in India, the authors of the book, Dr Robin Wyatt, who has a Ph.D. in Indian Law and Sociology, and works as a research consultant and Nazia Masood, a trained social worker, currently teaching

sociology at a school in Bangalore, have effectively drawn our attention towards both the disjunctures and the nature of interface between the social and the legal discourse on dowry. Through six compelling and nuanced stories this book takes the reader beyond labels like 'dowry death' and 'harassment', highlighting the need to delve deeper into those issues and problems that emerge in the institution of marriage. The different voices in the stories vary from that of a man convicted under Section 498A, accused of cruelty and of driving his wife to commit suicide, to a survivor of domestic violence. The irony lies in the fact that most of these cases are framed within the ambit of dowry laws when even a simple analysis of the interactions or accounts presented is strongly indicative of a completely different set of problems constituting the real causes of marital conflicts. The central issues raised by the authors are that the presentation of conflicts and the consequences related to domestic violence, non-fulfilment of the expectations of spouse and in-laws, shifting of loyalties after marriage, change in the power equations in the family and many more, are presented as 'dowry related issues' in the legal context. In these stories, some of the cases do entail disagreements and disputes over financial matters but the label of a 'Dowry Harassment Case' negates the actual problems in the matrimonial unit, causing an irreparable damage to it. Along with societal pressure on the couple to make adjustments, the stigma attached to 'divorce' and the often inaccessible option of marriage counselling further heighten their anxieties and suffering. The authors argue that in most cases that they came across during their fieldwork, the problem seemed less about 'dowry' and more tied to the failure to negotiate the challenges of marriage. Hence, they find 'dowry' as insufficient to understand the real and multiple causes of marital breakdown. 'Dowry', rather becomes a means to attain certain unrelated yet desirable legal ends.

Through nuanced accounts, the authors present a strong challenge to the Indian legal system in general and the anti-dowry laws in particular. The justice system has been challenged on several grounds. First, for not being able to fill the gap between the laws and the cultural understanding of dowry and its varied practices. Second, for functioning with some patriarchal assumptions like trying to uphold the institution of marriage by putting in all kinds of efforts to avoid divorce as a consequence of marital problems. Such an approach often results in a situation where the couples (specially the wives) feel a complete lack of options which

can have serious consequences like depression or even suicidal attempts. Third, for adopting a simplistic view that man is the perpetrator and woman is the victim of domestic violence, cruelty and any other kind of harassment. The stringent nature of the anti-dowry law becomes a major cause of its misuse in several cases for ensuring the prosecution of the accused. The authors locate another significant cause of the problem in the process of registration of such cases in the police station. As argued, the police officials are themselves suggestive that such cases could be tagged with the dowry matters to strengthen it as the related laws are stricter and pro-woman in nature. Moreover, corruption entrenched in the system brings down the hopes of getting justice. This book succeeds in pushing the reader to reflect on not just the judicial system but society as well. The book strongly recommends a more holistic approach to the 'dowry problem' to be able to effectively deal with the phenomena of matrimonial violence. Envisioning a better approach to such issues the authors present some possibilities to ensure an effective judicial and social system. A few of the proposed possibilities are amendments in the law to ensure a check on their misuse, upgradation of existing facilities to help couples in distress before abuse happens or goes too far, promotion of a positive orientation towards marriage counselling and providing easy access to it and sensitisation of the police and judiciary for conducting a fair and just procedure. The authors' argue that the parents of the woman are equally responsible for the damage caused to her. First, for not preparing them sufficiently for marriage. As in a majority of the cases marriage is presented as the most sacred institution for which adjustment of several kinds by the woman is her duty and utmost responsibility, and parents choose not to talk to their daughters about violence, neglect and harassment of any kind as a problem. Second, parents tend to abandon their daughters when they are most needed, thus pointing to the crucial responsibility associated with parenthood.

The authors, Wyatt and Masood, have looked at the role of the police and judiciary as playing a decisive role in the process of framing the cases of any kind of marital problems as dowry harassment. An account of a similar interaction with the police officials to know their side of the story or any such observations made by the authors themselves could have provided a glimpse into the perspectives and concerns of the former. Such a consideration would have definitely enriched the analysis further.

The use of simple and accessible language while presenting a critical outlook throughout the book, makes it an engaging text. The different voices emerging in the six narratives provide fresh insights into the complex nature of 'dowry' as well as cases framed as 'dowry related issues'. The authors must be congratulated for exploring, and seeking to understand, the oft repeated charge that the anti-dowry law is being misused.

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Bishnupriya Dutt and Urmimala Sarkar Munshi, *Engendered Performance: Indian Women Performers in Search for an Identity*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010. xx + 305. Plates, notes, bibliography, index. ₹ 995 (hardback).

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This work is a welcome addition to the discipline of performance studies that is still at a nascent stage in India. Both authors teach at the Centre of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and have multidisciplinary backgrounds. Bishnupriya Dutt is an actor/director, in addition to being a theatre historian and Urmimala Sarkar Munshi is a dancer, choreographer and anthropologist. The book is divided into two parts, theatre and dance, and have I assume, been written by each of the two authors separately. The overarching theme is on the relationship between gender politics and performance with a focus on women actors and dancers. While there is a thematic continuity between the chapters in each section, each one is discrete which does make for a certain awkwardness, stylistically speaking, as it leads to unnecessary repetition. However the book as a whole is well worth reading and I am sure it will soon feature in the syllabi of many university level social science departments.

The chapters on theatre serve as counter points to each other, moving from the early English and European performers who dominated the theatre scene in Calcutta and Bombay, to the Indian courtesan actresses such as Binodini Dasi and her mentor and director Girish Chandra Ghosh. Dutt has been able to source archival material such as early theatre journals for drama reviews and photographs thereby providing a great deal of historical detail. For me the two most interesting chapters in this part of the book are the ones on the Indian People's Theatre Association

and contemporary *jatra*. As the daughter of the eminent theatre personalities, Utpal Dutt and Shova Sen, and having been associated with their endeavours from childhood, Dutt brings a wealth of experience to her writing that is refreshing. To the best of my knowledge there is very little analytical work on this period of theatre history and the juxtaposition of two vastly different genres of performance serves to bring out the areas of silence in each. Dutt makes a case for limiting the scope of her investigation to Bengal. Even though some performance genres have a pan-Indian perspective, a real understanding of history must be region specific.

The second part of the book is on dance, more specifically on the gendered body of the dancer and the socio-cultural stereotypes within which it is constrained. There is a chapter on the *Natyashastra*, the *ur-text* for all the classical dances in India which discusses the way in which the typology of *rasas* and *bhavas* may be based on an implicit gender divide and one on professional woman dancers in various folk traditions across the country. One of the strongest chapters in this section is one where Sarkar Munshi describes three contemporary experimental dance forms founded by Rabindranath Tagore, Uday Shankar and the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) respectively. The author's choice of forms for discussion is deliberate as she uses them to problematise the folk/classical divide and the essentialisation of what began as a bureaucratic classification of dance forms in post-independence India. The closing section which provides the rationale for the book takes the form of a conversation between the authors and the noted theatre scholar Samik Bandyopadhyay about modern performative genres and the politics of representation.

By focusing on the body of the female performer the book claims to fill some of the gaps in Indian performance history. To this end there are important insights on the way embodiment is manifested in text and performance space. Unfortunately, this is not sufficiently elaborated. Perhaps the format of the book—its division into discrete parts—comes in the way of spelling out the argument. Let me take up just one example. Dutt makes a correlation between status and embodiment, as middle class women come into the profession through the IPTA, the body of the actress recedes from being the focus of display and the voice gains prominence. Body and voice as two alternate modes of embodiment has been the focus of recent scholarly attention, which might have helped flesh out

this significant insight. Sarkar Munshi, in the section on dance, is more exclusively focused on questions of embodiment but missed the opportunity of taking up the voice–body issue by using a restricted notion of the body. The book as a whole would have benefited from a more in-depth study of technique, an area that the authors are eminently suited to explore. This would have allowed for building a more complicated relationship between performer, context of enactment and socio-cultural environment. There is a tendency to assume a direct correlation between representation and societal norms which prevents the authors from exploring the contradictions within the dominant systems of representation.

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ROMA CHATTERJI

Rama V. Baru (ed.), *School Health Services in India: The Social and Economic Contexts*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008. x + 210pp. Tables, figures, notes, references, index. ₹ 550 (hardback).

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Improved child health and nutrition are welfare enhancing outcomes. While health/nutrition influences school enrolment and attendance as immediate gains, it also affects educational achievement as well as long-term productivity. Schools, therefore, can be excellent mediums for providing preventive and curative health services as well as promotive services through health education measures. The recognition of this fact is evident in Indian public health interventions, as is visible from interventions like the Integrated Mid-Day Meal Scheme, School health programmes under the National Rural Health Mission, School level interventions under the National Tobacco Control Programme and the Adolescent Education Programme under the National AIDS Control Programme.

The book has seven chapters that draw on primary and secondary data and are an important contribution to the discourse on school health interventions in India. While in the first chapter Rama Baru sets the premise of the book and raises important issues of different school interventions working in isolation, in the seventh chapter she describes the evolution of school health services in India and also analyses various constraints. The example of inter-sectoral linkages of education and health

departments in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra provide unique lessons that can be a useful advocacy tool.

The second chapter, which is based on a qualitative study across three states, takes a life cycle approach—from conception to adolescence—to discuss various health interventions. While the discourse is children-focused and attempts to link various determinants of health to the status of children, it lacks continuity and thus, in places, makes for difficult reading. The chapter could have been crisper with a focus on the analysis rather than the discourse around the findings of the survey.

Three chapters on various aspects of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme—although repetitive at times—make interesting reading. The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education—popularly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme—was launched by the Government of India in 1995 with the objective of giving a boost to universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, attendance and retention and simultaneously improving the nutritional status of students in primary classes. There are three distinct objectives of the scheme, namely (a) educational advancement through improved school enrolment and pupil attendance; (b) improved child nutrition through elimination of classroom hunger and the healthy growth of school children; and (c) social equity through sharing of common space and a common meal, which may reduce caste prejudices and promote gender inequality in access to food. Additionally, presuming that the majority of the students in government schools would be from the poorer families, it can also be seen as an indirect but targeted subsidy to these economically disadvantaged families. The Supreme Court in 2001 directed state governments to introduce cooked Mid-Day meals instead of the ‘dry rations’. This landmark shift converted the Mid-Day Meal Scheme into Cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and resulted in a significant reduction of classroom hunger, increased school enrolment and retentions in school. The book presents evidence of school health interventions, including the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme, having a positive impact on school participation as well as long-term productivity gain, especially for girls. Reading across these chapters enlightens the reader to the complexities involved in implementation and administration of the schemes. While there are excellent positive stories of the MDM scheme in states like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, there is an equally revealing summary of various challenges that the scheme faces in other states. These two states have utilised various

departments through inter-sectoral linkages for better implementation of the scheme. Reetika Khera in Chapter 4 also points to various possibilities within the system through which different administrative and financial responsibilities can be shared. There are indeed avenues of convergence with centrally sponsored schemes like Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, Urban Wage Employment Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission and school health programmes of the National Rural Health Mission, for better administration of various components of the Mid-Day Meal scheme.

The last chapter focuses on Health Education and advocates a public health approach rather than a biomedical one. The chapter relies heavily on experiences of Non-Governmental Organizations and presents their arguments through three different cases. The chapter discusses experiments of (a) training of teachers in primary as well as secondary schools; and (b) involvement of children, in particular and the community at large, in developing a meaningful pedagogy to include health into the ongoing curriculum. It reinforces the need to move away from a didactic method of teaching to more interactive pedagogy that not only deals with health education messages but also incorporates insights into the determinants of health and provides basic skills of diagnosing and managing common health problems.

Overall, this book will be useful to academicians working on health as well as those working on education. It will also be useful for policy-makers and certainly for public health professionals, especially public health nutritionists, as well as dieticians, in general.

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MAYUR TRIVEDI

Ananda Mitra, *Alien Technology: Coping with Modern Mysteries*.
New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010. x + 201 pp. Notes, index. ₹ 295
(paperback).

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In *Alien Technology*, Ananda Mitra draws attention to the technological world of various electronic gadgets and implements, which we currently

inhabit. Unfamiliarity and lack of adeptness in using such indispensable tools generates alienation. The book is an attempt to characterise such alienation. In overcoming alienation, Mitra suggests, that the language of technology be written transparently so that it is accessible to users.

The laws of technological alienation arise out of the ‘distancing’ between the ‘actual level of sophistication of the technology’ and the ‘perceived level of sophistication’ on the part of the user (pp. 10–11). Not knowing what a tool does signals the first level of alienation; the inability to comprehend the mechanism of how a tool functions constitutes the second level. The third level is marked by the uncertainty of whether an implement is functioning optimally. Mitra lists various examples to substantiate his claims, including factors like bad experience, fear, lack of appropriate tools which prevent us from repairing a broken tool, thereby increasing alienation. Alienation generates powerlessness, placing us in a subordinate relationship to those who possess requisite knowledge.

Mitra’s account is based on personal experience and is largely anecdotal. He says that alienation is a behavioural trait that can be measured like an intelligence quotient but refuses to elaborate on how to do it. The book promises much but the reader is left wanting at the precise moment when one expects a convincing answer.

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