

not mention that almost all the fundamental ideas in science have emerged out of speculations only. Otherwise most of the scientific discoveries are accidental.

In sum, *The Cartesian Mind* is an enjoyable reading, though it is a pity that almost all the other works by the author referred to in this book are not available for general public, especially when the author seems to be very selective in sharing his ideas. More specifically he does not "like to waste" even his off-

prints for an inquiring mind. Perhaps, this particular stance of the author has led him to enter into an unnecessary chain of arguments against the so called post-modernists before resurrecting Descartes' New Mind. He even goes on to say that much confusion arises when scientific issues are conflated with socio-political ones (p. 9). It may be true that some or even most of the works in this direction are based on hasty generalisations and have been quite successful in creating confusions. However, this

empirical fact cannot form a firm ground for the conclusion that there are no socio-political issues involved in the practices of the scientists. It will be an equally hasty generalisation to conclude that there is a necessary (or scientific) connection between conflation of socio-political issues with the scientific ones and arising of confusion.

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Peasantry and the State: Early Nineteenth Century Punjab

A revised version of a doctoral thesis, Radha Sharma's book consists of seven chapters, in addition to a glossary, a map, a bibliography and an index. As the author herself mentions in the preface, it was written with reference to the *Agrarian System of the Sikhs* by Indu Banga, the first comprehensive work on the agrarian history of the region, covering land-tenures, land-revenue and its administration, the political arrangements and institutions like vassalage, the *jagirdari* system and *dharmarth* grants. The *Agrarian System* contains an exposition of landed rights and peasantry, providing the basis for further exploration of the subject of peasantry and the impact of state policies on its condition during the early nineteenth century. The term 'peasantry' in Radha Sharma's book includes all landed elements engaged in the process of production and deriving livelihood from land. Thus, the large and small proprietors, the non-proprietary cultivators, and the contributors of labour and skill towards agricultural production are taken up for detailed study in this book. The link between the state and the agrarian producers was provided by the intermediary *zamindars* who, consequently, form an integral part of the study.

The area taken up for study is the core dominions of the Sikhs, covering the whole of the Bist Jalandhar and the upper *doabs* from the river Satlej to the Indus. This area was subsequently

covered by the British districts of Jullander, Hoshiarpur, Lahore, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Jhang, Gujrat, Shahpur, Rawalpindi and Jhelam, and the state of Kapurthala. The period of study extends from 1799, the year in which Ranjit Singh occupied Lahore, to 1849, the year in which the Kingdom of Lahore was annexed to the British Empire. That the scope of the work is quite comprehensive is evident from the chapters. The demographic pattern with special reference to agricultural population of the area under study is the starting point, followed by a discussion of agricultural production and the extent of cultivation. The third chapter deals with the number, the categories and the rights of the proprietors in the area under study. The size of holdings and the role of the proprietors in the social economy of the village are also taken up. Similarly, the number, distribution and differentiation among the non-proprietary cultivators are analysed in the fourth chapter. The intermediary *zamindars*, who too were land-holders in their own right, are treated in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter deals with the agrarian policy of the state. Towards the end of Sikh rule, British administrators had begun to interfere in agrarian matters of the Kingdom of Lahore. This process was followed more vigorously after the annexation of the Kingdom in 1849. Therefore, the last chapter deals with

• by Radha Sharma
• K.K. Publishers and Distributors,
• New Delhi, 2000, pp. 200, Rs. 350.
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'transition' from the agrarian system of the Sikh Raj to that of the British.

Radha Sharma's *Peasantry and the State* in the Punjab during the early nineteenth century is based on a variety of primary sources. Apart from the familiar chronicles, newsletters and orders in Persian, the contemporary travel accounts, and local histories in Urdu and other contemporary works in Punjabi, she has used a large volume of materials from the National Archives of India. In addition to books and articles published by a large number of historians, she has used the official publications of the early decades of British rule, like the district gazetteers, administration and settlement reports, census data and occasional reports. Obviously, the study is based on a comprehensive variety of source materials for empirical evidence.

In the absence of the figures of population for the early nineteenth century, the author has estimated the population by projecting the figures of 1855 backwards according to a formula devised by her, assuming a uniform rate of increase from 1791 to 1851. According to this formula, the population of the area under study was less than 39 lakhs in 1791 and over 67 lakhs in 1851. This is not very convincing because the rate of increase appears to get inflated through backward projection. The author states further that the population of the area under study in the 1840s was only a little less than what it was in 1855.

This sounds reasonable. Therefore, the analysis of population based on the figures of 1855 in terms of density of population, religious composition, the percentage of agricultural population and its religious composition should be close to the realities of the 1840s. Significantly, the area under study gets divided into three distinct zones on the basis of human resources - the five eastern districts having the highest density of population and the four western districts having the lowest. Further analysis of the population of these three sub-regions is based on the figures of 1881. It may be a little further removed from the realities of the 1840s. Strictly speaking, the study of demography tends to relate to the end of the period under study.

Similarly, for the chapter on land and its cultivation the contemporary and near contemporary evidence used by the author relates very largely to the 1830s and the 1840s. The conclusion drawn by the author is nevertheless significant that the area under cultivation increased during the early nineteenth century to make the situation comparable with the state of cultivation at its best under the Mughals. However, there was no change in agricultural technology or the patterns of agricultural production.

The chapter in which the use of contemporary evidence is more prominent is the one on the Intermediary *Zamin-*

dars. The *chaudharis* and *muqaddams* constituted the most important component of the intermediaries. Towards the end of the period, the *ijaradars* were becoming increasingly important. The author emphasizes that 'the adoption of the system of *ijara* did not hamper the concern of the state about the welfare of the peasantry'.

The intermediaries were encouraged to extend cultivation. Rewards in cash or in terms of revenue-free land served as incentive. The religious personages or institutions, too, were given wasteland by way of *dharmarth* to bring it under cultivation. The extension of cultivation was closely linked with the concern of the state for revenues. All those who could be useful in extending cultivation, and thereby increasing the revenue were protected by the state. Hardly any distinction was made between the large and small proprietors and tenant-cultivators or the intermediaries and the persons who were ready to invest their capital or labour in bringing more and more land under cultivation. The number of actual cultivators and peasant proprietors increased in this process. In certain areas, the non-cultivating investors acquired proprietary rights in land.

The last chapter relates to transition from the Sikh to the British Raj. In fact, this could be an appropriate title for the book as a whole. The system of *jagirdari*,

which was prevalent earlier, was abolished by the British. The social and economic basis of the former *jagirdars* and other intermediaries was gradually eroded by the policies of a new state. But the new state created its own intermediaries in the form of *zaildars* and *lambardars*. The British administrators brought about changes in the agrarian society by affecting all its three major sections : the proprietors, the tenants, and the intermediaries. The new rulers did not create proprietary rights but they did make the existing proprietary rights rather absolute. In their quest for simplification and rationalization, the British "compressed the existing multiple gradations in rural society into three broad categories of landlord, tenant and labourers".

As observed at the outset, Radha Sharma's study of the peasantry in the core area of the Punjab during the early nineteenth century is based on solid empirical evidence which is analysed in detail for understanding the position of the various elements connected with agrarian production in the context of state policies. Her findings appear to be sound and important. The book is a valuable addition to the literature on agrarian economy of the Punjab.

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The Ghosts and Monsters of India

Prof. N.N. Bhattacharyya's book *Indian Demonology* gives a detailed description of the various kinds of celestial, aerial and terrestrial demons and demonical beings associated with India's ancient myths and legends. Since there is no clear-cut demarcation between different kinds of demons and spirits, they are generally termed as demons. In fact, Indian demonology is a vast and complex subject, for India has no less than three hundred surviving tribes, each with its own mythology of gods, demons and spirits which have been subjected under diverse historical

conditions to the processes of social and religio-cultural transformation. Those who reached the high status through an upward journey and thus received a proximity with the Sanskrit culture experienced a modification of their original tribal demonology onto which Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain elements are also grafted. The Vedas contain various classes of demons which have characterized the so called inverted pantheon through the ages. These at the same time contain a number of demons who had attained celebrity in the epics, the Puranas and in the later Buddhist

- Indian Demonology, The Inverted Pantheon
- by N.N. Bhattacharyya
- Manohar Publisher & Distributors, Nes Delhi
- 2000 pp. 234 Rs. 400

and Jain literature. However, in the Vedas demonology is basically anthropomorphic and the characters were recruited from the gods of alien countries, races and religions together with the indige-nous hostile tribes, natural phenomena, and the popular world of spirits.

In the demoniacal hierarchy, the Vedas as well as the subsequent literature attributed the highest rank to the 'Asuras'. The 'Raksasas' and other classes of demons were assigned to the lower ranks because they represented the indigenous non-vedic cultures at a