

The insight of Rathore and Mohapatra that Indian thought is a twin that haunts Hegel's system should be fully endorsed. What needs to be added, however, is that this twin is at the heart of his system. No wonder Hegel could never exorcise it.

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ASHUTOSH KUMAR, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 338 pp.

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Prior to the abolition of slavery, many colonial powers experimented with an indentured labour system to keep their plantations running. The system was heavily criticised, especially by the anti-slavery movement that was later joined by civil servants, indentured labourers themselves and Indian nationalists. Ever since, there has been a debate about the moral valuation of the system: whether indentured labour was a new system of slavery. In this book, Ashutosh Kumar endeavours to push the historical debate further by connecting the economic and cultural lives of the labourers, both in India and beyond. To that end, Kumar argued that individuals made choices, had aspirations and lives overseas that were connected with their custodian socio-cultural life in the villages of the Gangetic plane.

This is an ambitious and challenging goal, and fascinating since in most studies the social and cultural life of indentured labourers were hardly addressed. The book consists of six chapters, in addition to the Introduction and Conclusion. The central message of the book is that the emigrants/*girmitya* Indians were not passive players in the colonial drama.

In the first empirical chapter, Kumar outlines that labour migration was characteristic of the north-eastern part of India, where communities were linked with the outside world by money in the form of remittances, letters and stories told by returnees. Chapter 3 focusses on the legal regulation of indenture which took into account the interest of both the planters and the labourers. Chapter 4 focusses on the voyage to the plantation societies, and Chapter 5 embeds the cultivation of cane sugar in selected aspects of regional custodian life in India, including family life and marriage, rituals of birth and death, festivals, and religious texts, sects and traditions. Chapter 6 deals with the experience of the labourers in Mauritius and Fiji, using the written accounts of one Muslim and two Brahmin labourers, paying due attention to women. This chapter addresses life on the plantations, religion under indenture, problems of returnees and leadership on the plantations. The final empirical chapter deals with the abolition of the indenture system, arguing that

the whole system came under attack when free Indian migrants and indentured labourers in South Africa started to be treated equally.

The lives of the emigrants on overseas plantations as well as those left behind is a highly under-researched theme that is gaining increasing scholarly attention. Kumar makes clear that the two worlds were connected. Many cultural elements were lost in transition and new ones created, especially in the field of language, religion and gender roles. Kumar points out that conditions for the labourers improved under the indenture system and that made it easier for them to settle down in their new home.

A second revealing issue in the book concerns the persistent belief that the labourers were tricked by recruiters to sign for jobs overseas and were exploited and badly treated. Without denying these practices, Kumar argues that the labourers knew about the operations of the recruiters in India and used the system to their own advantage, for example, by obtaining free transport, lodging or food and then walking away from the recruiter. Moreover, the labourers managed to save money, remit money to family in India, buy land and establish a life free from the restrictions of caste and tradition. All these accomplishments of the labourers contradict the suggestion that they had no agency.

The issue of agency acquires mounting relevance when women are considered. Emigrating women were a heterogeneous category, including widows, deserted women, wives in troubled marriages, childless women, single women and those involved in extra-marital affairs. Although they were victims of sexual exploitation by both Indian men, white overseers and plantation agents, due to the unequal sex-ratio, they acquired a high degree of agency, to the point that observers described their behaviour as ‘flitting from one man to another for jewellery, expensive clothes and similar things’ (p. 177). The fate of abused women was used by the nationalist movement as an argument that the moral standards of the emerging Indian nation was at stake, which was a powerful mobilising force against British rule and the indenture system.

Often they abandoned the low-caste women they had married in the host society because, in their assessment, it would be difficult to restart in India. However, many of them had a hard time in re-inserting themselves into Indian society, especially because they had crossed the inviolate *Kala Pani* and mixed with other castes and religions. When returning with money, they were obliged to part with much of it by relatives and priests. Sometimes, they found their homes occupied by relatives. Compared with India, life in overseas societies looked favourable. The experience of the returnees discloses the interaction between India and the plantation colonies and reveals as much about the departure society as it does about the destination society.

Some aspects of this study require reflection such as the focus on sugar colonies, as expressed in the subtitle of the book. Not all plantations were sugar plantations located in the British Empire, as the title suggests. Moreover, in most French colonies, as well as Jamaica, the indentured labourers hardly had a cultural life

because they were assimilated. Data issues loom when considering songs, poems, plays and other artistic expressions that suggest cultural practices of the indentured labourers but no insight into how these might have been integrated into a part of the custodian life. Kumar's story is credible, but the written sources could have been reflected upon critically, especially the many colonial reports produced by white people who most likely were carriers of racial, cultural and class biases. Similarly, Kumar often takes for granted the written accounts of the indentured labourers. These issues may be considered in a second edition. That will surely come, since this is an important book that answers old questions and raises new ones.

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PRIYA MAHOLAY-JARADI, *Fashioning a National Art: Baroda's Royal Collection and Art Institutions (1875–1924)*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016, 304 pp.

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Through her book, *Fashioning a National Art: Baroda's Royal Collection and Art Institutions (1875–1924)*, Priya Maholay-Jaradi provides a very important reminder to scholars of South Asia of the practices of patronage, collecting and curation when writing their political and social histories of nationalism, modernity and cosmopolitanism. Maholay-Jaradi focuses on one of the most versatile and committed royal collectors of the Indian princely states, namely, Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda (r. 1879–1939), for demonstrating the ways in which such practices were able to create a locally relevant modernity that was innately national, also in the aims at securing global recognition. She has carefully, and in detail, mapped the establishment by Sayajirao of a 'new art paradigm', 'the Baroda category of art' (see p. xl for a list of archives consulted), and has shown that this was 'capable of doubling up as an experiment of national and international standard and repute' (p. 249).

By focussing on the agency of a royal collecting practice and art patronage, Maholay-Jaradi questions the usefulness of many thematic dichotomies and binaries that inundate the histories of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century India, such as between the national and modernising projects, amateur and professional connoisseurship and native and European art practices. As she states in Chapter 1, where she profiles the development of Sayajirao as a royal collector and patron, 'modernity and indigenism did not share an oblique relationship. Instead, they could come together in alternative experiments that were viable not just for Baroda but for nation-wide progress and reform' (p. 55). Crucially, in telling the story of the ways in which Sayajirao, often with the help of his able and astute *dewan*, Madhavrao,