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A Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700–1935. By Frank F. Conlon. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. xv, 255 pp. Maps, Tables, Glossary, Bibliography, Index. \$15.00

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the Indian economy as it existed until independence."

Barun De's "The Colonial Content of the Bengal Renaissance" is an abstract of what could have been a major revisionist Marxist essay on Indian history. Alas, it seems that this very important short piece was written during the long journey from Calcutta to London in between sips of gin-and-tonic. Many provocative questions are asked and not answered. D. H. Killingley's "Vedānta and Modernity" refers to interesting but already known views on the subject. It is a pity, for the author is well acquainted with his subject and knows Sanskrit and Bengali.

Kenneth Ballhatchet is a man of few words. His note on "The Elphinstone Professors and Elphinstone College, 1827-1840" raises some important questions regarding the history of higher education in western India. It shows the difficulty, in the colonial context, of building up an institution of higher studies. There were Indian patrons and sympathetic English educators, but no students. M. D. Wainwright's "Continuity in Mysore" is a competent, if dull, piece of research on British administration in Mysore.

There are two papers on the missionary activities and conversion: A. A. Powell's "Muslim Reaction to Missionary Activity in Agra" and Robert Erik Frykenberg's "The Impact of Conversion and Social Reform upon Society in South India during the Late Company Period: Questions Concerning Hindu-Christian Encounters with Special Reference to Tinnevely." The Germanic title and the formidable scholarly apparatus (202 footnotes) of Frykenberg's essay should not stop readers; this important work shows that conversion to Christianity was one tool of major social change in South India. But the government was not an agent in this process of modernization (if upward mobility can be considered a symptom of modernization).

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A Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700-1935. BY FRANK F. CONLON. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. xv, 255 pp. Maps, Tables, Glossary, Bibliography, Index. \$15.00

The strengths of this book lie in Conlon's wide-ranging source materials, including interviews and materials in vernacular languages, and in the questions it raises concerning the history of corporate groups in India. Conlon works with three major themes. First, he recognizes the importance to the Chitrapur Saraswats (who fall within the Gaud Saraswat Brahman caste-category) of the political recognition of their swami (pp. 9, 40) and hence, implicitly, the dependence of caste or sect boundaries on political boundaries. Material for this theme is found throughout the book. The Saraswats' successive employment with Nayaka rulers, Hyder Ali, the Marathas, and then the British resulted in shifts of caste centers of employment, residence, and *matha* establishment. But the reader must construct his/her own charts to make these connections over time.

The second and very explicit theme is that of the Saraswats' Smarta sectarian affiliation, and their establishment of a line of swamis and *mathas* beginning in the eighteenth century. Here, too, the reader must chart out the succession of swamis, the changing location of the central *matha*, and the "powers behind the swamis," and relate these factors to the changing political arena. For example, the choice of successive swamis was controlled by the Shukla Bhat family, revenue accountants for the Nayaka rulers at Bednur, until British government employees in Mangalore displaced them in the 1830s. Conlon shows that then, after the 1859 British division between north and south Kanara and the 1862 transfer of north Kanara to Bombay Presidency, the Saraswats moving into Bombay city were beyond the "sphere of interest" of the Shirali *matha* and swami; and he hints at disruption of marriage relationships between the northern and southern Saraswats as well (although this is unclear). He focuses on ideological issues (such as the swami's orthodox stance on widow marriage versus that of social reformers) rather than institutional ones (such as the same swami's attempted enforcement of the collection of annual tithes to support the *matha*—and perhaps to extend its *purohit* services to the growing Bombay Saraswat community).

The third theme is that of urbanization and the reconciliation of the sectarian authority with the Bombay Saraswat caste association members. Here Conlon does a very good job of showing the trade-offs involved, as the Bombay

Saraswats took the initiative and worked with a new young swami, Anandashram, who was less opposed to western education and social reform than was his predecessor (Pandurangashram, swami from 1864 to 1915). His two chapters on "Religion and Reform" are really centered on preservation of the sect, not the caste, unless Conlon concedes that they are one and the same. In the 1930s, the urban Saraswats gave money and institutional support in return for the young swami's symbolic headship and spiritual guidance (they rejected his social control). In Conlon's words, "*Matha* and caste were again integrated" (p. 212); and he ends his account there.

There are a number of problems with the book. Conlon is an historian, yet he asks in the introduction "How does one periodize the life of a caste?" and says he has been unable to do so clearly. He proceeds to give detailed information in roughly chronological order, but he is ambivalent about whether he is studying a caste or a sect. The title emphasizes a corporate structure and sense of identity that adapt to changing social conditions, and he talks about the "redefinition of caste and its boundaries" over time; but never attacks this central problem directly and consistently. He does not define the caste or *jati* through documentation of kinship or marriage networks, or through locating kinship groups in localities (though he discusses places of origin and migration). He brings up language very late in the book (p. 197); the reader is then struck by the fact that all Gaud Saraswat Brahmans speak Konkani rather than Marathi or Kanarese, distinguishing them from other Brahmans in western India and making it even more important to carefully differentiate the Chitrapur Saraswats from other Gaud Saraswat *jatis*.

If they are a caste, some of the structural matters one might think necessary to an historical study have been neglected or inadequately researched. The Saraswats characteristically set up a "ten," Conlon tells us, representatives of leading families, when establishing themselves in a new place. These "tens" had an important relationship to the swamis and *mathas*. But we learn nothing further about this institution. He uses and defines "family" (p. 46, where the text usage contradicts the footnote definition) far too loosely, and marriage and inheritance regulations or practices are scarcely mentioned. Discussing landholding rural Saraswats, he assumes

that partible inheritance practices and a low mortality rate are causing rural Saraswats to move into alternative occupations (p. 106), but he fails to document either assumption. And it is very hard to follow his occupational designations for the Chitrapur and other Gaud Saraswats over time; they seem to include rural landholders and office-holders, private traders, clerks for private traders, and urban government clerks and administrators.

If the Chitrapur Saraswats are a sect, or if that is what makes them an endogamous caste, then we need to know more about how the *mathas* were actually financed and administered, how the successors were chosen and who governed on behalf of minors, and who else was employed by the *mathas*, so that comparisons can be made with the material given by Christopher Isherwood in *Ramakrishna and his Disciples* or Milton Singer in his studies of Smarta Brahmans in Madras and their relationship with the Sankaracharya at Kanci.

The reader needs more charts—of sects, occupations, and time periods, and of the swamis, *matha* locations, and political boundaries—in addition to the tables and maps Conlon does provide. One of these, a useful map of South India in the early twentieth century includes the major Saraswat centers over time: Bednur, Shirali, Mangalore, Karwar, and Bombay. Another map, of 138 villages of origin, was not helpful because few of the villages were referred to in the text, and, in any case, the list accompanying the numbered locations was not in alphabetical order. Conlon's chart of Bombay Saraswat occupations 1912–32 shows a preponderance of Saraswats in private trade and business, as he does say (p. 177); yet, much of the text relates employment in government service to the establishment and patronage of the swamis and *mathas* giving a different impression of Saraswats' occupational ambitions.

It is not Conlon's fault, of course, that the group he studied has a confusing historical past, and in many ways he faithfully reflects the problems encountered in trying to trace its origins. (I found it useful to read N. K. Wagle's article, "History and Social Origins of the Gaud Saraswat Brahmans of the West Coast" (in two 1970 issues of the *Journal of Indian History*) in conjunction with Conlon's book. Wagle's more inclusive comparative treatment and tables helped me, a non-expert in western Indian social struc-

ture, to place the Chitrapur Saraswats in their wider political context.) Conlon has immersed himself so deeply in the history of one group that he has sometimes forgotten the broad scholarly audience he surely wants—those who study family and caste history in other parts of India, or family history and systems of stratification elsewhere. Indeed, there are indications in the introduction and epilogue that those he studied are the audience for whom he wrote the book.

But the above criticisms must be tempered by the fact that this is a pioneer work, one of the first to concentrate upon a designated caste and follow its members over time. The questions Conlon's work raises are extremely significant ones. He has nicely conveyed the personal involvement characteristic of this kind of research, and the amount of material he gathered should inspire other historians to undertake similar projects and bring us closer to an understanding of how and why castes have developed and changed over time.

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The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847–1908.

BY ROBIN JEFFREY. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976. xxii, 376 pp. Notes, Appendix, Glossary, Biographical Notes, Bibliography, Index. \$20.00

This excellent study is concerned with the former princely state of Travancore, which in many ways differs from the rest of the present state of Kerala. This has been true at least since the latter part of the eighteenth century, when Marthanda Varma united Travancore and curtailed the power of the local Nayar chieftains in order to create a modern centralized state. The book presents an excellent detailed account of changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It first describes the high position held by Nayars in Travancore State during the first fifty-odd years after Marthanda Varma, when the state was under British suzerainty though ruled indirectly through the Maharaja under the supervision of a British resident. During the first period, Nayars continued to dominate as landowners and local village officials, as well as in the government center at Trivandrum.

A major problem I find in the book is the lack of comparison with the situation of Nayars in the rest of Kerala. One of the crucial differences between Travancore and Malabar was the involvement of the British. In Malabar, where the British ruled directly, missionary activity was somewhat discouraged. In Travancore, because of the missionaries, education spread rapidly, especially after 1850, among the lower castes and Christians. And a new commercial atmosphere was created.

Traditionally, in all of Kerala, Nayars had held most of the land as *jenmi* (landlords); but after Marthanda Varma, close to half of the land in Travancore had become government land. Still, as late as 1875, forty-five percent of Travancore Nayars referred to themselves as cultivators (men who owned or leased land to cultivate or have cultivated by others), whereas only twenty-three percent of the Christian males were so listed. Most of these latter were Syrian Christians claiming to have been converted from the Nayar or Brahman communities. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Syrian Christians who had earlier engaged in some trade began to follow commercial pursuits more; they were encouraged by the British.

Jeffrey argues that the matrilineal joint family of the Nayars, which was "ill-suited to the demands of a cash economy" and to the increasing individualism fostered by reform in education and administration, led to the decline of Nayar dominance in the state, and that other groups not so encumbered were better able to cope with change. I have strong reservations about such an explanatory mechanism; it fails to take into account the differential treatment and behavior of the foreign imperial power, of British business interests, and of the missionaries. To invoke a traditional social structural explanation for phenomena of this kind can be very misleading. Thus, it was not patrilineality that led to the downfall of the Muslims in North India after British rule, but the attitude of the British to the former ruling classes.

The chapter on the role of the missionaries among the lower castes is extremely well documented, though Jeffrey fails to explain why so many more missions were set up in Travancore than in Malabar or even Cochin. I would suggest three main reasons for this: the sizable already-existing Syrian Christian community in the area, the policy of the British to discourage mission-