

Editorial Foreword

CASTE TROUBLE Is a politically correct position on caste in India, or in South Asian studies, even possible today? One can denounce caste inequality, blame it on British colonial policy, correct for it through positive discrimination, build it into electoral contests, marry and bury in accord with it (or defiance of it), but no matter how consistently these postures are embraced or opposed, caste trouble is never far away. In progressive circles, denying the existence of caste privilege is equated with elitism and reactionary politics; yet insisting too firmly on the durability of caste, or tracing it to precolonial times, is equated with Orientalist thought. These critiques are not distributed evenly across caste hierarchies. They proliferate at the bottom and the top, where gross accumulations of opportunity and stigma produce caste trouble of very different kinds.

Ajantha Subramanian and **Anastasia Piliavsky** show us how complicated the results of caste analysis can be. For Subramanian, who tracks the disproportionate success of high-caste students in the Indian Institutes of Technology, the rhetoric of objective testing and meritocracy cannot erase the reality of Brahmin habitus, regnant models of innate intelligence, and generations of accumulated privilege. Although India's academic elites no longer want their supremacy to be defined (or devalued) as hereditary, Subramanian argues that caste is critical to understanding how the IIT system works, and how merit is used to buttress caste privilege in the face of subaltern demands for inclusion. Piliavsky, working with "criminal castes," encounters similar problems of denial and persistence. It is now common for postcolonial scholars to claim that criminal tribes and robber castes were an invention of British rule. In a spirited tour of precolonial historical sources, Piliavsky shows that outlaw castes were commonplace in precolonial political and economic systems. They were everywhere, doing important work on the margins of society. In fact, the stereotypes that define criminal castes today have deep histories, as do symbiotic relationships between criminal and Brahmin castes. In both essays, durability is problematic, and all attempts to disrupt the social reproduction of caste run up against historical patterns of inequality that are continually re-activated in caste-like forms.

MODERN HEALING MAGIC Are the recipients of modern biomedicine ever genuinely healed? They are treated, yes. They recover. Their health is restored. One can even say their bodies, wounds, and scars heal up. But being healed—by a "healer," no less—is a transformative event that now carries old-fashioned, religious connotations. It also encodes a critique of orthodox

biomedicine, a system whose heavy investment in rationalism and objectivity marks out the terrain of alternative healing traditions, which are nowadays associated with miraculous powers, arcane bodies of “non-Western” medical knowledge, and a rich array of remedies, diagnostic techniques, and cures. The differences between biomedicine and its many alternatives might seem stark on the surface, but in practice these traditions borrow from each other relentlessly. They authorize each other’s claims, sometimes through open competition, sometimes by acts of certification and mutual recognition.

David Hardiman, Lili Lai and Judith Farquhar, and Tatiana Chudakova take us on a grand tour of saintly healing, traditional cures, and high tech alternative medicine. In his exploration of the career of Sai Baba of Shirdi, a Muslim fakir who is now revered as a saint by a largely Hindu following, Hardiman argues that the centrality of healing to Sai Baba’s reputation is typical of modern saints, whose powers are enhanced by their ability to do (better) what Western doctors can do, thereby proving the superiority of Indian civilization. Premodern saints, Hardiman contends, were not known for healing individuals, but for using miracles to defeat their religious and political rivals. As a globally renowned healer of the sick, Sai Baba can be seen as a spiritual side effect of Western biomedicine. A similar transition is unfolding in China, where Lai and Farquhar visit the clinics of respected practitioners of minority national medicines, charting the attempts of the Chinese government to systematize, certify, and support ethnic healing traditions. These bureaucratized encounters between majority and minority traditions produce an unstable blend of “wild” (charismatic) and “rational” (institutionalized) medicine, and each variety, Lai and Farquhar suggest, borrows some of its authority and effectiveness from its opposite. This theme of complementarity attains climax form in Chudakova’s account of Russian scientists who are trying to build a medical instrument that duplicates Tibetan pulse diagnosis. Despite a lingering inability to define exactly what the pulsometer measures, or how and why it works, the principal oddity of this technical enterprise is its constant reliance on human Buryati pulse readers to determine the accuracy of the machines. In all three cases, alternative medicines derive much of their appeal from their special relationship to more powerful, more mainstream medical traditions, an interactive process that is changing the meanings of illness and cure.

VIOLENT STATECRAFT The making of sovereign states often entails violence. War, dispossession, and brutal subjugation are as crucial to the constitution of the state as are rules of dynastic succession or electoral laws. In fact, the kinds of violence state authorities are willing to inflict on their enemies—and on their own subjects—is a reliable guide to how sovereignty is defined. For centuries at a time, the choreography of violence is utterly predictable. Across much of Eurasia, for instance, premodern Christian, Muslim, and Hindu rulers extended their rule by desecrating each other’s holy sites,

massacring and displacing each other's populations, and imposing on remnant minorities a rich assortment of legal handicaps. The establishment of modern nation-states has triggered similar events, sometimes on a horrific scale, and "the people" have become a new means of violent assertion that states manipulate but cannot fully control.

Sunil Purushotham and **A. Azfar Moin** offer us a revealing juxtaposition of medieval and modern cases. Purushotham examines the 1948 "Police Action" that brought Hyderabad, a princely state ruled by a Muslim dynast, into the new, Hindu-majority state of India. Contrary to mainstream accounts of this event, Purushotham shows how essential and widespread violence was to the Police Action, which resulted in thousands of Muslim deaths, mosque desecrations, the forced conversion of women and children, detention, and banishment. The bulk of this communal violence was enacted not by Indian police and military units, but by para-state groups, by civilians attacking civilians on behalf of the nation, a collaborative process that, according to Purushotham, constituted and solidified the popular sovereignty of the Indian state. Moin, analyzing older dynastic regimes that defined themselves in relation to cosmological hierarchies and genealogical authenticity, shows how Muslim and Hindu rulers were less interested in violence against "a people" by "a people" and were more concerned with the power concentrated in saintly shrines and temples, sites of transcendent legitimacy they fought to control. Displacing a ruler meant destroying or appropriating the sacred places and objects on which his sovereignty depended, whether he was Muslim or Hindu. Violence is central to these modern and premodern stories of sovereignty, but the targets of violence are determined largely by the substance and location of power, a distinction that produces different forms of political struggle.

COSMOPAROCHIALS Perhaps no social type is easier to profile than the cosmopolitan. Set apart by urbane sophistication, familiarity with distant places and people, an ability to speak other languages and eat other foods, and an education designed to accentuate these qualities, the cosmopolitans of the modern era seem as much alike as peasants, industrial workers, or the dull middle classes do. More distinctive are the elites who are less mobile, and the world travelers who are less elite. Among these types are the rural notables, the small town dignitaries, the local machine politicians, labor migrants, missionaries, enlisted soldiers, and low-level traders. These non-elite cosmopolitans have their own forms of sophistication. Often, they are drawn to the same genealogical, racial, familial, and spiritual ties the "real" cosmopolitans are so eager to transcend. To develop these ties, parochial cosmopolitans rely heavily on special forms of imaginative labor, on cosmology *per se*, which they use to reinterpret (even to valorize) the marginality of their worlds.

Daniel Andrew Birchok, **Nora Lessersohn**, and **Joel Cabrita** explore the complex resources provincial cosmopolitans use to distinguish themselves

from other locals. For Birchok, the principal resource is genealogy, which Acehnese religious notables use to connect themselves to the Muslim past, linking themselves ultimately to the Prophet Muhammad, but also to larger national, transregional, and transhistorical communities. The fact that these men are largely unknown beyond their own region of Indonesia does not prevent them from building a multiscalar universe in which they are part of the most important events in human history. A resilient sense of connection to Others is on display in Lessersohn's study of an Armenian shoemaker who, despite witnessing the destruction of his natal community by genocide, wrote a memoir that vividly depicts the linguistic, ethnic, and confessional diversity of the Ottoman Anatolia of his youth. The memoir preserves the provincial cosmopolitanism that, Lessersohn argues, was familiar to many Ottoman Armenians, but is now obscured by a post-genocide worldview that emphasizes disconnection, antagonism, and hostility. Working across racial divides that were equally immense, Cabrita introduces us to the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, a divine healing movement that, circa 1900, was global in scope, transecting the Anglophone world and preaching the oneness of black and white believers in a unified Adamic race. This cosmology could not dissolve the very real barriers between the Boers, Americans, Britons, and Black Africans who embraced it. In the eyes of "real" cosmopolitans, the Zionists fed on bad science, bad medicine, and bad theology. In the end, the movement's followers were mostly Black Africans, who were happy to join the Adamic race. Compared to the identities favored by more powerful people—nationalism, empire, predatory capitalism, and a Christianity drenched in Whiteness—shared descent from Adam seemed the humane option and, by every local measure, the more genuinely cosmopolitan one.
