

groups had ethnographers as lucid and as concerned with getting things right.

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A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji, by John D. Kelly. University of Chicago Press, 1991. ISBN 0-226-43030-8 cloth, xvi + 266 pp, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$39.95; paper, US\$16.95.

From 1897 until 1916 people were indentured from Indian cities to work on European-owned sugar plantations in Fiji, a British crown colony in the South Pacific. Most chose to stay on after their contracts expired and their numbers were soon supplemented by a few thousand free settlers. Today the Indians and the indigenous Fijians each comprise nearly 50 percent of the population of independent Fiji.

Kelly presents an interesting new perspective on the Indians' responses to European rule and on the development of political divisions among themselves in the early decades of this century. He views colonialism as a hegemonic discourse of racial superiority and dominance with its own grammatical and dialogic forms. It is features of discourse, he maintains, that "enable agency and practice" (22-23). Colonialist discourse provokes its opposite as the colonized combat it with their own cultural resources. Hinduism with its imagery of good and evil, virtue and pollution, empowered a countercolonial discourse that helped bring about the end of the indenture system. The

evils of Europeans were likened to demons, the oppressors and tormentors of the devout and pure; the indenture experience itself was represented as a replay of "Rama's banishment," an epic of pollution and atrocity.

Abuse of Indian women by European overseers was a recurring source of grievance. A particular instance in which the woman resisted and took action to redeem her honor was publicized widely in Fiji and India. The image of a Hindu woman defending her virtue was quickly put into service as a metaphor for political action and its necessity. Indeed, the Fiji Indians' experience "helped develop the devotional imagery of Indian nationalist politics, including its use of the Ramayan as a vast political metaphor" (64).

The issues of female sexuality and sexual morality became crucial in defining Indian virtue and social worth in counterpoint to European racialism. Their importance was reinforced in an acrimonious rivalry that developed as Indians began to rebuild Hinduism in Fiji. Reformist Arya Samajists, upwardly mobile and bent on "modernization," rejected much of the sexual imagery in the sacred texts and some old prohibitions such as that against the remarriage of widows. Despite the virulent challenges, Sanatanist (orthodox) Hindus achieved the widest popular influence. Kelly argues that this dispute, arising partly from the countercolonial discourse, was responsible for undermining the beginnings of Indian political unity.

Kelly develops his case with verve and eloquence. Yet, as a reader familiar with Fiji's colonial history, I sometimes

found the argument spurious or misleading. As in much writing of the genre there is a tendency to sententious overstatement, often with erudition but not always convincing illumination of the historical case under consideration. The interest of the perspective lies in its claim to account for social action in terms of the logics and dialogics of narrative or textual constructions. This type of analysis can be persuasively developed largely in terms of evidence about discourse itself at the expense of an adequate examination of circumstances of political, social, and economic relations. Important sociological factors tend to be obscured by a dogmatic concern with the logical imperatives of narrative forms. The problem can be seen in Kelly's treatment of the question of why the Arya Samaj failed to "take on" in Fiji.

Kelly's analysis of the use of orthodox texts in the construction of countercolonial discourse would seem to imply that in a contest with the Sanatanists the Samajists would be doomed by a deficiency of cultural resources to offer Indians for their survival and strength in "the colonial social field." Orthodoxy triumphed because its narratives were most effective in defining Hindu being against degrading colonialist images.

An earlier comparative study of overseas Indians, by Jayawardena, suggests that the relation between religious forms and the degree of oppressive colonial racialism was the reverse of that which Kelly posits. Jayawardena shows that the Arya Samaj became strong in Guyana but remained weak in Fiji because of different colonial policies that accentuated European

racialism and cultural dominance in Guyana but tended to mitigate it in Fiji.

In Fiji, Indians were treated as a distinct population and in many ways the preservation or reconstruction of "Indian" cultural practices, including language, was encouraged or facilitated. The policy corresponded to the strenuous official maintenance of distinctive Fijian institutions, and limited the extent to which most Indians felt drawn into status competition with the Europeans and the Fijians. Jayawardena's study suggests that orthodoxy prevailed not as a means of asserting a virtuous being in the face of colonial oppression, but simply as part of the routine internal life of a cultural group relatively insulated from rivalrous and invidious interactions with "others."

In Guyana the policies and institutions of colonial rule, far from creating "spaces" in which distinctive cultural communities could be strongly developed, tended more to encourage rivalries across the ethnic differences and in terms of European values. It was the popularity of the reformist Arya Samaj, not Hindu orthodoxy, that reflected the resentment and anxiety engendered by racist denigration: a concern to diminish distinctiveness and become more "modern" in conformity with heavily promoted Western standards of behavior, belief, and social organisation. (For an introduction to the late Chandra Jayawardena's work see his "Culture and Ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji," *Man* 15: 430-450, 1980.) Perhaps Kelly would argue that any version of Hinduism can serve countercolonial discourse. Such a position would simply underscore the need

for a more rigorous examination of variables of social and political context such as Jayawardena's study offers.

Kelly's treatment of the contribution of the religious dispute to the collapse of Indian political unity is likewise limited by insufficient examination of social contexts. At the time of the dispute tension was building between Fiji-born people who had achieved relatively high economic and social status, many of them Arya Samajists, and the new settlers from Gujarati, all orthodox Hindus, who were displacing the more established Indians in the retail trade and other commercial enterprises. The tension soon erupted into political competition and deepened when the sugarcane farmers were unionized for struggle with the Australian milling company (Arya Samaj leaders supported one union and Gujarati Sanatanists encouraged another, and political leaders used the unions in their competition for the farmers' votes). A further factor undermining unity was a split between militant leaders of the farmers, and city-based leaders who came under greater pressure to compromise anticolonial demands in return for the favor of Europeans and Fijian leaders.

The social, economic, and political contexts of Indian "discourses" in Fiji have been more complex than Kelly's analysis allows. A closer study of the Fiji literature would doubtless have produced a better grounded and more nuanced account, and one more critical in its use of the discourse perspective. Yet, I believe that the weaknesses of the study arise more from the limitations and constraints of the rather doctrinaire school of analysis in which it was

produced. As a spirited exposition of this genre, Kelly's study has considerable intellectual appeal. To readers seeking a knowledge of the Indians of Fiji I would recommend the book but advise caution.

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Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific, by Nicholas Thomas. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. ISBN 0-674-25730-8 cloth, xiii + 259 pp, maps, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, US\$32.50; paper, US\$14.95.

In the past decade anthropological writing about the Pacific has been a key site of attention to indigenous histories, to colonial encounters, and to the reevaluations of meaning and practice that Nicholas Thomas so elegantly terms "entanglements." Focusing on material culture, this book presents a distinctive and rewarding contribution to ongoing debates. Arguing against scholarly dichotomies (at many levels: heavily descriptive studies versus general theoretical statements, typologies of gift societies versus commodity societies, and causal explanations privileging local culture versus global world-system dynamics), *Entangled Objects* considers the Pacific region as a whole (juxtaposing diverse historical and cultural accounts from across the Pacific) and seeks to develop what the author calls "intermediate level theory."

In his concept of entanglement