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Untouchable: An Indian Life History

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is central to R. J. Moore's thesis that Churchill had not changed his views about India. He did everything possible to sabotage any attempts to use the wartime situation to advance Indian independence.

By the late 1930s the friends of India in Britain were largely concentrated in the Labour Party, with which Gandhi, Nehru, and Krishna Menon retained close contact. On Labour's left was Stafford Cripps, eventually expelled for his advocacy of a popular front with Communists and Liberals directed against Conservative foreign policy. Cripps was thus very useful in negotiating with India and the Soviet Union, whose leaders had good cause to be suspicious of Churchill. Cripps had already dealt unofficially with the Indian National Congress at the end of 1939 when Labour was not in the cabinet and the threat from Japan had not materialized. By 1942 the situation was far more acute. Cripps was sent to India in March to gain acceptance for a cabinet declaration offering a postwar constituent assembly in exchange for full British control over wartime Indian defense.

Cripps's mission failed within a month. Moore makes out a convincing case for a "Churchill-Linlithgow axis" that conspired against the slim possibility of success. Despite the involvement of Roosevelt's representative, Colonel Louis Johnson, who developed a joint formula with Cripps favoring Indian participation in defense policy making, the alliance between the British prime minister and the viceroy was too powerful. As Moore concludes, "the Cripps mission was crushed by the monolithic millstones of Churchillian Conservatism and Congress nationalism."

This study is based on papers now publicly available in Britain. Moore's case is well made and is quite convincing. The Indian actors, however, appear as rather shadowy figures. They probably had a better idea of Churchill's intrigues than did Cripps, whose previous political behavior had been rather naive. One important Indian who does not appear at all is Subhas Chandra Bose, who was collaborating with the Japanese and the Indian National Army that they had organized. This excellent study casts doubt on the long-accepted myth that India might have achieved its independence just as easily under a postwar Churchill government as it did under Attlee's Labour Party.

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JAMES M. FREEMAN. *Untouchable: An Indian Life History.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1979. Pp. viii, 421. $18.95.

James M. Freeman, an anthropologist, has "created" the life history of an Indian untouchable, Muli, a forty-year old man of the Bauri caste in Orissa. Muli lives in a village of almost 3,000 people near Bhubaneshwar, the state capital; the Bauris are the second largest of the twenty local castes, but they are among the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Freeman states that, given the limited opportunities available to untouchables, there are three possible adaptations for Bauris: unskilled laborers; shamanistic faith healers; and transvestites, pimps, and prostitutes (p. 34). Muli represents the third group.

The book is the result of six months of daily interviews in Muli's language, Oriya, conducted by Freeman and an assistant in 1971–72. They translated their notes into English and edited Muli's narrative for publication. Following an introduction, a discussion of methods, and delineation of the ethnographic setting, the life history material is presented in twenty-six episodic chapters. A final chapter analyzes the life history, following David G. Mandelbaum's three organizing principles of dimensions, turnings, and adaptations. Much of Muli's account, the "text," is in the form of conversations that accompanied past events.

The book is a rare source of details about life at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy in India. Concern with work, food, and sex and with family and village relationships is constant, expressed in distinctively lower-caste idioms. Muli is an expressive and vivid storyteller. The focus is, however, external; as an internal view of a life history, the book is less successful.

Freeman is explicit about the problems that faced him as he tried to find out about "an ordinary untouchable from the untouchable's point of view" (p. 6), but his account of his methods leaves one dissatisfied. He states that "Muli was clearly at his best, not when directed, but when allowed to develop his story in his own way" (p. 15), then tells of Muli's shortcomings as an informant and says "we worked for several days showing him what we considered important; he tried to follow our directions, but with little success." Aware of the joint nature of his enterprise, Freeman gives examples of the ways in which he and his Brahman assistant from the village questioned, probed, and clarified Muli's narrative as it proceeded. The data are detailed and fascinating, but, as Freeman himself cautions the reader, Freeman's biases have become part of the life history.

Freeman sees Muli as engaged in purely transactional relationships with higher-caste men while maintaining a hopeless fantasy of friendship with these customers of his labor or his prostitutes. Yet Muli, working as a sharecropper for a Brahman landholder, was "the first untouchable in the village to publicly challenge and insult a Brahman" (p. 354), and his son was the first Bauri child from the village to complete three years of school and enter

high school (p. 380). These circumstances are puzzling in light of the data presented. Despite the many details, one feels that Muli is still an enigma, that a private and fuller explanation of his "turnings" and "adaptations" lies beyond Freeman's conscientious attempts to create his life history.

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SAMUEL L. POPKIN. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1979. Pp. xxi, 306. Cloth $14.95, paper $4.95.

How have peasants reacted to the commercialization of agriculture and to their incorporation into an expanding world economic system and how best, in their own interests, should they? Was that momentous transformation a Good Thing, and was it welcomed as such by the majority of precapitalist farmers? The loose coalition of broadly leftist scholars whom Samuel L. Popkin dubs "moral economists" believe it was not. How uniform a group they are and whether Popkin merely refutes his own caricature of them (as he admits is possible) are, however, arguable matters.

Grounded in what he calls "political economy" (here understood more in its nineteenth-century, neoclassical sense than with its current neo-Marxist connotations), Popkin's book has two parts: a formal theoretical statement juxtaposing the moral and political economy positions; and, to vindicate the latter, a quite extended consideration of the development of modern Vietnamese society and peasant movements. His chosen adversaries include the anthropologist Eric Wolf and the economic historian E. J. Hobsbawm—though not, surprisingly, E. P. Thompson, social historian and begetter of the "moral economy" concept. But as an Asianist Popkin has as his principal target James C. Scott, political scientist and author of *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1976). Where Scott sees village solidarity, reciprocity, and a rough communal egalitarianism, Popkin finds only division, self-seeking, and inequality. Where Scott emphasizes the particularity of diverse cultural contexts and values, Popkin builds his deductive argument upon what he sees as an investment logic of individual stratagems that purportedly express a universal economic mentality. While for Scott the creation of a market in land erodes a whole matrix of peasant institutions, for Popkin these customary arrangements were far from ideal and were, in fact, generally mechanisms for the exercise and legitimation of a village elite's local domination. Where Scott, therefore, sees traditional social arrangements as providing certain benefits to peasants, Popkin regards this view as a dangerous romanticization of the plight of struggling countryfolk all too eager to break loose from customary constraints that have long kept them subordinate.

Popkin's arguments (especially his discussion of patron-client relations) are challenging, and his analysis of how Vietnamese rural society responded to colonial intrusion is often revealing. But, for all its ingenuity, elegance, and scholarly breadth, his polemic seems based upon a misconception. To argue that village arrangements may often have failed actually to produce equality or maximize welfare does not refute the "moral economists." For them the premodern village economy is a moral one not because it automatically and directly produced moral outcomes but because it was based upon a distinctive economic rationality. This was not the individualistic and materialistic calculus of Gradgrindian "political economy" but a complex of beliefs concerning a person's entitlement to a culturally defined subsistence. These beliefs and entitlements rested upon moral expectations that were or, it was held, should be set against those other market-promoted grounds of choice making. Anthropologists no longer ask whether exotic folk are irrational or rational just like us. Generally they are neither, and in any given case the task of analysis is to discern the culturally distinct system of rationality that informs their behavior. One may reason brilliantly while thinking otherwise—Popkin, whose arguments raise issues of cardinal importance for students of rural society worldwide and from several disciplines, repeatedly does—yet still be wrong, a prisoner of limiting cultural preconceptions, in equating market morality with human nature.

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U.S. STATE HISTORY

A collection of review essays on the "States and the Nation" series, published by W. W. Norton, New York, 1976–79, for the American Association for State and Local History, Nashville. $9.95 each.

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