

also draw upon her work to inform their future studies of other social formations during the colonial period.

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SAMITA SEN. *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*. (Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society, number 3.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1999. Pp. xviii, 265.

Samita Sen's ambitious study is of women in the Bengal jute industry in late colonial India, by which she means the end of the nineteenth century to independence. She chose the jute industry as the only registered industry (under the Factories Act of 1881, amended in 1891) that employed any substantial number of women, some twelve to twenty-one percent of the work force from 1897 to 1950. Other industrial employers of women were smaller and more casual undertakings, such as cotton mills, rice mills, and bone mills, where women formed forty, thirty-five, and thirty-two percent of the work force respectively (p. 11). Presumably the choice was made because sources were more plentiful. Sen uses colonial records and legislative materials, jute mill and trade union records, and some interviews. Drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (1989), she adds a few years to his Table 1.1 (p. 10 in Chakrabarty, p. 5 in Sen) and much additional material on women in Bengal and the jute mills there (Chakrabarty's index shows fifteen pages on women versus Sen's 247-page book).

Sen argues that because the jute industry employed fewer women, it offered the scope to investigate both those women who undertook industrial employment and those who were "excluded" (p. 13), and one of her major contentions is that the jute industry "offers an interesting case of women's 'exclusion'" (p. 4). Yet the gradual decline from 17.4 percent in 1897 to 12.4 percent in 1950 (she takes the high point, 20.9 percent in 1901, which appears atypical to me in her selective pre-1911 figures) is not dramatic, and the case for deliberate exclusion is not really made. (The real decline seems to have occurred from the 1960s to the present; p. 214.) Sen's other very significant and related assertions—that "the devaluation of women's work is the key to some of the most significant social changes in early twentieth-century Bengal: the spread of dowry, the increasing restrictions on widow remarriage, the diffusion of *pardah* and child marriage" (p. 17)—are not convincingly evidenced by patterns of historical data.

At the micro level, Sen's work is thorough and informative. She has described migration from rural to urban areas and the composition of the jute mill labor force, pointing to the tendencies for married women to stay behind and work in the countryside while widows and deserted or deserting wives migrated and sought work in the mills. She has looked closely at recruitment and work patterns within the mills, concluding that

although women were relegated to certain lower-paid jobs, they were not on the whole segregated within the work setting, so that their mobilization for collective action by unions was not easy (pp. 93, 225–226). Sen presents detailed material about the policies of the colonial state and factory owners regarding women factory workers, particularly with respect to their motherhood and health. Showing that mill owners and government alike preferred welfare clinics and home visits to maternity benefits and other welfare measures, she also sees this as the creation of "networks of surveillance" over workers and their homes (p. 165). Looking at sexual and marital arrangements, she moves beyond the mill women to the urban poor, prostitutes, and Bengali bourgeois women to establish a broader context for her conclusion that gender and class relations in late colonial Bengal were "embedded in and constructed through one another" (p. 213).

Sen, in sum, has raised important questions about the relationship of marriage and family practices to industrial work settings in late colonial Bengal, and she has assembled a rich body of material for cross-cultural and cross-national analyses of gender and class interaction in processes of rural to urban migration, urbanization, and industrialization. A greater investment in oral history (historical anthropology being admittedly my field, not hers) might have provided more insights, but like Chakrabarty before her, she fails to resolve crucial issues of culture and consciousness. However, Sen's quest for working-class women's history in Bengali jute mills was a very challenging one, and she productively pushes our knowledge and questions further.

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MARIA MISRA. *Business, Race, and Politics in British India c. 1850–1960*. (Oxford Historical Monographs.) New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University. 1999. Pp. xiii, 250. \$72.00.

In the nineteenth century, as British rule integrated the Indian economy into the international system, there was a large flow of foreign, primarily British, capital into India with consequent external ownership of much of the modern sector. The managing agency system was one of the principal instruments through which foreign control was exercised. Managing agencies were private partnership firms, the senior partners resident in Britain and the junior partners in India, that controlled a diverse range of joint-stock companies to which they provided entrepreneurial, banking, and managing services under the terms of a legal agreement known as an agency contract (rather than by ownership of shares in the companies). At the end of the nineteenth century, there were about sixty of these managing agencies, a significant proportion of them in Calcutta, where they were most active in such areas as jute, tea plantations, mining, and shipping.