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fit at all. To suggest, for example, that the Ladakhis once sang constantly, but that now, because they have heard professional singers and are embarrassed by their own singing, sing less, is both naïve and wrong, which a visit to the cultivated fields of Ladakh in September would quickly point out (p. 92-93). Chapter Four, although comprising only 24 pages of a 225-page book, seriously flaws *Paradise for Sale*, because it erodes confidence in the reader in the authors' more comprehensive global analysis. If they didn't get it right with the specifics, are they correct in their overall assessment of the world?

I finished the book with the same misgivings I had when entering into it. In part, this was due to the book's premise about Nauru as metaphor of the world, but also because of a certain ambiguity that arose from the authors' assertions about the process of writing the book. On the first page of the Prelude, we read that the authors selected Nauru as a study site based upon an article in the *New York Times* and that one of the authors then visited the island to "check it out," presumably to conduct field research there. On the first page of the Coda, however, located at the very end of the book, we read that the visit to Nauru only occurred at the behest of a reviewer after the entire manuscript was completed and needed only "fine-tuning." I appreciated the honesty of these statements, but the chronology of research and writing, as well as the purpose and duration of the Nauru field visits, were troubling to me. That said, this book is a good choice for anyone interested in a considered, ultimately realist in its pessimism, overview of the world's environment and the consumption-oriented worldview of industrial society that has contributed to its recent decline. The authors' global knowledge is impressive and their sincerity is obvious, and where they successfully draw Nauru into the debates about the sustainability of the larger world, they do so with great effect.

The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India, by Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, xviii, 289 pp.

Reviewed by Lynn Vincentnathan, Department of Anthropology, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL

Writing against some current trends in the social sciences and in South Asian studies, Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, in their book *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, provide a solid argument for why untouchables still constitute a viable category in modern, democratic India. The main thrust is not only that discrimination against untouchables persists, though the worst of its ritual pollution based component is fading away, but that untouchables on the whole have not escaped from poverty, despite the plethora of government anti-poverty programs. Furthermore, because of untouchables' growing assertiveness coupled with the advances they have made (more perceived than real), caste Hindus are increasingly engaging in violent backlashes against them. These all serve to perpetuate the "fault line," as the authors put it, between untouchables and caste Hindus.

The book draws on history, including orthodox Hindu and bhakti literature, to show that untouchables -- though referred to by other names -- have been a part of Indian society for centuries, if not millennia. The authors discuss the problems surrounding the term "untouchable," but fortunately do not dwell on the issue of whether untouchables actually exist or are an artificial category created and used by others, as Charsley (1996) contends. However, their whole book can be seen as a strong refutation of this thesis. While they do not cite Charsley (1996), they do partly answer his criticisms by revealing the great diversity among untouchable castes and internal splits within them. Unlike Charsley, who follows current fashion by criticizing the British, they commend the British for contributing to an enhanced pan-Indian untouchable consciousness, but lament the difficulties in creating a unified untouchable political base. They cover much of India, describing a variety of untouchable castes, movements, and situations, focusing more heavily on Bihar, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab-Haryana, and Tamil Nadu. Regarding the fact that most untouchables throughout India do not perform polluting work, but are mainly agrarian laborers -- which Charsley (1996) uses to bolster his claim that the term "untouchable" is wrong -- Mendelsohn and Vicziany, following a critical perspective, suggest that the ideology of untouchability has probably been used for the

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purpose of exploiting agrarian laborers. Stein's (1967) historical work on this topic could have given support to this argument.

Mendelsohn and Vicziany refute Moffat's (1979) claim that untouchables are no different from caste Hindus and buy into the very ideology of purity and pollution that stigmatizes them. In addition to their own studies that reveal untouchable distinctiveness, counterculture, and resistance, Mendelsohn and Vicziany draw on older studies, such as those by Gough and Mencher, but they could have used some more recent scholarship in support of their thesis, including my own (L. Vincentnathan 1987, 1993a, 1994b) and that of S. G. Vincentnathan (1996), Deliège (1994, 1996), and Mosse (1994).

The book covers the social and political history of untouchables in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including early attempts at sanskritization and assimilation, their economic uplift and anti-discrimination movements, their conversions to other religions, their growing resistance, the contributions of Ambedkar and other prominent untouchables, and the government programs to help untouchables. The authors write at length on caste Hindus' increasing violence and backlash against untouchables, giving analytical depth to the atrocities depicted in Indian newspapers. They show how this differs from the traditional violence against untouchables. In the past it was violation of ritual purity that more often provoked violence, such as untouchables using caste Hindu wells, whereas today the conflicts tend to be more over land, wages, and government benefits. The authors strive to unravel analytically the intertwining factors of class and caste, and rightly stress the importance of both in the conflicts. They write of "extravagant revenge" -- revenge that goes well beyond the untouchables' less serious provocations. I agree with them that this indicates a belief in the untouchables' otherness, a further indication of the fault line.

The authors suggest that caste Hindu discrimination and oppression of untouchables might have been actually greater in the present era, except for some "masking" factors, such as government provisions of separate wells for untouchables and disposable tea mugs. They discuss that "new civic culture" that allows mainly urban caste Hindus to ignore purity concerns and function alongside untouchables in public spheres -- at school and work, and in restaurants. They point out, however, that this is more pragmatic than ideological, and that caste Hindus who return to their villages often revert to discrimination and avoidance of untouchables, again indicating the untouchable-caste Hindu fault line below the thin surface of modern civility.

The most startling and complex argument Mendelsohn and Vicziany make is that the Indian government itself contributes to the oppression and continued poverty of untouchables. Instead of seeing anomalous and isolated cases of government oppression -- such as scattered cases of police brutality and complicity in violence against untouchables, or discrimination by a few misguided bureaucrats -- the authors suggest that government abuse and indifference is endemic. This is especially so, they suggest, since the government is largely controlled by the upper castes.

The authors claim that government anti-poverty and affirmative action programs are set up to maintain the status quo rather than bring about the structural changes needed to redistribute resources and end poverty. They point out that these programs have not helped much, and even if they were implemented to their fullest extent by sympathetic bureaucrats under the best of conditions (which is not the case) they could not possibly help more than a small percentage of untouchables. Furthermore, government help is not adequate for the poorest untouchables. Only those who already have some economic and cultural capital can make use of the programs. Many anti-poverty programs, such as land reform and fair price shops, have mainly helped the backward castes and the middle class. Rather the authors suggest that untouchables experience greater economic advancement, though at a lower level than caste Hindus, when the whole population is improving, such as during Punjab-Haryana's green revolution or along with the general rise in health and literacy in Kerala. Furthermore, it is more the pragmatic new civic culture and the discrimination masking factors, not implementation of anti-discrimination laws, that has had the greater impact on reducing the most blatant forms of discrimination.

The authors rightly fault misguided emphases that steer the government and others away from pursuing real solutions to untouchable poverty and oppression. For instance, the government focuses heavily on affirmative action programs and anti-discrimination measures in the public sector, but allows discrimination to run rampant in the private sector, where most employment opportunities exist. Population control programs are given high prominence in the war on poverty, keeping more important causes of poverty out of the spotlight, such as discrimination and lack of adequate resource redistribution. Many scholars blame a self-perpetuating and self-centered "Harijan elite" for failing to help their poverty-stricken brethren. Mendelsohn and Vicziany, however, interviewed a number of these elites and found that many of them had modest roots and desired to help untouchable causes, but were in no position to buck a system dominated by upper castes.

In dedicating a whole chapter to a study of the Faridabad stone quarries, the authors give a good example of current untouchable hardship and the failure of the Indian government and society to alleviate this. The mainly

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untouchable quarry workers, living in squalid conditions away from their homes, were considered bonded labor, since they had borrowed money from the quarry owners at exorbitant interest rates (making repayment of the loans impossible), and were thus not free to leave the quarries. Some Hindu reformers, keen on ending bonded labor, along with some sympathetic judges, did help “free” a small percentage of the laborers after years of struggle against strong quarry owner and government opposition. Mendelsohn and Vicziany, however, did a follow up study and found the freed laborers in similar or worse conditions, some out of work in their home villages, many remaining at the quarries for want of better employment. The authors concluded that short of pouring in much greater resources for their rehabilitation, effort would have better been spent on more greatly improving their working conditions and wages, and providing them with low interest loans when needed.

While this book deals mainly with the problems, difficulties, and failures regarding untouchable uplift, it is not totally pessimistic. It does point to improvements, but stresses that further improvements are more likely to come from untouchable initiatives and activism than from government programs or the efforts of caste Hindu reformers.

The book should have a wider appeal than its subject matter indicates. It can serve both as an advanced contribution to untouchable and South Asian studies -- another voice on the side of untouchable distinctiveness in the ongoing debate -- and as an introduction to untouchable and South Asian studies, due to the thorough background explanations and the immense descriptive information and research that supports the authors' arguments. Those who might be interested in South Asian political economy, poverty, or politics, but not in untouchables per se, would be advised to read the book, since none of these areas can be well understood without understanding the untouchable dimension to them. On the other hand, those who are more interested in the anthropology of India or of untouchables would be advised to read it as a complement to the usual village ethnography that deals with ritual traditions and local caste hierarchy.

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