

Menšíková, Tereza

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Western Foundations of the Caste System]

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chtonickou strukturu, když nahradil původní „(zřejmě)“ za „(možno)“. Důvěru v Buccellatiho dokumentuje primárně ikonografická polemika s jedním z recenzentů/oponentů, prof. Petrem Charvátem, ohledně světové premiéry „dynastického programu“. V disertaci autor, následuje Buccellatiove, vyzdvihl unikátnost opakujícího se glyptického motivu dynastického nástupnictví (ruka syna na klíně rodiče). Prof. Charvát ve svém posudku upozornil, že „[s] tejnou tendencí vykazují výtvarné památky raně dynastické Lagaše“. V knižním vydání autor prof. Charvátovi za upozornění na tuto „analogii“ děkuje a s ní spojenou studii přebírá do své bibliografie, nicméně vypočítává odlišnosti, aby jedinečnost urkešského „programu“ zachránil (s. 101-104). Podle mého názoru neúspěšně. Oproti jeho tvrzení je lagašské královské dítě náležitě specifikované a motivy jsou primárně politické, nikoli ekonomické.

Přes řadu výtek budiž zdůrazněno, co již bylo řečeno úvodem. Práce dělá univerzitní řadě čest po stránce formální a autor zasluží pochvalu za odvahu a *Sitzfleisch*, s nimiž se do boje s unikátním materiálem pustil.

PAVEL ČECH

**Martin Fárek – Dunkin  
Jalki – Sufiya Pathan –  
Prakash Shah (eds.),  
Western Foundations of the  
Caste System,**

**London: Palgrave Macmillan  
2017, xi + 274 p.**

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For nearly two hundred years, the caste system in India has been the subject of intensive academic study. *Western Foundations of the Caste System* claims to represent a different approach in Indian studies and its theme has, according to one of the editors,

created a tense atmosphere in many conference halls. The main thrust of the book is a rethinking of the study of caste by means of a controversial argument which claims that the dominant conceptualisation of the caste system has its roots in the Western Christian experience of India and therefore, according to the authors, the phenomenon of the caste system in Indian society does not exist. Since such a general claim can easily be misunderstood, the authors devote a considerable amount of space to clarifying their argument and its background connected to the research of S. N. Balagangadhara.

The theoretical lens of caste has shaped the study of India and its culture, society, law, and politics for centuries. Whether academic researchers hail from India or abroad, the system (or systems) of castes is a unifying component used to understand the structure of Indian society in most writings. The editors of *Western Foundations of the Caste System* claim that this lineage of scholarly interest has been built on unstable foundations. They raise a number of questions challenging the nature of caste classification (“Introduction: Caste Studies and the Apocryphal Elephant”). Firstly, they point to the absence of consensus on the exceptionality of the caste system in other societies and the lack of attention paid to questions about its origins, propagation, social hierarchy, and fundamental properties, and the social conflict to which it is related. Secondly, this lack of scholarly consensus and the large number of unanswered questions lead the editors to the conclusion that the concept of multiple castes and one system binding them together is a construct which does not reflect reality. Finally, the authors create the theory that this construct emerges from Western Christianity, mirroring a Western understanding of Indian society. In other words, the caste system appears to the authors only as a mix of unrelated social phenomena which have nothing in common and reflect European history and thinking rather than the social reality in India. However, the book does not offer any concrete suggestions about how this reality actually appears. It only raises more questions (than provides answers), as the editors admit.

The book is divided into seven chapters containing essays by authors linked to the Department of the Comparative Sciences of Culture in Ghent. All chapters are strongly influenced by the works and research programme of S. N. Balagangadhara; therefore, their basis reflects his opinions and attitudes (contained in, for example, S. N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness": Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion*, Leiden: Brill 1994). The introduction part of the book (p. 1-30) contains a polemic with contemporary authors of theories about the caste system's origin and characteristics. According to the editors (p. 9-10), several leading scholars of caste, such as Declan Quigley, Susan Bayly, and Sumit Guha, have failed to answer an important question: how is the social categorisation in India different from any other categorisation in the world based on birth? For, if India's case is not an exceptional one, why do we not refer to the caste system in Europe during the Middle Ages? And when scholars like Sumit Guha refer to the similarity of the categorisation in India to that in other human societies, why do they not address the question of why colonial officials failed to recognize the caste system at home? Unfortunately, even in their polemic with other authors, the editors do not offer any answers from their own perspective to the multiple questions they raise.

The first chapter of the book ("Caste-Based Reservation and Social Justice in India") provides Balagangadhara's view on the caste-based reservation system of places in institutions protected by the Indian constitution and his analysis of the use of the term "social justice" to justify this reservation system. He draws primarily on data from the Constituent Assembly Debates from 1949 to 1950. Balagangadhara implies that arguments demanding caste-based reservation are not based on any moral grounds and that anyone using the term "social justice" normatively to ethically defend caste-based reservation is either a Catholic or an unfair, immoral, and unjust person (p. 53). However, Balagangadhara's final arguments are more unsupported allegations than reasoned arguments. Balagangadhara's statement that he "presup-

pose[s] an intelligent audience with some moral and intellectual integrity" (p. 33) does little to foster a positive impression of the chapter. He also disregards the fact that the use of the term "social justice" is not necessarily motivated by bad political intentions or by a Christian agenda, and overlooks another motivation for using this term. The original meaning of the term changed in time into a general call for a social reform and as such could be used in the Indian constitution with intention to describe a need for a change of the social situation of minorities in India. The argument for such a claim can be found in one of Balagangadhara's citations of Leo Shields (1941, p. 6): the term "social justice" was used between 1910 and 1930 in a popular and vague way (p. 49).

Other chapters deal with similarly controversial topics. The chapter by Jalki and Pathan ("Are There Caste Atrocities in India? What the Data Can and Cannot Tell Us") presents statistical data on caste atrocities and asserts that lower caste people do not face greater violence than other groups in Indian society. However, the authors compare statistical data on crimes against SCs (*Scheduled Castes*) with the rest of society, not with other specific groups. Their interpretation therefore misrepresents the situation. They mostly refer to NCRB (the National Crime Records Bureau) annual crime reports and statistics based on their dataset. From this dataset, the authors conclude that atrocities towards SCs as a population group are minor and that the evidence for the caste atrocities based on qualitative research ("collection of anecdotes" as they call it) is not generalizable (p. 72). Such a statement testifies to their misunderstanding of modes of generalization in the qualitative research. In this kind of research, general knowledge is not based on population statistics but on a systematic analysis of a specific problem. Qualitative analyses use numerous techniques of falsification.

In the chapter "Were *Shramana* and *Bhakti* Movements against the Caste System?" (p. 127-172), Martin Fárek presents an alternative explanation for early Buddhist and *bhakti* anti-caste movements, arguing that there is insufficient evidence for claims

# Religionistické učební texty vydané na Filozofické fakultě Masarykovy univerzity

V rámci projektu „Filozofická fakulta jako pracoviště excelentního vzdělávání: Komplexní inovace studijních oborů a programů na FF MU s ohledem na požadavky znalostní ekonomiky“ (FIFA), financovaného Operačním programem Vzdělávání pro konkurenceschopnost, vyšly tyto učební texty:

- *Kol., Konec světa*
- *Kol., Náboženství světa I: Západ*
- *Kol., Náboženství světa II: Východ*
- *Luboš Bělka, Buddha a jeho zobrazování*
- *Luboš Bělka, Mandala a dějiny: Bidija D. Dandaron a burjatský buddhismus*
- *Daniel Berounský, Archaická tibetská literatura (7.-10. století)*
- *Daniel Berounský, Tibetské představy o zaslávě*
- *Aleš Chalupa, Gnosticismus*
- *Miloš Mendel, Islám jako nepřítel? Eseje a poznámky k dějinám a současnosti islámu*
- *Dalibor Papoušek, Počátky křesťanství*
- *Pavel Šindelář, Etnografie Číny*
- *David Václavík, Proměny americké religiozity*
- *David Václavík, Religionistická typologie a taxonomie*



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about Buddha's rejection of brahmanas and *varna-dharma*. Unfortunately, the data provided in the text do not contain deep analyses of historical sources in the original language. Consequently, the argument appears more or less as a secondary literature analysis. Fárezek also posits a hypothesis concerning European understandings of Indian society. For example, the Portuguese confused a sporadic ban on inter-group marriages for a general religious endogamy in Indian society due to their Christian ideas and experience with the practice of endogamy in Europe. However, the author does not take into account precolonial Chinese or Muslim reports such as those by Suan Cang and Al-Biruni, who in their works explicitly mention Indian endogamy and systems of castes. According to Fárezek, the discussion about castes and *varna* is still limited by Christian theological thinking and it is therefore necessary to create a new framework based on a traditional Indian understanding of society in terms of *varna* and *jati*. Such a critique of using ethical concepts in research – in this case, by arguing that Indian culture can be understood only by emic concepts – leads to an understanding of Indian culture as *sui generis*. It raises a question, whether the author holds a view that social reality in India is exclusive and non-reducible. At the end of the book, the editors question even the position of *jatis* as a part of the social system in India as well as the use of the term “social system” (p. 254). However, this approach makes impossible any other generalizations and simplifications attempted by scientists to understand general concepts in the society and therefore, questions the basis of science itself. In general, all the chapters refer to specific issues connected to the caste system and provide statements challenging the accepted view in the field of caste studies. They call for an end to the study of caste and the caste system and express the need for a domestic Indian framework without Christian/Western influences. Although the authors do not explicitly identify with any ideology, their text makes the impression of authors' leaning towards *Hindutva* thinking.

One can raise many objections against the argument that the caste system in India

does not exist, but I would like to mention one in particular. According to the editors (“Afterword”, p. 253-261), the caste system is constructed by the West as a colonialist description, has no roots in Indian society, and, in this sense, is a collective illusion, which should be scientifically explained and falsified. But if so, how is it possible that the concept of the caste system is used *en masse* by Indians to describe their everyday reality? The editors compare them to people playing the Pokemon Go game, which modifies the player's perception of reality. They have a colonial consciousness and have become strangers to themselves. However, for many people, the caste system is very real in their experience. Claiming that the caste system does not exist regardless of people who (believe they) face it on a daily basis and to consider their perceptions as false and distorted is at least disrespectful and surprisingly intransigent. The way in which the editors use the category of caste implies a misunderstanding of the basis of anthropology. The category of caste is an anthropological concept and, as such, represents rather a notional map than a real object. This perspective is connected to another of the editors' arguments about the need for consensus (p. 11). They compare the concept of the caste system to a liquid found on Mars. Until we are sure that the liquid is water (the caste system) we must test it and the scientific community will require a crucial test and consensus about the nature of the liquid. I find this comparison unsuitable. Anthropologists do not test the field for known elements with an exact structure, and the absence of a general consensus does not imply the nonexistence of phenomena; it is quite common in every society and culture.

Although I personally disagree with some of the book's arguments and conclusions, many of the questions raised by the editors highlight a notional “grey zone” within caste studies. Such questions reveal inconsistencies and blind spots in existing theories of the caste system and the editors clearly have a sincere interest in pushing their approach forward. Unfortunately, the approach employed by the editors has more of an ideological basis than a scientific one. While reading this book one cannot escape



the feeling that there exists a struggle against a common enemy or conspiracy in the study of caste which intentionally or unintentionally overlooks or hides the truth. However, this ultimately concerns only a few essays in the book. The book has the potential to provoke serious debate about the nature of the caste system but instead leaves little common ground for scholars with different opinions by evaluating their intentions as “dishonest”, “deceitful”, “immoral”, etc. (p. 53).

*Western Foundations of the Caste System* introduces a project studying the impact

of orientalist discourse on the foundation of the caste system in India. In general, the book will be of interest to scholars and students of caste studies, India studies, anthropology and sociology. Its ambitious goal to encourage further research and establish a new field based on current knowledge charts a new trajectory for caste studies. However, it also undermines this goal by presenting incomplete analyses and ignoring blind spots in its theoretical foundation.

TEREZA MENŠÍKOVÁ