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Book Review: "Indian Critiques of Gandhi"

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sufficiently recognized by its opponents, namely that the effort to re-examine the Aryan Migrationist argument is also an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist project insofar as it entails a challenge to versions of early Indian history scripted by India's former colonial masters.

This is, after all, also a book about the politics of scholarship. From the British administrators' use of theories about the connection between Sanskrit and European classical languages to legitimate colonial rule to the use of evidence of an Indo-European homeland in South Asia by Hindutva ideologues to bolster a sense of Hindu superiority, Bryant illuminates how narratives about the past are employed to promote particular political agendas. And while such an endeavor is often undertaken in order to promote one agenda or undermine another, Bryant avoids this with his scrupulous fairness to all sides of the

debate. Notably, he goes to great lengths to advocate against what he calls Indological McCarthyism - the knee-jerk branding of anyone who opposes the theory of Aryan Migration as a communal bigot. In the process, he manages to bring a breath of fresh air into the sometimes fetid chat-room of contemporary academia. Edwin Bryant's lucid and thorough re-examination of the question of the origins of Vedic culture is a must read for any teacher who begins his or her courses on Indian religions with a discussion of the Indus Valley Civilization and the Vedas. It is an exemplar of one of the core values of critical scholarship: the willingness to question one's own cherished assumptions in the face of points of view very different from one's own.

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Indian Critiques of Gandhi. Harold Coward, ed. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003, 287 pp.

MANY in recent years have been dismayed at the seemingly radical eclipse of Gandhian ideals in India and the extraordinary success of ideologies and movements militantly anti-Gandhian in method and outlook. Witness, among other indicators, the Pokaran II nuclear tests (1998) and the recent (February 2003) installation in the Central Hall of India's Parliament of a portrait of "freedom fighter" V. D. Sarvarkar, virulent critic of Gandhi and master theoretician of Hindu communalism.

Given such developments, Harold Coward's edited volume *Indian Critiques of Gandhi* is timely and of great interest. The book opens with an introduction by Coward outlining Gandhi's involvement with the independence movement and its major figures during 1920-40. It is a valuable overview, especially for students or general readers whose familiarity with the story stems from popular accounts of the

Mahatma's life (or Attenborough's *Gandhi*), from which one would scarcely gather that he had opponents with serious objections to his moral/religious vision and his methods. Part one of the volume examines Gandhi's interactions with major figures in the Indian independence movement, including chapters on Nehru (Robert D. Baird), Ambedkar (Harold Coward), Besant (Joy Dixon), Aurobindo (Robert N. Minor), and Tagore (T. S. Rukmani). The chapters in part two focus on Gandhi's relations with groups, covering the Hindu Mahasabha (Ronald Neufeldt), Christians in India (Timothy Gorringer), Sikhs (Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh), Muslims (Roland E. Miller), and the "Hindi-Urdu question" (Daud Rabhar), which was to be one of the factors leading to partition in 1947. (It is rarely possible to attain complete coverage in a volume like this; the editor apologizes for having no chapters on players such as Subhas Chandra

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Bose and the Indian Marxists.) A conclusion by Julius Lipner reviews the various critiques, emphasizing the light they throw on Gandhi's conception of nonviolence. There is also a useful appendix by Hussein Keshani giving, in table form, a chronology of the developments considered in the volume.

Gandhi was embedded in, and frequently at the center of, a complex and multifaceted political and religious domain. The authors show how the impossibility of him satisfying myriad conflicting demands from various constituencies was exacerbated by certain forms of narrowness, even blindness, in his make-up, often connected to his religiosity. First, the authors remind us that there were few other Indian leaders who could accept his valorization of nonviolence as an absolute moral principle. Nehru, the Muslims, the Sikhs, Aurobindo, all recognized the utility of Gandhian *satyagraha* in certain circumstances, and were willing to work with Gandhi and even accept his leadership on that basis, but they rejected the notion that nonviolence was the only effective, morally defensible option. Aurobindo, as Minor writes, saw Gandhi's emphasis on nonviolence as the product of a limited, narrowly moralist view of reality, not truly representative of Hindu tradition. He regarded Gandhi's valorization of voluntary suffering in particular as an import from Christianity. Indian Christians, on their side, were aware of Gandhi's attempt to apply the Sermon on the Mount to politics, and the inevitable comparisons of Gandhi with Christ. Some of them were discomfited by this, Gorringer reminds us, but others – C. F. Andrews most famously – embraced such potentials. Muslims, of course, found in Muhammad's life compelling examples of the legitimate use of violence in the cause of justice. Miller argues that Gandhi "realized that the basic Muslim view of violence differed from his own" (203) and took a utilitarian approach toward enlisting them in his cause. Neufeldt shows that Sarvarkar, the Hindu nationalist, was at complete

loggerheads with Gandhi on the question of nonviolence as well as others, seeing *ahimsa* as a Buddhist and Jain mistake that had debilitated Hindu India and assumed "rabid," even "monomaniacal" proportions in Gandhi.

Also a concern of Gandhi's contemporaries was his deliberate, more general infusion of politics with religious symbolism and sentiment. Secularists such as Nehru, Baird reminds us, were wary of the mixture of religion – whether Hindu or Muslim – with politics, and worried about the forces that might thereby be unleashed. Orthodox and right-wing Hindus, alarmed by Gandhi's sympathy for Untouchables and Muslims, suspected that the Mahatma was not Hindu enough. For Muslims, the nationalist movement, under Gandhi's leadership, was too heavily infused with Hindu symbolism to be trusted. Miller gives an effective account of this problem, full of portent for the future of the subcontinent. The relation between the Sikhs and the future Indian nation was, Singh argues, seriously damaged by Gandhi's overbearing Hindu inclusivism, which precluded validation, acknowledgment, or even recognition of their newly awakened identity as a distinct community, thereby leading to frustration and feelings of betrayal. Indeed, Singh and others among the authors point to an unconscious majoritarian mind-set in Gandhi that prevented him from truly hearing, let alone understanding, the real concerns of Sikhs, Muslims, Untouchables, and others. As Coward points out, Ambedkar and other players were dismayed, despite Gandhi's campaign for the abolition of untouchability, at his support of a supposedly purified, non-hierarchical version of the four-caste system and his defense of Hindu solidarity by his refusal to countenance the creation of a separate electorate for Untouchables. Tagore, C. F. Andrews, and others were likewise disturbed by Gandhi's moralist, life-denying asceticism and his dictatorial attempts to impose his way of life on others.

Tagore and Andrews also, as internationalists, felt that Gandhi was sometimes too narrowly nationalist in orientation, citing especially the boycott of British cloth. Besant was opposed outright to Gandhi's desire for complete independence from the British, as well as his method of confrontation through noncooperation. For Sarvarkar, on the other hand, Gandhi was not nationalist enough, being a traitor to Sarvarkar's chauvinist vision of a Hindu nation. Would-be allies across the spectrum were repeatedly disturbed by Gandhi's authoritarian unilateralism in decision-making, consultation being subordinated to the authority of the Mahatma's "inner voice." Rukmani (113) cites Tagore's description of Gandhi as one "enamoured of his own doctrines, which is a dangerous form of egotism that even great people suffer from at times." The authors document how Gandhi's relations with Muslims and Sikhs were undermined by sudden changes of course and withdrawals of support, without warning or consultation, which caused them to regard him as an unreliable – and perhaps untrustworthy – ally.

Of course, Gandhi's critics were not always of one mind in respect of the Mahatma. Nehru's frequent exasperation with him, for example, was encompassed in a relationship of friendship and respect. Christians, Muslims, and other communities

were likewise not of one mind on Gandhi. A most valuable feature of this volume is its articulation of the rich complexity of this saint cum politician's conflicted historical relationships.

I am impressed by the consistent quality of the pieces in this volume. There is no chapter here that is weak. The editor has done an admirable job of selecting fine contributors, and keeping them all on theme with a consistent approach. If I would have any criticism, it would be that the contributors and the editor have confined themselves too strictly within the stipulated historical period. With the conflicts described in this volume still working themselves out so momentously in contemporary South Asia, as the contributors do in fact hint, one might have expected some kind of forward-looking analysis of the connections between then and now, if only briefly, perhaps in the conclusion. The editor might argue that this is the job of some other book; if so it is a work urgently needed. Meanwhile, the volume remains a significant contribution, highly recommended for students and general readers as well as specialists.

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Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism.
Harold Coward. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001, x + 115 pp.

THE author, known to scholars worldwide for his expertise in Hindu and other traditions, examines Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* not only in relation to Bhartrhari's (c. 500 CE) philosophy of language and theology of revelation, but also in regard to the influence the *Sutras* have exerted on modern Western

psychology, especially on Freud, Jung and Transpersonalists such as Washburn, Tart, and Ornstein. Whether the Western psychologists just named have been influenced to some degree by Patanjali's Yoga or rejected it outright, Coward notes that they are unified in their specifically