

**Rehana Ebr.-Valley.** *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa.* Social Identities South Africa Series. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001. 214 pp. R125, paper, ISBN 978-0-7957-0135-1.



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"The weight...[that] ethnic difference has had under apartheid," says Rehana Eb.-Valley, "acted as a deterrent to progressive writers against using analysis in social and political inquiry" (pp. 84-85). This book sets out to correct that trend and seeks to provide the nature and extent of ethnic differentiation among South Africa's Indians. This kind of differentiation prevailed right from the start when the Indians came as immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first part of the book outlines scholarly trends that focused on racial and ethnic differentiation among South Africans. The work of social anthropologists like A. R. Radcliff-Brown and N. J. Warmelo helped to shape the apartheid ideology. Reference to the historiographical orientations of the works on Indians was appropriate. But it is not clear why the author thought it necessary to detail apartheid's ideological apparatus which is left unconnected to the main part of the book on religion, caste and language as a basis of ethnic differentiation among the Indians.

Jat (caste), atak (clan or lineage), gam (town or village) were involved in the way in which ex-

tended families operated to create smallest fraternal component, namely jati (sub-caste). These categorizations are more appropriate for the Hindu and Muslim immigrants who came from regions like Gujarat and Kathiawad and about whom the author is well informed. We are not given such details about the Bhojpuri-speaking immigrants generally referred to as "Culcuttias," and the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking South Indians who were called "Madrassis." This is a weak part of the book. In their case, the author relies upon caste categories that appeared on indentured ships' lists. She is correct in saying that the caste system has retained many of its early features, but she is unable to say how it has changed for all the groups, especially those with indentured ancestry.

The author then proceeds to divide the Indians into two main groups, namely Hindus and Muslims. For the Hindus, regardless of their regional or linguistic heritage, she concludes, "The predominance of religion as an identity marker notwithstanding, there are vestiges of the caste system still operating among the Hindus community" (p. 150). This is likely true, but she provides

little empirical evidence to support her claim. As for the Muslims, caste does not exist but caste-like structures do. The author plausibly suggests that Muslim converts retained a "Hindu collective memory." She points to a whole range of cultural and/or religious practices among Hindus and Muslims that are similar. This should have been explored further, among other things, in the practices of Sufi Muslims who annually participate in the popular Mohurram festival that has elements of Hindu processional worship. Indeed, there is likely a substantial body of literature on Muslims in India who continue to retain vestiges of Hindu beliefs and practices, and she might have strengthened her case by drawing upon it. In any event, while many Hindus and Muslims identify themselves as "South Africans" and say that religion is not a significant factor in how they see themselves, as her small survey showed, there are layers of identity that suggest that ethnicity remains a significant factor.

This book does point to the kind of research that should be undertaken in the future. If, as the author says, "Indians started the reconstruction of their relational networks from value internalised in India" (p. 140), the answer is to be found in the way in which the Indian immigrants began to introduce transnational values especially in the thirty years before 1913 when further immigration was restricted, and in tracking their developments through the segregation and apartheid years. The book needs more empirical data and greater historical depth if it is to gain a true measure of ethnic transformations among the Indians in South Africa.

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