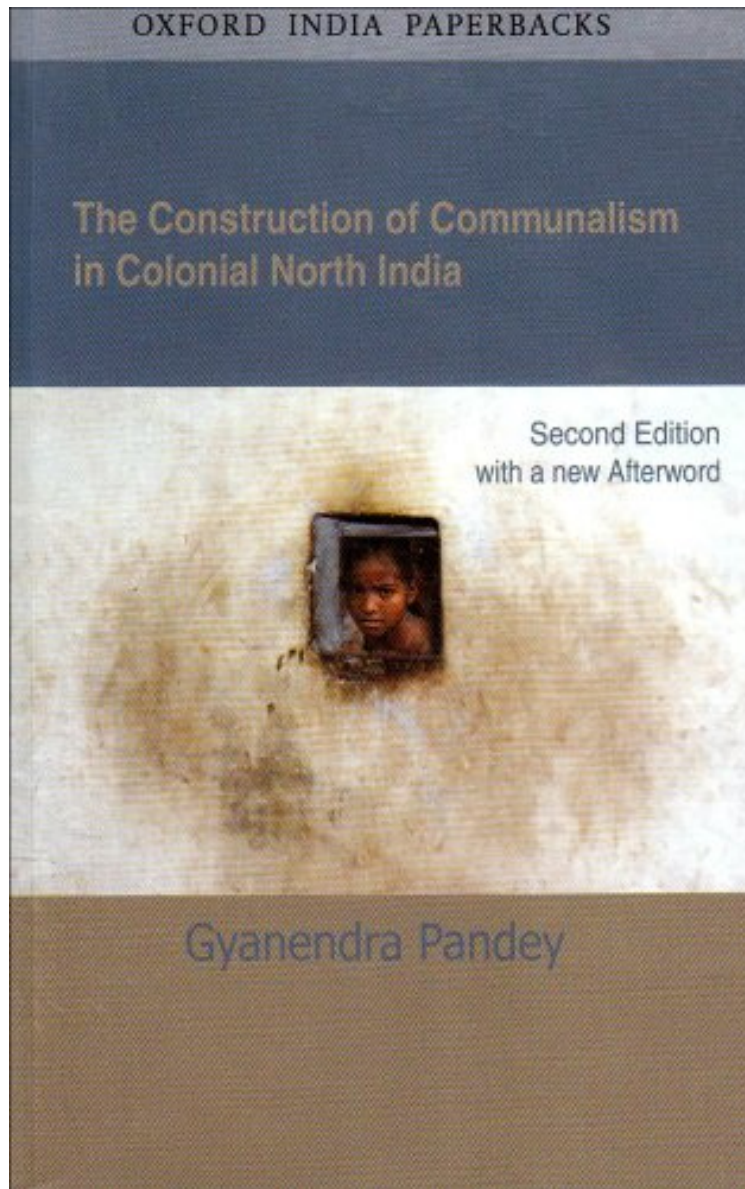


The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India

Gyanendra Pandey

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Gyanendra Pandey : The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Power problematizedBy A CustomerIn this monograph, Pandey seeks to deconstruct the discourse on communalism from a variety of approaches, by examining urban and rural class

relations, caste-uplift movements, mobilization in popular movements, and the colonial and nationalist discourses on the subaltern (Pandey 1990, 5). The geographical parameters of "The Construction of Communalism" are the Bhojpuri-speaking region of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, while its temporal scope, from the early nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, is delimited by the timeframe in which the phenomenon of communalism came into its own. As the Subalternist tide had shifted to take on as its opponent the Enlightenment, its rationality, the State, and so forth, by the time of its publication, Pandey privileges not the subaltern, but the resistant 'community' viewed as a countervailing force that constituted 'Indian society beyond the confines of the state [and] survived and demanded recognition as a dynamic, deliberative and far from insignificant force in colonial India' (Pandey 1990, 109). In "The Construction of Communalism," Pandey argues that rather than being the eternal 'pathological condition' of Indian society that communalism was understood as in colonial and nationalist discourse, it is 'another characteristic and paradoxical product of the age of Reason (and of Capital) which also gave us [Indians] colonialism and nationalism' (Pandey 1990, 5). More specifically, he identifies four historical forces that gave rise to the politics of communalism over the course of the nineteenth century: a colonial governmentality (Foucault's term) that sought to classify and fix caste and religious identities onto a relatively diffuse social order; the drive for upward social mobility of lower castes (both Hindu Sanskritization and Muslim Ashrafization) that found recognition in census categories; the simultaneous initiative of religious elites to purify religious life (both ritual and practical); and the economic and demographic dislocations wrought by colonial capitalism (Pandey 1990, 71-93). While difficult to grasp as a coherent monograph because it does not present a running narrative (this was out of the question by the time it was published), "The Construction of Communalism" presents what is, arguably, the most sophisticated framework of power relations between colonial government and subaltern community in Subalternist historiography. Not only does the number of pistons powering the engine of history multiply, but the number of engines, and thus, histories, proliferates as well: Up to the late nineteenth century, the agency of the community in enacting political movements was delimited by material circumstances and an autonomous consciousness. Virtually independent from this process, colonial discourse, for which political action was a law-and-order problem, interpreted this through an increasingly narrow lens of communalism. This discourse informed the 'colonial sociology' of the census. Meanwhile, communities such as the Julahas (predominantly Muslim weavers) of Mubarakpur resisted, both domination internal to Indian society and downward mobility instigated by the flooding of Indian markets by British textiles, through inventing their own genealogies, and used these in tandem with the niches colonial censusing was opening and fixing (Pandey 1990, 23-157). Thus, in accordance with Foucault and Said, an ever-intrusive Enlightenment power-knowledge permeated the very political pulse of subaltern groups. Power, in this interpretation, is no longer repressive, but productive. What rankles here as a non sequitur, therefore, is the valorization of the community as an (impermeable?) indigenous site of resistance to colonial power-knowledge for Pandey demonstrates the inverse quite effectively. Pandey's historical construct reveals a nuanced, shifting and interpenetrating complex of agency, structural limitations, and consciousness, all set against the dynamics of capitalist advance and ensuing socio-economic dislocation. It is important to note that attention is devoted to power where it coheres in political action and institutions of the state in what Foucault calls its 'terminal forms', while its dissipated omnipresence is also recognized. And, contrary to the Foucauldian dicta enumerated in "The History of Sexuality", power *is* acquired, held, maintained and exercised in the colonial construction of communalism in North India and subaltern interaction therewith. Pandey also makes good headway in "The Construction of Communalism" with the problem of sources faced by Subalternist historiography by excavating the jewels of "Waqaat-o-Hadesat" (a historical manuscript penned in Urdu in the 1880s by one Ali Hasan) and a weaver's 'diary'. He interprets them by sifting the biases and juxtaposing them in tabular form against official records to reveal functions of communal and colonial historical memories. Similarly, in his chapter on mobilization, he analyzes changes in patias, or circular letters, between the 1880s and 1910s, used for enlisting the support of the Hindu community in Cow-Protection campaigns. This is historical scholarship at its finest. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Poorly researched By Customer I found this to be poorly researched. What is worse, everything is tailored to fit preconceived beliefs. Read the works of Meenakshi Jain, K.S. Lal and Sita Ram Goel for a better understanding and more objective view.

This new edition containing a preface and afterword, is a part of a larger exercise aimed at understanding the construction of Indian society, and politics as a whole in recent times by challenging the conventional analysis of communalism and providing alternative theoretical cues to grasp its nature and dynamics.

About the Author Gyanendra Pandey is Asa Griggs Candler Professor of History at Emory University in Atlanta, USA.