

Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh's Diary: a Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India. (Book Review)
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Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh's Diary: A Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India, edited and commentary by Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph with Mohan Singh Kanota. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2002. v, 633 pp. \$40.00 US (cloth).

S.H. Rudolph and L.I. Rudolph with M.S. Kanota present the "bound" labour of some twenty-eight years research, with their commentary and editing of the diary of Amar Singh. Amar Singh was a Rajput nobleman and officer in the Jodhpur Lancers, a part of the British Indian Army. He kept an English-language diary of eighty-nine volumes for forty-four years, beginning at the age of twenty in March 1898 till his death in November 1942. The editors present Singh's writings to 1905. Reversing the Gaze is an attempt to appreciate as much as chronicle the life of an Indian. The title of the book is inspired, as the reader is presented with an Indian's perceptions of life under the Raj. The work is a significant contribution in the ethnography of colonial self-identity. The book joins a growing list of academic commentary in history and literature that have revived interest in non-Western autobiography and narratives. The book also presents a more specialized focus on Rajput society, which scholars that both avoid or adhere to a Rajput-centric understanding of Rajasthani history and society will appreciate.

Instead of the standard life-chronology of a diary, the editors have divided the book into an introduction and six thematic phases of Singh's life. Part I details early years and the beginnings of the diarist. Amar Singh was born in 1878, the son of Narain Singh of Kanota. At the age of ten, Singh was sent by his father to live at the Jodhpur court under the care of Sir Pratap Singh, to be apprenticed in the arts of the Rajput noble. Sir Pratap Singh was the prime minister of Jodhpur, an excellent polo player, and inventor of the Jodhpur breaches. The "Memorandum Book" begins with the first entry on March 28, 1898 and becomes a "diary" in September under the urging of Amar Singh's metaji or teacher

Ram Nathji to improve his English. In fact, the diary transcends being an amusement or didactic exercise for a youth and becomes a passion, a best friend and companion for Singh (p. 51). Singh emerges not only a prolific writer but also a voracious reader of many works from Plutarch's Lives to the Houghunter's Annual. Indeed, his dedication to writing and reading leads him to characterize other pursuits as idle and monotonous. Singh's idle pursuits, at the same time, provide the material for his written observations of Indian and British cultures. Much time is spent at various sports including goat- and pig-sticking, but principally polo.

The Rudolphs underscore their talents as ethnographers in the accounts of the importance of the diary and its central presence in Amar Singh's life. The Rudolphs deem the diary "a self-as-other' ethnography" that reveals the development of life around the author as much as being a private journal (p. 20). The central premise of the book is that Singh's "liminality" or borderline and permeable position--living and serving in British and Indian cultures, respectively--allows him to critique both cultures and question his place within them. As the chapters unfold, it is revealed how much Singh is a hybrid or layered identity that includes Edwardian officer, "martial" Rajput, and gentleman scholar. The Rudolphs seek to overturn the bias in older ethnography that deemed non-Europeans as the classical "Other," different from Westerners, incapable of writing ethnography, and unable to self-understand and objectively comment on one's society. The Rudolphs' argument is compelling, and while Singh did not appreciate his diary as ethnography, he clearly broke from Rajput custom that centred on bardic forms or charan. The novelty of the experience and the constantly-growing appreciation of his talents in large measure motivated Singh. Singh dispels older ethnographic stereotypes while essentially adopting Western conventions.

Specifically, Singh's responses were conditioned by two related structures, his place in the British Indian Army and his status as a Rajput. The Indian soldier was an essential support of the Raj and Empire worldwide. Post-1858, the British had redesigned the Indian army to secure the Raj. A central aspect of this involved the introduction of the Martial Race Theory. Various Indian communities were deemed "martial races" and characterized with laudable qualities such as manliness and bravery according to their loyalty and service to the

British. The Rajputs were a martial race. The Imperial Cadet Corps (ICC) and the Jodhpur Lancers, which Singh was a member of, emerged as important parts of the army. Parts II and IV detail Singh's army career in China and the Empire respectively. The contradictions of the martial race idea and the ambiguities of British-Indian interactions are exposed. Firstly, Singh's dedication to his writing squarely contradicts the notion that martial races deprecated erudition over warfare. Moreover, the re-organization of the army had not integrated British and Indian into a cohesive social unit. Singh's observations make clear that authority and social standing within the army were perceived differently by the two cultures (pp. 112, 292). Racial discrimination was also acutely felt by the Indian soldier. The Lancers' duty took them to China during the Boxer Rebellion of 1901 and, as the Indian Land Forces (ILF), to Iraq and the fields of France during the First World War. While in China in July 1901, Singh notes the discrimination towards Indians by French and British soldiers; the former refer to Indians as "coolies" and the latter refuse to salute them (pp. 159-60). In 1921, the editors note how Singh's army career comes to an inglorious end, as he is forced to retire at the rank of major due to the racial discrimination of his commanding officer (p. 18).

The re-organization of the Indian army post- 1858 had been one aspect of the British design to foster collaboration. The British also confirmed princely rights and privileges in exchange for the recognition of British paramountcy in the two-fifths of British India known as Princely India. In the nineteenth century, Princely India became another British construction. Rajput social and political relations were reconstituted under colonialism, as minor clans and lineages became Rajput princely dynasties, and Rajputs adapted to the ideologies of the colonial state. Parts V and VI detail the private and public (courtly) spheres of Princely India respectively. The private sphere became a significant arena within which authority and rank were visibly expressed. Singh details the complex society of the haveli (mansion). This is itself a breach of patriarchal authority and accomplished only through the medium of the private journal. Private and public are fluid categories, and "identity and conduct are subject to ever-present eyes, ears, and admonitions of others" (p. 308). In Part III, Singh had married in a traditional Hindu ceremony, wearing his long leather military boots. Upon his marriage, Singh's wife moved

into his family's house at Jaipur in Rajput custom. In fact, it is Singh who is incorporated into the family circle following a life largely among comrades-in-arms. Singh's perceptions of public and private realms approximate the modern-day ideas of public and private life. Characteristically, Singh continues the fine balance between East and West, engaging in the "diplomacy of everyday life." Singh accepts his grandfather and Rajput patriarchal authority as legitimate, yet ambivalently asks, "the will of parents will be obeyed but at what cost?" (p. 397). Singh also details the subtle battle for power waged between Sir Pratap Singh, the prime minister of Jodhpur, and Maharaja Sardar Singh. The latter does not measure up to Sir Pratap or the Raj's standards of an Indian prince due to his dissolute private life. Amar Singh traverses a delicate balance between both factions at court. Singh laments the decline of Rajput society under the maharaja (p. 428). Ultimately, the maharaja's authority is circumscribed by the British until he dies in 1911 and Sir Pratap assumes the role of regent to the twelve-year-old Sumer Singh.

Family and court life have the sense of being onerous duties for Singh. It is in the army that Singh is happiest. In 1905, at the conclusion of his term in the ICC, Singh notes his feelings, which might well encapsulate the reader's impression of the diary: "I learned a lot. When I joined I thought I knew all. Now I think I am just beginning to learn" (p. 303). *Reversing the Gaze* is largely a collection of thought-vignettes and dioramas presented through the editors' insights. The work is intended for researchers and academics of anthropology and the military and cultural history of South Asia, who will find the material rich for analysis and comparison; hence, the overuse of some anthropological jargon, principally the word "liminality." The thematic structure is appealing, though it could be organized further along private and public worlds, whereby Parts I, III, and IV follow one another and the other sections are similarly consolidated. The editors' ability to present a lucid redaction of the main points of Amar Singh's voluminous diaries is to their credit. Furthermore, many of the vignettes anticipate the present-day situation where "hybrid" personalities have given way to modern multicultural identities.

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