

or even double reading will enable the newcomer to get a good overview of the Subaltern School's projects. The sensible compilation demonstrates why Said's *Orientalism* and the *Subaltern Studies*' writings had and still have a far-reaching influence on all kinds of post-colonial historiography. Self-perception and self-awareness of the colonised is being reshaped according to this basic shift in the parameters of the humanities as testified in Ludden's *Reading Subaltern Studies*.

Reprinting the Indian edition, which came out with Permanent Black in Delhi in 2001, was a worthwhile undertaking professionally executed by Anthem Press. Without doubt, the book is a must for every academic institution as well as for anyone interested in South Asia's post-colonial history and historiography. Furthermore, the book will also be useful to historians of any traditional liberal historiography which, for some unknown reason, still dominates the "historic guild" in most countries of the post-colonial, globalizing world. Writing history without Said's impetus and the Subaltern School's impact is hardly possible when "Orientalism" and "Subalternity" have become an integrative part and an internalised moment of a critical and responsible reappraisal of history.

Michael Mann

NANDINI GOOPTU, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India*. (Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society 8). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. XXIII, 464 pages, £ 55.00. ISBN 0-521-44366-0

In the late 1930s, a word went the rounds in the poor neighbourhoods of the North Indian town of Kanpur: *netashahi*, 'the reign of leaders'. The Congress government of the United Provinces, so this term of political abuse suggested, was a government of self-interested leaders and not of the people. The historiography of the interwar period is, to a large extent, still *netashahi* history: The firm leadership of M. K. Gandhi and a few other personalities is celebrated for keeping the 'teeming masses' on the track of non-violent nationalism and setting limits to their propensity to riots and religious strife. Yet a growing number of historians have pointed out for some time now the legitimacy of autonomous 'subaltern' agency, plebeian appropriations of nationalism and the plurality of social movements that contributed to the upsurge of popular politics after World War I.

Gooptu's monograph is a valuable contribution to this debate. Drawing on a considerable corpus of studies on interwar North India, one of its achievements consists in synthesising results of usually unconnected strands of historical research on topics like urbanisation, industrialisation, popular culture and religious movements. Setting out to explore the 'politics of the poor' in the four major towns of the United Provinces (today's state of Uttar Pradesh), the au-

thor's primary material (official records, Hindi pamphlets and journals, some interviews) is more ample for Kanpur than for Allahabad, Benares and Lucknow.

Gooptu argues that the process of 'bazaar industrialisation' after World War I, i.e. the rise of small-scale entrepreneurs and the growing involvement of commercial classes in manufacture, engendered a restructuring of urban society in North India. A heterogeneous class, the 'urban poor' grew spectacularly even in towns without large-scale industries. This development was considered dangerous by both colonial officials and the Indian middle classes on sanitary, political and cultural grounds. The poor became stigmatised as 'dangerous classes' and municipal policy increasingly turned to sanitising, regulating and resettling the wards of the poor and 'reforming' their social behaviour. Such schemes were paternalistic at best and often coercive. Many measures aggravated the material situation of the poor and denied them a respectable place in urban society. According to Gooptu, both material distress and social discrimination contributed to growing class tensions and 'fuelled' new forms of local politics, the politics of the urban poor.

Gooptu emphasizes that bonds of community and cultural practices were remoulded in the light of social experiences made by the various groups of the 'urban poor' and discusses various phenomena of the religious upsurge of the 1920s from this perspective: the success of devotional (*bhakti*) Hinduism among 'untouchables', the creation of public rituals of militant Hinduism by lower castes and the growing attraction of Sufism for poor Muslims. Religious festivals were reinterpreted in ways despised by middle-class Hindus or Muslim *ulema*. Moreover, the theme of dispossession informed popular songs and plays of all segments of the urban poor: an assumed loss of status and power enjoyed in an earlier period due to machinations of high-caste Hindus against 'untouchables', of 'alien rulers' against Hindus or, of Hindu traders and the British against Muslims. The prevalent stigmatisation was thus countered by the assertion that the respective community's poverty was not due to lack of virtue but to historical injustice. The Congress, argues Gooptu, mainly referred to the theme of Hindu deprivation, thereby alienating the Muslim poor.

Another central feature was the martial, even militaristic style of local associations of the poor, namely of the mushrooming volunteer corps of the 1930s. Emulating organisation and drill of the colonial armed forces, they were created for various, often contradictory purposes. This local political infrastructure was successfully used by the Congress during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Yet the volunteer movement also roused fears and the Congress ministry of the late 1930s tried (without much success) to suppress it. Equally ambivalent was the Congress socialists' attitude towards labour. While propagating the spread of trade unions to the bazaars, they attempted to localise conflicts and reserve the wider political arena for issues of nationalism. Gooptu concludes that the Congress leadership's ride on the tiger of 'mass politics' was more hazardous than

most historical accounts suggest, but that the preoccupation with issues of 'deprivation' fell short of an autonomous political agenda of the urban poor.

Written in a pleasant style, material and argument could have been presented more concisely in some parts. This would have left some space for extending the analysis to a more meaningful historical watershed than the beginning of World War II. Following up the developments to the 1950s could have taught us more about the creation of the political space the labouring poor came to inhabit after independence. The book raises many other important questions. Some readers may be provoked by Gooptu's reintroduction of 'class' as a prominent analytical category. It is a timely provocation.

Ravi Ahuja

JOHN A. L. HAMILTON, *War Bush. 81 (West African) Division in Burma 1943–1945*. Norwich: Michael Russell, 2001. 400 pages, illustrations, maps, tables, £ 25.00. ISBN 0-85955-267-5

When Hamilton's book *War Bush. 81 (West African) Division in Burma 1943–1945* appeared in 2001, Southeast Asian historians still hardly acknowledged or talked about the West African involvement in Burma during the last three years of World War II, though the West African divisions played an important role in the struggle against the Japanese, most especially in the capture of Myohaung, the ancient capital of Arakan.

The British colonial possession of Burma was a rich prize for the Japanese – partly on account of its natural resources, partly as a stepping stone westward to India, partly as a buffer against the Chinese in the North and Northeast. The Japanese had reached Burma in December 1941, and had consolidated their position there by the end of 1942. Recapturing the country would take the Allies' 14th Army, which had nearly one million men in its service, three years of desperate fighting. Thirteen divisions were under control of the 14th Army, eight Indian divisions, two West African divisions, two British divisions, and one East African division.

Hamilton's book is dedicated to the 81st (West African) Division of the 14th Army, which was made up of about 23,000 West Africans from Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast, who fought in Burma (officially) as volunteers. Hamilton's research is mainly based on records and personal notes of the British involved in the war in Burma. Some few native African remembrances were investigated, too, but the Burmese view itself is missing completely.

The book starts with an introduction that gives an overview of the historical background to the war in Burma, and describes Japan's threat to the frontier of British India. In the first chapter, Hamilton gives details about the shipping of West African soldiers to India, their training there, and their move to the front