

RAVI AHUJA, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit und das Problem der Arbeit. Eine Studie zur Sozialgeschichte der Stadt Madras und ihres Hinterlandes zwischen 1750 und 1800.* (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, 183). Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999, X, 389 pages, DM 130,-. ISBN 3-515-07499-6

The colonial city has repeatedly been described as a European bridgehead or off-spring imposed on the non-European world. This view is apparently confirmed by the fact that many a colonial city was planned on a European model. Other works of research, however, emphasize the traditional aspects of the colonial city. In this opinion colonialism is nothing more than a corroded layer covering indigenous urban traditions. Such theoretical conceptions may be helpful. However, it has to be taken into account that every single city forms a social sphere of its own, the specific character of which is the result of rivalling interests and interactions. This is the starting point for Ravi Ahuja's doctoral thesis (University of Heidelberg, 1996) on the British endeavour to assert colonial rule and a new polity in Madras and its hinterland during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Ravi Ahuja regards control of the "labouring poor" – so the characterization used by the colonial elite, whereas Ahuja prefers the old German term *Arbeitsleute* (p.66) – as an essential goal of colonial rule. (*Arbeitsleute* must not be conceived as a class, but as a social group highly segregated by occupation and caste spirit!). Without this control colonial power was mere chimera. Therefore it is colonial rule in relation to the social organisation of the "labouring poor" that constitutes the theme of this study and the author, who characterizes the given period as a time of militarization and commercialization, consistently examines the colonial polity against its socio-economic background.

The introductory chapter and the subsequent survey of Madras and its hinterland are followed by a case study of the so-called "boat people", the stevedores of Madras. The English presidency town was a seaport without a port. Thus ships had to cast anchor beyond the violent coastal surf. It was the job of the native stevedores with their traditional landing boats to carry persons and wares across the dangerous surf. Madras could therefore not exist without the stevedores. The English, however, had no success in their attempt to get this lifeblood of the city under their thumb. Dockers and boatowners could easily leave the domain of the East India Company and evade its control. Hence, their working conditions were a permanent matter of discussion. Yet this game was not straightforward. There were native stevedores and boatowners, both indigenous and European merchants, the Governor and, from 1762 onwards, the English port captains. In this game all the players pursued their own interests. The network of changing interests, conflicts and coalitions could be handled, but never controlled. Only with the construction of a jetty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did this situation change.

By discussing the example of the stevedores of Madras Ravi Ahuja succeeds in illustrating the problem of labour with its various aspects in a colonial context. The issue is discussed again in more general terms in the following three chapters. For example, the author examines the spatial mobility of the "labouring poor" in chapter four. Migration and "flight-as-protest" (p. 162) had been traditional weapons of the

native *Arbeitsleute* in fighting for their interests. The "labouring poor" could easily withdraw from colonial claims to power as long as human resources were scarce and in demand by various indigenous and European powers in Madras and its hinterland. Moreover, commercialization and colonial wars enhanced physical mobility. Under these circumstances the establishment of English authority in the hinterland served as an instrument for controlling the labour market. Like the political landscape, labour relations were complex under English rule in the period reviewed (chap. 5). Traditionally the continuum of relations included slavery, various forms of dependent labour and the initial stages of free wage earning. The colonial elite could adapt these labour relations, but it could not change them at the core. Consequently, the free wage earner was not the rule during the fifty years under examination – neither in the city of Madras nor in its hinterland. For the colonial elite this was not even desirable, as is clearly demonstrated by the English policy towards the poor in Madras (chap. 6). This was not characterized by the liberal minded idea of the free wage earner as a partner in a labour agreement, but by traditional conceptions of charity and paternalistic master-and-servant thinking both in jurisdiction and daily life.

Ravi Ahuja shows the complicated interplay of indigenous and colonial conceptions to solve the problem of labour in Madras during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Yet he also demonstrates that for all the differences the European conceptions were no less traditional than the indigenous. It was not the liberal minded idea of a free labour market – as was propagated in contemporary England – that formed the basis of colonial labour policy, but rather the model of master-and-servant of early modern Europe. Various forms of hard labour played an important part in colonial Madras. This conclusion of Ravi Ahuja's study is certainly not much of a surprise. As a rule colonialism was indeed a system of domination which usually solved the problem of labour in a traditional, pre-industrial manner.

Ravi Ahuja's study is founded on a solid basis of mainly original European sources. The glossary, index and an appendix of prices and wages in Madras are very helpful. Five summarizing theses and an English summary conclude this study which is an important and stimulating contribution to the social history of the city of Madras in particular and of colonial cities in general.

Franz-Joseph Post

JOYCE J.M. PETTIGREW, *The Sikhs of the Punjab. Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*. (Politics in Contemporary Asia Series). London/New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995. xi, 212 pages, 1 map, US\$ 25.00 (Pb.). ISBN 1-85649-356-3.

PETER MARSDEN, *The Taliban. War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan*. (Politics in Contemporary Asia Series). London/New Jersey: Zed Books & Karachi/Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1998. vii, 162 pages, 4 maps. US\$ 19.95/£ 12.95. ISBN-1-85649-522-1 (Pb.). US\$ 55.00/£ 36.95. ISBN 1-85649-521-3 (Hb.).

Numerous studies have appeared in recent years on two of the major zones of conflict and violence in South and Southwest Asia – Punjab and Afghanistan. Most of