

of India with their remote history and somewhat exclusive culture and tradition (with roots which they claim can be traced back to forefathers in Syria), nevertheless constitute a unique and relatively prominent group of Christians in the southern Indian state of Kerala. In this book, Swiderski attempts to probe what he refers to as the "uncertainty" of this community concerning their identity, and in the process he provides the reader with a comparatively detailed and colorful insight into the history, religion, social customs, and other quaint cultural aspects of these 150,000 and odd south Indian Christians (both Roman Catholic and Jacobite), whom he describes as a "proud" people. Despite their being fiercely protective of their racial purity and the fidelity of their womenfolk, Swiderski nonetheless points out that the Knanaya claim to dignity can hardly be described as unique in a multiracial society such as India. Though in his methodology he claims to have rejected the personal experience approach and investigative journalism, and opted instead for personal interviews in connection with his fieldwork on the grounds that a scientific ethnography was impossible, nevertheless he does narrate several detailed personal encounters, not a few of which are spiked with humorous episodes.

According to Swiderski, the primary concern of the Knanayas is to preserve their identity both as Knanayas and as Christians, a process brought about by what he terms "artifacts." These are symbolic of Knanaya character, history, and landscape. Such artifacts would include metal crosses worn by generations of grooms, the book of songs, and most of all their churches, since these churches serve to symbolize the security and verification of Knanaya history, and are so to say, "platforms for the display of identity." Swiderski notes that the Knanaya go to great efforts to assert their exclusiveness from the rest of the Kerala Christian community, or even from the Indians as a whole. They are for instance anxious to spread the myth of the Knanaya face (which is distinguishable from other non-Knanaya faces), and at times even point out to similarities between their own religious rituals and those of the Jews (a fact by which they attempt to indicate their Near-East origins). However, this physical distinctiveness, age-old endogamy, and Near-East origins are chiefly symbolized for them by a mysterious fluid called "blood" which contains so to say the substance of heredity. In other words, there is something in a person's blood which constitutes him a member of the Knanaya community. Swiderski interprets this insistence on blood as a form of racial superiority, and declares that unlike other Indian communities which attempt to rid themselves of their caste affiliation, the Knanaya go to great pains to affirm it, thereby projecting themselves as an exclusive group.

All in all one might classify this as an informative book, and one which appears to be relatively unbiased in its approach.

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WALKER, ANTHONY R. *The Toda of South India. A New Look.* Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1986. xix+371 pages. Tables, figures, maps, plates, appendices, bibliography, glossary and general index. Hardcover US\$40.00.

Anthony R. Walker, a social anthropologist at the Department of Anthropology of the Ohio State University in Columbus, after nearly two decades of close contact with and

intensive study of the Toda, looks at the much studied Toda from an angle quite different from the existing literature. His is not a speculation about the origin and evolution of the Toda and their social institutions, but a synchronic-diachronic study. Therefore his book opens new avenues and challenges for future studies.

"A new look" means "to correct the view of Toda society as an isolated non-Hindu, 'tribal' people, for they have always interacted as part of a wider Nilgiri society." Hence, differing from Rivers, the author argues that the Toda are "a variant of the Hindu society of South India" (7). This ambition takes him through a journey of reports starting from Fencio (1603) through W.H.R. Rivers, a name synonymous with the study of the Toda, to a score of earlier and modern ethnographers and linguists. In the process he not only brings the data up to date, but challenging and correcting older views with new evidence, he also provides historical depth, thus offering the readers a view which leads from the past, through a series of changes to the present. With this the book is certainly a revision of W.H.R. Rivers' views (1906).

Walker's study is "a new look" also in that, unlike most authors who studied the Toda, he takes a holistic view starting with the matrix of their society, the physical and social environment as known through records. Thus chapter one deals with the physical environment of the Nilgiris, the five (Kota, Badaga, Kurumba, Irula, and Toda) societies living there, and the affinity of the Toda with the rest of South India. Chapter two is an updating of the earlier records about the Toda themselves. Chapter three deals with their social and judicial organization. Chapter four is a more extensive account of the buffalo complex than Rivers', and deals with the buffalo as the main focus of the economic, social, and ritual life of the Toda. Chapters five and six explain the organizational principles of the dairy cult and its rituals. Chapter seven deals with the passage of life, including the changes which have occurred since Rivers' account. Here the author also points out the practices and the underlying ideology common to the Toda and the wider Hindu society of South India concerning the observation of life-cycle events. Finally, chapter eight gives a comprehensive account of the social history between 1819 and 1981, an aspect even Rivers did not include. To make his presentation vivid and clear the author provides numerous tables, up-to-date figures, and excellent plates.

The main focus of the book, to place Toda society in a wider context, is not entirely convincing. He argues that Toda society is not a closed system but stands in relationship to the wider Hindu society of India in general and to the Hindu society of South India in particular, and is in fact a Hindu society. So much so that only in this context do the Toda institutions make sense. To support his claim the author provides the following arguments:

- 1) The Nilgiri communities resemble the multi-caste composition of Hindu society.
- 2) The language of the Toda is Dravidian and hence they have a common ancestry with South Indian Hindu society.
- 3) Their notion of ritual purity and impurity in connection with the layout of their hamlets and dairies point to a Hindu ideology.
- 4) Their sub-castes, which are hierarchically divided according to ritual criteria based on ritual specialization and degree of interaction and separation, are nothing but typical of Hindu concepts.
- 5) Their patrilineal and matrilineal clans are typical of South Indian communities.
- 6) Their kinship system is the same as for the majority of Dravidian speaking South Indians.

7) The way the Toda make decisions and administer justice is the same as in rural India.

8) In the sphere of their religious life the sacred dairy cult is the chief ideological and ritual pillar, for hierarchy and purity dominate the dairy cult. That kind of purity and pollution are Hindu ideologies.

9) Dairies and buffalo are the main referent in the ceremonies of their life cycle. There, too, the interplay of the idea of purity and impurity, and of hierarchy and specialization, play important roles. This concept again is typical of Hindu society.

I do not believe that these arguments are convincing enough to establish the link between the Toda and the South Indian Hindu society for the following reasons.

A) There is too much emphasis on the seeming similarities between the Toda and their neighboring Hindu society and much less attention to the differences that make Toda society into what it is.

First, Nilgiri society differs from the Hindu society of South India on the following accounts. The hierarchical ordering within the five Nilgiri groups and the exact place of the Toda in it is still a matter of dispute. Each group lives in a separate settlement, has separate priests and temples of its own and speaks a different language. There is no caste of priests and scholars who excel ritually and prevent any divergence from established norms of belief and practices. There is no body of scripture to provide a philosophical foundation for the social system and to assign each group its position in society. There is no single common ruling court to regulate order in the entire Nilgiri society. All these substantial differences do not support the author's arguments that Nilgiri society resembles the multi-caste Hindu Society as long as the latter society is what it is.

Second, the Toda in particular differ from South Indian Hindu society in many respects. For instance, their economic and religious dependence, more on the Badaga and the Kota and less on the Kurumba and the Irula, operates only within their hereditary friendship relations based on inter-familial links. This explains the symbiotic character of this relationship better than references to the *jajmani* system of a typical traditional Hindu society. Their much feared witchcraft gives the Toda a special place in Nilgiri society. Polyandry, though in the decline, and rituals and ceremonies of the life cycle centered around the buffalo cult are not practices of Hindu society.

The author only mentions these differences in passing and presumes them to be variants. But a closer look at them shows that they form essential aspects of Toda life.

B) The way that Walker chooses his criteria of similarities is difficult to accept.

First, he assumes that his criteria of similarities are universal to the entire South Indian society.

Second, he uses similarities of notion in some cases and similarities of structure in others. For example, he sees ideological similarities in the layout of Toda hamlets and dairies, the hierarchical division of sub-groups, the hierarchy in dairy-cult and rituals of the life cycle. He then ends up with structural similarities in settlement patterns and systems of clan, kinship, and judicial relations. There are no indications that the structure of Toda society has ideological foundations as in Hindu society.

C) While one should give the author due credit for his attempt to find an underlying principle in the life of the Toda, one is led to differ from him for reading too much of an Hindu ideology into Toda life.

First of all, the concept of purity-impurity in Hindu society implies an hierarchical gradation of social and religious interaction with communities other than one's own. Contrary to this, interactions between Nilgiri communities are not built on hierarchical principles but on a preferential and selective basis. For instance, the Toda who ap-

parently are meticulous about the purity of rituals are not so much concerned with purity in their social and religious interaction with other groups. They serve the Badaga in festivals and funerals as ushers and bow their head before a Badaga elder, but not vice versa. The Badaga would not eat in the house of the Toda, while the contrary is the norm. The Toda eat with the Kurumba only on selected occasions such as at the latter's funerals. The Toda give the Kota, who are ranked as inferiors, ghee but not milk or buttermilk or butter whereas the Kota would not accept cooked food from the Toda. All this shows that the purity-impurity concept of Hindu society is far from being applicable to the Toda.

Secondly, the religious practices of the Toda illustrate a different type of principle underlying their life. The Toda perform magic and witchcraft, they are healers, diviners and sorcerers. Their magic is much valued and sought, especially by the Badaga, who although being economically and politically superior, use this as an antidote to the more malevolent powers of the Kurumba. Because of their dependency on the Toda for magical protection and counter-sorcery, they don't want to offend the Toda lest the latter's witchcraft turn against them. Further, the Toda promote the prosperity of the Kota, their crops and cattles, while they themselves fear Kurumba sorcery, although it is sought to remove or prevent misfortune and to heal. All this shows the symbiotic relationship of the Toda with other Nilgiri societies in the religious sphere. This is far from the philosophical purity-impurity concept of the Hindus, and hence is not likely to prove a link between the Toda and Hindu society.

The author tried to cap the hitherto existing studies with "a new look" but the cap does not satisfactorily suit Toda anatomy. All the same the book challenges the reader either to pursue further and to prove the author's claims or to give due credentials to the independent identity and uniqueness of the Toda of South India.

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AVISHUR, YITZHAK. *Women's Folk Songs in Judaeo-Arabic from Jews in Iraq. Studies in the History and Culture of Iraqi Jewry, no. 4. Or Yehuda/Israel: Iraqi Jews' Traditional Culture Center, Institute for Research on Iraqi Jewry, 1987. xxii+244 pages. Bibliography, plates, English summary. (In Hebrew)*

The study of folk culture which began in the nineteenth century in Europe and whose achievements were considerable, did not achieve the same functional continuity and organic development amongst the Jews. The collection of material, the stage which precedes research and systematization, is one of the essential elements in the study of folk culture. The documentation of folklore—both verbal and from scant written sources—is a task whose essentialness and urgency has been much discussed. The situation today is such that any contribution in this direction, both about eastern European Jewish groups and about those from Asia and Africa, is significant.

Avishur has spoken out on more than one occasion about the situation of the folk literature of the Jews of Iraq and one can only praise him for his efforts to make a meaningful contribution to this field. His study, presented to the scientific community and to those interested in the study of the traditions of Jewish ethnic groups, is