

Peasants and Monks in British India. By WILLIAM R. PINCH. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xii, 242 pp. \$55.00 (cloth); \$22.00 (paper).

William Pinch's study of the social and political aspirations of members of the chief Ramaite *sampradaya*, the Ramanandis, in the central Gangetic region of Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, carries forward the pioneering work by Bhagvati Prasad Sinha, Richard Burghart, and Peter van der Veer. The major sources of the study are the extensive colonial archives and the many tracts, journals, and theological commentaries in Hindi. Pinch argues that for those involved in upward mobilization, religious affiliations were inextricably linked to issues of identity. In treating these issues, the author not only rectifies the historiographical imbalance created by the secular and subaltern mistrust of concerns deemed communal, but opens up further areas of research. In the neotraditional frame within which the colonial government chose to operate, renewed significance was acquired by a *varna* hierarchy which placed the martial *ksatriyas* at its summit. From the nineteenth century onwards, there were fresh attempts by the "middle peasants," the tenant farmers and small proprietors (*shudras* according to the *varna* scheme), to negotiate social status and claim some stake in political power. Mustering the support of Rama and the *ksatriya* lineage of the Sun has ancient tradition, as Hans Bakker has demonstrated. The Ramanandi *sampradaya*, with its egalitarian principles but also its heritage of martial valor, attracted many such aspirants.

The first half of the book is concerned with charting the social landscape of the *sampradaya*, especially as documented by Francis Buchanan, whose survey work between 1809 and 1813 is here evaluated in detail for the first time. Tracing the evolution of the *sampradaya* into the first quarter of the present century, Pinch recounts the heated debates about caste status which came to a head in the 1920s. The second half of the study deals with *ksatriyaization* movements involving the same peasant groups who invoked the Vaishnava ethos, though outside the *sampradaya*, and their interaction with the census operations of the colonial state, as well as with the Indian National Congress and the Kisan Sabhas. In the last six pages of his study, Pinch analyzes the role of these groups within the present political setup, with formations as diverse as the Hindu Right, the Janata Dal, and the Naxalites.

The historically hazy figure of Ramananda has traditionally been regarded as emerging from the guru lineage stemming from Ramanuja, who in the Gangetic plains eventually came to stand for caste conservatism. In the later commentaries on the hagiographic compendium *Bhaktamal*, a key text of the *sampradaya*, Ramananda's link with Ramanuja was finally to be severed, though opinions continued to be divided. The Ramananda *sampradaya* comprises three main strands; the first two, the Tyagis or ascetics and the Nagas or martial ascetics, are generally considered flexible in matters of caste. The Rasiks or devotees are hierarchically ordered and theologically the most articulate. The debates which led to the schism took place within Rasik ranks. Pinch follows the course of events through Dharnidharacharya of Ramanuji provenance. Himself a Kurmi or middle peasant who was to devote much labor to documenting the *ksatriya* status of his caste, Dharnidharacharya also operated within more comprehensive categories such as Sanatana Dharma and Arya, while positioning Muslims as the common enemies in history. However, in order to comprehend the structure of the *sampradaya* and the career of Bhagvadacharya, one time follower of the Arya Samaj who led the Radicals, the reader has to turn to Peter van der Veer, as

also for the information that in the key debates the Radicals enlisted the tactical support of the Nagas. Since it was the upwardly mobile groups which represented the general trend, as the second part of the study so conclusively demonstrates, somewhere on the way the argument tends to become diffuse. How and in what groups the radical Ramanandis managed to mobilize support remains unclear.

It would be rewarding to study in further detail the shifts which took place within the belief systems as depicted in the commentary literature, as well as the relationship of these movement to the larger overhead categories operative in the period, such as Sanatana Dharma and Hindutva, which sought to forge homogenizing links beyond *sampradaya* loyalties. On what points was there consensus or divergence? Pinch suggests that it is possible that today these very groups find themselves on both sides of the line dividing the Hindutva Right from the Dalit. Was this also the case in the Ramananda-Ramanuja divide?

All in all, Pinch presents a low-keyed, lucid account which, with its many-leveled approach, does more than justice to the complex themes studied. Small wonder that some of the many questions it attempts to answer crave further investigation.

VASUDHA DALMIA
University of Tübingen

Trade and Finance in Colonial India, 1750–1860. Edited by ASIYA SIDDIQI. Themes in Indian History. Oxford in India Readings. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. viii, 385 pp. \$25.00 (cloth).

Agricultural Production and Indian History. Edited by DAVID LUDDEN. Themes in Indian History. Oxford in India Readings. ix, 382 pp. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. \$29.95 (cloth).

Each book in Oxford University Press's *Themes in Indian History* series is designed "to critically assess the state of the art on its theme, chart the historiographical shifts that have occurred since the theme emerged, rethink old problems, open up questions which were considered closed, locate the theme within wider historiographical debates, and pose new issues of inquiry" (Ludden, vii). With slightly different emphases, both the volumes under review successfully meet these objectives by collecting important (but readily accessible at major U.S. South Asia research libraries) writings on their respective topics, prefaced by extensive, thoughtful, and well-researched introductions by each volume's editor.

Asiya Siddiqi's choice of the articles and book excerpts (all but one originally published between 1951 and 1982) included in *Trade and Finance in Colonial India, 1750–1860* reflects a number of themes central to East India Company, Parliamentary, nationalist, and contemporary academic concerns. The most enduring of these themes is the adverse impact of English trade policies and balance of payment financing on regional Indian economies through specie drain, discriminatory duties on inland and foreign goods, and technological advances in transportation and English manufacturing. While contemporary social concerns over specie drain and discriminatory duties largely disappeared with the colonial authority, the impact of technological change on national and regional comparative advantages, and consequently the disruption of existing social, political, and economic relations,