

This interesting and informative book on the religious life of the Raika, the semi-nomadic middle-caste 'Hindu camel-breeders of Rajasthan' (p. 10), offers an answer to the question why this unusual group of pastoralists is vegetarian, does not have a ritualistic tradition of blood sacrifice, and not only produces an unusually high number of renouncers but also accords a respectable place to ascetic ideology in the lives of householders (p. 138) by arguing that there is 'an "elective affinity" ... between the Raika mode of livelihood and their asceticism and renunciation' (p. vii). Two observations seem to support the hypothesis that a 'structural similarity may exist between herdsmen and renouncers' (p. 234). First, there is the culturally valued simplicity (p. 187) and the renunciatory psychology of the young Raika men, from whose ranks most of the ascetics are recruited — 'I did not come across any Raika who became a *sādhu* at an old age' (p. 211) — which apparently develops as a consequence of their lonely itinerant lifestyle away from the hamlets of their families, as expressed by a Raika informer: 'becoming a renouncer is like being permanently away with the *evār* (herd) in some *dāng* (jungle)' (p. 234), which is corroborated by the information that Raika renouncers 'are all said to have had a supernatural experience while grazing animals' (p. 215). The second observation concerns the economic rationale behind the vegetarianism of the Raikas — they would rather sell their animals than eat them (p. 125). Economic factors alone can, however, not explain the prominence of renunciatory values and the merely symbolic performances of blood sacrifice (in Rajasthan in general), which is attributed to Jain, Nath and Bishnoi religious influence (p. 131): 'the source of renunciation lies in the interaction between the Raika lifestyle and the little traditions of Hinduism and Jainism as represented in the local milieu' (p. 3). Unfortunately there are no records on the history of this interaction available nor figures on the total number of Raikas, but the author's 'guess is that there are not less than two hundred "renouncer's" fires (*dhūnīs*), tended by the Raika renouncers in Rajasthan' (p. 140, fn. 1).

Srivastava's work is 'not on renouncers or their "community" per se. Instead, it is on how a caste explains and understands the fact that it has produced many renouncers, and how the latter continue to have links with the "renounced community"' (p. 255). More precisely, it is about Raika householders' conceptions of 'Raika renouncers', that is 'those Raikas who are part of Hindu renunciatory orders' (p. 3, n. 4), and about the renunciatory lifestyle of the young Raika graziers and the old men (not the Raika women). This 'bottom-up' perspective is presented as a counterpoint to Dumont's theory of the 'janus-faced' Brahmin householder, to which it is nevertheless indebted (p. 256): 'Other studies have looked at renunciation from the point of view of renouncers or the Brahmin householder. This study attempts to offer a non-Brahmanical perspective on asceticism and renunciation' (p. 48). Srivastava's book contains a great deal of valuable information on Raika religion, but there are reasons to remain sceptical about the empirical foundation of his general claims. The concept 'Raika' itself is problematic, because it is 'more an occupational category' (p. 10; Westphal-Hellbusch) which covers at least three different regional groups of 'camel-breeders' in Marwar (Maru), Mewar (Godwara) and Gujarat (Rebaris), which do not

inter-marry or practice commensality (p. 19). These groups worship different local gods, although they see themselves as common descendants of Shiva, originating from Jaisalmer, and predominantly venerate Shiva and the sedentary 'Raika' ascetics of the Nath and Bharti traditions. Srivastava's informants came from two groups in three different locations: the Marwar Raikas of Gadhwala near Bikaner and of Pachunda Kallan and Bagri near Sojat, and the Godwara Raikas in Sadri-Ranakpur (south Pali). Although these groups have no socio-economic links, there are a few urbanised intellectuals who try to create a united front of all Raikas vis-à-vis the state authorities. It is their perspective which Srivastava adopts in his construction of 'the Raika view': 'Instead of the clear-cut differences between the Marus and Godwaras, as were explained to me by the elders, there existed a continuity in the same style of living, and this was the basis on which the Raika leaders were trying to unite the community' (p. 45).

Chapters one and two contain original material on the main deities (Pabuji, Mamaji, Balinathji, Ramdeo, Mataji, Bhairun, Junjhar, Gogaji, Purabji, etc.) and the structure of the Raika pantheon, as well as the typical religious practices of women, herdsmen and old men, and of the different religious specialist, i.e., the calendar-interpreting Brahman priests, the mediums (*bhopās*) for illness-curing gods, the renouncers, who 'are believed to be inhabited by divine elements' (p. 104), the talisman-makers who perform the sweep-and-blow cure (*jhārphūnk*), and the snake-bite-curing Meghwal priests of Gogaji. The presentation utilises Mandelbaum's distinction of transcendental and pragmatic religion to organise the material and argues that a hierarchical opposition of the abstract religion of the male renouncer and the ritualistic religion of the married female (the paradigmatic domestic worshipper), mediated by the category of the old men 'who have theoretically fulfilled their householder's dharma but are still householders and combine their duties' (p. 215), is the structuring principle of the religious universe of the Raika: 'Gods conforming to the renouncer's model — detached, but spreading long term welfare for all — are supreme (and superior) to those who conform to the householder's model — attached, involved, reprimanding, demanding obedience, fulfilling specific wishes of the people' (p. 86). Abstract religion posits that 'holding a belief in the existence of the god is in itself a way to conduct religion' (p. 121), in contrast to ritualistic religion, which 'regards rituals as important ways to enter into a relationship with deities, to entreat them and seek their favour' (p. 122). The gods of the Raikas are considered to be ancestors (p. 52) and old Raika men may become god-like themselves by renouncing rituals and progressively incorporating the compassionate side of Shiva (p. 147) by performing austerities and purifications (p. 209f): 'When the gods are internalized, they need no intermediary. In contrast to this, when they are external, their direct link with individuals is weakened, and so they chose *bhopās* (mediums) and *sādhus* (renouncers) as their "vehicles" (*vāhana*, *sawārī*) and embodiments (*rūp*) respectively' (p. 51).

Chapter three provides short profiles of five Shaivite Godwara Raika renouncers and of the Raika Jain Muni Shantisuri on the basis of second-hand information, as well as a general description of the Shaivite renouncer's fire (*dhūñī*), their lifestyle, and perceived spiritual power (*parcā*). Chapter four traces the Raika ideology of renunciation as a fruit of the uncontaminated and simple lifestyle of the graziers and the positive cultural evaluation of renunciation itself, which offers both an alternative for young males who are struck by misfortune and a source of prestige for their families (p. 203 ff). Chapter five elaborates the 'sociological' hypothesis that because Raika renunciation is related to the grazier's lifestyle, female Raika renouncers do not exist: 'There are sufficient grounds to believe in the existence of a certain similarity between the religious universes of the Raika men and their renouncers.... By contrast, a transition from "ritualistic religion" [of Raika women] to renunciation requires giving up the entire ritual complex as well as the accompanying beliefs' (p. 231). If this assertion seems rather unconvincing, because it posits entirely different conceptual worlds for Raika men and women, the ad hoc criticism in Chapter six ('The Raika Perspective') of Dumont who, because he supposedly only focused on Brahmin renouncers, apparently did not see how 'the caste from which a renouncer comes affects his general orientation' (p. 267), is entirely unacceptable. (Dumont writes 'The renouncer is of course often of Brahmin origin' (*Homo Heirarchicus*, p. 434), but Srivastava omits the 'often' (p. 267)). What is the general orientation of 'the' Raika renouncer? We cannot really be sure after reading this book. Srivastava obviously had limited access to the renouncers themselves, and a complementary study of their traditions, and comparisons with other herdsmen elsewhere, would have gone beyond the scope of his research aims. But it seems to me that the Raikas' belief in their descent from Shiva (p. 146) may be more important for an understanding of their religious practices than their occupational psychology or their economic dependency on powerful Rajputs and Jain merchants. Srivastava's single reference to the importance of Raika assemblies at annual fairs that are organised to mark the death anniversaries of their renouncers (p. 278) likewise betrays his outright dismissal of other functional ethnographies which 'look for collective ritual performances' (p. 111). But these critical remarks should not detract from the great achievements of this thought-provoking study, which reopens important questions for which, in the absence of historical records, satisfactory answers may never be found.

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