

GIDWANI, VINAY. *Capital, Interrupted. Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis [etc.] 2008. xxv, 337 pp. Ill. \$25.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000319

This book is an exceptional attempt to integrate traditions of thinking – in this case Marxist political economy, Bourdieudian sociology, and Foucauldian poststructuralism – which until recently tended to be treated separately, and social scientists have much to gain from carefully reading it. In an era where constructivism has become mainstream, anthropology and sociology have now started to refocus attention away from “narrative” and “imagining” towards “embodiment”, “experience”, “body politics”, and “ecology”. *Capital, Interrupted* can help to integrate these trends into a Marxist framework. Gidwani found that existing theories of capitalism could not fully explain the microeconomics of agrarian interactions in Kheda District (Gujarat, India). Bourdieu’s theory of social distinction, carefully inserted into the larger framework of macroeconomics, proved more productive.

Group-based and individual piecework arrangements are steadily becoming the modal form of payment in Indian agriculture. In the period between 1970 and 1990, the standard arrangement for agrarian work was daily payment. Since the 1990s, employment has increasingly taken place on the basis of specific contracts. Gidwani was struck by the fact that Marxist interpretations did not offer a satisfactory explanation for this development at the regional level. His own explanation goes a long way, and includes state-initiated development planning, caste formation, and the desire for social distinction among landowners.

The emergence of piecework contracts cannot be explained by structural factors alone. Gidwani shows, in an in-depth overview of new institutional economics and Marxist political economy, that both schools of thought privilege hard economics over cultural accounts. They are silent about the role of language and meaning in labour relations. However, cultural logics infuse the labour process. Social scientists must look at structural arrangements of labour in the agricultural sector, but not without paying attention to “the ways in which structures are inhabited” (p. 164). One such “inhabited structure” is caste.

During his fieldwork in Kheda District, Gidwani would always find the young landowners of the village at the same spot: at the tea stall, lounging, in their jeans and sunglasses, monitoring the village. It turned out that they hardly even visited the fields they had inherited. Most young men hoped to get a visa for the USA or the UK and displayed a profound disinterest in agriculture. Their fathers, grandfathers, and grandmothers spent their days on the land supervising the work of their daily labourers, sometimes working with them. But the young generation prefers to pay a group of workers for a clearly defined job (weeding for example). When the job is done, the employer makes a quick excursion by motorbike to check before he pays up. The older generation finds it hard to understand why young farmers choose this type of arrangement, which is more costly for the employer and can lead in the long run to deterioration of the land.

Gidwani emphasizes that even their poorer friends, who do not have land, join the leisured group. Financially, their families might benefit from wage labour, but these young men, in the prime of life (20s–30s), are reluctant to take orders from employers and prefer to hang out with their wealthier peers. From a new institutional economic or Marxist perspective such behaviour is hard to explain. There are no “rational actors” here, according to Gidwani. What he seems to leave out, however, is that these poorer friends and relatives often act as personal assistants. In exchange for being at the beck and call of their wealthier caste fellows, they receive money and gifts. Sometimes they are even made working partners or receive financial assistance in educating their children. Although they

are never treated as equals, they often benefit from an alliance with their wealthier peers, something which could in part be seen as “rational” behaviour.

Overall, however, Gidwani is right when he argues that Lenin’s extensive writings on agrarian class relations and subsequent analyses rooted in classical political economy do not fully account for the microeconomics of the agrarian labour relations found in Kheda. With the help of Bourdieu, and an in-depth history of the dominant Patel caste in the region, Gidwani offers a more satisfactory explanation.

The Patel caste presents an achieved hegemonic alliance between several groups in Gujarat. They were first identified as a single caste in the 1931 census. A coalition was formed between two groups, “Lewa Kanbi” and “Patidars” (p. 58), through the practice of hypergamy, which allowed Lewa Kanbi of lower rank to marry their daughters to the higher-ranked Patidars if they had acquired enough wealth to pay a good dowry. The construction of an endogamous caste was instrumental for class accumulation in a period of new British property laws and scientific systems of measurement. Caste formation and the practice of hypergamy helped secure property rights in the hands of a limited number of landowners.

The logic of the practice of hypergamy was that daughters who married into wealthy households would not have to work in public. Thus, leisure became a sign of social distinction. According to Gidwani, Patels are still driven by a desire to acquire social distinction. In agrarian society social distinction is pursued through the labour process. A key source of distinction is the ability to withdraw labour power from the family (devalorization). Such distinction is costly and risky to attain. If social distinction is mismanaged, it can lead to a total loss of distinction.

The desire to distinguish has become even more important in the face of the growing bargaining power of agrarian labourers. State-initiated development projects such as dairy cooperatives and irrigation have decidedly improved the fate of the Baraiya caste, which had always been locked in an uneasy interdependence with their Patel employers. Demand for labour rose, and the ability of labourers to find alternative sources of income increased. Thus, Baraiya can now afford to come late for work and shirk on the job. “[I]f Patel employers today are less willing to engage in field supervision of work and more inclined to spend their time elsewhere, often in activities that could be described as ‘leisure’, then why shouldn’t labourers also be able to take a leisurely approach to work without inviting derision?” (p. 167).

Does the combination of Lenin and Bourdieu help us further? On the one hand, Gidwani is crossing disciplinary fences, to the disapproval of some agrarian historians, and must therefore be credited with bravery. On the other hand, one could argue that Bourdieu has never let anyone down; somehow, his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* always seems to work, and therefore Gidwani’s efforts may not be that impressive after all. One problem associated with Gidwani’s attempts to try to creatively combine elements of theories from different strands is that it never amounts to a full synthesis. His theoretical contributions are sometimes eclectically fragmented. From highbrow abstraction Gidwani dives deep into the microcosm of ethnography, and back. In the end, he does not really outline how his theoretical contributions might be applied in future research.

In the presentation of his empirical findings we sometimes face similar forms of fragmentation. At several points in the book (pp. 114, 134, and 185–186 for example), Gidwani refers to the rise of Hindu sectarianism in Gujarat and the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002. However, his attempt to bring the consequences of the growth of communal politics into his empirical analysis remains fragmented and unsuccessful. This is probably owing to the fact that these developments were never really part of his original research

focus, which was developed in the early 1990s when the impact of communal politics was as not as clearly visible in Kheda District as thereafter.

Another problem with the empirical coherence of the book relates to Gidwani's assumption, from the very beginning of his research, that it is the erosion of the rural dominance of the Patel community in central Gujarat that needs to be explained (p. xix). Although he is able to show several aspects of the changing relations between the various communities of Kheda District over time, he is never able to convince the reader of the erosion of power by the dominant Patel community. For that, Gidwani would have needed much more information on the subordinate classes in Kheda District and the views and perspectives of its members than he was able to gather. In his afterword, he himself admits that one of the most difficult tasks during his fieldwork was to dissociate himself sufficiently from the dominant Patel community to be able to get access to the members of the lower classes and castes in the rural localities he studied. Although he occasionally presents us with some fascinating accounts of the views of members of the subordinate classes, the problem he encountered in gaining sufficient access to these groups indicates that the power of the Patel community in Kheda District might not, or not yet at least, have been eroded as much as he assumed at the outset of his research.

Notwithstanding these minor points of criticism, the book is a magnificent achievement in combining in-depth anthropological research with historical and creative theoretical analyses. This makes it highly relevant for scholars studying Indian society as well as those interested in larger issues of capitalism, caste, and class formation.

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KAWASHIMA, KEN C. *The Proletarian Gamble. Korean Workers in Interwar Japan.* [Asia-Pacific. Culture, Politics, and Society.] Duke University Press, Durham [etc.] 2009. x, 297 pp. £59.00. (Paper: £14.99.); doi:10.1017/S0020859011000320

For those interested in the labor and social history of the interwar period, Kawashima's study of Japan in the 1920s and 1930s is recommended reading for several reasons. Compared to most labor histories of early twentieth-century Japan, Kawashima shifts our focus away from the centrality of the factory floor to examine the larger processes of the anxiety-filled search for employment and housing by ethnic Korean workers. Taking cues from Marx and a range of post-Marxist theorists such as Louis Althusser, Kawashima argues that these Korean colonial subjects were not just exploited within a system of industrial production that paid them low wages and subjected them to harsh working conditions when they were lucky enough even to find a job. Rather, the ways they were exploited extended far beyond relations of production to the uncertainties and precarious nature of their very existence in Japan at this time. In this way, Kawashima brings our attention to the vulnerable, dependent nature of the Korean proletariat and explains how such relationships emerged and were reproduced during the interwar years.

Kawashima traces the emergence of such relationships back to 1910, the year that Japan annexed Korea as a formal colony. He highlights two elements of colonial policy that were particularly relevant to the changes among the Korean peasantry and their eventual migration to Japan as wage laborers. The first was the land survey that took place from 1910 to 1918 and second was the policy to increase rice production that was implemented

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