

used as a vehicle for religious education, and, as Muslim anxiety under British rule grew, so too did Urdu's identity as an Islamic language. In contemporary India, Rahman observes that Urdu is "anti-establishment" and "stands for the autonomy, identity, and rights of the Muslim community" (p. 159). In Pakistan, however, Urdu is associated with "pro-establishment and right-wing forces" (p. 159) and is used by the Punjabi elite to subordinate ethnic minorities—a fact that ironically conceals how both groups are "subordinated to the interests of the Westernized, English using, urban elite" (p. 162).

Chapter 7 discusses how one of the results of the Islamization of Urdu was that its status as "The Language of Love" was altered, even suppressed.

Chapters 8 and 9 survey the status of "Hindustani" and then Urdu during the period of British rule, with special emphasis on the Princely States. For those interested in ethnographic detail, there is an interesting discussion of British manuals on how to speak Hindustani—common to these tracts were grammatical errors and egregiously disrespectful uses of pronouns meant for status inferiors.

The remaining five chapters of Rahman's monograph serially engage the role of Urdu in employment, education, print, and on radio and the screen. Most interesting is a comparison of Urdu in Bollywood (Bombay) and Lollywood (Lahore) cinema.

In his conclusion, Tariq Rahman first returns to the common argument that Urdu was the language of the "camp," developed as soldiers attempted to communicate with the local population. Against this widely held view, Rahman maintains that while "urdu" does indeed mean "camp" in Turkish, the language referred to as Urdu "had been in use for at least five centuries" (p. 390). Crucial for Rahman is delinking Urdu from its association with conquest and the military. This leads to a broader point about the contemporary necessity of rediscovering the broad and deep continuities between Hindi and Urdu as both languages move further apart. Sanskritized Hindi and Perseo-Arabic Urdu have been socially constructed to reify identities that have historically been fluid or overlapping. Recognizing that spoken Hindi and Urdu are the same language is thus an important step in recognizing that Pakistanis and North Indians still share much in common.

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Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India.

By DAVESH SONEJI. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

xiii, 313 pp. \$72.00 (cloth); \$24.00 (paper).

doi:10.1017/S0021911812001684

Weaving together history, literature, ethnography, and ethnomusicology, Davesh Soneji's impressive work, *Unfinished Gestures*, showcases the

heterogeneity, hybridity, and ingenuity of India's *devadasi* artists in the colonial period and beyond.

This book examines the colonial and postcolonial history of *devadasis*—creative and often contentious figures who have worked as temple dancers, courtesans, entertainers, and key participants in social rituals, political campaigns, and diplomatic events in South Asia. Soneji diverges from the traditional scholarly preoccupation with *devadasi* temple performance, turning instead to the colonial Tanjore courts and urban salons of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chennai to explore the diverse lives, performance aesthetics, and performance genres of these artists. *Devadasis* inhabited innovative, cosmopolitan, and secular frameworks of performance, cultivating hybrid embodied aesthetics and linguistic and lyrical interpretation as a part of their evolving art. Soneji chronicles the rise of moral discourses and “reform” programs focused on these women, leading to the Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947. These measures had repercussions across all strata of society—not only negatively impacting the *devadasi* women's performance traditions and their access to legal and social support previously afforded to them, but also catalyzing the meteoric rise of *devadasi* community men in South Indian politics, even as the women of these communities were being relegated to lives of shame, poverty, and prostitution.

The book's final chapters feature ethnography of *devadasi* women from the South Indian villages of Viralmalai, Tamil Nadu, and Peddapuram, Andhra Pradesh, who today experience different types of hardship, stigma, and disenfranchisement, though they maintain some performance practices in the private sphere as a means of sharing personal memory, narratives, and moral knowledge.

Soneji juxtaposes these women's worlds to the now-bustling urban Chennai classical music and dance scene, which has been constructed as a utopian, nationalist, upper-middle-class Brahmin vision of what Hindu culture has always been since time immemorial, through its careful valorization of only select *devadasi* artists (e.g., T. Balasaraswati, M. S. Subbulakshmi) among its mostly Brahmin pantheon of artistic pioneers. The ethnographic in this particular volume is brief, leaving the reader curious for further stories from these surviving artists of the courtly era; Soneji has presented much of this in prior publications. Here, Soneji's painstaking archival data, music excerpts, and fluid linguistic engagement with Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Hindi, Persian, and European-language materials make this book's narration of *devadasis'* history vivid and compelling.

Existing scholarship on *devadasis* has primarily focused on dancers' ritual significance, notions of ritual auspiciousness, and *rasa* (Indic theories of aesthetics) in Tamil-speaking South India. The noteworthy contributions of *Unfinished Gestures* include, firstly, attendance to the *devadasis* of Telugu-speaking areas, whereas other literature has focused on Tamil-language contexts of *devadasis*. Secondly, this volume explores the hybridity and heterogeneity of *devadasis* as actors in highly political spheres and cultural agents beyond the temple environs; Soneji examines *devadasis'* secular, cosmopolitan, and politically enmeshed

worlds as servant-girls, entertainers, artists, lovers, queens, and businesswomen, among other identities. *Devadasis* drew from folk art forms, the emergent musical forms of Carnatic and Hindusthani music, Western compositions, Persian drama, and other performance genres to create a new and hybrid performative repertoire in a rapidly shifting cultural environment.

Soneji's focused study on *devadasis* also offers a broader picture of class, socioeconomic, and gender disparity in India in the postcolonial era. He demonstrates the cultural relevance of *devadasis* outside of their position as temple dancers during the courtly and colonial periods, which in turn further elucidates the grave disparity between the fate of living *devadasis* today and their contemporary counterparts in the popular Chennai music and dance scene who are upheld as bearers of Hindu dance and music culture. *Unfinished Gestures* calls attention to the liminality, ambiguity, and diversity of sexual relationships and gender roles that characterized *devadasi* communities prior to the moral discourses of the twentieth century, which sought to press *devadasis* into normative gender roles and the traditional conjugal boundaries of marriage.

Additionally, the book attends to another area of gaping disparity—that of gender disparities within *devadasi* communities themselves and the new, contemporary caste categories to which they have given rise: the *icai velalar* and *sur-yabalija* groups of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, respectively. Even as renowned and accomplished female artists from these groups were divested of their social and artistic prominence because of disparaging, moralistic discourse about *devadasis*' deceit and licentiousness, males from these communities, invoking their *devadasi* family lineages (vis-à-vis these new caste identities), began to claim legal rights and land inheritances—and have risen to unprecedented political heights, controlling contemporary South Indian politics for the most part. Political figures such as DMK leaders C. N. Annadurai and Muthuvel Karunanidhi hail from *devadasi* backgrounds. The power, wealth, and prestige afforded to these powerful political figures exist in stark contrast to the lives that present-day *devadasis* and their female descendants experience every day—lives characterized by abject poverty, stigma, brothel-style prostitution, or subsumption of mainstream caste and gender lifestyles, at the expense of their formerly valued artistry, legal rights to property, and social position.

This work benefits any scholar interested in the complex cultural matrices that informed South Indian society in the colonial era, and continue to shape today's global expansion of South Indian classical music and dance practice.

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