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Book Review

Jason Keith Fernandes, *Citizenship in a Caste Polity* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2020). Rs. 1075. Xvi + 361 pgs.

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Citizenship in a Caste Polity is a work in citizenship studies, a field that lies productively at the nexus of anthropology, political science, and history. The focus is on the Indian state of Goa, and in particular on contestations over language in the period after the region passed from Portuguese to Indian rule. Fernandes provides a compelling history of the processes by which Konkani came to be recognized as the official language of Goa in 1987, and by which the Antruzi (or Antruz) dialect and Devanagari script promoted by Goa's powerful Gaud Saraswat Brahmin (GSB) community came to be accepted as normative, to the exclusion of other dialects and scripts. The more original focus of the work, however, is on what happened afterwards, when several organizations began to contest the government's exclusive recognition of Konkani as written in *Devanagari,* arguing that the Roman script should also be recognized because of its historical and widespread usage.

As Fernandes shows through both archival research, ethnographic work, and his own memory of events—Fernandes had himself once been involved in the debates—Goa's Catholics, on which the study focuses, have found themselves on both sides of the issue. To simplify things considerably, the Brahmin-dominated Catholic hierarchy, trying to shed its embarrassing association with Portuguese colonialism and align itself with the GSB, largely supported the exclusive use of Devanagari as a way of burnishing its mainstream Sanskritic cultural credentials. Conversely, lower-caste and lower-class Catholic communities, among which the Roman script was in wide use, and who were farther removed from the image of the ideal Indian (and Goan) citizen-subject (constructed as an upper-caste Hindu male), favoured recognition of the Roman script.

Fernandes contrasts "citizenship practices," that is, "repetitive actions, actions that are often passive and one-sided," with "citizenship acts," which are acts (quoting Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen) that "disrupt habitus, create new possibilities,…claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones; pose their claims in enduring and creative expressions; and, most of all, are the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order" (289). In this

case, the language-related "citizenship acts" of the Catholic hierarchy effectively undermined the status of lower-caste Catholics: "…the post-colonial implication of [their citizenship] act was to enable upper-caste and upwardly mobile Goan Catholics to identify with the agenda for Konkani crafted by Brahmanical upper-caste groups. In legitimising a Brahmanical heritage, this citizenship act delegitimised the socio-cultural markers of Catholic groups, and especially Bahujan-Dalit Catholic groups, as valid constituents of national culture" (18-19).

Among the many novel arguments and aims of the book, two are central to the investigation and therefore merit particular mention. First, Fernandes suggests that Partha Chatterjee's binary division of national space into "civil society" (the realm of those who conform to the model of the ideal citizen-subject and are, therefore, addressed as individuals and spontaneously offered rights and privileges by the state) and "political society" (the realm of those who do not conform to the ideal, and who are therefore addressed as population groups that must *press* for their rights while generally being granted only *concessions*) is overly simple. Acknowledging the utility of the theory as a general frame of reference, Fernandes argues that it is difficult to allocate groups neatly into one or the other realm. For example, in the context of Goa's script debates, "groups such as the [pro-Roman script All Goa Citizens' Committee for Social Justice and Action], who imagine themselves within civil society, and in many cases, would actually form a part of civil society initiatives, are in fact forced, as a result of their espousing the cause of subaltern Catholic groups, to engage in forms of activism more suited to political society," while "Groups like the [pro-Devanagari] Konkani Bhasha Mandal, which are firmly hegemonic, reveal a tendency towards undemocratic processes that does not quite fit the imagination of civil society, which is assumed to be rational and have a reverence for a rule of law" (246).

Because in reality these civil and political society realms "merge into one another," what actually exists is not a binary but a "scale of forms" (207). This scale of forms is produced, in part, because citizenship is, according to Fernandes, mediated by the social, not something constructed exclusively in the political realm. "[T]he law is encountered not directly through a reference to the written text, or scholarly discussions of the same, but through its representations in the social field. The representations gain power, first, because of the social standing of the person who makes this representation" (209), and this social standing is in turn increased or decreased by social facts such as state recognition, academic or religious qualification, caste, gender, etc. Therefore, "Citizenship acts must be seen as the [attempt] to create space to manoeuvre in a variety of intertwined social locations, not merely within the realm of the political and in reference merely to the state" (207).

Second, drawing on the work of Saba Mahmood and Veronica Benei, Fernandes seeks to expand the focus of citizenship studies from citizenship *practices* (the field's traditional orientation) to citizenship *experiences,* arguing that, in this context, "citizenship was not merely a matter of practices, or performing bodies,

but…of felt and feeling bodies, and therefore, of experiences as well" (6). Noting the occasionally emotion-laden narratives and testimony of his interlocutors, Fernandes foregrounds three emotions in particular: shame, guilt and humiliation. Shame and guilt emerge, according to Fernandes, from the *incorporation*—and here the Latin roots of the term are significant—of the image of the ideal citizen-subject of Goan modernity into the very bodies of Goans. Such emotions do not arise spontaneously; rather, they result from a "a physical process of inculcation, which is precisely what the development of habitus is, physical training over a period of time so that the response is ingrained within the person" (260). To the extent to which one cannot conform to this (male, upper-caste, Antruzi Konkani-speaking, Hindu) ideal citizen, one feels shame and guilt. "[S]hame and guilt are self-evaluative emotions that arise when one fails to meet self-acknowledged standards of what the citizen-subject should be" (258). Because these emotions produce motivation to conform, they are part and parcel of the project to form the ideal modern citizen-subject. Shame and guilt are internalized from multiple social sites, but central to Fernandes's analysis is caste, which "is synonymous with shame and shaming" (258). These claims serve one of the author's primary aims, which is to show that citizenship is formed not only in the realm of politics ("citizenplace"), but also in local and even extra-national social space (respectively, "communityplace" and "internationalplace").

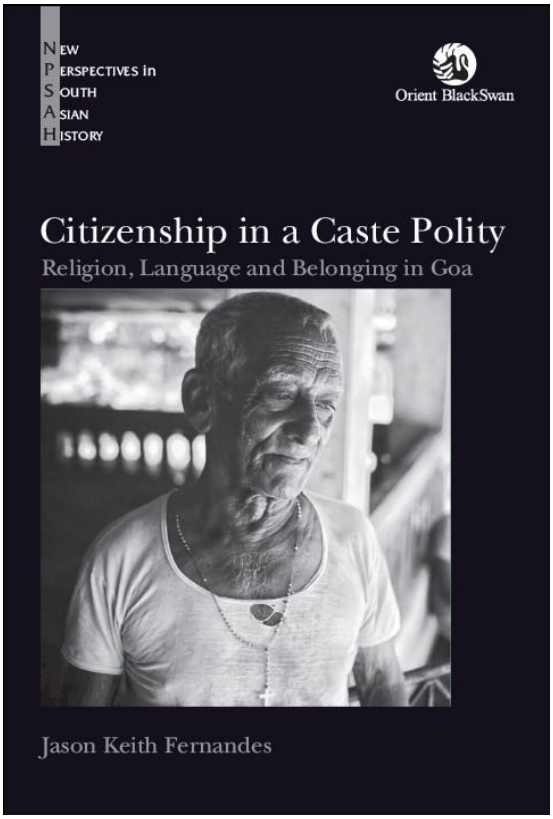
Humiliation, as presented by Fernandes, is less an emotion than a claim made "against…shaming." A citizenship act occurs when such a claim (of being humiliated) is "accompanied by a programme for change" (258). Humiliation "emerges when individuals are able to summon alternate discourses and assert that the shame or guilt that they experience is unacceptable, and challenge the existence of these norms" (296). Citizenship, suggests Fernandes, "is constituted by [such] acts of citizenship—that is attempts by both individuals and groups to challenge" a regime's "disciplinary regime of fixing…the identity of individuals into the frameworks of the ideal citizen-subject" (305).

In the Conclusion, Fernandes raises in a preliminary but provocative way (with the help of Omar Kutty) the question of whether "the citizenship experience of Goans…is so intertwined with caste…that there exists, in fact, [no] civil society in the first place" (314). Is what we view as "civil society" in Goa actually civil society, or just political society governed by a "legally secured casteist polity" (304) "where Brahmanical power is firmly associated with state legality" (314)? If the latter, then what we have in India is perhaps "not so much the realisation of a democratic regime of citizenship, but merely the rhetorical articulation of it" (315).

One of the great advantages of excellent work on Goa is that it allows us to escape the dominant British frame that governs so much of scholarship on colonialism and post-/colonial India. That advantage also makes the book somewhat more challenging, however, for scholars (like me) who are less familiar with Goan history and Portuguese colonization. Because of this, and its strong

theoretical orientation, the book is likely beyond the capabilities of most undergraduates. Graduate students and scholars in related fields, however, will find it a rich and intriguing work, all the more so if they are unfamiliar with Portuguese and Goan history.

Chad M. Bauman in Conversation with Jason K. Fernandes



In the Conclusion, you raise the question of whether "the citizenship experience of Goans…is so intertwined with caste, that there exists, in fact, [no] civil society in the first place" (314), and then suggest that what we have in India is perhaps "not so much the realization of a democratic regime of citizenship, but merely the rhetorical articulation of it" (315). Is this perhaps too high a bar? Are not all polities ones in which certain groups or certain kinds of social construction (caste, class, religion, race) enable the privileging of some groups over others in significant ways? If any such privileging undermines state claims to "democratic regimes of citizenship," then do any such regimes actually exist?

Your question requires that we appreciate the value of rhetoric in a polity. Too often, rhetoric is not taken seriously, or given the value it deserves. Rhetoric, even when not realized in practice is critical to the operation of a polity because it establishes the moral, ethical, and other standards of the polity through which the actions of the leadership, community, or individuals within it, may be judged. In the absence of a rhetoric, polities would be adrift in an amoral world and there would be no way to call the individuals that constitute the community and the community at large, to account.

Having said this, I would concede that if it is the case that every democratic polity privileges some groups over others in significant ways, then there are in fact no democratic regimes of citizenship. But this concession does not blunt my critique in the slightest! On the contrary, having recognized the value of rhetoric we are able to appreciate that this recognition spurs us onward and performs a larger task by preventing us from sitting back smugly and assuming that we inhabit a perfect polity. Democracy should, in any case, be about striving for a situation, not assuming that the mere

fulfillment of the procedural norms of liberal polities – of regular elections and peaceful transfer of office for instance – incarnates a democracy.

I am persuaded by your assertion that the ideal citizen-subject of India is the upper-caste Hindu male. If we were to extend your analysis to the United States, we would identify the ideal citizen-subject as the Protestant white male. However, beyond that the ideal gets murkier and more contested. Currently the US political system seems more or less equally divided between those who would add, as ideal characteristics, "rural, more pious than educated, white collar, and chauvinistic" (e.g., in their assertion of 'America first' and the notion that the putative glories of the nation emerge from the superiority of white culture and history), and those who would add "urban/e, more educated than religious, technocratic, and cosmopolitan/inclusive." This leads me to ask whether you see the claims of humiliation and the citizenship acts of Dalit-Bahujan communities in India today (in Goa or elsewhere) as a direct challenge to the male and upper-caste nature of the idealized citizen-subject, or merely the imagining of a different kind of upper-caste Hindu male (e.g., a more inclusive one). At times it seems to me your book supports the former thesis; at times the latter.

I have been concerned with being attentive to, and representing, the dynamism of the fields we study ever since reading Bourdieu as a young graduate student, so if it seems that my book supports both theses, then I am glad because it reflects my concern. I believe that your observation about the attempt to tag on features to the ideal citizen-subject is a feature of the dynamism of the political field – the citizen-subject is not set in stone nor frozen in time, but indeed it is constantly being influenced by various groups who seek to capture the space of the ideal citizen-subject and rearticulate the contents of this subject. This has been the case in India as well, where we have seen the movement of the ideal citizen-subject from the unmarked upper-caste Hindu male (i.e., the westernized, urban, upper-caste, "secular" Hindu) to the overtly Hindu upper-caste Hindu male. This movement definitely aids, and has been aided by, members of non-dominant caste groups who identify as Hindu. After all, the fact that the citizen-space is marked as Hindu does allow for some mobility to those who identify as Hindu, even if they are not dominant caste. They gain traction over upper-caste non-Hindus, for example.

To answer your question more directly, the challenges to the extant definitions of the ideal citizen-subject do not necessarily have to be utopian. Indeed, I suggest in the book that political activists are often pragmatic and merely concerned with accessing a seat at the table, and not being left out in the cold. They are not necessarily concerned about other marginalized groups. Thus, the challenges to the nature of the ideal citizen-subject are often about imagining a different kind of upper-caste Hindu male, or simply a different kind of Hindu male – to allow the possibility for male members of Bahujan groups to participate. This is

not to rule out that some activists may envision a utopian challenge to the extant ideal citizen-subject, but the pressures, and realities, of the field do not leave much space for that to be realized substantially.