
Book Review

Pankaj Jain, *Science and Socio-Religious Revolution in India: Moving the Mountains* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 98pp., \$70.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-02359-8.

This slender volume offers an introduction to the work of the Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization (HESCO), an Indian NGO with a long list of achievements in rural development, sustainable agriculture, and the empowerment of women. Founded by Anil Joshi in 1979, HESCO combines Gandhian principles with expertise in environmental science and a commitment to appropriate technologies. The book also includes a chapter on Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal, a Sikh activist who has been working since 2000 to clean and beautify the Kali Bein river in Punjab. The author argues that for Joshi and Seechewal, there is a harmony not only between environmental activism and *dharma* (the term used in modern Indian languages for 'religion', but with additional meanings and resonances, including 'ethics' and 'duty'), but also between *dharma* and science.

Science and Socio-Religious Revolution in India is thus a sequel to Jain's first book, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (Ashgate 2011), which argued for the harmony between *dharma* and ecology through case studies of three Hindu communities. In his latest book, Jain is interested in the relationship between *dharma* and science, and he suggests that a study of figures such as Joshi and Seechewal can help 'break down the religion–science divide in Western society' (p. 88). Chapters 1 and 2 ('Introduction' and 'Dharma and Science') develop the framework of Jain's study, arguing that the conflict between religion and science is a Western inheritance, whereas 'Indic traditions rarely if ever had the dichotomy between the two' (p. 6). Unfortunately, Jain's argument itself relies on an unhelpful dichotomy between a stereotyped 'Western' culture, in which religion and science are at odds, and a stereotyped 'non-Western' culture, in which religion and science are in harmony. There is no discussion of, say, Ian Barbour's four models of the relationship of religion and science (conflict, independence, dialogue, integration), nor is there acknowledgement of tensions and ambiguities among Indian thinkers (e.g., the early Gandhi's critique of machinery). Jain cites the work of C. Mackenzie Brown as evidence for 'the general Hindu perspective that science and religion are continuous and inseparable' (p. 6), but he neglects to note that Brown himself has called into question the compatibility of Hinduism and science, specifically on the subject of Darwinian evolution.

The remainder of Jain's book offers a detailed description of the work of Joshi and Seechewal. Chapters 3 and 4 ('HESCO: An Overview' and 'HESCO: A Brief History and Ethnography') introduce readers to the impressive range of HESCO's initiatives,

from its revamping of the traditional watermill (*gharat*) into a low-cost source of electricity for mountain villages, to its creative commercial uses of the invasive weed *lantana*, to its training programs for village women. Chapter 5 ('Restoring a Holy River in Punjab') describes Seechewal's success at raising environmental consciousness in the Sikh community, through his vision of environmental work as a form of devotional service (*kar sewa*). Chapter 6 ('Dharma of GEP and Science of GDP') returns to Joshi, outlining his proposal that government should take account of 'gross environmental product' rather than only gross domestic product.

While the case studies of Joshi and Seechewal are valuable, the book is marred by serious and consistent mishandling of sources. Insufficient paraphrase is everywhere: the author reproduces sentences and even paragraphs from his sources with only a few words changed, with no quotation marks but only a parenthetical citation. In Chapter 5, for example, Jain writes: 'This idea of oneness of God breathed a fresh air into the Indic religious traditions, and a new humanistic philosophy was thus born on the banks of the Kali Bein' (pp. 69-70). Compare this to the website of Seechewal's organization: 'This idea of Oneness of God breathed a fresh air into the Indian religious tradition... Thus a new humanistic philosophy was born on the banks of Kali Bein'.¹ Jain writes (again without quotation marks): 'While pollution and encroachment are common problems to all Indian rivers, the problem of scarcity of water is peculiar to the Kali Bein' (p. 71). The website reads: 'While pollution and encroachments are the problems common to almost all rivers and streams, the problem of scarcity of water is peculiar to the Kali Bein'.

Such examples could easily be multiplied, and it is disappointing that these problems escaped the notice of the copyeditors at Routledge. Chapter 3 is especially egregious: not only have passages been borrowed almost word-for-word, the author has neglected to give citations for them. At the beginning of the chapter Jain writes: 'What I present below is based on my several such interviews with HESCO coordinators and villagers working with HESCO. I have also extracted relevant information from the vernacular literature of HESCO that is based on the writings of Joshi and his team' (p. 11). In fact, much of the material on the following six pages (pp. 12-17) appears either verbatim or close to verbatim on the HESCO website.² For example, Jain's overview begins: 'For the last more than three decades, Dr. Anil Joshi and his team members of HESCO have been applying knowledge of environmental sciences and simple technologies to bring sustainable development to the rural villages of the Himalayas' (p. 12). There are no quotation marks, and no citation is given. The HESCO website reads: 'For the last 28 years, Dr. Anil Joshi and his team members of HESCO have been applying knowledge of the environmental sciences and simple technologies to bring consistent development to the rural villages of the Himalayas'. Jain continues: 'They live the Spartan lives of the villagers they serve, and tap the human resources of these same villagers to determine the real practical interventions necessary for their economic development' (p. 12). The website reads: 'They live the spartan lives of the villagers they serve, and tap the human resources of these same villagers to determine the real practical interventions necessary for their economic

1. www.nirmalkuteya.com. Accessed 2 March 2018.

2. www.hesco.in. Archived version (from 7 January 2012) accessed via <https://web.archive.org>, 2 March 2018.

development'. Whether Jain drew from the website or from a printed work on which the website is based, the fact remains that several pages of his book are reproduced, sometimes with paraphrase and sometimes without, from an uncited source.

The abstract at the beginning of the book notes that Jain's work 'will be of interest to students and scholars of South Asian Studies, Religion, Environmental Studies, Himalayan Studies, and Development Studies'. While the topic of the book will indeed be of interest, the problems noted above make it difficult to recommend.

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