

Joan M. Jensen — *Passages from India: Asian Indian Immigration in North America*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988. Pp. x, 350

This book purports to be a general history of events concerning immigrants from India to the United States and Canada, from the time of their first arrival, in any number (ca. 1903), through the 1920's. It is in fact somewhat more constrained than this in its topical and areal foci, being primarily concerned with two main issues in the overall saga of historical South Asians: intergroup relations which developed between these new immigrants and others, and various political responses to their presence. It is also a book considerably more concerned with America than Canada, especially in the year after 1914.

This all may suggest that readers not specifically interested in the South Asian diaspora or the history of Asians in North America should give this book a pass. After all, the total number of South Asians in Canada and America during the period in question was insignificant — never more than 10-12,000. By way of contrast, overall, immigration to Canada alone in the single year 1914 was 400,000. And this is not an immigrant-centered book either, grounded in the family- and community-based social stuff of everyday life. Readers seeking this sort of immigration history will, indeed, have to look elsewhere.

But I would nevertheless suggest that this book would be appreciated by a rather wide range of readers. Though it is little known in Canada and virtually forgotten in the U.S., the "Passage from India" of these few thousand men (and virtually no women) activated a number of highly significant social and political forces of great generality and impact, locally, nationally and internationally. As Jensen elegantly shows, Indian migrants were from the start seen as "non-whites" who almost all arrived on the Pacific after it had already been sharply racially polarized by the entry of Chinese and Japanese. Thus, as Jensen demonstrates (ch. 2-7), how Canada and the U.S. "dealt" with this new "racial problem" illustrates in fine relief key aspects of early twentieth century social and political responses to ethnoracial similarity and difference in both countries. Jensen, in this way, presents a great deal of valuable data detailing government practice and mindset concerning immigration control, naturalization and the social, political and economic rights of aliens. These, in turn, expand out in later chapters (ch. 11-12) into still more general issues: what is a "white person" in the U.S. (especially re: a group such as Asian Indians, whom the anthropologists of the era deemed "Caucasians") and what ultimately were to be the baseline criteria for being an American citizen.

Indians were, of course, migrants from Britain's most important colonial possession — one securely controlled chiefly through a thorough stifling of all but the most trivial internal dissent and political organization. But as British government officials immediately appreciated, Indian immigrants overseas were not necessarily subject to these same constraints and might, therefore, become "seditionists" and "dangerous revolutionaries". From the start, British government officials believed they had a vested interest in stopping Indian immigration to North America, and in controlling the activities of those who had already come. A cat and mouse game of escalating move and counter-move soon developed. Student revolutionaries established themselves along the Pacific Coast, especially in the San Francisco area and Vancouver. In co-operation with Canadian and U.S. authorities, the British instituted a system of covert surveillance and subversion. Alienated by profound discrimination in North America and by the active hostility of the British government, revolutionary feeling grew in the émigré community, such, that by the outbreak of World War I, the newly established Ghadar Party was able to convince over two thousand men to return to India to support a revolution. Hoping to increase dissent in an India drained of British troops, the Germans gave intermittent financial support till the entry of the U.S. into the War, in 1917. All of this intrigue has been covered before, starting with accounts of some of the principals of the story over forty years ago. But Jensen has been able to weave this story together particularly effectively (ch. 8-11), especially by the well-meshed use of the documentary materials of five governments: British, American, Canadian, German and Californian. In doing so, she, of necessity, brings out a number of central, more general issues of interest to social historians of the era: diverse national conceptions of colonialism, individual rights and national sovereignty as they were developing in the period leading up to the First World

War. My only reservations here are essentially wishes for more: more on the development of the Canadian story; more space devoted to the activities and outlooks of that mass of Indian immigrants who were neither leaders nor elite.

There is much here for the specialist, too, for whom this must become a central reference work. For the United States, this is the only detailed, contemporary historical monograph on the general situation of the early Indian migrants available. But this is faint praise, for it is more than this. *Passage from India* has digested a massive amount of data derived from what has evidently been at least a fifteen-year quest: government records, at least fifty American court cases, the historical media, academic commentary and even a bit of oral history. It, thus, provides a host of new factual insights to anyone working in the field of Asian North American history or early twentieth-century race relations. Although American-centered, there is even a fair amount of new material on Canada. Indeed, though someone who perhaps knows the Canadian scene as well as anyone, I was often surprised at how much new there was for me in this book, especially on U.S.-Canadian government relations.

*Passage from India* is of course neither perfect nor all-encompassing. After 1914, it is essentially an American history with few references to the Canadian situation. As such, while it presents a number of powerful parallels in Canadian and American reactions to Indian migrants before the World War, it does not show the many differences in these responses which arose thereafter. Indeed, its coverage of Canada (save for inter-governmental relations) is somewhat weak throughout, and it does not specifically reference much of the academic literature which has arisen in Canada over the past decade (e.g. Doreen Indra's and my *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada*, McClelland & Stewart, 1985). Moreover, this is not an especially theoretical book. Theory occasionally comes in, as in the discussion of why it was primarily Sikhs who came rather than other Indians (25-27), or in accounting for their subsequent geographical distribution in California (36). Jensen also adequately describes but does not fully explain the wide range of discriminatory practices faced by Indian migrants in California, save in reference to now-traditional arguments of the "Asian menace"; the whole book might have benefitted from more comparative race relation theory and from more comparative material on the South Asian diaspora elsewhere in the world. It also becomes somewhat theoretical in its effective presentation of the wider implications of Indian naturalization struggles in America (ch. 12). This book is stuffed full of facts and a few, inevitably, are wrong. As Canadian examples, there were not 2,500 Indians in British Columbia in 1903 (60) but rather only a handful; it is very unlikely that 80 percent of early immigrants mortgaged land in order to pay for passage (26); Indian immigration continued to be a very contentious issue in Canada after the 1908 ban, despite Jensen's conclusion otherwise (82); Indians got the vote in British Columbia in 1947, not in 1938 (276).

Stylistically, this book is quite well-written and very readable with only a few troublesome disconnected historical threads, and virtually no typos. The text is well referenced and is augmented with a reasonably comprehensive index and a bibliography which rates "good" for America, "basic" for Canada. I have no hesitancy in recommending it to a wide audience.

Norman Buchignani  
University of Lethbridge

\* \* \*

William Kaplan — *Everything That Floats — Pat Sullivan, Hal Banks, and the Seamen's Unions of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. Pp. 241.

The cover of this book proclaims that it recounts "one of the most infamous chapters in the history of the Canadian labour movement." The infamy of Hal Banks and his Seafarers' International Union (SIU) is indisputable. Brought in from the United States by shipping companies, with the