

that locality and served its residents in the nineteenth century), and another lane called Gulu Ostar Lane (celebrating a tailor who was her contemporary).¹

Memoirs of Roads is a fine exploration of Calcutta, a curious mix of archive, memory and lived experience of the city. To an outsider, some of the issues might not resonate as strongly as to somebody who has spent time in the city. As readers of his works, one only hopes that Sumanta Banerjee would venture to write a history of Calcutta with more entries from his diary and memories, and combine them with his vast knowledge of the annals of the city.

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Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurenev (eds), *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2014, xiv + 232 pp., ₹3,195.

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Alcohol and drugs, prevalent in India since ancient times, assumed new commercial and cultural importance with the beginning of colonial rule. Colonialists controlled the production and sale of intoxicants and encouraged their use for the sake of profit in India and outside. The consequences of this were temperance and anti-drug movements in India, which originated from the proselytizing of Christian missionaries, and later became a part of nineteenth-century Indian religious and social reform, finally taken over by Indian nationalists in the early twentieth century. So far, historians have studied the economic importance of opium to colonialism in India and have touched upon temperance movements as part of larger histories of Indian nationalism. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurenev add to that eight different case studies of intoxicants in modern and contemporary India in an effort to locate their histories in the global history of psychoactive substances. Their edited volume opens with a survey of alcohol manufacturing and consumption from the Vedic age to the Mughal Empire and closes with a study of prohibition in the modern-day Indian state of Gujarat. The volume ends with a brief critical commentary on the essays by noted French South Asianist Claude Markovits.

A variety of alcoholic drinks were brewed in India from the Vedic age till the end of seventeenth century, and their consumption was regulated by a web of injunctions and prescriptions, both royal and religious. As European traders arrived in Indian shores, they brought a large variety of superior quality wines from their continent. Europeans stationed in India were heavy drinkers, with sailors and soldiers being particularly notorious for their love of drink. Even

¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

European Christian missionaries, who were in India to preach the virtues of European civilization, could become slave to the habit of drinking. This is exemplified in Tobias Delfs' case study of Christian Fruchtenicht, a Danish Christian missionary in eighteenth-century Tranquebar who ruined his life due to heavy drinking.² His case demonstrated why Europeans of a higher social order sought to enforce public sobriety as a visible characteristic of those from the continent in India. With the establishment of colonial rule, the number of sailors and soldiers in port cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras increased rapidly. Later, in 1833, the licence system regulating the inflow of immigrants from Europe into India was removed, attracting a larger number of lower class Europeans. Their numbers grew even larger from the middle of the nineteenth century, when railway and telegraph construction offered employment opportunities. Many among the lower class Europeans were given to drink, and they did not hesitate to take to strong India liquor. They were very often seen drunk and brawling in public, thus undermining the myth of superiority of the European character. The consequence of this was the European Vagrancy Act of 1869, which tried to put lower class alcoholic Europeans away from public scrutiny in work-houses far from the port cities. A different policy was followed when it came to Indians; to them, their colonial government encouraged drinking to maximize revenue. Consequently, from the 1880s Indian nationalists led temperance campaigns. The Indian National Congress-led campaign calling for prohibition peaked, as Robert Eric Colvard shows,³ during the Civil Disobedience in early 1930s and ended in the enactment of piecemeal prohibition in the Congress-ruled provinces after 1937. The Congress imposed prohibition in a few areas of the provinces it ruled, created a non-state bureaucracy that maintained surveillance over possible smuggling and illegal business in alcohol, and aided officials in enforcing a ban on alcohol. Colvard doubts the efficacy of this short-lived policy,⁴ which was undertaken at the cost of massive loss of revenue, and which often resulted in increasing the social distance separating the elites and the middle class from the masses.

After 1947, several Indian states imposed partial to total prohibition. Gujarat opted for complete prohibition, which, as Carolyn Heitmeyer and Edward Simpson show,⁵ has not only failed but led to the undesired consequence of increasing urban crime and intensifying communal conflict. Drinking was common among princely rulers, Kshatriyas or the warrior caste, and tribals of Gujarat since before the advent of colonialism in the subcontinent. With the rise of the Brahmin–Bania caste alliance into power, a new set of values were imposed on food and drink,

² Tobias Delfs, "What Shall Become of the Mission When We Have Such Incompetent Missionaries There?" Drunkenness and Mission in Eighteenth Century Danish East India', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014), 71–75.

³ Robert Eric Colvard, "Drunkards Beware!" Prohibition and Nationalist Politics in the 1930s', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia*, ed. Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014) 173–200.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 187–88, 190–92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 193–95.

which called for giving up alcohol and identifying it as a marker of inferiority or perversion. Consequently, even among tribals, as David Hardiman has shown in the case of the Devi movement,⁶ abstention from alcohol became a marker of reformed superior character. Prohibition imposed after 1947, however, has failed to eradicate alcohol from the state and has brought into being a criminal network of bootleggers, corrupt politicians and government officials. The bootleggers make whiskey available to the globalized and affluent middle class and hooch or moonshine accessible to the lower classes in the dry state. Heitmeyer and Simpson say that bootlegging has become so profitable a business that contests over its patronage has taken the form of communal riots among Hindus and Muslims.⁷

Just like alcohol, opium, became a bone of contention among Indians and the British. By 1800, the company controlled the production and sale of opium from Bihar and Benaras, and strove to control the same in the Malwa region, which was then divided between Maratha and Rajput princely states, and was not under direct colonial rule. Indian traders of the region smuggled opium through present-day Rajasthan and Sind to China and Southeast Asia, which, according to Amar Farooqui, annually earned them ₹15 million.⁸ The British conquest of Sind in 1843 finally brought the trade under the company's control. Opium became a government monopoly as the colonial state replaced the company state in 1858. The Royal Commission on Opium of 1893, appointed by the government found that a very large number of Indians were addicted to the drug, the reason behind it was government propaganda to sell opium to Indians. For example, in Assam, the government promoted it as an invigorating antidote to the common and deadly disease malaria. The alarming increase in opium addiction led to a campaign against it by European Christian missionaries, carried forward by the English-educated Assamese in the nineteenth century. From the early twentieth century, Indian nationalists called for the eradication of opium. In the 1920s, the Congress initiated its anti-opium programme, which brought about a sharp fall in the sale of the drug by 1930. The Congress-dominated Assam provincial legislature brought out a comprehensive 'Assam Opium Enquiry Commission Report' in 1933, which recommended opium eradication. The party drew up a plan with the advice of medical practitioners, which, however, could only come into effect immediately after independence in 1947, and by 1959, opium consumption was completely wiped out of the state. This showed that the nationalist anti-opium campaign could only succeed at an all-India level after the end of colonial rule. Attempts to illegalize international trade in opium had proved abortive since 1909, when the first international opium congress was held in Shanghai. In the 1920s, when the Congress made its anti-drug and alcohol campaign an integral part of the Indian national movement, the USA severely criticized Britain for selling opium in the international market. In 1925, a League of Nations meeting in Geneva turned

⁶ Carolyn Heitmeyer and Edward Simpson, 'The Culture of Prohibition in Gujarat India', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia*, ed. Fischer-Tine and Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014) 203–18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸ Amar Farooqui, 'Opium, the East India Company and the Native States', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia*, ed. Fischer-Tine and Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014) 59.

into a battleground between the two countries, where Britain won the day by stalling the American efforts to illegalize the sale of opium for non-medicinal purposes. The Indian government was represented there by European officials, who prevented the ratification of international regulations meant to limit production and sale of the drug in India.

It would be wrong to presume that Europeans sought drugs in India solely for profit. The founder of the Theosophical Society in Germany, Wilhelm Hubbe-Schleiden came to India 'exclusively on a quest of spiritual insight' and was, according to Maria Moritz, the fore-runner of the hippies who toured the country in the 1960s seeking nirvana with the help of cannabis.⁹ In India, Hubbe-Schleiden soon fell out with the Theosophical Society and found an Indian guru, Pasupati Deva, and made friends with Ras Behari Mukherjee and Anagarika Dharmapala, the renowned late nineteenth-century Buddhist intellectual of Calcutta. He started taking *bhang*, the light liquid preparation of cannabis, in 1895 at his guru's behest, and finally graduated to smoking cannabis to find salvation and freedom from fleshly desires. His experiment failed and he left for Germany in 1896, disillusioned and dejected.

Covering such a diverse range of subjects, the most important contribution of the essays in Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev's volume is that they throw light on the impact of alcohol and drugs in politics in colonial India and thereafter. The essays trace the origins of tensions due to drinking within the imperialist ideology of white supremacy, which propagated the myth of the self-controlled European drinking in private. This clashed with the calculated championing of drinking among Indians by the colonial government and led to the nationalist response calling for prohibition, which in turn gave rise to tensions within a rigidly hierarchical Indian society in colonial times and paved the way for communalism and crime since independence. The struggle against the prime drug of colonial India, opium, proved even more difficult for the Indian nationalists. Indian opium generated large revenues for the colonialists, which they were not prepared to part with. So, even though anti-opium campaign of Indian nationalists could win support internationally, they had to wait till after gaining freedom to attain success in this respect. Taken together, the essays, as Claude Markovits rightly observes,¹⁰ pay more attention to alcohol than drugs, but they nonetheless add significantly to the existing body of knowledge on the subject. They successfully complement the history of the economic impact of trade in intoxicants in colonial India with their political significance and consequence.

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⁹ Maria Moritz, 'Looking for Spirituality in India: A German Theosophist's Experiment with *Ganja* (1894–1896)', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia*, ed. Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014) 117–36.

¹⁰ Claude Markovits, 'Afterword', in *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia*, ed. Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev (Routledge, London and New York, 2014) 222.