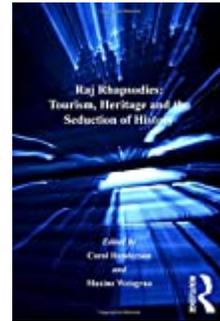




**Carol E. Henderson, Maxine Weisgrau, eds.** *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism Heritage and the Seduction of History*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xlvii + 236 pp. \$99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7546-7067-4.



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## **Tourism: A Tale of Heritage, Exclusions, and Identity Formation**

The study of tourism and the varied cultural and identity politics it generates never seem to fit disciplinary categories; but it is also precisely this state of flux that creates multifaceted opportunities for its study. In the collection *Raj Rhapsodies*, anthropologists, geographers, and historians come together to provide a close reading of the modes through which the Northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan has been manufactured as a carefully packaged repository of *ârealâ* India showcasing royal grandeur, colorful crafts, and *âheritageâ* architecture. The essays, however, go beyond stating that tourist destinations are specifically manufactured for visitors, which has been argued before (Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 1976); rather, they focus on the complex socioeconomic interactions that take place at these sites, which result in the reconfiguration of existing identities. More important, the essays make the case that tourism, as a socioeconomic and cultural force, influences the formation of palpable yet fluid stereotypical identities, which local players actually employ to their advantage to obtain economic and political influence. Providing a nuanced understanding of

the multivalent activity that is tourism, some essays in the volume show how colonial narratives of Rajasthan as an exotic land of rajahs, forts, and temples survive even today, and that these can be economically useful for current local actors in the tourism industry. However, such gain, as Tim Edensor points out in his foreword, is not always available to all in the region. Other essays point to the marginalization of both places and people, as tour itineraries exclude certain areas and interest conflicts prevent potential beneficiaries from partaking in the tourist economy.

Methodologically, the most striking aspect of this collection is the way in which it came into existence. The idea for the volume occurred to editors Carol E. Henderson and Maxine Weisgrau in the late 1980s, when they were on a field trip to Rajasthan and realized that despite visiting as scholars, they too were tourists in a sense. In particular, it was the experience of seeing a sign in their luxury hotel bathroom asking them to let their water run for ten minutes for it to become hot—at a time when the region was undergoing a major drought—that prompted

them to undertake a study of tourism and its inequities in Rajasthan. This recognition makes for extremely self-reflexive writing, in which the authors explore their specific tourist experiences and interactions as they conducted research. Such personalized writing, which forces scholars to implicate themselves in their arguments and assumptions, is refreshing, to say the least, in academic scholarship. On the flip side, however, personal narratives sometimes tend to complicate the author's own argument. For example, Anne Hardgrove's opening essay, "Shifting Terrains of Heritage: The Painted Towns of Shekhawati," examines the town of Shekhawati and its painted *havelis* (large flat-roofed houses often surrounding courtyards) belonging to the wealthy business community; the Marwaris have emerged as yet another decontextualized physical manifestation of "atypical" Rajasthani "heritage" visually on par with royal palaces. Hardgrove is rightly concerned when she sees poverty in the form of poor women under a "tiny bit of shade" while out of the relatively prosperous tourist zone of the painted structures. She concludes that Shekhawati presents a "staged" experience of tourism for and about the "doings of the rich and the high and mighty" (p. 18). Clearly, Hardgrove's own tourist-scholar experience of being stranded at a bus stop in rural Rajasthan underscores the point that tourist experiences are often controlled by commercial and political agencies and thereby exclude certain sections of the region from the benefits of the tourist economy. However, only two pages later in her exploration of ecotourism as a new form of heritage, she laments the absence of air-conditioning in the "blistering July heat" (p. 20). While this statement does not add to or detract from her main arguments about heritage in Shekhawati, it subtly points to anxieties in the author's attitudes toward tourism, which at once deplore the commercialism yet also expect its benefits.

In response to the sign about water, Henderson and Weisgrau write in their introduction that "even to anthropologists reluctant to study what was then perceived as a frivolous topic like tourism, this disregard for local needs, contrasted with the perceived requirements of the luxury tourist, could not be ignored" (p. 1). As anthropologists, they felt the need to justify their study of a "frivolous" topic like tourism by its link with social disparities, assuming that without such connections tourism would be a wholly unworthy category of study. Of course, intimate links with economic inequities definitely make travel and tourism a critical subject of study. But even without such justifications, the act of tourism, the historical knowledge it generates, and the political

implications in which it participates make it a pertinent subject of research. Having said that, however, this collection of essays is an extremely significant addition to South Asian studies in general because tourism in India, whether historical or contemporary, has not received the attention it deserves.

*Raj Rhapsodies* is divided into three sections highlighting different aspects of tourism in Rajasthan, such as the construction of heritage and travel narratives, socioeconomic identities, and sites of religious pilgrimage. The first section, "Creating Tourism Narratives of Heritage across Space and Time," traces the historical associations of tourism with the marking of certain structures, performances, foods, and/or crafts as recognizably "heritage." The essay of note in this section is James Freitag's "Travel, History, Politics and Heritage: James Tod's Personal Narrative," in which the author examines the much ignored travel writing of James Tod—the East India Company's political agent in the western Rajput states. In his analysis, Freitag juxtaposes the Orientalist historian Tod with the Tod who was sympathetic to the Rajputs as evidenced in his personal travel narratives. By doing so, Freitag is able to provide a nuanced understanding of this figure—who, until now, has been examined in a one-sided manner as an Orientalist. This section also contains a fascinating comparison of the tourist narratives constructed around the two cities of Jaipur and Amber from colonial to present times, Elena Karatchkova's "Ghost Towns and Bustling Cities: Constructing a Master Narrative in Nineteenth Century Jaipur." Karatchkova makes the case that Jaipur with its angular roads was imagined as a "modern" city by the British to emphasize the enlightened nature of colonial rule; whereas Amber was in its travel descriptions relegated to the past, with every narrative repeating the animal sacrifice at the Kali temple—whether the traveler had actually seen it or not. This essay is a wonderful survey of nineteenth-century Western travel writing on Jaipur and Amber, from Bishop Reginald Heber to Rudyard Kipling, but by the end the conclusions are not quite as powerful as expected. Karatchkova concludes that Jaipur, which was once conceptualized as modern by colonial travelers was now represented as a symbol of traditional India; but why that happened and what its political implications might be is not discussed in any great detail besides the suggestion that Western tourists come to India seeking the past and not the modern.

The second section entitled "Tourism, Transgression and Shifting Uses of Social Capital," focuses on the exclusions and formations of multiple socioeconomic, sexual, and political identities in tourist spaces. This part con-

tains some impressive essays that theorize the study of tourism and paint a picture of tourism as a double-edged sword with benefits and costs. Nicholas Bautã's "Exclusion and Election in Udaipur Urban Space: Implications of Tourism" is a fabulous exploration of the impact of tourism on the physical and human geography of an urban center. Through an in-depth study of the urbanism of Udaipur, the demarcation of specific tourist zones, and tourist promotional materials, he makes the case that the forces of tourism bolster existing socioeconomic and spatial disparities. He posits that changing urban patterns are deeply political in nature and directly affect economics and human lives.

The third section, entitled "Tourism and Spiritual Spaces," focuses on sites of religious pilgrimage, such as Ajmer, Pushkar, and Osian, which are also tourist destinations. In theoretical terms, this is a significant section of the book because it examines the relationship between heritage, tourist sites, and places of worship where visitors might be pilgrims or tourists or some combination of the two. John Cortã's essay "Devotees, Families and Tourists: Pilgrims and Shrines in Rajasthan," following in the vein of Richard Davis's *Lives of Indian Images* (1997), presents an analysis of the myriad identities and functions of the deities and the temples at Osian, which shift in line with the motivations of visitors to the site. Cortã's most notable point is that the multiple uses of the temples have been vital to their survival as a functioning and living place of pilgrimage and visitation in the twenty-first century. The shrine of India's most popular Sufi saint, Muãin al-din Chisti, forms the basis of Usha Sanyal's essay, which is fairly useful in providing an overview of the shrine's history, uses, and rituals

through the lens of nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel narratives and modern Web sites and blogs. The problem, however, is that she focuses only on one travel narrative, maybe two Web sites, and one blog. This does not seem to be a very comprehensive evidentiary base and often makes the reading of the material merely descriptive. Furthermore, given the current rise of Hindu nationalism in India, the essay misses an opportunity for analysis of the attitudes of such organizations toward sites like Ajmer, which attract people of all religious affiliations besides tourists. Nonetheless, this is a helpful introduction for those who are not at all familiar with the history of this shrine. In the last essay, "Hindu Nationalism, Community Rhetoric and the Impact of Tourism: The Divine Dilemma of Pushkar," Christina A. Joseph posits that the Brahmans, the main beneficiaries of tourism at this religious site, both mediate and resist the behavior of foreign tourists that they deem immoral. Joseph keeps central in her narrative the predicament of imposing cultural checks on foreign tourists while also benefiting from them, and weaves a careful analysis of the selective employment of Hindu nationalist rhetoric to resist and engage with foreign visitors to Pushkar.

Despite some essays being largely descriptive in nature, *Raj Rhapsodies* is a timely addition to studies on India and Rajasthan. After Edensor's work on the Taj, it is the first project that attempts a scholarly examination of tourism at an Indian site, and will help in bringing tourism as a category of study into the fields of art history, urban planning, architecture, and religious studies particularly in the South Asian context.

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