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Review of 'Making Faces: Self and Image Creation in a Himalayan Valley' by Alka Hingorani

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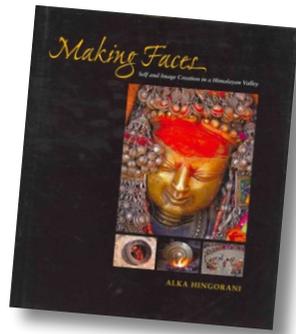
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Making Faces: Self and Image Creation in a Himalayan Valley

Alka Hingorani. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Pp. x + 150. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-8248-3525-5.

Reviewed by Gudrun Buhnemann

This book is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation titled *Making Faces: Of Gods and God-makers in the Kullu-Valley*, which the author submitted to The History of Art Department of the University of California-Berkeley in 2006. Research for this study was conducted in the Kullu Valley of the state of Himachal Pradesh in North India between 2002 and 2004.

The book deals with the making of face-images (*mohrā*) of deities. These images, which usually include the upper part of the deities' torso, are often called "masks," a misleading term since they are not worn. The face-images are mainly used in processions, most importantly during the Dashera festival. Dashera (also spelled Dussera, Dasara or, in Nepal, Dasain and known more formally as Vijayādaśami) is one of the most important Hindu festivals, whose celebration usually falls in October. It commemorates Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa and Durgā's conquest of Mahiṣāsura. The face-images are placed on either chariots or palanquins, which are drawn or shouldered by men. Important conveyances used in the Dashera

festival include those of Rāma (known as Raghunāth-jī), Balu Nāga, Śeṣa Nāga, the goddess Haḍimbā, Pārvatī, Mahādeva, Śṛṅga Ṛṣi, Gautama Ṛṣi and Manu Ṛṣi. Usually multiple images representing a single deity are placed on one conveyance. If a conveyance accommodates more than one deity (as is occasionally the case with the goddess Haḍimbā and Manu Ṛṣi), a single deity will still tend to be represented by several images. A set of face-images on one conveyance manifests a collective identity, which is distinct from that of another group of images placed on a conveyance from another village that has a different history. The face-images are periodically melted down and recreated by artists. The process of dissolution and renewal is a complex one. It involves questions about the time for renewal, the continuity of visual forms and the transfer of the sacred power of these images.

Chapter One provides a general introduction to the topic, acquainting the reader with the topography and culture of the Kullu Valley. Chapter Two focuses mainly on the material aspects of the face-images, which are made of either cast metal or are embossed on gold or silver sheets, and the characteristics of the conveyances on which they are placed. It also provides some information on the history of the face-images, although here more research is needed. Chapter Three is a lively ethnographic account of the processes involved in creating

an embossed face-image and a royal parasol. The author reports on the work of the artisan Taberam Soni, his community and the culture surrounding the production of images in the Kullu Valley. The chapter also deals with the ritual framework connected with the production of the *mohrās*. She describes in detail the rituals performed to secure an auspicious commencement of the process of manufacturing these objects, which involves the sacrifice of a sheep and the consultation of an oracle. Chapter Four is devoted to understanding the aesthetics involved in creating material objects of religious significance. It shows how the patron and the members of the community participate along with the artist in creating the standards for judging the appearance of an object (in this case an honorific parasol) they had commissioned. The role of the artist and his shifting status in the social hierarchy are the subject-matter of chapter five. Hingorani shows how the artist also functions as a bearer of news to remote villages and as a story-teller. To illustrate this role, she includes an artist's tale of the sun god and the divine architect Viśvakarman (the patron of artisans) in her vivid ethnographic account. The epilogue deals with the consecration of a temple to illustrate how sacred objects are consecrated and once more addresses the role of the artist in the social system.

This book adds considerably to our understanding of the process of manufacturing face-images in

Himachal Pradesh. It will be of interest to scholars of anthropology, material culture, history of religion and art history. It is also accessible to a non-specialist audience; diacritical marks are not used for words from Indian languages. Its value is greatly enhanced by excellent color photographs taken by the author.

Gudrun Bühnemann is a Professor in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has published extensively on South Asian iconography and ritual. Details can be found at <http://lca.wisc.edu/~gbuhnema/>. Her recent books include Buddhist Iconography and Ritual in Paintings and Line Drawings from Nepal (Lumbini International Research Institute, 2008) and The Life of the Buddha: Buddhist and Śaiva Iconography and Visual Narratives in Artists' Sketchbooks from Nepal (Lumbini International Research Institute, 2012).

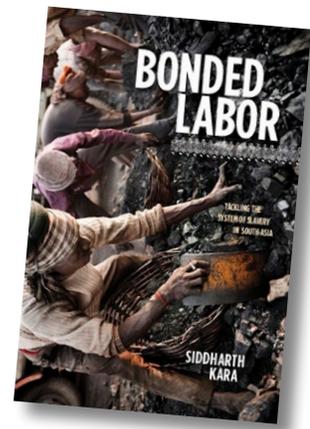
Bonded Labor: Tackling the System of Slavery in South Asia

Siddharth Kara. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Pp. 336. \$29.50 (cloth). ISBN 978-0231158480.

Reviewed by Indrani Chatterjee

The central conundrum that powers this book is the existence of millions of bonded laborers in all the nation-states of South Asia despite comprehensive legislation to abolish it. As Kara tells us, South Asia has 84-88 % of the 20.5 million total bonded laborers worldwide in 2011 (p. 3). India has the largest share of this, proportionate to its population. Yet, in 1920 began colonial legislation to regulate bonded labor. The Bihar Orissa Kamaiuti Agreement Act was hammered out that year. Madras followed in 1940. The regulatory agenda continued as the subcontinent was carved out into nation-states.

After 1947, governments of individual nation-states passed their own laws. India consolidated the disparate older regional acts and passed a consolidated Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act in 1976. Pakistan passed its abolitionist act in 1992. Nepal passed the Kamaiya Labor Prohibition Act in 2002. Bangladesh passed its Labor Act in 2006. Yet the author's visits to a vast number of agrarian concerns (tea-plantations and rice-fields in India, shrimp cultures in Bangladesh) and semi-rural manufacturing units (carpet-making in Nepal, glassmaking, tobacco rolling, stone cutting and quarrying, brickmaking) – that make up the bulk of the Chapters Two through Seven – found only laborers in chains.



The author begins with the broadest definition of 'bondage' possible: "The condition of any person whose liberty is unlawfully restricted while the person is coerced through any means to render labor or services, regardless of compensation, including those who enter the condition because of the lack of a reasonable alternative" (p. 31). Chapters One and Eight list twenty forces conducive to creating conditions in which huge profits are generated for employers of bonded laborers with no risk to themselves. A substantial number of these pertain to the domain of law. The implication is that bad laws created bonded labor and good laws will erase it. Lawyers will lead the way.

The author's focus therefore falls squarely on the failure of South Asian laws, lawyers and legal machinery. Readers find out that liability laws are very limited in their scope. There are nearly no penalties in the criminal legal systems for 'the crime of bonded labor'. Furthermore, those who are supposed to enforce these labor laws ensure that there are virtually no prosecutions for mal-treating bonded laborers. In the author's words, "dizzying levels of apathy, corruption, bureaucratic callousness; key deficiencies in the law that include criminal law penalties ... and a general social acceptance that it is reasonable to exploit the labor of a certain outcast segment of society render all best laws, system, mandates and efforts to eradicate bonded labor highly ineffective" (p.186).

The book offers an indictment of Indian law and government wrapped in an ethnography of labor. It is a baffling indictment because it is so