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The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India

In an area which has previously been neglected by the scholarly literature, Nandini Gooptu's magisterial history of the labouring poor in urban India represents a tour de force. By focusing on the role of the urban poor in caste, religious and nationalist politics, the author demonstrates how they emerged as a major social and political factor in South Asia during the interwar period. She explores their central importance in the economy through a discussion of the patterns of urbanisation, migration and employment and the development of a casual, 'informal' labour market. The empirical material, drawn from towns in Uttar Pradesh, provides compelling insights into what it meant to be poor in the urban environment: the insecurity and exploitation of the workplace; the problems of finding housing and the lack of access to the basic amenities of life; harassment and coercion by the police; and social and political exclusion by the elite, who regarded the impoverished with suspicion as undesirable and potentially dangerous. The author illuminates the processes of cultural transformation among the poor and their construction of social identities by concentrating on their modes of political action and perceptions. In this way, she takes issue with current interpretations of sectarian and nationalist politics that argue the salience of community identity and the irrelevance of class in political analysis. The book will be of interest to all those concerned with urban social history and with the comparative history and politics of poverty, labour and class relations, ethnic and sectarian conflict, and nationalist movements.

NANDINI GOOPTU is University Lecturer in South Asian Studies at the University of Oxford and Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford.

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To
my mother, Mukti,
and
my daughter, Sreya,
through whom I trace my spiritual genealogy

To
my father, Naranarayan,
who inspired my interest in political struggles

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Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIT	Allahabad Improvement Trust
AMB	Allahabad Municipal Board
<i>BEC</i>	<i>Report of the United Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929–30</i>
BMB	Benares Municipal Board
CID	Criminal Investigation Department, UP Police
CPI	Communist Party of India
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
DIG	Deputy Inspector General of Police
DM	District Magistrate
<i>EPW</i>	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>
ERR	English Record Room in District Collectorates
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fortnightly Report for the United Provinces</i>
GAD	General Administration Department
GOI	Government of India
GUP	Government of UP
Home Poll.	Home Department, Political Branch
ICS	Indian Civil Service
<i>IESHR</i>	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
IGP	Inspector General of Police
IOR	India Office Records, London
KIT	Kanpur Improvement Trust
KLIC	Kanpur Labour Inquiry Committee (Committee of Inquiry into Wages and Conditions of Labour in Cawnpore, 1938)
KMB	Kanpur Municipal Board
KRIC	Kanpur Riots Inquiry Commission (Commission of Inquiry into the Communal Outbreak at Cawnpore, 1931)
LIT	Lucknow Improvement Trust
LMB	Lucknow Municipal Board

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xvi List of abbreviations

<i>MAS</i>	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
NAI	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NML	Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi
<i>NNR</i>	<i>Native Newspaper Reports</i>
<i>PAI</i>	<i>Police Abstracts of Intelligence (Weekly)</i>
<i>RAPUP</i>	<i>Report on the Administration of the Police of the United Provinces</i>
<i>RCLI</i>	<i>Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931</i>
<i>RDIUP</i>	<i>Report of the Director (or Department) of Industries, UP</i>
<i>RTITC</i>	<i>Report of the Town Improvement Trusts Committee</i>
SP	Superintendent of Police
UICC	Upper India Chamber of Commerce
UP	Uttar Pradesh, or the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (before 1947)
UPPCC	Uttar Pradesh Provincial Congress Committee
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow

Select glossary

acchutoddhar	uplift of untouchables
ahata	complex of small houses in walled compound
ahir or yadav	a Hindu pastoral and agricultural caste, often associated with cattle-rearing
akhara	gymnasium; wrestling den; centre of physical culture; the spatial organisation or the site of activities and training of any specialised group
alim (<i>pl.</i> ulema)	Islamic learned person
anjuman	an organisation
ansari	Muslim caste of weavers
arti or arti puja	Hindu ceremony of worship
ashraf	Muslim upper classes
auqaf (<i>pl.</i> Waqf)	Islamic religious endowment
azadi	independence, freedom
azan	Islamic call to prayers
badelog	literally 'big people', refers to the upper classes
badli	substitute
badmash	thug or roguish person; miscreant
bandha	tied or bonded
bania	trader or moneylender
baqidari	a system of deferred payment of wages for workers
Barawafat	Islamic festival
Basant Panchami	Hindu festival
basti/busti	slum
bazar	marketplace
beer/bir	brave, courageous; also refers to deified heroic martyrs
begar	unpaid labour
bhagat	devotee
bhakti	Hindu devotionism

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bhangi	an untouchable caste group; sweeper
bidi/biri	Indian cigarettes
Biraha	a genre of folk song
bisati	general merchant; lower-caste pedlar
brahmin	upper-caste Hindu, usually associated with scholarly or priestly functions
chamar	an untouchable caste group; leather worker
charkha	spinning wheel
chaudhuri	headman of a caste panchayat or council of elders
chaukidar	neighbourhood watchman or guard
chehlum	Islamic festival
chikan	hand embroidery on cloth
chowkie/chauki	police outpost
Dadhkando	Hindu festival
daira	Islamic sufi shrine; tomb of sufi saint
dal	corps, party or group
dalit	term used to refer to untouchables
dangal	tournament or competition
dar-ul-harb	territory considered by Muslims to be that ruled by non-believers or infidels
darzi	tailor
dasa	servant or slave
dasata	servitude, bondage
deshdrohi	traitor to the country
dharma	religion or religious duty
dhobi	Hindu caste of washermen
diksha	Hindu religious initiation
Diwali	Hindu festival of light
dom	an untouchable caste group
Dusserah	Hindu festival
ekka	horse-drawn hackney carriage
ekkawala	driver of horse-drawn hackney carriage
faqir/fakir	Islamic mendicant or holy man
fizulkharch	unnecessary expenditure
garha	coarse handwoven cloth
garib janata	poor common people
garibi	poverty
gariwan	vehicle driver; coachman
ghat	bathing or washing place on the bank of a river, usually paved
ghazi	Muslim warrior

Select glossary

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goonda	thug; tough
goondashahi	rule of thugs
gujar	Hindu agricultural and pastoral caste
gulam/ghulam	servant
gulami/ghulami	servitude
guru	preceptor; teacher
halwai	Hindu caste of confectioners
harijan	term used to refer to untouchables
hartal	strike; stoppage of work
Holi	Hindu festival
Id-milad-ul-nabi	Islamic festival
Idgah	compound for Id prayers
jamadar	labour contractor; overseer
janata	common people
Janmastami	Hindu festival
jihad	Islamic holy war
julaha	Muslim caste of weavers
Kabirpanthi	followers of the devotional saint Kabir
kahar	carrier of load; Hindu caste of water-carriers
kalwar	Hindu caste of alcohol distillers
kamdani	embroidery on cloth
kanta	a weapon like a battle-axe
kanthi	sacred necklace of beads usually worn by followers of Hindu devotional sects
karkhana	artisanal or manufacturing workshop
karkhanadar	owner or proprietor or organiser of Karkhana
karmchari	employee
kasai/qasai	Muslim butcher
katha	reading and exposition of Hindu religious texts
khadi	handwoven cloth from homespun yarn
khatkana	residential neighbourhood of khatiks
khatik	Hindu caste of greengrocers and rearers of pigs and poultry
khattri	Hindu administrative and commercial caste
khayal <i>or</i> khayal-lavni	a genre of folk song
khonchawala	street-vendor
kirtan	devotional song
kotwal	law and order official of a town
kranti	revolution
kshatriya	Hindu upper caste associated with a martial or royal history
kuccha	temporary; raw

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kunjra	Muslim caste of greengrocers
kurmi	Hindu agricultural caste
lathi	a wooden staff, pole or baton
lavni or khayal-lavni	a genre of folk song
Loriki	oral epic of north Indian pastoral and agricultural castes, especially of the ahirs
madrassa	Islamic educational institution
mahajan	moneylender
mahasabha	conference or meeting; organisation or association
majlis	Islamic religious meeting or gathering, especially during Mohurram
maktab/maqtab	Islamic school
mallah	Hindu caste of boatmen
mandi	wholesale market
Manusmriti	corpus of Hindu religious laws
marsiya	elegiac poetry recited during Mohurram
matam	mourning
Maulud Sharif/Milad	recitation of verses in praise of the Prophet
mazdur	labourer
mehtar	untouchable caste group; sweeper
mela	fair
Meraj Sharif	Islamic festival
mochi	untouchable caste group; leather worker; cobbler
mohalla	neighbourhood
mohallawala	resident of a mohalla
Mohurram	Islamic festival
momin	Muslim caste of weavers
naukar	servant
naukri	work as servant
nautanki	genre of folk play or popular theatre
nirguna bhakti	Hindu devotionalism in which god is believed to be formless or without attributes
nishad	Hindu caste of boatmen
pahalwan	strong, muscular person; wrestler
pahalwani	wrestling; body-building
palledar	manual labourer or porter working in markets
panchayat	caste council or council of elders
panth	Hindu religious sect
pasi	Hindu agricultural and pastoral caste

Select glossary

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pir	sufi saint or spiritual guide
prabhat pheries	morning processions usually associated with the Congress nationalist movement
pucca	permanent
puja	Hindu worship
qasbah	small town
qassab, qasai, <i>or</i> kasai	Muslim butcher
qawwali	genre of religious songs, usually sung at sufi shrines
qist	instalment
qistbandi	loans extended on an instalment basis
qistia <i>or</i> qistwala	moneylender who extends loans on an instalment basis
Quran	Islamic scripture
Rajbi Sharif	Islamic festival
Ramdol	Hindu festival
Ramlila	Hindu festival
Ramrajya	kingdom or regime of Lord Ram; connotes ideal polity
Ravidas/Raidas	followers of the devotional saint Ravidas
rozai	loan of money taken and repaid on the same day
sabha	association; society; council; assembly
sabzi mandi	vegetable market
sadhu	Hindu ascetic or mendicant
saguna bhakti	Hindu devotionalism in which god is believed to be with form or attributes
sahukar	banker; moneylender
sajjada nashin	head of a sufi shrine
samyavadi	socialist
Sanatana Dharma	orthodox Hinduism
sangathan	political movement to promote Hindu religious unity and organisation
sangit	genre of folk play or popular theatre
sant	Hindu ascetic; preacher of Hindu devotionalism
sant-mat	the ideology of saints; Hindu devotionalism
sarraf	moneylender; bullion merchant
satsang	literally 'keeping good company'; congregational prayers and religious meetings for the reading and discussion of Hindu devotional ideas of saints

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satyagraha	'truth-force' or 'soul-force'; non-violent, passive resistance to injustice
satyagrahi	person offering satyagraha
sewa/seva	service
Shab-i-Barat	Islamic festival
shahi	rule or regime
shahid	martyr
shaikh	sufi spiritual guide
Shaivaite	follower of Shaivism
Shaivism	Hindu devotional sect
shaktishali	powerful
shariat	Islamic law
Shivaratri	Hindu festival
Shivnarayani	followers of the devotional preacher Swami Shivnarayan
shuddhi	literally 'purification'; religious movement for the reconversion of Muslims to Hinduism or for the incorporation of lower castes into the Hindu caste hierarchy
shudra	Hindu low-caste groups
sipahi	subordinate policeman
swadeshi	nationalist; home industry
swadhinta	freedom
swang, svang	genre of folk play or popular theatre
swaraj	independent rule; self-rule
swatantrata	independence; autonomy
tabligh	religious movement for the propagation of Islam
taluqdar	landowner
tanzeem	religious movement for the unity and organisation of Muslims
tazia	model of a tomb of Imam Hussain carried in procession by Muslims during the festival of Mohurram
thela	hand-pulled cart
thelawala	operator of hand-pulled cart
tonga	horse-drawn hackney carriage
tongawala	driver of horse-drawn hackney carriage
ulema (<i>s. alim</i>)	Islamic learned men
Upanishads	Hindu religious texts
urs	sufi religious ceremony
ushr	Islamic religious tax

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Vaishnavism	Hindu devotionalism
Vaishnavite	follower of Vaishnavism
vaishya	Hindu upper caste, usually associated with trading and commercial activities
varnashrama dharma	religious duty pertaining to Hindu classification of society into four orders and lifespan into four stages
Vedas	Hindu religious texts
vyamshala	gymnasium
waqf (s. auqaf)	Islamic religious endowments
yadav or ahir	Hindu agricultural and pastoral caste, often associated with cattle-rearing
zakat	Islamic religious tax
zamindar	landlord; landowner
zulm	tyranny; oppression