

## Book Reviews

**Michael Angelo. *The Sikh Diaspora: Tradition and Change in an Immigrant Community.* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997). 255 pp., \$65 cloth.**

This is a peculiarly narrow book, although published as part of a series on Asian Americans entitled *Reconceptualizing Culture, History, Politics*. The title is misleading, at first referring to "the Sikh diaspora," the settlement of India's Punjabi Sikhs throughout the world, but then indicating "an immigrant community" which turns out to be in the U.S., the upstate New York region around the capital, Albany. Angelo wanted to study Sikhs, a highly visible religious Indian sub-group, to see the effect of interaction with American culture on traditional religious values and attitudes. He found 2,694 Asian Indians in the 1990 Albany district census of 777,584 people; only 90-100 of these were Sikhs, he discovered, and he was able to interview only 35 of these. In what sense these 35 interviewees constituted a community or are part of another community is not clear.

The study is limited in many ways. It seems to be a Masters or perhaps a Ph.D. thesis, with the interviews done in 1990. However, the bibliography stops in about 1985, and the few later entries are not actually cited in the text, although they are highly relevant (Margaret Gibson's work on the Yuba City Sikhs, my own on the Punjabi Mexicans). Joan Jensen's book is not cited, nor are edited works on the Sikh diaspora in North America by N.Gerald Barrier and Pashaura Singh, Milton Israel et al, and many other significant recent publications. There is no effort to place the research population in the context of Asian American studies, although current theoretical issues in the field pit a "diasporic perspective" against an easy assumption of acculturation. Finally, while Angelo's premise is that Sikh responses would be different from those of other South Asian religious groups, the author makes systematic compari-

sons with two other "assimilation" studies of predominantly Hindu Indians done about the same time and finds the Sikhs fit the same general pattern (65); he does not investigate this further.

The premises and methodology of this carefully done small-scale questionnaire and interview study are so questionable that it is hard to see any significance in the findings. Angelo posits a straight one-way assimilation process, with the "compelling nature of the host culture's alternative life style" (182) bringing about "small, moderate, or considerable" (93) change or "process" (112) for the immigrants. A methodical, descriptive, and outdated review of the literature on acculturation, American culture, immigration is followed by a discussion of research design and methods, then by an overview of Sikh history and a demographic profile of the questionnaire and interview respondents. Angelo's major problem was the unwillingness of most of the 90-100 Sikhs to participate in his study, which he attributes to paranoia resulting from the 1984 Indian Army invasion of the sacred Sikh temple complex in Amritsar, followed by the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards and a Sikh movement for an independent Khalistan: Sikh immigrants in the Albany area reportedly feared he would share his data with the Indian government. This problem evoked the most lively prose in the book from Angelo, whose writing is otherwise wooden and in need of editorial attention. For example, speaking of the low number of female respondents (12 of 35), he says, "This segment of the subject community proved to be an elusive subject to obtain response from. No objective reason could be ascertained by the author for such reluctance to participate in the study" (67).

The findings are presented in the final chapters, on patterns of dating and marriage, family ties and kinship obligations, and so on. Here Angelo first presents "tradition," summarizing research on patterns in India and among Punjabi Sikhs, and then "change," giving his findings from the 35 Sikh informants. At least he could have asked his informants about their practices and views before migration, in an effort to get some valid comparative data; only the most dedicated Sikh specialists will attempt to make sense of these very particular and almost entirely quantitative findings. In short, the author went to great lengths to prepare and administer valid and reliable survey instruments and interviews, but he has been unable to place his findings in the context of current theory or literature about immigration and ethnic experience.

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