After a helpful introduction laying out the main themes of the book, chapter two examines the evolution of the states during the eighteenth century. Attention is paid to dynastic identity formation via such ‘elastic’ (p 15) categories as Rajput, while due acknowledgement is given to the diversity of the states’ political economy. In examining the building of the system of indirect rule, chapter three challenges the old orthodoxy of princely dependence on their British suzerains through a model of ‘dynamic tension’ (pp 58–59) in the shifting but never fully dominant relationship between the princes and the British. Chapter four contrasts British theories of indirect rule and the evolution of Orientalist models of the states with the political and administrative experiences of the states themselves, reflecting recent shifts towards institutional history. While, in its descriptions of such elite activities as hunting and founding museums, chapter five demonstrates the general dearth of research on the cultural and religious life of the princely states, chapter six contains helpful accounts of the importance of the zanana (women’s quarters) and the economic structures of agriculture, railway building and industrialisation through which the states became ‘enmeshed within the overall political and economic framework of the British India empire’ (p 204). Chapter seven presents important material on the evolution of popular politics and communalism, mapping local changes in group identities against a backdrop of pan-Indian Congress and Communist politics. A final chapter examines the road to dissolution after 1930, challenging platitudes concerning the inevitability of the states’ dissolution. A short epilogue considers their legacy after 1947.

Ramusack is strong on the appraisal of the existing historiography of the princely states and, from the beginning, argues for the historical agency of the princes and the polities they represented: ‘British imperialists did not create the princely states or reduce them to theatre states where ritual was dominant and governmental functions relegated to imperial surrogates’ (p 2). Nonetheless, despite this shift in perspective from princely passivity to action, this is still a narrative in which the British Empire maintains centre stage and in which the princely states are seen predominantly through the prism of their relations with the imperial centre. Given the limitations in much of the existing literature that Ramusack ruefully acknowledges in her conclusions, this is understandable in a survey work of this kind, but the reader must not expect the more localised ethno-historical perspective pioneered in a number of studies over the past two decades.

Despite these qualifications, The Indian Princes and their States remains a considerable scholarly achievement that, unlike so many long-gestating projects, has managed to keep abreast, if not always ahead, of shifts in scholarly perspective. Broad-ranging in its coverage, both geographically and thematically, it will be an important reference work for all those interested in modern South Asian history.

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India: A National Culture?
Geeti Sen (ed)
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This book brings together essays by well-known authors from the disciplines of history, art history, political science, sociology and literature among others. The introduction claims that it is concerned with an essential ingredient in the making of Indian nationalism; namely, ‘culture’. But the question mark at the end of the title betrays ambivalence at the heart of the project. Is there a national culture in India?
Divided into five sections and featuring two photograph essays, this book raises a gamut of issues. The first section, entitled ‘Visions: Scripting the Nation’, has excerpts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Maulana Azad. There is no contextualising introduction to these, and the lay reader may well conclude that these thinkers and politicians’ lives were solely informed by the spirit of the harmonious views cited here. The passages do not do justice to their enormously complex and often contradictory philosophies and politics. The choice of these thinkers over other architects of the nation such as Rabindranath Tagore is also noteworthy.

The second section, ‘Memories are Made of This . . .’, deals with essays on the Gandhian symbols of charkha ([spinning] wheel) and khadi (homespun cloth), and on Shantiniketan, Kalakshetra and Aligarh Muslim University. Saturated with a sense of loss, these essays capture well the hope that invested the founders of these institutions with a dream. Both Leela Samson’s ‘Imbibing Culture at Kalakshetra’ and Uma Dasgupta’s ‘In Pursuit of a Different Freedom: Tagore’s World University at Shantiniketan’ contend that the visions of Tagore and Rukmini Devi cannot be measured in terms of success or failure. These educational institutions encouraged freedom, and combined formal training with a deep knowledge of the arts and culture, a holistic understanding of town and city, and of the urban/formal with the rural/informal. Krishna Kumar’s informed discussion of culture as either ‘under construction’ or ‘finished’ welds the problem of culture with that of formal education, especially the ‘propaganda machine’ (p 67) that operates in Indian and Pakistan today.

In the third section, ‘Voices: Affirming Plurality’, Alok Rai’s essay on the yearning for Hindustani as reflective of ‘a revulsion against the purist, intolerant attitudes that inform the politics of the Hindu Right’ (p 79) is historically grounded. Neera Chandhoke’s ‘Holding the Nation Together’ and T. K. Oommen’s ‘Demystifying the Nation and Nationalism’ (slotted mysteriously into the final section; see later) are the only theoretical pieces in the book that query the categories nation, nation-state and ethnic. While Chandhoke’s treatment leads into an analysis of linguistic nationalism, her conclusion that leaders leave social engineering alone so that ‘the people’ forge ‘a common language of commodity . . . cricket . . . Bombay film and its music . . . dress codes . . . cuisine . . . or of icons’ (p 94) is naïve. Kapila Vatsyayan’s ‘Plural Cultures, Monolithic Structures’ ranges over millennia to reflect on the ecological, linguistic, religious and educational pluralism that guided India’s pasts. A ‘single model’ (p 109) is their sorry replacement today. Makarand Paranjape dwells on responses to the external challenges to Indian nationalism over its internal conflicts, concluding that ‘the makers of modern India—from Rammohun Roy to O.V. Vijayan—tried to rewrite the mono-linguality of modernity and imperialism in our own multiple tongues and voices’ (p 126). At the very least, the reader is confronted with plural opinions on plurality in India’s national culture.

Section four, ‘Metaphors of the Nation’, deals with essays on icons and images, and their inclusions and exclusions. Geeti Sen’s ‘Iconising the Nation: Political Agendas’ develops the idea of ‘Mother India’ through posters and films. It is accompanied by visuals and a close discussion of Rabinandranath Tagore’s painting ‘Bharat Mata’ (1905). Another excellent essay, Kavita Singh’s ‘The Museum is National’, discusses the idea of a national museum encompassing much of the unfinished business of accommodating India’s diversity and pasts. The photograph essays by Ram Rahman and Sheba Chhachhi are intriguing, although further textual support and elucidation are required.

The final section, ‘Vistas: The Global Cusp’, carries essays on cricket and film, the news media, ethnic cuisine and a theoretically significant contribution by Oommen. Again, we are faced with opposing views, even on the significance of cricket. While Bhaskar Roy, in ‘Cricket’s Social Subtext’, holds that the partnership of Mohammad Kaif and Yuvraj Singh presents ‘an immaculate picture postcard of Hindu-Muslim camaraderie unspoiled by the most
chilling nightmare in Gujarat’ (p 258), Sudhanva Deshpande’s brilliant essay ‘What’s so Great about Lagaan’ is emphatic: ‘Lagaan… is a charming fantasy tale that constructs a Gandhian utopia. It is a measure of the hopelessness of our times that, in opposition to fascist fantasies, Gandhian utopia seems radical. We are clutching at straws’ (p 245). Antara Dev Sen’s ‘News Watch: In Search of a National Culture’ discusses media in similar troubled vein. Her acknowledgement of culture as constantly open to change is the only promising note in an essay devoted to showing how critical news items on violence and development get subsumed in mainstream media because of a growing politics of corruption and escapism. Oomen’s essay, mentioned earlier, invites attention to the changes in context that have accompanied the categories ‘nation’ ‘nationalism’ and ‘ethnic’ in Europe, the United States and Asia. His analysis of linguistic and other ‘nation-seeking’ (p 265) or ‘nation-renouncing’ (p 265) movements in India touches on the changing connotations of the term ‘nation’ in post-colonial India. Oomen charges that ‘the idea of compositeness wished away the distinctiveness of Hindu and Muslim cultures’ (p 268).

Oomen’s argument and Geeti Sen’s own subdued admission in the Preface that ‘We may concede in retrospect that by resisting the influence of both culture and religion in India, secular thinking has not widened in appeal nor grown in its constituency’ (page not numbered) suggest that the open-ended question that frames the title of this book is yet to be answered. Although the essays are broad ranging in time, their elaboration of India as a political space suggests the shape of post-colonial India. Pakistan and Bangladesh are ignored, and the one essay that may have shed light on the political culture of the Pakistan movement (Mushirul Hasan’s ‘Aligarh Muslim University: recalling radical days’), revels instead in the nostalgia of the Nehruvian era. Written for an audience that is aware of current trends in politics, and tinged with the memory of the recent carnage in Gujarat, the essays vary in depth and criticism. The jury seems divided on whether we are clutching at straws. On the whole, this book raises more questions than it can answer in one frame.

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**Goa Indica: A Critical Portrait of Postcolonial Goa**
Arun Sinha
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Steeped in theoretical excesses, much academic writing puts off readers who would otherwise be keen to learn about a subject. The objective of spreading knowledge is also lost when academic points are presented in complex and convoluted ways, when they can well be made in simple terms. There are few books that would meet Wilson’s criteria or what might be called ‘crossover’ books that appeal to the academic as well as the general reader.

Happily, *Goa Indica* is clearly one such crossover book. Arun Sinha, one of India’s finest journalists and editor of Goa’s premier newspaper Navhind Times, has already won acclaim in academic circles for his earlier work *Against the Few: Struggles of India’s Rural Poor*