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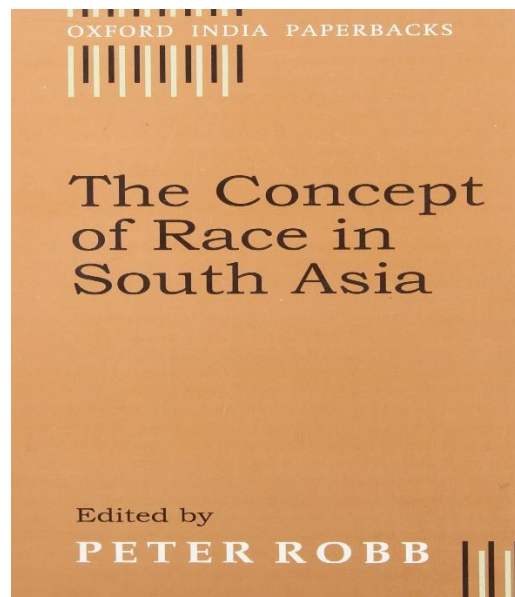
**REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION,
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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND
HUMANITIES**

SOCIAL SCIENCES: HISTORY-SEMESTER III (2021-2022)

BOOK REVIEW

C1 ASSESSMENT



**Peter Robb, The Concept of Race in South Asia, (Oxford
University Press).**

Published:1997

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Peter Robb studied English and History at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, until 1966. At Victoria, he became a senior scholar in 1966 and a Junior Lecturer in History in 1967. He was a Commonwealth Scholar during the years of 1967-1970 and was awarded a PhD from SOAS in 1971.

Professor Robb has held appointments at SOAS since 1971; most significantly as Pro-Director of the School for five years until the end of the 2007/8 session, and before that as Head of the Department of History, and Chair of the Centre of South Asian Studies.

He is currently Research Professor of the History of India.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the Royal Asiatic Society, where he is currently a member of Council. He has

been chairing of the Council of the Society for South Asian Studies and of the British Association for South Asian Studies, and a member of the British Academy's South Asia panel.

REVIEW

This is a collection of essays by historians and others about the perception of race in South Asian societies. Because the subject is not race but what people have supposed it to be, the discussion has a somewhat open-ended character.

The essays in the volume are wide-ranging but the Hindus in India receive the most attention, although the ideas of race introduced by the colonial rulers into India and elsewhere are discussed by several of the contributors.

Attention is also paid to Islamic conceptions, in India and outside India, and there is an essay on racial identities in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sri Lanka.

It is a truism that race is not just a matter of inherited clusters of biological traits, but also of social perception and consciousness. Indeed, the concept of race has survived

better among cultural than among physical anthropologists, and this book will help us to understand why. There was a time when many anthropologists believed that it would be possible to define race clearly and accurately in terms of physical characteristics, and thereby dispel all false conceptions of it stemming from language, religion, nationality and so on. In the thirties and forties of the present century, students of social stratification in the United States, starting with Lloyd Warner and Gunnar Myrdal, decided to replace 'race' by 'caste' in writing about the division between Blacks and Whites. That solved some problems but it created others and the debate over the 'colour-caste system' remained inconclusive.

All the contributors agree that the sense of race was sharpened by the imperial presence in South Asia. What

they set out to discover was 'whether there were South Asian concepts of race, or whether, as initially seemed likely and often has been argued, "race" became an issue in the subcontinent only under Western influence after the eighteenth century' (p. 1). Having a sense of race and making an issue of it are of course two different things, but the difference is not always kept in mind by the contributors. Those interested in the scientific study of race have tried to find a rigorous culture.

South Asia has always played a part in the European imagining of race, but has not been considered in the scholarly literature of the present generation; nor, recently, have concepts of race figured very prominently in South Asian Studies.

This volume constitutes one of the first attempts to raise the question comparatively and over a long time-span with regard to South Asia. It examines whether there were South Asian concepts

of race, or, as has often been argued, race became an issue in the subcontinent only under Western influence after the eighteenth century. The issues studied include South Asian equivalents of the concept of race, the nature of Western concepts as applied to India during colonial rule, and the origin and type of more recent variants. The essays in this volume engage with a vast and growing body of writings on such issues, embracing studies of the person, identity, civil society, ethnicity and nationalism. This book will interest all scholars of Indian history.

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