

ANOTHER NOSTALGIC MASTERPIECE

Prakash Tandon is a remarkable and lucky Punjabi. Born near the Bullokee headworks, within hearing of the music of "Ravi dian chhallan", he spent his childhood in Punjab. His father worked as an irrigation engineer, giving the youngster a marvellous view of the Punjab countryside, with its many sen-

land of the British and spent eight long years there. I have no doubt that he sipped life in the West, inside and outside the university, as only a Punjabi can. He came back to join a pucca British firm, Unilever.

Some Punjabis, particularly those who form a part of the elite, have a somewhat unedifying characteristic. In search of advancement of a kind they tend to forget their roots and pretend that the latest is their very own. One should have imagined that Prakash Tandon would be such a man, considering that he had spent eight years in the West, married there, and joined an imperial firm. It was a joy and a surprise, therefore, to find that the memories embedded long back in his childhood had flowered into a remarkable book, many years after Independence.

It is said that every man has a book in himself, but it is rare that a man's first book should be a masterpiece. Punjabi Century was indeed a landmark which portrays vividly, and with remarkable felicity, the life of the urban middle class of the last century. One was amazed to see how fresh and alive had been Prakash Tandon's recollections of his past in Punjab. All the coating of the West had failed

to erase it, and it has burst forth like water from a dam.

Since that book the theme of Punjab has remained with Prakash Tandon. Some time later he wrote "Beyond Punjab", and now the latest — "Return to Punjab". To be honest, one must say that this book cannot achieve the heights attained by "Punjabi

ease". It is full of delicate and wry humour, perhaps a legacy from his long British connections. Ours is more robust.

Particularly interesting is Tandon's experience with government, civil servants and public sector corporations. It is the fashion with businessmen to suggest that while they are all ef-

he himself — found it difficult to leave their footprints in the sands of government or the public sector. And yet Tandon points out with delicate understanding the shortcomings of government and of its political and bureaucratic masters. To me, at least, his remarks are valid and touched with an understanding and humour such as men like Parkinson have produced.

"Return to Punjab" is a book which is absorbing, easy to read and full of knowledge of a complex situation.

Tandon is indeed a lucky man. Having known Punjab in his childhood, he failed, in spite of a long sojourn in the West—which usually leads Punjabis astray — and in spite of serving an imperial company in the heyday of the Empire, to forget and disown the land of his birth. Normally this should have happened, particularly to a Punjabi. I remember another person with a Rohtak background who, on joining the "gora log", became such a pucca sahib that he was heard to tell a visiting British Lord: "Oh, Lord J, I find Indian newspapers, absolutely soggy and detestible. My bulter has to iron them so that they are crisp, like the London Times, when brought in with the morning cup of tea".



PRAKASH TANDON

His father probably still smoked a nice hukka somewhere in Haryana.

Prakash Tandon has not allowed his memories to be overpowered by his long absence from Punjab. This is why he has been amply rewarded by his three remarkable and nostalgic books of which the latest is "Return to Punjab".

—M. S. Gill

Books

Century". It is written in the usual, easy and graceful style that Tandon has mastered, but this is only to be expected. "Punjabi Century" was a deeply felt emotional experience; "Return to Punjab" is a well-conceived and well-written narrative of Tandon's experience in the public and private sectors, in dealing with the bureaucracy and government, in trading with the Russians and in opening India's most famous business school. His account is fascinating and written with what Mr Partap Singh Kairon called (in another context) "effortless

efficiency, government is the opposite, and for no valid reasons at all. Tandon makes no such sweeping and perhaps unbalanced and unfair judgements. I think he realises that even for Levers, with all their alleged efficient management, selling Dalda, soap, and tooth-paste in a market of little competition was much easier than for a government organisation to deal with the complexities of economic management of a poor country. The parameters and the situation are totally different.

This is why perhaps many of Tandon's colleagues — and even

RETURN TO PUNJAB, 1961-1975 by Prakash Tandon, Vikas, Delhi. Pp. 227. Rs 50.

sons, from the cold weather with its yellow "sarson" fields, ducks in the marshes, and partridges in the wheat; to the severe summer months of May and June. The sights, smells and sounds of Punjab have been better described by men like Mulk Raj Anand and Ved Mehta, Prakash Tandon savoured them all, and filed them away deep in his memory. Government College, Lahore, gave him another experience, and another layer to his personality. Lahore was, and perhaps still is, a special cultural centre for northern India.

Like many Punjabi Jasons, Tandon then took off for the