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Circuits in an Ecumene

Rajat Kanta Ray

SOCIETY AND CIRCULATION: MOBILE PEOPLE AND ITINERANT CULTURES IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Claude Markovitz, Jacques Poucheпадass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, pp.364, Rs.650.00

In dim proto-history, a few centuries before the emergence of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, there emerged circuits which manufactured a civilization out of an entire subcontinent. Jambudvipa (the earliest dateable indigenous name for India), the existence of which as a single entity is implied in the notion of 'the sixteen mahajanapadas' of the Buddha's lifetime, was an ecumene fostered by the movements of warrior clans and priestly notions over the vast subcontinent. Rama's journey from Ayodhya to Lanka, and the gathering of all the known warrior clans at the Kurukshetra war, afford us mythical glimpses into the creation of circuits which integrated a whole world. The boundaries of the civilization were defined by the contours of the emerging circuits. An account of a Tamil Brahman woman named Adi Lakshmi whose travels (1790-1802) were interrupted by her husband's death at Banaras defined the limits of the ecumene: 'beyond the Sindhuo Nuddee is the dominion of Persia, the Hindoos never go thither' (Velcheru Narayana Rao and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Circulation, Piety and Innovation: Recounting Travels in Early Nineteenth Century South India').

Circuits, through which persons, goods, coins, credit transfers and ideas might move frequently, gave rise to integrated networks in old India, but the railways built by the British speeded up the circulation. This book consists of nine essays presented by different authors at a periodic seminar in Paris; the introduction by the three editors names 'circulation' in colonial India as the focus of the work. In fact, not all the essays focus on circulation; the essays by Eric Meyer 'Labour Circulation between Sri Lanka and South India'; G. Balachandran 'Circulation through Seafaring: Indian Seamen 1890-1945'; Claude Markovitz 'Merchant Circulation in South Asia: the Rise of Pan-Indian Merchant Networks'; Neeladri Bhattacharya 'Predicaments of Mobility: Peddlers and Itinerants in Nineteenth Century Northwestern India'; Catherine Servan-Schreiber 'Tellers of Tales, Sellers of Tales: Bhojpuri Peddlers in Northern India' and the piece by Rao and Subrahmanyam fit better into the conceptual framework.

The editors distinguish the history of circulation from the existing histories of migration and diaspora outside the subcontinent. Circulation, in contrast with diaspora, implies going forth and coming back. Such movements were fairly regular between

different parts of India. As a description, circuit or circulation is therefore useful to historians of the subcontinent. The editors would like to go further and would wish to introduce circulation as a concept. Such a concept is no less robust in their view than the concept of the frontier. They write in this connection: 'The totality of circulations occurring in a given society and their outcomes could be viewed as defining a "circulatory regime", susceptible of change over time.' This implies a structure, and they are perhaps too ambitious in this: for there was too much about circulation in the subcontinent that was not structured. 'Circuit', like 'network', is, however, useful to historians as a descriptive term for the movements of men, goods and ideas in and out of India.

Historically, as the editors say insightfully, it is misleading to think of an eternal India in which life was fixed for ever upon fixed points. There was no unchanging agrarian regime organized around 'the age-old certainties of village and caste'. On the contrary, there was constant circulation of men, goods, information, knowledge, ideas, techniques, skills, cultural products (texts, songs), religious practices, and 'even gods'.

Earlier historians were aware of this. The editors are a little unwilling to recognize how close the previous historiography is to their own position. The Aligarh school, which does not find favour with them, previously demonstrated how much of a circulatory regime the Mughal Empire was. The agrarian surplus which the Great Mughals extracted, concentrated and mobilized increased the velocity of money, goods and officers, enormously in the seventeenth century.

The editors would have done better to be more careful over historiography, especially after the subaltern historians made themselves a laughing stock by dismissing all previous historiography since 1800 as either imperialist or nationalist. Amidst general amusement, the subalternists put forth the claim that they changed all that in 1982 by the publication of *Subaltern Studies I*. As empirical historians, the editors and authors of the volume under consideration have made a solid contribution to knowledge. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to misrepresent previous historiography, and upon occasion they betray ignorance of it. To take an instance of this, I was under the impression that I had earlier contested the notion of 'the dual economy' (a dominant



European capitalist sector and a subordinate indigenous and non-capitalist sector), for I had argued elsewhere that there were three distinct rates of money in three distinct segments of the colonial Indian economy. I am therefore puzzled to see Claude Markovitz represent me as an advocate of the dual economy in his essay in this volume.

Again, the editors say that the advent of the colonial regime did not impede the itinerary of the eighteenth century sannyasis and fakirs along the Gangetic valley. The fact is that the Sannyasi Rebellion in Bengal under Warren Hastings was occasioned by the Company's obstruction of the annual pilgrimages of the sannyasis and fakirs from upper India to Bengal. Not to speak of the earlier work by Rai Sahib Jamini Ghosh entitled *The Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders of Bengal*, more recent books such as A.N. Chandra's *The Sannyasi Rebellion* (1977) and Atish Dasgupta's *Fakir and Sannyasi Uprising in Bengal* (1992) narrate these events at length. To take another instance, the editors refer to the late professor Burton Stein as if he was the first to explore the differences between the wet and dry zones in the South, though D.A. Washbrook and C.J. Baker had earlier set out the theme clearly in their histories of the Madras Presidency. Professor Stein did use the term 'circulation' in his article 'Circulation and the Historiographical Geography of Tamil country' in the ecological context; the editors might have mentioned that in the text while introducing their notion of circulation. The value of the careful histories presented by the different authors of the volume would have been enhanced by an equally careful historiography.

Several authors write informatively and interestingly on the circulation of persons, things and ideas in and beyond the subcontinent. Presenting detailed documentary evidence from the northwest, Neeladri Bhattacharya traces the movements of traders from Punjab to Yarkand across the Karakoram Pass. Pastoral traders would load their goods on sheep and goats across ranges where even ponies could not pass. Eric Meyer records how Tamil craftsmen accompanied Madurai princesses to the Sinhala Court, forming a

Tamil population in Sri Lanka even before the migration of labourers from the Madras Presidency to Ceylon in the colonial period. G. Balachandran dwells on the large labour force of sailors recruited through Bombay (mainly from Ratnagiri, Goa and the Punjab) and Calcutta (mainly from Chittagong, Noakhali and other districts in East Bengal) by P&O and other lines. His evidence conveys the impression that the Indian seamen were predominantly Muslims, but since he does not explicitly draw this conclusion, there is no discussion why this might have been so. Catherine Servan-Schreiber traces the pilgrimage routes of the Madari fakirs and Muslim Jogis along the Gangetic valley.

The early colonial travel narratives from South India analysed by Velcheru Narayan Rao and Sanjay Subrahmanyam bring out the difficulties of travel before the railways. Without acquaintances and connections in strange places, one might easily lose one's way through foreign parts. For Brahmin women, there were additional problems arising from notions of pollution from living in tents, but necessity compelled them to do what they would rather have avoided. The railways changed all that and enormously enhanced the volume and velocity of circulation. The book might have gained from a study specially devoted to the fundamental change that this brought about in Indian life during the colonial period. ■

Rajat Kanta Ray is Professor and Head of the Department of History, Presidency College, Kolkata.

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Exploring History's By-lanes

Kanakalatha Mukund

THE POLITICS OF TRADE: ANGLO-FRENCH COMMERCE ON THE COROMANDEL COAST 1763-1793

By Arvind Sinha
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 249, Rs. 500.00

THE ARABIAN SEAS: THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

By R. J. Barendse
Vision Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 588, Rs. 595.00

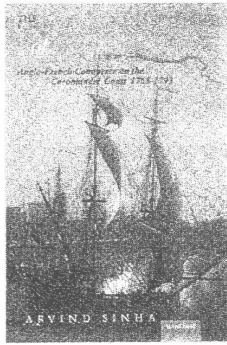
When I saw the title of the first book under review, I had the bemused feeling that I was back in time in history writing to twenty-five or thirty years ago, when historians of seventeenth and eighteenth century India were exploring the activities of the European Companies in India, with the added objective of gaining a better understanding of the structure and ramifications of indigenous economic activity. Now, when historians have moved on to many unexplored themes in pre-colonial and colonial history, it was surprising, to say the least, to come across this throwback to the earlier genre of historiography. An added surprise was that the topic was also so narrowly defined, to cover just a thirty year period in European commerce on the Coromandel coast.

The author himself explains his choice of subject. To begin with, he points out that the study of the French in India—as compared to the other European trading companies—has been relatively little explored. Historians like Kaepelin and Malleson generally deal with the period prior to 1763, and they also focus mainly on the political, rather than the commercial, aspects of French activities. Further, it is widely assumed that following the French defeats during the Seven Years War, the Treaty of Paris in 1763 marked the total eclipse of the French in India. In reality, the French continued to be quite active, especially on the Coromandel coast till 1793, when their settlements were seized by the English. These thirty years saw not only active competition between the French and the English, but also, beneath the outward rivalry, the private collusion through which the French and English merchants siphoned off the profits from Indian trade.

In a style reminiscent of Arasaratnam, the author begins with a brief sketch of the Coromandel coast, moving from north to south. He identifies three major resource regions along the coast, beginning with north coastal Andhra (formerly the Northern Circars), followed by Tanjavur and Madurai in the south. He follows this up with an outline of local society and economy, especially the monetary system and banking networks. The identification of the three resource regions would lead to the expectation that they would

feature prominently in the account in the main body of the book about the rivalry between the French and the English to control the economic resources of the Coromandel. This however is not the case, and such haphazard writing is one of the main weaknesses of the book. Further, the author's knowledge about the Coromandel region itself seems to lack depth. In describing the irrigation sources and ground water management along the coast, Sinha cites many contemporary French accounts. Yet, this is, after all, a much studied region, with much more authoritative secondary sources which could have been referred to. Sinha also argues that the expansion of the textile procurement of the English to the Tirunelveli and Madurai region was the prime motive behind their action against the Poligars (*palayakkaras*), showing a woeful lack of knowledge about the extensive literature on the Poligar rebellions. (In support of his tentative conclusion, he cites a Public Department Consultation referring to the migration of weavers due to the levying of loom taxes from Damal "district" which is near Kanchipuram and about five hundred kilometers away from Madurai!) The same lack of appreciation of the fact that the Coromandel coast was not a single homogeneous region, and that economic conditions across the region were determined by a variety of locality specific factors is seen at the end of the book when Sinha discusses the conditions of textile production and trade, without distinguishing between north coastal Andhra and the southern districts of the Tamil countryside.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, there is much of interest in the book. French commerce in the Coromandel is discussed under three main sub-themes—the debate surrounding the liquidation of the original French East India Company (*Compagnie des Indes Orientales*) and its ultimate abolition in 1769, the period of free French trade from 1769 till 1784, and the scenario from 1785 when the new Company (*Nouvelle Compagnie des Indes*) was formed till 1793. The direction of the external trade of the Coromandel which now became oriented towards Europe forms the backdrop to the analysis of the activities of the Europeans in the region during these thirty years. French trade suffered from two



drawbacks – first, there was an excessive dependence on bullion imports from Europe to finance French trade in India, whereas the English could rely on the surpluses from the land revenue of Bengal. Second, with the abolition of the French Company in 1769, private French merchants lost the privileges which the Company had enjoyed as an official body. Nevertheless, there was a mutual alliance between the private interests of the French and the English, especially in channelling English remittances back to Europe, and this is detailed well in the book, with an interesting account of the various business houses, bankers and partnership firms which participated in this activity. In fact, even the establishment of the new company was due to the collaboration between banking houses in England and France. During this period, the new contours of European participation in Asian and country trade also emerged, with the English concentrating on the China and Far East region, while the French were mostly concerned in the coastal trade from Bengal down to Ceylon and Mauritius.

The concluding section concentrates on textile production and trade in the Coromandel, and the gradual subjugation of the independent weaver to the English Company. This is done in great detail, but adds little to the existing corpus of works in the field. One suspects that some of this is used as padding to make this work into a viable book. The book badly required the services of a good copy editor to tighten the language, and improve the presentation and analysis of the tables. It would have then made an interesting and scholarly monograph on French trade.

While reading the formidable book *The Arabian Sea*—formidable in scope, scholarship and length—I was reminded of a comment by Wodehouse in the Introduction to one of the omnibus volumes of his short stories. Wodehouse wrote that though the whole book could be read in one sitting (as he himself had done for proof reading the manuscript) he strongly suggested that the book should be read

in short instalments to get the best out of the volume. This luxury was denied to me since I had to read the book under review without taking a break. But I would recommend that to appreciate the intricate details of the history of the Arabian Seas from the East coast of Africa down to the West coast of India which the author covers in this book, this book should be read in short spells.

The author divides the Indian Ocean into three regions—the seas around Indonesia, the Bay of Bengal and the “Arabian Seas”—the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea proper. The coastal areas bounded by these seas were the “lands before the wind” where trade and navigation were strictly governed by the monsoon winds, and, Barendse argues, the entire coastline formed a world economy within itself because of the extensive intra-regional trade all along the coast, while it was also becoming linked by extensive trading networks to Europe, central Asia, East and South East Asia, central Africa and America. The port towns along this coast were by and large not integrated with the hinterland, and were populated by traders and mariners, living within autonomous communities (*nations*). One of Barendse’s main objectives is to give proper recognition to the fact that the East African coast was very much a part of the Arabian Seas commerce and the Indian Ocean circuits. As he points out, many works on the Indian Ocean seem to regard China as a part of the region while ignoring the trade links and the importance of East Africa. Finally, Barendse concludes, though at the end of the century, trade was still predominantly being conducted within the Arabian Sea region, the trade and economy were being marginalized in the emerging world order, or the “development of underdevelopment”.

Analytically, Barendse is clearly influenced by the work of Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank. But while these concepts are spelt out in the Introduction, the book in the main concentrates on the complex strands of trade which linked the coastal towns, the hinterland, the overland routes to central Europe and Russia and the changes which occurred when the Europeans began to trade in the region using the sea routes. In fact, the activities of the Europeans and their interaction with indigenous merchants and traditional trading networks is the dominant theme in the book. Barendse begins his work with an account of the ports and the hinterland, starting with the Mozambique coast in east Africa, moving up to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Unlike the travelogue type of account that one encounters in many books, Barendse outlines the political institutions and economic structure of the region, beginning with the intrusion of the Portuguese into Mozambique and East African society and polity. Many of the ports along the coast were transitory settlements, with tempo-

rary structures, or what Barendse calls “wooden” ports. Several others had a more lasting impact and were virtually autonomous city states, or “stone” ports. But the mortality rate was high among both types of ports, and the rise of new ports and the eclipse of old ones were striking features of the region, including the West coast of India.

This is followed by an account of the European “nations” or communities in the region, with many amusing insights into the problems of man (and woman) management faced by the European companies and governments in these alien cultures and states. The accounts of the underprivileged rank and file European soldier and trader are of particular interest. Of less interest is the short chapter on European relations with indigenous states. Much of this chapter is devoted to the various kingdoms in India, and their role in the trade of the region. Since this is a topic which has been studied at length by several historians, beginning with Moreland, it cannot be said to add much to what we already know on the subject. Barendse tries to avoid the orientalist trap, but nevertheless, since he relies so heavily on European sources, the European bias in the tunnel vision of their own rightful and morally justified position versus the irrational and corrupt despotism of the indigenous rulers somehow does percolate into the narrative.

Next come what I would consider the core chapters of the book—the discussion about mercantile activity and trade. Barendse structures the discussion around the well-worn theme of van Leur’s position that intra-Asian trade was, by and large, peddling trade. It is not clear why this should be the underlying theme when the nature of intra-Asian trade is also a much discussed topic. Barendse himself does subscribe to the notion of peddling trade, though his own observations on the volume of trade in foodgrains, coarser textiles, yarn and other basic goods would not support the basic conditions of peddling trade. The analysis also does not take into account the limited size of pre-modern markets and demand, which were also important determinants of mercantile activity. Much of Barendse’s discussion, however, revolves around the two great variables of pre-modern trade—the costs of protection in conducting a safe trade and the slow and poor flow of information on which merchants could base their decisions. The former once again takes us back to Steensgaard’s work on how the European companies could internalize the costs of protection through shifting to sea-borne trade using their own ships. The chapter on trade unravels the complex strands that linked the trade of western India with the Persian Gulf ports and from them on to the Levant and Russia. Trade in bullion, Indian textiles, Malabar pepper and slaves are taken up for more detailed discussion.

The book concludes with four chapters on the activities of the Europeans—both official and the unofficial, but still very prevalent, private trade. The Portuguese establishment and the Dutch and the English companies, each represented a different facet of European activity. While all three tried to monopolize the trade, in the case of the Portuguese, this benefited individuals, but not the Portuguese government. The Dutch, at least in the seventeenth century, emerged as the strongest among the Europeans, while the English, who were still struggling to survive, were the ultimate winners.

The book is based on Dutch archival sources, and the published records of the English East India Company, as well as an impressive range of secondary works in many languages. From the Introduction one realizes that this is a book of great scholarship and breathtaking vistas. At times the complexity of the narrative trying to link all the various strands of trade over three continents becomes almost too much to comprehend. Thus, I go back to my initial comment—read this book in small doses and admire the scholar who had the courage to attempt such a vast academic enterprise!

Kanakalatha Mukund was formerly with the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad. She is the author of *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant—Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (Orient Longman, 1999) and co-author of *Traditional Industry in the New Market Economy—Cotton Handlooms of Andhra Pradesh* (Sage Publications, 2001). Her work *View from Below—Interactions Between Indigenous Society and the Early Colonial State in Tamil Nadu* is forthcoming.

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Evolving Alternative History

Bhairabi Prasad Sahu

TRADE AND TRADERS IN EARLY INDIAN SOCIETY
By Ranabir Chakravarti
Manohar, Delhi, 2002, pp.262, Rs.500.00

This collection of ten essays and an Introduction, which ties them together, is a product of the author's sustained interest in the history of trade in early India. The term early India in conventional historiographical usage accommodates the early historical as well as the early medieval period. Thus, chronologically it covers a large span. The book provides a corrective to tendencies to generalize about trade and traders by focusing on change, differentiation and pluralism, and demystifies notions we may have once held or cherished about the non-agricultural sector of the economy. Trade and urban centres, Chakravarti emphasizes, were inextricably linked to agricultural production and the agrarian world. The work is impressive because it ranges over wide and varied historical experiences.

The Introduction is followed by an excellent synthesis of recent perspectives of the material culture of early historical India, touching upon important themes and debates and driving home the importance of agriculture and related aspects in sustaining crafts, trade and urban centres. The emergence and spread of cities and states in north India in the mid-first millennium B.C. and the evolution of complex society outside the Ganga valley during post Mauryan times constitute the core of chapter two. The archaeological and epigraphical evidence have been fully integrated in this overview, which also recognizes the inter-regional variations and the phased extension and actualization of historical processes of change across regions.

Chapters three, five and eleven chart the chequered history of merchants from the second to the thirteenth century. Chakravarti critiques the way in which usually differentiation within the trading community has been pushed aside. Traders in early India, he argues, were neither a homogeneous entity nor simply peddlers, and urges the recognition of the existence of different categories such as the *vaniks* (petty traders), *banjaras* (peddlers), *sarthavahas* (caravan traders), *shreshthis* (rich merchants), and *rajashreshthis* (royal merchants). They travelled far and wide and many of them dispensed their resources on donations for religious and secular purposes. The essay on Bandhogarh in Rewa in Madhya Pradesh while focusing on similar activities, points to the absence of evidence for *varna-jati* affiliations of the donors and the marginal involvement of royalty in such acts of patronage during the

post Mauryan period. What obtained at Bandhogarh was largely in keeping with the known trend at sites like Mathura, Sanchi, Bharhut and numerous other places in the Deccan. The site, on the basis of available material, is perceived to be a mid-way resting place for itinerant merchants. The discussion on *rajashreshthis* (royal merchants), especially in early medieval Deccan and South India (chapter 5) addresses the issue of their status and functions at important urban centres, including capital cities. They derived their exalted position from the administrative and diplomatic-cum-commercial duties they performed as also their role in the import of war-horses, elephants and luxury items to fulfil the requirements of the state and ruling elites.

The presence of non-Indian merchants from distant places throughout early Indian history at coastal sites, particularly on the western coast, is known from a variety of sources. The concluding essay drawing on a bilingual inscription (in Sanskrit and Arabic) from Somanatha and other material sheds light on this aspect and moves on to construct the world of the merchant, which as it emerges went beyond the prescriptions of normative texts. The building of a mosque at Somanatha (a major Saiva centre) by a ship-owning merchant from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, the use of Sanskrit to communicate ideas of Islam and employment of identical phraseology, irrespective of the religious affiliation of the establishments, in matters of patronage unambiguously articulate the spirit of tolerance, accommodation and cultural pluralism in a situation characterized by networks of trade and wideranging interactions. It also reinforces the fact that places like Somanatha had more often, than not, multiple identities.

Issues of typology and differentiation, including hierarchization, among non-rural settlements constitute the subject matter of the essays revolving around the *putabhedana* (no. 4), *mandapikas* (no. 9) and the *pentha* (no. 10). The *putabhedana* (literally meaning a site where lids of containers of merchandise were opened), *pentha* being its Deccanese counterpart, was a supra local level market centre. The *mandapikas* in early medieval western and northern India were centres of economic transactions, involving collection of levies and tolls, and flowing from it the focus of political interest.

Pattanamandapikas located at large urban centres distinguished themselves from the

mandapikas in terms of the range of their spatial interactions. Market centres such as these had their regional specificities, but what they shared in common was the important middle level linkage they provided between villages and cities and/or ports. Agrarian expansion and the growth of rural economy in the early medieval centuries provided the basis for the emergence of *mandapikas* and *penthas*. Many of them dealt in daily necessities and agricultural products and some evolved into urban centres. Like different types of merchants there were varieties of market places too. However all of them were not the same, they were hierarchized.

The essays focused on Bengal not only provide an overview of maritime trade and commerce on the Bengal coast, in the background of Indian ocean trade, but also relate to larger issues of the interrelationships between ports, hinterlands and routes; their changing

fortunes and complex linkages. While one of the essays (no. 7) profiles the history of Sabhar, a modest inland riverine port in the context of the shift of maritime trade of Bengal from Tamralipta to Samadar in southeast Bengal, another (no.8) situates seafaring in the Bengal coast with reference to its deep and rich hinterland as well as the absence of middle level trading centres.

Chakravarti is consistent in his rejection of the idea of decline of the non-agricultural sector of the economy during the early medieval period. He presents a picture of change through continuity. The emergence of various grades of merchants and markets are related to the changes coming from within local and regional societies, in a milieu of immense dynamism leading to agrarian growth, exchangeable surplus, market economy and interactive political formations. Here the influence of the writings of B.D. Chatto-

padhyaya (among others), who has been arguing for a shift in the discursive ground for understanding early India is easily discernible. One would agree with most of the author's arguments, but I am not entirely at ease with the Introduction. It could have included recent historiographical issues, incorporated recent perspectives of political processes and social formations in early Tamilakam and the nature of 'Indo-Roman trade', and perspectives from texts regarding perceptions and attitudes towards towns, trade and traders. In a collection such as this overlaps are quite natural, but they do not in any way diminish the merit of the book. Chakravarti's collection of essays fills in a perceptible gap in the evolving alternative history of early India.■

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An Enduring Saga

Nilanjana Roy

A PRINCELY IMPOSTOR? THE KUMAR OF BHAWAL AND THE SECRET HISTORY OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

By Partha Chatterjee

Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002, pp. 429, Rs 595.00

"They thump the tables in tea shops, the debate is truly on:

Some declare the rani will win, others prefer the sanyasi.
It's the tenants' money going up in smoke, the sanyasi bides his time,
He drinks his milk and eats his ghee and waits for the judgement to come.
If he loses, he makes a run for it, with his lota and blanket and all;
If he wins, he sits on the throne to which he truly does belong."

Nagendranath Das, author of the popular commentary (*Bhaoyaler rani sannyasir ladai*) above, was only one of hundreds of people who were captivated and consumed by the details of what was known, simply, as the Bhawal Sanyasi case.

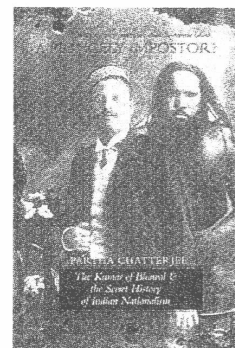
The facts of the case are easily told. On April 18, 1909, Ramendra Narayan Roy, the second kumar of a Dacca zamindari called Bhawal, left for Darjeeling. It was hoped that this visit to what remains one of Bengal's most popular hill stations would cure his health, unstable ever since he contracted syphilis three years before. Less than three weeks later, the second kumar died. Religious ceremonies were performed on May 18th, and what was left of the Bhawal zamindari began to grapple with the complex issues of property rights and issues of inheritance. The eldest kumar died in 1910; the third kumar died in 1913. Bibhabati, the widow of the second

kumar, and his sister Jyotirmayi, made different arrangements for themselves.

From time to time, rumours popped up about the second kumar's death. The body that burnt on the funeral pyre was not that of Ramendra Narayan Roy, said some. An orderly returned from Darjeeling with a story that seemed to cast a shadow of doubt on the circumstances of the kumar's death. Then another kind of rumour began to circulate—a whispered story to the effect that the kumar had never died at all, that he was roaming somewhere in north India in the garb of a sanyasi.

Then, perhaps in late December 1920 or in early 1921, a sadhu showed up in Dacca. He spoke a rustic Hindi, complained about the climate of Bengal, but made no claims as to identity. Rumours began to spread again, to the effect that the second kumar of Bhawal had returned. The family decided that the sadhu should be brought to Jaidebpur. Over a period of days, the sister of the second kumar became convinced that the mysterious sadhu was indeed her brother, and persuaded him, eventually, to make a dramatic public declaration to that effect.

Rani Bibhabati, the wife of the—apparently late—kumar of Bhawal, was not to be convinced quite as easily as her sister-in-law. She had no doubt that her husband had died, she stated, and that this man was an impostor. Given the circumstances, she refused to meet the sadhu—since her husband had died in her presence some 12 years ago, she had no reason to give credence to other stories.



A court case was filed, and for the next two decades, the complexity and intensity of the legal proceedings would be matched by a corresponding debate in the public mind. On July 30, 1946, after several judgements, appeals and counter-appeals, the Privy Council would finally decide that the sadhu was truly Kumar Ramendra Narayan. On July 31, the kumar-sanyasi went to the Kali temple to offer a prayer of thanks. He was seized by a stroke as he left the temple, and died two days later. Those who supported his story would claim that justice had been done—he died as himself, the second kumar of Bhawal, not as an impostor. Those who supported Bibhabati's version and felt that he was an impostor saw a vindication of sorts in his death at the precise hour of his triumph—the gods would not allow a false claimant to prosper from his lies. To this day, the controversy remains alive in Bengal. I know at least two lawyers who went through the volumes of evidence on the subject. Neither has ever been able to come down conclusively on one side or another.

It's a great story, isn't it? It offers everything from insinuations of murder most foul to the possibility of a cover-up, from internal family politics to the not-so-remote chance that the sadhu was merely a clever, fraudulent opportunist.

ist. The pictures of the sanyasi and the kumar are satisfyingly inconclusive, suggesting a resemblance strong enough to create suspicion in one's mind but not so strong that it can banish all doubts. There is enough drama to warm the hearts of the most diehard jatra addicts, from the storm that broke over the cremation ground to the image of a "corpse" vanishing from its bier, to the many dazzling legal flourishes and last-minute surprises that visited the courtroom drama. Like that other modern narrative, the Nanavati murder case, there's something about the story of the Bhawal sanyasi that captures the collective imagination.

If Partha Chatterjee had restricted himself to fleshing out the bald narrative in which I have set down the thrilling, twisting story of the Bhawal case, he would have pulled off a feat of no small proportions. For years, the Bhawal story has been told and retold in magazine articles, been recited in the crude verse of the streets, been dramatized as a gory tale of murder committed by a doctor who had a tendresse for the kumar's wife, been set down in the dry rhythms of legalese. But, despite a few other attempts to recount the tale, there was, before *A Princely Impostor*, no single authoritative narrative that stood as a dispassionate arbiter rather than a pleader for one side or the other.

Chatterjee is a historian by profession, which allows him to see not just the immediate narrative, however blindingly colourful that may be, but the multiple narratives of power and struggle that lie behind the seemingly straightforward question of a claimant's identity—as impostor or as rightful heir.

His story, then, is a multilayered narrative, superimposing the form of a thriller over the dark bulk of history looming just beneath. The "detective story" requires him to sort through an overwhelming mass of contradictory evidence. Witnesses were fought over by both sides, doctors were caught out in errors both minor and major. Even the simplest of questions—did it rain during the cremation, for instance—were mired in contradiction. Nor was the question of motive straightforward by any means. Bibhabati, by all accounts, had a trying marriage. Her husband was a crude man whose pleasures lay chiefly in hunting rather than more cultural pursuits; moreover, he was known to be a womanizer. She had little to gain by acknowledging either an impostor who could then claim rights to her life and to her property, or by acknowledging a husband with whom she had little in common. For the sister, Jyotirmayi, the return of the second kumar offered a way out for the beleaguered family, even the prospect of a resurgence in family fortunes.

All this is intimately connected to the second story in the book, the background against which this narrative of identity takes place. Bhawal was the second largest zamindari in the area, one of the few remaining that had not been fragmented or impoverished. It functioned with something of the "arrogance" and "paternalism" that Chatterjee describes as the prerogative of the zamindaris of

the time; but the doctrines of loyalty to the rulers that had held sway for centuries still dominated the hearts of the tenants of the Bhawal Raj.

"The rule of the zamindars," writes Chatterjee, summarizing the opinion of Kedarnath Chakrabarti, editor of the *Rajyat*, "was in the traditional mode. It was oppressive, often arbitrary, but at the same time personal, capable of being paternal and caring.... (there) was much room for tenants to evade the arm of the administration and do as they pleased. The regime of the Court of Wards was the exact opposite. It was cold, impersonal, ruthlessly efficient. There was no escape from its clutches. This was particularly so in relation to the extensive forests in the Bhawal estate, where tenants believed they had customary rights that the zamindars had never questioned but that the new administration refused to recognise."

Beyond the bare question of identity, then, there were the swirling currents of history. The struggle between Bibhabati and Jyotirmayi, between fraudulent sanyasi and rightful heir suffering from periods of amnesia, was also a struggle that mirrored many of the debates and issues at the heart of this nascently nationalist period. Perhaps the most striking image of these battles and multiple narratives lies in the documentation: the careful but dusty bundles of papers that the courts perused and the flurry of pamphlets, rhymes and heated editorials that occupied the more unofficial, less sanctioned, but far more widely public space.

There was also the clash between perception and reality, seen at its sharpest in the rift between the images of the kumar projected by prosecution and defence. The lawyers for the defence sought to project the classic picture of the zamindar as a cultivated, learned, even Anglicized man. The lawyers for the plaintiff argued, with considerable success, that this was in direct contrast not just to the character of their client—but to the known character of Ramendra Narayan Roy himself. This was just one of the dissonances between perceived image—in this case an image that the defence assumed British judges would accept as a picture of upper-crust Bengali nobility—and the reality, which allowed for far more variation in the quality of its noblemen.

The Calcutta High Court decision itself was remarkable—it ended with two of the judges, Justice Charu Chandra Biswas and Justice Lodge coming up with contradictory judgements, and it was left to Sir Leonard Costello, sitting in war-torn England, to deliver the casting vote. "...Costello was conceding to an Indian judge of a district court an autonomy of judgement and an awareness of his responsibility that few others of his kind would have done," explains Chatterjee. In a rare moment of speculation, one of the few he allows himself in this book, the author goes a step further. "Perhaps he [Costello] was experiencing, we might say with a short leap of the historical imagination, a moment of decolonisation." Later on in the book, the author points out that the texts of the judgements of the two Indians, Basu and Biswas, were "replete with

the marks of this nationalist consciousness", even as they claimed an "insider knowledge" that their colonial masters were denied. The struggle of Indian judges and lawyers to have their arguments heard, at a time of increasingly assertive nationalism, was another aspect of a larger battle between the people of India and its colonial government.

Narrative, history, and finally, identity. This last aspect of the Bhawal sanyasi case takes Chatterjee into one of the most remarkable discursions in an already remarkable book, as he examines the fascinating question of what constitutes a man's identity. It makes us even more conscious that the Bhawal controversy occurred in the twilight years before DNA testing, which would have settled the issue once and for all but is no longer, given the fact of cremation, an option. And readers interested either in emerging technologies or in the study of contemporary governments will find their attention snagged by Chatterjee's bold assertion: modern governmental regimes must presume every individual to be an impostor until he or she is able to prove the contrary.

How is this relevant, one might ask, and indeed, at first reading this seems to be one of the few chapters in this brilliant excursion that exceeds its grasp. But over the many months that I have read and returned to *A Princely Impostor*, this rather than the melodramatic tale of a sadhu who might have been a zamindar appears to be the central issue. The chief protagonists in the Bhawal sanyasi case lived in a world where no one's identity could be taken for granted, where your cultural, national, social identities were constantly evolving, being reworked, being denied or being reasserted. Perhaps that is why the Bhawal case still exerts its deathless grip on our collective imagination. In an earlier age, the question of identity might have been settled by a trial of faith, a requirement of the sadhu that he submit to some kind of ordeal that would satisfy his interlocutors. In a later age, forensic science might have rendered the whole debate moot: this man is who he says he is, or not, because these tests say so.

This story of amnesia and wandering, of the loss of language and the recovery of memory, of a confusion and uncertainty that persists into the next century, could not have taken place in any other age—or against any other historical background. Deprived of history's fabric, set apart from the clash between colonialism and nationalism, the Bhawal sanyasi's story would have been merely a colourful footnote.

Chatterjee's greatest achievement is to see both the story and the context that illuminates it. And decades later, when today's emerging stars of IWE fiction have all but been forgotten, I predict that this book will have endured. It's a classic that goes beyond the borders of genre and rises above the narrow straitjacket of merely "Indian" writing. ■

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On Reviving Ayurveda

Imrana Qadeer

STUDIES ON INDIAN MEDICAL HISTORY

Edited by G. Jan Meulenbeld and Dominik Wujastyk
Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001, pp.243, Rs.325 00

This well brought out, 243-page book, *Studies in Indian Medical History*, under the series Indian Medical Tradition, deals essentially with the ayurvedic system of medicine and not 'the healing arts in India' as mentioned in the preface. The book has been divided into three sections titled classical tradition, colonial interaction, and modern observations.

Section One delves into the philosophical and empirical domains of the classical tradition of ayurveda. A variety of issues are covered ranging from the philosophical basis of pharmacology and the understanding of body, mind and soul within the ayurvedic system of thought, to the challenges of tracing names of medicinal plants back in history (to achieve precision in recreating recipes), locating original documents like *Madhvacikitsa*, exploring the place of numerical figures in ayurvedic therapeutic practices, and examining the shared importance of "vaidurya", the precious Lapis Lasuli, in Tibetan, Chinese and Indian texts on healing practices. It also includes a translation of a classical text on the treatment of leprosy.

Section Two has three chapters that explore the shaping of the ayurvedic system in the colonial period. The first presents the nature of shifts in the interaction between the traditional system and the colonial state. The second presents a substantive and detailed argument to establish the fact that vaccination was not known to the traditional ayurvedic practitioners, as claimed by some, and that Jenner was the first to actually use cow-pox virus for vaccination. The evidence from Persia that claims pre-Jennerian knowledge of vaccination has however, been difficult to refute. The third chapter presents valuable insights into the management of lunatic asylums for the natives in the nineteenth century. It vividly brings out the early theoretical emphasis on institutional and environmental management and the state of apathy towards Indian patients as well as their Indian caretakers. The paper effectively illustrates the gap between the theory and practice of psychiatry in that period.

Section Three has four chapters that look at the contemporary situation. It covers a disparate set of subjects and fails to locate the real issues that surround traditional systems today. The first chapter examines in detail the medicinal potential of *Centella Asiatica*, a

medicinal plant popular both in India and Sri Lanka for leprosy, infections, skin disease, cardiovascular problems, and as a tranquillizer. This multiplicity of medical properties is meticulously explained on the basis of recent pharmacological studies that prove its richness in bioactivity. Its therapeutic qualities vary across regions and have been a matter of interest for long. The second chapter claims that the analytical frame used for the study of doctor-patient relationships in modern medicine is applicable to the study of ayurvedic practitioners as well. The next chapter is yet another descriptive effort at providing an anthropological view of the treatment meted out to witches in Mewar. The last chapter touches upon an interesting subject, that is, the dialogue in research on traditional Indian medicine. Short sketchy chapters (except for the first), inadequate methodologies of field research, and lack of analysis weaken this section. The last paper raises some pertinent issues but is written under the misconception that global research today is only in aid of a humanitarian cause. If the export of medicinal plants to the First World and the thoughtless over exploitation of regions that produce them is any indication, then, international health research calls for shedding such naïveté.

The two papers on the philosophical basis of ayurvedic pharmacology and understanding of mind and spirit are extremely interesting and valuable. They bring out vividly the diverse traditions, contradictions, and conflicts, as well as attempts at resolving these and developing unified theories. The authors argue that the thought systems of ayurveda are not only rational, they are also open and have space for exploration and dialogue. At times however, some of the authors tend to be ethnocentric in their approach. For example, it is said that Indian authors on the subject are, "biased and contaminated by interpretations reflecting the struggle of power of the practitioners and their struggle to prove that their system is as valid as, or more valuable than, that of western medicine". This attitude is reflected when Meulenbeld pronounces his view on the "imposition of divinity over ayurveda" without referring to the fact that Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya had already presented this conclusion on the basis of his research work that is referred to later in the same paper. The

same bias is reflected when Patterson explains the negative attitudes of the British towards Indian medicine by the end of the 17th century on the basis of "the dramatic and extravagant behaviour of the folk practitioners", without any mention of the extravagances of the European medical practices in that era.

Though the end of 17th century as a period of "enlightenment" of the colonial rulers and their general feeling that, "The advanced state of Indian civilisation should not be interfered with", is highlighted, no new evidence is presented to further substantiate this view. Also, why despite this respect, the graduates of vernacular medical schools remained as subordinates only is never touched upon nor are the reasons for the switch over to westernization. As a result, the paper remains descriptive and does not add very much to present knowledge in terms of new explanations for the shifts in the status of traditional systems.

The problem with this collection therefore is twofold. Firstly, it sees ayurveda as a part of the alternative medicine, yet it makes research into ayurveda a white man's burden and a tool for international health. The latter today is an area of activity where a popular notion is that advanced allopathic technologies cannot be made available to the Third World. Hence, appropriate technology or cheaper local traditions need to be revived. As a result, instead of extracting the comprehensive approach, the understanding of disease causality, and the principles of achieving health within ayurveda, the focus becomes extracting medicinal prescriptions and testing plant extracts. These are no doubt important but not sufficient either to the revival of ayurveda or to discovering its value for the world (and not just the Third World). Secondly, an overarching framework is lacking that could hold the sections and the chapters together. The variety of sources and methodologies does not make up for this lack. While each chapter hangs as a discrete thought, no single issue is sufficiently explored and no problems are tackled to the extent that, if not resolved, at least the scope of the debate is unveiled.

Given the paucity of serious efforts to unravel the accumulated knowledge within the traditional systems of medicine, this reprint of *Studies of Indian Medical History* provides some valuable insights. However, its key papers are written in a highly specialized style and therefore may not be accessible to the general reader interested in the subject. It is a reference book for researchers. It is hoped that some of the philosophical and empirical explorations that have been initiated by the volume will be of value to them. ■

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Empirical Insights

Rama Baru

**DISEASE AND MEDICINE IN INDIA:
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

Edited by Deepak Kumar

Tulika Books, New Delhi, pp 307, Rs. 495.00



The volume under review is a collection of articles presented at the special panel on the history of health conditions and the progress of medicine in India at the 61st session of the Indian History Congress, held in Kolkata in January 2001. This volume is indeed an important contribution to the history of science and technology covering the ancient, medieval and colonial periods. These articles provide some valuable empirical insights of science and technology, an area that has been under researched and therefore a welcome addition. This volume covers the ancient, medieval and modern periods in Indian history. In the section on the ancient period, Suraj Bhan and K.S. Dahiya examine the disease and medicine during the Harappan period. The authors point out that there is a paucity of archaeological evidence available to reconstruct the nature of diseases, their distribution and services available. However the well planned towns in Harappa with extensive drainage systems and facilities for storing grains suggests that there was some form of public health planning and could have contributed positively to the health of its citizens. As far as services are concerned, there is considerable evidence from texts that the art of surgery was well developed. This has been codified in fair amount of detail in the ayurvedic texts during the ancient period.

The contribution to the section on medieval India is extremely rich and provides some new insights into the development of science, technology and medicine during this period. Iqbal Ghani Khan's chapter on medieval theories on vision and introduction of spectacles shows the growth

in mathematics, physiology and physics and its application. It also suggests that there was a great deal of dialogue and exchange of scientific ideas between the Arab, the Iran and the Indian subcontinent. This was facilitated by the translation of Arabic and Persian texts into Sanskrit and vice versa. This clearly enriched the growth of science during this period. The chapter by Rezavi on physicians during the medieval period was of great interest since it captures the plurality and hierarchy among them. There were a few physicians who were salaried and served only the king while the majority was referred to as 'bazaar practitioners' who practised privately. It also provides evidence on the rise of hospitals and even medical colleges that were financed by the state under the mughals. Professor Irfan Habib's chapter uses the example of the introduction of china root for the treatment of syphilis and inoculation for small pox to examine the readiness of ayurveda and yunani to accept and experiment with new drugs and techniques.

The contributions to the section on modern India cover a range of issues. These include the outbreak of major diseases like malaria, cholera and syphilis during this period and the introduction of allopathic medicine. Both Kazi and Sarkar explore the relationship between environmental factors by way of embankment of rivers in Bengal and reclamation of low-lying areas in Bombay and malaria epidemics. The contributions by Raj Sekhar Basu, Sujata Mukherjee, Sunitha Nair and Mridula Ramanna on the growth of medical missionaries and the social history of western medical practice in Travancore highlight the manner in which allopathic medicine was introduced and evolved in India during the early part of the twentieth century. The last chapter by Mohan Rao's is a critique of contemporary developments in the health sector under the aegis of the World Bank, that gives primacy to technology in solving the health problems rather than improvements in the living standards of people. This book is an important addition to the

history of disease and medicine and covers a wide range of issues. The strength of this volume is that all the contributors have drawn on a number of sources to provide empirical evidence in areas that have so far received little attention. Apart from the academic content, the book has been very well produced that adds to the pleasure of reading. ■

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Themes of Relevance

Padmini Swaminathan

DEVELOPMENT, POVERTY AND FISCAL POLICY: DECENTRALIZATION OF INSTITUTIONS

Edited by M. Govinda Rao

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp.358+xvi, Rs.595.00

As the title suggests, the collection of essays in this volume addresses the issues of development, poverty and fiscal decentralization. But to begin at the end, neither the introduction nor any one of the authors/chapters have attempted to weave a link between development, poverty and fiscal policy; the commas that separate these issues in the title continue till the end. Taken individually, however, most of the papers combine and cover remarkable breadth of vision and range of issues. In this brief review we cannot do justice to all the papers but we hope that our thematic discussion of the book will cover most.

The first part of the volume entitled 'Poverty: Magnitude and Missing Dimensions' contains three papers focusing on the controversy surrounding the magnitude of poverty in India, the trend in poverty after economic reforms were initiated and appropriate anti-poverty intervention strategy. Surjit Bhalla's paper has two conclusions to offer: (i) NSS data are grossly in error especially during the 1990s, and (ii) poverty in India around 1998 is likely to be close to 15 per cent as opposed to 42 per cent which has been indicated by NSS for 1998 by the World Bank (p.39). By Bhalla's own admission, his chapter does not discuss what he calls 'the other correlates of poverty - low education, bad health, etc.' because according to him, "when absolute poverty is removed in terms of provision of basic expenditure, policy should move to these other correlates" (p.39). In contrast, the papers by Mahendra Dev and V.M. Rao stress the need to engage with poverty at a much broader level. In fact, for Rao, what is more important is the need to 'understand poverty' rather than just measure it (p.75).

Mahendra Dev's analysis does corroborate Bhalla's contention that there are serious problems with NSS data on poverty. However, both he and Rao go beyond issues of measurement to record the different kinds and levels of deprivation that poverty entails. These include slowing down of pace of employment growth, deterioration in quality of employment, slow growth of the agricultural sector, preoccupation with the minimal concept of poverty, namely, food deprivation - in short a combination of multiple handicaps that makes eradication of poverty not such an easy task even while reduction in poverty is possible.

While Dev and Rao's papers read together provide a fairly comprehensive account of the

complex nature of poverty in the country, it also needs to be recorded here that this understanding does not necessarily form the basis for the subsequent discussions on tax policy and decentralization. The second part of the book entitled 'Raising Resources for Sustainable Development: Issues in Tax Policy and Reform', contains five papers covering different aspects of tax policies. Sven-Plof Lodin's paper discusses the important question of increased mobility of tax bases in the context of globalization, international integration, technical development in general and the development of electronic communication in particular. This mobility, according to Lodin, has led to increased international tax competition and a downward pressure on tax rates and revenue from areas affected by this development. This could, in turn, argues Lodin, make countries to "rely more on source of taxation, as it will become crucial to collect tax while the tax base, and thus the money, is still under control within the jurisdiction. To tax what you can practically tax will be a more important principle than what in theory ought to be taxed" (p.101). The more important implication stemming from the tax mobility syndrome, in our opinion, is the observation that Lodin makes namely, that, "to collect the same amount of revenue for public spending, a heavier burden must be put on the tax bases that are not so mobile, such as labour, real estate and consumption in general. The tension within the tax systems will grow, may be to such levels, that taxes on the less mobile tax bases will also have to be reduced to maintain the credibility of and the loyalty to the tax systems. This would mean that international tax competition with regard to internally mobile tax bases will lead to lower taxes generally and necessitate reductions in public sector activities and spending irrespective of what the needs may be" (p.101).

Leif Muten's paper on fiscal relations between rich and poor countries touches on important aspects of the tax implications of business transacted between developed and developing countries because of unequal power equations. The paper sketches several scenarios, existing and potential, and in the process highlights the increasing complexity of the situation. While at one level, the rich countries use all means, including multilateral agencies to influence tax policies in the poor countries, at another level, the poor countries

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Development, Poverty,
and Fiscal Policy

Decentralization of Institutions

edited by

M. Govinda Rao



have resorted "to tax incentives not just to promote industrial development but also to establish themselves as tax havens, offering a location to offshore activities" (pp.110-11). Muten also dwells at some length upon the equally vexed question of (poor) tax administration characterizing most LDCs.

In my opinion there should have been some engagement by the editor to, at least, draw out the implications (of the above globally-driven changing fiscal scenarios) for India's development agenda in general and poverty eradication public expenditure programmes in particular. Sadly, while the papers in themselves have plenty to offer, their relevance to the themes of development and poverty remain muted.

G. Thimmaiah's paper takes us on a journey of India's attempts at tax reform; according to him, India's tax reforms have passed through five phases since Independence. Thimmaiah's overall evaluation is that, the central government has not been able to raise the tax/GDP ratio, so crucial to the huge investments required to build social and economic infrastructures. "It is necessary to remember in this context that most of the tax reform measures have been in the nature of give-away measures to the high-income groups and corporate sectors... Unfortunately, the give-away measures on the tax reforms side have been added to the continuing give-away measures on the public expenditure side also, thereby making the fiscal system to face continued instability" (p.136). To us the more significant observation is contained in the very first para of Thimmaiah's paper where he has clearly hinted at the fact that over time Indian taxation policy has got delinked from addressing issues of development and poverty.

Arindam Das Gupta's paper develops an elaborate framework for assessing tax systems performance of governments. His conceptual framework includes indicators not just to analyse the *capacity* of the tax system to meet specified goals (including raising resources) but also the *quality* of institutions in order to be able to judge their performances. In the process, Das Gupta makes some telling comments on what passes for tax administrative machinery in India. "The main aggregate

Decentralization of a function does not mean that the central government no longer has any responsibility in the area. What it means is rather that the nature of central responsibility has changed from direct service delivery to regulating and monitoring the efficiency and equity of services delivered by local governments.

measure to examine efficiency is the cost of collection of tax to society per rupee of tax collected. For costs, at present no cost data are collected..." (p.154). "Poor performance evaluation procedures prevent tax officials in need of training from being systematically identified. Furthermore, there appears to be no long-term planning for manpower development, except possibly in the area of computer training" (p.159).

"The implementation of computerized systems lacks an integrated approach that takes into account the need for redesigned business procedures and necessary reorganization.. Thus current computerization efforts are not just delayed but are also likely to be inefficient" (p.160).

U.Shankar's paper on fiscal instruments for pollution control in India becomes important in the context of the increasing emphasis on pursuing environmentally sustainable growth. The paper outlines the theoretical context in which the different instruments have evolved before taking up the Indian scenario for discussion. According to Shankar, the pollution control regime in India is based on the standards and commands and control approach. "The penalties for non-compliance with the standards are disconnection of water/electricity supply, imprisonment of officials responsible for non-compliance, fines (fixed in nominal terms) and closure of the units. In monitoring, prosecution and even in court decisions on violations of the pollution standards, the stress at present is on compliance or non-compliance and not on the extent of non-compliance" (p.181). On the issue of product tax, Shankar questions the usefulness of such a measure in India, since "prices of many environmentally-harmful products do not reflect even their private marginal costs because of subsidies and taxes and also because of various inefficiencies in the system" (p.186).

What Shankar does not engage with is the more difficult task of even designing a set of instruments for a context (like India) which is characterized by a complex range as far as forms of business organizations are concerned; worse, this complexity is not just across different products but within each product.

Even more difficult would be the task of operationalizing these instruments across nonhomogenous institutions and classes of people.

The third part of the book consisting of five papers is devoted to the issues of federalism and fiscal decentralization. Once again, each of these papers individually contains a wealth of information brilliantly argued and analysed. Richard Bird's comprehensive account of intergovernmental fiscal system is anchored in the experiences of several developing and transitional economies. Among other things, an important observation that Bird makes and which we find eminently applicable to India, is the following: "Decentralization of a function does not mean that the central government no longer has any responsibility in the area. What it means is rather that the nature of central responsibility has changed from direct service delivery to regulating and monitoring the efficiency and equity of services delivered by local governments. The essential tool needed for this task is an adequate and up-to-date information base. Regardless of the form of decentralization, an important institutional problem is (thus) how to ensure both that the relevant central government agencies have adequate incentives to monitor sub-national activity and that sub-national governments have sufficient incentives to provide the necessary information" (p.217).

In 'Rethinking Federalism' Amaresh Bagchi traces the factors that have contributed to the accentuation of centralization in India. According to Bacchi, the single most important factor was the adoption of planning as the strategy of development with the Centre taking the lead. "Invoking the powers under Entry 20 in the concurrent list, namely, 'Economic and Social Planning', the Central Government stretched the ambit of some articles in the Constitution to acquire control over a wide area of the economy in order to serve the purposes of planning. A classic instance was the assumption of control by the Center over all important industries through the enactment of the Industries Development and Regulation Act of 1956" (p.246). Bagchi's perception that federalism is not just a structure but a process makes it clear that the institutional developments for creation of a bargaining process and to foster cooperation have hardly begun in India.

Roy Bahl in his paper sketches an extremely useful scheme for developing a successful decentralization strategy in LDCs. He is emphatic that intergovernmental fiscal relations must be thought of as a system, and the pieces in this system must fit together. "Implementation should begin with a design of the comprehensive system, and should lay out the plan for each element of the system. A 'one-off' piecemeal reform, encompassing only one element of the system (for example, revenue

sharing), is not likely to lead to success" (p.256). Bahl's conclusion is as important as the scheme that he has sketched, namely, "the greater enemy of progress now is poorly conceived decentralization policies" (p.277).

Govinda Rao's paper entitled 'Poverty Alleviation Under Fiscal Decentralization', among other things, analyses the design of general and specific purpose transfer schemes relevant for poverty alleviation strategy. This categorization takes as its base the argument that poverty alleviation is not merely a redistributive function but involves both 'capacity-improving' and safety net policies. General purpose transfers are meant to augment capacity and therefore according to Rao, need to be designed to offset fiscal disabilities of poorer regions. Specific-purpose transfers are intended to ensure that services required to combat poverty directly or 'categorical equity' services are provided in required quantities (p.298).

Ramani Gunatilaka's observations based on Sri Lanka's experience with rural development and infrastructure provide much food for thought. Arguing that, 'no country in the world has succeeded in reducing poverty by keeping the majority of its population on land and engaged in the primary sectors of the economy,' Gunatilaka's contention therefore is that rural development paradigm as 'currently conceived is fundamentally flawed. Given this context, fiscal decentralization will not make it any more effective in reducing poverty. Rather what Gunatilaka suggests is that 'policy makers need to define the role of fiscal decentralization in a policy framework that is in tune with the forces of urban agglomeration and global integration' (p.320).

It is a pity that neither in the Introduction nor as a Conclusion, has the editor even attempted to tie together the rich insights gained from these papers and reflect on their relevance to the theme of development and poverty. It would be futile to pretend that they are self-evident. Not only are they not self evident, but more significant, even a minimalist agenda aimed at revising a fiscal policy (decentralized or otherwise) to engage with poverty (as understood by Dev and Rao) would immediately bring home the almost insurmountable distortions and contradictions that have set in in our economy in these last five decades since Independence. In one way or the other, each of these papers highlight some aspects of these distortions and contradictions but a resolution to these problems cannot be sought within the frameworks adopted by these papers. It has to begin, unfortunately, with the most basic question, who are the poor, what is development all about and where does fiscal decentralization fit in all of this?

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Critical Empowerments

Asha Achuthan

THE VIOLENCE OF DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY, GENDER AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN INDIA

Edited by Karin Kapadia

Kali for Women, Delhi, 2002, pp.526, Rs.450.00

This is a book that grapples with the 'violence of development'. What first struck the reviewer as interesting, however, was that, of the eleven-odd essays that deal with the problem, none takes up the anti-developmental position as a route to a solution. While that in itself may be a comment on several things, including the pervasiveness of 'development', or the hegemonic apparatuses that promote it, *empowerment* is yet to be thought viably outside structures. And while the *outside* is something that its adherents are attempting to work towards, and one that feminists must needs anxiously look to for a possible position, one would sometimes like to think that it is in *inhabiting* these structures—consciously, or rather, assuming responsibility for one's position, however constituted by the dominant—that one may move from submersion *in* to subversion *of* structures. That may be the strength of the myriad stories this book entertains.

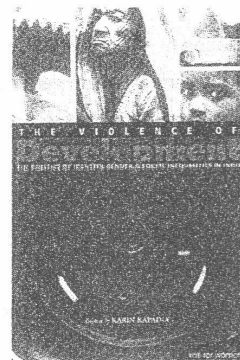
The essays in this edited volume have been woven together on the strength of certain terms they bring forward as key actors in development—tradition-modernity, public-private, the communal question, all refracted through the women's movement in India and the meanings of sisterhood, and the 'feminine'. In a sense, it is the *inside-outside* dilemma that plagues many of the pieces, moving from the failed promises of development, to the new violences engendered by the development-modernity nexus, to the successes of semi-sponsored innovative programmes like the Mahila Samakhya, to a "history that repeats itself"—the title of the last section.

The first essay addresses the disbalance that prevails in today's lopsided conditions of development, with "women's socialization in India — still tied to basic social values" with the overtake of traditional subsistence economies by commercialized economies, as Nirmala Banerjee points out. This is of course the result of the conscious adoption of the Nehruvian over the Gandhian model by the independent Indian state, and Banerjee points out how the vastly different pace of economic and social development has rendered unviable the latter. There is a sense here of development as primarily an economic activity. Development may need to be brought back—especially in that now unfashionably named Third World—from the mire of the social that had exploded in the 1970s to some of its perhaps insidious roots in the economic. This has been illuminat-

ingly suggested in discussions of the resurgence and spread of dowry in India by Banerjee. But one would, perhaps, point at the continuities, at least in gendering, between subsistence and capitalist economies. The sources of employment that were lost through processes of industrialization were also gendered sources—food processing, textile making—the *normatively* traditional preserve of women. Also, the devaluation of women's *contributions to development* in commercialized economies is part of a general investment of value only in the visibly productive that actually buttresses surplus. This is a notion that informs most dominant development perspectives and that the analyses do not seem to challenge head on, though the question of reduced economic value of women's work is discussed.

It is here, however, that Padmini Swaminathan's essay promises a break with dominant liberal theories of development, showing the *unenability* of causal associations derived from statistical data between employment, education and women's empowerment. These are associations that tie up well with accepted articulations by Amartya Sen (referred to and questioned by the author) on the relation between women's well being and their agency—that suggest that "[f]reedom in one area (that of being able to work outside the home) seems to help to foster freedom in others (in enhancing freedom from hunger, illness and relative deprivation)"¹. This freedom, says Sen, enhances "the opportunity the mothers have when their agency is respected and empowered, to influence family decisions"², an especially significant move given "the importance that mothers *typically* attach to the welfare of the children" [italics mine].

Agency here is understood as freedom—to enhance 'capability' — agency "per se"—the individual as end rather than means. This agency is said to be to a large extent accessible through employment, which can make a "positive contribution in adding force to women's voice and agency—through independence and empowerment." An agent, however, may also be understood to mean instrument, a means to an end. And in the enmeshed production of meanings, the question that arises is whether/where the woman becomes the means. The contours of the liberal, by its very logic, will expand to include the marginal. Swaminathan, through the debunking of honoured development indices, offers new



insights that directly point at the structural levels of oppression that undergird increasing and increasingly exploitative employment opportunities for Third World women.

In the continuing story of the 'paradoxes of development' in the first section, Karin Kapadia's essay reflects the growing need to articulate and define 'location', through an interesting foray into "[c]ontemporary processes of self-making in India — on the terms of — modernities that include complex articulations with 'Western' notions of 'rights'." Kapadia works on Castoriadis' notion of an 'imaginary' to pose dalit resistances, for example, as a phenomenon that cannot entirely be captured by modernization/industrialization or the Mode of Production debates, and suggests a greater concentration on 'translocal modernities' that cannot be understood through East-West binarisms either. At this point, however, an unease creeps into the mind of the reader, for while the possibility, rather the need, to think a different imaginary to contest the Symbolic, communicates its promise, how the drawing "on translocal imaginaries from elsewhere in India" can remain uninflected by the West is somewhat unclear. Again, can this translocal contest the parochial, or the nationalist agendas?

Engagements with Mode of Production debates also beg a few questions. Left party documents from the 1970s, and several contemporary Marxist schools of thought in India and outside, have been critical of the classical model, having made available alternative theorizations—of class, of changes in modes of production, of surplus. It would be interesting to look at the continuing paradoxes of development in the light of these newer theorizations.

The feminine is a question that has deep implications today for the feminist movement in India as well as other movements, ecology among them. Having come to the point where "[t]he term 'Indian women's movement' is ... highly contested", as Samita Sen states in her essay towards the close of the book, feminists in India are already past the stage when sisterhood was thought to be global, or even national, on the grounds of biology. Some of this was forcefully brought home during the 1980s, as most of the authors in the second section, that

attempts to grapple with these layers of difference, have noted. This was the period that saw the consolidation of majority fundamentalism worked out largely on women's bodies. This was also the period, again, that saw new economic policies take root. Kalpana Sharma, in her study of women across divides of caste, class and religion in riot-torn Bombay (today Mumbai) in 1993, shows these women articulating, and sometimes keeping alive, resonances across tense divides, with an acute awareness of the needs of daily living. Among these needs is peace, where peace means a ceasefire—the control of physical violence. These women are seen as *not* always making radical strides towards freedom or a greater peace, but making a *stoic space for survival* within the difficult confines of communal and gender divides, questioning neither. What is also new in this understanding of women's responses to violence is their often willing participation in violence in a deeply communalized atmosphere — women's agency will not manifest itself in increased work participation rates alone, but in all forms of violent identity formation, including the nation. While women, and feminists, have come together on various campaigns against violence against women, they have also been caught on opposite sides often, as Urvashi Butalia notes. There are two questions then. One of a deferred, articulated sisterhood—"is a gender identity enough to build a movement that cuts across caste, class and race ..." (Butalia). The other is the fact of the adoption of violence *by* women—the only route to empowerment they have accessed in a predominantly masculine, aggressive world. They are key questions both for an articulation of a *feminine imaginary* and the possibility of working such an *imaginary* into women's movements. And while we need to theorize nonviolence as not merely the absence of violence, we also perhaps need to view forms of violence—consent and coercion—as feeding into each other.

This book is important, perhaps, in that it has sought to address development in the context of social inequalities not given by 'tradition' or 'modernity' but produced at some conjuncture between the two, and this is the context in which many of the questions it raises get thrown up. One of them forces itself to the mind of the reader in Nisha Srivastava's addressal of the experiences of women's organizations in rural UP. Srivastava presents telling statistical evidence of women's status in UP, concentrating both on their socio-economic realities and the extent of physical violence perpetrated on them. The many incidents of naked parading of dalit women as punishment for their infringements of caste hierarchy that come up in her and other accounts—in fact, this seems to have become a universally adopted mode of 'punishment' in India—seem, however, to symbolize a chilling turnaround of the public-private debate. A denial of the private sphere to women — a

dragging of their bodies into public view — a publicizing, but not on the terms of public as inherent in liberal notions of justice. Of course, caste, as religion, continues to play out its power struggles on the bodies of women—a case in point being Uttarakhand, a predominantly upper caste movement, where in a reversal of hierarchical inscriptions of violence, upper caste women were subjected to physical, including sexual torture. The perpetrators, in these and several other cases, have also been the state and its agencies—another issue that the authors have raised forcefully throughout the book.

The section on 'Widening Democracy' carries four essays that discuss state institutions like Panchayati Raj, women's experiences of this institution in various states, and a unique experiment—Mahila Samakhya. Revathi Narayanan, in her fairly gripping account and analysis of the programme, draws favourably on Amartya Sen's notion of women's well-being and agency, to show how the attempt to evolve "gender-sensitive learning methodologies and materials" translates virtually into a movement for taking up social space for the women of Karnataka. The uniqueness of the experience where the organization never transforms into a political party, but yet takes up the politicization of women, throws up several questions—is this a radical or conservative move? How much has this contributed to a "transformative politics"—for this is very much on the feminist agenda, as Samita Sen notes. Again, will there be a "feminization of politics" through this? And what do we mean by feminization? Is this feminization to be naturally tied to women? That *women will raise different questions* has been noticed through their participation in Panchayati Raj institutions. *Will women raise them differently?* Several of these questions are taken up by Narayanan, and later Samita Sen, while Seemanthini Niranjana's essay, addressing Panchayati Raj institutions in Andhra Pradesh, focuses primarily on the relations of power and empowerment, the political-radical, and a need to redefine notions of public-private and state-civil society that fail to address those *outside*. In a sense, then, political representation is a central anxiety of her essay, as is women's agency—and it throws up the double question, again, of introducing women as women into political processes, and of introducing the feminine in philosophy.

Shail Mayaram discusses the empowerment accruing to women through 'Women in Development' (WID), 'gender sensitization of institutions' (GAD) and the importance of 'women in governance' (WIG). She discusses the backlash, particularly against rural women, that has proved to be the dark underside of empowerment. This was manifested most chillingly, as Mayaram suggests, in the fate of the Women's Development Programme to train *sathins* in Rajasthan, and she urges the need for the women's movement to take "cognizance of

political violence against women". Anandhi S. brings up the binarism inherent in the public-private divide and, along with Mayaram and Niranjana, focuses on the failure of empowerment through election to state institutions, highlighting the "locking together [of] private and public patriarchies" in the non-state domain that renders effective its collusion with state apparatuses in disempowering women.

Whither then, feminist perspectives on women and development?

One answer, perhaps, is "multiple-issue gender work". Samita Sen would add that one needs "to recognize the importance of women's associations at the local ... levels, but without retreating into the irreducibly 'local'" to "rebuild the fragmented 'women's' constituency".

Three small questions continue to prod the corners of the reviewer's mind. One is the multiple experiential accounts of women—a general feature of developmental analyses dealing with women, the village community, the marginal. Is experience the only prerogative of the uninitiated, the marginal? The second question is related. The narrative of development, if one may so put it, is perhaps closely linked, in and outside its transactions with state institutions, with apparatuses of governmentality—apparatuses that work as much on the individual woman, building her 'capability', as through the state, and that have actually succeeded in keeping the state alive today. For "the state, no more probably today than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, to speak frankly, this importance; maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. Maybe what is really important for our modernity—that is, for our present—is not so much the *étatization* of society, as the 'governmentalization' of the state."³ The third question is—it would seem, that development initiatives, in a bid to empower women, are continuing an institutionalized process of organization of poor women in the 'Third World', while their men flounder at the margins—or so the backlash at least would say. What are the ideologies at work here? What are the ideologies at work in the narrative of development for poor women in the 'Third World'?

NOTES

¹ Sen, A. 2000. *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press: 194.

² Sen, A. 2000. *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press: 195.

³ Foucault, M. "Governmentality" in *Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault (1954-1984), Volume III (Power)*. (ed) James D. Faubion, Penguin Books, 2000: 201.

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An Effective Tool for Development Objectives

Lekha S. Chakraborty

BEYOND MICROCREDIT: PUTTING DEVELOPMENT BACK TO MICROFINANCE

By Thomas Fisher and M.S. Sriram
Vistaar Publications, New Delhi; Oxfam, UK and New Economics Foundation, London, 2002,
pp.390, Rs.340.00

The book under review explores how microfinance (mF) can be designed to address a wide range of developmental objectives, viz., poverty eradication, gender empowerment, democratic governance and promoting livelihoods, with special reference to diverse mF practices in India. This book is the outcome of a four-year organizational development project, coordinated by the New Economics Foundation in London, for major mF organizations in India, viz., BASIX, Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF), PRADHAN and SEWA Bank.

Microfinance is a wider term than microcredit. It encompasses all plausible financial instruments like savings, credit and insurance. The book illustrates how effectively these micro financial services result in enhancing livelihoods of low-income households, who have remained outside the banking orbit. For instance, the book elaborates the experience of SEWA Bank in providing a variety of *protective* mF services ranging from credit for housing and education to insurance for women to cover a wide range of diseases and for farmers against crop failure (chapter 5). Yet another example illustrated in the book is that of the *promotional* mF services provided by BASIX such as supporting small enterprises for wage employment, reviving rural infrastructure etc. The book also noted that BASIX goes a step ahead from the minimalist micro credit, by integrating the provision of microcredit with a wide range of technical assistance and support services, in highly cost-effective methods (chapter 6).

Another dimension discussed in the book is the scope of mF in building up social capital through democratic people's organizations. It is generally noted that social intermediation is an important tool to ensure efficient delivery of mF services. But Indian experience showed the reverse in which mF services emerged as an effective tool for organizing and empowering people, in particular women. In the process, this book goes beyond the conventional focus on intrahousehold gender relations in access and control of mF resources and reviewed how mF organizations bring about wider system-level changes or institutional changes. For instance, chapter 6 discusses the practical strategies of SEWA of integrating mF services within trade unions to promote the recognition and rights of poor self-employed women; the efforts of CDF in changing the legal environment for cooperatives and the practical

strategies of BASIX and Sa-Dhan (Indian association of mF institutions) in influencing the policy and regulatory environment of mF.

The book challenges the microfinance industry to go beyond the narrow focus of dominant theoretical matrix of 'financial sustainability and outreach to poor'. The book argues that "if such a framework is allowed to dominate debate and practice, as often it has, it will severely limit the potential developmental ends to which mF, as a means of instrument, can be put. In the process, the development impetus which first gave rise to mF is often lost" (p. 20). The book firmly argues that the challenge of *putting back development into mF* can be met by organizations that seek to combine mF services with developmental objectives, which authors call as 'developmental enterprises' or 'social enterprise'. The core of the book thus deals with the *organization of mF*.

Part II of the book (Chapters 7-12) concentrates on the organizational aspects of mF institutions in India. Malcolm Harper succinctly compares and contrasts the Grameen model and Self Help Group models of mF in chapter 7, especially in terms of how these models influence costs, sustainability and empowerment outcomes. He analyses that rigid, autonomous, readily transferable and dependence creating Grameen model of mF can fit well into homogeneous nations, while SHG-model is quite appropriate a model in nations of diversity. However, the author has rightly mentioned that SHG models are more vulnerable to exploitation by pressure groups and vulnerable to collapse. Mathew Titus in chapter 8 has attempted to outline the factors that contribute to the costs of promoting SHGs. He has listed three sets of costs: the costs arising from historical losses; the costs of establishing a new set of organizations built by poor communities to overcome credit-market imperfections; and the ability of the promoting organizations to provide and maintain an effective service, which can be included in the pricing strategy of the organization. Ajit Kanitkar in chapter 9 explores the role of SHG in creating social entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. Overall the effectiveness of SHGs in reducing the transaction costs and enhancing efficiency through forming cohesive groups is discussed in detail in Chapters 8 and 9. Frances Sinha and Sanjay Sinha in chapter 10 have tried to evolve a methodology for measuring the developmental impacts of microfinance, incorporating various organiza-

tional and financial parameters into a sophisticated rating mechanism. In the process, they criticize the wrong reliance on often-used proxy indicators like repayment rates and outreach to measure the impact of mF services. Mathew Titus in chapter 11 focuses on the measures to be undertaken to deepen the microfinance services in India. He highlights the roles different stakeholders have to play in overcoming the information asymmetries in the market and increase the flow of resources, both for capital and organization development.

The emerging lessons and challenges in the field of microfinance outlined in the last chapter suggest that microfinancial services are means not an end to achieve development, the mF has to adapt to the environment in the provision of microfinancial services and finally NGOs have to play a distinct role in making mF an effective instruments of development. The challenges include incorporating development perspective in provision of mF services, learning by doing, resolving the issue of ownership and control of mF and develop the art of capacity building. Also, the book demonstrates how the current analysis of efficiency in microfinance is simplistic, ignoring a range of real economic costs. This is very important in the context of India, as it is the largest emerging market for microfinancial services in the world. However, the book is silent on government intervention in the provision of mF services. As government has already been in the provision of various such services, especially in India, through programmes like Rastriya Mahila Khosh and Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, a critical evaluation of some of these government run programmes would have given a complete understating of the functioning of mF and also the effectiveness of these schemes. In that sense the book gives a partial picture of provision of mF in India. The book would have been analytically strong, if there were more empirical data analysis of the issues discussed with respect to these four mF organizations. However, the issues raised in this book are extremely important to take note of in incorporating any model of development through microfinance. ■

NOTE

¹ This matrix integrated the two schools of thought domineering in mF literature, finance school and poverty school. While the former emphasizes mainstreaming of microcredit as financial service, the latter stresses the need to reach poor people and may be suspicious of financial sustainability. This matrix of combining outreach and financial sustainability is discussed in detail in the first chapter of the book.

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Intergovernmental Relations

M.P. Singh

FEDERALISM WITHOUT A CENTRE: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM ON INDIA'S FEDERAL SYSTEM

By Lawrence Saez

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 252, Rs.440.00

Based on a University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation under the supervision of Professor Lloyd Rudolph, this is probably the first well researched book-length work on intergovernmental relations in India with a focus on the developments since the early 1990s. This central concern has, however, expanded to include other significant aspects of political economy of federalism and neo-liberal economic reforms in India such, for instance, as regional parties and economic liberalization and their impact on changing federal relations. Besides, the book also looks into two dimensions of what may be called "sectoral federalism" in India, namely, the policies and processes of economic reforms in the energy, banking, and telecommunications sectors. In looking at the reforms in these sectors of the economy, Saez proceeds to make an interesting comparative study of India and China.

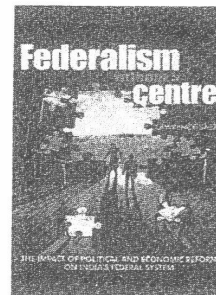
The subtitle of the book 'Federalism without a Centre' comes, the author informs us, from a 1996 seminar in Hyderabad organized by a group of Chief Ministers who were part of the United Front government formed in New Delhi in the summer that year. It is euphemistic rather than descriptive of the state of affairs in the Indian parliamentary-federal system. However, it does convey the sense of the major direction of the system, although it is debatable to what extent the trend of decentralization can go on, given the nature of the constitutional text and practices as well as the security threats that make India a national security State in South Asia despite the worldwide trend of liberalization and globalization. For reasons peculiar to South Asia, India's integration, both in global and regional terms, has been halting and intractable.

Like some other observers of the Indian federal scene, Saez attributes the growing trend of federalization since 1980s/1990s to two major political and economic causal factors: rise of regional parties and their impact on political dynamics and the new economic policy of liberalization and its effect on federal relations. In the process of developing his argument, he analyses the quantitative indicators of the growing influence of regional parties in State Legislatures (where others have mainly focused on the parliamentary trends). The Sarkaria Commission Report on Centre-State relations (1987-88) is examined in the backdrop of the struggle of regional movements and the rise of regional parties in state and

federal legislative wings. However, it is noted that the growing autonomy of state governments has paradoxically resulted in the "demise of intergovernmental institutions," whose influence might have been expected to rise with this new trend. This paradox, which is largely left unexplained, is partly an artifice of Saez's research design that decided to include the Inter-State Council (ISC) and inexplicably exclude the National Development Council (NDC).

As an intergovernmental agency the NDC preceded the ISC by a gap of four decades and has continued to be more frequent in meetings as well as more relevant to fiscal federalism and politics of economic development. The quantum of public investment has admittedly been steadily going down, yet it is still quite sizeable in proportionate terms. The most direct reason for the marginal role of the ISC as an intergovernmental forum is the emergence of federal coalition governments with strategic representation of regional parties in the Union cabinet itself. Most state governments, for this reason do not need intergovernmental agencies, as they have access to the regionally weighted federal council of ministers, whose ministers are more beholden to their party leaders than to the Prime Minister. Constituent allies of the coalition reserve the power of nominating and recalling their representatives in the Union cabinet. Powerful regional leaders prefer to stay in state politics as chief ministers or party bosses and send second rung leaders to represent them in the Union cabinet. This strains the collective responsibility of the cabinet to the Lok Sabha and weakens the authority of the Prime Minister. This more than anything else has made the ISC largely superfluous. However, coalition governments are not a part of the study design of Saez.

Moreover, there are other reasons why the role of intergovernmental agencies in Indian federalism is less vigorous and marked than, say, in Canada. The terms of fiscal federal-provincial relations that are periodically negotiated at laborious and protracted intergovernmental conferences in Canada among the first ministers, ministers, deputy ministers—secretaries in Indian terms—are not that necessary in India. For the basic framework of fiscal relations between the two orders of government are in exceptional details provided for in the constitution itself, the longest in the world. And what remains to be reviewed periodically is done by a Finance Commission



to be appointed by the President of India every five years, whose report is supposed to be the basis on which federal transfers are made from the Centre to the states. Discretionary grants are, of course, made by the Centre on the advice of the Planning Commission, a non-constitutional agency and a creature of the Union executive.

The strongest part of the book comes in the latter part, chapters 5 to 7, examining India's economic reforms, particularly the economic liberalization package and its impact on federal relations, and reforms in energy, banking, and telecommunications sectors in India and China. Despite diversion to themes somewhat extraneous to the title of the book, this part is extremely rich in exploring a dimension of Indian federalism usually not explored by political scientists nor by economists due to their disciplinary blinkers. Comparative insights about developments in India in relation to China are also very valuable. There is analytical rigour in both the political and economic dimensions of federalism and economic reforms in the book.

The main finding of Saez regarding the political consequences of economic liberalization in India is that it "has shifted the focus of federalism from inter-governmental cooperation between the central government and the states towards interjurisdictional competition among the states" (p.217). This, in turn, the author goes on to say, has meant, in causal terms, that

the coordination of developmental policy through cooperative arrangements has given way to a disjointed implementation of developmental policy. This piecemeal approach to development has failed to respond to two conflicting objectives: (a) the capacity of the central government to meet its developmental goals, and (b) the ability of most state governments effectively to implement their own industrial policy (*Ibid.*).

Saez concludes his study with some recommendations "to improve some areas of India's federal system". These are the following:

1. A constitutional amendment to enable the States to collect corporate taxes. States whose "ability to grow is hampered by an

obtuse tax system that allows States to mostly collect land revenue and sales tax. This would give the State governments a more elastic tax base commensurate with the administrative and developmental tasks assigned to them under the constitution. Besides giving the States a greater ability to regulate the goods and services they provide to private firms in States, the new tax regime would also allow them "the ability to offer targeted corporate tax incentives to potential foreign or domestic investors". While the point is well made, the absence of any reference to the Raja Chelliah Tax Reforms Committee Report in the book appears to be a glaring omission.

2. In contrast to the Center's slow response to the problem of fiscal deficits, the State governments "have not properly addressed this problem in their States".
3. The Planning Commission should increase the weightage of fiscal performance of States among the criteria for devolution in the modified Gadgil formula, that "only accounts for 7.5 percent" as compared to much higher weight of backwardness and population. While the suggestion is unexceptionable, particularly in the context of inexcusable fiscal irresponsibility in most States, yet federalism is not only a political mechanism for autonomous as well as shared governance between the two orders of government but also a fiscal instrument of equalization payments from the common national wealth to States to reduce regional economic disparities.
4. There is need for a more concerted effort at the Centre to streamline India's foreign investment strategy and the creation of new interjurisdictional institutions to attract foreign investment into the various regions and States.

Saez concludes on a balanced note that "these proposals would not automatically transform India into a world economic superpower. However, ... [they] would serve as a pragmatic first step in allowing the viable development of India's redefined federal system" (p.227).

An interesting comparative finding is that China's success with the first-generation economic reforms are more spectacular than India's on account of the former's authoritarian manoeuvrability. But in second-generation reforms India is likely to do better than China. This paradox is explained by Saez by pointing out that while China undertook to reform its economic system on capitalist lines experimentally within the communist political framework, "doubts about the success or need for reforms began to surface within the country's leadership". ■

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Making Sociology Meaningful

Nasreen Fazlbhoy

STRUCTURE AND TRANSFORMATION

Edited by Susan Visvanathan

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 219, Rs.495.00

As a teacher who has struggled to put across sociological concepts developed in the West to students from a very different cultural milieu I enjoyed reading this book. The editor writes that she and her colleagues were inspired to write this book because of the intense frustration they felt in their efforts to make sociology meaningful to themselves and to their students. Commissioned by the Oxford University Press to produce a book that keeps in mind changes in the discipline of sociology, and the needs of students in relation to university curricula, the editor had her work cut out. She had to find a way of producing a book which would not compromise on complexity, which would be faithful to the author's vision of sociology as both a science and art, which would aim at conceptual clarity but be intelligible to students who are notoriously resistant to theory. The book has thus arisen out of the individual (and perhaps also collective) efforts to work through different themes relating to Indian society. The themes appear to have been inspired by each author's special expertise or interest in an area, as the articles while individually extremely adequate in terms of coverage, do vary greatly between one another in terms of the themes that have been taken up, both in breadth and depth of coverage. Major faultlines in Indian society such as caste, class and tribe are addressed though ethnicity has not been dealt with. The problems and contradictions of industrial development are looked at through issues of anomie and alienation, problems of plantation labour, gender and migration. Ethnographic accounts are interwoven into the discussions so that there is some sense of the vitality and complexity of the process being discussed. The editor's introduction brings out the theoretical frame that informed each author's discussion.

The discerning student (as also the teacher) could learn a lot from this book. The dialectic between theory and observation or experience, the way a concept or area of study develops in sociology through articulation with other related concepts and as the context changes, how to interpret facts in light of theory, or theory in light of facts, can be seen by looking at the articles not just as sources of information, but also as illustrative of the sociological approach or the sociological enterprise. Each article reads like a review article, covering theoretical issues and also the available ethnographic material, largely,

though not exclusively from India. The student can thus get exposure to a number of different areas (there are ten articles in all!) in varying degrees of generality. Sheena Jain's article is the only one that directly takes up a conceptual issue. She takes us through two of the most imprecisely used terms in sociology—structure and culture. This excellent overview of the debates is like a mini history of sociology itself. She shows how the different theoretical positions in sociology—the Marxist, functional, structural, have each brought a different nuance to these terms and how over time the terms have articulated with one another.

Satish Saberwal's scholarly discussion on change treats it as a confrontation between two different systems of order—the European and the Indian. He provides not only a framework to study change, but through case studies also gives life to what is often a hackneyed topic of 'tradition and modernity' for students. The ethnographic material he uses to discuss this shows how dynamic this process was and becomes a lesson on how to give life to a sociological problem. Savyasachi looks at the situation of tribal forest dwellers and their encounter with modernity as a clash not just between world views but what it has meant in terms of loss of 'self rule' for the tribal. What we see here is the world of the tribal in which the encounter with modernity is an encounter with displacement, a denial of plurality, a destruction of a world view. Other articles deal with the problem of alienation and anomie in the context of industrialization in India. Migration, which often appears only as a statistic for most of us, looks different when viewed from the vantage point of gender where we see the myriad ways in which women's lives can be affected. The editor's own article raises an important conceptual issue: what is the modern city? This question becomes a way of looking at the weakness of a linear conception of history and the inadequacy of looking at society through dualisms such as traditional/modern or developed/underdeveloped. Looked at this way, the very presence of immigrant pockets in the cities of the West brings into question simple oppositions of First and Third world.

The final paper in the book is by Shiv Visvanathan, who, in introducing us to the life and world of Patrick Geddes suddenly reminds us that even the 'disenchanted' world of the city was studied by someone who 'enchanted'

The discerning student (as also the teacher) could learn a lot from this book. The dialectic between theory and observation or experience, the way a concept or area of study develops in sociology through articulation with other related concepts and as the context changes, how to interpret facts in light of theory, or theory in light of facts, can be seen by looking at the articles not just as sources of information, but also as illustrative of the sociological approach or the sociological enterprise.

the most mundane of subjects with his own genius, perhaps illustrating thereby the true meaning of 'genius' as one possessed (by a jinn or genie). The magus here was science itself, which for Geddes was the new enchanted world. Geddes comes alive for us as a person with an independent and unconstrained set of concerns which endear to us a figure who is otherwise barely known to sociologists in India, especially students of today who may not realize that such a personality ever existed. Coming as a finale to the other articles which have followed a more conventional format, the article is a reminder that ultimately some inner drive, some unique personal quest, is what counts.

I have not dealt with all the papers not because they suffer qualitatively or do not have much to say, but because of lack of space and the impossibility of dealing with the articles in any depth in a short review. A few comments are in order here though, on the enterprise itself, which in its very conception contributes to the construction and development of the discipline of sociology in India. A lacuna, which is unfortunately very much a part of academic sociology, and is reflected in this book, is the absence of a discussion on ethnicity and religion. The invisibility of the diverse ethnic groups, especially the religious minorities, in curricula hardly needs to be pointed out to those who are familiar with the academic development of the discipline. It was regrettable that this invisibility should have been reproduced in a book which has otherwise acknowledged other marginalized categories. This calls for some self-reflection. Apart from this, I would say the book is a valuable addition to any student's or teacher's library. ■

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Hydra-headed Canker

S.S. Gill

CORRUPTION—INDIA'S ENEMY WITHIN

By C.P. Srivastava
Macmillan India, Delhi, 2001, pp. xvii+240,
Rs. 275.00

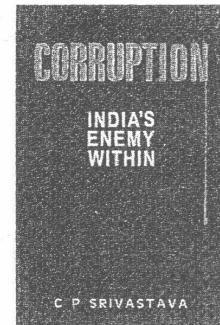
Corruption is a global phenomenon. And it always has been. The techniques and avenues of corruption described in the Arthashastra have a contemporary ring about them. When the freedom movement was at its peak and the Congress formed ministries in several provinces, there were so many complaints of corruption against the Congress ministers that Gandhi said in desperation, "I would go to the length of giving the Congress a decent burial, rather than put up with the corruption that is rampant."

But in view of the extent to which corruption has eaten into the innards of the polity, it has attracted a lot of attention of late—and that too on the global scale. In India more books have been written on corruption in the last five years than during the first forty-five years after Independence. At the international level, the World Bank Report, 1997, devoted a whole chapter to this subject. The OECD examined a comprehensive note on Combating Bribery in International Business the same year. A paper, Helping Countries Combat Corruption was discussed at the Fund/Bank meeting around the same time.

The book under review is another addition to the same corpus. C.P. Srivastava, one of the most eminent members of the IAS, served as personal aide to Lal Bahadur Shastri in his earlier days as a civil servant, and saw at first hand Shastri's deep commitment to probity in public life. Later he held some of the highest posts under the United Nations for sixteen years. Naturally, on his return to India he found the prevailing culture of rampant corruption in public life most disturbing.

The author examines the phenomenon of corruption from various angles, feels most upset at the steep decline in the standards of public morality. Corruption in the political, business and administrative spheres receive his special attention, and he finds that there has been an all-round decline in all these areas of public discourse. In this connection he gives a very well-informed account of the measures taken by his hero, Lal Bahadur Shastri, in combating the "Cancerous Growth of Corruption". Starting with Nehru, he traces the steady decline in the standards of public morality, and laments the 'Tragic End' of Rajiv Gandhi's 'Brilliant Beginning'. Indira Gandhi also comes in for her fair share of blame.

The author views corruption from a humanist and ethical standpoint, and feels distressed at the helplessness of the common man caught in the



coils of this dragon. He has devoted a large section of the book to various measures to combat corruption and given a number of useful suggestions. In 'What Then Must India Do', he contends, "To fulfill its rightful destiny in the new millennium, the country will have to find ways to move towards an honest and ethics-based polity, an efficient, compassionate and corruption-free administration and bureaucracy and a responsible and value-based society". He has made a strong case for giving much higher salaries and allowances to our legislators and ministers so that they are not tempted to explore corrupt avenues to augment their income.

As to the remedial steps to be taken by the government, the author is categorical that "Strict adherence to the principle of meritocracy... is cardinal to the establishment of top quality permanent civil service". In other words, reservation for the deprived sections of society should be abolished. Then, "The principle of political neutrality of the members of the service... needs to be restored with unshakable firmness". Further, quickening the pace of decision taking, making the system more accountable and transparent, simplifying rules and downsizing of bureaucracy are other measures suggested by the author to tone up the system. Further, "The role of the IAS in the new economic scenario is that of a 'facilitator' and no longer that of a 'controller' as in the past. And instead of the citizen running from pillar to post while dealing with the official agencies, he favours the establishment of Single Window Facilitation Centres. But the "ultimate objective is to launch a People's Empowerment Programmes by introducing transparency and accountability in the functioning of the public delivery system through a well spelt out citizen's charter and an independent information dissemination system". The author believes that in the ultimate analysis ethics should be the basis of governance.

The book contains too many long quotes which detract from the smooth flow of the narrative. Moreover, these quotes have not been isolated either by quotation marks, or by a different font, or short paras. So, at times it is not clear as to where a quote ends and the normal narration beings. ■

S.S. Gill is a retired civil servant.

Two Conflicts Analysed

Lt. Gen. A.M. Vohra

MUSHARRAF'S WAR

Edited by Major General Rajindar Nath
Lancer Books, New Delhi, 2003, pp.298, Rs.580.00

THE 1971 INDO-PAK WAR: A SOLDIER'S NARRATIVE

By Major General Hakeem Arshad Qureshi
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2002, pp.325, Rs.475.00

Occupation of heights across the LOC in the Kargil sector in 1999 and thus move the LOC forward, interdict Srinagar-Kargil-Leh road with greater effect, internationalize the Kashmir issue by creating a scare of a nuclear flash point led General Musharraf to launch operation "Badr" in the spring of 1999 which can rightly be called Musharraf's war. This book, however, also gives a resume of three previous wars between India and Pakistan, the 1947-48 attempt to grab J&K, the 1965 and the 1971 wars. This was perhaps not necessary and, in any case, how can one do justice to such a vast review in 49 pages? The author has raised a number of issues and expressed, what are at best personal views, without any empirical evidence; matters like the role of the few senior British officers that still served in the Indian Army, the availability of forces to go beyond URI (The official history of 1947-48 war does not think so) and the failure of General Cariappa and Thimayya to recapture Skardu.

Leaving aside the genesis of the Kargil intrusion, whether it was initially planned to be executed in 1984 as the author believes, or was first considered by Zia-ul-Haq at a cabinet meeting in 1987 and set aside, Musharraf was certainly going ahead with all measures to implement the plan at the time of the meeting of the prime ministers in Lahore early in 1999 where peace and reconciliation were the issues. The author suggests that Pakistan went ahead with its intrusions in the belief that its recently proclaimed nuclear weapon status would prevent India from starting a conventional war. For good reasons India restricted its response to getting the intrusions vacated and did not wish to enlarge the scope of hostilities, but its response was strong, deliberate and well planned. Colonel Ludra, in the chapter on 'Operations in Kargil', spells this out. Once the chief of the Army Staff, General Malik, assessed the situation and laid out his priorities and methodology—"The use of air power by India put Pakistan totally off-balance", as brought out in the subsequent chapter of the book.

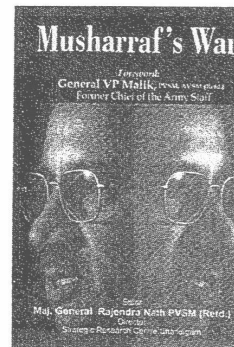
Air Marshal Bedi's 'The IAF in Kargil—The Inside Story' is a valuable contribution in understanding the circumstances and the constraints under which the air force operated and why the application of the air power in its classical sense stood precluded. While agreeing with his observation that it is normal in India to keep the service chiefs out of the decision making

process at the top level, as is reported to have been the case while deciding not to cross the LOC, it must be stated that this decision won international approbation. The lesson of course is that the chiefs need to be more assertive and the politico-bureaucratic conglomeration more understanding. The discussion in regard to the crossing of the LOC should have been taken in the chiefs' presence and after taking their views into consideration.

The Air Marshal has also explained the circumstances that brought in the IAF into the battle only on 26 May—two crucial weeks had been lost. The lessons to be learnt here have been spelt out and no doubt noted by service headquarters concerned.

Apropos Major General Rajindar Nath's chapter on 'Macro Level Aspects of Kargil War', we are fortunate that Kargil Review Committee report has done a thorough job of the work entrusted to it. Some recommendations in regard to modernization of equipment and force multipliers have been already implemented, e.g., night vision devices based on thermal imaging, battle field surveillance radar of medium and short range and high altitude UAVs have been introduced. Major General Rajindar Nath's point regarding the amalgamation of the para-military forces and a review of their arms as well as training needs early implementation.

Almost half of the book *The 1971 Indo-Pak War* deals with the political situation in East Pakistan in August 1970 when the author took over command of 26 Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment (26 FF) located at Saidpur. On seeing the plight of the populace, he observes, "for them, independence has changed nothing, only the masters". He noticed that Bengali translation of the Guevara's book on guerrilla warfare were being sold on the foot path of main cities. After the indefinite postponement of the inaugural session of the National Assembly scheduled to be held on 3 March 1971, the murder of army personnel, (from West Pakistan) caught in ones and twos became an everyday occurrence. "We were slowly but definitely losing our credibility". Civil disobedience movement gained momentum. "Bengali officers and men of Pakistan Army resented, restricted and later prohibited the passage of West Pakistani troops. Higher Command was earnestly trying to bring political parties to a negotiated solution". Why, he asks, could not Bhutto and Mujib narrow the gap; the 'six point' programme of Mujib and 'two



majority parties in one country' (*udhar tum idhar hum*) of Bhutto. "Obviously the proximity of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to the seat of power..... point to a deliberate and well thought out position."

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman launched civil disobedience. Martial law was invoked. Major (later Major General and President of Bangladesh) Ziaur Rehman made a declaration of independence on Chittagong Radio on 27 March 1971 on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Disarming of the East Bengal Regiment and EPR was ordered and massacre took place of West Pakistani troops at Pabna and Kushtia. The author observes that, "To expect a Bengali in uniform not to have been affected by the aspirations of his people and to remain indifferent to the blood of his kinsman flowing as a result of military action was to ignore human nature." Yet, he had to disarm 3EBR by military action by his battalion, 26 FFR. This 'internal' strife among the forces in East Pakistan "squeezed" the Pakistan army into the cantonments under their control with others held by EBR, EPR and 'Ansars'. Several chapters are devoted to the attack and recapture of these towns from them and the reassertion of state power by June 1971.

In the Preface, the author sets out his two-fold purpose in writing this book. Firstly, to record the deeds of his battalion, 26 FF, and secondly, to leave for the young and the middle rank officers of today and tomorrow a legacy of his battle experience.

On 3 December 1971 Pakistan declared war in the belief that with a major portion of Indian forces so inextricably involved in East Pakistan that the situation in West Pakistan presented an opportunity. He outlines the Pakistani perception to defend the Eastern Wing by fighting along the borders to defend every inch of territory. In this context, he states that the assumptions on which Pakistan based its plans had gone for a six and that it was essential to modify the defensive strategy. "Our lack of foresight and failure to reset to new operational realities meant that at no stage during the battle for East Pakistan did we withdraw to an inner triangle and we did not "defend Dhaka at all cost" as planned. In fact, we appear to have disintegrated as a cohesive fighting force somewhere between the borders

THE 1971 INDO-PAK WAR
A Soldier's Narrative



Major General Hakeem Arshad Qureshi

and our envisaged first, or in some cases second, line of defence...we lost the war without losing a battle."

On 15 December 1971, the defences of the Brigade of which 26 FF was a part, were readjusted; Dinajpur was abandoned to reduce the brigade's extended frontage. On 16 December, orders were received that arrangements to end hostilities have been worked out; units should contact Indian counterparts by raising white flags and lay down arms. To the Commanding Officer of the 26 FF this was beyond comprehension. However, the battalion surrendered, laid down its arms and were moved to a POW camp. On 21 December, they were moved into India by buses.

Life in POW camps in Ranchi is described. An aspect worth mentioning is what the author calls the "crude attempt at mass indoctrination" the response to which was "full of contempt and dislike". Some of his musings while he was a POW are at variance with his observations. A notable one relates to Bhutto. As quoted earlier, he bemoans Bhutto's reasoning of two majority parties. "*Udhar tum, Idhar hum*" and points out that Bhutto's proximity to the seat of power led to a deliberate and well thought out position. He also opines that "without assigning him the role of the architect of the Martial law policies, his conduct cannot be explained". In his musings he refers to Bhutto as a leader of consequence and praises his performance at the Security Council and his resignation at Tashkent. The author's own observations about the plight of the people of East Pakistan and his sympathy for their aspirations all go by the board. If there is one person responsible for the break up of Pakistan, it was Bhutto.

The author raises the question whether the course of insurgency adopted by Mujib's Awami League was "a strategy to attain independence or was it something imposed on the people of East Pakistan? He draws attention to Sheikh Mujib's "illuminating responses" and states that these were of a majority party leader and not a secessionist.

The book is more an account of political issues concerning East Pakistan and not so much of a book on the 1971 war. The observations on the war are limited primarily to the action of 26 FF, the author's command. ■

Lt. Gen. A.M. Vohra was the vice chief of army staff of the Indian army.

Bridging the Divide

S. Kalyanaraman

CONTESTING MARGINALITY: ETHNICITY, INSURGENCY AND SUBNATIONALISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

By Sajal Nag

Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 381, Rs. 795.00

The Indian state has had to confront separatist insurgencies in its north-eastern periphery right from its inception. Its response has flown from the perception that insurgencies essentially constitute a challenge to the project of nation building and that the rebels are fellow Indians who had to be won over. This understanding is reflected in Indian Army counterinsurgency doctrine as well, which does not solely emphasize upon victory against the rebels but also recognizes the need for social, economic and political measures designed to win the hearts and minds of the disaffected populace. Crucial to the design and implementation of such ameliorative policies is a comprehensive understanding of the reasons that impel a particular group of people to rebel against the state. The book under review throws much light on this last aspect with respect to the separatist insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

Contesting Marginality is an exploration of the pattern of discourse between the Indian state and the rebels waging 'independence struggles' against it. What the former sees as secessionism constitutes nationalist freedom movements for the latter. An unfortunate feature of this discourse is the adoption, or rather unquestioned continuation, by an influential section of the Indian elite of the British colonial attitude towards the peoples of the north-eastern hills. Here, Sajal Nag cites as examples the non-accordance of the status of 'nationalist struggle' to the resistance offered by these peoples to British conquest, as well as in the continued propagation of the colonial argument that their conquest was necessitated by the constant raids and head-hunting that they inflicted upon the territories controlled by the Raj.

Even Jawaharlal Nehru, who empathized with the peoples of this region, was not exempt from faulty perceptions. His analysis of the roots of the Naga insurgency, for example, traced it to the lack of national consciousness among the Nagas who were "hardly influenced by the struggle for freedom or other movements in India." Another strand in Nehru's analysis was the role of colonial administrators and Christian missionaries – the tribals' only contacts with the outside world – in planting anti-Indian views in the minds of these peoples. But

such analyses fail to take into account the profound ways in which these tribal societies were transformed by their forced absorption into the modern world.

The introduction of road links, welfare services, western medicine and hygiene, education, and Christianity, all contributed to the process of detribalization. From this process of wrenching change emerged a middle class, which became greatly influenced by the idea of national self-determination that began to sweep the globe in the wake of the two World Wars as well as by the chorus of demands raised by communities within the Raj for separate statehood in the decade before Independence. It was not much of an intellectual challenge for the members of this middle class to articulate the distinctiveness of their identity, given the evident social, economic and cultural differences between their societies and that of the Indian mainland. This task was made easier by the articulations of some colonial administrators in this regard and their shenanigans to create a Crown Colony or Trust Territory out of these frontier hill areas.

British withdrawal and Partition were critical events in the definition and articulation of the tribal identity. The argument was that since the tribals were neither Hindu nor Muslim, they should not be included in either dominion. Some even suggested that all tribal areas along the Indian and Burmese frontiers be brought under a single entity. Tribal apprehensions about being wiped out if "thrown among forty crores of Indians" were tinged with conflicting anxieties about severing all ties with India as well as about the perpetuation of the old tribal order.

Unfortunately, neither the Assamese leaders nor those at the Centre had any understanding of the problem. In Sajal Nag's words, they knew "next to nothing" about the tribal peoples, let alone being able to grasp the intricacies of the tribal situation. But such criticism sounds rather unfair. The tribal areas were after all kept excluded from the mainland by the Inner Line regulation. Moreover, the atmosphere at the time of Independence can only be described as crises-ridden. The north-east and the issues dominating the lives of the region's peoples were minor blips in the whirlwind of events

then unfolding. Yet, the Constitution that was drawn up—and in which process some tribal leaders did participate through the Subcommittee on the administration of the Tribal and Excluded Areas—did incorporate regulations to preserve and promote tribal interests in the Sixth Schedule, which provided greater autonomy to the tribal areas, considerable control to the tribals over their own affairs as well as protection of their land and customs.

One signal service that the book renders is to help lay aside the myth that the tribal societies of the north-east enjoyed 'splendid isolation' from the Indian mainland before the advent of the British. Interactions between the two societies did occur, and constantly at that. In some cases, like Manipur for instance, this process even led to the birth of a new composite culture that fused elements of the two societies. Given the heterogeneous and absorptive character of Indian society, there is no reason to doubt that such a process of fusion will continue; provided, of course, the modern idea of India is not discarded in favour of communal politics.

Contesting Marginality has its flaws as well. It is littered with typographical errors. Passages are repeated on occasion, and there are no maps. But in the overall analysis, it is a useful contribution that generates greater comprehension of the crises that the Naga, Mizo and Manipuri societies faced, and are facing, in the course of a significant period in their evolution. The debate generated by this work will hopefully help decision-makers design and target appropriate policies towards the troubled north-eastern region as a whole. ■

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An International Concern

P. Sahadevan

THE GLOBAL THREAT OF TERROR: IDEOLOGICAL, MATERIAL AND POLITICAL LINKAGES

Edited by K.P.S. Gill and Ajai Sahni
Bulwark Books & Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, 2002,
pp.v+268, Rs. 600.00 and US \$ 40.00

Studies on terrorism in the post-September 11 period adopt a broad-based approach to include its transnational dimensions. Multiple global networks and clandestine activities of many terrorist organizations in the recent years point to the fact that terrorism, in most cases, is not any more a national issue, and the global reach of terrorism makes it truly an issue of international concern. It means that any national political effort or counter-terrorism strategy in the absence of a coordinated international support is bound to fail in eradicating this menace. The book under review seeks to expose the multiple linkages—ideological, material and political—that some of the terrorist groups, mainly from Asia, have forged in pursuit of their goals.

Contributors to this volume, which is an outcome of an international conference in 2001, belong to three different fields—counter-terrorism, policymaking and academics. Bringing all three categories of people together to produce a conglomeration of views and opinions not only fulfils the basic objective of any study of this sort but also serves the purpose of readers who are keen to be informed of varied contentious viewpoints. However, this sort of conglomeration has in a way created an obvious structural deficiency in the volume, in the sense that some chapters are analytically sound and comprehensive in empirical data, and many others are merely prescriptive for devising better policy responses. Imbalance is also evident in the length of chapters. For instance, as compared to the chapters on terrorism in Sri Lanka and South Asia, Kozhokin's chapter on terrorism in the post-Soviet states is too slim and inadequate to explain the entire phenomenon there. Also, only half of the essays have referred to sources. However, this does not undermine the overall importance and utility of the volume.

A brief introduction by K.P.S. Gill mainly provides the state-centric views on terrorism from the perspective of a counter-terrorism strategist. While identifying the trajectory of terror over the decades, he cautions the world community of the increasing capability of terrorist organizations in waging "total wars". Yet, he argues,

terrorism is not mentioned on the statute book of several countries. In hard-hitting statements, he questions the liberal political thinking on violence and human rights and therefore rejects the root cause theory of terrorism that the liberal intellectual tradition likes to emphasize and advance. This is however discreetly contested by L.M. Singhvi (besides some others) whose short essay presents balanced views through a somewhat academic treatment of the subject. He rightly states that "we must study the causes of terrorism", but such an intellectual enquiry should not be allowed to be used to "condone terrorism, to become an excuse, a justification, for terrorism" (p.29). Stating that terrorism violates human rights, he makes a sincere plea for a comprehensive mission to redress the real grievances of the society. Given his background as an eminent jurist, his strong penchant for freedom and human rights is understandable and appreciable. For him, the civil society's role in protecting human rights and fighting terrorism is absolutely crucial. Two essays representing the political establishment are in a different analytical flavour. Highlighting India's long terror experience, Defence Minister George Fernandes states the reality of India having to fight its own battle against sustained cross-border terrorism. Arun Shourie's prescriptive essay covers a wide gamut of issues ranging from India's anti-terrorism measures to the forces that sustain terrorism. While offering a set of don'ts and dos to strengthen counter-terrorism strategy, he questions the liberal political views and advocates tough measures to end terrorism.

Amin Saikal provides a succinct analysis of the failure of the United States in understanding the nexus between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's *Al Qaeda*. He rightly argues that due to its overwhelming interest in energy, the United States refused to read the writings on the wall. He states that had the United States heeded the warnings of the slain leader of the anti-Taliban forces, Ahmed Shah Masood, it could have avoided terror attacks against its own interests. In the entire post-September 11 developments marked by the United States-led war on terror, Pakistan has remained the most

important beneficiary. Reuven Paz's essay on 'The Brotherhood of Global Jihad' is an interesting piece of work, which portrays the emergence of multinational Islamists who have developed a new *Global Jihadi-Takfiri-Wahhabi* ideology. The Islamist radicalism in Muslim communities of the West provide the required base and infrastructure to promote the ideology by groups like the *Al Qaeda*. An important consequence of the globalization of this ideology is the spread of suicide terrorism. In order to contain the *Jihadi* ideology, the author suggests, a "brotherhood of global counter-terrorism" aimed at dismantling all cells of multinational Islamists should be created.

Equally interesting is William Maley's chapter on 'Messianism and Political Action'. The author is of the view that messianism (defined as a faith that life on this earth will be transformed one day for good) becomes a strong political force when it is mixed with fundamentalism. Messianic groups are bound by religious doctrine and also the sway of their leader. They undertake actions for what they symbolize. For them, the September 11 attacks in the United States were not a means to an end, but an end in themselves. One tends to agree with the author's argument that "institutions of democracy, crudely interpreted, are not necessarily the most useful institutions in surmounting the discontents on which terrorism can build" (p. 81). But, it is equally important to note that other political systems do not provide even the basic framework for addressing or redressing group discontents. In his chapter on terrorism and politics, Mahmoud Mourad fervently argues against any attempt at linking terror with religion although it is used as a cover to mobilize support and gain false legitimacy. All right-thinking people from every religious faith should accept this fact. Otherwise, we will be playing into the hands of the terrorists who use religion for their violence.

Three chapters in the volume are empirically rich and highly informative. G.H. Peiris has made a systematic mapping of the international network of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It is very well demonstrated that by its wideranging clandestine activities for fund raising and arms procurement, the LTTE qualifies to be called a multinational force. The main inference made in the chapter is that the group has abundant resources at its command to engage the Sri Lankan state in a prolonged civil war. Ajai Sahni's chapter on South Asia is by far the most comprehensive one that provides a good account of terrorism from a number of dimensions—support bases of terrorists, Pakistan's role in terrorism, duplicity and inconsistency of United

States responses, and India's predicament. The author has paraded a huge set of data to convince the world community of the threat that Pakistan poses to India by sponsoring cross-border terrorism. Rightly, he is very careful in choosing the title 'Extremist Islamist Terror and Subversion' to convey an important fact that "there are many Islams, and that the adherents of the murderous mix of religion and terror are only a small fraction of Muslims in the world" (p.238). Finally, Rohan Gunaratna's well-written chapter gives very useful information on terrorist dependence on organized crime for financial viability to conduct their terror campaigns. He analyses three cases—the LTTE, the *Al Qaeda* and some extremist groups in the Philippines—to show that the survival of these groups is closely linked with their international activities. He makes valuable policy suggestions that the states, in formulating responses to combat terrorism, should take into account the crucial terrorist-organized crime nexus. In fact this is the central message of many of the authors. The volume is a good addition to the burgeoning literature on international terrorism. ■

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Saraswati Samman, 2002 has been awarded by the K.K. Birla Foundation to Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Yugant*, a Marathi play. It carries an award of Rs. five lakhs.

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Among his plays characterized by daring modernity and originality, are *Sultan*, *Holi*, *Garbo*, *Vaasanakand*, *Wada Chirebandi* and *Aatmakath*. *Yugant* perhaps the only trilogy ever written in Indian theatre, is an amazingly told story of four generations of Deshpandes, a feudal family living in a remote village of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. The picture he draws is grim and frightening. He clearly sees us creating a wilderness around us. An environmental as well as a moral, spiritual, social, cultural, ethical desert, it reminds one of a Greek tragedy where those who died are luckier than those living.

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Print Culture

Patricia Oberoi

IMAGES OF FREEDOM

By Amrit & Rabindra K.D. Kaur Singh
Indialog, New Delhi, 2003, pp.128, Rs.325.00

At one level, *Images of Freedom* is just an attractively designed (and very reasonably priced) album of some fifty popular prints covering the period of the freedom struggle through to the dawn of Independence, with brief but informative glosses on each of the prints by the "Singh Twins", Amrit and Rabindra. This would be to understate the interest and importance of the book, however.

Firstly, this is one of the few publications to take popular print culture seriously – and not merely for its historical and sociological interest, but for its artistic creativity as well. This style of artwork, widely known as "calendar art", is not usually regarded as proper "art". Apart from aesthetic considerations, it is mass-produced, and lacks the individual artist's signature that is deemed to be the mark of the authentic bourgeois work of art. Or rather, the signatures are meaningful only to those in the trade, not to the wider public who buy prints chiefly for their subject matter or decorative appeal. And in any case, given the routine copying, plagiarism, recycling and *bricolage* that go into the production of the "original" paintings from which the prints are made, the signature as such is a poor guide to authorship.

Rather than denigrating the prints on grounds of their mass appeal, the Singh twins give credit to their power and outreach, especially – in this case – in the cause of the freedom struggle. They see creativity, not dissonance, in stylistic hybridity; in adaptations that might otherwise be condemned as "copying"; and in the calendars' bold use of the sort of colours that are denigrated as "garish" in polite circles. In particular, they applaud the creativity of the *allegorical* mode, whereby Hindu religious, epic and folk motifs were cleverly deployed to subvert British colonial authority. The British were of course very sensitive to the power of the images to provoke disaffection or incite communal tension, but the print makers were always able to keep the censors on their toes.

Secondly, the book presents a particular type of calendar art – political and patriotic iconography, focussed especially on national leaders – which could easily have been as deadly dull as DAVP promotions or school text-books. In fact, it turns out to be quite inspiring, a reminder of a time when politics commanded idealism, not cynical disinterest, and when leaders had both stature and charisma. (Looking back, it seems that Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the last *iconographically* worthwhile leader at the national level, though regional politics has been more vibrant.)

Thirdly, as artists themselves, working in a format that they rather wittily term "past-modern

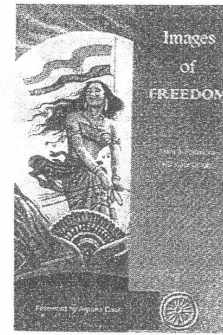
miniatures" (see the Air India Calendar for 2003), the Singh twins make many acute observations on the technical modes of execution of the calendar paintings – perspective, colour, shadows, composition, etc. – and on stylistic continuities between calendar art and traditional folk and fine art styles, especially that of miniature painting. For instance, regarding the eclectic style and figural disproportions of a scene of the raising of the national flag on the ramparts of the Red Fort on 15th August 1947, the twins comment:

Key political figures of the freedom movement survey their fellow countrymen with pride – the people of all social and religious backgrounds who have gathered on the grounds below. The Indian Air Force salutes the gathering overhead whilst warrior heroes of India's historical and more recent past (Shivaji, Bose and Pratap) appear in the sky above.... Their placement within an opening of glowing clouds denotes their glorified status and transcendence to a heavenly domain (a convention rooted in Christian iconography).... Whilst the treatment of the figures (which are modelled and cast shadows) complies with Western-style realism, the overall flattened perspective and arrangement of key elements of the composition within clearly defined horizontal registers is rooted in traditional Indian art convention. This fusion of different cultural aesthetics is also evident elsewhere. For example, relative scale is used for the figures in the crowd scene to create a sense of foreground and background. However, at the same time the artist employs symbolic scale, making key figures on the fort ramparts abnormally large (but denoting their importance in the scheme of things).

The twins also have many telling observations on *inter-visual* aspects of Indian calendar art – for instance, the influence of theatre in backdrops, settings and figural compositions (p.106), or of European mass-produced postcards in providing the European landscape scenery in which Indian gurus and deities are now routinely set (p.110).

Fourthly, the twins' comments on themes, aesthetics and symbolism are often acute and thought-provoking, reflecting their familiarity with both western and Indian art history and artistic conventions. They remark, for instance, on the representational likeness of the figure of Mother India to the Indian goddess on the one hand, and Britain's warrior queen Boadicea on the other; on the ritual symbolism of the tributary offering of the severed heads of freedom fighters to Mother India; of the purificatory symbolism of fire in an image of India reborn; and of Gandhi's deified portrayal (with halo and joined hands) in the style of a Christian saint.

Fifthly, they have sought to appropriate to the pictorial record of India's freedom struggle images of the Sikh Gurus who suffered martyrdom in defence of their faith or who resisted foreign rule, as well as images of the Akali movement, and of individual freedom fighters presented as Sikhs (Bhagat Singh, Udham Singh, Baba Kharak



Singh). This perception, one might add, is not actually conceded in commercial calendar art (not even that fashioned for a Punjabi clientele), but is an aspect of the self-perception of prominent Sikh organizations and corporations seeking to assert their simultaneous national and Sikh allegiance. In this gesture, the Singh twins are not merely curators and commentators, but themselves active participants in an ongoing process of identity construction.

Though distinguished painters themselves, the Singh twins manage to present their mass-produced images without either mockery or condescension. Indeed one could perhaps see several parallels between calendar art and their own paintings (exhibited towards the end of 2002 at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi). Like the calendar artists, though in a rather different way, they have "cocked a snoot" at the bourgeois insistence on individual authorship, for much of their work is executed by the two artists *jointly*. Like many calendar artists, too, they work at the interface of Indian miniature painting and western perspectivism. Their paintings are exceedingly ornate and realistically detailed, yet governed by certain traditional representational conventions that contravene this realism, both engaging with and flouting rules of colour combination to produce extravagantly colourful textures. Similarly, their comments on the calendars disclose a keen eye for detail and a strong sense of irony, as do their own paintings. Perhaps this whimsical and ironic tone comes from their location in the Indian diaspora, reflecting the joys and pathos of being both at home and alien in a foreign land. Fully alert to these ironies and dissonances, the paintings seem more kind and witty than cruel and critical, and the contested "politics" of the diasporic condition remains muted. The twins' comments on the freedom struggle calendars are similar – astute and perspicacious, but lacking a biting political edge. Nostalgia for an imagined past of political idealism should not disguise the fact that there were at stake, then as now, *rival* visions of freedom and of the nation – both inclusivist and exclusivist. This cautionary reminder is left to painter Aparna Caur's eloquent "Foreword". ■

Patricia Oberoi is a sociologist, working with the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi.

The Dominant and the Oppressed

Mousumi Majumder

DOCUMENTING DISSENT: CONTESTING FABLES, CONTESTED MEMORIES AND DALIT POLITICAL DISCOURSE
By Badri Narayan
Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2001, pp.165, Rs.250.00

A cursory look at the socio-political scenario of Indian society in recent times by the most casual observer would reveal a noticeably sharp political and cultural upsurge within the dalit communities, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. These communities belonging to the lowest rung of the rigid Indian caste hierarchy, who had been oppressed and subjugated by the upper castes for centuries, have now started asserting their own independent identity. Their voices that had long been suppressed in history can now be heard in the narratives of their own culture and traditions. These narratives that are independent of the Brahminical value loaded narratives traditionally present in Indian society, have their own folk heroes at the centre of their discourse. Many of these folk heroes are now being projected as alternate heroes and are being put into mythical frameworks. Contemporary politics are using these alternative narratives and folk heroes for mobilizing the dalit communities by distorting and twisting them in their own way. Dalit leaders are also utilizing these myths in their election manifestoes to create a vote bank and gaining the votes of dalit communities.

What are the sociopolitical and cultural factors behind the emerging dalit identities taking political shape in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh? How are myth, memory and history being used as discursive strategies by the lower castes to fight against the centuries old history of oppression and subjugation faced by their communities? As a corollary, how do myths and narratives help in bringing out the social conflict hidden and underlying in the collective memories of the oppressed and how do they help in the process of their identity formation?

These are some of the questions and issues raised by Badri Narayan in the book under review. Dr. Badri Narayan, a social historian and cultural anthropologist, currently a Faculty Member of G.B.Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad, has made an exhaustive study of the sociopolitical and cultural events that have helped in the creation of the newly emerging dalit identities taking shape in north India, with special reference to the Aurungabad region of Bihar. The theoretical issues addressed in the book are: the sudden rise of dalit politics in north India and its exponential growth among the rank and file of dalit castes, its influence on the electoral politics in India, its attempt to create a counter culture against what the dalits call Brahminical culture, the distrust of history written by anyone other than a dalit, the desire of the dalits to create their own corpus of historical knowledge and their claim to continuity in the

present through their efforts to explore their identity in the past.

The author tries to seek the answers to these issues through an analysis of the acts of violence between the lower caste community of Dusadhs and the upper caste landowning caste of Bhumihars, which are regular occurrences during the performance of folk theatres based on the love story of a Dusadh hero Chuharmal, and an upper caste heroine Reshma.

It is difficult to separate the mythical and real elements of the story of Chuharmal and Reshma but this story has now become a part of the collective memory of the Dusadh community of Patna and Mokama, and also of the other groups that counters such a memory. There are seven versions of the story of Chuharmal and Reshma in the popular literature produced between 1892 and 1997. The same Chuharmal is a thief of the British administration, a hero of love and moral rectitude for the community to which he is said to have belonged, and is also an antihero for the same community that has adopted another hero for its identity. In yet another version, he is dubbed as evil by the dominant sections but is a hero among the subaltern communities. In all these versions of the same story, folklore plays a crucial role in the formation of the collective memory of the people. This story has also spawned many incidents of violence and many violent outbreaks that took place in this region were the outcome of the resistance put up by the Dusadhs against the atrocious attempts by landlords of the upper castes to stop the performance of the play or narrate the story publicly. Many folklores, biographies, nautankis (folk theatres), and commemorative melas (rural fairs), based on this myth that highlight the attitude of people regarding this myth, have been collected and documented by the author and put in the form of the present book.

An interesting description of the way in which the space and occasion of a fair held every year to commemorate Chuharmal, the hero of the Dusadh caste, is used for political mobilization of the dalits, is given in Chapter II of the book, called 'Mela, Leela and Politics'. This fair is held in the Chaitmah each year in Chardih, district Mokama, and is attended by a large number of Dusadhs. During this fair dance parties perform the drama of Reshma and Chuharmal. Gradually the fair acquired political undertones when the management of the fair was entrusted to an M.P. of the Rashtriya Janata Dal. Laloo Prasad Yadav also visited Charadih and used the occasion to employ the myth of Chuharmal to politically mobilize the dalits. This fair and the myth

DOCUMENTING DISSENT



BADRI NARAYAN

associated with it later became the contesting ground for two politicians namely Ram Vilas Paswan and Laloo Prasad Yadav for displaying their political prowess.

Another trend in the effort for dalit mobilization as described in 'Heroes, Histories and Booklets', is the use of Hindi booklets that are sold during the Chuharmal Mela. These booklets contain highly significant socio-political discourses to arouse the interest of dalits, to generate socio-cultural awareness among them, and to disseminate stories and myths about local folk heroes among them. The author feels that these booklets may be an effort to reconstruct dalit history and establish a relationship with the emerging dalit bahujan discourse in North India.

Thus through the analysis of the counter and contesting narratives of the story of Chuharmal and Reshma and the folklores associated with it, the study attempts to investigate the role of myth as a source and vehicle of stories that evoke people's memories. The intervention and reinterpretation of these myths by political forces in ways which would suit their political ends, as is happening in today's political arena, is also well investigated and analysed. As the author says, "that is why the language of the Dalit cultural politics in Indian Hindi belt seems to be largely based on invention, reinvention and use of traditional mythical language". At the grassroots level there is continuous contestation between various voices of the dominant and the oppressed. This study tries to examine how this contestation is also going on at the level of narrative (stories and folklore), metaphors, myths, words and lastly at the level of memory.

The book is a successful initial attempt at documenting and analysing the dissenting voices that had been suppressed by the voices of the dominant sections throughout the course of history. It is also an attempt to describe how the various versions of a story appear as a domain of identity formation and identity assertion of groups and castes in Indian society. In the words of the author, a new history is emerging in north India but the nature of this history remains to be specified. ■

Mousumi Majumder is a freelance journalist, residing in Allahabad.

Merging the Inherited and Acquired

Jagdish Hiremath

BECOMING AMERICAN, BEING INDIAN: AN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK CITY
By Madhulika S. Khandelwal
Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 2002, pp.xii+198, price not stated.

Becoming American, Being Indian (*BABI*) is a welcome addition to the growing body of writings on the Indian Diaspora. It is the product of fifteen years of research undertaken by Madhulika Khandelwal, currently Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. She has interviewed hundreds of Indian emigrants and exchanged views with many scholars immersed in similar studies, while also teaching classes at various universities. *BABI* is based on mining the long-forgotten memories of her interlocutors.

The book's title encapsulates the fact that Indian emigrants to alien shores, whatever their new citizenship status, tend to retain their basic Indian characteristics. This is a phenomenon that is visible, irrespective of the circumstances of the migration—whether to a country under colonial rule in the 19th century as 'indentured labour' or, a hundred years later, to various parts of the developed world in vastly more propitious circumstances.

Taking the Queens Borough of New York City as her laboratory, Khandelwal has mirrored with clinical thoroughness the gradually evolving pattern of the lives of Indian migrants who had started their American adventure in that place. *BABI* is a mine of information with its description and analysis of what befell our compatriots on their first arrival in their new country, and of how their fortunes and their societal fabric got transformed in subsequent years. As the author tells us in her Introduction, this book is about 'the interplay between ethnic consciousness and such factors as class, gender, generation, American politics and Indian cultural traditions'. It is an 'interplay' that is germane not only to 'the emigrant community in New York City'—the target group mentioned in the sub-title of this book. It is something that informs the ethnic consciousness of Indian emigrants elsewhere also in the United States. It is thus a handy guide to the challenges and opportunities that any aspiring emigrant is likely to encounter in the New World.

All these factors and how they affected

the different waves of Indian emigrants are delineated in this book—the 'early birds' who had gone there in the 1950s as students; the highly qualified young people who migrated to the US in the 1960s and 1970s; the growing numbers that were allowed into the country after the liberalized INS regulations permitted near relatives to join their kith and kin in the US; and finally, the comparatively recent generation of 'infotech whiz-kids' that have taken the Bay Area by storm.

The first chapter of *BABI* describes the setting for what is to follow. In 'The Landscape of South Asian New York' we see the migrants opting to begin their American sojourn in Queens because of the conveniences to be found there, such as its proximity to Manhattan, its comparatively less expensive lifestyle and the presence in it of other, similarly disadvantaged immigrants like Chinese and Korean refugees.

After digging in their roots and gradually improving their economic status, they moved to less run-down places in Queens. We find here tidbits of information such as about the establishment of the first Indian grocery store in Queens and of the first Indian food store.

But their ambition was to transfer eventually to New York's aristocratic suburbs like Westchester and Pelham—to live there like the Whites, in sprawling, single-unit houses from which to ride in their own cars along beautifully landscaped parkways to downtown Manhattan.

The chapter on 'Transplanting Indian Culture' describes some of the things that the immigrants had carried with them to their new country—their diverse food and dress habits, the many tongues in which they communicated with one another and their attempts to establish an 'ethnic media' in order to keep in touch with similar linguistic or regional groups located in other parts of their extensive and far-flung country of permanent settlement. Not content merely with Indian community matters, members of the Diaspora sought recognition and approval of their American hosts by inviting them to the classical music and dance concerts that they organized for their own

The book's title encapsulates the fact that Indian emigrants to alien shores, whatever their new citizenship status, tend to retain their basic Indian characteristics.

amusement.

The chapter on Worship and Community begins with the assertion that 'religion plays an important role in most immigrant communities'. Khandelwal then notes perceptively that although few Indians subscribe to the western or American separation of the religious and secular worlds, 'historically Indian secularism has stood for tolerance and respect for all flourishing religions, rather than a pushing aside of religion from everyday temporal life' (p. 67).

A welcome feature in this chapter is that western readers are gently introduced to the text itself—without the help of a glossary—to essentially Indian religious and socio-cultural rituals and practices like *namaz* and *zikr*, *gurbani* and *derbe meher*, *namkaran samskar*, *griha-pravesh*, *visarjan* and *alpna*, *bhakti* and many others.

Other chapters of this book deal with important developments in the life of the US-based Indian community as it grew in numbers and in its complexity. Khandelwal describes the changing socio-economic profile that comparatively recent emigrants have had to encounter. The bewilderment and often sheer frustration of the nisei or second generation Indian Americans, sometimes ungenerously referred to as 'ABCDs' also finds a place in this book—their rebellion, for example, against arranged marriages. On the other hand, we are told about parental opposition to 'peer pressure' that compels their offspring to follow local customs such as dating. The emergence of educated young women actively involved in social reform also seemed to bother the older and more conservative emigrants!

The family reunification regulations of the INS had resulted in the emigration of a wide variety of persons. Most of them were in no position to take up productive employment and felt frustrated. They also encountered other kinds of problems in their new setting. Generational differences of approach to common social and ethical issues resulted in much unhappiness. Many old parents felt isolated, or deprived of their independence as they had no income of their

...this book is about 'the interplay between ethnic consciousness and such factors as class, gender, generation, American politics and Indian cultural traditions'.

own, or were unhappily relegated to baby sitting chores, while their upwardly mobile kids dashed around, following their respective vocations or partied with their peers.

Khandelwal tells us (pp.93-4) that from 1961 to 1968, 67% of Indians employed in the US were in professional categories—a figure that jumped to 89% in 1969-71. But the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act had opened the doors wide to immigrants who were not necessarily professionals. If a well-paying job was the basic motivation for a post-1965 Indian migrant, such jobs were not available for the asking any more. The reality for them was therefore a life of sordid deprivation and endless search for jobs—any kind, to keep body and soul together. Thus an Indian 'working class' had come into existence and the reality was that there was a growing number of Indians working wherever they could find an opening, whether as clerks, messengers, or in retail business as sales persons in chains such as Woolworth. Many had begun to appear as street vendors selling newspapers or distributing flyers at busy traffic intersections, while a sizeable number had become New York City cab drivers.

At the same time and coexisting with the sordid fate of many Indian migrants, there was another and more reassuring scenario. At the upper end of the scale were the young professionals who had established themselves in the Silicon Valley of California. The Ind-US Entrepreneurs ('TiE') had spread their activities to many other countries. IIT alumnae had reached top posts in the most prestigious of American companies. There were no less than thirty thousand Indian medical doctors in the country and, by 1892, its leading members had set up the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. 'AAPI' and the Association of Hotel Owners of Indian Origin had considerable political clout and influence in the country. Major American universities had any number of Indian professors among their faculty.

This is a fantastic tale—of triumph for some and frustration for others. ■

Jagdish Hiremath is a former diplomat

That Elusive Truth

Laila Tyabji

OUT OF GOD'S OVEN: TRAVELS IN A FRACTURED LAND

By Dom Moraes & Sarayu Srivatsa
Viking, Delhi, 2002, pp. 387, Rs. 450.00

Dom Moraes's father was Frank Moraes, brilliant, principled editor of the *Times of India* and *Indian Express*, whom I remember as a gentle, genial, but driven friend of my father's, often retreating from the dysfunctionality of life into drink. As a child, Dom's rites of passage included seeing his gifted, sparkling mother turn into a raging, weeping schizophrenic eventually committed to an asylum. His life and writing bear the scars. In his 60s now, no longer the sensual, iconoclastic young poet who won the coveted Hawthornden Prize at 19 (in the 1950s, when Indian writers were not publishers' trophies), Dom Moraes has turned his sensitive, perceptive poet's eye from inwards to outwards, transforming himself in the process into editor, war correspondent, UN consultant, Leela Naidu's husband, and Mrs. Gandhi's biographer—a respected but not exactly establishment columnist and social commentator. An expatriate in his youth, he committed in middle-age to the India he both loves and loathes.

Sarayu Srivatsa is younger: an architect and town planner by training, Tamil Brahmin, growing up in small-town middle-class South India, nurtured and more grounded in Indian tradition, less darkly pessimistic. Their collaboration (each one writes separate chapters) is giving and taking and mutually respectful—Dom admiring her beauty and the rooted serenity her knowledge of Indian mores and mythology give her; she gently mocking his drinking and hypochondria, but conscious that his reading of people transcends the limitations of language and culture. Their affectionate, humorous, caring relationship, two people of very different kinds living and growing together, gives the book a warmth it might otherwise lack—a thread of hope running through much bleak rapportage of starkly different interactions.

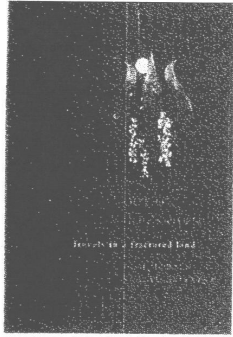
The book opens with Ahmedabad, torn and bleeding from the post-Godhra massacres. The authors report on the riots and their aftermath, as well as use it as a paradigm for an India that is also fractured and bleeding. "More than 50 years after Independence, the illusions sacred to our parents had been shattered, and the surviving pieces scattered over the enormous landscapes of the sub-continent," says Moraes. "India had once possessed a great culture," he continues. "But this culture included some very undesirable components: greed for power and money, inefficiency, complacency, and the acceptance of corruption as a way of life." Tracing this culture, and the ways, positive and negative, that contemporary Indians interpret and apply it, is the road map that directs Dom and Sarayu's journey.

The journey encompasses an extraordinary range of people—Naxalites, academics, filmmakers, victims of riot, rape and the Bhagalpur blindings, civil servants, social workers, dancers, activists, lawyers, media men, sadhus, supporters of Khalistan, Congressmen, industrialists, dropouts. Ela Ben of SEWA, Dr Kurien of AMUL fame, Beant Singh's widow, K.P.S.Gill, Tarun Tejpal, an ebullient and boastful Laloo Prasad and his smugly quiescent Chief Minister wife, Rabri.

The mood generally is gloomily negative; a passive acceptance of India's slide into a messy chaos of communal hatred, disintegrating institutions, consumerism, class war, and corruption, without the saving grace of activist anger.

As Mani Shanker Mukherjee, an executive and well-known Kolkata novelist, says: "When I was young we had some ideas about pride. We thought it shameful to be forced to devalue our currency. In 1947 we were Rs. 1.75 to a dollar. Today it's Rs. 40 to the dollar and we call it adjustment. We Indians have removed some words from the dictionary. Like we have no famines, only droughts. Our people die of malnutrition, not starvation. The only interesting thing about India is that it is such an open society. We can find out our mistakes because everyone discusses them all the time."

Sunil Gangopadhyay, another Bengali writer, echoed this. "If you ask questions about India, you will find many people... who will point out what is wrong. But I don't think anyone will be able to point out a way to make it right. If he could, he would be a leader, and India's tragedy is that it has none.... One obsession Nehru had seems laughable now. He thought we were the natural leaders of Asia. We are so far behind every other Asian country in



everything... that we could be called one of the most backward nations in the continent.”

(Apropos of this, my travel agent neighbour ruefully told me last weekend that the tiny island of Bali today has more tourists than the whole of India put together!)

Sunil Gangopadhyay adds, “Corruption is an off shoot of hypocrisy, the habit of lying to oneself.I don't want India to break up. But look at the flaws in the national character. We have an endless capacity for hero worship, but we also pull down our heroes.” Dom Moraes points out that the Indian people have “no sense of history. Their heroes shared the fate of their ancient monuments. Bal Thackeray had resurrected the Maratha warlord Shivaji as an icon for his party, but Mahatma Gandhi seemed forgotten in any real sense.... Once calendars with his photograph hung in every wayside teastall. Not now; now books were written in defense of Godse, the man who killed him.”

For Aditya Prakash, a Chandigarh architect, it was television that was responsible for the spread of consumerism and breakdown of values and traditional social structures. His metaphor for this, funny but also telling, is Punjab farmers moving away from “Agriculture” to “Culture”—as defined by Bollywood and Cable TV.

John Lal, retired ICS officer, was even more starkly pessimistic: “I think chaos stares us in the face, and people can see it... There won't be a revolution. A revolution has to be directed towards a known result. The most likely result will be simple chaos. And it's already here. People say that this is functional chaos. But we may then have chaos that is non-functional. Tell me what we will do then.”

Ratan Tata is probably the only one with a solution for India's malaises – agro-industries that use and value-add to rural produce, creating local employment, and thus making rural communities shareholders in industrial growth; raising the quality of life in villages, so preventing the crippling bulk migration to the cities, and the criminalization of the lumpen unemployed, pushed into the slums and

politicized violence - without education or opportunities to harness their energy in positive directions. V Suresh, Chairman & MD, HUDCO reminds us that if we don't “deal with the problems of slums in a constructive manner, they would start dealing with cities in a destructive manner. At independence, we were 330 million with 14% settled in urban areas. Now we are one billion with 33% of the population living in urban areas that comprise only 7-8% of the total area.”

Possibly the missing link in the book is the young – India's millions of thrusting urban, educated, youth – the credit card, consumerist, under-25, yuppie generation – looking Westwards rather than to Gandhi and the Vedas for inspiration and icons. Reading John Lal's apocalyptic vision to one young corporate executive in his 20s, he looked at me as if I was mad. He saw no chaos, except possibly congestion on the road. Like Nasser Munjee, deputy MD of the finance corporation IDFC, quoted in the book, he saw positive changes and an exciting new India—“tough young entrepreneurs as the future leaders of India, and 57 TV channels, Coke and Pepsi in the shops, 7 % growth, foreign cars on the road” . I.K. Gujral too, was positive about India, at least at the time. (he was Prime Minister when Dom and Sarayu interviewed him). Gujral saw “the democratic process of change as inevitably ‘not a dramatic one’. For him indigenously produced cars rather than imported bicycles, women abandoning their purdah to become *sarpanchs*, were telling images of an India in hopeful transition.

On a personal note, it was saddening to read the litanies of a stream of otherwise quite ordinary, sensible people—ranging from students to Delhi socialites, and including a dalit leader, a Christian publisher in Mumbai and an elderly Tamilian housewife in Chennai—who actively dislike and fear Muslims, and feel India would be a better place without them. “Partition” was “the day”, Bina Ramani says, “that I knew Muslims were very bad, and that Hindus and Sikhs had to be

Is India really a Hindu country, and does that mean that the millions of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists, Jains and Jews who have grown into the fabric of this land, shaping its culture and aesthetic over the centuries, no longer have a stake and voice? I cannot believe this true.

saved from them”. While Muslims certainly need to introspect on why we are so hated, other Indians too need to ponder on whether this demonic stereotype matches the profile of the majority of Indian Muslims—and whether India would truly be richer by their exclusion. Would that solve problems that are basically economic and societal in essence? After all, as Moraes reminds us, Bal Thackeray's Shiv Sena first began by attacking South Indians in Bombay—perceived as monopolizing jobs he felt should be the birth right of Marathas . It was over 3 decades later that he became a proponent of Hindutva and began targeting Muslims and dalits. Who will come next?

My forefathers came to India 300 years ago from Yemen. A persecuted minority of breakaway Shias, they looked to this great and diverse country for religious tolerance; each successive generation finding such openhearted largesse that when the option of Pakistan came, it was rejected by the family en masse. My great aunts marched with Gandhi to Dandi, and gave up their *lehnga-odhnis* for *khadi* saris in solidarity with the National Movement. We celebrated Divali and Holi as Indian rather than Hindu festivals, and felt the deities and great art forms of Ellora, Ajanta and Hampi, the wisdom and strength of the *Upanishads*, *Geeta* and *Granth Sahib*, the music and poetry of Mira Bai and Kalidas, as much a part of our inheritance as the Taj Mahal, the *Koran*, and Ghalib.

It is sad—and shattering of many ideals and illusions—to read a reasoned, thinking person like Mr Pandit now state that “One has to accept that India is a Hindu country. Those who declared it a secular state in 1947 didn't understand an obvious fact.” Is India really a Hindu country, and does that mean that the millions of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists, Jains and Jews who have grown into the fabric of this land, shaping its culture and aesthetic over the centuries, no longer have a stake and voice? I cannot believe this true.

But, as Dom Moraes says, “In the end what is truth? Pilate would never have found the answer in India. Here truth took on diffused shapes that overlapped and faded into each other. Sometimes the truth could be glimpsed briefly, from the corner of the eye, like a rat that streaks across the floor and disappears. It was glimpsed, it has gone; nobody can tell you where it may now hide.”

Bits of India's truths (and in a country that has so many multiple dimensions, how can there be only one?) lie in the pages of Dom Moraes and Sarayu Srivatsa's insightful and sensitive book. One hopes that other, more positive truths and new directions still await uncovering. ■

Laila Tyabji is Chairperson of *Dastakar*, a society for crafts and craftspersons in New Delhi.

A Black and White Picture of Changing Society

M. Mukundan

ROOTS

By Malayattoor Ramakrishnan. Translated from the Malayalam by V. Abdulla
Orient Longman, 2002, pp. 196, Rs. 195.00

Roots is the translation of a contemporary classic novel originally written in Malayalam by Malayattoor Ramakrishnan. He was a best selling novelist, a humorous cartoonist, a mainstream film script writer, a mellifluous orator, an eminent IAS officer, a glamorous film director all rolled into one brilliant personage. He was charismatic, debonair, handsome, rich and famous. Among the writers in Kerala, his was an enviable success story. And yet, ravaged by alcoholism, he degenerated into a slow, painful death, raising his own life to the level of fiction.

The story of *Roots* is quite simple with a straightforward narrative. Raghu is a civil servant posted in Trivandrum. Although he hails from a middle class rural Malayalam and Tamil speaking Brahman family, he is married to a city-bred wealthy girl, Geetha. She speaks only English, except when she is angry. Because she can express her anger only in her mother tongue, Tamil. They have two children, Ajayan and Suma. While he toils at the office she passes time playing rummy at the Women's Club and returns home only late at night. He never gets from her the "wifely comfort" which he righteously looks forward to. It is his mother who cooks sambar for him (Ah, he relishes sambar!). Sometimes late at night Geetha gets dropped home by a friend....

So far it looks very much filmy, isn't it? you guess what lies ahead. Customarily, there should be conflict between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Inextricably caught between the two, he should be a tormented soul of sorts.

No, you're mistaken though. Happily, the story will soon take a redeeming turn. The couple wants to build a house in Trivandrum. Interestingly, both Raghu and Geetha obtain separate blueprints for the house. Hers is 4500 square feet, while his is 2500. Finally, she is the winner. They decide on 4500 square feet and, yielding to her pressure, Raghu leaves for his village to sell his ancestral property to raise funds for the building of the superfluous house.

Hold your breath! Raghu's trip to his village turns out to be a voyage to his past and to his traditions - briefly, to his roots.

The doors to the past are thrown open

with the image of old Periamma, who sits in front of the house drying chillies marinated in curds. Lyrical images of rural life unfold one after another. Here comes out of the lane a bullock-cart loaded with jack-fruit, driven by old Athruman. (Athruman did nothing other than deal in jack-fruit. He could never understand what Athruman did during the rest of the year when jack-fruit was not in season.) On top of the local post office, the typing classes are in progress. (He felt sure that most of the stenographers in Bombay came from his village.) As he moves ahead in his car towards his elder sister Ammulu's house, Raghu reconstructs his memories. Each person or each object he comes across leads to an onrush of revived memories. When his car turns to the road that "had not changed", it takes him to memories of his school days tinged with erotica. (His school was five miles away. There were no bus services and one had to walk... He would fold his dhoti up at his knee and carry his books... Raghu used to see Pankiamma often when he was at school. In those days she was fifty but healthy and well-built. Once he had happened to see her bare breasts. What size!)

The emerging picture of his native village with its paddy fields, dusty roads, buffaloes, toddy shops, and above all its legendary river the Periyar gives him a sense of belonging. Food is a strong element of his nostalgia. (*A breakfast of cooked tapioca garnished with chillies... and coffee sweetened with jaggery awaited him.*) Though leading a high profile life in a city, his favourite food remains tapioca cooked with plenty of ground chillies.

He has come to his village on a week's leave. Before he returns to Trivandrum, he should find a buyer for his property and complete all formalities relating to the deal. But he is now more preoccupied with reliving his past with his family members and village folk. He eats boiled gram, drinks coffee whitened with goat milk—all signifiers of the past. Finally he finds a buyer, the nouveau riche Devassy, and the deal is struck—five thousand rupees an acre. But will he sell his ancestral house? (*The ancestral dwelling stood on the land which his father's grandfather Ganapathi Paatta had*

To some extent, the protagonist of *Roots* is none other than camouflaged Malayattoor Ramakrishnan. *Roots* is the story of his community. No other writer in Kerala has written so marvellously about it.

bought. Every stone in it had been chiseled and fashioned under his loving supervision. Adinarayanan Paatta, his great grandfather had lived there.) I won't reveal it for you. Get hold of a copy of the novel and find it yourself.

Kerala's upper class Brahmans are mainly Nambodiris, found all over the state. In some areas, in particular at Palghat and Travancore, lives a small community of Tamil Brahmans. Raghu is a member of this community, bred on a blend of Tamil and Malayalam culture and languages. The language they speak has a unique flavour and beauty about it. This particular community has contributed not only to Kerala's music and literature, but also to the state's administration. Most of the IAS officers and accountants and stenographers are Tamil speaking Brahmans of Kerala. True to that tradition, Malayattoor Ramakrishnan was an I.A.S. officer known for his administrative ability. To some extent, the protagonist of *Roots* is none other than camouflaged Malayattoor Ramakrishnan. *Roots* is the story of his community. No other writer in Kerala has written so marvellously about it.

This Brahmin community is known for its orthodoxy and its elaborated, codified practice of culture and faith. It is a closed society. With education and widespread social reforms Kerala is well-known for, it progressively opens up. Raghu represents its enlightened class. But his voice is muted and his revolt is subdued. When his father dies, he simply tells his mother: Amma, don't shave your head. It says everything.

What makes Raghu interesting as a fictional personae is the fact that though he is highly educated and lives in the highest echelon of society, he resists westernization, upholding his culture and tradition.

Most importantly, though *Roots* was written nearly a quarter of century ago, it raises certain issues which are still very much relevant—threatened indigenous culture, onslaught of the English language on the mother tongue, westernization of urban society. And the hallmark of this novel is its placid, austere style which the translator has rendered into English effortlessly. ■

M. Mukundan is with the French Cultural Centre, New Delhi.

An Activist's Autobiography*

T.K. Oommen

THE GIFT OF A DAUGHTER

By Subhadra Butalia

Penguin, Delhi, 2002, pp. 170, Rs.200.00

This is a thin book by a frail author. But as everybody knows appearance is often deceptive. In spite of the small size of the book the descriptions in it are thick and they contain some hard-hitting ideas. The frail figure of the author is a camouflage for a steel frame!

This book is essentially an activist's autobiography wherein the distinction between the person and the activist is scrupulously maintained. An individual's autobiography deals with her worries, aspirations, achievements and it often rationalizes one's actions and defends one's faults. But an activist's autobiography analyses issues, describes her trials and tribulations and accounts for one's failures and successes. In this process autobiography metamorphoses into history.

History is a confusing word. In terms of scope it varies (e.g., world or Indian history); in terms of dimensions it is variegated (economic, social, political, cultural etc.); based on time-chunk it could be different (such as ancient, medieval, modern or contemporary); it could be viewed from above (e.g. elite history) or below (e.g., subaltern history). But I am not referring to any of these. Subhadra has written everyday history which is everybody's history. And this is a rare genre of writing in India.

Everyday history is experienced by all of us irrespective of our background; the issues are the same even if the actors change. It happens in micro-structures such as family. Family was viewed as a private space until recently. Not only that. Family was constructed as a sacred space and the space is created through a sacrament called marriage, the only route for an Indian woman, particularly Hindu woman, to get to heaven. These two features of the family—private and sacred—prohibited intervention by the human agency. If intervention is to be permitted at all, it has to be by close kin because the private and sacred space creates family's *izzat* (prestige), to be jealously guarded. Paradoxically, in spite of these attributes, family is a theatre of violence, particularly for women. This book intrudes into the complex space of family to narrate the story of atrocities perpetrated by family on family.

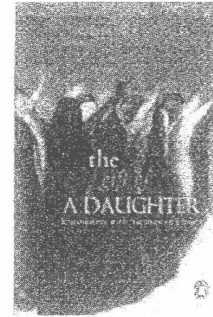
It is important to remember here that most

human beings are born into a family—the family of orientation, where one is socialized or trained. And quite a few, that is, those who marry, have also a family of procreation, in which the act of reproduction takes place. For men these two families are or could be the same. But for women they are to be different under patrilocal residence, which is reinforced by patrilineal descent and these in unison cement patriarchy as a value system. Much of the violence against women is committed in the family of procreation into which they move in. And, the primary sources of violence are related to the expected exchange of wealth between the family of orientation and reproduction incarnated in the institution of dowry.

In the absence of gender equality women become particularly vulnerable to violence. Escape routes such as divorce is perceived as stigmatizing. Further, the women do not have control over the income generated by them. Even the family of orientation do not accept the married daughter when she is battered and burnished because its *izzat* is more important (by pretending that all is well with the marriage of the daughter) than her safety and security. This book provides a moving description of the pathetic condition of the married daughter in her husband's family.

The causes of discord in the family are many, but this book focuses on dowry, which is a tradition, a custom and an institution which persists with a vengeance in Indian society. A fundamental problem about the practice of dowry is that there is no consensus about it as an evil, as social pathology; unlike say other traditional practices such as sati or untouchability. This is so because the issue of dowry transactions and the problem of gender equality in the context of property inheritance are seen in conjunction by quite a few in Indian society. One may legitimately argue that in a male-dominated society the tendency to disinherit daughters is widely prevalent and therefore legal banning of dowry transactions pander to patriarchal values. On the other hand, it could be forcefully suggested that dowry is an entitlement, which should bring about and reinforce gender equality. This value dissensions about dowry makes it extremely difficult to fight it. And it is this unenviable task that Subhadra Butalia and her activist colleagues had undertaken.

In pursuing the fight against dowry, the activist has to interact with the concerned families, the media, the police, the politician,



the lawyer, the bureaucrat and the judiciary. And an overwhelming majority of them, without exception act against the interests of the victim, rare exceptions apart. In India the image about police is utterly negative and they spare no effort to reinforce it; the lawyers are known for their cunning and they perpetuate it with gusto; the media is oriented to scoops wherein truth is often the causality, the politicians' notoriety has become proverbial, the less said the better. But unfortunately even the girl's family of orientation where she is nursed and nurtured and the judiciary, which is expected to be an impartial and final arbiter of justice, are not on the side of dowry victims. The author refers to several instances of these with great disappointment and justifiable anger.

Let me close my observations by suggesting that there is a lot of "social theory" in the book, about which the author may not be aware. In fact, she may even be amused about this remark. But if you read the book you will learn and understand the trajectory of genesis of a movements, the inevitability of an organizational weapon for a movement to persist, the internal contradictions thrown up by collective leadership, the style and functioning of bureaucracy, the brutality of police and its dehumanizing effect, the stereotypes and prejudices internalized by the judiciary and how they impact on their judgements, the delaying tactics resorted to by the lawyers in the court and its demoralizing effect on victims, the deafening silence of elected representatives when they ought to have spoken aloud, the deviousness of bureaucracy to extract bribes, the partiality shown by politicians to their party loyalists endangering rule of law, the high human cost of media type and much more. Social theorists have dissected and tried to explain these and similar issues.

The rise and fall of *Stree Sangharsh* and the unfinished story of Karmika which are the themes this book prompts the reader to think, and hopefully to act, about the malaise of our society. ■

T.K. Oommen is Professor of Sociology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

*Text of a presentation made on 3 December 2002 at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

Bold Portrayals

G. Anuradha

THE GUILTY AND OTHER STORIES

By Vaasanthi

Translated from the Tamil by Gomathi Narayanan and V. Ramnarayan
Indialog Publications, New Delhi, 2003,
pp.196, Rs. 195.00

Vaasanthi, Tamil writer, journalist, political columnist and rights' activist, has authored more than forty books including novels and short stories. Her work has been translated into many foreign languages like English, Czech, Dutch, Norwegian and some Indian languages like Hindi and Malayalam. *The Guilt and Other Stories* is an anthology of short stories by Vaasanthi comprising one long story (a *kuru* novel of 106 pages out of the 196) and seven short ones. Seven of these are translated by Gomathi Narayanan and one 'The Seeking' by V.Ramnarayan.

There is an element of suspense in most of the stories which arouses the reader's interest and keeps the tension till the end which provides a twist, an almost haunting climax.

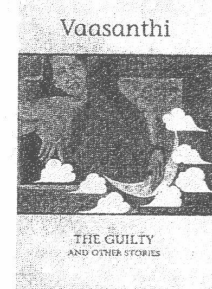
These women-centred stories feature protagonists ranging in age from adolescents, Chellam in 'Murder', to a ripe old ninety-eight year old, Nagu Patti of 'The Journey'. The settings shift from the rural to the ultra urban, a South Indian village, to the modern American city of New York in 'What She Said'.

Women face hardships and injustices wherever they are. However Vaasanthi's characters are not meek, docile or subservient in any way. They are strong human beings who rebel against oppressive norms of society. They rise to these challenges with conviction, dignity and

with steadfastness of purpose. Be it a young girl reacting to her grandfather's strictures on women's behaviour in 'Murder', or the woman Rangamani who unwillingly commits female infanticide and reacts violently against her forced profession at the end in 'Poison'; wives pushed over the edge by an impotent husband in 'The Seeking' who commits his wife to a mental asylum; a sadistic hypochondriac husband emotionally chaining his wife by his side in 'Prison'; an old great-grandmother humiliated by her daughter-in-law Parvati for being alive after gobbling up generations in 'The Journey', each is a finely etched, convincing character portrayed by the brush strokes of a master storyteller.

The one story, 'The Ashes', written from the point of view of a male character Raghav, seems to project a negative aspect of a woman Raji, Raghav's wife. Raghav feels that she is responsible for his being in a foreign land, far away from his parents who are in Kumbakonam, and whose funerals he is unable to attend. In fact this story is a but a subtle critique of the typical spineless husband who tries to shift the blame on to his wife for his own inaction.

The main story and the longest one in the collection, 'The Guilty', needs special mention. It is woven around Uma, the central character, and has a mysterious plot. The estranged relationship between Uma and her father, Balasubramaniam, the trauma of her mother Parvati's suicide, her close bond with her brother Madhav, who is her one and only friend and confidant in the family, all constitute interesting development of the characters wherein each and every individual experiences pangs of loneliness and isolation, and the lack



of comprehension of Parvati's action even two decades after her demise. 'Why did she hang herself?' That is the question that haunts the narrative and to which the answer unravels fully only at the end. The plot is taut and the tension is gripping throughout with a startling revelation at the conclusion.

The translators have done an excellent job. They have maintained the ethos of each story even while making the stories accessible to non-Tamilian readers. While initially the Tamil words did seem problematic, like the ambiguous *muttram*, the logic for their use becomes apparent as one reads on. One had the satisfaction of reading a good Tamil book albeit in English.

Mention must be made of the pleasure to be found in good quality printing paper and the excellent editing with no typographical errors that is so rare these days! Keep up the good work publishers!

G. Anuradha teaches English and also works on the administrative side of The Ramakrishna Sharada Mission's Nivedita Vidya Mandir, New Delhi.

PAST CONTINUOUS

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Interrogating Conventional Norms

Neeraj Malik

LIFTING THE VEIL: SELECTED WRITINGS OF ISMAT CHUGTAI
Edited and translated from the Urdu by M. Asaduddin
Penguin, Delhi, 2001, pp. 261, Rs. 250.00

In her autobiography, *Kaghazi hai Pairaban*, Ismat Chughtai records the following conversation she had with her father when she was nineteen years old. It was a decisive moment in her life and the incident is revealing in more ways than one.

"I want to go to Aligarh for my studies." It was out finally. And there was not even a hint of quiver in my voice.

"But you do study, your Bade Abba teaches you, doesn't he?"

"I want to appear for the matriculation examination."

"What purpose will that serve? Only two years are left for Jugnu to finish his studies. And after that – no use."

"I want to do my matriculation."

"But tell me, what's the use? It would be better if you learnt cooking, sewing etcetera. How accomplished your sisters are, and look at you!"

"I am not interested in accomplishments, I want to study."

"We can't send you to Aligarh...if something untoward happens it'll mean a scandal for the family."

"Then I'll go there myself." I was like one possessed.

His eyes were ablaze but I did not turn to ashes. I felt as if I was hanging from the eastern turret of the Taj Mahal, the rope was very weak, my palms were bleeding badly, the rope was going to snap any moment, my body was going to hurtle down to the marble floor, and I would smash to pieces.

"I will go out of the house, get into a tonga, go to the station, and hop into a compartment."

"Then what?"

"I'll get down at any station, ask my way around to the Mission School. There I'll convert to Christianity. I'll be able to study as much as I desire over there."

The nut-cracker lay paralyzed in Amma's hands.

"Did you hear, Begum, did you hear her ravings?"

Perhaps Mirza Qaseem Beg Chughtai was at heart an enlightened man or perhaps he recognized the unmistakable tone of determination in his daughter's voice, for two days later he handed her a bank pass-book with six thousand rupees in her account along with the

gift of a house in Agra saying that this was her dowry which she was free to use as she deemed fit. And thus, Ismat Chughtai, the ninth child of a middle-class Muslim family, escaped the fate of her sisters, went on to study further, became a teacher (later Principal and Inspector of Schools) and a writer.

In her writings, too, Ismat displayed the same courage and commitment to her beliefs and values that characterized her way of life. She wrote about her own milieu, the middle-class Muslim society of North India in the early decades of the twentieth century, with an uncompromising and searing honesty that earned her quite a few brickbats but, ultimately, also ensured her place in the forefront not only in Urdu but in Indian writing as a whole. The present collection of her writings in English translation, therefore, is a welcome step towards making her work accessible to a larger readership.

Ismat was a prolific writer who wrote novels, short stories, memoirs, autobiographical pieces, and film scripts in her literary career of almost fifty years. This collection, aptly titled, *Lifting the Veil*, contains eighteen of her stories, and three non-fictional writings. In a sense it is difficult to draw hard and fast lines between the different genres in Ismat's work since many of the characters and incidents in her stories are drawn directly from real life experiences while the sketches and memoirs have the raciness and dramatic quality of the stories.

The portrait, in 'Hell-Bound', of her brother, Azim Beg Chughtai, who was a well-known satirist and who had always encouraged Ismat to read and write, and thus contributed to her development as a creative writer, is a brutally frank appraisal of the man and writer. Clearly ignoring the dictum, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* (Of the dead speak only the good) she paints him warts and all (and real ugly ones) without hiding, at the same time, her love and admiration for him. Though many readers criticized her for being vituperative and blasphemous, the essay had its supporters in people like Saadat Hasan Manto who reportedly told his sister that he would be willing to die if she promised to write a similar kind of tribute for him.

Manto himself comes alive in the other two essays, 'My Friend, My Enemy!' and 'In the Name of Those Married Women....' The latter is an account of the fallout of the two lawsuits

Ismat writes in the realistic mode, carefully recreating the domestic scene in all its detail, and its incessant activity and chatter. But as the narrative builds up, it reveals the larger social world and its feudal, patriarchal values that govern this space and its inhabitants.

filed against Ismat and Manto on charges of obscenity on their respective stories, 'Lihaaf' and 'Bu'. This is a classic Ismat piece in which she recounts her initial trauma at the reception of 'Lihaaf', the enthusiastic support that Manto provided to her, and their journey to Lahore where the cases were tried. Written with her characteristic elan and humour, the essay cheerfully exposes the hypocrisy of established social and artistic mores. The essay ends with a touching account of the author's encounter with the real life Begum Jaan who was the subject of 'Lihaaf' and whose life had taken a happy turn after the publication of her story.

The hostility and notoriety that 'Lihaaf' had earned for Ismat did not end with the dismissal of the court case. Ismat continued to outrage readers as also many literary critics throughout her working life. From almost the beginning of her career she had refused to write in the conventional romantic/sentimental mode thought appropriate for women. Instead she chose to follow the model set by 'Angaare', a volume of short stories and plays published in 1932, which aimed to foster a new awareness regarding social and economic issues. In particular, Ismat was impressed by the stories of Dr. Rasheed Jahan (one of Jahan's stories was entitled 'Parde ke Peechhe') in which she confronted patriarchal familial values and dealt openly with the question of women's sexuality.

Ismat, too, focuses largely, though not exclusively, on the world of women. Invariably, her canvas is the large teeming household of middle-class Muslims of the Doab region (in cities such as Aligarh, Agra and Bareilly) which is presided over by women. This is the milieu she knew most intimately and she uses this knowledge to probe the ways in which family traditions and customs and arrangements of everyday life impinge on the lives of its women. Ismat writes in the realistic mode, carefully recreating the domestic scene in all its detail, and its incessant activity and chatter. But as the narrative builds up, it reveals the larger social world and its feudal, patriarchal values that govern this space and its inhabitants.

The stories in this volume have been carefully selected to represent the large range

If Ismat's seminal contribution lies in her exploration of new areas of experience, it lies equally in the fact that she brings to fiction a new language. This is the language of the women of the specific social group that she portrays, the language known as the "begumati zuban."

and variety in Ismat's portrayal of women. My own favourites here are 'The Wedding Suit' (*Chauthi ka Joda*) and 'The Homemaker' (*Gharwaali*), the one a tragic tale of a widowed mother's desire and repeatedly failed attempts to get her daughter married, and the second, a comical-satirical expose' of the norms of respectability, marriage and male and female sexuality. 'The Wedding Suit' tells the story of Bi Amma whose skill in measuring and cutting cloth for sewing is acknowledged by the whole neighbourhood. The story opens in her courtyard where women of all ages—"eagle-eyed virgins", "newly-wed brides," mothers with babies at their breasts—assemble to watch her wizardry at work, either in helping out a neighbour with a particularly tricky piece of sewing, or in producing a new dupatta or a suit of clothes for her own daughter's dowry. This is their everyday activity made up of multicoloured snippets of cloth, silver sequins, golden flowerets, needles, thimbles etc. together with the busy gossip, the loud guffaws and giggles at dirty jokes, and the spontaneous songs. The writer's perceptive eye for detail and her compassionate understanding of the psyche of the women becomes evident as the scene unfolds. The story proceeds to focus on a month long sojourn of a young male relative in the house, the mother's fond hopes that he will ask for her daughter's hand in marriage, and her attempts to please him and feed him even at great cost to herself and her family. It is a powerful narrative in the way it builds up unobtrusively and un sentimentally to a tragic denouement that becomes a scathing indictment of oppressive customs and traditions.

'Gharwali' also deals with the theme of women's repression but it employs a different strategy. In place of the image of the woman as victim, it foregrounds the figure of the natural rebel. In Ismat's stories, the rebellious woman is usually from the lower strata of society who lives outside the pale of middle-class social and sexual behavioural norms. Her transgression of these restrictive norms makes her a subversive figure through whom patriarchal values are unsettled and interrogated. In the present

collection, Rani in 'The Mole', the peasant woman in 'Touch-Me-Not', and Lajo in 'Gharwali' are such figures. Similarly, there is the character of Gori in 'Do Haath' (not included here).

The protagonist of 'Gharwali' is Lajo, a young attractive woman who was born and brought up in the streets. A "stranger to bashfulness or the sense of shame," she gives freely of her love to anyone who needs it. Circumstances lead her to the house of Mirza where she cheerfully slips into the role of maid, housekeeper and lover. Troubles begin when Mirza insists on elevating her to the status of wife. Lajo's natural inability to follow the codes of "respectability" is in sharp contrast with Mirza's expectations and injunctions on matters of dress and behaviour.

Mirza put a ban on the lehnga and instructed her to wear tight-fitting churidar pyjamas. Lajo was used to open space between her legs. Two separate legs joined by a strip of cloth were truly bothersome. She kept pulling at the string....'Which sadist invented this contraption? One has to tie and untie it each time one goes to the lavatory!' Lajo gave vent to her spleen.

As more complications arise, life becomes intolerable for both. Peace is restored only when the exasperated Mirza divorces her and they finally resume their earlier relationship. It is a story told with great relish. Its irreverent humour and satire hold up the notion of marriage and the prescribed roles of husband and wife to ridicule and reflective inquiry.

The power of this narrative was first brought home to me when the film actor and theatre person Naseeruddin Shah dramatized it as part of his stage show entitled 'Ismat Aapa ke Naam' a couple of years ago. It was a great actor's tribute to a great writer and the effect was electrifying. I must state that many re-readings later, the story continues to provoke and ruffle, and the power of Ismat's words remains undiminished.

Ismat also wrote on a variety of other themes and several stories in this collection represent that aspect of her work. 'Roots', 'Sacred Duty', and 'Kaafir' deal with the phenomenon of communal prejudice and mistrust. All three stories question communal stereotyping and posit alternative relationships based on mutual love and understanding that triumph over entrenched attitudes. In a similar vein, the story 'Quit India' shows the individual relationships transcending the overarching political developments. Set in the colonial period, the story explores the life of a British administrator who forges bonds with his Indian lower-class wife and children and refuses to leave the country with his compatriots. He patiently tolerates the derision and ridicule of his Indian neighbours and "quits"

India only with his death.

Ismat's narrative style gives the impression of being uncomplicated and spontaneous. At the same time, however, one cannot but notice the artistic skill with which she orders her material to evoke the desired response. Her sophisticated approach is evident in her employment of the device of the child narrator in stories like 'Lihaaf' and 'Gainda'. Her stories have a certain raciness and speed, with words and phrases pouring out in a powerful flow.

If Ismat's seminal contribution lies in her exploration of new areas of experience, it lies equally in the fact that she brings to fiction a new language. This is the language of the women of the specific social group that she portrays, the language known as the "begumati zuban." Rooted in the everyday material life in the household, this language has a distinct idiom, it is rich in vocabulary, adjectives, metaphors, abuse and curse words, and is colourful, innovative and vibrant. In Ismat's hands, it becomes an active element, used not for illustrative or decorative purposes but is integral to the structure and meaning of the story.

Translating a writer like Ismat is bound to be a daunting task. Editor and translator, Asaduddin, has had a longstanding interest in her work. His research into her writings and his understanding of its rich cultural context has enabled him to capture the nuance and flavour of the original to a considerable extent. His strategy, as he states in the Introduction to the volume, is to strike a balance between the demands of the English idiom and the cultural rootedness of the original text. So while some translational losses are inevitable in cases where equivalences either do not exist or make for awkward reading, the translation, on the whole, is successful in giving us a sense of the writer's style. The translator's strategy of retaining several culture-specific words in their original is quite effective considering that the sound of words is such an important element in Ismat's work. So several words like *qiyamat*, *dulhan*, *seh-dari*, *chawki*, and *chauthi* are retained in the English text. Often the meaning of these words is self-evident from their context, but when this is not the case, the original word is initially combined with its English equivalent (as in "at the far end of the seh-dari, the verandah") and is subsequently used on its own.

Perhaps, it would have added to the value of the book if the original title and date of publication had been provided at the end of each of the stories and essays. However, on the whole, this is a useful and enjoyable addition to one's library. ■

Neeraj Malik teaches English at Indraprastha College, Delhi University, Delhi.

Mohbhanga with Swaraj¹

Sudhir Kumar

REGISTAN

By Kamleshwar

Rajpal and Sons, Delhi, 1996, pp.76

"The foreign power will be withdrawn before long, but for me real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of western education, western culture, and western way of living which have been ingrained in us, because this culture has made our living expensive and artificial—both for men and for women. Emancipation from this culture would mean freedom for us."—M.K.Gandhi (19 April 1947)²

"I give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away."—M.K.Gandhi (August, 1947, TPGR, p.91).

Kamleshwar's novel *Registan (The Desert, 1996)* may well be read as a requiem for the Gandhian *swaraj*. The managers of the post-colonial nation-state (i.e., Bharat or India) did to Gandhi (i.e., his vision of Bharat) what even a Godse could not do. The latter was responsible for the death of his body (a crime which Gandhiji would have forgiven), but the former conspired to bring about the death of his vision! Instead of "decolonizing the mind" by promoting the pluralistic Indian culture—as envisioned by Gandhi, the CEOs of the Indian democracy seem to be "re-colonising the Indian mind" by abjectly giving in to the forces of the multinational capitalism. This may well account for the apathy of the Indian nation-state towards "the weakest and the poorest man (or woman)" who was the centre of Gandhi's famous talisman for the project of nation-making. Or how else, for example, can one possibly reconcile the rotting of the thousands of tonnes of foodgrains for want of storage-facilities with the increasing number of starvation-deaths in the country?³ The novel, *Registan*, thus, foregrounds the all-pervasive *mohabhanga* (disillusionment) with the Gandhian ideals of *swaraj* (self-rule), *swadeshi* (self-reliance) and *sampradayik sadbhav* (communal harmony)—which were the cornerstones of his vision of a free India through the story of Vishwanath, a quintessential Gandhian school teacher who comes from a village near Mainpuri (a *mofussil* qasba in central U.P.—about 250 km. away from New Delhi).

The narrative in this novella (it is an extended short story, in fact) centres round the disillusionment of Vishwanath, who decides to work for the propagation of *swadeshi* and *rashtrabhasha*, (that is, Hindi in central and south India (Nagpur, Kalcit, Cochin, Bangalore, Tirupati, Trichur, Chengalpet and Madras) under Gandhiji's influence in the 1930's.

Ironically enough, all his Gandhian efforts end in a fiasco:-

He kept on running from place to place, from one corner to another so that he could help nurture our native languages and promote Hindi as the national language....Left the job of a school teacher in 1930 for the promotion of Hindi! And what he saw on his return was the fact that Hindi has even vanished from the places where it was earlier firmly entrenched. ...Where had gone our languages? Where is Hindi now? People are mute and dumb.... (p.17).

This lament for the collapse of Gandhi's dream of making Hindi (Hindustani) a national language in the post-colonial India also underlines the neo-imperialistic hegemony of English. Unable to cope with the collapse of Gandhiji's visions, Vishwanath loses his sanity at the end and starts speaking in English before he dies—unwept and unwanted. Didn't Gandhi declare in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in no uncertain terms?—"To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us....It is worth noting that by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation. Hypocrisy, tyranny etc. have increased; English-knowing Indians have not hesitated to cheat and strike terror into the people." It needs to be told that Gandhi was not an enemy of English; he prescribed its selective learning for the few who would translate its wisdom into national languages. Similarly, he was not a Hindi-zealot either—as it is explicit from this quote:- "Every cultured Indian will know in addition to his own provincial language; if a Hindu, Sanskrit; if a Mahomedan, Arabic; if a Parsee, Persian; and all Hindi. Several northerners and westerners should learn Tamil. A universal language for India should be Hindi." One may find faults in

this formulation, but no one can doubt Gandhi's farsightedness and sincerity in trying to "imagine" an integrated India through a language that is still spoken, and understood by more than seventy per cent of our population—from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Manipur. One need not cite a Ngugi wa Thiong'o or a Paulo Frere to support the Gandhian strategy of decolonizing the mind through the agency of a national language in the context of the national reconstruction. Kamleshwar's *Registan* reminds us of the blunders of the nationalist-ruling elite—the latter-day- "gin-drinkers" who seldom tried to translate Gandhi's vision into practice.

Kamleshwar also weaves into the narrative how the Gandhian vision of communal harmony lie in a shambles in free India through the stories of Baqar and his family. The trauma of Partition and the "two-nation" theory took its heavy toll. Baqar, whose son has already migrated to Pakistan during the Partition, is harassed and humiliated by the police as a Pakistani-agent Baqar wants to settle in India because this is his "*watan*" (motherland). His comments on the difference between India and Pakistan deconstruct the "two-nation" theory: "That (Pakistan) is a *mulk* (country), and this is also a *mulk*. The difference is that Pakistan is only a *mulk*, but this (India) is my *watan* also. ...In fact the Muslims were partitioned...they have become *bewatan* (without a motherland)" (p.66). It is significant to note that for Vishwanath's Hindi-Mandir, it is Baqar who donates his land! Hecctored relentlessly, Baqar goes mad as the voices of communal harmony have become meaningless in free India. On 9 April 1940, Gandhiji emphatically declared (TPGR, p.274)—"*As a man of non-violence I cannot forcibly resist the proposed partition if the Muslims of India really insist upon it. But I can never be a willing party to the vivisection. I would employ every possible means to prevent it. For it means the undoing of centuries of work done by numberless Hindus and Muslims to live together as one nation.*" Gandhiji was practising his discourse in Noakhali whereas the managers of the nascent nation-state were revelling in the celebrations of Independence in August, 1947! The subtext of the Baqar-episode is the Gandhian praxis for communal harmony. Kamleshwar later on worked out this subtext in the form of his novel—*Kitney Pakistan (How Many Pakistans?)*.

At yet another level, *Registan*, critiques the paradigms and processes of "development" adopted and implemented in the post-independence-era by describing the condition of Mainpur—the problems of poverty and underdevelopment that haunt the people of the rural areas, and its cultural degradation under the impact of valueless modernity. The qasba of Mainpuri also undergoes the process of Nehruvian modernization—electricity, *big* markets, *big* pucca roads, and *big* business

The novel, *Registan*, thus, foregrounds the all-pervasive *mohabhanga* (disillusionment) with the Gandhian ideals of *swaraj* (self-rule), *swadeshi* (self-reliance) and *sampradayik sadbhav* (communal harmony)—which were the cornerstones of his vision of a free India through the story of Vishwanath, a quintessential Gandhian school teacher ...

came up—crushing everything that was small. Vishwanath wondered: “*The big gets bigger, it’s all right; but the small is altogether lost—this is not right*” (p.7). When he was looking for a portrait of Gandhiji, he found heaps of semi-naked pictures of film-heroines instead in the shops (pp.8-9). The shop owner, Banne Mian, who used to give liberally the portraits of Bharat Mata, was now in free India, selling the pictures of *Sultana Daku*, *Gulbagawali* and *Rama Dhobin!* From the markets of Mainpuri suddenly vanished the open spaces, the *pheriwalas*, *chatawalas*, *halwais* and a whole host of small merchants. Mainpuri, thus, metonymically implies the condition of the nation in postcolonial times. It is in this Gandhian sense that Mainpuri as well as India has become a *registan*, a desert. Kamleshwar, in a recent speech delivered at Jaipur, expressed his unhappiness “*over the continued importance of English in country’s life and letters*” and reiterated his crusade for the national languages:—“Freedom was won through the Indian language newspapers. You have to use your own language to enter the soul of your nation” (*The Hindu*, 25.8.2001, p.9). The ending of *Registan* is a kind of dirge for Hindi and other Indian languages. The only extraneous element in *Registan* is the Vishwanath-Sushila-affair—which seems contrived and artificial. Gandhian crusaders like Vishwanath had /have little patience or time for mushy sentimentality.

The novel also suggests the death of Gandhian *swaraj*—which implies a structure “composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles, life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village” (*TPGR*, pp.83-84).

Are the CEOs of great(?) Indian democracy listening??

NOTES

¹ Mohbhanga (disillusionment) with the Gandhi’s visions of *swadeshi* and *swaraj* in post-Independence India has been an important theme of many Hindi novels such as Renu’s *Maila Anchal*, and *Parasi Parikatha*, Nagarjuna’s *Baba Batesarnath*, Mannu Bhandari’s *Mahabhoj* and Srilal Shukla’s *Rag Darbari*. Kamleshwar, who incidentally belongs to Mainpuri (a nondescript qasba near Agra in U.P.) makes Mainpuri a metonymy of Bharat or India -which implies that the nation- state in postcolonial India has set aside the Gandhian ideals of *swadeshi* and *swaraj* in the project of national reconstruction.

² *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, ed. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, New Delhi, Penguin India, 1993, p.88. Hereafter cited in the text as TGPR with page numbers in parentheses.

³ For example, see *The Times of India* (dt.4.9.2001, p.5,col.2-3) informs the reader (a sensitive one?) of the expected availability of more than six lakh metric tonnes of paddy and the lack of storing facilities in the mandis in Punjab. The same newspaper, (*The Times of India*, 4.9.2001, p.1.col.1-2), on the very first page informs the reader that the “Supreme Court censures states for starvation deaths” and castigates the Orissa government “for its apathy towards the drought-hit people”.

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"Discernible Inheritance"

Usha Hemmadi

A MARRIED WOMAN

By Manju Kapur

Indialink, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 310, Rs. 395.00

In her first novel, the prize-winning *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur speaks of the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance. It is precisely this excitement of discovery which seems to be missing in the more laboriously worked out second novel, *A Married Woman*, though the "discernible inheritance" is very much present.

A writer's first novel has so much of the self poured into it, tortuous experience, fresh observations on people and history. It is a little odious to make comparisons between the two novels. However, when the first novel is as successful as is Kapur's, the anticipation of good writing causes a great block of disappointment by its very absence. An unfortunate comparison then forces itself on the reader.

A Married Woman too is set against a backdrop of history, the entire Babri Masjid controversy, but where the earlier novel was a powerful portrait of a society where shame overshadows grief, superstition makes an uneasy bedfellow for pragmatism, this novel weaves a slow, often painfully ponderous story of Astha (meaning faith). Astha has everything going for her in a very familiar middle-class environment. School and college go their dreary way, containing no excitements. Life at home with her parents is suffocating. Meeting Bunty, exchanging letters with him becomes a highlight, but the relationship is promptly aborted by her mother. The letters stop, leaving Astha living each miserably empty day, only pride carrying her through. Where is the man whose arms are waiting to hold her? She longs to exchange confidences with her giggly classmates in the college canteen. She does try to introduce Bunty's name, just to show that she too has lived and knows what love is. The girls, however, are sceptical, "how could they believe in the reality of one who was never seen hanging out at the back gate?"

Her short-lived affair with Rohan is equally frustrating. Introduced to sex for the first time in the back of Rohan's car, poor Astha has never been so aware of her body's separate life before, and she is painfully grateful. Of course there is consternation when her mother discovers her secret journal. Covering up her secret life with a lie

about writing a story, she tries a few entries in an elaborate code, "but an audience was now branded into every page", and in any case, the Rohan affair has come to a sorry end. The light-hearted Rohan goes off to Oxford, making her realize even more vividly how different her own family is. Her father, a minor bureaucrat, has never studied abroad, his sole possession being 280 square yards of land in the wilderness beyond the Jamuna.

Marriage then is inevitable, especially when Astha receives a proposal from "an MBA, foreign-returned" son of the prosperous Vadera family. Despite a tendency to stretch out trivial details, up to this point the novel holds one's interest. But with Astha's marriage to Hemant, Kapur's writing loses whatever strength it possessed, petering away into a stilted narrative. A great many details of sex life are inserted, making for a solid block in the flow of narrative. Where the women in *Difficult Daughters* were painfully torn between the desire for education and the lure of illicit love, Astha moves through her life with some enjoyment, but no real feelings, negative or positive.

It is only after two children and a somewhat dull teaching job, that she shows any need to fulfil herself. History steps in most fortuitously in the shape of Aijaz Ahmed who starts a movement to secularize society. Aijaz is modelled on Safdar Hashmi without the latter's charisma. Astha's slowly-growing awareness of him as a sex symbol only shows up her total lack of knowledge of herself and what she really wants from life. Two children, a prosperous husband, all the accoutrements of middle class happiness have merely covered up her incompleteness. Even her discovery that Aijaz is married to Pipeelika (ant), seems ineffectual. Like the far more charismatic Safdar Hashmi, Aijaz is murdered brutally. It is a time of political and social upheaval. The Central Government fails to act on the Mandir-Masjid controversy, the mosque is partially destroyed by a mob of fanatics, party-lines become sharply etched into history. Kapur has researched all this carefully, indeed this bit of the novel makes good reading. Astha needs, nay, wants very much to be a part of it all, yet she is not portrayed with the vigour Manju Kapur is clearly capable of.

Meeting Pipeelika, Aijaz's widow is a significant milestone in Astha's life, which should have been presented with a great deal more power, but falls painfully short. Astha embarks upon a lesbian relationship with this younger, more emphatic and experienced woman. Fraught with jealousies, lies, frantic escapes from husband and children, this relationship which could have been the hard core of the novel, wrecks itself on the twin reefs of Kapur's laborious descriptions and Pipeelika's decision to move out of it on her way to a foreign degree and higher things. Where she has worked out her destination carefully, Astha like Hardy's Tess, but without the tragic nuances, is like a straw in the wind. She is in fact a successful artist with both paint and pen, possessing the ability to transfer outer experience such as the march to the Masjid on to a vivid canvas, or even to write poetry about it. What she does not have is the power, because Kapur denies it her, is to transfer her inner life to either her understanding or that of the reader.

The book ends on a somewhat promising note. "As Astha drove, she imagined the misery in the cars around her. 'Join the queue, Astha join the queue.'" Manju Kapur can and does write well, but this novel is ruined because of its denseness, its lack of a proper narrative framework, and its ineffectual characterization of Astha. It is, in fact stretched out painfully thin over its three hundred odd pages. ■

Usha Hemmadi, an editor and critic, was senior lecturer, Elphinstone College, University of Mumbai, Mumbai.

BOOK NEWS

BOOK NEWS

Zaka Ullah of Delhi by C.F. Andrews with an introduction by Mushirul Hasan and Margrit Pernau provides an overview of the intellectual and cultural life of Delhi during Zaka Ullah's time. Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 114, Rs. 350.00

Family History by Janaki Agnes Penelope Mazumdar edited with an introduction by Antoinette Barton describes the family fortunes of at least two upper-class Bengali families during the period 1870-1945. Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 150, Rs. 345.00

Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition edited by Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos brings together essays that treat the renaming of the city as a point of departure in visiting enduring themes in Bombay's life. Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 336, Rs. 645.00

CULTURAL STUDIES

Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History by Krishna Dutta explores the multiple paradoxes giving personal insights into the city's unique history and identity as reflected in its architecture, cinema and music.
Roli Books, 2003, pp.255, Rs.295.00

Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan by Michael Hutt reconstructs the history of the Nepali community in Bhutan and the story of the 95,000 or so people of Nepali ethnic origin who had been wrongfully evicted and arrived in Bhutan in the early 1990s.
Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.308, Rs.595.00

FICTION

The Chosen by Usha K.R., set in southern India, shifting between Bangalore and a fictional French protectorate on the western coast tells the compelling story of a young woman torn between who she is and who she wants to be.
Penguin, 2003, pp. 321, Rs. 295.00

In Times of Siege by Githa Hariharan is a stark, funny, moving contemporary narrative unfolds the story of ordinary lives besieged, of men and women struggling to make sense of hatred, ignorance, love and loyalty that holds up an uncompromising mirror to India today.
Viking, 2003, pp. 206, Rs. 295.00

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Making Sense of History: Society, Culture and Politics by Mushirul Hasan is a historian's exploration of the past and present which resonates with ideas on the contemporary Indian scene.
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Manohar, 2002, pp.552, Rs.895.00

China: Enabling A New Era of Changes by Pamela C.M. Mar & Frank-Jurgen Richter draws together a broad array of expertise, regional and concrete business judgements and sets a benchmark in synthesizing and clarifying the diverse factors that are shaping China's century.
John Wiley & Sons (Asia) and World Economic Forum, 2003, pp. 220, price not stated.

Understanding Partition: Separation, not

Liquidation by Yuvraj Krishan focusses on the growth of separatist movement in India leading to Partition.

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Land of Early Dawn: North East of India by Romesh Bhattacharji takes us on a journey into little-explored terrain, through breathtaking natural beauty juxtaposed with a concern for the hopes of the people and their trials and tribulations.

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Kargil 1999: The Impregnable Conquered by Lt. Gen (Retd.) Y.M. Bammi assesses the Kargil war and the lessons to be drawn from it.

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Emerging Asia: Challenges for India and Singapore edited by N.N. Vohra is the proceedings of the second India-Singapore colloquium organized jointly by the National University of Singapore and the India International Centre, New Delhi in February 2002.

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Danger in Kashmir by Josef Korbel is a reprint of the 1954 Princeton edition and provides invaluable insights into the genesis of the Kashmir question.

Oxford University Press, Karachi, pp.352, Pk Rs.595.00

Kashmir: Behind the Vale by M.J. Akbar delves into the roots of Kashmiriyat and uses it as the backdrop to explain how the 1980s have opened the way for Kashmir's hitherto marginalized secessionists.

Roli Books, 2002, pp.232, Rs.295.00

Jihadis in Jammu and Kashmir: A Portrait Gallery by K. Santhanam, Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena and Manish deals with the origins of the Kashmir dispute and provides a handy reference of 31 tanzeems, their objectives, sponsors and organizational structure in a comprehensive manner.

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Manohar, 2003, pp.277, Rs.650.00

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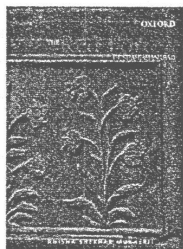
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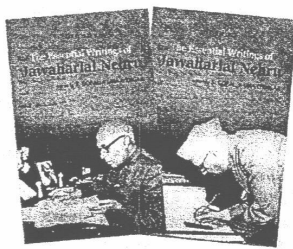


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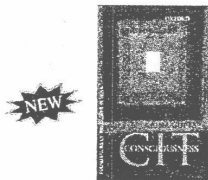
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