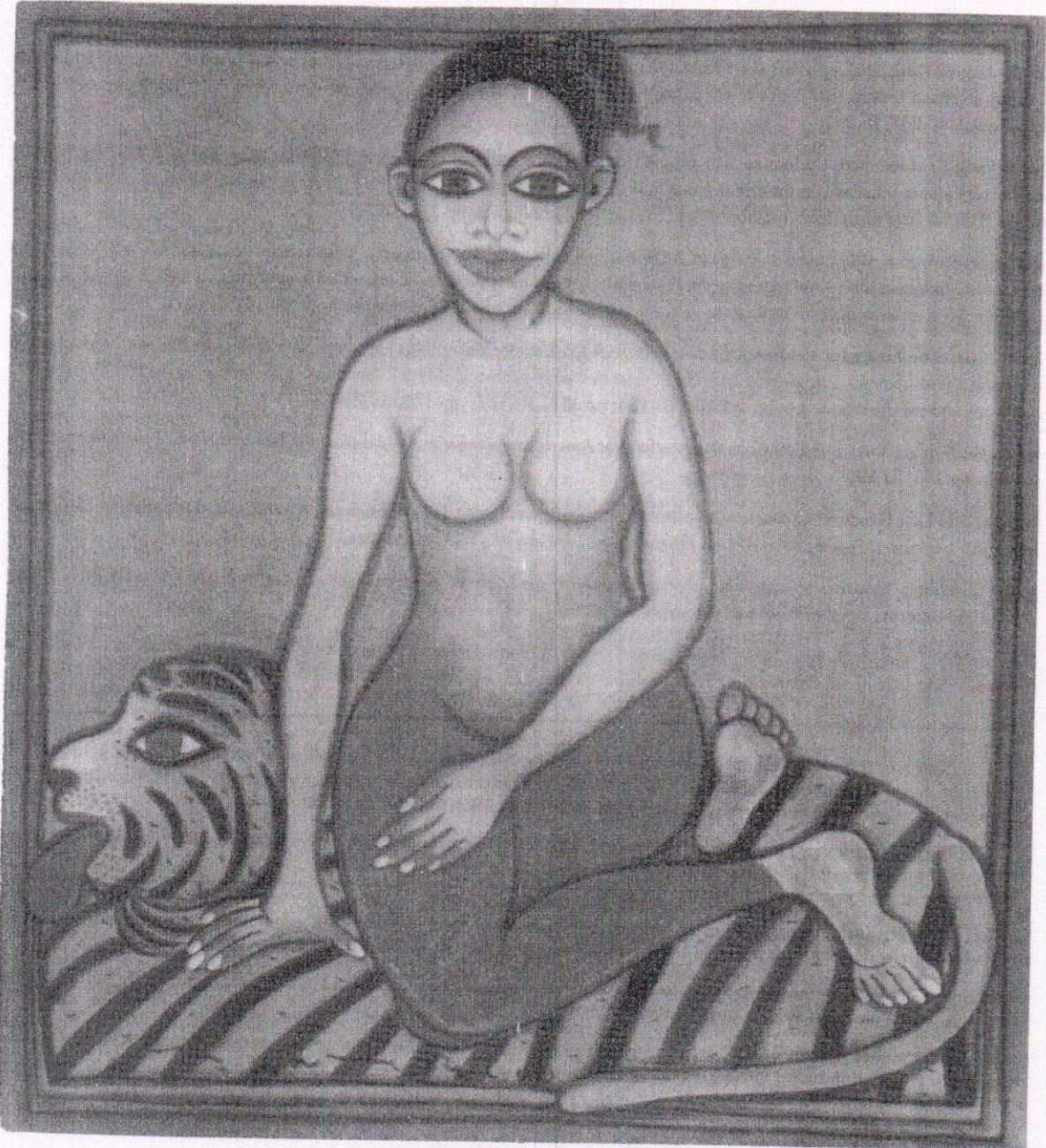


# THE BOOK REVIEW

Rs 40

VOLUME XXVI NUMBER 9 SEPTEMBER 2002





## J. KRISHNAMURTI BOOKS

*You are the world, you are not separate from the world. You are not an American, Russian, Hindu, or Muslim. You are apart from these labels and words, you are the rest of mankind because your consciousness, your reactions are similar to the others... If you change, it will affect the whole of mankind.*

— J. Krishnamurti

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**Questioning Krishnamurti:** Dialogues with people from different walks of life such as Chogyam Rinpoche and Walpola Rahuala, Buddhists; Eugene Schallert, Jesuit priest; Jonas Salk and David Bohm, scientists; Iris Murdoch, Huston Smith, and Renee Weber, writers. The subjects range from social problems to science and religion. pp 256, Rs 150.

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**You are the World:** Talks and discussions with students at American universities, held during the late 1960s when the campuses were in revolt. pp 175, Rs 100

**The First and Last Freedom:** Containing selections from Krishnamurti's talks and answers to questions, this anthology is essential reading for beginners. Foreword by Aldous Huxley. pp 264. Now at a highly subsidized price of Rs 50.

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### Periodicals

**The Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools:** A forum for teachers to share a new vision of education in the light of Krishnamurti's teachings, and accounts of creative classroom practices. Relevant for teachers, parents and those concerned with education. Brought out yearly. Subscription Rs 100 (in India); \$ 6 outside India.

**KFI Bulletin:** Quarterly journal containing materials largely from the unpublished talks and writings of Krishnamurti. Annual subscription: Rs 50; life subscription: Rs 500.

**Websites:** [www.jkrishnamurti.org](http://www.jkrishnamurti.org). Launched recently, this website is devoted solely to Krishnamurti's teachings and presents a variety of materials, starting from the early 1930s. A joint venture of the Krishnamurti Foundations worldwide.

[www.kfionline.org](http://www.kfionline.org) Website giving information about the Krishnamurti Foundation India, its publications, study centres/retreats and schools. Books and audio-video tapes available for sale.

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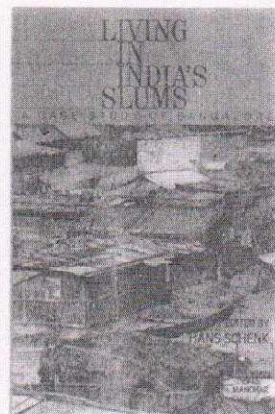
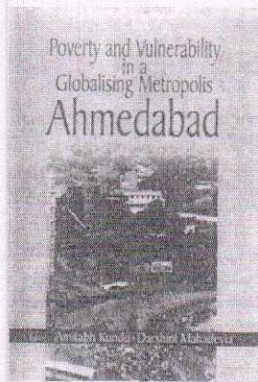
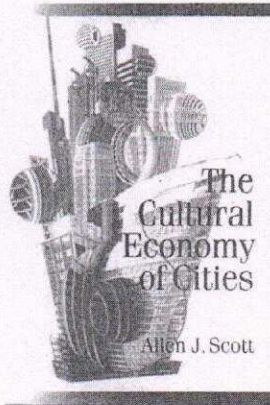
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# The 'Indian' City

A. G. Krishna Menon



Given the nature of our contemporary postcolonial cultural and urban history, it is not surprising that both lay people and professionals find it difficult to imagine an 'Indian' city. What I mean by an 'Indian' city is one that suits our rapidly developing society, constrained economic circumstances and diverse ways of life. To cut the coat according to the cloth would be a sensible imperative to guide city planning, but instead, we aspire to emulate foreign cities which are products of considerable economic development and wealth, suiting lifestyles of societies that have modernized over a long period of time. We do not possess the same level of material or social capital, but our planners persist in applying 'western' solutions to 'Indian' problems, and the privileged sections of society whose opinions influence policy, demand them.

These circumstances are as much a commentary on occidentalism permeating our postcolonial consciousness, as it reveals a profound lack of understanding about the objectives of city planning. It contains two important misconceptions regarding the relationship between city form and society: one, that the form of the city is independent of socio-economic realities, and two, that emulating the form of cities of the developed world would transform the urban environment here. Such fallacies unfortunately underpin the practice of city planning in India, and it is hardly surprising to find Indian cities in the mess they are in: it cannot be otherwise, because obstreperous reality will inevitably

insinuate itself into the quixotic predilections of city planners and wreck their Master Plans.

For evidence, consider the fact that even in Delhi, a relatively well endowed and perhaps over-administered city compared to other metropolises in India, over 60% of the development has been 'regularized'. This means that a majority of the development that took place after the Master Plan came into effect 40 years ago, has not conformed to its prescriptions. In other cities, planned

objectives of planned growth. Consequently, in the wake of the massive migration into the city, individuals and entrepreneurs were forced to take matters into their hands to find space where they could, and seize opportunities to meet their economic needs, often in contravention of the statutory Master Plan. The recent drama over the relocation of well-established industries in 'non-conforming' areas is a typical example of the toll society has to pay for the inadequacies of Master Plans and the process of its implementation. The fact is not only in Delhi, but everywhere else, the will to survive and sustain oneself will always overcome the impediments of any Master Plan. It is in this light that we need to critically examine the contents of the Master

Plan itself, and the process of urban development that it advocates, before we castigate the 'law-breakers'.

In time, the vibrant democratic processes conferred legitimacy to 'illegal' developments, and they got 'regularized'. The professionals and administrators are critical of this political process, and blame the 'people' and 'politicians', for subverting their Master Plan. They begin to view the massive forces of urbanization and the process of 'regularization' as a 'disease'. It takes on the metaphor of cancer, which must be 'resisted' and 'cured' through drastic surgery. They do not try to diagnose it, or under-

stand the symbiotic relationship between city development and politics. If they did, they would have proceeded in a different manner, and perhaps encouraged rather than resisted, the latent energies of urbanization for the larger good of society. That is why we need to imagine an 'Indian' city, and plan for it to guide urbanization, and not attempt to replicate a Paris or Singapore

development is an even greater exception to the rule, because the Master Plan of Delhi has influenced the plans of other cities, but they did not have the same level of resources to implement them.

The Master Plan of Delhi was modelled after post-war European new towns, and therefore did not anticipate the vigorous forces of urbanization that overwhelmed the

#### THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CITIES: ESSAYS ON THE GEOGRAPHY OF IMAGE-PRODUCING INDUSTRIES

By Allen J. Scott  
Sage Publication, London, 2000, pp. 245, £18.99

#### SHANGHAI AND MUMBAI: SUSTAINABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

By Tapati Mukhopadhyay  
Sanskriti, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 143, Rs. 325.00

#### POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY IN A GLOBALIZING METROPOLIS: AHMEDABAD

Edited by Amitabh Kundu and Darshini Mahadevia  
Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 398, Rs. 700.00

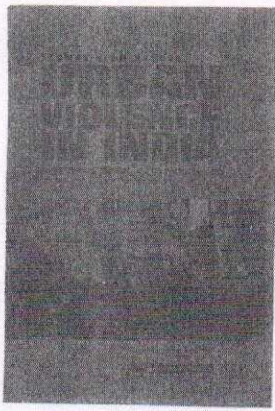
#### LIVING IN INDIA'S SLUMS: A CASE STUDY OF BANGALORE

Edited by Hans Schenk  
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 311, Rs. 600.00

#### URBAN VIOLENCE IN INDIA: IDENTITY POLITICS, 'MUMBAI', AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CITY

By Thomas Blom Hansen  
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001, pp. 269, Rs. 550.00





in India.

It is with this background that I am reviewing these books. They are a varied lot, covering three cities each in India and abroad, from different disciplinary perspectives. Perhaps they should have been reviewed in their respective disciplinary journals, where reviewers with similar backgrounds would have addressed the expectations of the authors more satisfactorily. However, I believe that these books hold important messages for a wider audience, and have a place in journals such as this one. They provide powerful insights into the problems created by the kind of 'beautiful' city even the eclectic readers of this journal often innocently demand, because it reveals the fatal disjunction because it reveals the fatal disjunction between urban realities and the postcolonial vision of the city that is destroying our urban environment as predictably as a Greek tragedy. My review will focus on this predicament, and attempt to extract the significant messages from these books, which might define the 'Indian' city.

Allen Scott's book *The Cultural Economy of Cities* is perhaps most distant from the concerns of Indian city planners. Firstly, it is from the discipline of geography, which in the West has developed compelling frameworks to understand their post-modern urban societies, but has languished here in the academic wilderness. Scott explains the logic governing the location of "image producing" industries in Los Angeles and Paris and how that logic contributes to their commercial success. These industries include clothing, furniture and the media industries such as cinema and music recording, which are considered the foci of economic growth and urban development in modern capitalism. Secondly, he argues that city planners need to take into account their locational factors and *facilitate* their functioning, so that they can continue to thrive and dominate the global market place, and thereby bolster the local and national economy. That perspective would appear alien to city planners in India who are more concerned about rationalizing land use

patterns on paper than focussing on the economic health or contributing to the global dominance of industries in their cities.

For example, many industries have come up in Delhi because of locational advantages—in terms of transport, labour, and availability of space among others, following an organic process of development that is not different from what Scott describes happened in the case of "image producing" industries in Los Angeles and Paris. But in Delhi this process is considered illegal because it usually does not conform to the land use patterns pre-determined in the Master Plan. Never mind that over the years these industries build up a strong industrial base for the city, and make important contributions to the national economy, because as far as the planner or bureaucrat—and lately, the Courts—are concerned, if their location is not in conformity with the Master Plan, then they are illegal and have to be closed down.

A good example of this process at work is Viswas Nagar in East Delhi, where what looks like a slum at the periphery of Delhi turns out to be India's largest industrial cluster manufacturing world quality electric cables and conductors. Here there are over 2000 home-based industries, obviously working without government approval, controlling 30% of the country's market in those products.<sup>1</sup> But all this is considered illegal because these industries are located in what the Master Plan has identified to be a residential area. Focussing on that lacuna, a righteous Jagmohan, when he was briefly the Minister of Urban Development, had many such industries closed down.

In India, industries are expected to follow the dictates of plans made by planners, whereas Scott argues that planners should *help* industries by taking into account and facilitating their present and changing needs. Scott's prescription requires a flexible city plan and a mutable city structure, whereas Jagmohan and Indian city planners possess a typically postcolonial perspective on development which views organic growth as 'chaotic', and themselves as guardians of "law and order" to ensure the adherence to the rigid and immutable city plan. In dialectic terms, they set out to defend the rights of an abstract administrative entity ("The Master Plan") against the concrete rights of citizens.

Is there an alternate model to 'plan' for

1. The source of this information is an unpublished PhD thesis entitled "Neighbourhood as Factory" by Solomon J. Benjamin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Cambridge, June 1996.

unpredictable urban development and allow market forces adequate space to thrive?

Tapati Mukhopadhyay's book, *Shanghai and Mumbai—Sustainability of Development in a Globalising World*, sheds some light on this question though that is not the central focus of her study. She examines two large coastal metropolises, Shanghai and Mumbai, which have expanded by occupying or reclaiming coastal land—Pudong New Area in the case of Shanghai, and Navi Mumbai in the case of Mumbai. In both cases the issues of sustainability of planned development looms large, and Mukhopadhyay discusses what the planners in each city are doing—or not doing, to face those challenges. Shanghai's regional city planning she concludes, has been more successful than Mumbai's, but her analysis reveals an ironic twist to the tale, and offers insights into planning for market-led development.

The reason for the Pudong New Area's success was not as one would suspect, that it was planned and developed by a strongly centralized planning authority commonly associated with the Chinese government, but because that government modified its rules to open up the coastal area for rapid industrial development. Among the changes they permitted was to grant land use rights not only to Chinese citizens but foreign investors as well. It was such pragmatic changes in policy ("ideological intransigence and tactical flexibility"?) that catalysed the impressive development of the Pudong New Area. Simultaneously, existing settlements were systematically absorbed and brought within the purview of the new development policy.

In Mumbai on the other hand, where we have a democratic society and a liberal land regulation policy, as well as individual property rights, the state decided to impose centralized authoritarian control over development and acquire all the land it required for building Navi Mumbai. Thus in Shanghai an authoritarian government adopted a liberal development policy within an overall system of centralized controls, whereas in Mumbai an overall democratic and liberal system adopted an authoritarian model for developing Navi Mumbai. This created two problems in Navi Mumbai: one, it virtually disenfranchised the local population from the new development, and two, by taking on the entire burden of development, it slowed its pace, thus creating problems that were easily predictable, because they are commonly associated with the developments of Delhi and other 'planned' cities in India.

This strategy of authoritarian control over development is the norm all over India, because city planners are unable to change their mindsets on the issue of 'control' over development—a policy that in practice



translates to mean 'impede' development. The issue of involving the market and the local people in the development process is the new mantra of 'good governance' promoted by international aid agencies and calls for "public private partnership", but the city planners and bureaucrats in India have still to come to terms with this concept, let alone use it to their advantage. While the book edited by Amitabh Kundu and Darshini Mahadevia points to the tragic pitfalls of this strategy in the case of Ahmedabad, as a strategic option, particularly for large projects discussed by Mukhopadhyay, the use of market mechanism to develop cities has its obvious merits.

As regards future sustainability of these massive developments, Mukhopadhyay draws independent lessons from each city. In Shanghai she feels that the authorities must consider still further liberalization of their policies. She points out that the migration policy should change to permit more labour to settle in the city. She also apprehends that with the economic development of the hinterland, (when the Three-Gorges Dam project begins to yield dividends, for example) Shanghai's primacy will be eroded and it will have an adverse impact on its economic, and ecological sustainability.

In Mumbai she identifies the unrealistic land reclamation strategies which have resulted in among other issues, the growing problems of marine ecology, and unsustainable land development programmes. She also criticizes the isolation of the *Gaothan* or traditional settlements from the new developments, pointing out that "one of the greatest weakness of the planning of Navi Mumbai is that it has ignored the inherent character of the existing villages within the emerging urban system. As a result, within the Municipal boundary of Navi Mumbai, there exists two systems, one village (*Gaothan*) and the other, the urban nodes". She infers quite correctly, that this will create land-use management anomalies (similar to the problems created by the *lal dora* settlements in Delhi) which will be in conflict with the overall objectives of planned development. Her message is that the existing social and physical ecology must be taken into account while planning of cities. While this is obviously the sensible approach, implementing it is not going to be an easy task to undertake in India, as I will explain in the end.

The book edited by Amitabh Kundu and Darshini Mahadevia, *Poverty and Vulnerability in a Globalising Metropolis: Ahmedabad* offers an entirely different perspective of this 'globalising' metropolis. It examines a city specific response to globalization in some detail and offers a new conceptual framework to evaluate the lives of the

disadvantaged. The ten papers in the book examine various aspects of how the city of Ahmedabad has tried to cope with the problems of urban poverty at a time when compulsions brought about by resource scarcity induced pressures from international agencies to adopt more decentralized and capital market dependent strategies of governance. These papers analyse the socio-economic consequence of the new policy initiatives, by examining the correlates of poverty before and after globalization. The key question they focus on is whether the attempts to open up the economy and democratize the municipality for bringing in efficiency have had a positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of the poor or not.

Each paper examines the concept of 'vulnerability'. The editors argue that this concept provides a more accurate index of poverty than levels of income or physical deprivation. Mahadevia's paper charts the development scenario in the state and argues that the process of globalization resulted in the crisis in the textile industry, and a large section of the organized working population shifted to informal employment, and became vulnerable to fluctuations in the labour market and inflation. Mahadevia also shows how spatial segregation between the rich and poor localities have increased because it was rooted in the market based philosophy of development. This resulted in a change in the character of the city from one that was inclusive to what is now more exclusive.

Wilfred D'Costa and Bhabani Das in their paper undertake a micro-level investigation to define spatial vulnerability based on community characteristics and geographical locations of people within the city. They show how the construction of commercial complexes and beautification of the city has further segregated the city and resulted in the removal of the slum dwellers, the most vulnerable section among the city population.

The role of NGOs, including SEWA, has been strong in Ahmedabad. In a detailed historical analysis Howard Spodek points out that Ahmedabad's response to abject poverty has fitted into the context of India's responses generally, but it has also had a unique side of its own, influenced by the special weaving together of voluntary, Gandhian, entrepreneurial, industrial, and feminist traditions. He points out that the trend in the evolution of policies for the poor has shifted from state-directed to community-based initiatives, such as the famous Slum Networking Programme—which won the Habitat Award.

The achievements of the NGO sector are discussed and examined critically in the light of neo-liberal approach to urban

governance. Rajendra Joshi, himself an NGO activist, however contests some of the gains claimed by other NGO activists working in slum projects. He makes a candid assessment of community based initiatives, and concludes that these collaborative strategies with various stakeholders skirt the structural issues regarding poverty and vulnerability, and they will "at best, remain an *ad hoc* and experimental programme, 'packaged' and 'marketed' by the international donors". In this context, Hans Schenk's book on the Bangalore slums offers a different view on this subject, which is only to be expected, because these contested views are indicative of the complexity of the issues involved when dealing with slums, and highlight the futility of generalizing the problem. Each city will have to formulate a context-specific solution to the problems of slums in their cities. Master Plans however, tend to treat slums as a homogenous entity and thereby begin the process of exacerbating the problems.

Though the book was published before the recent carnage in Gujarat, its message predicts the events. The horrifying consequences of increased vulnerability of the poor and large segments of even the middle-class population and their spatial segregation into exclusive zones in Ahmedabad would in no small measure have contributed to the tragedies we witnessed in the recent past. This is not to claim that events would have taken a different turn with more sensitive city planning, but it is certainly difficult to maintain after reading this book and witnessing the recent events in Gujarat, that city planning is a purely abstract and technical exercise conducted by professionals on drafting boards, and that it does not have enormous political and social consequences.

Hans Schenk's edited volume, *Living in India's Slums—A Case Study of Bangalore*, is of interest because it takes the given political and social realities into account in tackling the problems of slums. The book contains the research findings of an Indo-Dutch research team of anthropologists, sociologists, geographers and urban planners, who conducted an extensive study of the approximately 450 slums in Bangalore containing a population of about one million in the 1990s.

It was surprising to me at least, to learn that Bangalore authorities "have a distinct record of non-improvement and even non-acceptance of urban slums contrary to approaches in other cities in India where one sees some component of welfare-oriented state involvement with the urban poor". If this be so, then I agree with Schenk's observation that the conditions in Bangalore can be seen to be precursors of what the urban future holds for India's



urban poor if the current retreat of state involvement in the development process continues.

The objectives of this study was "designed to provide a better understanding of the slums in Bangalore, the condition of slum dwellers, and the nature of policy interventions on the part of government organizations from voluntary organizations and from slum dwellers themselves". The study has attempted to show the close links between research and action, and some of the Dutch team members even stayed on after the completion of the research project to run development-oriented activities financed by the Netherlands government.

The key to tackling the problem of slums the study found is security of tenure. This offers a clue to defining the 'Indian' city, when they conclude: "Without doubt, legalisation of slums by local and state authorities, if done, could become one of Bangalore's landmark achievements, helping it further its ambition to become a modern and cosmopolitan city". This is indeed ironic, because Indian city planners firmly believe that the city can only become modern and cosmopolitan by getting rid of the slums from the city.

Of course, merely granting *partas* to slum dwellers will not solve the problem of slums or poverty. Experiences in other cities have shown that ownership of valuable urban land will tempt the new owners to cash in on the opportunity cost of their newly legitimized land, and move to another slum. The study therefore, emphasizes that providing security of tenure and improving the quality of the slum habitat cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger economic and social issues affecting slum dwellers. This calls for an integrated approach towards tackling the problems of urban poverty to allow them to "live in dignity".

The two books on slums, of Ahmedabad and Bangalore, are a welcome addition to the literature on the subject. Both have filled lacunae in earlier research, one by introducing the concept of "vulnerability", and the other by identifying the importance of linking research to action in the field. They have documented the "mosaic of characteristics pertaining to life in slums in one single city", giving us two perspectives on the mixture of illegality, insecurity and antagonism that characterize the texture of urban slums in India. Their messages are however similar: city planners in India should give up their strategy to bulldoze slums in order to 'beautify' cities, and instead seek ways to accommodate them as stakeholders in the 'Indian' city.

The consequences of failure are immense. This is the chilling message of Thomas Blom Hansen's book, *Urban*

*Violence in India: Identity Politics, 'Mumbai', and the Postcolonial City*. The book is an excellent treatise on the process of criminalization in contemporary Indian politics, with Mumbai as the background. Here we get another perspective of the city: how militant political outfits like the Shiv Sena are able to advance their cause by taking advantage of urban problems and promising better urban services, and thereby encroach on the sovereignty of the state.

Central to the 'identity' politics of the Shiv Sena is their antagonism towards the Muslims. In Hansen's words: "This book tells a story about Mumbai and Maharashtra centred around material generated in localities marked by high levels of Hindu-Muslim conflicts and often a strong presence of the Hindu nationalist and majoritarian forces. I fully realize that this merely is one among several possible narratives that could have been told about contemporary Mumbai, but I felt this was the most urgent and compelling". Few readers harbouring secular ideals and concerned about the unfortunate turns in Indian politics will disagree with the focus of Hansen's study. My interest however, is in the agency of the city in this narrative.

Hansen meticulously documents the characteristics of people living in Thane, north of Mumbai, in the old city of Pune, and in Central Mumbai. The deprivation in urban services and related problems created by the deteriorating conditions of the urban environment puts pressure on the limited civic resources and sets the stage for competing demands. "India's continued poverty, deprivation, illiteracy, and exclusion of large segments of the population from organized society and the economy all translate into an enormous need for the collective representation of demands from all kinds of movements, organizations, and informal and local operators, from social workers to *dadas*". These *dadas* broker advantages for their communities—and themselves, through political "performances and spectacles in public spaces".

The link between Hansen's study and city planning is admittedly tenuous, but I nevertheless draw attention to it because deteriorating living conditions in our cities is often the base on which organizations like the Shiv Sena construct the strategy for political intervention. Therefore, the political consequences of neglecting the environment should be a matter of concern to the city planner—and the privileged citizen. As a key agent in this drama, the city planner should listen to the voices from other disciplines so that they can understand the consequences of their Master Plans. Their deafness to these voices has resulted in self-referential insularity that has marginalized, and perhaps even perverted

managing the spatial needs of society. It has diverted their gaze from the real problems confronting the urban environment, to dealing with the abstract issues of land use planning.

The statutory Master Plans largely cater to the community of privileged citizens. The professional city planner is also a part of this class, so their opinions coalesce to determine the allocation of resources and defining the desirable 'image' of the city. Rarely are the perceptions and requirements of the low-income groups taken into account, and carried out in the Master Plans. The message of at least three of the books reviewed here is that we need to understand the causal links that exist between the inequalitarian objectives which generates the Master Plan of cities and the increasing evidence of criminalization that is beginning to characterize the urban environment in India. The postcolonial mentalities that lie at the root of these practices need to be excoriated before we can plan the 'Indian' city.

But this is going to be a difficult task, because the depth of the chasm between the ability to understand the problem and designing appropriate solutions on the one hand, and on the other, to have it accepted by decision-makers, is so great that it now appears almost unbridgeable by the force of reason alone. This is because decision-makers are bound not only by the limitations of their knowledge and visions, but also by archaic laws and traditions of practice, including the huge vested interests that are now deeply entrenched in our society which determines the development of land.

For a recent competition for the design of the new capital for Chhattisgarh, I was part of a group that submitted a plan that proposed an 'Indian' city. We not only based our proposals on the principles of ecologically sustainable planning but also recognized the positive role that the local villagers could play in building this city. We proposed to absorb all the existing villages (*Gaothans*) into the structure of the new city. We developed our design by taking into account the preexisting 'living' landscape and not by importing an iconic model of a city plan to be laid out on a *tabula rasa*. The new city we argued would have to conform to these 'Indian' realities and local conditions. Naturally, our design looked 'different', and as it turned out, this difference in looks emerged to be unpalatable to the jury.

The jury consisted of eminent and experienced bureaucrats and professionals, but what they were looking for was a pretty-postcard image of a 'modern' city. They wanted a clearly legible image that would compare favourably with other capital cities



of the world. They held the traditional engineer's view that technology—and money—could overcome the environmental and social problems that had been our starting point for designing the new capital, and achieving long term social and environmental sustainability. While the jury appeared to appreciate this imperative in principle, they were obviously not prepared to accept its consequences—a different looking city. So they selected a town plan that was in conformity with their (mis)understandings about city planning, and the precedents set by Chandigarh and New Delhi, where the existing landscape and social ecology had been wiped out to build them. What we realized through this frustrating experience is that the prospects of developing an 'Indian' city are indeed bleak because under the postcolonial circumstances, no decision-maker becomes 'educated' enough to consider the *process* of city planning afresh, and accept the resulting form of the city as a logical outcome.

The prospect of bringing about changes to the existing cities also appear to be equally unpromising. The Delhi Development Authority is currently engaged in preparing the Third Master Plan for Delhi for the period 2001-2021. The cynicism with which this exercise is being conducted can be gauged by the fact that time appears to be of no consequence to the authorities who are responsible for preparing the document: the new Master Plan *may* come into effect several years after the statutory bench mark year of 2001. As far as they are concerned, whether it is the old plan or the new one, there is not going to be much of a difference between the two in any case, (except that the new one will be bigger to accommodate an additional 10 million population by 2021), so what is the significance of time? Such indifference carries over to the contents of the new plan as well, and therefore only cosmetic changes can be expected to call this a *new* plan.

For example, I have argued that the new statutory plan offers the opportunity to correct the anomalies of the earlier ones by undertaking comprehensive urban renewal. After all, the 'old' city will now be larger than the 'new' one, and this provides the rationale to shift the focus from development of new land to renewal of what exists. This will necessarily involve understanding the existing problems of the city before the solutions are constituted as the new Master Plan. But unfortunately, the planners have poor data of what exists, less expertise to deal with it, and even less will to even contemplate, let alone undertake such a complex task. Thus little of consequence can be expected from the new plan, other

than of course, the reiterations of pious good intents to undertake urban renewal. In ideological terms, the contents of the new plan will be no different from the previous ones, and in time it too will create more problems than it will solve.

Perhaps that is an overly harsh indictment of the planning profession in India. I realize that the basket of problems is overflowing in India, and dealing with any one or a bunch of them, offers enough challenges to engage the professional's time and commitment. The city planners have kept themselves busy, and it must be acknowledged that they have contributed significantly to the development of Delhi and other cities. But my complaint is that tackling only some of the problems and not others have revealed a pattern of professional bias, which is that they have largely catered to the needs of the privileged. The problem confronting the profession flows from this bias: its moral self-affirmation and ideology are rooted in serving the ruling class and ignoring the spatial needs of what can arguably be identified as the majority of the population. The results of such limited vision are clearly evident from the evidence presented in the books reviewed.

There is a lot that the urban planners currently working in Delhi's new plan (or Chhattisgarh's new capital) can learn from the books reviewed here. These books do not cover the entire range of issues with which the planners ought to be involved, but they do focus on important and critical segments of their work. They also remind us of their break with the origins of modern city planning concepts which had found expression in two schools of nineteenth-century thought: the Utopians, who had a vision of the city as a self-sufficient, coherent organism, and the specialists and officials, who in contrast, endeavoured to remedy each urban defect individually. Despite the conceptual difference, both were inspired by a shared ideology that found its correspondence in the spirit of modern socialism. That spirit no longer guides city planning in India. Somewhere down the postcolonial road, long before the 'market' became a convenient scapegoat for conceptual inadequacies, city planners in India seem to have lost their way. I believe that by focussing their attention on the imperatives of the 'Indian' city, they can get back on track, and carry the original spirit forward. ■

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# Fanaticizing Religion

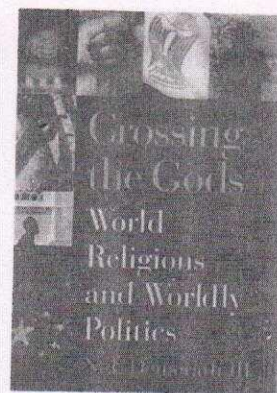
Dipankar Gupta

Just when you thought it was safe to step out with a positive attitude towards fellow beings, a riot hits some part of the world, usually India. Once this happens all the old doubts, fears and anxieties step in. A lot has been written on the subject and more will surely be produced in the years to come, but in all instances, I suspect, authors are trying to figure out how some people can squeeze blood out of the Bible. If we know how religious riots are caused then perhaps we might also find ways of preempting them, or, at least lessening the severity of their impact.

Ashutosh Varshney's book has a straightforward thesis—perhaps a bit too straightforward. He argues that if there are strong interfaith ties then riots do not happen, and if they do, then these ties can help to shorten their duration and curtail much of the bloodshed. In other words if there are good community ties then there cannot be bad community ties, and it is the bad ones that cause riots. This formulation appears tautological but it is still worth reading on. As we all know, tautologies can often bring out qualities that might otherwise remain hidden or go unnoticed.

Varshney believes that there are two kinds of civic life that are relevant for his project. He calls the first "associational" as it relates to interactions in formal organizational settings, such as in business associations, trade unions, libraries, reading clubs and so on. The other kind of associational life he terms "quotidian", as this has to do with more spontaneous and informal kinds of relationships that relate to family and neighbourhood. Of the two he gives greater importance to associational relations, and rightly so. Kin, clan and neighbourhood can become sickly sentimental which is why scholars are often misled to glorify tradition rather uncritically. We have seen a lot of that in the treatment of civil society among a fair section of Indian academics.

In any case, now that we are told that strong associational and quotidian ties are riot repellants, we are curious to know how one determines the strength of these ties. Is it possible to objectively measure them? This is the kind of work that network analysts like Wasserman and Faust (1994), Bonacich (1972) and Burt (1976) do rather well. In India, Professor Suraj Bandopadhyaha of ISI, Calcutta, has authored some landmark studies in network analysis. Network analysts plot out the depth, frequency and occasions for



different kinds of interactions across levels, divisions and functions. At the end of the day one has the benefit of graphic and diagrammatic representations of interpersonal, intra-associational and interassociational relationships. Unfortunately, Varshney's book does not give any glimpse of network analysis. This is rather unexpected, for given the kind of

many Muslims and Hindus there are in different business organizations in these cities, but there is no information about the density of their interactions. Just because the proportion between Hindus and Muslims is high in some associations should not be taken to mean that they are in each other's arms. In fact, the reverse could be equally true once we factor in the element of unfair competition, which is really the stuff of loose informal economies. Further, as the data on membership in business associations is largely from secondary sources, the information is not always comparable. In some cases we have figures of Hindu and Muslim proportions in small factories, sometimes in the unorganized sectors, and sometimes in somewhat larger establishments.

Most of the interesting evidence in this book on the shanty towns of Surat where the 1992 riots happened, is taken from the works of other scholars like

Asghar Ali Engineer, Jan Breman, and from the survey conducted by the Centre for Social Studies. In fact, from page 164 to 256 all the relevant information pertaining to Varshney's major thesis are selectively picked from secondary sources which, on most occasions, make claims contrary to what Varshney does in this volume. Yes, it is difficult to gather first hand primary information and survey data. But one is curious to know what the 12 research assistants were doing if not just this. If they did their job then where did all that data go?

I think the research assistants were hamstrung by an inordinately unwieldy questionnaire that is about eight printed pages long. While some of the questions are straightforward, there are others that need finessing. But a large number of questions in the questionnaire find no expression in the main text. For example, there is an interesting question which asks whether the respondent eats with members of different religious groups, but I did not find the answers to this question receive any treatment in the book. Perhaps these responses would have received greater attention had the questionnaire included sub-

## ETHNIC CONFLICT AND CIVIC LIFE: HINDUS AND MUSLIMS IN INDIA

By Ashutosh Varshney  
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. xv+ 382, Rs. 495.00

## THE DEADLY ETHNIC RIOT

By Donald L. Horowitz  
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. xvii+588, Rs. 595.00

## CROSSING THE GODS: WORLD RELIGIONS AND WORLDLY POLITICS

By N.J. Demerath III  
Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2001  
pp. xv+ 284, price not mentioned.

exercise he is interested in, network analysis should have been a natural choice. Without the benefit of this methodological tool it is not surprising that Varshney's data should be quantitatively sparse and qualitatively unimpressive.

The first 100 pages (or one third) of this book is about general issues and statistics which do not have a direct bearing on Varshney's principal thesis. The reader is waiting to get to a study of civic engagements, to an examination of different kinds of networks and impatience builds in when one is subjected instead to summaries of diverse approaches to the study of riots and of the history of the national movement. After page 102 the book gets more focussed. The six cities that Varshney examines with the help of 12 research assistants are now introduced. But the paucity of primary data is all too apparent. In the absence of a thoroughgoing network analysis, the reader is confined to very general and impressionistic remarks about the civic associations in the six cities.

The data on associational links are presented in too formalistic a manner which do not quite whet the appetite. We are told how



Ashutosh Varshney's book has a straightforward thesis...that if there are strong interfaith ties then riots do not happen, and if they do, then these ties can help to shorten their duration and curtail much of the bloodshed.

questions on this subject such as where they ate together, on what occasions, and so on. On p. 127 the author says that 60 % of Hindus and Muslims in Aligarh visit each other regularly, yet, nowhere are we told about the kind of visits they pay each other. Do they eat together? Do they meet at restaurants? Do the women meet as well, or is it a strictly male affair? What do they talk about when they meet? Business matters? Family matters? Politics? Are these meetings usually at the workplace? Do they meet at weddings? Where? To be treated to a bland answer in percentage terms will certainly not do, especially when the thesis is about civic relations and networks.

And then there is question number 9 on p. 304 that clearly should never have been asked. It has such a hectoring tone that it is bound to elicit very biased and guarded responses. The question reads as follows: "Islam allows up to four wives. When Prophet Mohammed announced this in the seventh century, it was a revolutionary step because men before that used to have many more wives and women's rights were not well defined. In today's condition, can or should polygamy be practised?" Is this a question in a survey or a term paper topic for graduate students? I can visualize poor villagers and slum dwellers cowering in fear and in all kinds of incomprehensible doubts when assaulted with a question like this by an unknown research assistant.

I, however, feel that Varshney's point regarding the relationship between Muslim chikan workers and Hindu traders is an interesting hypothesis worth examining. According to Varshney as Muslim chikan embroiderers work for Hindu traders, there is peace in Lucknow as nobody wants to suffer economically. This is an interesting poser, but only a poser. In this connection it is worth noting that though in the first week of rioting itself the economic losses in Ahmedabad alone ran up to about Rs. 179 crores (SEWA Relief Team 2002), the rioters were in no mood to let economic calculations come in their way. Secondly, a vast majority of Hindus in Lucknow are not traders so it is no skin off their nose to start a riot. Finally, dense interaction between communities, such as in SEWA, did not help quell the riots in Ahmedabad. In fact, SEWA just shut shop and was absolutely impotent against mob rage fuelled and abetted

by state patronage. Trust and intercommunal bonhomie can evaporate into thin air as we saw with SEWA in the recent riots in Ahmedabad. Moreover, trust in informal economies is built on asymmetrical power. The *marka* gambling operations in Mumbai appear to be built on "trust" only to a superficial observer. In fact, anyone who dares break the code established by the patrons can expect, at the very least, to have a finger broken for starters.

Varshney should have seriously taken into account four other possible explanations for the presence, or absence, of riots. First, wherever there is an active left movement riots do not happen. Second, wherever the minorities are divided among Shias and Sunnis or among Memons and Bohras or among Muslims, Syrian Christians and Nairs, riots find it difficult to manifest themselves. Third, rioters tend to stay away from sites where minorities are in large numbers, for example, Bharuch. Finally, riots take place only when the rioters are assured of state protection and administrative support. I am indeed puzzled by the way Varshney calmly side-steps the influence of the left when it comes to Calicut. Only on p. 164 is there a grudging one and a half line admission to this fact. When it comes to state and administrative support, Varshney makes light of the entire issue and gives it no credence at all (see p. 296). This is a serious drawback of the book.

Fortunately, Donald Horowitz's *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* corrects this error very handsomely. If there is an overarching thesis in this book then it is that rioters are risk averse and require authoritative support before they take off on their killing sprees. This point of view is not new. It has been made in the Indian context time and again, and with telling impact during the Sikh killings of 1984 (PUDR 1984). Since then this aspect of riots has been continuously emphasized. Even court judgements have been passed indicting governments for their complicity in riots, such as the one in Mumbai in 1993. This was also the thesis of my book on ethnicity in Mumbai (Gupta 1982) and in Punjab (Gupta 1997). I am therefore delighted that Horowitz too comes to a similar conclusion (see p.342 and *passim*). Now that it has been said from a respectable university in America, maybe we in India will pay more attention to the question of state support to rioters.

Horowitz demonstrates that not only is authoritative support required for a riot to happen, but that if the administration is serious it can bring back the situation to normalcy almost at will. Further, riots do not spread to areas when there is no authoritative support. I can think of two perfectly fitting examples for this. After Indira Gandhi's assassination there was no trouble in Karnataka and, barring some early skirmishes, nothing in

Bengal. In neither of these two states was the party in power interested in fomenting the riots. Areas neighbouring Bengal, such as Bokaro, went up in flames, but once inside Bengal, there was peace.

Horowitz makes out his case with a great degree of erudition and with a lot of (perhaps too much) cross cultural data. He takes us across the world to all the trouble spots where ethnic riots have occurred. In order to bolster his argument that riots do not just happen, Horowitz quite rightly draws our attention to the fact that the rioters are risk averse generalists who feel emboldened only when they have authoritative support. If rioters know they will be penalized then they step back and go home. As they are risk averse they choose their targets carefully making sure that they do not get hurt amidst all the excesses which they plan to commit (p. 387).

Each of these positions come together cogently to uphold Horowitz's central thesis regarding authoritative support to riots. But then he tends to undermine his own thesis by paying attention to rival claims rather unself-consciously and by resorting a bit too often to the on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other-hand kind of approach (p. 155, pp. 170-1, p. 185, p. 203). When one is making a serious thesis about state connivance it is not time to be polite. For example on p. 137 he gives the impression that "prejudiced individuals" cause most of the damage. In which case the argument about state support stands vastly impoverished. The greatest damage Horowitz does to his own thesis is when he sporadically entertains the claim that riots build on traditional rivalry and on a history (concocted, perhaps) of aggression (p.151, p. 161, p. 165). If "stored anger" and "accumulation of grievance" (p.147) are important considerations for the occurrence of a riot then the spontaneity theory of riots gets greater credence. This is clearly against Horowitz's express intention which is why he should do something about his style. Perhaps he has read too much and wants to share everything with us without offending anyone.

Apart from the fact that by ceding ground to alternative positions Horowitz eventually undermines his major thesis, he does not always have convincing facts on his side either when he takes on board alternative explanations. Contrary to his opinion, there was no traditional rivalry between Hindus and Sikhs before the 1984 riots. It was created in retrospect once things began to go wrong with Indira Gandhi's active interference in the *gurudwara* politics of Punjab. In fact, till then Sikhs were praised by many Hindu activists as the sword arm of Hinduism. As far as an aggressive past is concerned, the South Indians lived peacefully in Mumbai and throughout the anti-Gujarati Samayukta Maharashtra Samiti movement, they never felt threatened.



Religion by itself, quite clearly, cannot explain religious hatred, or ethnic riots. It is the context that is important if we want to understand religious bigotry on display. Friendly neighbours can become mortal enemies, and old associations of warmth and camaraderie can suddenly become difficult to recall.

Yet, suddenly in 1966 they became Shiv Sena's sole target. Neither the Gujaratis nor the South Indians have ever been demonized in popular lore as aggressors. Shiv Sena actually makes fun of both these communities by portraying them as soft and cowardly.

There is an equally serious problem when Horowitz once again undermines his thesis by entertaining the suggestion that caste antagonisms can protect a society against inter-faith riots (see p.51, and p. 378). In any case this claim cannot be made that easily. Gujarat, for example, was all caste till 1981-3, and then slowly caste politics gave way to religious politics and it was led by practically the same people—the Patidars. Uttar Pradesh is quite caste conscious and yet the BJP is very powerful there. The Shiv Sena, to take a slightly different example, initially attacked South Indians, and then suddenly in 1967 it decided to make the communists enemy number one and from 1984 (when communists did not matter really) it began to target Muslims. In between the Shiv Sena was very active against dalits and scheduled castes in Mumbai and Marathwada. The fact is that if an organization once wins source credibility either on regional or caste grounds it can, with adequate authoritative support, move on to an ethnic front quite easily.

On the whole, Horowitz is intellectually inclined to be suspicious of sentimental communitarians, primordialists, and with Robert Putnam style social capitalists. His argument that rioters are encouraged by authoritative support because they are generally risk averse is very convincing. In keeping with this line of argument he cites a number of instances when riots negate years of inter-community camaraderie with one stroke. Horowitz details at great length how the Sinhala and Tamils were on great terms till the *Swabhasha* movement went to the villages. At that point the Sinhalese changed tack and began to attack the Tamils, who till then were their allies (p. 423). Likewise, the Lulua and Lubua of Zaire had no traditional history of antagonism and yet they become the bitterest of foes (p. 423). The Uzbeks and Meshkhe-

tians fell upon each other with such bloody ferocity and yet till very, very recently, they saw themselves as two branches of the great Turkic nation (p. 190). Recently, in Ahmedabad, and elsewhere, many of the victims said they knew the Hindus who came to kill them. They had been to their family weddings, and even played around as children with them. They were thus unprepared when these very people came later to their homes to kill, loot and maim.

Religion by itself, quite clearly, cannot explain religious hatred, or ethnic riots. It is the context that is important if we want to understand religious bigotry on display. Friendly neighbours can become mortal enemies, and old associations of warmth and camaraderie can suddenly become difficult to recall. This is why the distinction that N.J. Demerath draws between canon and context in his book *The Crossing of the Gods* is so important. In my view this book should be read widely by scholars who not only study flash points of inter-faith or inter-community relations, but are also interested in the larger conceptual issues regarding the relationship between the state and the church, between civil religions and world religions. Demerath's study, like that of Horowitz, has a global scape and he uses his comparative data to great advantage. As a sociologist he has a disciplinary advantage over political scientists for he is not overly enamoured by the written and the spoken word and constantly seeks to put them in contexts. Once this is done, texts lose their charisma and multiple voices can be heard clamouring for attention.

Demerath clearly demarcates his position from those who tend to present religion within their own "traditional canon of belief and practices, as if these remained somehow fixed and invariant across time and space" (p.7). Instead he argues that comparative material should "demonstrate if anything, ...that any given religion is best understood—perhaps only really understood—in its myriad social and political settings" (p.7). This is why labelling oneself "as believer may mean different things in different settings" (p.9).

To this end Demerath introduces a very insightful term—"cultural religion" (p.59). Cultural religion refers to an "identification with a religious heritage without any religious participation or sense of personal involvement per se" (p. 59). The Irish and Swedish, for instance, are Catholic and Lutheran Christians respectively, but only in terms of "cultural religion". Though Sweden's is officially Lutheran, the "nation's most sacred sense of itself is organized far more around its commitment to democratic welfare liberalism" (p. 57).

Professor Demerath is clearly a hard nosed intellectual unimpressed both by the high church and by liberation theology. He notes wryly that the *comunidades eclesiais de base*

(or ECB) set up by radical priests in Latin America went "normal" once the earlier charismatic clerics left (p.22). He also shows how religion, including its highest virtuosos, can be used effectively for worldly politics. It will interest readers to know, for instance, that Protestantism was funded by Americans in Guatemala to subvert the hold of the Catholic Church (p. 30). This has turned out to be quite a successful strategy as most of the city's "leading lights" today are Protestants (p. 32).

Let us move on to Poland. There is no denying that Lech Walesa used the Catholic Church very effectively during the Solidarity movement. But once that phase was over, the Church began to lose its grip over the people very rapidly. Demerath writes: "To many Walesa quickly lost his charisma and reverted to working-class form as an unkempt rube..." (p.38). In the same society where during the anti-communist struggle the church played a major role, President Kwasniewski dropped the phrase "so help me God" from his oath of office (p. 41). The church and religion have become that irrelevant in the once reverent Poland. This should correct the popular belief that certain societies are unremittingly religious in a canonical sense. This again shows how malleable culture really is when placed in a live, dynamic context. The certitudes of yesterday appear so impractical once social coordinates mutate and newer exigencies come to the fore.

Or take Israel. Many of the leading Zionists are personally not religious. Their commitment is to Israel as a nation, and not so much to Judaism as a religion. In other words, for these Zionists, Judaism is a "cultural religion". Their main opponents are the religiously orthodox Gush Emunim and the Haredim. But of these three, the Zionists have the largest support base (p.100). It is necessary to remember this as the Arab-Israeli conflict tends often to get portrayed in straight religious terms. Not only has this led us analytically in the wrong direction, but has had disastrous practical and political consequences. Of course, it makes a lot of sense to cast one's adversary in purely religious terms to demonstrate not just the irrationality of the enemy but of the enemy's religion as well. But it is for sociology to cure us of the spontaneous tendency to look for explanations in religious idiosyncrasies.

Demerath's treatment of India is also very insightful, and once again he is quite clear that neither Punjab nor Hindu activism can be understood principally in terms of canonical doctrines. He could have certainly devoted a few more pages to the subcontinent in this book as the lessons from this geographical and cultural region have such vast analytical bearing on the sociology of religion. In addition, comparisons between India and America are always very rich as the two countries are so



different at one level, and have great similarities on the other. Reading *Crossing of the Gods* I get the impression that Demerath is aware of this which is why it is disappointing that, given the scope of his work, India does not get the attention that it deserves. It is true that both India and Israel "illustrate the seductions and the subversions inherent in religious struggle for power" (p.127), but this conclusion would probably hold for the other countries too.

Then onwards we go to China, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia, and in each of these cases there is a very nuanced presentation of how canons are moulded by contexts. In the case of Thailand, for instance, we have a feel of the tension between a Buddhist State and State Buddhism (p.132-2). The tendency to see too many overlaps between Thailand's homogeneity and Buddhist hegemony is again a populist impulse waiting to be corrected. Not only is Buddhism's relation to the Thai state problematic, but there is the army too which needs to be factored in very centrally. Then there is Buddhism of the temples and "folk" Buddhism of the villages. True to his sociological sensibilities, Demerath separates both from "cultural Buddhism" (p.135).

The last section on America is very rewarding, especially for those who work on secularism and multiculturalism. America, like India, has publicly debated the relationship between church and state as well as on the provisions for affirmative action. This is why it is all the more interesting to understand what is really meant by the "Jeffersonian wall" of separation between the church and the state. The distinction that he draws in this connection between "establishment" and "free exercise"

with respect to religion in America is very illustrative (p.185). In fact, Americans too would find these pages very rewarding as many of them are confused about the constitutional correctness behind the overt role religion seems to play in American politics. As he takes exception to American exceptionalism, his work has the credentials to be truly comparative in character. ■

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# Analytical Foundations for a Future Edifice

Harish Khare

## PARTIES AND PARTY POLITICS IN INDIA

Edited by Zoya Hasan  
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. 566,  
Rs. 750.00

By now the story of the wayward career of the party politics in India is familiar. There are many chapters in this story, each making potentially absorbing reading. The birth, consolidation and then depletion of the one-party dominance by the Congress; the fragmentation of that one-party domination and the rise of regional political parties; the fitful record of the BJP as a possible successor to the Congress; the inability of the Congress to make a national level recovery, despite an impressive come-back in recent years in the states; and, the personalization of political organizations. These are some of the major themes in the story of the party politics in India.

Notwithstanding the exasperation and cynicism that characterize the discourse in the popular media about political parties, the scholars and students of Indian politics remain satisfied, even fascinated, by the complexities and depth of the interface between the citizens and the political parties. After all, political parties are indispensable organizers of political choice in a democracy and are the primary instruments available for giving direction and coherence to political life. The Indian political parties have indeed made critical contribution in sustaining institutions of democracy.

This story of Indian political parties is told reasonably well in this collection which brings under one roof some of the "classic" writings on the party system in India. It is a valuable addition to the Indian politics scholar's bookshelf.

Since the change is taking place at a fast pace, and since what deemed durable till a few years ago does not appear so, many articles in the collection may appear dated. Nonetheless, the collection does provide a benchmark against which to judge what is durable and what is changing in the Indian party system.

A collection by its very nature cannot address all the issues; the editor has to make a choice between representation and comprehensiveness. This provides a good historical overview.

Some questions are yet to be answered definitely. Why did the upper castes, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, abandon the Congress, and why has the Congress not been able to win them back? Was it a dissatisfaction with the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and its later aberrations; if the answer is yes, then is the process irreversible? Or, is the Congress

guilty of flawed social engineering? Or, were the reverses suffered by the Congress indicative of the fact that the "Congress system" had reached the limits of its efficacy?

There is fairly good insight into the linkage between social cleavages and the political mobilization as well as the institutional context of the rise of regional parties.

Mayawati gets a limited space. Hasan notes correctly that Mayawati continues to exercise sway over the mind and votes of the dalit community, despite the fact that there is so little that can be demonstrated by way of having been "achieved" by her for the community. All that there is to show is an undefinable sense of "recognition". Hasan quotes an IAS officer to provide an insight into the Mayawati phenomenon: "The dalit fight is not for economic emancipation, it is a battle for social recognition. If the dalit assertion was for economic rights then we would back the Communist parties. We are struggling for dignity and participation in government which gives us social status."

Perhaps a detailed study should be able to show the reasons behind her success in building/and holding on to that "core" support once she has arrived at the Sachivalaya in Lucknow. Will her appeal get diluted over the years as she hobnobs with the BJP; or, vice versa, will an association with BSP, make BJP change its spots? Or, will the upper castes continue to support BJP, even if it gets into political bed with the BSP? Or, will the BSP constituency see Mayawati's apparently expedient and self-serving alliances as brilliant tactical manoeuvres to make the upper castes fall in line? Or, will Mayawati herself realize the importance of blunting the sharp edges of her appeal in order to bargain/accommodate other castes?

There is an understandable preoccupation with electoral politics; the exception being Heath Yadav "social profile of Congress voters." Sridharan catalogues seven explanations for the fragmentation of the party system whereas Balveer Arora explains the dynamics of coalition building among parties. These essays bring out the fertile areas of research a scholar can still till, they also constitute a case for moving beyond the election outcomes. There still has to be an explanation as to why some parties like the Samajvadi Party and the BSP "prosper" without wanting to put in place internal institutional rules and procedures, while some others, equally eccentric leader-centric parties, like the TDP and the AIADMK have elaborate organizational procedures and rituals.

However, there is no hint in these studies of a major development: "familyization" of political parties. With a few exceptions, the parties are displaying shades of being leader-centric to family-centric. The most glaring case, of course, is that of Sonia Gandhi's entrenched hold over the Congress; what is more relevant, even those leaders who are fully convinced of Mrs Gandhi's limits as a leader in a mass-based

polity believe that her daughter can be the only alternative.

The "familyization" process as practised by the Congress, of course, is different from the earlier phenomenon of the Gopalans, the Farooquis, the Kripalans and the Dandvates. But the new process has become the role model for other parties. The Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, which began as a classic antithesis of whatever the Congress stood for, has now taken a leaf out of the Congress book and has apparently decided that the leadership must stay within the family. What is more the RJD constituency does not seem to mind. Even Mulayam Singh Yadav is practising politics of family. When a Balayogi of the TDP dies, the parliamentary seat goes to his widow. This process has percolated down to the district level. The emerging pattern is for the baton at the district and state level to be passed on to this or that member of the family of the leader. This "familyization" is bound to have an adverse effect on the usefulness of political parties as vehicles of political radicalization and social mobility.

There is no connect, on the one hand, between the political parties and the competition and conflict they generate and the need, on the other, to sustain and periodically re-enforce the pan-Indian state order. For instance, Anthony Heath and Yogendra Yadav pronounce the arrival of a "third electoral system" in which "the state, rather than the nation, has emerged as the effective arena of political choice." Then, Balveer Arora cites Paul Brass to the effect that "there is a strong sense of national identity among important, elite segments of society everywhere in India and a desire to maintain the unity of the Indian state and to strengthen it in order to maintain its place in the current world order, sentiments which are most effectively articulated by the BJP."

Yet if there is one lesson in the last ten years of economic reforms/globalization it is that India has yet to find the requisite mix of unitary compulsions and regional aspirations that would enable the managers of the Indian state to undertake the task of coherent governance. The BJP leadership, for instance, has tried to convert the limits of its geographical spread and parliamentary majority into a genuine federal coalition. Nonetheless, almost every month the BJP establishment is made to realize how this lack of geographical spread hobbles the Centre's efforts to "sell" basic administrative measures. For instance, as the Union Home Minister, Lal Krishan Advani has failed to forge an agreement among the chief ministers that issues like sabotage, subversion and infiltration be put on the Concurrent List of the Constitution.

This collection, nonetheless, provides the analytical foundations on which future research in party politics has to be built. ■

Harish Khare is Associate Editor, *The Hindu*, New Delhi.



# A Complex Vista

Anirudh Deshpande

RSS'S TRYST WITH POLITICS: FROM HEDGEWAR TO SUDARSHAN

By Pralay Kanungo

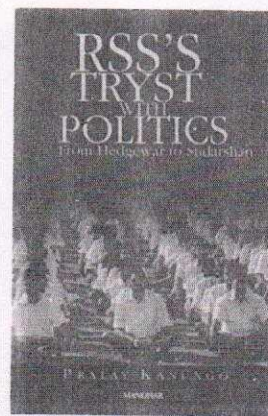
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 314, Rs. 625.00

This well conceived and informed volume is an important and timely addition to the growing corpus of critical literature on the *Sangh Parivar* and its saffron ideology. These days it must be read in the context of the shameful Gujarat carnage masterminded by the *Sangh Parivar* and its BJP state government in February-March 2002. The nuances of this volume would tend to imply that the contemporary state of Gujarat symbolizes the political project of Hindutva. The message it conveys through an admirable analysis of a totalitarian rightist organization and ideology ends up confirming the worst fears of a democrat. Moreover, Kanungo's trenchant critique is helpful in redefining the standard notion of minorities. In a dispensation of the *Sangh Parivar's* making the Muslims, Christians, secularists, feminists, doves, gay activists, environmental activists, social critics, non-conformist artists and writers are all in danger of losing their liberty and, if it comes to a Gujarat like situation, their lives as well. When the present *Sarsanghchalak* of the RSS chillingly speaks of the coming war between Hindus and anti-Hindus we are warned of a denouement worse than Huntington's contrived clash of civilizations. It is easy to imagine how many civil wars will break out in India if the RSS ends up implementing its political agenda.

The fact that an assimilative pluralistic country like India could also be home to vicious forms of communalism including Hindutva is in itself difficult to comprehend at times. This volume reminds us that the Hindutva ideology is essentially a product of colonialism. Developments during the colonial period like Hindu revivalism, Muslim separatism, extremist nationalist politics and colonial historiography were responsible for the rise of communalism in India. Hindutva, like Nazism and Fascism, is a distortion of modernism which should not be confused with the worldview of Hinduism. Hindutva, in sum, does not represent Hinduism although it has a substantial following. Nourished by the anti-Muslim religious bias of the Arya Samaj and the political extremism of leaders like Tilak it was fashioned into a narrowminded belief by Savarkar and Golwalkar. Driven by a pathological hatred of Muslims, Christians, Communists and now even the Liberals, Hindutva parades varying as cultural nationalism,

Hindu communalism, Hindu fundamentalism and majoritarianism. Subtle differences apart, these descriptive categories mean the same thing for social scientists and, more significantly, all Indian minorities. In revealing the culture of politics and political culture of the Janus faced RSS, Kanungo has done well to build on an epistemological base created by the work of D.R. Goyal, Bruce Graham, Christophe Jaffrelot, Peter van der Veer and others on exclusivist nationalism. This book contains valuable information on the birth, historical background and political journey of the RSS. However, upon receiving this volume this reviewer and potential readers may well ask the most obvious question regarding any publication: Why another book on the well researched RSS and the *Sangh Parivar*? In the context of Kanungo's submissions this question invites two correct answers.

First, a well researched monograph on the politics of the RSS sits nicely in the foreground of the ethnic cleansing witnessed recently in Gujarat. This deplorable episode of modern Indian history was inspired by the hate propaganda of the *Sangh Parivar*. The Gujarat pogrom makes a reevaluation of Hindutva and its ability to distort and ultimately destroy Indian civil society mandatory. Undoubtedly Gujarat is a showcase Hindutva performance. However, all this does not detract from this book's general merit. It raises fundamental issues regarding the relationship between the Indian state, constitution, republic and democracy on one hand and Hindu nationalism on the other. Many of these contemporary issues are touched upon competently in this book. Furthermore, and as the author asserts repeatedly, the politics of the RSS is woven around the concept of a unidimensional *Hindu Rashtra*. In this volume the RSS emerges as an undemocratic organization incapable of coexisting with democracy beyond a certain point. Its main aim, which is sometimes couched in the vocabulary of culture, is to appropriate political power and social spaces in the hope of destroying India's multicultural legacy and pluralist democracy and substituting it with the hegemony of the *savarna* and *sanatan* Hindus. The attitude of the patriarchal RSS towards the adivasis, dalits and women makes this absolutely clear. The RSS, very much like the German National Socialists in the 1920s and 1930s, is willing,



prepared and organizationally capable of using electoral politics to ultimately destroy a democratic experiment based on India's largely secular freedom struggle. Hence our experience of the RSS-BJP politics undermines the hope, mainly entertained by some liberals during the period of BJP's ascendancy, that Hindutva's participation in democracy and governance will soften it. How the RSS and its *Parivar* of cadres has come into this position since Hedgewar established it in 1925 is explained by this volume. The politics of Indian Nazism, we are told confidently, grew gradually in the medium of culture. Its success as the BJP *avataar* was later assured by the political and economic failures of the Indian state.

Second, capable theses ought to be published anyway. Books based on good doctoral dissertations are usually quite solid. This one is no exception. However, the greatest merit of this volume is to be found in the ability of the author to present an insider's view of the RSS. Kanungo gives you a feel of a 'hands on' experience of the RSS and its various activities ranging from holding *shakhas* to establishing schools for the indoctrination of young minds. While Jaffrelot's submissions on Hindutva are based on his study of central India, Kanungo's generalizations emanate from an intensive fieldwork carried out in the Phulbani district of Orissa. The RSS model which emerges from Orissa is similar to models elsewhere. These state models are perfect examples upon which a nationwide generalization regarding the activities of the *Sangh Parivar* can be made. A scrutiny of these models suggests the following about the RSS. Ideological indoctrination from the neighbourhood *shakha* upwards, the charisma and personal influence of local RSS leaders, a well-drilled cadre, the magnetism of the *pracharaks* and a large network of educational institutions are the greatest strengths of the RSS. This volume highlights the centrality of the RSS *pracharaks*, i.e., ideologue-activists equivalent of *commisars*, to the process of organizational foundation, consolidation and expansion. Unsurprisingly, the *pracharaks* lead the RSS attempts to 'civilize' the tribals and integrate sections of dalits into the Hindutva project. These are some of the results of



Kanungo's meticulous fieldwork and interviews with *swayamsevaks*.

Four chapters of this book, following the introduction, are the most meaty and contain invaluable analyses of the foundation, organization and expansion of the RSS. Chapters six and seven narrate the well known story of the RSS's political rise in contemporary India. Hence this review will offer no comments on them. The terse Conclusion comprises important observations. Notable among these is a succinct paragraph underscoring the difference between the multidimensional nature of philosophical and historical Hinduism and the "precariously narrow" Hindutva of the *Sangh Parivar*. Kanungo is also right in concluding that the growing influence of the *Sangh Parivar* and the willingness of the regional parties to support the BJP at the Centre, "need not be dismissed as pure political expediency; it also indicates the shift of the Indian polity towards the Right." That this should have happened in a period of economic liberalization and the dismantling of the Nehruvian state should not surprise anyone.

The Introduction is comprehensive and summarizes all the views on the RSS. These views, in general, underline the RSS's religious and exclusivist nationalism which militates against Indian history and pluralism. However, in commenting upon Achin Vanaik's attempt to differentiate between the RSS and National Socialism the author could have gone further in his categorization of the *Sangh*. According to Vanaik the RSS does not share the Nazis' anti-capitalism. In this reviewer's opinion the Nazi party's dislike of capitalism was too superficial to be noteworthy. Indeed the RSS comes closest in definition to the Nazi Party due to (a) its emphasis on following a single leader [*ek chalak anuvaritita*], homogenous culture and *Hindu Rashtra*, (b) its academically bogus and socially damaging assertion of Aryan and Vedic supremacy over Indian religio-cultural pluralism, (c) its violent attitude towards the minorities, (d) its paramilitary and authoritarian organization and (e) its flagrant abuse of a democratic system.

On the whole this book is recommended to the lay and specialist reader alike. It is easy to read and offers an insight into the complex vista of the RSS ranging from Hindutva attempts to appropriate the Gandhian notions of *swadeshi* to its stern discourse on culture, family, women, films and celibacy etc. Kanungo's prose is shorn of post-modernist jargon albeit it successfully delivers a contemporary and comprehensive critique of India's foremost communal organization. With better editing the book could have been shorter but the author can hardly be held accountable for this minor drawback. ■

**Anirudh Deshpande**, a Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, is the author of *Colonial Constraints and Declining Power: British Military Policy in India 1900-1945* (Forthcoming, Manohar), and co-editor of *British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces 1857-1939* (OUP, 2002), New Delhi.

## An 'Insider' Critique

Surjit Mansingh

### HINDUTVA DEMYSTIFIED

By Virendra Prakash

Virgo Publications, Delhi, 2002, pp. 187, Rs. 295.00

The political climate in India today has come to resemble the pre-monsoon weather of sweltering heat without relief. Many feel trapped inside a pressure-cooker, looking up at a leaden lid of grey sky and saffron agenda, and wondering if we can avoid catastrophe. The most important questions facing us today are: how to recover and rebuild a liberal polity so badly damaged by the selfishness of the political-bureaucratic class; how to transform a callous and hierarchical society into a caring and egalitarian one in which all Indian citizens can begin to feel secure; how to release the productive energies of Indians so that achievement is not penalized and living standards at the bottom can improve; how to establish a rule of law and make authority accountable for its actions—or non-actions. Answers to these questions all require one common ingredient for their implementation, *courage*. Without courage we remain armchair blabbers. Stereotyped images of Indians—especially of Indian civil servants—do not include the quality of courage, though it was conspicuous in the life of Mahatma Gandhi and is to be found among many unsung individuals today. The first compliment one must pay Virendra Prakash, a former civil servant, is for his courage in publishing the book under review.

*Hindutva Demystified* is a book that deserves wide readership throughout 'India that is Bharat'. The book is doubly valuable because its author is a devout Hindu from a 'dvija' family, and has been a distinguished member of the Indian Administrative Service since 1959. His account of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) 'shakha' training imparted to young boys suggests personal experience. He came into close contact with leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) when he was Secretary to the Government of India, and in other senior administrative positions such as Chief Secretary and Municipal Commissioner Delhi. Therefore, his analysis of Hindutva carries the weight of authenticity, perhaps initial empathy, and certainly deep thought; it is not an ideologically motivated critique to be lightly dismissed out of hand. His well-argued warning that our beloved country is in serious danger because of the programme and activities of the *Sangh Parivar* needs to be heeded before it is too late to save either democracy or plurality. India has faced and overcome 'dangerous decades' before, but neither the linguistic reorganization of states in the 1960s nor even the

Emergency in the 1970s threatened to wrench apart the very fabric of composite Indian culture and society as much as the Hindutva agenda of this decade. It can best be compared with the 'two nation' platform of the All India Muslim League 1937-1947, and we all know the results of that.

Virendra Prakash has used a brilliant stylistic device to document these dangers, taking the letters spelling Hindutva and explaining them with the help of writings and speeches by Guruji Gowalkar, Veer Savarkar, and contemporary leaders. 'H' stands for high caste male hegemony, legitimized by mobilization against the 'common enemy'—Muslims and Christians today, low castes and untouchables tomorrow, women always. The crying need for social uplift is ignored. 'I' stands for insecurity and inferiority seemingly ingrained in the 'Hindu mind-set' since the 1920s, which leads them as a majority to behave like a paranoid minority. 'N' is for negation of the rich diversity of Indian culture and the true spirit of *sarva dharma sambhava* incorporated into the Constitution of the Republic of India as secularism. 'D' is for duplicity and use of unlawful means toward concealed ends. Without the equal application of law there can be no civilized state. 'U' is for the uncommitted, uncaring, attitudes displayed toward other people and living beings, including the supposedly 'sacred cow' whose pitiable fate on Delhi's roads we witness every day. 'T' is for triple faced, referring to the fusion of religion, culture, and narrow nationalism in the doctrine and practice of the RSS and its political and muscular arms in the *Sangh Parivar* such as the Bajrang Dal and the VHP. Similar fusions in other countries have led to civil war and failed states; is that to be the fate of India too? 'V' is for vendetta and what he rightly calls the "suicidal illogic of 'righting historical wrongs'" which does *not* have a mandate from the Indian Constitution or the Indian people. 'A' is for anti-India, and this penultimate chapter shows how the Hindu version of the two-nation theory threatens our ability to cope with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as our survival as a modern, united, country.

The last chapter illustrates the analysis summarized above from events in Ayodhya, Gujarat, and Orissa in 2002 that horrify from newspaper headlines. Yet Virendra Prakash ends on the optimistic note that "India is too vast, too eclectic in its outlook, too poor" to be distracted by "diabolic ventures" that must end now. ■

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# Sage Ruminations

I.P. Khosla

THE MARCH OF FOLLY IN AFGHANISTAN, 1978-2001

By Jagat Mehta

Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp.224, Rs.450.00

Professionalism inspired by objectivity, a primary concern with the overriding need for good relations with contiguous neighbours and the pursuit of enlightened self-interest superscribed Jagat Mehta's long and distinguished career in the diplomatic service. This collection of writings on Afghanistan has interest not so much because he was a participant in the formulation of India's policies towards this neighbour during the most critical period of the last quarter century—he retired a month before the Soviet military intervention of December 1979—but because he was then able to apply a more leisured attentiveness, based on his experience, to the study of developments there; the earliest piece was penned in 1981. There is homogeneity here, a consistency which appears once the compulsions of being in service, of responding daily to disparate unpredictable events, disappear.

The collection comprises two long analytical treatments, one prepared at the Woodrow Wilson Centre, the other a keynote address delivered at a conference on the lessons and legacy of Afghanistan which was organized by him at the University of Texas in October 1989; the former, in the shortened form published in *Foreign Policy* in 1982, is also included. There are other writings: newspaper articles; a piece for the *Indian Annual Foreign Policy Review* of 1985; an ordered description of the world after September 11.

Unity is provided by Barbara Tuchman's suggestion that states and governments very often take decisions contrary to their own interests, knowing that better alternatives are available; and the cadence in many of the pieces, appearing in one variation here, another variation there, is that there was a quadrilateral of misperceptions that led to the tragedy of Afghanistan.

The Soviets blundered in underestimating both the damage that their invasion would cause to their international political standing and the tenacity of the Afghan resistance. They just did not learn the lessons that history would have taught them without too much effort if they had looked at the British experience and writings on the subject. The Americans blundered in underestimating Soviet concerns about their national security which played the chief role in their decision to intervene; in thinking that this was the first step in a move to throttle the oil arteries of the West or at least realize Peter the Great's ambition for a warm water port; by inserting

Islamic radicalism and violence into a genomic melange which then generated, in the years following the Soviet withdrawal and unattended by the US, a monster. India blundered: by abstaining in the January 1980 voting on the question in the UN General Assembly, thus alienating the Afghans with whom we had strong traditional bonds; by allowing, more or less unchallenged, the remilitarization of Pakistan; and by departing from, by 'betraying the fundamentals', as the author says, the principles of nonalignment which it had taken the lead to formulate. And Pakistan blundered: in thinking that unlimited western economic aid would follow its alignment with western policy; and in calculating that military aid would be the panacea for its problems. Both India and Pakistan blundered in treating this issue from a Cold War viewpoint instead of one that concerned good neighbourly relations in the South Asian region; friendship, even reasonably good relations between India and Pakistan is the sine qua non for good relations between any of them and Afghanistan. As long ago as 1989 he had said that 'an Afghan settlement and South Asian rapprochement must ... go hand in hand.'

So this is the quadrilateral, and, curiously, the Afghans are left out of those whose misperceptions and misjudgements led to the quarter century of calamity in Afghanistan. The intrigues of Hafizullah Amin, the subservience of Babrak Karmal, the false bravado of Najibullah, not to mention the thousands who joined the leftist and pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan; the mindless violence of some of the mujahideen leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; the willingness of others among them to become instruments in the hands of the US or of Pakistan; these aspects are somewhat summarily treated and the Afghans end up as objects, victims without subjectivity. Events after September 11 may tend to reinforce this judgement, that the Afghans are just victims without any substantial say in their own fate. But few will agree, given the history of Afghanistan, that before that the Afghans themselves had little or no say in what happened, or that agency was wholly or largely in the hands of the foreigner.

The author does suggest some of the things that could have been done to halt the march of folly in Afghan policy, starting with his own efforts soon after leaving the diplomatic service. These are of more than purely historical interest. He tried to meet Prime Minister

## The March of Folly in Afghanistan

1978-2001



JAGAT S. MEHTA

Indira Gandhi; met Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao and Foreign Secretary Ram Sathe and then B.K.Nehru, to all of whom he explained the urgent need for prophylactic diplomacy to ensure that South Asia was not once again riddled by superpower rivalry resulting in grave economic and political damage to Indian interests. These interlocutors either did not share the urgency and magnitude of his concerns or, if they did, took no followup action. There was therefore no change in the policy of the government of India which he characterizes as 'the most serious avoidable mistake in 54 years of the foreign policy of India'.

Swedenization of the region and Finlandization of Afghanistan through a concert of regional powers working under the auspices of the United Nations are his steps to a solution. These proposals appear consistently in his writings through the early 1980's. They are based on three suppositions. First, that the Soviets could not be defeated in Afghanistan, that when they did leave it was a unilateral withdrawal without parallel such as could lead to a new pattern of global politics marked by nonintervention. There has been some debate about this, but there are strong grounds for believing that the Soviets were defeated and left the battlefield. Indeed most Afghans, and a few others, are convinced that this defeat was the proximate and most substantial cause for the dissolution of the Soviet alliance system and of the Soviet Union itself. Second, that the Afghan national resistance will not fade away. This proved true, but in the current situation when one asks how much traditional Afghan nationalism remains, of the kind that the British faced in the nineteenth century, there has to be a large question mark in front of it. Third, that history can be turned back to revert Afghanistan to the pre-1978 dispensation of an independent nonaligned country. Setting aside the question of what nonalignment means today, this was probably never going to be possible after December 1979; the external powers had soon after spun too complex a web of interconnecting interests for it ever to be disentangled. In the current situation such a reversal of history is even



Swedenization of the region and Finlandization of Afghanistan through a concert of regional powers working under the auspices of the United Nations are his steps to a solution. These proposals appear consistently in his writings through the early 1980's.

more difficult, perhaps impossible. It is nevertheless a tribute to the author's judgement that in the years after 1989 India did make an effort to bring the regional countries onto an agreed set of steps that could be taken for the restoration of the independence of an Afghanistan that was then rapidly coming under Pakistan's influence.

The last essay, written after September 11, is a sober reflection on the emerging new horizontal bipolarity: between governments interested in stability, using their resources to

enforce law and order, to generate development, and generally raise the standards of living and of human development of their peoples; and transnational groupings growing out of the discontent and disaffection, injustice and deprivation characterizing much of the developing world and even parts of the developed countries. On the one hand there is the international community and the United Nations, a series of resolutions adopted particularly by the Security Council after September 11, national laws adopted by an increasing number of countries including India, tougher security measures which often affect the daily lives of the people, all signifying the determination of nations to work together to curb and eventually eliminate the menace of terrorism; on the other the argument that it is not easy to distinguish terrorism from violence in support of a worthy or just cause, that a global malaise of disaffection leads to terrorist acts and that the threat of terror could therefore be more insidious and longer lasting than the earlier nation state based threats.

This argument is part of an intensive debate which has still not ended: between those who want governments to have more

power to deal with terrorism and those who want priority for removing the sources of disaffection and deprivation; between Israel and the Palestinians, for instance; between India and Pakistan, or between the government of India and human rights groups. But in Afghanistan, where the most recent cycle of this debate started, operation Enduring Freedom has made it irrelevant.

The solution to this argument which is provided by the author is indisputable if somewhat idealistic: a Gandhian pledge to peace and nonviolence. However his answer to the question how to get there is certainly not without dispute. It is that only the US can provide the lead, the ideology and the resources.

Jagat Mehta's writings are always a pleasure to read, whether one agrees with what he says or not: for his grasp on international affairs; for his ability to analyse the critical forces at work; and for his elegant and somewhat stately prose. This collection of writings lives up to all these expectations. ■

**I.P. Khosla**, a former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan (1985-89), has served as Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

## CONTEMPORARY INDIA

A Journal of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library



EDITOR: O.P. KEJARIWAL

*Contemporary India* has been conceived as the torch-bearer of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library — an Institution known all over for its objective of promoting high standards of historical research. Its contribution over the past three decades has been highly respected and widely acclaimed by the scholarly community.

*Contemporary India* with a multi-disciplinary focus aims to provide a forum to scholars worldwide for serious academic research and discussion on issues relating to the Indian nation and on its life in the modern period.

*Contemporary India* is a quarterly publication. The first issue for the quarter January-March 2002 includes articles by Judith Brown, Ramachandra Guha, Matin Zuberi, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Kalim Bahadur among others. The next issue for April-June 2002 is in print.

Articles are solicited. More details may be obtained from the Editor, *Contemporary India*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti House, New Delhi-110011. (E-mail: [nmml@vsnl.net](mailto:nmml@vsnl.net))

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# An Academic Life

Indivar Kamtekar

POWER, POLITICS AND THE PEOPLE: STUDIES IN BRITISH IMPERIALISM AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

By Partha Sarathi Gupta

Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001, pp. 502, Rs. 775.00

A long-serving and highly respected professor of history at Delhi University, Partha Sarathi Gupta died in August 1999 at the age of sixty-five. The sixteen articles collected in this volume were first published between 1966 and 1998, a period stretching over more than thirty years. They bear the imprimatur of a mature and devoted scholar. Their hallmark is solid detail of unusual density.

The volume opens with an appreciative introduction by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, who knew Partha Sarathi Gupta well (they attended the same school, taught the same subject, and lived in the same cities). Biographical information is supplied in the introduction, institutional affiliations are recorded, and intellectual contexts sketched. Bhattacharya also explains that he has chosen to arrange the essays thematically.

If we choose, however, to read the essays in chronological order, they might unfold the course of an academic life. The earliest in this collection, a 1966 essay titled, 'The Quality of Life and Indian Scholarship', shows the thirty-two year old author evaluating Indian academic institutions and their output, earnestly surveying the sea on which he was to sail. He deplores low standards: 'the bulk of our work has been imitative rather than creative'. He bemoans the 'increase in the number of substandard staff', and the effects of political pressure. The next articles are colloquium offerings. Then come the feathers in the cap: addresses occasioned by honours, like the presidentship of the modern India section of the Indian History Congress, an invitation to deliver the Deuskar Lectures in Calcutta, and so on. Chronologically the last, the 1998 article is the General President's address to the delegates at the Indian History Congress.

Much more than any earlier piece, this is a view from a podium. The issue is: How does one explain the emergence of nation states? What were the roles of religion, language, collective memory, economic networks, and pre-existing political structures? Can insights and warnings from the experience of Europe be brought home to Indian history? More generally, what kind of history should be espoused? This leads to an affirmation, a credo rather than a clarion call:

I prefer enquiry and generalisations based on empirical research rather than generalisations founded on metaphysical concepts, or the manipulation of a set of abstract oversized concepts.

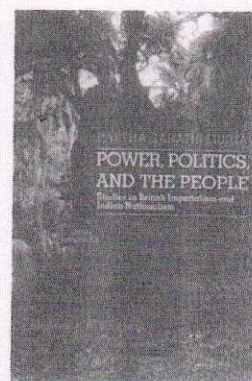
Here is someone who obviously abjures flashy

phrases, concessions to the box-office, and playing to the gallery.

Partha Sarathi Gupta's doctoral research at Oxford on British labour history made him an Indian authority on Europe, and hence a member of a species always on the verge of extinction. Perhaps the requirements of intellectual survival, after returning home from Oxford, made him look for nourishment nearer by. He turned to Indian history. In a paper on the Indian working class, he examined the sources of industrial labour in cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Kanpur. What were the workers' regional and caste origins, and was Indian industrialization hampered by labour shortage? Such questions continue to be staples of research.

While he had begun his academic career by looking at labour, in course of time Partha Sarathi Gupta's forte became the study of British policy in India. He sought to settle a few standard questions in this area. Was British policy conducive to Indian industrialization in the inter-war period? No, he answered, it was not. He announced, with archival authority, that A.K. Bagchi's conclusions on this matter were substantially correct. British officials had spoken about the Indianization of the officer corps of the Indian Army: how sincere were they? After careful examination of the documents, Gupta announced that they were not sincere: their behaviour was marked by reluctance and prevarication. Any gains that accrued in Indianization owed more to Indian nationalist pressure than to British sincerity. Another question was: What were the calculations behind the Government of India Act of 1935? Was it meant to steer India towards self-government? Once again, Gupta's answer was negative. Contrary to the imperialist view of Indian history, the 1935 Act was not a step towards freedom. It was meant to divide Indian politicians and thereby to deflect challenges to imperial control.

Not all answers were so straightforward. Partha Sarathi Gupta was too good a historian to see the world in black and white. Examining how the judiciary functioned in the aftermath of the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, he emphasized that courts sometimes questioned executive actions and embarrassed the government as a whole. 'Juridical liberalism' constrained the colonial government, preventing it from becoming a repressive monolith. It was an authoritarian government, not a totalitarian one. Our understanding of this government needed to be nuanced.



Gupta also rebutted the charge that the Partition of India was a parting kick by British imperialists, designed to cripple their ex-colony. Did the British really wish to divide India? The documents revealed—quite contrary to a common Indian conviction—that in the 1940s the British tried fairly hard to keep India united (because this suited their military aims against Russia better). Why were the British so keen that India join the Commonwealth after Independence? Again, the kernel of the answer was military. Decoding the word 'Commonwealth', Gupta showed that the British vision of India within the Commonwealth meant, in their eyes, that India would be kept firmly within a British military alliance.

Of course this plan did not work out. British aims—like the goal of an India united for defence purposes—had to be given up; expectations had to be scaled down. When India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir, many British calculations were blown to smithereens. Partha Sarathi Gupta summed up his assessment of British policy towards India in the late 1940s by calling it 'a study in failure, failure in the pursuit of multiple illusions'.

While he preferred the minute scrutiny of limited subjects, Gupta could, when needed, deal deftly with larger themes. One article takes up the debate on the causes of imperialist expansion. Several historians, most notably Robinson and Gallagher in their book *Africa and the Victorians*, had seen political rather than economic motivations as crucial. After taking the reader on a brisk tour of South Africa, West Africa, Latin America, the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia, Gupta concluded by defending the case for the primacy of economic factors over a purely political hunger for power. In another essay, asking whether imperialism reflected capitalism, he concluded that it did: 'imperialism itself is best understood in capitalist terms'. Nevertheless, certain reformulations were necessary. *Pace* Lenin, trade and markets mattered more than outlets for metropolitan finance capital.

In his Deuskar Lectures, titled 'Radio and the Raj, 1921-47', Gupta explored why the British failed to use the radio in India as an effective medium of propaganda. The radio's propaganda potential remained unrealized,



Gupta argued, because the British gave it insufficient money and inadequate thought. Another essay, still further off the beaten track, is on 'Music and Communalism in Bengal'. Centred on the career of Kazi Nazrul Islam, and celebrating his efforts for a nationalism above Hindu-Muslim differences, it is steeped in patriotic songs, which Gupta quotes with relish. No rigour is sacrificed thereby: one of the footnotes to the article is 'HMV Cassette No. STHVS 24029'.

The articles in this volume have a distinctive stamp. The style is austere. One article does comment that 'The [first world] war, while increasing the British lion's appetite, had weakened its digestive capacity'—but such a lapse from sobriety is rare and momentary. The purpose of a paper is often stated in its opening sentence. The author disdains being clever, or taking vulgar delight in startling disclosures. He does not try to provide the stuff of excited coffee house gossip. He does not try to be fashionable. Despite the popularity of gender studies and ecological history, women and trees fail to pop up in these pages. Neither do odd, quirky characters. This is original research in a traditional mould.

Its virtues are traditional. Nothing is woolly: the question asked is always clear, and so is the answer arrived at. Ideas and information are punctiliously acknowledged. The judgements are magisterial, unhurried and well-considered. Different sides of each case have always been carefully heard, and the evidence scrupulously weighed, before a verdict is reached. The research is painstaking and meticulous, and the conclusions trustworthy. Not a single footnote is incomplete or out of place. One cannot imagine a single relevant fact, however damaging to the author's argument, ever being suppressed. In short, the essays are accurate, unpretentious and valuable.

But the collection may not capture, for the casual reader who did not know him, why Partha Sarathi Gupta inspired widespread and deep affection. The reason he was loved became very apparent after he fell ill. Stricken by a stroke, and reliant on a crutch, he refused to founder, rolled up his sleeves, and continued researching. He finished editing his part (three huge volumes of documents on the years 1943-44) of the Indian Council of Historical Research's *Towards Freedom* project, well before the editors of companion volumes did. As he struggled on despite his handicap, you saw in him old-fashioned love for historical research, and courage, and sheer dedication. It was no surprise when, soon after he died, the Delhi University history department's new library was named after him. His presence was heart-warming. He stood for something. If historians are allowed to enter heaven then Partha Sarathi Gupta is certainly to be found there, toiling in the archives. ■

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## A Classic Revisited

Narayani Gupta

### ALBERUNI'S INDIA

Translated and edited by Edward C. Sachau (Trubner & Co., London, 1889) Rupa & Co., 2002, pp. ix+820, Rs. 395.00

Reprints of classics are always welcome, and applauded. Unfortunately, they often do not understand that reprints need as much editorial care as a new manuscript. The book under review is a case in point. One is delighted to welcome back this timeless classic—BUT

1. The cover has a sketch of the five-storeyed Qutab Minar, with two gentlemen in shawls and turbans gazing out from the foreground. Alberuni and friend? Not possible. *Al Hind* was written in 1030, the Qutab attained its full height in the 1360s. We can now expect to see Bernier's *Travels in the Mughal Empire AD 1656-68* with a view of Correa's LIC building on the cover.

2. Sachau's translation, published in 1910, was reproduced by a Delhi printer in 1983. It was entitled *Alberuni's India, an accurate description of all categories of Hindu thought, as well those which are admissible as those which must be rejected*. The present edition has reduced this to *Alberuni's India, as will (sic) those which are admissible as those which must be rejected!*

In the text, all marginal subheads have been inexplicably deleted. There are irritating abbreviations (e.g. 'On Mount Meru according to the belief of the authors of the Puranas' has become 'On Mount Meru according to the belief (sic)').

3. And this is really a disaster—over 150 pages which are unusable (pp. 165-820, 'Annotations'). The 1910 edition was in two volumes, each paginated separately. The present edition has been typeset afresh, with continuous pagination. Result: Section II, p. 3 corresponds to page 407, but the Annotations' page references have NOT been changed accordingly! Maybe the publishers could sell the book at Rs. 75.00 less than the marked price?

Alberuni was a polyglot, as was his translator. Alberuni was fluent in Arabic, Farsi, Sanskrit. Sachau translated *Al Hind* into German in 1884 and later into English. It is a sad commentary on Indian scholarship that there has been no new edition, no attempt to compare Alberuni's interpretation with the Sanskrit texts he used. This was a landmark manuscript—the first international encyclopaedia of the philosophical texts and scientific treatises of early medieval India.

Alberuni, an astronomer-mathematician of Khiva, north of Afghanistan, was brought to Ghazni in 1017 as a prisoner of war. At the court of Ghazni he met poets and scholars,

among whom was Firdausi, the greatest Farsi poet of all time. As one tries to visualize that world, where the hazards of travel and the vagaries of war did not constrict scholarship, one realizes how inadequate it is to study South Asian history in isolation, how necessary it is to read it in conjunction with that of other regions, to appreciate the arts and knowledge-banks 'sans frontières' that flourished in a world of changing political frontiers.

What for others would be a lifetime's work was achieved by Alberuni in thirteen years. Europeans would call him a 'Renaissance man'. Curious not only about mathematics and astronomy, but also folklore, languages and geography, he was part of that tradition of transmitting South Asian scholarship to Europe via Baghdad. 37 chapters in *Al Hind* are devoted to astronomy and astrology. "The Hindus do not consider it wearisome to reckon with large numbers, but rather enjoy it" (p. 405). Nine chapters are on aspects of religion, with sections on the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the *Puranas*. Two describe, with some impatience, rather bizarre superstitions, concluding tolerantly "but tricks of this kind are common to all nations" (p. 183).

The ten chapters on geography is inevitably all about north India. On Kashmir, he reports "(The inhabitants) used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly Jews, but at present they do not allow any Hindu whom they do not know personally to enter; much less other people" (p. 194). Twenty-one chapters are rich in sociological details. He sees the Varna system as something common to most societies. "The kings of antiquity—spent most of their care on the division of their subjects on different classes and order" (p. 83). "Most of the Hindu festivals are celebrated by women and children only" (p. 588). On Diwali "people dress festively and give each other presents of betel leaves and areca nuts... (and) light a great number of lamps" (p. 592).

About *Sati*, "If a woman loses here husband, she cannot marry another man... she has either to remain a widow or to burn herself" (p. 563). Beef eating had once been prevalent, but was now prohibited (p. 560). After listing explanations for this, he himself inclines to an "economical reason" (the cow as provider of milk, the uses of dung, their use as draught animals) and is reminded of a similar prohibition in Babylonia.

A compelling read, despite loads of awe-some astronomical calculations. To end this review, the most well-known quote (p. 6), "The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no religion like theirs... If they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their mind, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is". Jet-setting ministers, are you listening?

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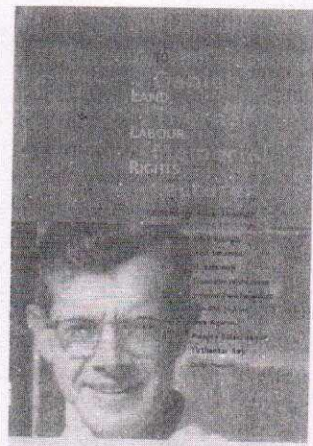
# The Missing Wonder that was India

Nasir Tyabji

LAND, LABOUR AND RIGHTS: 10 DANIEL THORNER MEMORIAL LECTURES

Edited by Alice Thorner

Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 279+xxxi, Rs. 525.00



One of the accompaniments of the national movement in India, as is the case with all liberation movements, was the emergence of a group of foreign, mostly western, friends of the movement, friends of India in our case. Mary Carpenter, C.F. Andrews, Annie Besant, Madelaine Slade come easily to mind for the pre-Independence period, J.B.S. Haldane and Andre Malraux during the post-Independence years. Within this latter group must be included Daniel and Alice Thorner, both perhaps better known in the worlds of development planning and academia than in public life, but critically important to India's development. During their most active period academic inputs played a substantial role in the planning process.

The issues mentioned in the title of the book, land and labour, if not rights, at least as we understand them today, certainly formed the core of the promises held out by the politico-economic programme of the national movement. As these promises continued to infuse the prose of the first three five-year plans, the essays in this book should help us to understand the reasons that attracted our friends to India in the first place. Alice Thorner, in her Introduction, refers to Daniel Thorner's initial engagement with India stemming from friendship with P.N. Haksar and K.T. Chandy, dating from the late 1930s, but it is clear that it was the issues that this group of students in London were espousing that drew Daniel Thorner to an emotional involvement with India.

The lecture series that commemorate Daniel Thorner were inaugurated in the mid eighties by Utsa Patnaik and in the intervening years she has been followed by Atul Setalvad, N. Krishnaji, Elizabeth Whitcombe, Jacques Pouchepadass, Nandita Haksar, Bina Agarwal, Pulapre Balakrishnan, Tirthankar Roy and Dilip Menon. If the series themselves begin with the Rajiv Gandhi era, the period of intellectual formation of the lecturers covers the high noon of Nehruvianism through to the curious mixture of self flagellation and narrowly conceived nationalism that permeated the mid and late 1980s and beyond. And differentiation in attitudes to the Indian experience is the most striking feature of the lecturers, more diverse than the topics chosen by them. This point is relevant because, by the end of a reading of the papers (whose indi-

vidual quality is not at issue), the reader is left wondering what possible reason could have led people like the Thorners to forsake the infinitely more rewarding prospects (career-wise) flowing from a consideration of issues of North American or European societies for such an apparently dispiriting subject like India and its endemic problems.

However, neither the lecturers, nor the Editor nor the publishers can be held responsible for failing in a task set them retrospectively by a (wayward) reviewer. Utsa Patnaik, for instance, would indignantly deny that there was even a trace of Nehruvianism in her mental make up. Her resolution of the paradox of the attraction of India to foreigners, in the context of its tawdry performance in the areas of land, labour and rights, lies implicitly in the argument that the state successfully redefined the goals of development, so that sectarian economic and political interests could be served while an inspiring image of national objectives was projected. She identifies a landlord dependant capitalist path of development in the Indian agrarian economy which all the while underlay the truly mesmerizing slogans of our childhood, and accelerated through the more utilitarian years of garibi hatao, and a government that works. A landlord based capitalist path delivers productivity increases only when potential technological changes in agricultural production allow for quantum increases in profits from farming. Further, these must be discernibly greater profits than those achievable from the combination of renting land out and money lending, both non production oriented activities. The major reason the absence of technological innovations in recent years has escaped widespread public notice is that continuing rural poverty has prevented the gap between food availability and the demand for food from expressing itself in any dramatic way.

N. Krishnaji examines the evidence for changes in the per capita availability of land, seeing this as a critical index which underlies prospects for increasing well being. While there are a number of factors which, in combination, affect the changes in this ratio, Krishnaji concentrates his discussion on demographic factors. Here the variations in population growth are shown to depend on inter-class and inter-regional variations in both fertility and mortality rates. Krishnaji shows

the complex ways in which the end result, of a faster rate of growth of the poorer sections of the population actually manifests itself. Ultimately, the demographic transition to a regime of low birth rates and low death rates will reach the poor only when there is a satisfactory level of provision of health services, opportunities for literacy, employment and provision for old age. All of these, it may again be noted, are the precise manifestations of the gap between the allure of a new India which drew the attention of sympathetic observers abroad, and the reality readily observable.

Two of the other lectures, by Bina Agarwal and Pulapre Balakrishnan discuss related issues. The first introduces the gender question into the problem of peasant land alienation and the indignities heaped on agricultural workers, particularly from dalit communities, while the other examines the "egregious" behaviour of agricultural wage levels in Kerala as compared to the rest of the country. While it is generally true that wage levels and agricultural production move in the same direction, in Kerala, they have been shown to diverge i.e. wage levels have risen while agricultural production has declined. Balakrishnan provides an explanation in terms of the effects of West Asian wage rates for labour, which provide an external push to agricultural wage rates by drawing off a section of potential agricultural workers. Bina Agarwal uses the term land alienation not as a process but as a condition of being. Women are alienated from the land because of social practices, land laws, and the operational procedures of the government. Self employed peasant households are then really units of self employed male small holders and unwaged female workers. Following through the policy implications of this formulation, Bina Agarwal presses for changes in perceptions towards the constraints faced by small holder agriculture and argues that a feminization of the discussion over agriculture related problems can open several areas for welfare increasing, gender equalizing and production improving



interventions.

Atul Setalvad and Nandita Haksar examine another area of divergence, between the constitutional promise and the actual performance in the area of social and economic rights and civil liberties. Setalvad critiques the Indian legislatures' propensity to pass "paper laws" which appear to be intended to be unenforceable, but does see a solution in the initiation of public interest litigation. Nandita Haksar deals with the important problem of reformulating the bases of struggles for rights and liberties in a world context where there is increasing encroachment on values and institutions that were established in response to assertions of the ex-colonial people after the Second World War. She mentions the closure of the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations, which move, apparently, was unopposed by the Group of 77, as an instance where demoralization of the countries of this group was made apparent. In this scenario, the only possible institutional basis for the reassertion of the rights of Third World peoples necessarily moves from nation states to coalitions of NGOs. In this formulation, of the focus of resistance now lying with organizations of coalitions of affected peoples together with articulate mobilizers, Nandita Haksar shares a vision similar to Atul Setalvad's.

Elizabeth Whitcombe and Jacques Pouchepadass turn to the colonial period to examine forms in which colonialism impinged in ways unfavourable to both the immediate (famine mortality) and the long term prospects (environmental degradation) of well being of the Indian people. It is surprising in this year of Gujarat, that accounts in black and white of the past can still make the reader angry, as does Elizabeth Whitcombe's account:

The picture in this brief sketch is frightful.

The giant misery of starvation was compounded by the appalling conditions of migration and overcrowding into which the starving poor were driven, often literally to death, conditions exacerbated by the official measures devised for famine relief. Worse, in the great famine years, by perhaps the cruellest of the many cruel ironies of famine history, rain which might have been expected to bring respite to the survivors of the drought, instead intensified their suffering: epidemic malaria took its colossal toll.

Jacques Pouchepadass, in his own account of the colonizer's view of the civil order, presents an instance, in more measured words, of the consequences of the clash between this world view, and the recipient cultures:

In [the view of the colonizer] civilized order was not a...forest with humans living in symbiosis with it, no matter how knowledgeable and sophisticated this interaction might be, but the domestic

order of cultivated fields, or a plantation of selected species, where yields are carefully monitored and the return of spontaneous vegetation efficiently prevented.

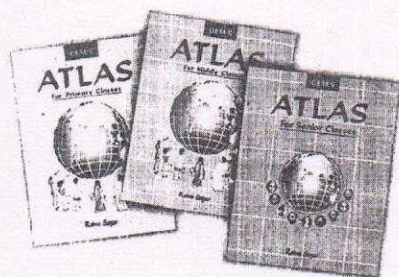
In these two papers, surely, are reflected the anger, concern and sympathy that drew successive foreign friends of India to engage with Indian problems. It is disconcerting, then, to find that Tirthankar Roy ends his own lecture with the thesis that all processes of industrialization, whether in Europe, Japan, or other parts of Asia entailed the same key processes: commercialization and modernization of traditional industry. Further: if such common roots, according to Roy, have given rise to vastly differing levels of prosperity, these are not due to global factors such as trade or colonization, but by local factors and by the history of these countries after colonial rule ended. If this indeed were true, what could possibly be the reason for the special interest that made these friends of India sympathetic, when there is so evident a failure to put our own act together? Roy's main thesis seems to attempt altogether too much in revising the longstanding conception of colonial deindustrialization by reducing the profundity of the colonial impact to numerically determinable changes in employment and national income. It may or may not have some nuance to add to India's colonial economic history. It does logically also reduce the phenomenon of the migration of Daniel and Alice Thorner's intellectual concerns to India to solutions of individual existential problems.

In Dilip Menon's lecture, presented 15 years after Utsa Patnaik's, there is an unexpected closure. Dilip Menon would find, somewhat to his own, and to Utsa Patnaik's surprise, that he agrees substantially with her thesis: that a narrow technocratic vision and strategy of development ("dams, nuclear establishments and steel mills but devoid of people" in Menon's words) underlay the aesthetics as much as the political economy of Independent India. Even interventions in the field of the arts came in the form of disjunctures, intrusions from outside and from on top.

Reading this collection of essays helps to open our eyes to many facets of India's present and past, with some sombre thoughts for the future. It also explains why the only friends of India we now seem able to attract are second generation NRIs flush with funds and nostalgia for the small town life their Mummies and Daddies inhabited, at least in their imagination. What it is unable to do is to explain the wonder that was Daniel and Alice Thorner and their fraternity with India. ■

Nasir Tyabji teaches at the Centre for Studies in Science Policy at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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# Institutions and Development

Amiya Kumar Bagchi

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By John Degenbol-Martinussen :

Sage, New Delhi, 2001, pp.260, Rs. 475 00

## INDUSTRIALISATION AND INNOVATION: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

By Nasir Tyabji

Sage, New Delhi, 2000, pp.162, Rs. 345 00

In the cacophony of propaganda for the so-called economic reforms and rich man's globalization in India, an elementary lesson obtained from the history of successes and failures is generally lost sight of, namely, no reforms can succeed without appropriate institutions to implement and sustain them. John Degenbol-Martinussen's new book addresses the broad issues surrounding the malformations in the institutional domain that would hinder the realization of the goals of economic reforms proclaimed by its strident advocates. Nasir Tyabji's new book tackles the issue of the way innovations are imported, generated and absorbed in India with a deep focus on history. The two discourses are complementary to each other, for, the only way a major country can succeed in global competition in any field is by successfully nurturing domestic innovations, effectively absorbing imported innovations, and doing all that over a wide arc and in a sustained fashion. Appropriate institutions are the key to all these endeavours.

Degenbol-Martinussen (DM for short) provides a historical view of the way industrial policies evolved since Independence and uses the concepts of the developmental state and embedded autonomy to illuminate what went wrong with India's attempt to use a policy of state patronage and import substitution to accelerate India's industrial growth rate in a sustainable fashion. The author is neither an uncritical admirer of the state-led industrial policy regime that prevailed until the 1980s, nor of the neo-liberal policies that were begun under Rajiv Gandhi, but blossomed fully from the period of Narasimha Rao's Prime Ministership.

Unlike the typical economists, DM has talked to actual businessmen and policy-makers before making his judgements about the appropriateness of various policy packages. He found, for example, that many prominent businessmen admitted that after Independence, the government had no alternative than to develop the heavy industries because the private sector was too weak to do the job, and such industries were essential for the project of India's industrialization. He also found that many businessmen admitted that they had benefitted from the policies of protection and

patronage pursued by the government.

Coming to the period of economic liberalization since 1991, DM found the industrial policies to be incoherent and shortsighted with very little depth of perspective. According to him, one of the major claims of the liberalizers, namely, that the reforms would reduce the scope for arbitrariness in government decisions and thereby reduce both bureaucratic red-tape and corruption has been largely falsified by the actual experience. Autonomy has not become embedded in the Indian government's decision-making apparatus. I agree almost entirely with DM's judgements in this respect except that I want to add one clarification and one rider. The clarification is that embedded autonomy requires practically the same fundamental reforms that energizes a successful developmental state. A successful developmental state needs to get rid of non-market private power and the major form of that power in an underdeveloped economy, namely, landlordism. Indian policy-makers recreated a new form of landlord power after getting rid of formal *zamindari* and *taluqdari*. A successful developmental state needs to drive towards universal literacy as quickly as possible. Most policy-makers in most states in India were happy to thrive on the miseries of an illiterate and dependent peasantry. A successful developmental state needs a set of rulers who are genuinely nationalist and can use the knowledge of other countries to enrich their own. Indian businessmen and dominant policy-makers at the Centre were, especially after the passing of the generation of freedom-fighters were too busy forming alliances of convenience to even grasp what is in national interest, let alone pursue it successfully. Policy autonomy does not grow out of such degraded soil.

Let me now turn to the rider to DM's espousal of the desirability of transparency and embedded autonomy. I want to ask, 'Isn't embedded autonomy an exception rather than the rule in most capitalist states?' Let us look at nineteenth-century Europe. The Second Empire in France was notorious for the way Empress Eugenie's love of jewels determined policy choices. Maybe, that was one reason, Prussia routed the French army in the battle of Sedan. But, *personalismo*, to use an expressive

## POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Coping with Liberalisation and International Competition in India



Latin American epithet need not be so costly, if the country concerned has raced well ahead in the capitalist race. Look at the recent revelations about the way President Bush and ex-President Bush and their trusted ministers and many of the Democratic party as well fraternized with Kenneth Lay of Enron, or Bernard Ebbers of WorldCom or other fallen knights of the world of megacorporations. Or take the cases of President Chirac of France and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy, who have thrived electorally in spite of having unanswered charges of abuse of office for money-making against them. The pity is that India cannot afford such slimy chumminess and yet, in addition to our home-produced muck, we are getting covered by the slime blown across all the oceans from the USA, as the affair of the defunct Dabhol Power plant has so strikingly illustrated.

DM's book is a balanced though slightly pained and bemused account of the wrongness of Indian institutions for any serious project of economic development in this country. He also takes account of the way in which the imperialist project embodied in the WTO and the threatened project of capital account convertibility is likely further to harm India's interest. The book will be useful to all students who want to move beyond the strident propaganda of neo-liberals and seek to understand the institutional framework that keeps India a poor and shambling giant.

Nasir Tyabji, another regular contributor to our understanding of the course of industrial development in India uses both history and theories of technological change to give body to his analytical concerns. He also devotes considerable attention to the way different segments of Indian capital adjusted to the challenge posed by the opening up of the Indian market to aggressive foreign competition. I gathered the impression that the best strategy for long-term success is to innovate in depth rather than try simply to float along with the current, giving up any pretence of holding on to a corporate strategy. This is well illustrated by the defeat of the Mody-Kashyap plan to convert the Tata Iron and Steel Company into a trading conglomerate and the victory of J. J. Irani in sticking to the further development of the core competence of





## Contending with Political Gridlock

A. Vaidyanathan

FACETS OF THE INDIAN ECONOMY

Edited by Rakesh Mohan

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 348, Rs. 625.00

the company. However, history and current practice in the corporate world has left Tyabji less than sanguine that the much-touted India Inc. can really emerge as an effective player in the global competitive game.

Tyabji has a very interesting but rather sad discussion of unexplored competitive strengths of Indian technology. With the usual manual dexterity of the Indian artisan and his pride in his craft, s(he) could enormously increase the flow of incremental innovations. However, Indian managers do not grasp the potential of this vast reservoir of human skill and ingenuity. As he puts it in the concluding chapter of the book, 'On two matters of critical significance, ... the design of the Indian innovation system was silent: first, on the conditions of existence of the industrial workers, even from the point of view of improving their 'efficiency', and second, on the modernization of the system of industrial relations, in order to introduce true collective bargaining' (p.147). Workers were never part of the profit calculations of most Indian industrialists except as a casually and wantonly exploitable and exhaustible resource.

The rudiments of a national innovation system could be found only in some government laboratories, a few public sector enterprises and the rarest of the rare cases of private enterprises such as TELCO under the management of Sumant Moolgaonkar and his team. With the coming of the WTO regime in trade, investment and IPRs, even that rudimentary system seems to be in tatters. However, if the democratic struggle of the Indian people succeeds in reversing some of the craven and criminal manoeuvres of the current government in depressing the conditions of the ordinary people and selling out most of the policy autonomy to corporate barons and fly-by-night financiers, Tyabji's book will provide many useful clues for starting the process of national reconstruction in the industrial sector. ■

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The volume under review is a collection of 12 lectures sponsored by the National Council of Applied Economic Research to mark its golden jubilee. They deal with a wide range of developmental issues, some specific to India and others relating to themes of broader interest, but all relevant and important to the contemporary debates relating to the ongoing process of economic reforms in India.

The first section of the volume, consisting of four lectures, focusses on recent developments in international trade and financial regimes, and their implications for India. T.N. Srinivasan and Anne Krueger, both ardent advocates of 'Free Trade', see the creation of WTO as a significant step towards creating an open and free international trading system. Srinivasan recognizes that the process and the outcomes of negotiations leading to the creation of WTO are not satisfactory: rich nations dominated the process of setting the agenda and negotiations; they successfully exploited differences among developing countries to prevent the latter from exerting concerted pressure to ensure that issues of their concern were seriously addressed. They also succeeded in incorporating non-trade issues on the agenda. In the event rich nations have also been able to get away with non-compliance of their limited and grudging commitments under the Uruguay Round to developing countries. The WTO has been far from effective in dealing with these problems. Both Srinivasan and Krueger emphasize the threat that the active promotion of regional trading blocks under the auspices of developed countries poses to the emergence of a free and open world trade regime.

In the light of these it is odd that Srinivasan should blame the developing countries' lack of enthusiasm for free trade, their preference for autarkic, import substitution strategies and failure to participate in the negotiations 'fully, vigorously and on equal terms' for not getting a satisfactory deal in the Uruguay round. Nor is there basis for optimism about their ability to secure a fairer deal in the current round of negotiations and ensure that the WTO will be markedly more effective in ensuring that commitments by the rich are honoured. Neither the power of the developed countries nor their propensity and ability to use it to further their interests has changed.

C. Rangarajan's account of the East Asian crisis of the mid nineties points to several inter-related factors which led to it. The mix of these factors varied from country to country, as

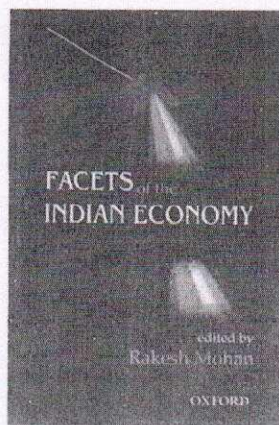
did the measures used to cope with the crises. An important lesson from this experience is the need for caution in allowing free flow of international capital and a strong and transparent regulatory system to monitor such flows. India escaped the contagion of the East Asia crisis largely because of its consciously conservative policy on external capital flows.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, speaking of the financial sector as a whole, points out that indiscriminate and hasty deregulation of the sector in recent years has in most cases been followed by serious financial crises. Only countries which had strong government regulation of financial markets were successful in avoiding, or withstanding, such crises. He notes that, despite the East Asian meltdown, several developing countries are seeking to liberalize their financial sector in the context of a nonexistent or weak regulatory system, thereby exposing them to greater risks of financial crises. Besides being transparent and independent of government, a good regulatory system must replace rigid and dysfunctional regulations relating to individual asset categories with regulation aimed at reducing the risk of investment portfolios and by creating incentives to encourage competition and innovation in the financial sector.

The other group of lectures on themes of broader interest are in section 3. Kaushik Basu argues that while ideology and value judgements are legitimate in assessing policies, one must recognize that there are situations in which the relative importance to be attached to different values becomes important (for example in choosing between a total ban on child labour as morally unacceptable and permitting it because it worsens the conditions of children in poor households). Similarly existing perceptions of the right course for achieving a value (he cites the example of stringent labour laws in India to protect workers against arbitrary lay off and retrenchment and to promote their workers' well being) must be open to change if evidence and analysis of experience warrants.

Bina Agarwal documents in detail how women are systematically and almost universally denied rights of ownership and access over basic production resources. This, she argues, is based on the wrong presumption that the family is a harmonious unit and that it treats all members (including women) equally and take care of their interests. She argues forcefully and persuasively that gender discrimination can be effectively tackled only





if women are given legal rights of ownership and access to land and common property resources.

Vinod Thomas questions, with supporting evidence, the '... wisdom and viability of going all out for short-run economic growth' through trade and price liberalization and improved fiscal management (advocated by the Bank and the Fund) without putting in place an effective regulatory framework, and without paying attention to distributional aspects, sustainability and quality of governance. This view is now widely accepted, even in the Bank. How these desiderata can be combined and balanced to produce a consistent and workable package remains the challenge.

The second group titled 'Political Economy of Development' includes a succinct but thoughtful overview by Vijay S. Vyas of the nature and direction of change in agriculture during the last 25 years and difficult challenges ahead. Montek S. Ahluwalia's finding that inter-regional disparities have widened during the nineties, rest on shaky facts. His prescription that the center should pursue a proactive policy of using carrots and stick to induce states to perform better is also questionable.

By far the most interesting lectures in this section are those of Deepak Lal, Deepak Nayyar and Pranab Bardhan who deal with broader aspects of political economy of Indian Development.

Deepak Lal's discussion of culture, democracy and development is far too wide-ranging a theme to be dealt with satisfactorily in one lecture. His analysis of the modern Indian experience, though sketchy, evidently concurs with the view of Nayyar and Bardhan that inefficient use of resources and slow growth in India is largely due to the extensive state involvement in production and finance, both directly and through control of private sector activity, and the pursuit of autarkic policies. They agree on the need for restricting the state's role, removing controls, allowing much freer play of competitive market pressures, and integrating with the global economy to get out of this bind. (They may disagree on the precise mix of the reforms but do not discuss this aspect in the lectures under review).

While recognizing that significant reforms have taken place, they rightly point to the hesitating and tardy effort at tackling issues like reduction of subsidies, privatization, changes in labour laws, and checking corruption. These reforms, everywhere difficult, are more so when the competing conflicting interests have to be mediated through democratic process. While all three recognize and welcome the widening and deepening of democracy in India, they emphasize the inherent tension between democracy (which seeks to include the poor and the underprivileged) and the market (which is indifferent to their exclusion). Moreover, they see the way democracy functions in the specific socio-cultural milieu of India as posing serious difficulties for implementing the needed reforms.

As Pranab Bardhan puts it, there is a political gridlock in India '..... originating in collective action problems in a large, heterogeneous coalition of dominant interest groups with multiple veto powers, with no interest group powerful enough to hijack the state by itself. The system has thus settled for short terms particularistic compromises in the form of sharing spoils of the system in an elaborate framework of subsidies and patronage distribution to the detriment of long term investment and growth'. This characterization of the Indian situation, is largely valid but incomplete and, in some important respects, questionable.

It is incomplete in not taking cognizance of the attitudes and role of the Indian entrepreneurial class. That, in sharp contrast to the East Asian counterparts, their response to liberalization has been diffident and defensive rather than proactive, is surely of some relevance to the growth performance.

While welcoming the diffusion of power to socially underprivileged segments, Bardhan singles out the nonchallant and unapologetic attitude of newly emergent groups (lower castes) as the cause of rampant corruption and deterioration of governance. This interpretation is surely open to serious question. Corruption, use of public resources for patronage and personal profit and other aspects of amorality in politics are not unique to backward caste politicians. They were very much evident, and were spreading, even in the days of upper caste dominance of government.

Bardhan's prognosis about the reform process is also overly pessimistic. Certainly progress beyond liberalization has been limited, weak and sometimes by stealth. That they have to contend with the political gridlock is also well taken. At the same time one cannot underestimate the significance of the fact that political leaders – including the Prime Minister and several Chief Ministers – acknowledge and talk openly in public about the unsustainability of large subsidies and the need to curtail them by restructuring utilities and raising user charges. Dire financial

situation has forced several states to adopt a tough stance vis a vis their staff and also raise utility charges (especially electricity and urban transport) in a degree which would have been unthinkable, even unmentionable, a few years back. That those who have taken strong action have not suffered electorally might strengthen the spine of more governments in power to take bolder action. The creation of public regulatory systems to ensure proper functioning of utilities and financial institutions and the intense public discussion of their deficiencies; increased recognition of the need for rationalization of poverty alleviation and rural development programmes and improving their efficiency; and the growing pressures for effective devolution of power and resources to elected local bodies are all significant pointers to the changing climate.

All this is not to claim that there will be dramatic changes in a short period; nor can one confidently say how far and how fast the process will be. Mediation and resolution of the complex conflicts involved in reforms are likely to be slow. But that the process is underway and spreading is significant and their potential should not be underestimated. ■

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# Analysis and Prescriptions

Somesh K. Mathur

## THE EAST ASIAN CURRENCY CRISIS

By Mihir Rakshit

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp 288, price not stated

In the 1990s, financial crises erupted in half a dozen developing and emerging market economies in Asia and Latin America as well in Russia and Europe. The East Asian financial Crisis of 1997 caught everyone on the wrong foot because it occurred in countries like Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea long considered model economies and quite immune to such affliction. Secondly, such a crisis was largely unanticipated with quite severe and pervasive effects on economy and even in few cases led to political and social turbulence.

*The East Asian Financial Crisis* examines the factors leading to the currency crisis and outlines some preventive and prescriptive measures. In tracing the origins of the crisis and explaining different phases, the author re-examines the mainstream theories and policies and draws some interesting analytical and policy conclusions. The book is based on the series of papers that the author wrote on the East Asian Crisis for *Money and Finance* over the period 1997-99.

The introduction describes the term currency crisis which admits various interpretations. While some studies define it in terms of devaluation and its frequency of occurrence, the author is of the view that crisis may incorporate not only large devaluation or steep depreciation of the exchange rate but also unsuccessful speculative attacks which were averted without devaluation but at the cost of loss of international reserves, quantitative restrictions on imports and controls on capital movements and/or forced restrictive monetary policy of high interest rate. Eichengreen, Rose and Wyplosz (1995) and Girton and Roper (1997) define an index of the pressure in the currency market on the basis of the weighted average of the three indicators—falling exchange rate, decumulation of foreign currency reserves and rising interest rates.

The chapter 'Post War International Finance and Currency Crisis: Some Perspectives and Theories' examines the evolution of the international finance system since the Second World War with special reference to exchange rate regimes and integration of global capital markets and draws attention to the increasing frequency of currency crises since the late 1960s. The chapter also summarizes the two generation models of currency crisis advanced in order to explain the Latin American (and other episodes of) currency turmoil, occurring between the early 1970s and 1990s. Although the chapter focuses on the East Asian currency crisis, an adequate appreciation of the phe-

nomenon requires some acquaintance with international financial arrangements and familiarity with modelling of currency crisis.

The first generation models of currency crisis developed in the context of the Latin American currency turmoils in the 1970s, popularized by Krugman (1979), focused on the inconsistency between expansionary fiscal and monetary policies on the one hand and the pegged exchange rate system on the other—an inconsistency that makes the collapse of the system inevitable. The models also underline why a speculative attack, launched before the central bank's foreign exchange reserves are exhausted under the normal process is perfectly rational and how the attack advances the timing of the crisis. The first generation models do explain features of financial crisis like current account deficit and dwindling reserves, and so are applicable to East Asian economies immediately before the crisis.

However, contrary to the teachings of the first generation models the currency turmoil buffeting the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in the early 1990s suggested that there could be successful speculative attacks on a currency even though there was no deterioration in the country's longer term fundamentals. The second generation models (also called self-fulfilling models) popularized, among others, by Ozkan and Sutherland (1995), Obstfeld (1996), Wyplosz (1998) and Radelet and Sachs (1998) do explain some features of the East Asian crisis. The models suggest that when the government has multiple objectives and continuously evaluate the relative gains and losses of sticking to or abandoning the exchange rate peg, there may be a large number of situations where the peg can endure indefinitely in the absence of a speculative attack, but in case of a large scale attack, defence of the currency becomes too costly. The second generation models identify a much wider set of factors causing currency crises than the first generation ones. These models reveal the inefficacy of high interest rates and the instability of the banking system—features applicable to some East Asian economies. However, not only does the outcome in the second generation models remain largely uncertain but they also fail as the East Asian experience has shown to identify some of the crucial elements triggering off and deepening a currency crisis.

While the author has dealt with the first generation and second generation models of currency crisis in chapter two there is no

explicit discussion of the third generation (fundamentally political economy models) or the fourth generation (panic models) of currency crises in this chapter. The third generation models were proposed, among others by Krugman (1998), Dooley (1997) and Radelet and Sachs (1998). The fourth generation models were popularized by Radelet and Sachs (1998) and Bhagwati (1998). The existence of crony capitalism as revealed in the process of privatization (Ghosh, 2000) and the sharing of the fruits of industrialization with the concomitant moral hazard problem in some cases, as in bank borrowing and lending, amply demonstrate the applicability of the third generation models too. The severity of the East Asian crisis is also due to panic: panic from contagion, panic among the foreign investors, panic among the domestic investors and depositors, panic among the political circle to manage the misaligned economy and so forth. Thus, the proposed fourth generation models is also relevant in these economies.

In view of the applicability of all the four generation models what appears to be true is that no single model is enough to explain the financial crises of the East Asian economies: what is needed is an eclectic model which is a combination of all these models. Therefore, the author stresses on the unique role of economic fundamentals and self fulfilling expectations as explanations of currency crisis is unfounded.

The second section, 'Unfolding of the Asian Crisis' discusses the origins, manifestations and resolution of the Asian crisis over the period 1997-99. 'Learning and Unlearning from the Thai Currency Crisis' records the author's response following the outbreak of the crisis. Thailand was the first to experience severe pressure in the foreign exchange market and had to let its currency float in mid 1997. The author concludes that despite Thailand having strong macroeconomic fundamentals, the currency crisis was triggered due to change in expectations formed by investors. Such change in perception seems to occur due to the stagnation of exports and revelation of high non-performing assets (NPAs) of finance companies. The author suggests two important policy conclusions. First, neither the strengthening of economic fundamentals nor adoption of precautionary measures in respect of investment and borrowing, can be left to the operation of market forces. Second, given the magnitude of floating funds in the international financial system, both prevention and management of the crisis require international cooperation with some organization like the IMF playing a role similar to the one that a central bank plays in the face of (domestic) banking crisis. However, the role of lender of the last resort should be limited in the face of the moral hazard problem (Mathur, 2002). The problem of moral hazard can be dealt with official regulation, private sector monitoring and self regulation and the imposition of costs



on those who make mistakes. The adoption of international standards would raise the quality of official regulation. Improvements in transparency, the provision of information by the public sector, and improved regulation, together with bail-in procedures that set the right incentives, would encourage better monitoring and self regulation by the private sector. The charging of a penalty rate would discourage borrower moral hazard, and improved procedures to involve private sector creditors in crisis reduction should reduce investor moral hazard.

'Crisis, Contagion and Crash: Asian Currency Turmoil' discusses the rapid spread of the Thai crisis to the rest of the world within a few months despite the defensive measures adopted by the countries concerned with the series of rescue operations on the part of the IMF. According to the author's analysis, the economic forces behind the contagion helps in identifying some crucial weakness of policies pursued by the crisis countries and suggests how and why instead of arresting the contagion and effecting a rapid resolution of the crisis, the IMF bailout programme tended to make matters worse.

'Retracing the Roots of Asian Troubles: 1996-7 Some Analytical Issues and Empirical Evidence' provides a critical assessment of some of the hypotheses of the causes of the East Asian financial crisis and suggests an alternative explanation in the light of empirical evidence and theoretical considerations. The author's explanation centers around a combination of external shock and some important features of the ASEAN-4 and Korea that magnified the impact of the shock and caused a drastic revision in investors' expectations regarding the short and medium term outlook of these countries.

The last chapter of the second section 'Crisis and Recovery: 1997-99 East Asia Revisited' provides an overview of different phases of the currency turmoil and seeks to analyse the interplay of economic forces, including policy responses that seemed to govern the course of the crisis, its turning points and its resolution. The proximate source of the East Asian turmoil lay in large scale external borrowing by banks or corporates in order to finance long term investment and in inadequate foreign exchange reserves in relation to short term external liabilities. At the structural level, the origins of the currency crisis and its rapid contagion and deepening may be traced to the countries' exceptionally highly leveraged firms in a handful of export industries and real estate; fragility of banks under a lax regulatory environment; and unusually strong trading and financial links among countries of the region. Of particular importance in worsening the crisis was the failure of Japan to arrest the slide in its GDP and the exchange rate and to resolve its growing banking sectors problems—factors which produced negative impact on the crisis countries export demand and inflow of external funds.

'Lessons of the Asian Crisis' in the last section 'Stock Taking: Analytical and Prescriptive' draws the main theoretical and policy lessons of the East Asian experience. In the light of the analysis in the earlier chapters the author draws attention to some important issues brought to the fore by the Asian crisis and suggests measures at the domestic and international level that make countries less vulnerable to currency crises and help limit their damaging impact. Specifically, these measures relate to modes of financing, taxes and government expenditure programmes, banking system, exchange rates, capital flows, and the international financial systems.

Rakshit does not adequately examine the relationship between banking crisis and currency crisis. Recent studies increasingly point to the important role of the weaknesses in national financial systems in triggering or exacerbating crises. To reduce vulnerability to national and international financial crises, countries must address the weaknesses in their financial systems.

The book contains an unusually large number of footnotes and appendices. This is intended to keep the text uncluttered with theoretical details and equations and to enable general readers to follow the narrative without losing the main thread of discussion. ■

**Somesh K. Mathur** is Lecturer in the Department of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University), New Delhi.

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# Returning to Basics

Mahesh Rangarajan

THE WAY OF THE TIGER: NATURAL HISTORY AND CONSERVATION OF THE ENDANGERED BIG CAT

By Ullas Karanth

Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bangalore, 2002, pp. 290, Rs. 495.00

In an age of ecological pessimism, this is a rare book that is marked by a cautious optimism. It is a mood that is qualified and backed up with sound field level scientific investigation, but optimism nonetheless. Ullas Karanth is India's and easily one of the world's leading tiger ecologists. The core message of the book is a deceptively simple one. The conflict between tigers and humans boils down to shaping conservation strategies around the basic biology of the big cat. As long as this approach continues, the tiger will remain secure in its wild home.

This is what leading tiger range nations like Nepal, Bangladesh and India did in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The new beginning is indeed under threat, but the basic premises of conservation *in situ* of the tiger, prey, habitat and all in select patches of its once extensive range were sound. What we need is a return to basics, not a discarding of the core philosophy of preservation.

If this does not sound new, what is striking is the way the reader is led to such a line of thinking through the basics of biology. Karanth begins by tracing the evolution of the species and its radiation across diverse habitats across Asia, from the dry thorn forests of the Aravalis where the mercury touches 48 Celsius to the colds of the Siberian taiga where it can dip as low as 35 below zero. The big cat colonized different regions depending on a complex interplay of factors: changes in climate and vegetation patterns and the spread of all-important ungulate prey species. Till about 20,000 years ago, tigers across mainland Asia were connected by habitat contiguity: today they survive in small and shrinking islands of this range.

Tigers can prey on a range of animals, and in his major study site at Nagarhole in Karnataka, Karanth found over a dozen species consumed by the great cats. But only five key ungulates mattered: the chital, sambhar, wild boar, gaur and muntjac. High prey densities hold the key to the amazingly high numbers of tigers packed into tropical Asian parks.

Unlike the shikar parties of yore and Indian foresters in the early 1970s, his technique of tiger counting is far more complex, drawing on new technologies of camera trapping and also on basic statistical methods of sampling. Pugmarks, a good way to establish tiger presence, may not be a good enough guide to ascertaining numbers. Nor are these considered ever in isolation. In Arunachal's

Namdapha or the Sundarbans mangrove, the depletion of wild prey makes it impossible to sustain large predators at high densities. The reverse is true for Nagarhole with its 175 ungulates per square mile, or in the wet grasslands of Assam's Kaziranga where tiger densities approach those of lions in some of East Africa's best-known parks. The decline of prey can result in a steady and irreversible diminution of tiger numbers. There is no substitute for protecting the prey if tigers are to survive in the wild state.

He writes that, "In a tiger population that survives by cropping ten per cent of the prey base annually, a prey population of 500 animals is required to provide the fifty animals required by a single tiger. Assuming that the habitat supports 150 prey animals per square mile (50 per square kilometre), as many protected forests in southern Asia can, this requirement can translate into an area of 3.3 square miles (10 square km) of land to support just one tiger. In an area where there are only 15 prey animals per square mile (5 per sq. km), the extent of habitat required to support a single tiger would be about 33 square miles (100 sq. km)."

This would explain why Russia's Far East could just about sustain a tiger for 100 sq. km, while at the other end of the range, Kaziranga holds over 17 to the same area. What is significant is that his findings are built on long range studies in a core field site, but now backed up with surveys and research in a host of other parks. Comparisons of the Nagarhole information with work in Nepal's Chitwan suggests also that tiger populations under pressure due to hunting and habitat degradation can and do recover rapidly. Continued pressure on prey can make it impossible for tiger numbers to ever recover, as in Thai parks like Khao Yai, where the small-bodied muntjac is the main prey left.

The retreat of the tiger and its complex, often-brutal encounter with humans forms a theme through the book. The author allows for a degree of human fascination with the animal, consecrated, as it is in royal lore and priestly cultures, in oral and folk performances and even in modern corporate logos. The tiger has been worshipped and feared, revered and despised, but over the last two centuries, it has been a species in retreat. Earlier, shifting agriculture, the use of fire and axe, may even have helped open up new range for its prey and for the tiger. But technological changes in

weaponry and the colonial era craze for trophies were combined in British, French and Dutch ruled Asia with drives to wipe out the species. Agricultural expansion has however probably been the single most powerful force reshaping the tiger's living space in a manner detrimental to its survival. Add to this, the expansion of cash crop cultivation such as tea, coffee and rubber, and the habitat losses are staggering. Conflicts multiply over time.

It is not just a case of more people versus less wildlife. Recent research suggests that the diets of large carnivores in different regions in India can include domestic livestock to the tune of 15 per cent. Both commercial and subsistence demands also mean more potential for an indirect resource squeeze on ecosystems. In the initial years after colonialism, economic growth was given priority and even safari hunting was a means of generating dollars for newly free nation states.

A major change in attitude came about in the 1960s. The biologist George Schaller generated scientific insights into tiger behaviour, ecology and predation with his work in India's Kanha Park. The author also gives equal credit to early campaigners for tiger conservation like Kailash Sankhala and the first team that administered tiger reserves in India and Nepal in the succeeding decade. Leaders like Indira Gandhi, King Birendra and Sheikh Mujib took an unpopular but far-sighted decision to set aside small but critical habitats for total protection. This, more than any other single action enabled some of the world's finest tiger habitats to be brought back from 'the brink of disaster'. Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India have a better record of tiger conservation than much of South East Asia precisely because they earmarked areas for total protection.

More than the rise of illegal trade in tiger parts, which he feels can be tacked with better ground level protection, Karanth sees a breakdown of the paradigms of conservation as sign of crisis. 'Sustainable use' is a positive idea but not license for experiments on the relatively small areas that require total preservation. Development on park borders, while laudable, is not and cannot be a substitute for protection of the prey, predator and vegetation in the parks. Popular support at the local level is a must and he catalogues some innovative techniques in Karnataka. Planned and transparent relocation of settlements from within protected zones is an indispensable part of such a strategy. But so is education on conservation around the parks: only local pride and support can shore up conservation as the era of strong national leaders draws to a close across Asia.

The conservation paradigm championed in the book is one in an increasingly broad spectrum of options for the environmental movement. Often, the debates on the issue of parks and people, preservation versus sustain-



The core message of the book is a deceptively simple one. The conflict between tigers and humans boils down to shaping conservation strategies around the basic biology of the big cat.

able use have been polemical and bitter. The road ahead is often unclear, and there may be more than one approach that works in different conditions across the 13 tiger range countries.

Karanth's own view is crystal clear: the dominant model, with all its faults, is too valuable to be undone. It can be reworked but should not be dismantled. There is room to argue with his findings, but to his credit, the grounds for debate are reasoned and measured, based on careful accretion of facts and not mere assertion.

What makes this book a compelling read is its lucid style, and the author's ability to render complex scientific terms accessible to the lay person. Even his convictions are articulated in a reasoned and measured tone, making this a truly thought-provoking book. The photographs are a treat for the eye. A must for all who care about the dilemmas of conservation. ■

**Mahesh Rangarajan** is an independent researcher and commentator.

## Dangers of Playing God

Shobhit Mahajan

THE ETHICS OF HUMAN CLONING

By Leon R. Kass & James Q. Wilson  
Scientia Press, 2002, pp. 100, Rs. 125.00

Cloning of humans has always been a controversial issue. The sinister images of runaway Nazi doctors, secretly producing Hitler's clones in the jungles of Brazil come to mind. *Brazil Boys* may have been just a movie, but the specter of science producing your identical twin has always troubled not only scientists and philosophers but also religious people. Is human cloning ethical? Should it be left to individual choice (like in vitro fertilization) or should it be banned? This and a host of other ethical issues are explored by Leon Kass and James Wilson in this thought-provoking book.

These questions might have remained in the realm of philosophy and ethics had it not been for Dolly. On February 23, 1997 news

came from a Scottish laboratory that a lamb had been cloned from the nonreproductive tissue of an adult female sheep. This meant that the lamb was genetically identical to her progenitor (in this case the sole progenitor). Predictably, this news led to a lot of media hype and even hysteria among people and therefore among politicians. The issue was not really Dolly, but the possibility of human cloning. Imagine having a clone produced from some cells of your skin! All of a sudden, the prospect seemed real, at least for the lay public, though to be fair, scientists have always cautioned that it is still a long way to successful human cloning.

Leon Kass is Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the College of the University of Chicago and has authored several books on biology and its social implications. James Wilson is a philosopher at the University of California, Los Angeles. The book consists of two essays each by these authors; a main essay and a rebuttal of the other's position.

Kass's essay, 'The Wisdom of Repugnance' is a passionately argued piece on the need for us to stay away from messing with nature. His central point is that all of us are repelled by the prospect of cloning humans not because it is something unusual, but because we can intuitively feel that it is a violation of some of our cherished ideas. He sees that in this age where everything is permissible (so long as it is done freely), repugnance is our only hope to protect the central core of humanity. Repugnance is not an argument but rather an "emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power to fully articulate it". Indeed, he feels that it might be our only hope against the onslaught of excesses of human willfulness. "Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder." His thesis is that nature has given us a package where love, pleasure of sex and the desire for children all come together in the act of procreation. The "severing of procreation from sex, love and intimacy is inherently dehumanizing, no matter how good the product".

Wilson, while agreeing that there are indeed philosophical and practical objections to cloning, feels that the enterprise poses no special risks to society as we know it. The philosophical objection that cloning is contrary to nature he interprets as meaning that the cloned child can be put to harmful uses. In this sense, it is a practical problem of regulation. Indeed, he feels that if the regulatory mechanism is in place cloning could be like existing methods of producing children. If society does all in its power to ensure that the child is only "born" to a married woman and is the joint responsibility of the married couple, then there wouldn't be any problems. As he says, "Parents, whether they acquire a child by normal birth, artificial insemination, or adoption, will, in the overwhelming majority of cases, become deeply attached to the infant and care for it without regard to its origin." Of course, he is aware that parental ties are not enough to prevent infanticide but there are other reasons for this, not how the child is produced.

In the rebuttals, both the authors try and find common grounds in their arguments while at the same time restating their individual positions. The issue is by no means settled. The positions outlined in the book are just two of the many being offered nowadays. Scientists, politicians, ethicists, philosophers and even media commentators have given us their views on this controversial issue. Undoubtedly, as science progresses and human cloning comes closer to becoming scientifically feasible, this debate will hot up. Already, the issue of the use of embryonic stem cells in research has become important with the pharmaceutical and scientific interests on one side and the religious interests on the other. This book is a good place to become familiar with some of the ethical questions which we shall face as we move along the path to playing God. ■

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# Landscaping the Homo Sapien and his Faith

Sisir Kumar Das

## FAITH IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

Edited by Sima Sharma  
Indialog Publications, Delhi, 2000, pp. 228, Rs. 395.00

## THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE

Edited by Geeti Sen and Ashis Banerjee  
Orient Longman, 2001, pp. 244, Rs. 500.00

The first work under review is an anthology of articles by various authors, scientists, theologians, professional philosophers, writers and performing artists, all of them well known in their fields of specialization. One can hardly expect any structural unity in a work like this, each article being an independent statement of individual thought and experience. What, however, links them together is a serious concern about the question of faith and its relevance to our time, which is indeed an age of uncertainty. Whether faith is to be totally identified with religion or not may be debated but the issues connected with faith can neither be fully addressed without reference to its centrality in all forms of religion, nor by overlooking the spectacular role of religion in the history of civilization.

Traditionally, 'faith', in whichever way it is defined and understood, is inevitably associated with religion, the recognition of so called secular faiths such as communism or humanism notwithstanding. The belief in something supreme or permanent, imperishable and all pervading, which is the essential component of all religions known to us, has been more or less present in some form or other in all societies and communities, irrespective of their material or cultural development throughout the history of mankind. Different religions have emerged at different periods of history at different geographical areas, each proclaiming a way of life negotiating between the mundane and the supernatural, and claiming the knowledge and experience of what can be called the fundamental or the eternal. Faith is based on the accumulated experience of a community considered to be not only noble and good, but also the highest truth, the perfect and the right. Each religion has claimed its superiority, either by implication or by open declaration. Certainly, this has given strength and solidarity to its followers, encouraged them to offer extreme sacrifice for its cause, to defy the comforts and ease of life and to choose a life of suffering. History abounds with examples of individuals, some known and apotheosized, but hundred unknowns who had dedicated their lives for the sake of 'faith'. And yet history is also replete with numerous instances of violence and terrors perpetrated under the banner of faith, whether one calls it

a *dharma yuddha* or a crusade or a jihad. Marx echoed the voice, perhaps of a minority critical of the role of religion, that "Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people". Let us replace the word religion by faith and we get a summary of the history of faith.

Such an observation will be dismissed by the students of faith as too facile and incorrect, and they will argue, as some of the contributors to their volume indeed do, that faith has not only given peace and contentment to many individuals, but also brought out the best that is in man, that it lends energy to society to transcend the pitfalls of history and to strike for a perfect social order. Yet almost all the contributors of this volume are aware of the history of the challenges that has been made through centuries against religion (and faith), all the papers reflect the growing anxiety of the present generation at the decline of faith. The challenge today has become extremely acute not only because science has demystified the world or broken the old relationship between mythos and logos, as one of the contributors has put it, but more because it has promised a life of comfort, freedom from the tyranny of nature, more leisure and capacity to enjoy, for the large section of mankind. Why does man need 'faith' at all, particularly when he sees how easily it turns into fanaticism? The conversation between V.S. Naipaul and the editor, included in the volume, under the title 'Not among the Believers', therefore, though it does not present any philosophically significant argument, certainly puts forward clearly and forcefully, the dischantment of our times with religion. Naipaul says, 'the idea of the interfaith dialogue is nonsense'. The idea of religion, not circumscribed by ritualism, or religion that speaks of love for all, compassion for all—which is often asserted by the leaders of religious groups—is shared by a small, microscopic group, and what prevails is the institutionalized faith generating violent forces against communities that do not adhere to them.

The question of faith today can no more be a matter of academic exercise. The most important issue is how to control the tendency



of man to degenerate faith into fanaticism, and how to free God from the chains of dogma made by a group of man. We would all like to share the words of Kathleen Raine, uttered in a nostalgic mood, "Can we, even now, raise our vision beyond the nihil to the unknown unknowable sources once called God, whether the source be in ourselves, or in and beyond the marvels of the phenomenal world, rediscover that things which are seen were not made of things which appear—the ground of 'faith'?"

What I find so soothing to heart and pleasant to the eyes in this volume are the moving quotations from poets of different lands, and paintings and photographs. Indeed, they are the finest things in this volume.

*The Human Landscape* is also a collection of essays, dealing with various facets of Indian landscape, some celebrating the antiquity and beauty, some relating it with the economic and spiritual life of the people living there, and some demonstrating the function of landscape in defining the culture of a community. All the essays presented here contribute substantially to the understanding of the multiplicity of Indian culture, and the role of climate in particular and natural environment in general in the everyday life of a community as well as in the formation of its worldview. One need not be a specialist in anthropology or cultural geography to realize the roles that the rivers and the mountains and deserts and seas and forests play in the lives of men, and how their lives, economic, cultural and religious, are regulated by these components of nature. Yet accounts of places and people living in different geographical areas open up a new world of experience, some of which are both beautiful and bizarre, and magical and yet so real. As one proceeds through the volume, one realizes that, as the editors claim, "these essays portray not literary creations but the fabric of real life. Yet it surprised us as to how many of them weave a quality of magical realism".

The volume opens appropriately with a perceptive account of the sacred city of Benaras by Richard Lannoy. It traces the growth of the city from the hoary past of mythology and archeology connecting it with different phases of its formation. Fully aware





# Writer of Many Dimensions

Shobhana Bhattacharji

THE IMAM AND THE INDIAN: PROSE PIECES

By Amitav Ghosh

Ravi Dayal Publisher, and Permanent Black, 2002, pp. xiv+361, Rs.495.00

Some years ago, when some Indian novelists were still known by the clever if separatist title of the St. Stephens School, a deprecating critic said, "They write good English, but what they have to say!" "*Arre kya baat karti ho*. What about Amitav Ghosh and his *Shadow Lines*?" "That's an exception, but *In an Antique Land* is surely far better than *SL*." "Oh, of course. Just give him time. Ghosh may well turn out to be the greatest non-fiction writer among them." A prophetic statement of sorts. Since then, Ghosh has written two more novels, of which *The Calcutta Chromosome* was either beyond me or genuinely forgettable. In *The Glass Palace*, on the other hand, he dropped the fashionably fantastical mode, and returned to his storytelling, history-weaving self.

By now Ghosh has acquired several dimensions as a writer. He is a sociologist who writes academic articles like a story-teller (his classes must be a dream), a historian of lesser known happenings such as the visit of a Cambodian dance troupe to France, an occasional commentator on current affairs such as the nuclearization of the subcontinent, a perceptive literary critic, an epistolary conversationalist who put his *adda* with Dipesh Chakravarty on the web, and a reviewer of flair and distinction. This collection of essays is fairly representative of his range; its variety in the matter of footnotes and endnotes is a relief from the straits of style sheets.

In terms of sheer bulk, Ghosh has probably written more non-fiction than fiction. Of the eighteen essays in this collection, numbers 1, 4, 9, 10 grow out of and add to *In an Antique Land*. He meets the villagers he lived with during his research in Egypt, and records the changes in their lives that have resulted from wider political events. For instance, the huge Egyptian migrations into Iraq, which had lost its young men to war and required cheap labour, caused Iraqi money to radically alter the apparently changeless Egyptian economy. But the new *pukka* walls never gets a matching *pukka* floor because another shift in Iraq's political economy creates anti-Egyptian feelings and reduces the incomes of the Egyptian boys.

In his essay on the Nobel prize winner Mahfouz, Ghosh wonders why it is that the women who leave their homes in Mahfouz's novels always suffer. In an otherwise judicious and searching essay, Ghosh surprisingly does not analyse the reasons for this, having — I suppose — assumed that "good" novels must

profess gender equality. Why cannot there be a place for pervasive reactionary attitudes in a novel? Even more to the point, why was the Nobel prize given to a man who has these views? Ghosh doesn't ask these questions.

He is more exhilarating in 'Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel'. Crudely put, its argument is that if great literature has been produced by every economic upheaval, why did no great novels come out of the oil crisis? It is neither usual nor easy to locate, define, and analyse something that did not happen, but Ghosh ranges lucidly through the rise of the novel, the quickly established assumptions about the conditions for novel-writing such as nationalism, and the internationalism of the oil economy that worked against these "rules". 'The March of the Novel through History' is another illuminating exercise in literary criticism.

Two tongue-in-cheek pieces—at least I think they are tongue-in-cheek—are about the USA, one a report of a fund-raising dinner for New York's rich and famous, with its "thicket of reed-necked women", another about the herd-like pursuit of triviality by American tourists in their own country. Amitav Ghosh does the anthropologist from a superior civilization observing and explaining a strange society to perfection, but the running contrast between what he observes and what he knows (of Tibet and Native Americans) redeems the essays from being merely clever.

The book concludes with Ghosh's obituary for Agha Shahid Ali, who died of a brain tumour. Quite different in register to obituary by the poet's student, the Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie, Ghosh's is both a review of the poet's work and a lament for his friend and fellow writer.

The best piece is 'Empire and Soul: A review of the Baburnama'. I believe no one can write badly about the region, and a writer like Ghosh can only be better than most. The cadences of his prose sweep their subject before them like the winds of the steppe where Babur grew up and longed to reign. (Until this point in the book, one does not notice the somewhat repetitious staccato rhythm of the other essays. The woodpecker effect does not occur in Ghosh's novels nor in his longer essay like *Dancing in Cambodia*. Among diverse articles in a newspaper, a shorter Ghosh essay is remarkable for its clear brilliance. The insistent beat must be the unfortunate result of collecting these occasional pieces in one place.)

When it first appeared, 'The Ghosts of

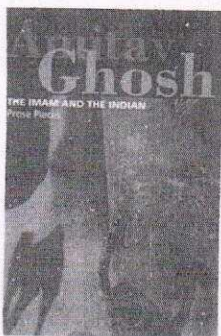
of its modern state, its labyrinth of houses and narrow lanes, confusions and chaos, he tries to capture what he calls the distinctive ambiguity of the human landscape of Benaras. The concluding essay, 'Past Remains' by Shahid Amin also seems to be appropriate to the spirit of this anthology. Nostalgic in spirit, but rich in hard facts, this delightful essay traces the history of the ridge and the surrounding area where the University of Delhi is located. A story of urbanization and of new constructions and slow ruin of the beautiful ridge: the hare and the peacocks have nearly disappeared but monkeys have multiplied.

Between these two articles, one on the ancient sacred city rich in symbolism and legends, and the other on the capital of India one finds fifteen presentations of various types. One reads the amazing tiger-tradition of the Khasis, and the Toda landscape, or the sacred groves in the West Sikkim Himalayas. Monisha Ahmad writes about the weaving tradition among the normadic pastoralists of eastern Ladakh, Simron Jit Singh tells about the Nicobar Islands, where the winds dictate the life of the people, and Regunathan narrates the stories of festivals in Arunachal Pradesh. I need not refer to all the articles, all of which are immensely readable, rich in facts and thought. They amply fulfill the aim of the editors in focussing on the importance of the elements of nature by which the cultural roots of a people are nourished and also preserved.

This volume contains four photo essays, i.e. albums of evocative photographs which record the landscapes of several regions of India faithfully and beautifully, and which captured certain moments of human life in action and in union with the environment. Photographs of Benaras by Lannoy, the Buddhist markings at Ladakh by Jahnwij Sharma, festivals in the Nicobar by Simron Jit Singh and fishing at Palolem by Vineeta Gothoskar are no less eloquent and thought provoking than the essays collected in the volume. ■

Sisir Kumar Das is a poet and a playwright and a literary critic.





Mrs. Gandhi', Ghosh's moving account of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 made quite a stir. Yet his bewilderment that such violence could occur in a civilized land surprised many. Where, asked more than one reader, had he been during the recurring post-Independence communal riots that targetted Muslims? Ultimately, the essay seemed to be more about his outraged innocence than about a political event, but reading it again after all these years brings back the despair one felt at the time. This is indeed powerful writing. It is only fair to say, though, that the ongoing violence since Advani's Rath Yatra in the early 1990s, the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and especially with the planned pogrom in Gujarat which no one seems to want to report anymore, the massacre of the Sikhs needs to be told in another way, as part of a policy of ethnic cleansing perhaps.

The last three pages of 'The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi' should have been a separate essay. Ghosh talks here about how writers must also be citizens, and how they must avoid aestheticizing disaster. Why would any writer worth his salt even consider writing and being a citizen as exclusive categories? And surely by appending so many words about the rights and wrongs of aestheticizing violence as a coda to the events of 1984, Ghosh could be held guilty of a little aestheticizing himself. I cannot recall if this was part of the original essay, but this one is considerably weakened by what seems to be a sort of belated attempt to fit the main events into a theoretical framework.

A recent reviewer said that *The Imam and the Indian* defies generic placing, and in the very first line of the Acknowledgements, Ghosh himself has a dig at the taxonomically minded. Yet it is this opening essay that places the book in a definite genre. For one thing, Ghosh is a significant writer. This is a strange thing to say about a well-known writer but *The Imam and the Indian* almost forces one to say, "Here Is A Significant Writer." After all, only an established writer's essays from here and there, collected in one volume, would find readers. It has not always been so. Five hundred years ago, Ben Jonson was mocked by his contemporaries for publishing his *Works*, a story so old, it is usually forgotten. About two hundred years ago, collected works of popular (i.e., marketable) authors were published for the ordinary reader. From about the time that

literary criticism became a profession in the early twentieth century, scholars have hoped that the assorted writings of novelists and poets will shed light upon their research. Ghosh knows of this academic enthusiasm among critics of literature, and in his Acknowledgements helpfully tells us when an article was written, how its purpose (e.g. research) influenced its style, and how it meshes with his novels.<sup>2</sup>

I would hazard that prefaces by authors to their works began to appear (in England) at about the time literature — as distinct from literary criticism — became a profession. The eighteenth century honed them, as it honed other forms of writing, but the most famous prefaces are probably those of the Romantic poets (Coleridge's to *Kubla Khan*, Wordsworth's to *Lyrical Ballads*, his *Prelude*, Shelley's to *Adonais*. In fact, there is a strong case for seeing every poem by these poets as a preface to everything else they wrote). When the differences are trimmed away, all their Prefaces, like Ghosh's Acknowledgements, give us biographical information, explicate the process of creation, tell us why the ensuing pieces are arranged as they are, and teach us how to read them. Even if the precedent was not so obvious, the title of Ghosh's longest non-fiction work, *In an Antique Land*, is a clue to his Romantic ancestors.

Like the Romantics, he too has extended the travel writing genre. But that is an undiscovered country about which there is bound to be a seminar somewhere fairly soon. ■

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On tehelka.com

<sup>2</sup> This may be neither here nor there — I suspect it is here, only I don't know how to fit it in, but when Keats realized that he was dying, he began to write with a fierce desperation in almost every known genre. He only completed the shorter poems, the rest were fragments, but that has not mattered to posterity, especially literature students. Keats wanted to be remembered as a poet, and his reputation rests almost wholly on the sheer bulk and variety of what he wrote in the last working year of his life. He would not have liked the proviso to that remembrance, that condescension that "He *could* have been a great poet had he lived, but all the same, these are promising fragments" — but he is remembered as a poet.

**Shobhana Bhattacharji** is Reader in Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi.

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बरसों पहले प्रेमचंद और कन्हैयालाल माणिक लाल मुंशी ने एक ऐसी पत्रिका की कल्पना की थी जो देश की सारी भाषाओं के साहित्य का आईना बन सके इसी सपने को साकार करती साहित्य अकादेमी की द्विमासिक पत्रिका

## समकालीन भारतीय साहित्य

एक पत्रिका जो पूरी किताब है  
आप इसका हर अंक पढ़ना ही नहीं सुरक्षित भी रखना चाहेंगे।

क्योंकि इस में देश की सभी भाषाओं के समकालीन साहित्य के रचनात्मक तेवर देखे जा सकते हैं।

क्योंकि यह सिर्फ हिन्दी की नहीं, हिन्दी के माध्यम से सारी भाषाओं की पत्रिका है।

क्योंकि इस के हर अंक में जीवंत कहानियाँ, कविताएँ, पुस्तकों से परिचय, चिन्तनपरक लेख, यात्रा-संस्मरण, उपन्यास-अंश और संपूर्ण उपन्यास एवं नाटक होते हैं।

क्योंकि 200 बड़े पृष्ठ हर बार किसी महत्वपूर्ण कलाकार के चित्रों और रेखाचित्रों के साथ अत्यंत आकर्षक मगर सादी साज-सज्जा में।

क्योंकि इस पत्रिका ने अंक 101 के साथ अपने 22 वर्ष पूरे कर लिए हैं!

इसलिए यह पत्रिका समय काटने के लिए नहीं, अपना समय जानने के लिए है।

यदि आप चाहें तो नमूने के तौर पर पुराने अंक की एक प्रति भेजी जा सकती है।

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# Rich Portrayals

Nalini Jain

REAL TIME: STORIES AND A REMINISCENCE

By Amit Chaudhuri

Picador, 2002, pp 184, Rs. 395.00

Fourteen short stories, some only vignettes, a personal narrative called 'Prelude to an Autobiography: A Fragment', and an autobiography in verse entitled 'E-Minor' are on offer in Amit Chaudhuri's delectable collection, *Real Time*. Set mostly in Calcutta and Bombay, both cities nicely mapped out for the reader with the names of roads and buildings, the familiar mode of the tales is questioned by the uncertainties of the events around which they are woven. Occasionally, as 'In a Second Marriage', one is taken as far as Kensington and Bayswater, away from 'the anachronistic old-world atmosphere of Calcutta with its small ambitions and dreams'. Or to Dubai, in company with the Indian cricket team, as in 'The Great Game'. 'An Infatuation' is a retelling of the story of Surpanakha and Rama from the *Ramayana*; 'The Wedding' is a personal rendering of the myth of Shiva and Parvati's marriage.

Chaudhuri displays extraordinary skill as a short story writer – a very difficult form indeed. Often eventless, the tales appear to be impressionistic personal reminiscences. They are nevertheless rich portrayals of the characters' minds, quite at odds with their external behaviour or conversation. Consider 'Real Time', the story after which the book is named. "Why did she do it?" Mr. Mitra asks his wife, in a deliberately off hand tone, referring to Anjali's suicide. He does not know what to expect at the ceremony which the couple feels compelled to attend: in his mind's eye when he tried to imagine the priest, or the long rows of tables at which people were fed, he saw a blank. The author deliberately withholds information about the central event of the story. It is released slowly, or just leaks out, in and between Mr. Mitra's leisurely and uncertain musings.

Did it happen here? He looked at the woman attach clips to another towel. Apparently those who always threaten to, don't. Anjali had been living with her parents for a month before leaving her husband. She'd left him before, but this time she'd said her intentions were clear and final.

By contrast, external trivia is depicted with a grotesque clarity; this contrast explores a disjuncture between meaning and reality:

This Coke has swollen my bladder

There was a jumble of sandals and shoes by the door, promiscuously heaped on one another.

On the sideboard was a Mickey-Mouse shaped pencil box next to a few photographs and curios. A clock upon one of the shelves said it was eleven twenty-five.

Amit Chaudhuri sets off a well-defined external world, engendered through minute, realistic observations, against a fluid, limpid consciousness rendered in a low key. As he himself puts it: the banal, briefly glittering sequence of events, where the heart beats underneath. That is what I am concerned with; because that is when I feel myself in the silence, on the edge of words ... (almost) too trivial to become words or story.

But there is subtle, almost imperceptible structuring as well. At the end of the story Mr. Mitra is left with a 'vaguely unsatisfying feeling, as if the last half-hour had lacked definition.' The conclusion echoes the beginning when he had asked his wife:

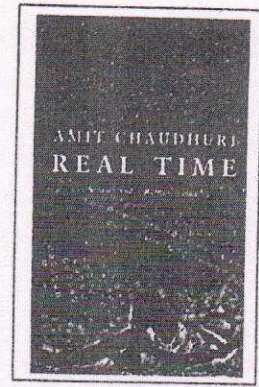
Well, what should we do?

To his pained question his wife had replied: Do what you want to do quickly.

He sighed; his wife never satisfied him when he needed her most.

We are left wondering what lies at the root of Mr. Mitra's unsubstantiated dissatisfaction. Was it his relationship with his wife, or was it the unfocussed get-together he had just attended? Or may be both. The stories work through suggestion. The end of the story points to Mr. Mitra's acceptance that happiness is not up for grabs; rather it is to be found in life's very 'lack of shape, or abode, or clear ending'.

The verse-autobiography, 'E-Minor', moves in a tone and mood quite different from that of the stories. In a 'voice musical with irony' Chaudhuri traces the origins of his family in Sylhet, now in Bangladesh. A degree in English literature and "twelve years/ in England, six of them with my mother" opened to his father the portals of the BBC (British Britannia Company), and for the son, many packets of Biscuits – Bourbon, Cream-cracker, Nice, which he did not eat. Later by some strange quirk of fate, "or whatever force binds destinies/ Together, ... the woman who is my wife/ is, as my mother puts it, a 'biscuit junky'." His



wife's biscuit-eating habits, or perhaps his own long association with them, provide the author with one of those telling observations that link life with art:

She dips her Marie in tea; the dipped bit tans,  
And, moistened, the biscuit droops like a Dali clock.

Chaudhuri traces his life in a steady ascent from Cumballa Hill to a building called II Palazzo on Malabar Hill, intertwined with a regular rise through an old Ambassador, to an Austin, and finally a Mercedes Benz.

Of course, we knew this life, refracted  
Through cut glass, reflected on brass, was,  
in part  
Make-believe ... Yet that view,  
Morning and evening, of the Arabian Sea  
And the Queen's Necklace, and the dome  
of the Taj,  
Was all mine.

The poem ends with an astute homage to Arun Kolatkar and his poem *Jejuri* "the best loved book of poems by an Indian writer/ in English". Adil (Jussawala?) and Arvind Mehrotra keep literary company with Amit as the text insinuates itself around Elphinston College, Kala Ghoda, Flora Fountain, the Bombay Gym and Colaba—an instructive journey. Ultimately the poem is about the subject's loss of innocence and his insertion into reality—not only in the rites of passage theme, not only in the rude awakening that *Paradise Lost* is not a tropical island, but in the acceptance that it is the detritus of life that takes over. To not 'quite know, and (to) know that we don't know' is the quiet wisdom that keeps company with the facticity of: "no hunger, before or after lunch, is complete".

The tales both instruct and delight. But one has to tune one's sensibility in order to enjoy them. Sometimes the quietude becomes enervating; but, if one can adjust to Chaudhuri's slow movement and rhythmic uncertainty, the stories are amply rewarding. ■

Nalini Jain is Professor of English in Delhi University, Delhi.



# "Hailing" the writing subject

Ira Raja

## MASTERPIECE AND OTHER STORIES

By Yasmine Gooneratne  
Indialog Publications, New Delhi, 2002,  
pp. 206, Rs. 195.00

As recently as 1986, there was no acknowledgement of the existence of the genre of multicultural writing in Australia. In fact, it is only in the last two decades, thanks partly to the efforts made by institutions like Deakin University (Victoria) to foster such collections as the multicultural Literature Collection, that the literary profile of Australia has come to include a substantial category of works by writers from migrant backgrounds. The facts speak for themselves: in a survey of Australian literature conducted in 1976, for instance, L. Honbein was able to identify only 26 multicultural writers, a number which rose to nearly 900 in another survey undertaken by Sneja Gunew in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

But even as this diversification of Eurocentric, bourgeois literary canons was a cause for celebration, it did not come without its share of anxieties. The opening up of the canon was accompanied by a consolidation of the genre of the first person confessional which doubly enhanced the self-perception of victimhood that often characterized early migrant or ethnic minority voices in Australian writing. The first person mode also built upon the "hailing" of ethnic minorities as speaking subjects rather than writing subjects. Confessional voices thus routinely foreground their lack of ease with the English language, in the process transforming the inability to write well (and the corresponding closeness to the spoken word) into an index of authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

Yasmine Gooneratne has been writing and publishing for the last two decades now. The present anthology brings together a selection of stories that have been published in various books and journals over the years. A Sri Lankan poet, novelist, short story writer, literary critic and social historian who has lived in Sydney since 1972, Gooneratne's writing has regularly resisted generic expectations of ethnic minority literature. Even as she makes frequent use of the first person mode, Gooneratne's narratives undercut some of the fundamental assumptions of the genre. As against the truth-speaking subject often implicit in traditional semi-autobiographical writing, her stories foreground the fractured subjectivities of their narrators. In an overt problematization of the first person mode, Gooneratne's stories offer a narrative filtered through the consciousness of several narrators. In 'How Barry Changed His Image', the unreliability of the narrator is foregrounded in a more direct manner, as when Navranjini or Jean, the naïve young migrant from Sri Lanka

who accuses the (white) Australian academic of racism, is "accidentally" betrayed by her own (mis) appropriation of Australian racist language into appearing even more of a racist than the one she is accusing! What is called into question in their amusing, confusing exchange is the promulgation of the truth-speaking subject implied in early semi-confessional migrant narratives. The contradictory positioning of Jean as the local-elite-turned-global-subaltern ("now that we live in Australia and have no servants in the house") not only draws attention to the fractured subjectivity of the speaking "I" but also shows at work a postcolonial sensibility which is attentive to the contradictions of her positioning.

Navranjini's attempts to master Australian English in a bid to effect a smooth socialization into her adopted country are not very successful—a fact that also immediately distinguishes between Gooneratne, the author and Navranjini, the narrator. Even as the latter struggles with her limited language skills, the story firmly establishes the discursive presence of the ethnic minority in fiction which confidently draws attention to itself as the product of a writing subject rather than a speaking subject.

Another aspect of Gooneratne's writing which differentiates it from existing migrant discourse is her perspective on the relationship between the migrant characters who populate her fiction and their pasts, which is not one of nostalgia so much as interrogation. In the story 'Astronauts', for example, a sharp distinction is made between the narrator/local journalist's perception of the visitor from overseas from that of the newspaper he is writing for. The newspaper's editor wants the narrator-journalist to do "a hopeful and encouraging piece" about Sri Lankans who continue to return to the Island long after they have settled comfortably overseas in a bid to renew and maintain contacts with their "motherland". The editor's take on this narrative of return is implicitly underpinned by nostalgia, longing and love for the motherland. The narrative of return that the narrator constructs, on the other hand, is played out against a different set of motivations in which the returning Sri Lankan casts himself in the role of a "native informant" for whom the bloody history of the civil war that has torn the nation apart is little more than an instrument of personal gain.

Taken together, the seventeen stories in this collection deal with a wide range of themes and settings—a diversity that not only gives it a breadth of perspective but also serves the more political purpose of challenging universalizing notions about migrant experience. 'Delicious Solitude' for instance, tells the story of Anita, a young Sri Lankan academic returning to the country of her birth on a

professional assignment after having lived in Sydney for the nearly twenty years. It delineates her experiences with the conservative Sri Lankan society which she resists for a while only to be eventually so overwhelmed and turned compliant by pressures to conform that she begins to feel "it was like she has never been away". If Anita feels ill at ease in Colombo, the place of her birth and young adulthood, Navranjini in 'How Barry Changed His Image' feels the same sense of discomfort in Sydney, her adopted place of residence. The difference in their frame of mind has not just to do with the amount of time each woman has spent in either place (though that must play a role too), but has also to do with the social positioning of each, quite independent to that of her husband. Anita, the successful academic, it seems has always been ambitious, outgoing and independent, a fact which makes it easier for her to both access as well as appreciate the little freedoms offered by her Sydney lifestyle. Navranjini, on the other hand, while vocal, seems from the beginning to live in the shadow of her husband, a fact which makes it hard to say with certainty that Jean like Anita would come to feel more at ease in Sydney compared to Colombo after she has lived there for a certain number of years. As Mary E. John warns us, "In order to be able to insert the contemporary postcolonial intellectual within the larger immigrant scenario, we must mark dislocations and alterities carefully to avoid conflating processes that are discrepant".<sup>3</sup> For Gooneratne, the respective social positions of her migrant characters are carefully historicized and not distilled to reveal a general postcolonial condition that plagues all migrants equally.

*The Masterpiece and Other Stories* makes for an interesting selection of stories in which a range of personal relationships are examined against a spectrum of cultural contexts. To produce these different stories under one cover is a welcome move indeed and one which enriches our understanding of what is increasingly one of the most dynamic bodies of modern literature: that produced by migrant and minority authors. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> L. Honbein, "Survey of Ethnic and Migrant Writings in Australia", *Work in Progress* (Adelaide: ASL Working Papers, 1976) 2.1.

<sup>2</sup> Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 57.

<sup>3</sup> Mary E. John, *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1996) 16.

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# Novel as Fable

Komilla Raote

## THE CHRONICLER'S DAUGHTER

By Kishore Thukral

Ravi Dayal Publisher, Delhi, 2002, pp. 358, Rs. 300.00

It takes a brave man to write a contemporary novel as a fable, the fable having been dismissed in literary circles as a folk form popularly used to instruct children, as through the *Panchatantra*, or cloaked with such childish meanings as fabled riches and fabled lands: in India, of course, that would be the tourist's Rajasthan, or the mythical land often discussed by the bosses in parliament, the perfect kingdom of Ram...

Kishore Thukral happily does not recognize such fashionable literary pressures. In his absorbing book, *The Chronicler's Daughter*, he uses the political fortunes of the imaginary city U Belly – well, he is a Delhiite – to extrapolate on India's future, warning that the path to a global role is paved with good intentions, but can only lead to regenerative, repetitive revolutions. (That the U Bellians must have bellies is a foregone conclusion, a physical condition not so very unfamiliar to murg-makhani New Delhians, after all.)

Thukral recreates an oligarchic *ramrajya* by the Pandava Elders, the five wise men who rule U Belly. The Eldest of the Elders, a nonagenarian who has been bedridden for thirty years, a catheter dangling down the side of his bed, and the other four Elders – Elder-2, Elder-3, Elder-4 and Youngest – offer the kind of feudal governance that provides U Bellians with food, shelter, medical care, and an iron-clad social structure within which thought is quite unnecessary.

The Elders govern from the 'legislative' building called the Sanctum Sanctorum, the tallest building, standing in the centre of U Belly and luminously wrapped in glass – obviously a metaphor for transparent government. 'Transparent' naturally indicates the city and the people – for the whole of U Belly can be easily viewed from the top of this tower – but not the Sanctum, for few U Bellians have ever been inside, or even seen the Elders.

The social set-up includes a caste system. All first-born sons must follow their father's profession, whatever it may be. If there is no son, then the privileges of position and office must pass on to the son of the second-in-command, and the son-less family becomes anonymous. This is what worries the

Chronicler and his wife, Mrs Chronicler. The Chronicler's job is to record the events of his time, not as he sees them but as the Elders gently interpret them for him: to put it in context in present-day India, we have the straightening out of our own modern history by RSS thinkers. Who will record history after he retires is the question worrying Mr. Chronicler.

The Chroniclers have three daughters, named Chronicler's Number One (written as C No. 1), C No. 2 and C No. 3, and they have just one chance more, since no couple may have more than four children, to produce a son and so ensure a comfortable life for themselves and their progeny. Meanwhile, they have another big worry, their daughter C No. 1. She has no belly, that is bad enough. Worse, she uses her mind, and speaks it. The parents love her dearly, but they are convinced she will come to a bad end.

She almost does: she creates so much trouble with her questions and her thinking that the Elders are forced to banish her, once a year for five years, to the forest of No-know which surrounds U Belly, the mysterious other side of the Wall. In due time, of course, the Elders themselves are run out of town, escaping into the high and mighty mountains in the north called Scalps – the Himalayas, of course – and maverick C No. 1 becomes the Chief Administrator of U Belly.

Will C No. 1 be able to sustain a democratic government and lead her people to happiness, progress, and the good life? Alas, U Belly and C No 1 come to the attention of the president of the Banded States of Monimaynia (right, the bandit states of money maniac). As soon as this charming and 'amazingly handsome man' with glistening teeth, pink gums and combed-back flaxen hair gets a look at the virginal C No. 1, he goes 'Wow! Awesome!' What follows then is to be expected: the seduction of C No. 1 and the rape of U Belly, efficiently and playfully catalogued by investment consultant Thukral. *The planned closed-door meeting of the two Heads of State had to wait for all unplanned engagements to finish. They finally met on the eve of her departure, long after dinner was over. The staff, except for the Night Guards, had retired ... Taking advantage of the informality that had developed between them, the*

Kishore Thukral...uses the political

fortunes of the imaginary city U Belly...to extrapolate on India's future, warning that the path to a global role is paved with good intentions, but can only lead to regenerative, repetitive revolutions...

Thukral recreates an oligarchic *ramrajya* by the Pandava Elders, the five wise men who rule U Belly.

*President loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar ... She stared at him, though not at his face. He traced her gaze down to his legs, and realized that his trousers had dropped to his ankles. 'I'm sorry.' But he made no effort to pull them up. His orange underpants glowed undeserved.*

Actually, the prez explains, that wasn't his fault. His country had run out of belts, and he forgot for a moment to hold on to his pants. Since one of the sideshows in a 'political' novel is making guesses about who plays who, Thukral makes it easy for readers to identify the charming prez, and leaves us feeling sorry for poor little 'Monica'.

We all know what happens to the Monicas. As for U Belly, Thukral hints that we look towards Rwanda and Russia to understand what happens when leaders and people are too blinded by 'strings of sparkle wound round the megalopolis in mesmerizing coils' to see what Monimayniacs are doing to their country. ■

Komilla Raote is executive editor (features) with *The Pioneer* newspaper in Delhi.

### Readers Please Note

The lines 'Why should I leave my home to look after the handspan-sized stomach?' in the review of *Beasts of Burden* by P.A. Krishnan in *The Book Review*, Vol. XXVI No. 8, 2002, pp. 27 should read: 'Why should I leave my home to look after a handspan-sized stomach?'



# History, Myths and Relationships

Sachidananda Murthy

MAHACHAITRA, THE GREAT SPRING AND OTHER PLAYS

By H.S. Shivaprakash. Translated from the Kannada by C.P. Ravichandra, S. Sandhya, and Lakshmi Chandrashekhara. Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2002, pp.165, Rs. 225.00

The conflict between King Bijjala and his Treasurer Basavanna of Kalyan State in the 12th century has so far been the biggest volcanic explosion in the religio-social history of what is present day Karnataka. A strictly segregated orthodox society with all movement prohibited by decree and terror, was turned upside down, as the great reformer Basavanna crusaded against the oppressive caste system. From the perspective of the status quoist forces, of course, Basavanna was the biggest mischiefmaker who unleashed undesirable tendencies in society.

Though Basavanna was exiled from the kingdom, which led to horrendous riots in which Bijjala was assassinated, his followers from different castes founded a religion which has taken strong roots in Karnataka. But over the last seven centuries the principles of universal brotherhood preached with such vigour and originality by Basavanna have given to stratification of the Veerashaiva society almost akin to the caste system against which he revolted.

The facts and myths surrounding the complex relationship of Bijjala and Basavanna, which mirror the continuing conflict between orthodoxy and reform in Kannada society of the 20th century, have fascinated writers and playwrights. Bijjala's sister Neelambike renounces the comforts of the palace to follow Basavanna into his movement, which is a magnet for those rebelling against the terrible rigours of casteism. The climax of the relationship where Basavanna, despite being the trusted treasurer of Bijjala, advocates *pratiloma vivaha*, where a low caste man marries a high caste woman, against the entrenched social orthodoxy, which is enforced by the King's sovereign powers. The cosy relationship of the reformer and the enforcer is shattered by the wedding which pits the oppressed castes against the oppressive elite. Bijjala orders execution of the low caste man who defied the ban. Bijjala's forces, backed by the priests and merchants of Kalyan attack the supporters of Basavanna triggering a violent backlash. As the king is assassinated while doing a *yagnya*, the old order, enfeebled by a succession war between Bijjala's brother and son, and by a devastating drought, crumbles. Out of this chaos, hope springs forth.

Shivaprakash, one of the highly acclaimed poets of the last quarter century of Kannada

literature, has worked on this subject undaunted that modern playwrights like Girish Karnad and P. Lankesh, to name just two, have produced classics on this theme. But Shivaprakash in his much acclaimed and controversial play 'Mahachaitra' looks at the conflict from the totally different perspective of the oppressed, where Basavanna never appears in person in the play, but his personality and influences affects the characters. Yet Basavanna appears first in stone form and later in flesh, in the third play of the collection 'Madaiah the Cobbler', which again emphasizes the theme of socio economic exploitation and discrimination prevalent in Karnataka through the centuries. This is the play which tells the cunning and bravery of Shiva who appears in the form of a cobbler and emancipates the lower castes from the tyranny of a dictator, who wants to conquer all the worlds. King Shrivana dies a horrible death, as does Bijjala, in the play 'Mahachaitra', and the climax of both the plays are placed in tremendous setting of dance and song using the folk arts of the dalits and backward castes of Karnataka.

The second play is different as it deals with the last years of Tipu Sultan, who bravely fought and perished due to treachery of his minister and also more because of his own obsession with martyrdom, as ordained by Islam. There is tragedy and pathos, as Tipu, loses his wife (killed by a stray bullet), sons (taken away as hostages by the British Army) and his chief minister (who leaves the king at the last minute). Shivaprakash struggles to project the otherworldly obsession of Tipu Sultan, which does not easily reconcile with the reputation Tipu had earned as the Tiger of Mysore who outwitted not only the British, but other mighty foes. That a crafty king could be misled into blunder after blunder only by rumourmongering of one of his ministers strains credulity a bit. The other reasons which went into the disaster of 1799 which ended the last resistance for the British in South India are not emphasized in the play. However the character of Mir Sadiq, the minister whose name has become eponymous for treachery is delineated better, though there is lack of drama, as Sadiq is rarely challenged in his shenanigans.

'Mahachaitra' became a controversial play as there were protests from the Veerashaivas that

there was denigration of Basavanna, but the furor only helped more people to read and witness the outstanding play, which is as noted for its fiery and poetic language, as for use of the folk forms and idioms to put the conflict in perspective.

What also fascinated the readers and audiences was the extraordinary compassion and concern for environment which came through in both 'Mahachaitra' and 'Madaiah the Cobbler'. A terrible drought haunts the land when the climactic events take place in both plays. Starvation and deprivation are rampant among the poor people who are without jobs, livelihood and even their dignity is on assault. Even when the characters are describing a scene, Shivaprakash infuses strong messages into these lyrical descriptions seamlessly. In 'Mahachaitra', a character is fascinated by the tailor-bird. "Appanna, look at that nest of the tailor-bird...so small—hardly as large as a fist. Yet it builds its nest so delicately, marvellously. But it destroys it, builds it again. Again and again..." This cycle of construction and destruction sparks off a debate on whether human beings should adopt such a karmic cycle or preserve what they build.

The theme of drought and spring keep recurring in both the plays as the regreening of the land is inextricably associated with the subjugation and slaughter of the oppressor. In 'Madaiah the Cobbler', Shivaprakash makes gentle fun of the gods like Vigneshwara and Shani. The folk artistes practising Veeragase, Hulivesha and Kamsale, narrate through dance and song, the vivid and tragic moments like the *jalasamadhi* of Basavanna, the preparation of human skin sandals for King Shrivana by a cobbler couple using their own skins, flesh and nerves, and the impregnation of a barren woman abandoned by husband and kinsfolk. Instinctive revolt against oppression and discrimination, combined with personal and ideological clarity as well as mastery over dramatic form makes both 'Mahachaitra' and 'Madaiah the Cobbler', disturbing and absorbing for the reader. ■

K.S. Sachidananda Murthy is Resident Editor, *Malayala Manorama* and *The Week*, New Delhi. He writes the column Last Word in *The Week*. He has reported extensively on Kannada Literature when he was working in Karnataka for the Indian Express and later for the *Malayala Manorama* and *The Week*.

## TBR Book Club

Please note that the TBR Book Club pages have not been carried in this issue. Orders may be placed from the August 2002 issue.



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## ECONOMICS

*India: Development and Participation* by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen explores the role of public action in eliminating deprivation and expanding human freedoms in India. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 512, Rs. 395.00

*Development Economics: Nature and Significance* by Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi looks at the subject as new paradigm, rich in predictive power and empirical content. Sage, 2002, pp. 269, Rs. 275.00

*Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer contends that a key element in theorizing about globalization and in organizing to resist it is an understanding that it is propagated not to bring a better and more just world to the masses but only to propagate the interests of the powerful and the privileged. Madhyam Books, 2001, pp. 183, Rs. 200.00

*Globalization and Development Studies: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* edited by Frans J. Schuurman provides a comprehensive introduction to the concept of globalization and its challenge to the contemporary study of development. Vistaar Publications, 2001, pp. 212, Rs. 275.00

*State, Economy and Social Transformation:*

*Hyderabad State (1724-1948)* by Y. Vaikuntham focusses on the impact of indirect rule and colonial policies on the Hyderabad State. Manohar, 2002, pp. 210, Rs. 450.00

*The Politics of Trade: Anglo-French Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1763-1793* by Arvind Sinha deals with the period of transition in the Indian economy from pre-colonial to colonial times. Manohar, 2002, pp. 249, Rs. 500.00

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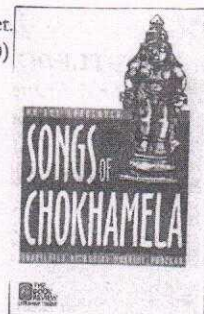
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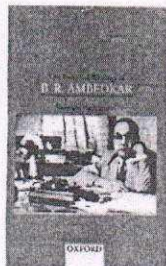
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**The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar**  
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The Decline of Mumbai and its Mills  
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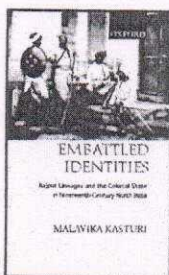
Mumbai is India's commercial and industrial capital and is

expected to become the world's most populous urban agglomeration by 2015. This book examines the growth of Mumbai through redevelopment of mill land. Cotton mills were Mumbai's premier industry till the late 1970s and have since declined. Mills occupy around 500 acres of prime property in mid-town Mumbai. The city has some of the most expensive real estate in the world and the attempted sale of mill land is literally a matter of life and death for mill owners and trade unionists alike. Although the state government would like to project Mumbai as another Singapore or Hong Kong, the fact remains that more than half its population lives in slums.

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authority and influence of elite Rajput lineages and clans in the public arena, the family and household emerged as central sites of struggle over the redefinition of masculinity, class, and status. It suggests that social boundaries and hierarchies in the 'imagined' Rajput community were transformed as much by conflict within the 'embattled family' as by tensions in the public arena.

The author locates these themes against the backdrop of changing gender and property relations, social hierarchies, and state formation.

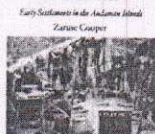
The book will interest historians of colonialism, gender, caste, and the family in South Asia.

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Zarine Cooper



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The book focuses on the networks of civic engagement that bring Hindu and Muslim urban communities together.

These networks may take the form of associational interaction or they may be everyday forms of engagement. Both forms, if intercommunal, promote peace but the capacity of associational forms to withstand events, like the partition of India in 1947 or the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992, is substantially higher.

Strong associational forms of civic engagement such as integrated business organizations, trade unions, political parties, and professional associations, are able to control outbreaks of ethnic violence, Varshney says.

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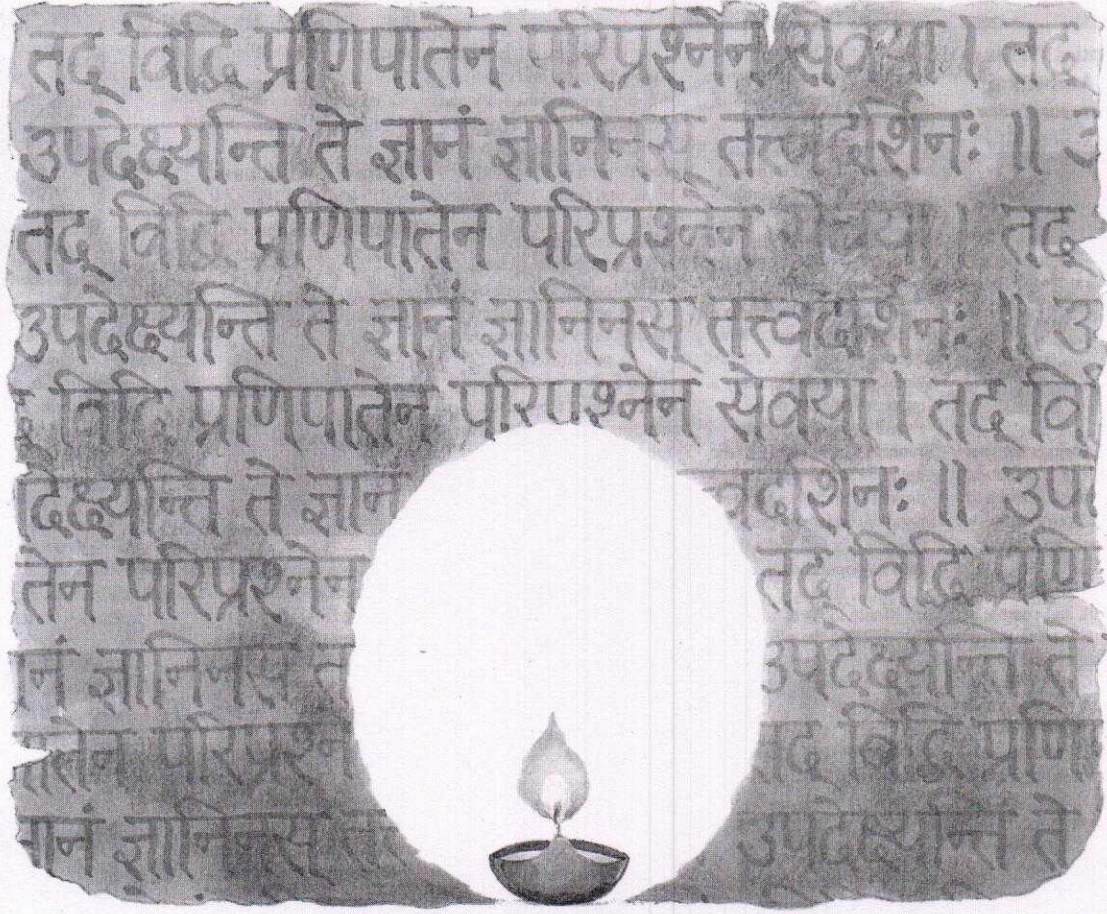
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upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jñāninas tattvadarśinaḥ*

‘Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the truth will instruct thee in knowledge,’ says Lord Krishna to Arjuna in *The Bhagavadgītā* (IV-34).

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