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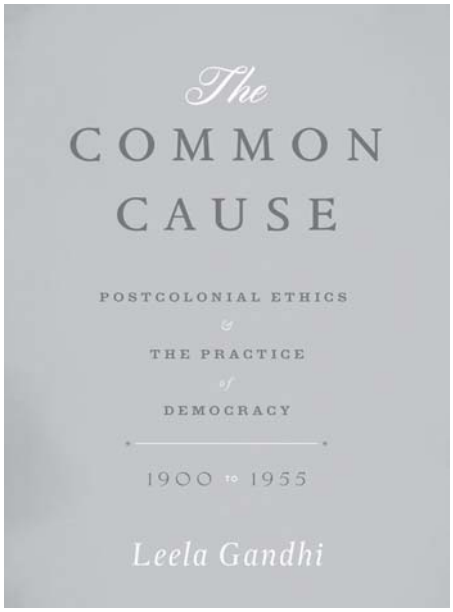
Challenging Western Interpretations of Thought

T.C.A. Ranganathan

THE COMMON CAUSE: POST-COLONIAL ETHICS AND THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY
By Leela Gandhi
Permanent Black, Raniketh, 2015, pp. 161+66, ₹495.00



This is the latest offering of the author, who is the John Hawkes Professor of English and Humanities at Brown University, and the founding co-editor of the journal *Post-Colonial Studies*.

Postcolonial studies represent an academic branch of studies which debunk and challenge western interpretations of thought. The rise of this branch of discourse in western academics is often dated from the publication of Edward Said's influential critique of western constructions of the Orient in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. A layperson can get an initial perspective from the handy internet toolkit, Wikipedia, which indicates that postcolonial studies draw from 'postmodern thought' to analyse the politics of knowledge (creation, control and distribution) by analysing social and political power that sustains neo-colonialism/colonialism. As a genre of history, says Wikipedia, postcolonialism questions and reinvents the modes of cultural perception, the ways of viewing and of being viewed. As Anthropology, it records human relations among colonial nations and the subaltern people exploited by colonial rule. As a critical theory, postcolonialism presents, explains and illustrates the ideology of neocolonialism.

Leela Gandhi is the daughter of the late Indian Philosopher, Ramchandra Gandhi (to whom this book is dedicated) and, accordingly the great-granddaughter of M.K. Gandhi and C. Rajagopalachari. This is her fourth independently authored book: Her first, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* was described as mapping the field in terms of its wider philosophical and intellectual context, drawing important connections between postcolonial theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, Marxism and feminism. Her next book, *Affective Communities* was written to reveal 'for the first time how those associated with marginalised lifestyles, sub cultures and traditions—including homosexuality, vegetarianism, animal rights, spiritualism and aestheticism—united against imperialism and forged strong bonds with colonised subjects and cultures' mapping the connectivity between Edward Carpenter and M.K. Gandhi and between Mirra Alfassa and Sri Aurobindo. Her third offering was *Measure of Home: Poems*.

The current work is described in the book cover as focusing on 'defining a shared culture of perfectionism across imperialism, fascism and liberalism—an ethics that excluded the ordinary and the unexceptional'. She 'also illuminates an ethics of moral imperfection, a set of anticolonial and antifascist practices devoted to ordinariness and abnegation'. Moral imperfectionism is presented as the lost tradition of global democratic thought, which could be a key to democracy's future—defining 'democracy as the shared art of living on the other side of perfection' and 'mounts a post-colonial appeal for an ethics of becoming common'.

The thought ideation is presented in six tightly argued chapters, intensively annotated, indicating the width and depth of the research underlying her analysis. The book starts off by protesting that the miscellany of Euro/American thought leaders have surreptitiously fostered the view that democracy is a uniquely western property and inheritance, enabling them to condone violent territorial interventions in its name. In this, they have ironically been supported even by the Left leaning ideologies emerging in the poststructuralist framework, holding that postcolonialism is harmful, or at best irrelevant to democratic thought. The intent of the book is thus twofold: to reveal the internal ethical inconsistencies of these varied ideologies and to delineate the indigenous, non-western experiments in democratic politics.

The introduction articulates that while anti-colonial movements have clubbed demands for independence with that for universal enfranchisement, the book's intent is to demonstrate that their reaction to the practice of colonialism was to adapt aberrant practices of self-ruination in order to not only defend the colonial victims but also to simultaneously seek to reform the very perpetuators of colonial violence, using case studies of the Indo-British colonial encounter, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. It then proceeds to show that while 'New Imperialism' (the imperial expansion witnessed post American Revolution/ post collapse of the Spanish empire in early 19th century) and 'New Liberalism' (which emerged post the Boer war vide Lloyd George/Winston Churchill/Herbert Asquith) are often represented as contesting ideologies, operationally they were similar, if not identical, insofar as the impact on the colonies was concerned. Extensive discussion of various shades of thought within these two broad sects exists, amply annotated. The representation of the anti-colonial response is through the works of M.K. Gandhi (in particular, his writings in *Hind Swaraj*). An interlude in the form of referencing the writings of Greek Cynics and the Buddhists/Jain philosophies follow.

This introduction is followed by the four main chapters, each representing a separate form of enquiry. The first uses the backdrop of the British Labour Agitations of 1910/13 for highlighting the inconsistencies within socialist anti-materialist thought, between manifestos 'for poverty and against poor' (strikes for the sake of strikes) and 'against poverty and for the poor' (agitations to secure wage enhancements, etc.) and the 'moral nausea' in the liberal space directed against the 'consuming poor' but not against the

> "Moral imperfectionism is presented as the lost tradition of global democratic thought, which could be a key to democracy's future—defining 'democracy as the shared art of living on the other side of perfection' and 'mounts a post-colonial appeal for an ethics of becoming common'."

'consuming rich' to highlight the inherent antagonisms. Chapter 2 explores the contest between racial ethnography and the Aryan myth (often used to justify New Imperialism) and modern Indian Spirituality as represented in the writings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi. Rich discussion on the thoughts of Max Muller, Weber and Isherwood exist as do the views of J.S. Mill (and his endorsement of despotic governance for India while advocating plural votes for educated citizens at home) to bring out the distinctions between the science of 'Ascent' (of New Imperialism) and the arts of 'Descent' (Indian Guru's) and resultant interpretations regarding democracy.

The third chapter deals with the impact of the widespread usage of soldiers from the colonies to rescue a Europe endangered by imperial-fascism during the course of WW1 and the resultant contradictory dynamics and implications thereof for postcolonial thought. The writings of Sartre, Paul Nizan and Husserl and others are woven into the dialogue. The fourth chapter discusses the contradictory aspects of the anti-imperial mutinies which followed WW2, in the Indian Navy/elsewhere, during January–March 1946 to depict that notwithstanding the negative reception in the national/world media, the mutineers were, in fact, refuting the perpetuation of empire within themselves. The tendency of the dominant power to focus discussion on superficialities (because they are easy to espouse/exploit) rather than on the underlying causes which are often difficult to articulate is delineated. The author brings out aspects of commonality between these mutinies and those of the previous century (1857) to round off the dialogue.

These four different strands of enquiry are then consolidated into an epilogue, entitled 'Paths of Ahimsaic Historiography' to close the dialogue (Ahimsa is usually described as being 'non-harmful' to others, especially if they are weaker than you). The consolidation process starts from Michel Foucault's last lectures describing Greek Cynicism as an ethics of non-sovereignty and non-value to highlight prevalence of moral laws evaluating the values of excellence premised on the mastery of self. It is articulated that western modes of thought get prominence, in main, only because their cultures/ sub-cultures are better documented than those of the colonized. The texts and traces of the latter renditions tend to be fragmented/dispersed. 'So much of Sri Ramana's crucial early teaching … was noted on erasable slates and on the shifting sands of the ashram grounds.'

The attempt of the author has been to collate and cumulate the evidences available in the soldiers' letters from the front, spiritual diaries, courtroom testimonies and eyewitness and journalistic accounts to present and depict the existence of an alternate paradigm, which contends that 'true democratic existence is not merely the condition of passively inhabiting or even participating in/ with the culture of a given mass or collectivity. It is, rather, an acutely individualistic dedication to becoming common … disregard for the self for the cause of inclusive sociality' or in other words giving up the desire for hierarchy and allied forms of control over others, settling for less and thus making ourselves, in a way, 'imperfect'.

The author emphasizes that the validity of this alternate ideation cannot be denied solely on the grounds that they have not been as well choreographed as the ideations of the colonizer. It is advanced, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, that history proper does not appreciate the transformative conditions of cooperative coexistence because they seem so ordinary to the expert/s eye. Further, it is 'not that history is inattentive to small details but that it censors the creative leap of faith, required to apprehend the extraordinary in the ordinary.'

A reading of the book generates an inference that it is possible that our increasingly globalized, crowded, interconnected and combative world may find stable solutions more profitable/ viable though exploring these alternate approaches of thought than those presently being generated by the currently popular western ideations which lay emphasis on the glorification/gratification of the self to the exclusion of the others.

The book is passionately intense but articulated as tersely/sparsely as Kant's work, referred to in the book. The scholarship is wide ranging from the Cynics to the 'ordinary language philosophers (OLP)' to Bernard Shaw and numerous others apart from the Indian Savants referred to earlier. Even the 'get well cards' of *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* finds a place. However, communication is in a language, possibly comprehensible to the initiated but somewhat perplexingly obscure to a lay reader. The unwary generalist could be pardoned for feeling somewhat buffeted by the excessive non-usage of the 'ordinary language' and thereby, possibly, missing out on some of the important aspects of the dialogue.

It is not as if the author's intensity is any way less in 'ordinary language'. She is for instance at her eloquent best when she illustrates how the new liberal, pro Boer sympathies for Churchill's 'left out millions' scarcely translated into sympathetic attitudes towards 'natives', citing the pamphlets advertising the triumphs of liberal governance between 1906/08 by showcasing the forcible deportation of all Chinese migrant labour on the Rand but for which 'there would not have been a single white miner on the Witwatersrand but 200,000 china men'. Or when she examines the labour strikes of 2009/13 and illuminating the protests against 3 shift working as occurring because these practices would '… prevent the male members of a household from reliable participation in domestic chores (such as feeding babies, cleaning homes and shopping for groceries) to which they were so clearly committed….' Or in her analysis of new imperialism characterized by its identification with violent autocratic governance by citing Kitchener's massacre of some ten thousand Mahdist dervishes 'in order to test the new Maxim machineguns' at Omdurman (Sudan). If she could have used similarly 'normal' language as the norm throughout the book, postcolonial studies could attract a wider readership though admittedly, if a determined focussed reading is done, the present dialogue is stimulating.

T.C.A. Ranganathan, an alumni of the Delhi School of Economics and a former CMD of the Exim Bank, is currently a freelance writer.

Book News	*Book News*

The Silk Roads: A New History of the World by Peter Frankopan is an exploration of the forces that have driven the rise and fall of empires, determined the flow of ideas and goods, and are now heralding a new dawn in international affairs.

Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, pp. 636, ₹799.00

Diagnostic Account of Imperial History and Thought

Soumyabrata Choudhury

THE INFINITE DOUBLE: PERSONS/THINGS: EMPIRE/ECONOMY
By Rahul Govind
Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla, 2015, pp. 563, ₹750.00

A book with so formidable a scope as Rahul Govind's *The Infinite Double: Persons/Things/Empire/Economy* cannot be limited to a critique. And if it's salutary ethical tonality doesn't determine its explicit intellectual object while also not being a mere critique of imperialism, then what sort of a book is it? In my view, Rahul Govind has written an extraordinary *diagnostic* account of imperial history and thought. So what differentiates a diagnosis from a critique? While the latter presents the general conditions for individual phenomena, a diagnostic identification of phenomena involves three features: an analysis of causes in the depth of time, i.e., an etiology; a nomination of the present constellation of phenomena so as to convert the 'symptoms' into an 'object' i.e., a performativity; and a prognosis of the future of the object based on the reading of the symptoms or 'signs' of the present, i.e., a semiotic. Thus we are mobilized from a limited philosophical project of identifying the universal limits of historical interpretations to an infinitely modulated 'historico-medical' method whose amplitude extends the historico-philosophical—this Rahul Govind makes possible with an erudition and intensity that, to my mind, was hitherto unattempted in recent scholarship.

At first glance one might object that a massive research which consists of precise yet idiomatic readings of John Locke, Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo among others, and which also involves consulting the archives of the East India Company's policies, implies a heroic exercise in the history of ideas with a simultaneous *translation* of doctrine(s) into imperialistic practice(s). This construal would be mistaken. *The Infinite Double* is not a translation of categories into history; it is an *articulation* of effective categories and concepts inasmuch as this effectivity is the motor of history. And the 'infinity' of this articulation will need to be inspected as we go along. Suffice it to say for the moment that the articulation of history as a practice of the effective concept also indicates the 'logical' violence that the book's method responds to in history—a difficult attunement that takes it beyond the pale of intellectual history.

The book introduces its daunting task—which I have called 'diagnostic'—with a concern that is actually ethical: suppose the diagnosis of imperial modernity is that the latter's 'logical violence' is equally genocidal; suppose the categorical locus of the human subject is diagnosed as a differentiated imperialist entitlement in relation to the wholesale killability of that part of humanity that is simply judged to be 'inhuman', then isn't the diagnostic method also an *ethics of method?* However, there is a certain bitter force about Rahul Govind's diagnosis that raises the ethical question in the most ironic epistemic circumstances. The problem in the author's own words is the following: 'Genocide [thus] even when reduced to a matter of scale is irreducibly linked to exploring the category of 'humanity'. Thinking the latter reveals the politico-juridical problematic of judgement to be indiscernible from the epistemo-ontological issue of whether one knows what one judges' (p. 1). The really interesting point is that while Govind starts with posing the paradox of grasping the perpetrator of genocide through a universal judgement predicated on the access to a generalized 'human subject', the historico-philosophical investigations of the book are as much about the status of the *victims* of genocidal decisions and actions as 'human'. Everything hinges on a sort of neutral institution of the 'human' in the Sciences of Man, as they are called, in law and economics, and the simultaneous articulation of this institution with the partisan histories of appropriation and subjection, of capture and extermination. The double, indeed, and its logico-genocidal work...

The difference between the diagnosis of the work of the double and the postcolonial analysis of 'culture', a type of hegemonic analysis so fashionable in academic circles, is that the former, unlike the latter, deepens the etiology of modern politics, dares to name that politics and reads its dismal signs towards a contestatory future as the *universal* emergences of juridical and economic power. There is no consolation to be drawn from the historical origins of the 'ideology' of domination and violence in 'western culture'; there is no attenuation, compensation or succour from the cultural 'fact' that non-western societies, dominated by western power, hold in secret reserve *another* culture incommensurable with modern politics even as these societies grow modern. The historical mode of these universal juridical and economic emergences is the imperialistic *wars* of the period roughly between 17th and 19th centuries (though they carry on in the 20th). And as the several studies on the East India Company show in this book, the work of the economy is always the double of war.

One might even go to the extent of saying that the economy is the *infinite* sphere of war in modern societies. And on this point, the book faces its most delicate theoretical challenge; which is to transmit the fundamental antinomy between the axiomatic universality of state-sovereignty and the particular infinity of the ever-expanding, never-totalizable economy. In fact the vast material that Govind mobilizes with a view to analysing the documents of the East India Company's mercantile policies in India in relation to the horizon of British state sovereignty never ceases to be subject to the inaugural theoretical antinomy of the book. Yet a dense history unfolds in the element of the antinomy itself for which the chapters devote their intricate tapestries. And through the difficult and rewarding reading of the chapters/studies, an argument emerges that in the 17th and 18th centuries, the monopolistic and corporate singularity of the Company is, of necessity, open to the historical *logic of multiplicity* involved in the civil administration of mercantile as well as juridical authority. In turn the colonial history of territorial appropriation and economic exploitation in India can only be grasped in the dialectic of particularity (the Company) and multiplicity (Civil Administration) that produces a sovereign yet (bitterly?) ironic result (British Rule).

I hope the author will forgive me my dialectical schematization of the book's infinitely modulated presentation. Without taking anything away from its original style and idiom, its brave solitude, as it were, this reviewer's schematization of the book exists only to clarify a major thesis which is that the narrative from the East India Company's policies in the 18th century, the supportive, restrictive and responsive moves of the British government in that period to the declaration of the Queen's sovereignty over India in the 19th century does not constitute a progressive conquest by policy and coercion. The imperial logic is far more 'antinomic'; it follows from a citation from John Locke posted as an epigraph at the start of the first chapter. In this extract from a 1696 'practical' text on Interest and Money, Locke clearly says that the aim of imperial expansion of wealth and territory can be served by both

conquest and commerce. However, unlike the historical genius and circumstances of the world conquering Roman Empire, in the 'modern' 17th-18th centuries, '...no Body is vain enough to entertain the Thought of reaping the profits of the world with our swords' (p. 77). Contrast this to Calgacus's sentiments from the times of the Roman Empire when he says in effect that wherever the Romans conduct a successful genocide, they declare that spot part of the Empire, in all its spotless majesty. The crucial point here is that John Locke, Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus et al each in his own way arguing for an 'empire-in-instalments' instead of instantaneous sovereign capture, held the same Roman sentiment that *as a people* they were part of a 'natural-instantaneous' imperium. To that extent they were ready to declare an Empire as the natural victors in the site of war and at the same time, to displace war to the site of the economy, of what Machiavelli called, the 'truth of things'.

So what forces imperial sovereignty to attenuate its violent and axiomatic existence towards the administration of things in their slow truth? I think it is here that the diagnostic method gains its most delicate and unsparing edge. There is something about the *infinity of the world* as it befalls the thought of empire and economy, state and subjectivity that must be captured and capitalized, that refuses in turn to give itself to be thought as the object of sovereign power and economic calculation. Let me term this 'infinity of the world', the world as Thing that resists and at the same time, conditions the access of the world as political and economic object(s).The world as Thing is a scientific-to-speculative upsurge which *does not* take place primarily in the life of the 'modern' subject. I doubt whether Govind's methodological scruples ever allow him to affirm an infinite Galilean world or an absolute Hegelian one outside the experience of the finite subject—yet his is not merely a critical position, as I started with saying. All the impasses and subterfuges endemic to the 'epistemo-ontological' (in Govind's language) relation of the subject to the object interest the author when he reads Hume, Locke, Hegel—and it is with Marx that the argument reaches, if not an affirmative, definitely a philosophically provocative threshold.

In the second chapter and in a later discussion on Marx and anthropology, Rahul Govind shows, in a singularly complex way, that the infinite double of the speculative-to-scientific world as Thing when reflected in the calculable domain of socio-historical (that is, political and economic) objects in the modern world turns out to be the 'commodity'. The commodity faces the human subject as Thing and Nature in its spectral incarnation; and as a real entity, it is the cipher of socio-historical relations between human subjects. Either way, the commodity infinitely escapes the grasp of the finite subject. Given this asymmetry, what is to be done with the imperial project? Well, for one thing the case of the East India Company is instructive in that it, in participating—the Greek word is 'methexis', which the author likes—in the world of commodities that escapes it, responds by forging a '... *combination* of finance, commerce, politics and war' (p. 182). I also think that confronted with the infinity of the world, in its critical, spectral and affirmative shapes, the subject apart from, adopting the 'mixed' or combinatorial strategy, is led to a *purely* subjective moment entirely cut off from the world of objects. Faced with this radical non-knowledge, the so-called modern subject also becomes a subject of revolt *and* faith, something manifest in an entirely new form of political and/or religious militancy 19th century onwards. Both these manifestations are types of 'passion' of the subject as Thing. Marx represents the inaugural moment of this sort of subjective passion of the political militant while Kierkegaard is the unique figure of religious passion without religion as knowledge ('knight of faith'). One might conclude this point—though it is not the book's main preoccupation—by saying that this new form of pure subjective passion, or subject as pure passion, is the reverse side of the infinite analytic of objectivity given to pure science.

There is no chapter more shattering, more brutal and subtle, than the last two on the economy and imperialism. That is as it should be as from the point of view of the economy, *imperialism is perfection.* It is always as if political, military and genocidal powers are at the service of a perfection that only the economy sufficiently understands. Who can doubt that in our times the economy is granted the same privilege and on a more concerted and global scale. But Rahul Govind makes it his painstaking job to uncover the historical strategy of this privilege, that only apparently seems consensual and a 'thing of nature'.

In his excellent section on Malthus intriguingly called 'Thomas Malthus: The Divine and Demand' (p. 413) —to unravel the intrigue fully one must go to the book—Govind analyses the compensatory strategies of securing the perfectibility of Man in the economic sphere. Strangely, one such key strategy is that of *culture.* It is a peculiar prescription to be found in Malthus when the latter speaks of 'taste' as the requirement of the population which is faced with poverty and unemployment. For Malthus, land is where the perfect divine Thing resides. But even this natural perfection must be inserted into a human history of population putting increasing pressure on land. Such a history is the history of increasing *scarcity of perfection*. Hence, a supplemental historical process of juridical and cultural strategy must be put in place. The poor and unemployed population must cultivate a 'taste' for both industry, i.e., production of commodities/value and new demands/products. In the face of the fall of abstract Man from the perfection of Nature into the real time of hungry, lazy, unruly populations, *the time of the poor,* the most a cultural prescription can aim for is a class of 'worker-demanders'. But the bitter Malthusian lesson is that it is a hopeless task. Even as the narrative of acculturation moves from the poor of the West to the colonized indigents, the population of the world keeps growing. A bitter infinity of the world as population threatens the natural perfectibility and productivity of Man. I will not hesitate to say that we live in neo-Malthusian times inundated by the sentiment that there is always a hopeless surplus of unproductive population over productive and 'cultured', productively cultured humans. It is a short step from here to the prognosis that such an unproductive 'infinity' is culturally dispensable. The short step will have been *genocidal* potentially when it will have been supported by the decision to mark the dispensable population by identity-marks such as ethnicity, race, language ... caste, why not! At the same time we have to guard against confusing this diagnosis with a postcolonial culturalist thesis. The density of Govind's argument comes in the wake of the *equivocation* that a Malthusian (or neo-Malthusian) sentiment or passion arises from the same structure of world-wide capitalism which prescribes that *all* human beings be made productive, *all* 'natural production' be subjected to circulation and capitalization. Culture is part of the logical violence of imperialism; empire is not a species of some insidious cultural logic. That is how I synthesize the book's extraordinary mosaic of thought.

I would like to end the review with three points of contention. I will present them very briefly, even elliptically.

Firstly, when the author takes issue with Michel Foucault's so-called neglect of imperialistic wars when Foucault uses war as an 'analyser' of power in the 1975–76 College de France seminar *Society Must Be Defended*, he leaves a crucial methodological feature unmentioned. Michel Foucault chooses 'European' wars from the medieval times (Franks and other Germanic tribes in action) at an *anonymous* level. The analysis of society as

war takes place with the formation of strata of power that are not pre-identified as either 'racial' or 'national', or 'imperial' and 'colonial'. These names/identifications are precisely de-stratified by the method of war as 'analyser' rather than consolidated as legitimate sovereign actors of war—and peace. The hoarse anonymous cries of victory—and despair—are retroactively distributed as which 'body' legitimately deserves to survive, which to be exterminated. Thus emerge 'race wars' and 'state wars' based on the distribution of 'race-bodies' and 'state-bodies'.

Secondly, much as I admire Rahul Govind's difficult attunement to the equivocations of the historico-conceptual sequences he investigates, I miss the *affirmative infinity* that renders these sequences open to what I will call the untimely political Idea. Strangely, the untimely Idea is totally immanent to the historical sequence(s) and at the same time, decisively re-configures the sequence(s) in a way strategic thinking cannot anticipate. And insofar as the philosopher is the intellectual strategist par excellence, she has to divide her time and element between strategic reason and an originary thaumaturgy towards the untimely Idea. No one is more divided, more equivocal *and* affirmative, strategic *and* militant, sceptical *and* curious than say, Marx.

Finally, while *The Infinite Double* presents a virtuosic diagnosis of the period between the 17th and 18th centuries, of the East India Company's mercantile expedition as a historico-conceptual constellation, the diagnostic will remains a will to something like *continuous constellation*. History becomes intricately and fascinatingly topological and every historical site seems a variation of another. Within a regime of history, practices and concepts are mutual variations, convolutions and complicities. What the method doesn't recognize is the *event* of history that contingently breaks the play of continuous constellations. The event is the historical 'outside' of history. As a somewhat arbitrary instance, I would like to suggest, following someone like Susan Bayly, that the 1857 revolt was an upsurge which, in its happening in contingent circumstances, also becomes the ruptural point when British sovereignty, orientalist knowledges, and colonial control over Indian subjects are equally contingent—and imperialist—deployments. This ruptural point I call 'event', which cannot be simply diagnosed and must also be affirmed in its infinite possibility, which is not the same thing as equivocation.

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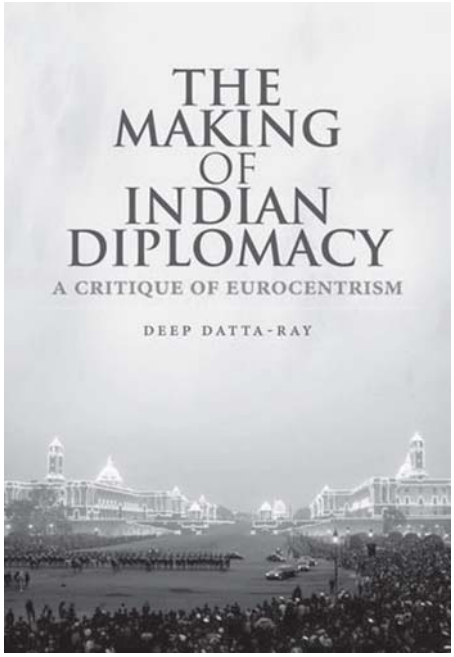
In Search Of Roots In The Epic

Satyabrata Pal

THE MAKING OF INDIAN DIPLOMACY: A CRITIQUE OF EUROCENTRISM
By Deep K. Datta-Ray
Oxford University Press, 2015, pp.380, ₹755.00



This book will generate very different responses from its readers. Indian academics may contest its premises and conclusions, but will have to grapple with a thesis so novel, which argues that Indian diplomacy flows from the Mahabharata, emerging from the progressively narrower and corroded conduits of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as satyagraha. Indian diplomats will find it either unreadable or extremely funny—the purest poppycock. The danger of course is that foreign analysts, unfamiliar with India and looking for keys to unlock its mysteries, might take it seriously, and form an utterly false view of how Indian diplomacy and diplomats work. There is the further danger that it will be fodder for a political dispensation determined to establish that everything of value in India has its roots in Hinduism. Though if a foreign policy establishment so far kept at arm's length by the powers that now be, as tainted by the influence of the *mlechcha*, is then embraced as the finest flower of Hindutva, some good may come out of this book after all.

The author's primary aim is to show that Indian diplomacy is not derived from European practice, even though the first generations of its diplomats were mimic men, anglicized and deracinated. Unusually, in an academic analysis, the author is free with details of his own background, from which we learn that he comes from a family of *Ingabangas*, as Bengalis who aped the English were called in the Raj. Bihari Lall Gupta, one of the first Indians in the ICS, was a forebear and his father is the distinguished journalist, Sunanda Datta-Ray, whose friendship with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is also artfully brought to the reader's attention to explain how the author got privileged access to the Ministry of External Affairs. It is hard not to get the feeling that this book, though abstruse, is the work of a precocious adolescent, railing against his family's values from the cocoon of its sanctuary, the sublimation of a teenager's rebellion in an arcane polemic.

The book ascends to the sublime—the Mahabharata—from the ridiculous, because from the first few chapters it appears that while satyagraha is the strategy deployed by Indian diplomacy, its tactics are *jugar*. The author uses *jugar* in its North Indian meaning, as improvisation to cobble together the makeshift, but generalizes it as an Indian characteristic, which it may well be. The shambles of Delhi's preparations for the Commonwealth Games is often given as an example of *jugar* gone bad. However, the use the author makes of the word is *jugar* run amok. These are two samples:

> From joining the MEA to fighting for 'stuff', diplomats struggle, and this way of working is termed *jugar*. Found in both reserved and general category officers, *jugar* makes for practices of mobility neither anarchical nor modern. Nor is *jugar* the overwhelming use of violence along a single trajectory, it is the way of the feeble. Most often, *jugar* is not an expression of violence at all…. In other words, what is violence for the weak is often no more than an expression of frustration at the possibility of what has been secured slipping away. Such responses, but in particular non-violent ones, are what makes for virtue, and they animate the MEA as a unit because it is an expression of *jugar*.
>
> The virtue of *jugar*, which motivates the individuals who perform diplomacy, not surprisingly personifies the MEA and characterises Indian diplomacy.

Firstly, *jugar* has no connotation either of violence or nonviolence: it is simply a falling back on ingenuity to solve a problem. The word and the concept carry none of the moral freight the author places upon them. So the conclusion that *jugar* reflects the nonviolence of the Indian mind is itself without any basis. Even more, the extrapolation and generalization to embrace all of Indian diplomacy come from the author's interactions with two batches of probationers whom he taught at the Foreign Service Training Institute. He met some others as well, but the trainees were his principal interlocutors. He therefore formed his conclusions about Indian diplomacy, the Ministry and how it worked from conversations with trainees who still had not started to work at its offices or to function as diplomats. A greater absurdity can hardly be imagined.

The author's descriptions of these probationers, and his recounting of his conversations with them, are very like the European accounts of encounters with 'natives' which he would find insufferable. Conscious of his own background, he weaves it into his narrative, as in this passage about a visit from a probationer, which could have been written by an Englishman in the Raj about an Indian visitor to his house:

> Obviously he was impressed by the 'style' of my house; his pellucid question indicated his assumptions that I had rented a flat, and that it was a flat rather than a house—even though he had entered what was quite obviously a three-storey house; also that it could not be owned by me (the house is actually a family property) and finally, that the furnishings, the Tagores and Jamini Rays on the walls, could just be there rather than be accoutrements installed by a designer to convey what he called 'style'.

The author makes the point that the social spectrum from which the Foreign Service is drawn has changed dramatically since Independence, with almost half now taken from the reserved categories. They often come from villages and small towns, are comfortable only in their mother tongues, and while this might be perceived as a disadvantage by earlier generations of diplomats, for the author this means that they are more Indian than their Anglophone predecessors, resonate more to the Mahabharata, and will therefore be better able to understand and to execute diplomacy as satyagraha.

This presupposes, of course, that the Mahabharata has indeed been the foundational text for Indian diplomacy, though for the author this is a given:

> Evidently, from independence to today, the *Mb* has been a trope for Indian diplomats. The presence of the text at the core of what is presumed a modern nation-state is jarring, for the text does not just orient Indian diplomats to the technicalities of diplomacy but may also be treated…. as a tool-kit to explain the structure-of-struc-

> “. . . *jugar* has no connotation either of violence or nonviolence: it is simply a falling back on ingenuity to solve a problem. The word and the concept carry none of the moral freight the author places upon them. So the conclusion that *jugar* reflects the nonviolence of the Indian mind is itself without any basis.”

tures animating the practices of diplomats and diplomacy today.

There is no such evidence, and, it could be asked, why the Mahabharata? The author seems to have struck upon the idea after hearing the then Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon remind probationers in a lecture that there was an old Indian tradition of diplomacy, of which Krishna's attempts to avert the great war were examples. Menon did not say, and it does not follow, that the Mahabharata is the fount of modern Indian statecraft. As a particularly erudite diplomat of the old school, he could just as easily have quoted from the Rgveda, or the Ramayana, even more popular than the Mahabharata, which also carry references to envoys. More to the point, he did not ask the trainees to take the Mahabharata as their guide, nor has any Indian diplomat ever been asked to base his or her actions on its precepts, or invoked it to justify a decision. India had an ancient system of medicine in Ayurveda, popular to this day, but if students training in modern medicine are reminded about this, it does not follow that the precepts of those ancient texts will be their guide.

It is ridiculous to posit national behaviour on a fondness for a particular book or myth, or to seek explanations for the decisions of a modern state and of the behaviour of its agents in an epic. No one in his right mind would argue that Nordic diplomacy differs in important respects from that of other Europeans because it is rooted in the sagas, or that Irish diplomacy is not the same as the British because it draws on the living tradition of Celtic myth. Finnish nationalism may have been formed by the Kalevala, but Finnish diplomacy is not driven by it.

On the Mahabharata, there is of course also the small difficulty that for several hundred years most of India was ruled by Muslim dynasties, which practised diplomacy. The author gets around this to his own satisfaction with the following ingenious argument:

> It is a modernist ruse to think that in the case of the *Mb*, Indians means Hindus. To do so is to resort to 'religion' and hence to implicate the text in modernity. Even if 'religion' is maintained, Muslims have long been familiar with the text. They have used it from at least the 11th century for not religious, but philosophical and political purposes. The *Mb* intrigued the Mughals….

He argues, without a shred of evidence, that the Mughals internalized the teachings of the Mahabharata. Even if this is conceded, it would still mean that only those involved in the statecraft of the Mughal empire absorbed its lessons; it was not then, or now, part of the Weltanschauung of the Indian Muslim. Nor is it a text that Indian Christians and adivasis grow up with, or those from the North East, and there are significant numbers of Indian diplomats from these backgrounds. To foist the Mahabharata on Indian diplomacy is in fact to give it a Hindu cast. As a former diplomat from a Hindu family, who worships the cow, but as Stroganoff, Wellington or rengdang, I find the thought revolting.

Where does Gandhi come in? According to the author,

> Gandhi engaged the *Mb*'s dharma-complex, synthesised it to make for truth and made it the basis of a politics so different from power politics-between-nations that it is termed the art-of-politics….
>
> This intellectual revolution came to life internationally with Gandhi's death, when his mantle passed to Jawaharlal Nehru. Though starting as a modern, Nehru was distinguished from mimic-men by moving towards Gandhi's art-of-politics and then deploying its practice, *satyagraha*, to the acme of anarchical-binarism, the 'international'.

The author holds that every external crisis which Nehru's India faced can be explained once it is understood that he was following the principles of *satyagraha*, whereas the Pakistanis in J&K, the Chinese in Aksai Chin, without the benefit of the Gandhian tradition, were simply being aggressive. Datta-Ray explains the blunders on China with this astonishing claim:

> Ultimately, the Forward Policy arose from Nehru aspiring to establish the truth of his stated position (open to contestation but unchallenged) by harmonising the border regions to create a *Ramarajya…* rather than arriving at a resolution over the heads of the people who would have been directly affected. To do so was to act in terms of the art-of-politics by facing aggressive-violence, but without resorting to aggressive-violence both within and without the state.

Much can be forgiven an academic spinning harmless theories, even if irredeemably silly, but this statement, which might please Nehru's acolytes, is an insult to the people of the border regions, who suffered then, even more than now, from the most acute neglect. To describe their state of being as *Ramarajya* is an almost fascist inversion of meaning. It was Nehru, in 1958, who gave the armed forces their special powers under the Act that continues to be abused till now in the furtherance of what the author would no doubt extol as *Ramarajya*. And it was on Nehru's watch that in 1963, Chinese Indians were interned, deprived of their rights, property and liberty, and subjected to the aggressive violence of the state. That too presumably can be traced to Gandhi and the Mahabharata.

In the author's view, the finest hour of Gandhian Nehruism was in the decision to test the nuclear bomb. The first test, under Indira Gandhi, was in truth peaceful, because she said it was, and a textured reading of politics always goes by what the actors say:

> … the test for India was a 'peaceful' explosion but was misread as India's seeking to claim for itself nuclear weapons status….
>
> The context included China's testing not just nuclear bombs, but bombs launched seven times by airborne bombers. That India's response stopped short at a capacity-demonstration, rather than moving on to any effort to miltarize the atom, is evidence of the continuance of *satyagraha*…

On the tests in 1998, the author's view is

> …it is an error to assume that Pokhran II was necessary to continue *satyagraha*…. A more compelling requirement was internal to the art-of-politics: preserve truth by not telling a lie. India therefore weaponised in terms of the art-of-politics to meet a new context, and tested to preserve truth… To not formalise this would contradict truth—by living a lie that modernists gloss over with the term 'ambivalence'.

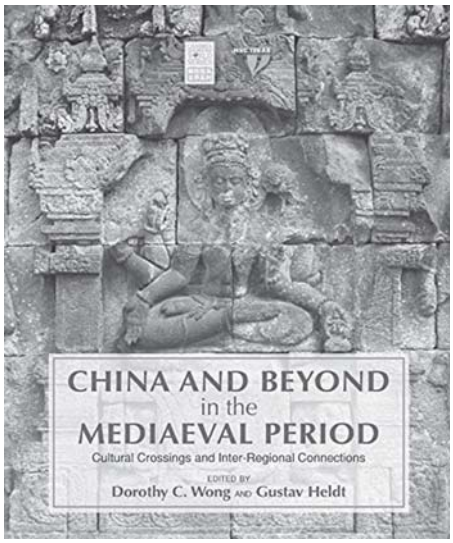
Reading passages like these, one wonders if this book is an elaborate hoax. It is hard to believe that these arguments are seriously put forward. If it is a running satire, it is superb, as good as *A Modest Proposal*. If it is not, the book is a disaster. The trees that gave up their lives to get it printed died meaningless deaths; this should not have happened in a Ramarajya run on the principles of *satyagraha*.

Satyabrata Pal, a former diplomat, was Member of the National Human Rights Commission.

Interdisciplinary Analyses

Madhavi Thampi

CHINA AND BEYOND IN THE MEDIAEVAL PERIOD: CULTURAL CROSSINGS AND INTER-REGIONAL CONNECTIONS
Edited by Dorothy C. Wong and Gustav Heldt
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 441, ₹3500.00



This is a splendid book on cultural interactions across Eurasia from approximately the 3rd-10th centuries CE. In keeping with its title, the book itself crosses many boundaries—disciplinary, national and conceptual—to provide us with an awe-inspiring picture of the 'different forms of transmissions, transgressions, hybridizations, dialectic encounters, syntheses, and transformations that occurred when peoples and cultures came into contact' (Introduction, p. 16). Although the focus is on China, the canvas is actually much wider, covering West, South, South East, Central and North East Asia, together with Europe. The subject matter encompasses diverse elements of social life and material culture, including art and iconography, ritual practices, literature, science and technology, trade, diplomacy, gender and rulership. Each of the studies is a model of scholarship in its own specific field, as testified to by the impressive bibliographies of primary and secondary sources appended to each essay. While this means that from the point of view of the non-specialist reader, some parts of the book make for difficult reading, it also means that the important insights provided by this book, which illuminate a whole range of issues, stand on a solid bedrock of scholarship.

China and Beyond can be seen as a product of the current emphasis in academia on a world scale, which rejects national and disciplinary limitations on scholarship, and lays greater stress on cross-disciplinary understanding and inter-regional connections. As the Epilogue by David Summers points out, 'in a world of vastly greater contact and interdependence,' there is an 'ever-growing interest in connections, and a corresponding decrease in putative cultural essentialisms' (p. 425). Nevertheless, it is rare to find such an array of diverse studies on this theme (twenty-one in all) in one volume. The editors have done a commendable job of pulling it all together in their Introduction. The essays have been grouped together under the rubrics 'Networks of Exchange', 'Silk Road Crossings', 'Textual Centres and Peripheries' and 'Buddhist Art and Iconography'.

This book is valuable for the general reader because it helps to undermine several questionable historical and cultural stereotypes. One of these concerns the nature and significance of the so-called Silk Road. As several of the studies make clear, the extent and diversity of the commercial and cultural transmissions across Eurasia are not adequately conveyed by the term 'Silk Road', which privileges one route (the overland route from China to Europe) and one commodity (silk). As Summers's epilogue puts it: '…the Silk Road was not really a road at all … it was, rather, a network of linked entrepôts, the relative prosperity and the very existence of which depended on events to the east and west, north and south' (p. 421). Tansen Sen's essay on maritime Buddhist networks draws attention to the importance of the maritime trade and pilgrimage routes. He says that the maritime and overland routes should be seen as complementary and interconnected, further arguing that Buddhist connections forged through the maritime networks proved in fact to be more enduring than the overland ones. In contrast to the notion that China was the eastern terminus of Silk Road connections, Dorothy Wang, in her study of the 8th century monk Chinese Jianzhen's mission to Japan, makes out a case for considering Japan rather than China as the eastern end point of the route. These insights, which stress the fluid and open-ended nature of the Silk Road, are particularly important in today's context, when attempts are being made to appropriate the legacy of the Silk Road and other pre-modern cultural transmission belts for national purposes.

Given the centrality of China in this volume, one of its major contributions is to bring out the open, flexible and accommodative nature of Chinese civilization. After going through the numerous micro-studies in this book, it will be very hard for anyone to hold on to the notion of China as an inward-looking, monolithic, 'sinocentric' culture. From the welcome given to foreign astronomers in the Tang court, to the popularity of foreign dress among both elites and commoners, and the innumerable examples of the adoption of Buddhist art, iconography and ritual practices, one is struck by the extent to which China absorbed cultural elements from various directions. At the same time, these elements were adapted and significantly transformed in China, and then transmitted to other regions like Japan, which in turn modified and practised these in their own unique ways. Lewis Lancaster's lucid opening essay convinces us that 'it is in just such complex narrations over centuries of time and widely separated regions of Eurasia that we find the roots of the patterns that we can spot in "China"' (pp. 33–4).

A related stereotype that is dissected in this volume is the concept of 'sinicization' (*hanhua*) prevalent in some academic circles in China. Albert Dien's discussion of the role of Sogdians, who were very active in the Central Asian trade from the 4th to the 8th centuries CE, takes issue with the attempts to show them as having become 'sinicized', on the basis of study of their burial places and epitaphs that have been excavated in recent decades. He shows how these same objects also prove that the Sogdians retained a distinct sense of their own ethnic identity. More importantly, he argues that attempts to fit their experience in China into the paradigms of 'sinicization' or 'assimilation' obscure more than they reveal about the important role of the Sogdians in Chinese history.

Several excellent studies in recent years, notably those of Liu Xinru, have highlighted the links between trade and the movement of religion across Eurasia. *China and Beyond* illuminates this subject further in several of the studies contained in it. Lancaster questions the idea that Buddhism was a 'passive passenger on the caravans' (p. 32) and sees Buddhism in many cases as providing the motivation and infrastructure for the development of trade. Sen's essay on maritime networks illustrates how monks and merchants, while often interdependent, also found themselves at times in an antagonistic relationship with each other. Ramirez-Weaver's piece on the intriguing Buddha image discovered in Helgo, Sweden, with its origins most probably as far away as Swat in

> “Given the centrality of China in this volume, one of its major contributions is to bring out the open, flexible and accommodative nature of Chinese civilization. After going through the numerous micro-studies in this book, it will be very hard for anyone to hold on to the notion of China as an inward-looking, monolithic, ‘sinocentric’ culture.”

present-day Pakistan, raises questions about the ‘expanding interregional economy in the ninth century’ (p. 181) and the role of Frisian traders in it. Summers’s epilogue emphasizes that commercial interaction could simultaneously entail ‘conflict, conquest, and tribute’ as well as ‘accommodation, translation, adaptation, incorporation, and synthesis’. Most important, as he says, ‘trade routes are as fundamental among the real spaces of world art as ritual centres and cities, and commerce is a basic mode of cultural contact and interaction’ (p. 422).

This volume is particularly notable for its several fine studies of Buddhist art and ritual practices, which bring out similarities as well as differences in the forms these took in different regions, especially the profoundly influential worship of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Three of the studies are related to the process of cultural transmission and adaptation between China and Japan. Three other essays relate, most unusually, to issues of gender and hybridity in Han and Tang China. The very broad range of subjects taken up for discussion greatly expands our understanding of the subject of cultural crossings, which are not limited to the crossing of geographical boundaries but also other boundaries such as those of gender and ethnicity. Only in a couple of instances did this reviewer wonder about the connection of the subject under discussion with the stated title of ‘China and beyond’. Overall, specialists in the various disciplines covered in this volume will find much that is new and rewarding, while the general reader can also benefit from the many thought-provoking ideas and insights it has to offer.

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From The Grassroots

N. Manoharan

SRI LANKA IN THE MODERN AGE: A HISTORY
By Nira Wickramasinghe
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015,
pp. 443, ₹995.00

As David Thelen said the main ‘challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present.’ This recovery and introduction is being done by historical writing, which is one variety of written expression that seeks to inform and persuade the reader through the use of evidence organized around a central thesis or argument. *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History* recounts the modern history of Sri Lanka, starting from colonial times to the present, a story of about two centuries.

In the process of recounting Sri Lanka’s modern past, Nira Wickrama-singhe draws not only on her own research, but also on the recent work in the field. In the process, the book undoubtedly dispels Thomas Carlyle’s understanding that ‘Histories are a kind of distilled newspapers’. On the other hand, what comes out is an intellectual distillation of narration from the point of view of communities. The academic rigour displayed by the author goes on to prove Karl Kraus wrong when the latter observed that ‘A historian is often only a journalist facing backwards.’

There is no dearth of historiographies on Sri Lanka. So, one tends to ask, what is unique about this book? The book under review stands out from other history books in two ways:

Firstly, to author Wickramasinghe, the project was to write a history of peoples and communities ‘as opposed to a history of the process of state-building’. In other words, when other historians tended to focus on the state’s failure to accommodate the needs and demands of minority communities, the book places the claims of minorities alongside the political, social and economic associations and groups, tracing their lineages to the colonial period. History need not be past politics, and politics present history. It is more than that. Crucially, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age* brings out Sri Lanka’s past from the perspective of identities: how different communities of Sri Lankans defined themselves in relation to other communities and with the power centre of a given period, from the colonial era; and how they bargained and forged socio-economic and political alliances for their survival, growth and prosperity.

Secondly, though there are numerous good books on the history of Sri Lanka, their main focus is on particular historical aspects like communalism, separatism, religion and identity. However, the book under review tries to cover the entire gamut of issues in a single volume. Interestingly, the narration is done in ‘an accessible yet unconventional manner.’ It is an accomplished history of both the state and the people of Sri Lanka which provides an essential background for understanding the country’s contemporary problems. In short, it is an up-to-date history of Sri Lanka that is available in the market.

This is a huge task because writing of history from the grassroots involves painstaking collection of ethnographical works. The author has done that creditably.

Written in ten chapters, the book is broadly divided into two major parts respectively to deal with pre-colonial and postcolonial years of Sri Lanka. The last two chapters are very important and form an interesting read dealing with the post-war years. There is a dire need to understand the post-Eelam War years of Sri Lanka from a historical perspective. However, one wonders whether the last two chapters project the subaltern view as claimed by the author. They read just like generic political history rather than other points of view. Also, one wonders whether all communities are proportionately represented in the narration. Use of vernacular sources (both Sinhala and Tamil) could have made the observations more credible. A revised version may take care of this lacuna.

On this book, one tends to agree with Norman Cousins, who famously remarked: ‘History is a vast early warning system.’ Take for instance, the concluding remarks by the author: ‘Between self-defeating neo-liberal UNP and a shallow inward-looking JVP, change could only come from democratic pluralistic forces recapturing the SLFP from dynastic rulers of the past and present and voicing a message of political reconciliation coupled with constitutional reform.’ This is exactly what has happened.

The chapters are well structured. The writing is lucid, incisive and gripping. And the flow is smooth from cover to cover. The wealth of information is immense. ‘Select Bibliography’ in the end is a valuable addition for those who wish to dwell on the subject further. A must read for Sri Lanka watchers and to scholars and policy makers as well.

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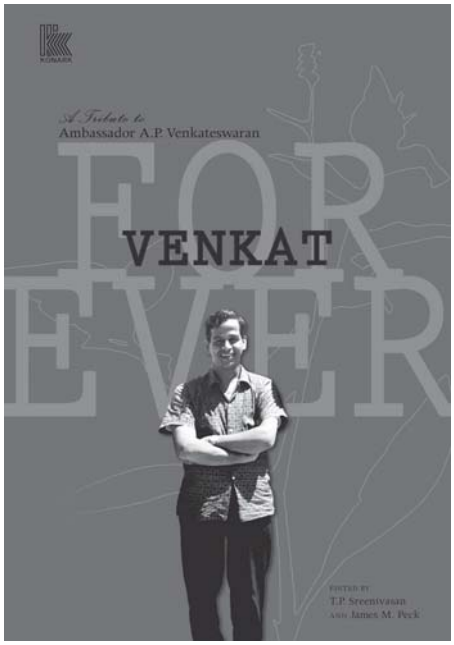
Rebel With A Cause

I.P. Khosla

VENKAT FOREVER: A TRIBUTE TO AMBASSADOR A.P. VENKATESWARAN
Edited by T.P. Sreenivasan and James M. Peck
Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 2015, pp. xiii +217, ₹595.00



This is not just a tribute, as suggested in the title, it is a 'labour of love' undertaken at speed by a former admiring junior colleague and Venkat's one son-in-law, and motivated, as the editors elaborate in an introductory note, by the conviction that the hero of the volume was such a unique person that he should be remembered forever. The contents generally justify that introduction, for it ends up between analect and anthology, with a marked emphasis on the former. It has, of course, been well publicized and received praise; released originally in Bangalore, it was then presented to the Sharjah Book Fair, then released again by the Dalai Lama.

The volume starts with a 23 page summary of 'a life well lived' by family members. Then follow some fifty tributes, largely by former colleagues who knew him in or after he retired from the Foreign Service, but also from friends outside the service, relations and well wishers like the cycling enthusiast who became his admirer (none from any foreign friends or admirers though, presumably due to shortage of time). There is then a section consisting of photographs and 'Venkatisms' like the reference to Rajiv Gandhi, under whom he served, that one can inherit good looks, also intelligence, but not experience. The last section, which is strictly not part of the tribute, has more substance, being an oral history interview which he gave to a colleague and where he recounts details of his career, from the time he joined the service to his retirement, with interesting asides, about the issues he faced, what he thought about Indian diplomacy and the Indian diplomat and, of course, what needs to be done.

The tributes occupy well over half the book, ranging from a two liner which describes him as caring and hospitable, to much longer ones which recount in some detail what it was like to work with him with greater or lesser closeness, to know him socially, to enjoy his hospitality and, in more than one case, to encounter him in other circumstances, fleeting or not. Some of the contributors knew him well, others hardly at all, though this does not necessarily detract from the value of what they write. The keenness of his intellect and the sharpness of his wit are the qualities that come in for most attention; one after another, the tributes refer to his humour, his capacity for quick repartee.

There is no doubting Venkateswaran's intellectual calibre. Even in college, having never studied the subject and despite advice that he should take up at Masters level something he knew, he took economics, then stood first as well as earned a scholarship to the London School of Economics. Instead he decided to join the Indian Foreign Service and had a most distinguished career. He served as a start in India's embassy in Prague, and then in New York as Consul; Ethiopia came next, where he charmed Emperor Haile Selassie and dodged bullets during an attempted *coup d'etat*. Later came Moscow, where he was Head of Chancery, followed by Fiji (High Commissioner), to Delhi as Joint Secretary, then Washington (as Deputy), then Damascus as Ambassador. Finally the capstone, Ambassador to China, following which, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and then Foreign Secretary. There was no doubt in his mind, and his family clearly agreed with this assessment wholeheartedly that the assignment to Moscow was the highlight of his career, the place from which he says he benefited the most.

Coming back to the tributes, one after another they describe his as one of the most incisive minds ever; an extraordinary intellect, with sharpness of mind, a brilliant man, a stalwart in his professional domain. He knew western classical music and could identify any composer on hearing just the first few bars of the piece. One contributor, however, writes that in sharpness of mind he was outstanding but a copy, the original having been his father, who was even more of a ready wit.

Of his wit and humour also there is little doubt, the first being razor sharp and the second puckish. Even in the midst of crisis conditions he stayed cool and relaxed and never missed the opportunity to make quips. It's not easy to know precisely how to handle this business of repartee; easy to be off centre; hesitate and no one laughs for it is too late; go too far and it causes offence. This is a large part of what led to the trouble. He had little time or patience with ministers who took time to understand issues or were obtuse for other reasons. On one occasion he told a junior colleague that he had such a low opinion of a particular minister that he wouldn't employ him even as a clerk in his office, on which he was gently told not to air such views too widely.

But it was his interaction with Premier Rajiv Gandhi that brought his tenure as Foreign Secretary to an early end. He had, it was generally known, an inclination to treat the former lightly, which several colleagues noted at the time, and one of them even wrote about it. Indeed some of his more caustic comments were reserved for the Premier. Once he commented (to him) about his foreign wife, which by any standards was an inexcusable liberty; on another occasion he showed him, somewhat jocularly, how to shut a file folder; on yet another he joked to a colleague that if Rajiv Gandhi was on the plane there was no need to worry since a spare pilot was available. In our system these comments have a way of getting to the person who is the butt, and there was no doubt that the Premier was uncomfortable having Venkat as Foreign Secretary. On top of this there were differences on policy and Venkat clearly thought that the Premier was too inexperienced to be able to take properly thought out decisions, as also that the Foreign Office was being left out of the decision making process on such issues. There was the question of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, and Venkat believed Indian policy ended up appeasing the Sri Lankan government on this. There was the matter of relations with China, on which he believed India should go further and faster than was

happening; and he opposed the suggestion that statehood should be granted to Arunachal Pradesh. Finally there was Pakistan and the real difference between the two men on the best approach to relations with that country.

The famous press conference of January 1987 at which the Rajiv was asked about a possible visit to Pakistan and where that difference came out into the open, followed by Venkat's rush back to South Block to hand in his papers established his reputation for-ever for being courageous and not hesitating to stand up to his political masters.

Every bureaucrat has this problem with his political masters. Before Independence there were, of course, few such because the bureaucrats reigned supreme, since politicians were either not around, or wore veils of emasculation. For years after Independence there were politicians around but they did not realize that in effect they could wield real power. This dawned on them, really, by the 1960s, as has been brought out by studies in bureaucrat-politician relations in India. So thereafter they took control, against much kicking and struggling, it's true, but they did realize that without their signatures, nothing could go forward; that they had the power to transfer a bureaucrat at will; that it is in the bureaucrat's best self-interest to show loyalty to them. Of course it took years more for bureaucrats to be reconciled to this new state of affairs; in a sense they are still not yet fully reconciled; this will be, for years more, a sort of 'yes, minister' kind of relationship. So when a bureaucrat holds up his end of the equation high and does it with panache and a great deal of publicity, no other bureaucrat, no matter that he has no intention whatsoever of doing anything similar, will hesitate to applaud. So now the Foreign Service Association passed a resolution praizing Venkat's eminence and his service to Indian diplomacy and, without directly criticising anyone, noting that this long service should not have had ended in such a regrettable manner.

Altogether this is a tribute and little else. There is no index, of course, one cannot expect one in this kind of volume, but there is not even a list of those whose writing have been included and that, too, in a sequence which is not anywhere explained.

However, for admirers of the hero this would certainly be a useful addition to their libraries.

I.P. Khosla, a former diplomat, is the author of *How Neighbours Converge: The Politics And Economics Of Regionalism* (Konark, 2014).

The Tellers of Tales

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan

INDIA: THE CRITICAL YEARS
By T.V. Rajeshwar
Harper Collins, 2015, pp. 281, ₹600.00

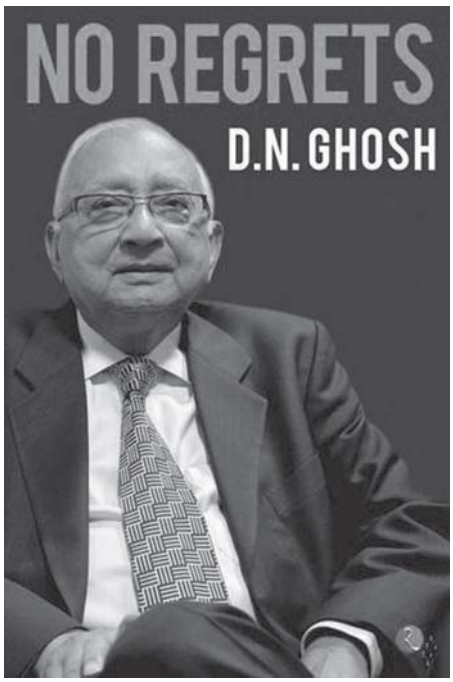
TO THE BRINK AND BACK
By Jairam Ramesh
Rupa, 2015, pp. 216, ₹395.00

KASHMIR: THE VAJPAYEE YEARS
By A.S. Dulat
HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015, pp. 344, ₹599.00

NO REGRETS
By D.N. Ghosh
Rupa, 2015, pp. 375, ₹695.00

DREAMING BIG: MY JOURNEY TO CONNECT INDIA
By Sam Pitroda
Penguin, 2015, pp. 331, ₹700.00

AN UPSTART IN GOVERNMENT
By Arun Maira
Rupa, 2015, pp. 252, ₹500.00



A 'small' publisher I know never lets slip an opportunity to morosely grumble about how the 'big' publishers are putting the small ones out of business. That may well be true, or largely true. But there is a silver lining, too, at least for readers. Suddenly, in contrast to the time when Indians who had worked for the government would sneer at colleagues who wrote their memoirs, they are now bursting forth in full autumnal song. The big publishers have at least succeeded in reversing the perverse tendency towards snobbish bureaucratic reticence. The generous advances that they give, and the free publicity they arrange, must be irresistible after a lifetime of gnome-like anonymity. As a result, there is now a veritable tsunami of autobiographies. In the last five years there have been around 50.

In recent months we have had T.V. Rajeshwar who was former head of the IB, Jairam Ramesh who had been a man for all seasons in government since 1982, A.S. Dulat who headed RAW under NDA I, Sam Pitroda who was responsible for the telecom revolution in India, and D.N. Ghosh a career civil servant who had specialized in banking, telling their life stories. Finally, there is Arun Maira who served as a Member of the Planning Commission during UPA II. It is reported that there are many more in the works, including ones by M.L. Fotedar and other political VIPs who now inhabit the dustbins of history. The urge not to be forgotten, never mind that they will remain no more than a couple of footnotes, seems very strong.

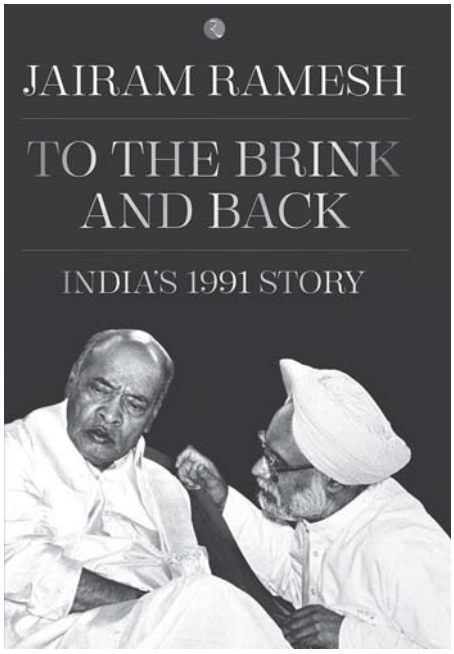
T.V. Rajeshwar, who has been labelled as a liar and a senile old man by no less a personage than R.K. Dhavan—that too on national TV—writes about the Emergency and the role the IB played in it. He says it didn't have any inkling about what was coming on the night of June 25, 1975 and the decision 'was not made in consultation with the IB or the Home Ministry.' Other versions certainly bear out this claim, whatever R.K. Dhawan may say now. Later at his book launch he said that all decisions which leaders to arrest were made either by Mrs. Gandhi herself or by her son, Sanjay Gandhi. He writes that 'One year after the imposition of Emergency, the IB conducted a State-wise survey of the state of affairs and recommended the release of all political prisoners. It was suggested to Ms. Gandhi that it would be advisable to hold elections some time in October 1976. The elections were held in 1977, and Ms. Gandhi's defeat from her pocket borough of Rae Bareli in Uttar Pradesh was announced on the night of March 23.' He is very clear that it was Sanjay Gandhi's influence over his mother that led to the rejection of IB's suggestion of holding elections in October 1976.

Jairam Ramesh's book is not an autobiography, at least a full one. He should write one because he is an excellent raconteur. It is an excellent and accurate account of the 1990–91 balance of payments crisis in India. Mr Ramesh has also appended a lot of documentation to the narrative. His main point is that many of the things that happened in July 1991 after P.V. Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister were already on the

anvil and some of the things had, indeed, already been done. I can't help but suspect that he wants not just to give credit to Rajiv Gandhi so that the Rao shine goes off a bit but also to slightly take Manmohan Singh down a bit. 'The first two years of Rajiv Gandhi... saw a flurry of initiatives to give greater incentives to the private sector to expand... Indira Gandhi herself had cautiously begun the process... India's first major reform that partially decontrolled the cement industry took place in 1982. Earlier, in May 1979, the Committee on Controls and Subsidies set up by Morarji Desai government under the chairmanship of Vadilal Dagli submitted its report.' This is consistent with the view many others hold.

A.S. Dulat reveals many nasty secrets about Kashmir, Pakistan and the separatists, a masala book as it were. While reading this book, you wonder whether it is a good idea to let out certain types of secrets but giving Dulat the benefit of doubt, some, at least, of these revealed secrets must have had a collateral purpose. The thrust of his book is that New Delhi has played ducks and drakes in Kashmir, preferring to focus on resolving immediate problems rather than address long term issues. He does not quite say what these latter are, though. Pakistan too is guilty of this, he says. There are some revealing anecdotes that would make nice reading in a gossip column but are of no great historical significance. For example, Brajesh Mishra once sent Farooq Abdullah a message that '…if he's not willing to cooperate, we have our own ways of doing it'. He also reveals that the government thought Mehbooba Mufti had 'militant' links.

D.N. Ghosh is not someone about whom you can say modesty comes easily to him. By a clever trick of writing he manages to place himself at the centre of every story which he narrates. He even claims oblique credit for the final decision of bank nationalization in 1969. You are left with the impression that but for him it may not have happened. If true, he has a lot to answer for. He had two moments in the sun: one as the man who supervised the banking division in the Finance Ministry in the period after 14 banks were nationalized in July 1969; and the other about two decades later as chairman of the State Bank of India (SBI). A more modest moment came when he was chairman of L&T and warded off a takeover bid by Reliance. It makes for very interesting reading. There are several stories which make the book a riveting read for students of economic history. The book shows how casually economic policy used to be made in India and how whimsical it could be. Little



wonder then that we find ourselves where we are. Ghosh, by the way, when he was chairman of SBI, had declared that India did not need ATMs.

Sam Pitroda doesn't reveal any secrets but his book is full of nice little anecdotes about himself, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, in particular. He more or less dropped out of the sky in 1984 into India, and managed to impress both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi with his approach to modernizing India. Their political backing, along with the determination to, to begin with, modernize Indian telecommunications enabled him to leave a proper legacy. India has much to thank him for. Pitroda also doesn't parade himself as a saviour although he did initiate a great many other changes in policy. He just tells the story. Above all, the 'mission mode' which Narendra Modi has now adopted to get things done was started by him.

Arun Maira, who was brought in from the private sector, laments about the way things get done and not done in government. His main brief, from the Prime Minister himself, was to see how the manufacturing sector could be made to grow faster. He says he was assigned seven people as his personal staff, with one to carry his papers and one to open the door for him. The others took his calls, typed for him and were general factotums without whom he could have done just as well. He says he enjoyed the experience but the tone and tenor of the book suggests that he is merely being polite. He has scrupulously avoided names and incidents other than the most anodyne.

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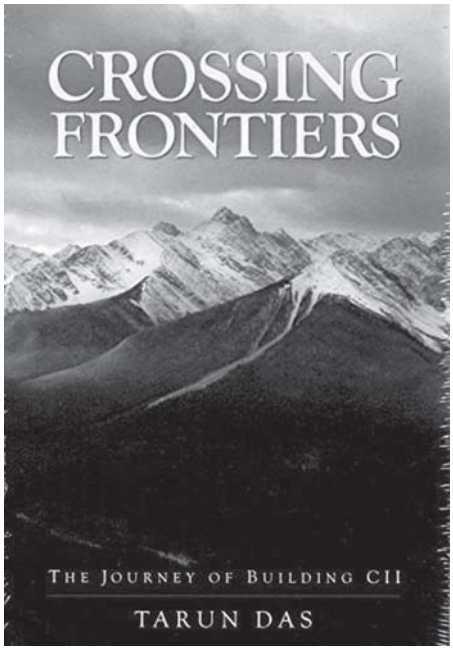
On The Path Of Reform And Growth

Kishan Rana



CROSSING FRONTIERS: THE JOURNEY OF BUILDING CII
By Tarun Das
Business Standard Books, New Delhi, 2015, pp. IV+236, ₹699.00

Tarun Das transports the reader on a 30-year twin journey: he narrates the opening up of India, from its hesitant and wayward path before P.V. Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister in 1991, gaining traction after the latter launched economic reforms; that story is juxtaposed with a detailed account of the transformation of an obscure engineering industry association into what became for a time India's most powerful non-state economic actor. Tarun Das accomplishes this in a short book, which unfortunately leaves out a large part of his fund of rich stories, episodes that those that travelled with him on stretches of that journey might wish were included.

I first met Tarun in mid-1975, on way to an ambassadorship to Algeria; I have only a faint recollection of a modest engineering association office in Jor Bagh; it was after I reached Kenya in 1984 that his organization, on its way to becoming the 'Confederation of Engineering Industry', became our Mission's useful interlocutor; friendship flowered during the years 1986 to 1995, when Tarun and his Confederation became, at San Francisco, Mauritius and Germany, our indispensable partners for economic promotion.

In essence, Tarun Das tells us in detail the way institutions are built, how organizational practices, internal and external, that became hallmarks, were forged in the early years, 1974–75, producing a chrysalis cycle that led from AIEI to CEI and thence to CII in 1992. These practices included a strict one-year term for the organization's president, a 15-member executive that handled key decisions, and a council of past presidents, all designed to promote unified actions, combined with enduring values. We read of organization heads, all busy corporate leaders, that took a year's leave from their work commitments, like Suresh Krishna travelling across India to connect with members, listen to their needs, and deliver the organization's message. A starting point for external outreach to ministries and other official agencies was data collection and processing, to produce credible policy advice, rooted in facts. The real novelty was a mindset shift, to work *with* the government, not to confront it, which was the traditional default setting for business chambers.

One chapter sets out the ingredients for a successful organization; prominent amongst these is building credibility, creating confidence with official agencies that are to become partners. At a time when real business-industry dialogue did not take place, AIEI chose to start with the Department of Heavy Industry, and found in Mantosh Sondhi, the Secretary heading it, an ally willing to listen. That set of persuasive actions progressed across the government, into bastions with which business had not connected with in the past, especially the Finance Ministry and PM's Office. The end result was public-private collaboration of a nature unseen in India, at a time when the term 'PPP' had not entered common usage.

CII was an early mover on 'Total Quality Management' and environment work. Externally, it was partnership with the World Economic Forum that helped CII, and through that, India as well. This was the large canvas role that Tarun Das played, and truly reflected his vision and drive, though the author does not use such words for himself. CII anticipated action by the government in framing on its own norms for corporate governance, much before this was enacted into law. Few parallels exist anywhere in the world, for such early moves by an industry association.

Through the 1980s and later, CII was an upstart in what then became a rivalry with FICCI, and to a lesser extent, Assocham, the three principal business bodies on our economic landscape. In the beginning, FICCI was simply too slow and old-fashioned in thinking, though the author is too polite to rub this in. Yet, these rivals did occasionally cooperate; Tarun Das mentions joint sessions they hosted for Russian President Putin in the late 1990s, but in fact such collaborative joint business meetings were sometimes imposed from outside even earlier, as during Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 1993 visit to New Delhi, and PM Rao's return visit in 1994. The author is entirely right in stressing that such rivalries among business entities exist in other countries; it makes for healthy competition.

Omitted from this book, perhaps out of modesty, are accounts that would have told the story of CII's overseas marketing of India. One example is the persistence in connecting with the iconic Jack Welch of General Electric, and how those persuasive efforts produced a major tilt toward India by that global company, leading inter alia to the establishment of one of the world's largest corporate research centers in Bengaluru. Such stories are essential history.

The author's writing style is staccato, sometimes laconic, resembling his speech. A few sections of the book are repetitive, especially description of personalities that worked closely with the author. A deeper lacuna is that in his effort to avoid controversial comment, the author has left out details of how some of the domestic battles played out in taking India forward along the reform and growth path. But for all that, the book is inspirational and laden with advice that is rooted in vast personal experience.

As Tarun Das might say: Great read. Easy flow. Terrific.

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Book News	*Book News*

The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa by Ethan B. Katz is a sweeping history of Jews and Muslims in France from World War I to the present, offering fresh perspectives for understanding the opportunities and challenges in France today.

Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 465, price not stated.

Indian Women...A Study In Sepia

Kalyani Menon Sen

INDIAN WOMEN: CONTEMPORARY ESSAYS
Devaki Jain and C.P. Sujaya
Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2015,
pp. 235, ₹335.00

This collection of essays edited by two eminent Indian women brings together contributions from some of the best known and most respected scholars and activists in the country. It is the second edition—coming three decades after the first—of a collection of essays that is described as a precursor to the 'Towards Equality' report. Surely a book that will endure as a benchmark in the field of women's studies, to be quoted and cited for many years to come.

All of the essays in this book are substantive and thoughtful, as is only to be expected from authors of this eminence. The book opens with Romila Thapar's magisterial reflection on women's position in ancient India, and moves on to a compilation of official data on the current 'gender scenario'; reviews of women's situation with respect to some key issues (legal rights, education, political participation), and reflective pieces on the situations of particular categories of women (Dalit women, Muslim women, Malayali women). There is a piece of almost-fiction (a description of a day in the life of an ageing upper-caste woman in a Tamilnadu village). Bringing up the rear is a statistical profile highlighting changes in indicators of women's status since the 1980s.

What is the thread that knits these essays together, apart from the obvious one of their all having to do with Indian women? Why have they been sequenced in this particular way? What is the conceptual framework that underpins them? What do the editors think about these issues and the positions taken by the authors?

The introduction, which is usually where the answers to such questions can be found, is strangely tepid. Instead of the forceful opinions one looks for from Devaki Jain and C.P. Sujaya, we have the kind of inane pronouncements that would be more at home in a govenment report than a volume of feminist writings: 'While there is progress for many, success is still very distant for all women' and 'while all women are not homogenous and uniform yet there are running threads that bind them together' and 'it has been a long journey for all Indian women to walk through many new paths and learn many new lessons.'

The introduction does little more than string together the supposed highlights of each chapter, but these are often framed in terms that the authors themselves might have difficulty in recognizing. We are told that Jayati Ghosh explains the 'increasing incidence of paid labour, underpaid labour, unpaid labour and open unemployment in terms of a combination of paid work, unpaid work, underpaid work and open unemployment.' Syeda Hameed's personal reflection on religious identity is described as a depiction of 'the negative-positive situation of Muslim women'. Vimala Ramachandran's careful intersectional analysis of educational outcomes is summed up as showing that 'schoolgirls who are poor and do not dress well suffer from the same backlash that occurs when slight success has been achieved'.

The chapter closes with the profound statement: 'What kind of experiences and lessons Indian women have learnt upto now and what would be the scenario that Indian women would confront in the next 5–10 years, would lie in the future.'

It is surely a coincidence that the cover of the book mirrors the sense of vagueness and confusion induced by these opening pages. The design has the word 'woman' in various elegant scripts hovering just below the surface of a cloudy background, sliding away onto the back cover as if to elude capture by the reader's eye.

It is very difficult for this reviewer to accept that the editors had anything to do with this introduction, marred as it is by the smudgy fingerprints of governmentality. Nevertheless, this must be recognized as a historically important book. It marks the end of an era—an era when feminists (like the editors themselves) worked closely with the state to build a policy framework that matched Constitutional commitments and aimed to ensure equality for 'all women' at least in intent. This intent has now been quietly laid to rest, with even the usual *pro forma* commitments to equality 'regardless of sex, caste, creed or political persuasion' being unceremoniously dropped from policy documents and official priorities.

Coming at such a time, the essays in this book stand out for the uncompromising manner in which they lay bare the ingrained misogyny of the state—a misogyny that can be traced back down the centuries as Romila Thapar demonstrates. In Indira Jaising's words, what we are dealing with is 'criminal syndicates, what in legal terms is called organised crimes against women...the tragedy is that those in power either choose to ignore it or cast the blame on the breakdown of moral values and societal apathy without evaluating their role or apportioning any responsibility for the ineptness or failure of systems and mechnisms of governance.'

The most powerful essays are those that speak in the personal voice. The flame of Indira Jaising's anger is fuelled by a lifetime of battles with the state to defend women's rights and the rule of law. Syeda Hameed's anguish stems from her struggle to practise her feminist politics without either invoking or denying her religious identity. The question she raises around our easy ascriptions of victimhood go beyond her personal story and place a question mark on the lenses through which we view caste and class identities.

Mina Swaminathan's Chellamma is a gentle yet unsentimental depiction of the politics of the personal, acknowledging privilege without prevarication and conveying how things have changed far more powerfully than any amount of figures and statistics. In the same vein, J. Devika's story of the woman panchayat president who described herself as a rocket with its tail on fire—'I am flying very fast but I have no clue where I am going and whether I will come back home safely'—says more about the complex impact of reservations than pages of data and tables.

That is not to decry the importance of the data and tables collected in this book. In a climate when even government reports are suppressed or sanitized if they fail to validate exaggerated claims of *vikas*, using official data and statistics to question official narratives is a politically significant act.

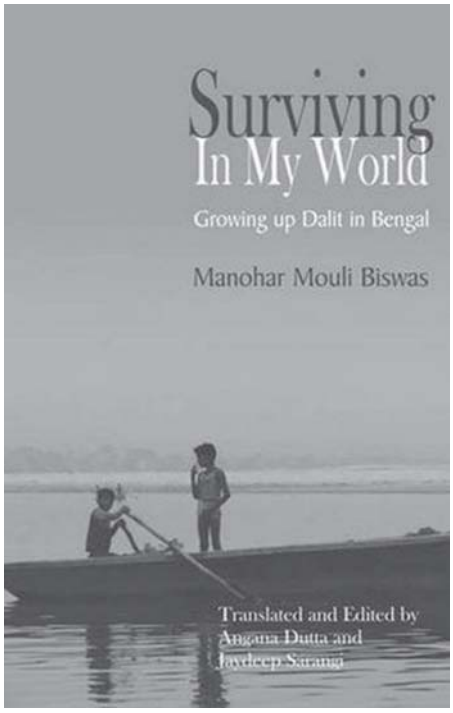
Apart from its value as a reference point for students of women's studies, this book will be read by women's movements and feminist activists who are confronting a government that makes no secret of its Hindutva-driven agenda of policy change. One hopes the editors will return to this collection and give us a companion piece that frames these essays in terms of their significance for our feminist politics in these dismal times.

Kalyani Menon Sen is a feminist activist and independent researcher who works in Delhi. Her work focuses on the impact of macro policies on women's lives.

Bygone Memories

Rob Harle

SURVIVING IN MY WORLD: GROWING UP DALIT IN BENGAL
By Manohar Mouli Biswas. Translated from the Bangla and edited by Angana Dutta and Jaydeep Sarangi
Bhatkal & Sen (Samya) Kolkata, 2015, pp. 125, ₹350.00



This is an engaging, poignant and important autobiography. It will be a serious 'reality check' for all readers! Biswas is a wonderful story teller, his almost 'matter-of-fact' style engages the reader and virtually transports him or her to the rice paddies, river banks and muddy creeks which are indelibly part of Biswas's formative years.

At times the story envelopes the reader in powerful and poignant emotional recollections which would be quite difficult to handle if they were overly dramatized. Manohar 'tells it like it is' in simple language, his honesty and forthrightness coming through on every page. We experience the dignity and genuineness of this man in an almost palpable way. It is amazing, considering the deprivation suffered, social rejection and poor living conditions of the dalits (namashudra or untouchables) that Biswas's story does not focus on bitterness or hatred. There is at times an underlying sadness expressed in the chapters—how could there not be?—when one group of humans have been treated in such a detestable way by other groups within the caste system.

The caste system incidentally was not originally a state instigated abomination but one of religious beginnings in the Vedas. 'The Vedas itself stated the stratification of four categories of castes, such as the brahmins, the kshatriyas, the vaishyas and the shudras [Rig: 10.90.12]' (p. 96). The 'partition' of the nation (Bengal) was used by a minority for their own purposes, 'They were successful in using religion blindly for their own selfish interests' (p. 80). Similarly the treatment of black Africans, slavery and Apartheid by so called Christians was a result of deliberate and inaccurate interpretation of certain Christian scriptures.

Surviving In My World is an important book because it exposes the caste system for what it really was (and in some respects still is), it presents the living conditions of dalits in a day-to-day quest for mere survival, which feeling persons could never condone nor tolerate if they were fully aware of the dalit's plight. By publishing his story Biswas will reach a large number of people in both India and globally who previously may have had no real idea of the extent of suppression and oppression of the untouchables, myself included. As R. Azhagarasan says in the beginning of the book; 'Manohar Mouli Biswas's autobiography is significant not merely in expanding the dalit canon but in locating the biased vision of the seemingly secular Bengal mainstream.'

A little about the content of the book. It has in my opinion a skilfully designed cover which is both captivating and truly expresses the purpose of the book. *Amar Bhubane Ami Thaki* is the Bengali title of this book originally written by Biswas in his native language. This version in English, brilliantly translated by Dutta and Sarangi consists of explanatory notes on the Bengali calendar, kinship terms, and a very useful glossary. There is an introductory note by Manohar; a foreword by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, introduction by the editors; and a most enlightening and engaging interview with Biswas by Dutta, Sarangi and Gurav.

Many of the passages in the chapters give the reader a deep understanding of the dalit's world and just how isolated both geographically, culturally and socially their world was. Referring to dalit songs and his boyhood companions, 'Their illiteracy, their poverty, did not sour them and they remained engrossed in their world. They had sculpted their world in their own style, and just as the outer world had provided no entry there, they did not step out of their world' (p. 38).

Manohar compares the dalits' lives to that of the water hyacinth, very resilient but despised, neglected and uncared for. This plant grows in the mud prolifically and was ever present in the waterways around the villages. These waterways were in a sense the life blood of the dalits as they enabled the rice paddies to yield good crops (monsoon disasters notwithstanding) and were also inhabited by fish which Manohar relates how he loved to catch.

Manohar is at pains to point out that this book is not his complete autobiography. Further on in the story he includes details of his successful education against all odds, his marriage and children who did not experience his formative years growing up as a dalit. 'This autobiography is my autobiography, my father's autobiography, my grandfather's autobiography, my great grandfather's autobiography. This is the autobiography of remembering the bygone memories of my community' (p. 78).

Those not living in India and Bangladesh would be forgiven for thinking that the lot of the dalits had been vastly improved in recent years but as Manohar relates this is not the case. 'There is no greater pain than hunger to the starving. There have been commendable developments in government policies aiming at dalit empowerment and much has been achieved as well; however, large sections of dalits still remain trapped in conditions of dire deprivation. Many of them remain homeless, without any shelter' (p. 79).

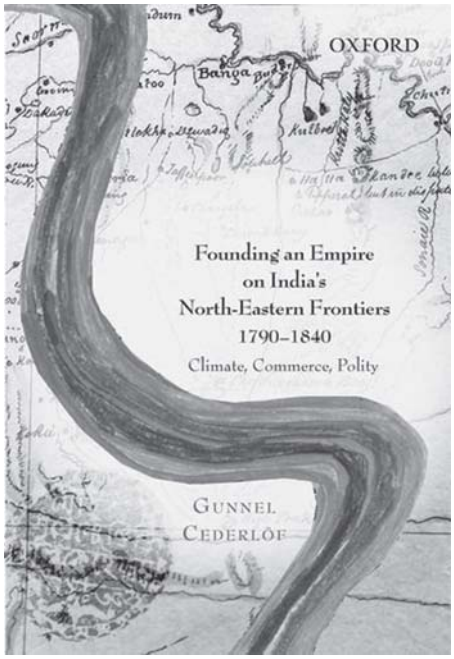
In the interview section of *Surviving In My World* the interviewers ask Manohar, 'Don't you desire to get all your work translated so that internationally people can be inspired by your writings and shoulder the responsibility of emancipating the dalits?' His answer: 'I don't believe in it because of the fact the state-level people do not recognise me. Then how can I be known internationally?' (p. 108) I feel Manohar may be in for a pleasant surprise! He has worked tirelessly to improve the dalit's situation especially through his literary creations, including his recent book of poetry *The Wheel Will Turn,* and now this heartrending autobiography. I only hope that the publication and global exposure of Manohar's books (despite his reticence), and also the reviews of these books will help the dalits gain the freedom that many of us simply take for granted.

Rob Harle is a writer, artist and academic reviewer.

Across Spatial And Temporal Frameworks

Debarati Bagchi

FOUNDING AN EMPIRE ON INDIA'S NORTH-EASTERN FRONTIERS 1790–1840: CLIMATE, COMMERCE, POLITY
By Gunnel Cederlöf
Oxford University Press, 2014, New Delhi, pp. 296, ₹895.00



Gunnel Ceder's is an important contribution to the historical scholarship on colonial state making in South Asia in general and frontier and borderland studies in particular. Taken together, her earlier works on the interfaces of agrarian, environmental and legal histories in colonial and early colonial South India and eastern Bengal and the book under review on India's North Eastern frontiers, speaks of the author's rare ability to traverse a vast landscape across spatial and temporal frameworks. Rejecting the ascription of frontier as an 'isolated enclave' at the very outset, *Founding An Empire* shows how India's North East was 'an open-ended affair' (p. 6) at least until the early decades of Company rule. Arguably, the book lends a certain centrality to the landscape between Bengal and Burma and posits how significant this region could be in reshaping our understanding of early colonial state making.

Cederlöf sets her timeframe between 1790 and 1840, the 'formative years' for the East India Company as she calls it, when a mercantile corporation was transitioning into an entrenched polity. Clearly influenced by Philip J. Stern's model of 'Company State', Cederlöf identifies this phase to be one when the Company was still struggling to get a foothold in the colony and grappling to combine commercial, military and administrative imperatives. By emphasizing the word 'formative', Cederlöf attempts to complicate the givenness of the idea of colonial state and illustrates how it gradually took shape through a conflicted and unsmooth journey from corporate bureaucracy to governance. The subtitle introduces the three key issues that the book deals with: climate, commerce, polity. The first chapter is a further elucidation of the larger thematic and historiographic concerns in terms of which these issues are discussed in the rest of the chapters: the entangled histories of ecology and the agrarian, the contested processes of mapping and demarcating regions and the shifting ruler-subject relations.

The second, third and fourth chapters address the varying notions of space and the imposition of cartographic boundaries to suit the Company's military and trade interests before and after the Anglo-Burma War during 1824–26. Before entering into the extremely rich archival explorations, Cederlöf craftily posits a crucial point: how the separation of the agrarian and the ecological is arrived at in the very logic of the colonial archive. She illustrates this by highlighting the contradictory tenor of disaster reports and the revenue surveyors' reports of eastern Bengal produced around the same time in late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. While the disaster reports contained descriptions of 'chaos' resulting from floods or earthquakes, revenue surveys gave accounts of a 'regular, stable and ordered landscape' (p. 19). The call for an awareness of climate and ecology to grasp the history of the landscape is a recurrent trope in Cederlöf's book. Thus, the story of transition from commerce to polity, from merchants to administrators entails the story of privileging the agrarian at the cost of the ecological.

Subscribing to the idea of colonial rule as practice (she acknowledges influences of Jon Wilson and Neeladri Bhattacharya in this formulation) as opposed to abstracted general principles, Cederlöf depicts how the cartographers and district administrators struggled to implement the schemes designed in Calcutta and how making of jurisdictional and fiscal boundaries were always a result of contingent 'interactions and confrontations' at the ground level (p. 49). To corroborate this point she unearths fascinating accounts of boundary making as classic examples of conflicting notions of space. Faced with a 'nearly complete natural line of frontier' (p. 38–39), Thomas Fisher had to draw a line in red ink along the small streams running from the hill ranges to demarcate a Tippera-Sylhet boundary. Dalasuri river, which served as a connection to the local inhabitants, became an 'easily defended outer border, separating people by a line cutting through the landscape' (p. 37) for the Company administrators.

Of course, rivers did not serve as boundaries alone. After the Anglo-Burma war ended, cartographers and surveyors were employed to map and take control of the riverine networks of Brahmaputra-Surma-Barak to connect Bengal and China markets. Although apparently in tune with David Ludden in saying how colonial boundaries, as a principle, can curb 'old order of fluidity and vagueness in which land use, commerce, and culture existed in mobile geographies'(p. 51), Cederlöf gives a more nuanced picture of the differing notions of boundaries. She points out the colonial surveyor's inability to grasp the 'notion of a boundary *zone*, characterized by tributes and negotiations' as opposd to 'a boundary *line*' (p. 37). Cederlöf emphasizes that cartographic expeditions also facilitated shifts in political heartlands along with the shifting imperatives of commerce to polity. Manipur is a case in point. Contrary to its peripheral location in the present day maps, Manipur was a focal point between Bengal and Yunnan in the early nineteenth century surveys.

The fifth and sixth chapters illustrate the conquest and consolidation of Company rule and links up the question of polity formation with ruler-subject relations. Between 1790s and mid 1820s, Decennial and Permanent Settlements were implemented in the diwani territories as 'rigid bureaucratic

> "Arguably, the book lends a certain centrality to the landscape between Bengal and Burma and posits how significant this region could be in reshaping our understanding of early colonial state making."

measures' to lend fixity to revenue administration. From late 1820s–1830s onwards, the focus shifted to 'governance' and the establishment of a more entrenched Company rule by strengthening fiscal relationship with the subjects. On the other hand, beyond Mughal jurisdictions, the subjugation of resource-rich territories of Jaintia, Cachar, Manipur and Khasi Hills was carried out differently. Ruler-subject relations in these areas depended on more arbitrary measures like invasions and imposed treaties. Such varying modes of conquest resulted in what Cederlöf calls 'dual polities under one government' (p. 241).

This argument of a 'dual polity' is quite central to the book. It is premised upon a distinction made between the geography of diwani-permanent settlement continuum and the territories outside. In the case of the North East, however, the former refers just to a small area constituting chiefly the Sylhet district. In Sylhet, it was often claimed by colonial officials that trajectories of permanent settlement and tenancy relations deviated largely from the agrarian heartland of diwani-permanent settlement area, i.e., Bengal. As one progresses through the archives of the late 19th century, Sylhet emerges as an exception to the rule of permanent settlement. Sylhet's singularity may thus retrospectively interrupt the structural neatness of Cederlöf's explication of dual polity.

The way Cederlöf conceives the shift to Company administration in the diwani areas seems to presuppose and perhaps even valorize a Mughal past based on symbiotic relations between the revenue administrators and their subjects. On more than one occasion, she observes that the idea of a 'fixed and static taxonomy of land types' propounded by the perpetual settlement and the abstracted idea of a fiscal subject remained 'disconnected from the existing social order and societal life of the place' (p. 156). Company officers managed to collect some revenue, but failed to establish 'relations of trust or dependence' (p. 220) that governed Mughal revenue administration. I am curious to know, if the Mughal mechanisms of resource extraction was so much consensual, then what possibly explains violent peasant rebellions in the heartland of the Mughal empire ever since the late 17th century? Also, Cederlöf's logic hits an unavoidable self-contradiction. In reference to the Mughal state, the post-permanent settlement Company bureaucracy appears to be simultaneously more entrenched and more fragile.

Cederlöf does not prefer to call early colonial boundaries 'statist'. She believes it would be premature to deploy the 'logic of state institutions to corporate bureaucracy' (p. 11). And it is at this point that she engages with James Scott's formulation of anarchist non-state territory. Instead of perceiving 'state' to be a given, unified, coherent entity which is always already there, Cederlöf thinks the task of the historian is to reconstruct the making of the state instead of its radical undoing, which can only succeed the formation of the state. Instead of debating the state non-state binary, she prefers to carry out a 'search for the bureaucratic practices that were shaped into a polity in the formative period of colonial rule' (p. 11). Cautious about not looking through the prism of state-like 'intentions and interests', Cederlöf finally narrates the story of a mercantile corporation that, as already discussed, grows into a dual polity under one government. But doesn't this indefinite detention of the state's becoming make the critique of the state impossible? After all, one can always show the becoming of the state at various stages in history.

Nevertheless, the book is indeed a welcome addition to the historiography of state formation in colonial South Asia. I am sure it will encourage and inform future scholarship.

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Book News	*Book News*

The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War by Yasmin Khan, the award-winning historian, marshals interviews, newspaper reports and unseen archival material, to tell a forgotten story, and makes the reader feel and hear the lost voices of a people involved *in* a war that wasn't of their choosing.

Vintage Books/Random House, 2015, pp. 416, price not stated.

Why The Southern States Are Ahead

Kham Khan Suan Hausing

THE PARADOX OF INDIA'S NORTH SOUTH DIVIDE: LESSONS FROM THE STATES AND REGIONS
By Samuel Paul and Kala Seetharam Sridhar
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 260, ₹850.00

It has for long been an accepted economic wisdom that the trajectory of economic development taken by 'constituent units of a country' (hereafter as 'States') tends to converge over time. In a timely intervention, Samuel Paul and Kala Seetharam Sridhar have, in their co-authored book entitled, *The Paradox of India's North-South Divide: Lessons from the States and Regions* (hereafter as *The Paradox*) 'counter' this by drawing from variegated economic experiences of North and South Indian States. They examine the *why* and *how* of North-South divide by invoking a set of 'proximate' and 'foundational' factors to (i) test the 'credibility' of the claim that southern States performed better than their northern counterparts, (ii) examine 'when and in what respect' the South performed better than the North, and (iii) examine the 'reasons behind the paradox' of the North-South economic divide (pp. 5–6). While acknowledging the import of 'proximate' factors like literacy, health, education, infrastructure, and urbanization, among others, Paul and Sridhar contend that 'foundational' factors like governance, law and order are critical in determining divergent economic outcomes of North and South Indian States (pp. 33–34).

Organized into six chapters (including introduction and conclusion), the authors have marshalled a wealth of data and evidence to support this argument. Mindful of the limitations of econometric data alone in explaining the 'underlying causes' of the North-South divide, Paul and Sridhar ambitiously adopt a 'holistic and multidisciplinary app-roach' by drawing insights from economics, sociology, political science, history and management (p. 7, p. 22). This is intended to overcome a propensity to rely on 'variables that are easier to identify and measure' and thereby ignore 'factors that are qualitative and difficult to quantify' (p. 32).

The authors undertake a historical and controlled comparative study of Tamil Nadu (TN) and Uttar Pradesh (UP) before they embark on a more comprehensive comparative study of a cluster of North and South Indian States. Their choice of TN and UP was informed by the fact that 'both were metro regions of two large presidencies' with 'common administrative systems, tradition and policies inherited from the British colonial past' and 'partly because it was easier to track and understand specific developments and policy changes ... in individual states than at the level of a region consisting of several states' (p. 23).

It is notable that the growth of the industrial sector in UP caught up with TN and surpassed the latter only in the last few years of the present decade (p. 30). The share of the service sector to their State economies is more or less equal till the 1980s. Both States have largely similar level of people living below the poverty line and Net State Domestic Products (NSDP) respectively till the 1980s and 2004–05. Yet TN had overtaken UP by the 1980s as service sector and investment surge in TN and it became more successful in reducing poverty, so much so that the per capita income gap between the two States has increased from 39 percent in the 1980s to 128 percent by 2005–06 (p. 26).

The authors rightly point out that TN's advantageous 'initial conditions' like higher literacy, contribution of the Church and Christian missionaries in education and the role of British in constructing roads and bridges are keys to this divide (p. 83). TN has successfully developed key infrastructure like roads, telegraphs, electricity and communication networks which not only increase productivity and output but also expedite the urbanization process. Paul and Sridhar contend that a major factor that spurred TN's economic development in the late 1980s and early 90s is 'its investment in human resources primarily in health and education in the post 1960s' (p. 43). The proliferation of engineering colleges in TN and increase in enrolment of students generate a pool of skilled human resources which make efficient use of resources. Unlike UP, TN also has a convergence of robust demand and foundational factors. Longstanding and relatively more successful social mobilization in TN and for that matter in South India ensure heightened consciousness of citizens about rights and entitlements. The existence of effective caste and community networks not only promotes entrepreneurialism but also 'facilitate both networking and collective action to address abuses of public power and to demand greater responsiveness from governments' (p. 72).

This explains why TN and South India have better foundational factors like law and order and public governance which in turn leverage effective systems and procedures. TN also has better quality of leadership and interdepartmental coordination than UP. These foundational factors and the fact that TN has begun to reap demographic dividends thanks to its lower fertility and infant mortality rate are critical in inducing economic growth even as they create 'enabling environment for the productive use of both capital and labour' (p. 32, p. 68).

After an intensive comparison of TN and UP, Paul and Sridhar make an extensive comparative and historical study of the divide between a cluster of North and South Indian States. The authors unravelled how the northern States, despite having higher NSDP and per capita developmental expenditure till the 1960s, have not been able to translate these initial advantages not only into 'higher growth rate of literacy, health status or infrastructure' (p. 88, p. 119) but also in terms of better access to basic services and assets including electricity, public latrine, bathroom, radio/TV, transistors, etc. (pp. 107–116).

Not surprisingly, the southern States are clearly ahead of their northern counterparts in terms of human capabilities, skills and awareness. The higher level of literacy rates, higher weighted average proportion of graduates, higher intake into engineering colleges and presence of larger labour force with technical skills enable the southern States to overtake their northern counterparts by the 1980s and 90s (pp. 90–93). A long tradition of social movement across the southern States (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and TN) that 'promoted greater awareness and interest in education among the lower castes' was also at work behind this (p. 105). The ability of the southern States to make efficient use of scarce resources like land and water ensure that they have higher per capita agricultural production (pp. 99-100). Blessed with a set of political leadership who made a smart 'strategic move' to focus on labour intensive investment, particularly the IT sector, the southern States expand urbanization and promote economic growth at a faster pace unlike their northern counterparts (p. 118).

The authors found that the southern States have a clear lead over their northern counterparts in terms of the three indicators of good governance that they have come up with, viz., tenure of Chief Minister, number of police firing per million population and cases pending before the States' judiciary (pp. 102–105). Paul and Sridhar speculate

> "... Paul and Sridhar contend that 'foundational' factors like governance, law and order are critical in determining divergent economic outcomes of North and South Indian States ..."

that the small size of the southern States and the fact that they are more homogenous and denser might have made them easier to govern (p. 119). Unlike their southern counterparts, the northern States have weak convergence of demand and foundational factors. The fact that the northern States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, UP, Chattisgarh, and West Bengal have major concentration of economically and socially deprived sections also means that they remain economic laggards.

In sum, the book under review is a useful contribution to a growing corpus of literature on comparative State politics in India. One of its weaknesses though is that its authors have not referred to, leave alone engage with, some of the recent influential works on comparative political economy of Indian States. I have in mind particularly the works of Rob Jenkins, Aseema Sinha and Prerna Singh. Prerna Singh, for example, has persuasively argued how the feeling of 'weness' or sense of solidarity and belonging energizes populations to constructively contribute towards inclusive economic growth. The foundational factors privileged by Paul and Sridhar as their key analytical tools have already resonated in the work of Aseema Sinha and Rob Jenkins. Jenkins, for example, convincingly showed how States having effective public governance, infrastructure and favourable 'initial conditions' have fared better in the era of 'provincial darwinism', an era marked by competition between Indian provinces (States) for investment and growth. The longish appendix which offers basic statistics of the States under comparison are also not very helpful. On balance, although the book is not intended to 'offer standard recipe for achieving development outcomes or a formula to plan for or sequence the preconditions for growth', some of its findings may be particularly useful for policy planners and practitioners of developmental politics (p. 121).

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Beef

By Vasanth Kannabiran

Beef she said. I want beef curry ma.
I am hungry and need the juice from the meat
to wet my dried up nerves and wrinkling skin
My nerves are like dry tendons drained by the lust
of this mad carnivorous mob.
Devouring human flesh,
feasting on youth, old men,women and babes
hacking and killing to cries of mother cow
holy mother holy cow.
Yes the cow is holy in our myths.
Gautama circling a birthing cow
Earned the merit of circling the world
But what is sacred needs to be consumed in gratitude.
The coconuts, goats, chickens we offer to holy
Mother we treasure and feast on them .
Not let them rot because they are sacred
No we do not practice ahimsa.
Our creed ishimsa
killing we plunder and pillage and burn savagely without respite
We kill because we thirst for blood.
Let us celebrate our culture of savagery
Declare with pride and honour that we are vampires
Declare we kill because we love the smell of blood.
We killed Gandhi, and countless others, no matter.
Let us then eat beef cooking it tenderly with love
You and I and say that what is sacred is food.
No animal is our mother father or god.
No cow, elephant, monkey or mouse
There is no God save greed the glorious and great
Greed for wealth, land, power and pelf
Greed for blood.
Let us then declare our creed with pride and eat drink and make merry.
Beef will feed more people than a goat
The milk will not feed ten people.

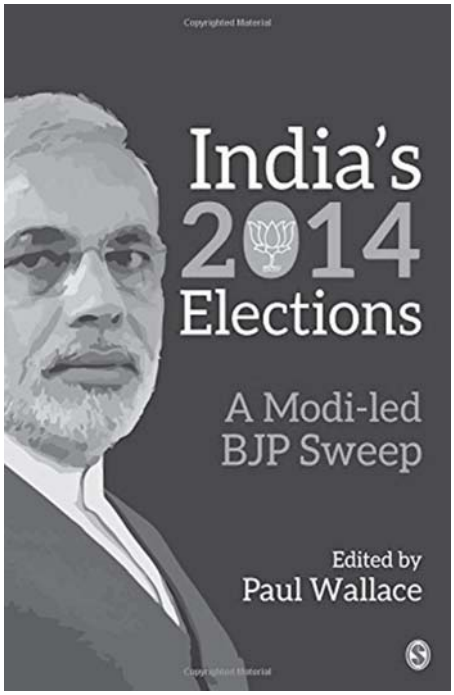
Blow then the trumpets
Beat thou the drums,
Bring out the beef and lay the feast

This is ancient Bharat the purest land in the world.
Let us flaunt our beliefs.
Quench our thirst for blood
What price the approval of the world
When we can harvest their capital.

Of Change And Continuities

Ashutosh Kumar

INDIA'S 2014 ELECTIONS: A MODI-LED BJP SWEEP
Edited by Paul Wallace
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 427, ₹1250.00



The election held in 2014 was significant in many respects. First, for the first time in the electoral history of India, a non-Congress party was able to come to power at the centre on its own, considering the fact that the Janata Party was a conglomeration of parties 'coming together' to contest election in 1977. Second, the colossal presence and impact of Narendra Modi as the prime ministerial candidate and chief campaigner of the BJP over the eventual electoral outcome was a reminder of the person-centered campaigns undertaken by Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. Third, it was arguably the first election when the social, electronic and print media seemed to play such an important role in setting the electoral agenda and influencing electoral choices. Fourth, this election reflected clearly the demographic shift taking place in mostly young India with 100 million new voters, among whom 23 million voters were 18-19 year old. Fourth, the election saw the unprecedented loss of seats for the Congress as its tally was reduced to 44 seats, raising concerns about the future of the national party and its leadership especially in the States like West Bengal, where it ceased to be among the contenders for power by a long shot. Fifth, a right to the centre shift was also visible in favour of market oriented economy if one goes by the NES survey data especially among the voting public belonging to the urban middle classes and also the youth.

However, in true Indian tradition, there were important continuities also that accompanied the change. For one, contrary to popular perception the elections did not see the decimation of the State parties. The State level 'regionalist' parties having ethno-linguistic roots like AIDMK, TRS, TMC, TDP, among others retained their support base as the same number of the seats (212) as in 2009 elections remained this time also with the state level parties. The BJP gain was mostly at the cost of the Congress and the dismal performance of the caste-based 'social justice' parties of the Hindi speaking states from where the BJP got most of its seats. Even the Congress getting 19 plus percent of the votes should have got more seats if the votes polled for the Party would have translated proportionately into seats, but for the first past the post electoral system. Then the politicization and mobilization along the lines of identities continued to play a significant role in determining the electoral outcome as the regionalist parties like TRS, AIDMK, and TRS played the regional card successfully. Even the BJP campaign leaving aside the development and governance centered speeches of Modi, did have strong communal and casteist undercurrents in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the two states which contributed significantly to the BJP tally of 282 MPs, not a single one being a Muslim.

How have analysts made sense of the 2014 elections at the State level given that the States have emerged as an autonomous arena of politics and economy in India recently? The State specific and general essays based on CSDS-NES, 2014 survey data were published in the special issues of *EPW* (2014, 49/39) and RJSS (2014, 22/2), published by Panjab University. A set of essays covering the 2014 elections including the State specific ones, authored by the academics associated with BASAS have now been published in the special issue of *CSA* (2015, 23/2).

The edited volume under review is a significant contribution to the analysis of 2014 elections, as it comprises not only five essays of a general nature but also twelve essays, each focusing on a particular State. The essays by Paul Wallace, Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers and Andersen all focus on the 2014 election from the vantage point of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The other two essays in the first part refer to the role of gender and civil society organization during the electoral campaign. Wallace in his introductory essay terms the election as 'historic' and 'transformative' in nature both in terms of 'historic high percentage' of voters' turnout and the emergence of a leader after a long time who dominates 'his party as well as the country' (p. 3). Dissecting the victory of the BJP, Wallace refers to three contributing factors namely the weak economy under the UPA regime, corruption in high places and the 'presidential, plebiscitary style campaign in a parliamentary system' run by the chief campaigner Modi pitted against a listless Rahul Gandhi (pp. 10–1). Wallace raises question like 'are the Congress and the dynasty finished?'. Jaffrelot and Verniers in their co-authored essay bring to attention the 'geographical concentration of the BJP vote' (p. 29) and the 'resilience of regional parties' (p. 32) in face of the 'Modi wave', particularly the ones which were able to appeal to 'broader segments of the electorate' (p. 44) and not merely particular caste categories like the RJD or the SP.

Underlining the significance of the regional States, the authors suggest that in the near future the challenge to the Modi led BJP would come not from the faction ridden Congress but from the State level parties (p. 45). Walter K. Andersen in his paper underlines the personalization of the BJP campaign whereby Modi 'set a precedent in Indian politics' (p. 56) by 'articulating an economic agenda and turning it into an electoral rallying point that transcend(ed) barriers of caste and religion' (p. 56). The seductive promise of growth and development, however, has its own challenge. The economy has to move forward briskly to fulfill the roused aspirations/expectations of the electorates sold on the 'Gujarat model'. In addition, can Modi be successful by retaining his Gujarat style of person-centric leadership and governance in a complex democracy like India or would he adjust (p. 57)?

Rainuka Dagar observes that gender issues came up prominently as subthemes during the campaign as part of the debates on electoral issues like governance, development and secularism (p. 64). While women's

safety in post-Nirbhaya India was taken up as predictor of effective governance; women development was projected as part of 'inclusive growth' agenda; violence/crime against women in communal/caste riots also came up with both the Congress and the BJP trading charges and making promises in their manifestos and speeches. Jyotirindra Dasgupta and Anshu N. Chatterjee in their paper have referred to the role of a particular civic group named Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) in presenting 'reliable information on the election processes in order to enable voters and citizens to make well-grounded choices' (p. 97).

In the section with State-centred essays. Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar refer to the volatile nature of electoral politics in Uttar Pradesh thus raising a question mark over the replication of its massive victory in the forthcoming assembly elections in 2017. What might go against the BJP would be the 'absence of a strong organization, social base and effective leadership' (p. 136). Like in the case of UP, Maneesha Roy and Ravi Ranjan in their Bihar paper attribute the electoral gains of the BJP to the 'consolidation of communal identity and shift in community identity in a multi-polarized election' (p. 160). Ravi Ranjan in his paper on Delhi attributes the BJP success to the role of media, money power of the BJP and the Modi factor. However, the dalit and Muslim vote got divided into the AAP and the Congress in a triangular contest to the benefit of the BJP, which received the upper caste and middle classes vote (p. 185). Pramod Kumar in his Punjab paper has referred to the dual advantage of the AAP of 'being an outcome of a protest movement and an aggressive appropriator of the space created by the propagation of honesty as a supreme value' (p. 220) which led to the unexpected gains for the party in the State. Rita Chowdhari Tremblay and Mahi Bhatia argue that in the 'contentious politics of Kashmir, more the things change they stay the same' (p. 231). They refer to the emergence of region specific electoral outcomes showing the communal polarization in the sense that the BJP and the PDP divided the seats between them by BJP winning all the three seats in Hindu dominated Jammu region and the PDP winning other three seats in the Muslim dominated Kashmir Valley. However, as far as the election campaign was concerned it was all about development and governance for all the parties in the fray and that included the NC and the Congress (p. 233).

Ghanshyam Shah in his Gujarat paper gives credit to mega marketing and corporate style management to the yet another success of Modi led state unit of the BJP. Modi, a fellow Gujarati being the prime ministerial candidate, also led to the united efforts on the part of the Sangh parivar groups and other religious organizations (p. 281). Suhas Palshikar and Nitin Birmal in their co-authored paper on Maharashtra draw attention to the fact that besides UP and Bihar, Maharashtra with 42 seats for NDA contributed a lot to the NDA securing 336 seats. Another factor they highlight is the 'steepest fall' of the Congress in Maharashtra until the date. This is important as Maharashtra was for long among the strongest base of the Congress where the Party lost for the first time an assembly election only in 1995, much after the Party had already lost a number of key states. Then also the party had come back to power in 1999 defeating the BJP-Shiv Sena combine (p. 284). The 'long shadow of Congress decline' is attributed by them to factors like the popularity of Modi, the 'national mood' against the tainted UPA-II regime, the lack of cohesion between the Congress and the NCP (p. 296).

Amiya K. Chaudhuri in his West Bengal paper refers to the ascendance of the TMC after the dominance of the Left parties in the Lok Sabha elections for as long as 34 years. The Left has been reeling under the organizational decline as its cadres have shifted their loyalties to the TMC and so is the case with the urban middle classes who for long were Left supporters. Karli Srinavasulu in his essay on Andhra Pradesh and Telangana makes an important observation. While referring to the TDP-BJP alliance as indicative of a continuing process of party level alignment, he argues that the vote for the TDP and TRS, two regional parties in the two states, should not be viewed as a 'rejection of the national parties' (p. 356). TRS in Telangana can also go in for alignment with any national party in future, as the politics in the nascent state now is fluid despite the voters going all out for the local regional party that led the movement for separate statehood. S.S. Patagundi and Prakash Desai in their essay on Karnataka have referred to continuity and change in the electoral politics of the state as reflected in the outcome. The third force in the form of Janata Dal (s) has continued to decline the since 1999. This election was not an aberration as the party system in the State has become increasingly bi-polar in nature, with the Congress and the BJP, the two national parties, pitted against each other. Identities continue to play a role as the 'discourse on political campaigning (revolved) … around AHINDA and the upper or dominant caste groups' (p. 374). Akhil Ranjan Dutta in his write-up on Assam refers extensively to the trends visible in the elections that may have a bearing on the forthcoming assembly elections. He refers to the media playing a partisan role in favour of the BJP, which put the incumbent Congress government on the defensive. The increasing ethnic/communal polarization visible in the violence in Bodo Territorial Area Districts benefitted both the BJP and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), the latter seeking Muslim support (p. 382).

> "The seductive promise of growth and development, however, has its own challenge. The economy has to move forward briskly to fulfill the roused aspirations/ expectations of the electorates sold on the 'Gujarat model'."

The volume is fifth in the series of the edited volumes covering all the Lok Sabha elections since 1998. What is noteworthy about these volumes is that while the essays of a general nature enable the readers to understand the larger forces and long-term changes taking place in the volatile electoral politics of India, the State-specific essays make us aware about the distinctive patterns unfolding at the State and sub-State levels. The volume could have also included comparative papers having two-State analysis. Since the volume has been published after a gap of a year, the authors should have been asked to add postscripts like in the case of Maharashtra paper, mentioning the developments that have taken place since the elections. One expected that at least in case of Delhi paper.

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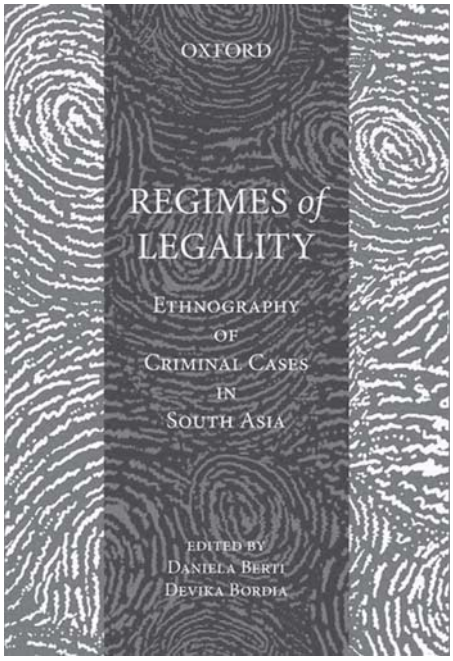
Justice Vs Compromise

Manoj Mitta

REGIMES OF LEGALITY: ETHNOGRAPHY OF CRIMINAL CASES IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Daniela Berti & Devika Bordia
Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 352, ₹995.00



It's about the farcical trial of a Left-wing folk singer accused of instigating a sewage worker to commit suicide in a manhole. India's official entry for Oscars 2016, a Marathi movie called *Court*, has earned acclaim for its insightful portrayal of the Indian legal culture. It's a rivetting story even as it focused on banality rather than the usual fare of dramatic situations and stirring dialogues. In a matter-of-fact tone, the movie brings out the quirks of the judge, prosecutor, defence counsel and the accused person, not only in the court premises but in their personal lives too.

The book under review, *Regimes of Legality: Ethnography of Criminal Cases in South Asia*, is reminiscent of this movie. For, in a manner as clinical as the Oscar entry, the book edited by Daniela Berti and Devika Bordia dismantles institutional claims towards neutralism, objectivity and equality. The official version of the facts produced at the time of the trial is shown to be often the result of informal, under-the-table negotiations based on power relationships, political pressure or monetary transactions. The message of the book is of no small value to societies accustomed to accepting judicial verdicts with little independent scrutiny.

In a further parallel with the movie, one of the nine ethnographic pieces put together in the book deals with the vagaries in the enforcement of the special enactment on caste atrocities. Nicolas Jaoul's 'A Strong Law for the Weak: Dalit Activism in a District Court of Uttar Pradesh' is also topical because of the recent public outrage over a minister's statement comparing the killing of two dalit children to the stoning of a dog. With his meticulous study of the four SC/ST special courts in Kanpur, Jaoul underscores the tragic contrast between the stringent law and the incapacity of the dalits to ensure its implementation.

Another essay provocatively titled, 'Pyar Kiya to Darna Kya: On Criminalizing Love', may be evocative of the recent controversies over love jihad or inter-community marriage. But this study by Pratiksha Baxi is actually about an instance of inter-caste love story, which prompted the girl's parents to file a false case of rape. By the time the case went on trial, the accused who was asked by the court to reach a compromise with the complainants, was happily married with the alleged victim. In the ensuing courtroom drama, procedures were contrived to ensure that the verdict was in keeping with the compromise between the parties. The judge and even the prosecutor made no issue of the settlement because of their awareness of the non-criminal nature of the case.

But then, even in cases which are clearly criminal in nature, judges have a record of pushing for compromise if the victims happen to be dalits, as recorded in Jaoul's chapter. Not surprisingly, such gratuitous attempts to defeat the ends of justice are perceived by lawyer-activists of the dalit community as proof of judicial corruption. One of the factors that emboldens judges to side with accused persons so blatantly is the dominant discourse alleging that the caste atrocities law is being rampantly misused. The propaganda against the alleged misuse had in fact reached such proportions that even a dalit leader like Mayawati, in one of her stints in power in Uttar Pradesh, issued an order in 2002 making it hard for people of her own community to take recourse to that special law. Subsequently, the Supreme Court, at the instance of dalit activists, quashed Mayawati's order applicable as unconstitutional.

Amid all the caste Hindu prejudice betrayed by prosecutors and judges, whatever little success the victims have had in securing justice is thanks to dalit activism inspired by the resurgence of the Ambedkarite movement. Though prosecutors formally represent the victims of caste violence on behalf of the state, the real legal challenge to accused persons comes mostly from, as shown by the book, dalit lawyers appearing on a pro bono basis. Drawing from the frugal resources of the Ambedkarite movement, these independent lawyers help the dalit victims cope with the 'cross cases' that are often foisted on them, resist the pressure to give up *nyay* (justice) for *samjhauta* (compromise) and bring on record the lapses committed by the police to weaken the evidence against upper caste culprits.

Remarkably, Jaoul also managed to interview three dalit judges, even if not all of them were still serving or from Kanpur. One such judge was openly involved in the Ambedkarite movement even before his retirement. Thanks to his dedication to the dalit cause, his rate of conviction was higher than that of his colleagues. He told Jaoul that 'almost 100 per cent of cases judged under the SC Act were genuine, since the police had already filtered the cases to a considerable extent.' Hence, according to this dalit judge, 'committed people were all that was needed to apply the law'.

The problem of settlement negotiations bending the judicial process is of course not limited to cases driven by upper caste interests. Nor such negotiations are necessarily encouraged by courts, tacitly or otherwise, in all situations. Take the narcotics case from Himachal Pradesh discussed by Berti. The negotiations prompted witnesses to deny before the judge whatever statements they had recorded before the police. Such repudiation led the prosecutor and the judge to declare those witnesses hostile, insinuating thereby that they had struck a deal with the accused. In his verdict, the judge blamed the police too for turning the case around in favour of the accused through those contradictory statements.

More such legal ironies are brought out by the chapters dealing with domestic violence cases from Kolkata adjudicated by the special mechanism of family courts (Srimati Basu), charges against a tribal woman of murdering her husband in Himachal Pradesh (Bordia), criminal cases against transgendered individuals in Pakistan (Jeffrey A. Redding) and the functioning of extra-legal katta panchayats in rural Tamil Nadu (Zoe E. Headley). The chapter on transgendered individuals demonstrates that when the col-

> "Amid all the caste Hindu prejudice betrayed by prosecutors and judges, whatever little success the victims have had in securing justice is thanks to dalit activism inspired by the resurgence of the Ambedkarite movement."

loquial term 'hijra' was, at the instance of the Pakistan Supreme Court, replaced by the more gender-neutral 'unix', it had a positive impact on this traditionally reviled community.

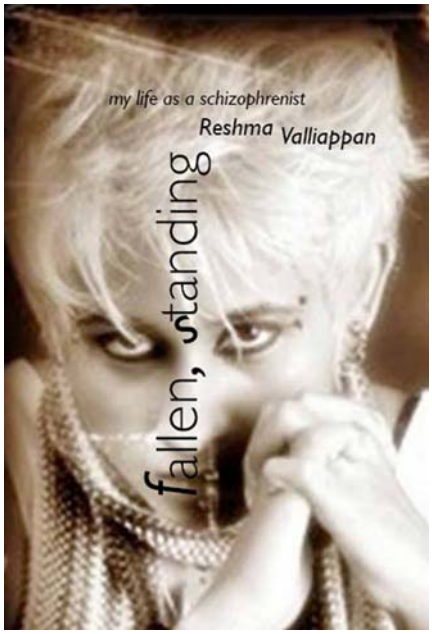
From the viewpoint of the ongoing political churn in India, the most significant chapter is perhaps the one on Nepal by Chiara Letizia: '"The "Secularism Case": Prosecution of a Hindu Activist before a Quasi-judicial Authority in the Nepal Tarai'. The country that has transformed from a Hindu kingdom to a secular republic seems to offer a bit of a contrast to the dithering lately in India in cases of 'saffron terror'. Although he was statutorily exempt from being tried in a court, and for all the strategically located sympathizers, the authorized executive officer convicted the Hindu activist for possession of unlicensed arms and awarded him the minimum permissible sentence of one year. For all the evidence of his membership in a Hindu fundamentalist underground association, the activist got away lightly because, as Letizia has demonstrated, the case was prejudiced by public sentiments stoked by Right-Wing groups against the introduction of secularism in Nepal. Clearly, the democracies in South Asia are still far from liberal. Though they have a record of elections leading to peaceful change of regime, their systems of accountability are nowhere as robust as they should be. The book offers a wealth of ethnographic material to bear out this disquieting infirmity.

Manoj Mitta is a senior journalist and Regan—Fascell Fellow at National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC.

In Vol. XXXIX No. 11 November 2015 issue of *TBR* the reviewer credit on P. 41 should read as: Debashish Chakrabarty teaches in the Doon School, Dehradun. The error is regretted.

A Tough Hill to Climb

Ammu Joseph



FALLEN, STANDING: MY LIFE AS A SCHIZOPHRENIST
By Reshma Valliappan
Women Unlimited, 2014, pp. 274, ₹325.00

More than two million people in the United States have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and the treatment for most of them mainly involves strong doses of antipsychotic drugs that blunt hallucinations and delusions but can come with unbearable side effects, like severe weight gain or debilitating tremors.

Now, results of a landmark government-funded study call that approach into question. The findings, from by far the most rigorous trial to date conducted in the United States, concluded that schizophrenia patients who received smaller doses of antipsychotic medication and a bigger emphasis on one-on-one talk therapy and family support made greater strides in recovery over the first two years of treatment than patients who got the usual drug-focused care.

— 'Talk Therapy Found to Ease Schizophrenia', Benedict Carey, *The New York Times*, 20 October 2015

My thoughts were with Reshma Valliappan, author of *fallen, standing—my life as a schizophrenist*, as I read the *New York Times* piece. Diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia at 22, Valliappan was on psychiatric drugs for several years until she opted to stop taking those medicines and decided, instead, to focus on understanding her condition and dealing with her symptoms.

As she notes in the book, 'I chose this even while I experienced many "psychotic" episodes, knowing I had the option to suppress it all by going back on meds. But I made a promise to myself a long time back… I told myself, "No matter what, I will not take another one of those pills even if it costs me my life—I simply have to find a way out."'

That courageous, if controversial, decision—challenging in multiple ways—appears characteristic of the person who emerges through the book as Valliappan tells the compelling and complicated story of her life thus far. The journey of the evidently bright, talented, popular, nonconformist, free spirit of a school girl growing up through trying, even traumatic, times in the home country (Malaysia) as well as the forcibly adopted one (India)—including the lost post-diagnosis years—towards becoming the confident, articulate 'Artist/Writer/NutCracker/Painter', 'Mental Health Self-Advocate & Researcher' and 'Artist Activist' she is today has clearly been far from easy.

So it is not surprising that *fallen, standing* is not an easy read. The book's content is often painful, though Valliappan writes with a lightness, liveliness and sense of humour that make the ordeals she describes somewhat more bearable for the reader. Its form is often confusing, with emails to the publisher (Ritu Menon of Women Unlimited) interspersed with text constructing and deconstructing past and present experiences, thoughts and feelings—sometimes in first person, at other times in third—and occasional samples of earlier writing, including poetry.

As the Publisher's Note at the beginning clarifies, 'This book does not have a conventional beginning, middle and end. … It is presented here more or less as it came to us. … No attempt has been made to impose an "order" on it, and some sequences of events may seem confusing. That is as it may be. The form and fluency of the narrative, its stops and starts, its interruptions, are part of the author's story.'

Clearly the sporadic process of writing was both harrowing and potentially healing. Valliappan admits that it was not as easy as she had thought it would be because remaining truthful to her experience rendered her open and vulnerable. Obviously the hurt, frustration, disappointment and rage she felt as she endured various experiences over the years 'never got expressed…until this writing began.' As she puts it, 'Writing all this has certainly forced me to go back into a past I never thought existed. I had a very flowery image of it—almost erasing all the negative memories in order to survive.'

This may be partly why the story she tells in the book is in some ways quite different from the picture painted in the 2011 documentary film, *A Drop of Sunshine*, in which Valliappan's experiences and insights were drawn upon to question the prevailing perception of schizophrenia and explore the possibility of a more empathetic and empowering understanding and treatment of the condition. The most conspicuous divergence is in the portrayal of her parents and the complex role they evidently played at various stages of her life.

However, *fallen, standing* is by no means merely a litany of pain and suffering. The relationships between Valliappan and her siblings—especially her much younger sister—affirm that emotional bonds can survive the most testing of circumstances. The sympathy and support received from some friends, classmates, camp-mates, seniors, teachers, principals, counsellors, therapists, 'adoptive mothers' and others along the way—even a couple of psychiatrists!—obviously made a positive difference to her life. In her Preface she clearly states that she owes her recovery to 'many good, compassionate, caring practitioners and people.'

The book also raises important and difficult questions about how society, including families and the medical profession, views and treats people with mental illness. Particularly startling and thought-provoking are three pieces of writing retrieved from 'all the assorted writings that each one of my selves … conveniently made separate blogs on or posted elsewhere in the virtual world.'

The first presents her 'understanding of Maslow's Self-Actualisation versus today's psychology and diagnosis' in 17 points, among them: 'I am not rude, I just avoid playing games and prefer being honest,' 'I do not have a personality disorder, my views just don't coincide with those of the majority.'

The second, which outlines 'etiquette for practitioners when treating a person with mental illness,' should probably be required reading for all doctors and medical students, not only those specializing in mental health. Right off the bat is this suggestion: 'When I walk in don't ask my carers, "How is she?" You can look at me and ask me directly. I'm a person first, then your patient.'

The third, 'a letter to carers from a person with mental illness,' is a poignant ap-

peal for more understanding, which acknowledges that at least some of the common mistakes made by carers spring from love and concern:

- If you worry about what might happen to me after you're gone, teach me how to be independent and learn from my mistakes. Isn't that a better deal than making me dependent on someone else or on a system?
- I might not be the same as the neighbour's child, I might just be very different…just like that child. So let me be all I can be just the way I am.
- When I get angry and violent it might not be a symptom. Isn't it human that I too can feel anger? Do you remember that day when you nearly beat someone up for reckless driving? Or the day you didn't get that job or lost a friend?'
- Try not to overdo your love and care by being overprotective. You have to let me fall just like I did when I first learnt to cycle.

Valliappan also highlights the denial of fundamental rights to people believed to be mentally ill who, for example, at least in India, cannot vote, sign a contract, hold office or have a say in their own treatment, and can be held against their will. She points out that mothers who are labelled mentally ill have to fight for custodial rights to their children because they are deemed to be of 'unsound' mind, and that partners, spouses and other family members have the unilateral right to take away property and other assets from, as well as divorce a person, on grounds of insanity. She refers to the discrimination not only she, but her entire family, were sometimes subjected to on account of the schizophrenia label.

Valliappan effectively uses 'the metaphor of the mountain' to provide a sense of what living with schizophrenia is like: 'You can reach heights that seem almost impossible to fathom, impossible to achieve, impossible to breathe, yet you can fall so hard that you can die, break your bones, and surrender… The journey both ways is always alone… The air can confuse you and force you into states of delusion and hallucination… The coarse rocks, the cold snow, the heavy downpour, the landslide, the strong zephyr, the invisibility of everything, the lack of other creatures, this is what the mountain offers…'

Among the several interesting aspects of her personality which she alludes to but does not elaborate upon is her spiritual life, which evidently grew out of a bizarre encounter as a teenager with an Aghora tantric she (in her 14-year-old avatar) describes as 'that dude, that guru, that crazy mumbo jumbo coolness,'

> "... it is not surprising that *fallen, standing* is not an easy read. The book's content is often painful, though Valliappan writes with a lightness, liveliness and sense of humour that make the ordeals she describes somewhat more bearable for the reader. Its form is often confusing, ..."

and the mother goddess he worshipped.

The two brain-related, physical problems she survived—first as a baby and, more recently, as an adult—are also intriguing but not dwelt upon, except in terms of the seizures and convulsions the surgery occasioned by the latter has made her prone to. The anti-epileptic drugs she now has to take have their own debilitating side-effects, including depression.

Similarly, although she refers to counselling and various therapies, as well as her own decisions about dealing with the voices and hallucinations that are among the 'so-called' symptoms of her condition, which together helped in her recovery, few details are provided. Interestingly, the film foregrounds her art much more than the book does, even though she does mention towards the end that painting set her on the road to recovery. But, as she explains in an e-mail to the publisher, 'I cannot answer all the questions you have asked me in one book, Ritu… The recovery or my rehabilitation years will have to be another book in itself.'

I hope she will eventually write that book, especially because it is difficult for the uninitiated (among whom I count myself) to comprehend the meaning of recovery in the context of schizophrenia. Even the process of writing the book evidently involved 'many moments of angst, suicide attempts, social withdrawal, isolation, and seizures,' at least some of them due to medication for the scar epilepsy resulting from brain surgery. I suppose what matters, in the end, is her attitude and approach: 'It's a tough hill to climb but I don't mind it. We all have our own hills to climb.'

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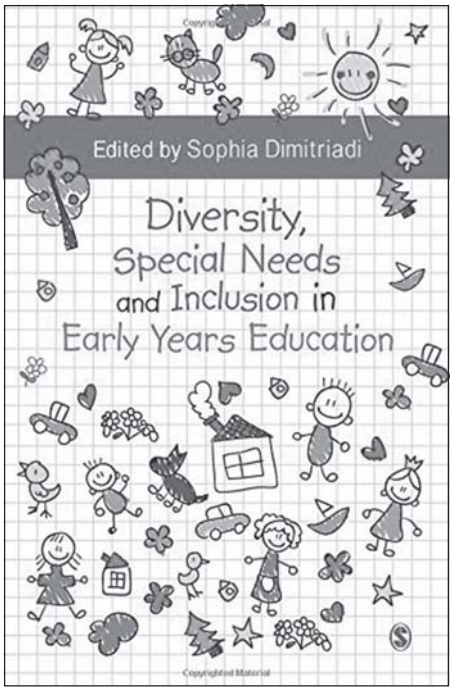
Embracing Diversity and Creating Inclusive Spaces

Toolika Wadhwa

DIVERSITY, SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION
Edited by Sophia Dimitriadi
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 226, ₹1095.00

DISABILITY, GENDER AND THE TRAJECTORIES OF POWER
Edited by Asha Hans
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 278, ₹995.00

FINDING NEEMA
By J. Reynolds
Hachette India, Gurgaon, 2013, pp. 340, ₹399.00



The books by Dimitriadi, Hans, and Reynolds present diverse perspectives to understanding disability and inclusion. Dimitriadi's edited book provides an overview of research work and perspectives from across the world in the area of disability studies, with particular focus on policy and pedagogic interventions. The anthology by Hans presents a fresh look at disability in understanding it as a gendered construct. The use of first person narratives and autobiographies has provided voice to disabled women that was missing from existing literature in the area. Reynolds's description of parenting has brought to light the need for increasing research in the area of engaging with disabilities and the difficulties faced in the absence of awareness.

Dimitriadi's book addresses diversity not just in terms of disability, but also in terms of individual identity. The perspective on inclusion goes beyond shared spaces. The key themes addressed in the book include special education, disability, language learning, personal, social, emotional and moral development, as well as cultural and gender issues. The book makes a case for addressing diversity and inclusion in education, during early childhood.

The first section presents significant insights and learnings from research studies and projects. For instance, Mary Moloney and Eucharia McCarthy who explored the shared experiences of children with special education needs and early childhood practitioners, conclude that merely placing children in inclusive settings is not enough to meet their needs. Mary Wangechi Kamunyu's work on language issues in preschool education in Kenya emphasizes the role of language in developing literacy and numeracy skills on the one hand and interpersonal skills and peer relations/ group memberships in children, on the other. Hayal Koksal's work describes the implementation of a project for teaching collaboration during early childhood through the use of technology.

Section II of the book addresses approaches and methods of inclusive education. Dimitriadi's own work with Persona Dolls in Greece emphasizes the need to understand diversity by going beyond merely including the physically impaired. Diversity includes all those who are vulnerable to exclusionary processes. Persona dolls and stories developed around them were used to tackle exclusion and discrimination, as well as to unlearn prejudices. The work thus highlights the need for generating greater awareness and valuing diversity, emphasizing that ideas of fairness, taking a stance and thinking for themselves, compassion and expression need to be developed early in life.

Dorothy R. Howie emphasizes the importance of addressing the intellectual and socio emotional needs of children with cultural sensitivity, western frameworks generally tend to overlook culturally mediated values and practices in parenting. The significant learning thus is embracing diversity within parenting processes.

Section III focusses on educational frameworks, curricula and methods. Agnes N. Toth's work in particular readdresses an issue raised repeatedly in sections one and two, wherein the need for change in teachers' attitudes along with change in policy were highlighted. In his view, it is curricular changes, along with the professional development of teachers that are important dimensions.

In Section IV of the book, Amitav Mishra and Mousumi Bhaumik present a cross disability approach to inclusion. They point out that support at the level of policy, trained staff, accessible facilities, flexible curricula and teaching methods need to be provided. Ajay Das, Annamaria Jerome-Raja and Sushama Sharma elaborate on government initiatives in India in addressing the needs of young children with disabilities and developing essential competencies in this regard.

If seen holistically, the three key aspects in embracing diversity and inclusion that are highlighted in the book include: strengthening of pre-service and in-service teacher training, developing an attitude of empathy and sensitivity among students and teachers and investing in appropriate infrastructural facilities.

Hans's edited volume focuses on the interplay between disability and gender and the complex power relations that emerge from it. Upali Chakravarti highlights how disabled people are often seen as being '*without gender*, as *asexual* creatures' (emphasis original). Another very significant issue is that of the right to life. Scholars have objected to the presumption that a disabled life is less gratifying or valuable. Amrita Patel and S.B. Agnihotri's work on women with disabilities traces the status of women with disabilities in four states in India. They present an analysis of demographic data, identifying clusters of disabilities in relation to region as well as gender. Using Sen's framework to understand inequality, they highlight how social, cultural and economic barriers lead to the translation of impairments into disabilities. Nilika Mehrotra and Mahima Nayar focus on shifting the lens from the biomedical model to the social model of psycho-social disabilities.

The second section explores human experiences and agency. Malini Chib of presents an autobiographical account of identity development, highlighting the role of social acceptance and technological advancement in providing independence and control. She writes: 'If the society accepts us for who we are, life becomes normal for us' (p. 96). Tina Minkowitz's and Santosh Halder's writings focus on women's experiences in different context. Minkowitz highlights show psychiatric oppression leads to disempowerment and the disabling of women, alder fo-

cuses on marital life and disability. Sandhya Limaye traces the journeys of disabled mothers. Shubhangi Vaidya's work highlights that the responsibility for taking care of the disabled often falls on women in the household.

Section III addresses non-discriminatory gendered strategies that have been employed across the world. Stephanie Ortolena highlights the exclusion of girls from school and higher education, particularly in science technology engineering and mathematics. Renu Addlakha elaborates on the gendered construction of work, emphasizing the enhancement of educational and employment opportunities for the disabled. Bhargavi V. Davar's work focuses on building the legal capacity of the disabled.

The book highlights the need for building an enabling and empowering environment for the disabled and recognizing their rights.

Reynolds's *Finding Neema* is a poignant narrative of the events in the life of the author and her adopted son who is diagnosed with autism and mild mental retardation. Covering issues of diversity in terms of ethnic backgrounds, family structures, interpersonal relationships, social class and disability, the book is a powerful non-fictional account of the author's experiences in India. Being British herself, but married to an Indian artist, Reynolds has provided a unique blend of the insider outsider perspective to Indian society and the perceptions of people towards alternative professional and personal choices.

She chronicles her journey in finding a niche for Neema. The narrative is particularly significant in highlighting the struggles in the diagnosis of a child with autism in the 1980s in India, when there was little awareness of the condition in the country. Even greater difficulty arises in finding institutional help in terms of schooling, that leaves little possibility for education and building peer relationships. An equally trying struggle is in helping Neema to achieve domestic independence and personal grooming. In the absence of adequate awareness, parenting styles and disciplining mechanisms that will work or will be counterproductive, are learnt as part of everyday life. The high costs associated with each of these processes further highlight the difficulty Neema might have faced had the middle class writer-painter couple not taken legal guardianship. He would have continued with his mother Poonam who was an irregularly employed, domestic help. Poonam was not just from a social and economic background that provided little possibility of employing help and care in her absence from home; she was also prone to be fickle in her relationships. In fact, the book has highlighted how Neema's early childhood experiences with Poonam and her family, her varying marital relationships and conflict ridden home may have in fact, strengthened some of his autistic symptoms. In this, the book pronounces a rather important role to the immediate family and primary caregivers in the life of a child with autism.

One of the key aspects touched upon in the book that sets it apart from many other chronicles is that of sexuality. For instance, the sensual experiences of touch, coupled with impulsiveness, could lead to voyeuristic tendencies, if they remain unchecked. Similar to disciplining mechanisms, behavioural approaches of reward and punishment as well as patient explanation and modelling proved successful in containing Neema's tendency to behave inappropriately with members of the opposite sex.

Neema's story is also important in highlighting the need for acceptance, love and care to a child with disability, whether physical, mental or emotional, or all three. Further, the need to understand how children with disabilities and children with autism are not homogeneous entities is particularly significant. The trials, tribulations, and triumphs of having a person with autism as a part of the family have been put forth with honesty as well as compassion for the person with disability as well as the families. Significantly, the quest for identity is nearly as poignant for a person with autism as anyone else of the same age. Neema, thus, is happiest in the end, having found a sense of purpose in caring for others at the special institution set up for persons with mental and socio-emotional challenges.

All the three books have highlighted the importance of understanding the world of the disabled within the framework of diversity and inclusion. The need for early childhood intervention, and building an inclusive environment at home, school and society, are seen as means to facilitate the development of a sense of identity for the disabled. The ethic of care in this regard has also been emphasized. What comes across extremely strongly is also the need to hear the voice of the disabled. Disability studies have remained superficial and have often been restricted to understanding problems in physical adjustment in different institutions. What need attention and presence in the discourse are other sociological aspects such as gender, religion and the political and legal rights of people with disabilities.

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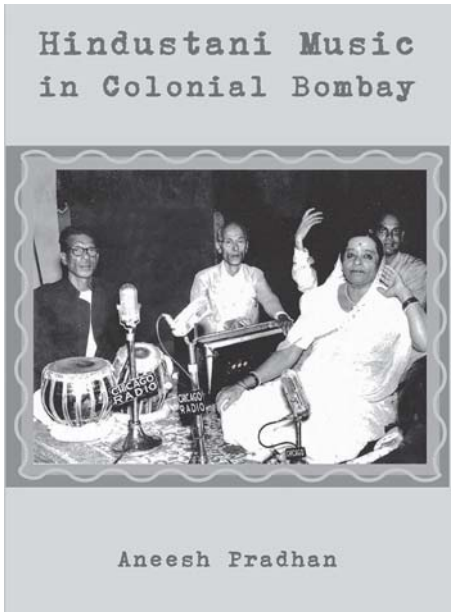
Music And The Metropolis

Partho Datta

HINDUSTANI MUSIC IN COLONIAL BOMBAY
By Aneesh Pradhan
Three Essays, Gurgaon, 2014, pp. 348, ₹750.00



'*Dharma Migu Chennai*', 'Madras is replete with piety'—so the saint-poet Ramalingaswamy pronounced in the nineteenth century. In her excellent account of the social history of music in South India, the historian Lakshmi Subramanian (2006) probes this 'curious testimonial'. Of all places why was parvenu Madras bestowed with such high status? The answer lay in the nature of the colonial city itself—replete with possibilities, it beckoned a range of people eager to seek fortune, fame, honour and a decent living. Musicians in Madras could look forward to the new patronage of the indigenous notables who as *sampradayikas* built temples, sponsored festivals and supported ritual. But there was more to the colonial city than economic opportunity: it was also a new kind of space in which social relations were in a flux, where danger and allure formed an attractive and heady mix. '*Langot-bandh rehna*' 'Keep your desires in check' was the advice that Ustad Kallan Khan of Agra Gharana sternly gave his young disciple Khadim Hussain when he was getting ready to leave for Bombay from Jaipur in 1925 (Jayawant Rao, 1981).

The relationship of musicians with the metropolis in India runs deep and its fascinating history has been explored by Aneesh Pradhan for nineteenth and twentieth century Bombay in great detail in this book. The range of his concerns are impressive. This is a rich history which covers patronage, institutions, associations, social organization, technology and performance. The puzzle is that despite western India's deep investment in music, legendary musicians and an enthusiastic and discerning audience, it has taken this long for a comprehensive book on Bombay and Hindustani music to be written. There is only one such comparable survey for Calcutta, Atanu Chakrabarty's pioneering *Mehfil Bahar* (2001, revised edition, 2012) written in Bengali. Pradhan's book is doubly welcome because the author is a well-known *tabla* maestro. He brings a special empathy and understanding of a musician to his material.

Colonial Bombay was famous for its skyline of monumental Gothic and Victorian buildings but its unique character was made by the inhabitants. One powerful group were the indigenous bourgeoisie, the *shetias* or merchant princes from a range of communities: Oswal Jains, Parsis, Banias, Bhatias, Khojas, Memons, Bohras, Sonars etc. Kalbadevi Road was an area in the city where a large number of them resided. In 1846, in a prescient move one such *shetia* Jugannath Sunkersett donated land to set up the Grant Road Theatre. In another significant move, in 1852 he set up the Bombay Association with the help of Dadabhai Nauroji. Reformist and philanthropic, *shetias* not only supported art institutions, many of them patronized the *nautch* and women vocalists also. It was quite the norm for a rich merchant to adopt a woman vocalist exclusively. A mark of status, it showcased the artistic side of mercantile patronage.

Women performers in Bombay, Pradhan tells us, came primarily from two communities: the Muslim *tawaifs* and the Hindu *naikins*. Many settled in the Foras Road area where their salons or *divankhanas* were accessible to rich merchants and commoner alike. Contrary to the impression that Hindustani music was the preserve of lofty *ustads* and *pandits*, Pradhan's study demonstrates that women performers played a vital role in the generation of music related activities in the public sphere in Bombay. The relationship between the male patron and woman musician despite the trappings of tradition was monetized and with the advent of professional theatre, the nascent recording and film industry, wage labour became the norm. Not only did women performers constitute a small if significant part of the urban workforce, music also became a new form of labouring, contributing to the political economy of the urban. It was women vocalists from this group who initially became important patrons of male *ustads* who arrived in the city as teachers to traditional performers. Through Pradhan's research it is possible to read *gharana* ideology—the transmission of music knowledge through male heirs—as a later invention and a tussle for power, which consolidated and entrenched Hindustani music as a distinctive male preserve. The critic S. Kalidas once commented that *gharanas*, with their distinct styles, were a response to the competitive market for music in Bombay.

The presence of an array of musicians attracted the interest of the Hindu middle classes in the city. Judges, lawyers, doctors, teachers, officials, products of colonial education, formed a distinct group whose experience of modernity was mediated through nationalism—but in the early decades of the twentieth century this was not anti-colonial nationalism yet. Many early nationalists (e.g. V.D. Paluskar) had no qualms about singing the praises of England and the King-Emperor. Music was a legacy through which the colonized middle classes could connect to tradition and feel pride in the past. Eager to embrace this valuable legacy, social reformers directed the full blast of their endeavour towards this traditional art. Voluntary music associations and reformist pedagogy was the agenda. Traditional musicians were berated although their music was appropriated but the greatest effort was directed inwards, to a comprehensive self-fashioning.

Some of the earliest music 'clubs' interestingly followed the trajectory of other social reform associations, they were primarily communitarian efforts, since the community was seen as a building block for the nation. In the major metropolises the concerns of Hindu and Muslim Gymkhanas, cricket clubs and football associations, education societies and music clubs overlapped. The most famous early example was the Parsi Gayan Uttejak Mandali which was an effort at inculcating refined music tastes among Parsis in Bombay. The Parsis had emerged as a powerful and confident economic group in the city and such a move naturally followed attempts at uplifting and modernizing the community. These clubs, Pradhan has shown, represented a new source of patronage which challenged the hegemony of the *shetias*. V.N. Bhatkhande and V.D. Paluskar emerged after this effort as champions of the new music pedagogy. Their efforts run on meticulous modern lines (text-

books, syllabi, exams, conferences, minuted meetings, subscriptions, ticketed concerts) rocked the boat of the guild-like *guru-shishya parampara*.

As a musician Pradhan is naturally interested in the changing nature of performance in the city, what he calls 'adaptive strategies'. This he rightly points out is a neglected field of study. As music became entrenched in the city, vocal music displaced dance, *khayal* displaced *dhrupad*. In a fascinating crossover, male *ustads* embraced feminine genres like *thumri* and other related forms in a bid to extend their repertoire. In an equally significant move, Pradhan points out, women from the *devadasi* tradition took eagerly to *khayal*. As a result not only did women emerge as classical vocalists in their own right, it went a long way in bestowing equal status to women performers with male musicians. The spectacular rise of the harmonium as an accompanying instrument, despite its tempered scale unsuited to Indian music, Pradhan has insightfully argued, was due to its western origin. Bereft of associations of lowly status that the *sarangi* and *tabla* had in traditional music, it was readily accepted socially, enabling amateur music to flourish in the domestic sphere.

Notwithstanding the many insights of the author, frankly, I found his approach dated. A little more effort could have been made to connect themes, facts, sources. For some reason he has not ventured into the exciting world of historiography that has emerged in the last two decades. Reading Pradhan on colonialism and orientalist scholarship it would seem Edward Said never existed. Rich conceptual terms like 'public', 'private', 'spaces' are used literally. Throughout the book the term 'art music' appears and yet nowhere does he explain how this particular usage came into being. He has some sharp things to say about Janaki Bakhle but the argument is limited to counterfactuals. The appendix has transcripts of interviews with some well-known Bombay patrons and impresarios which provide a wealth of anecdotal information. There is also a map of the city in the book with neighbourhoods and music venues carefully marked. Aficionados will be grateful to Pradhan for photographing these sites, some of which have legendary associations with musicians, *gharanas* and concerts. There is a photograph of Kennedy Bridge, but I missed one of French Bridge (the hallowed memory of Ustad Alladiya Khan is closely associated with this place).

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A Mountain Saga

Satish C. Aikant

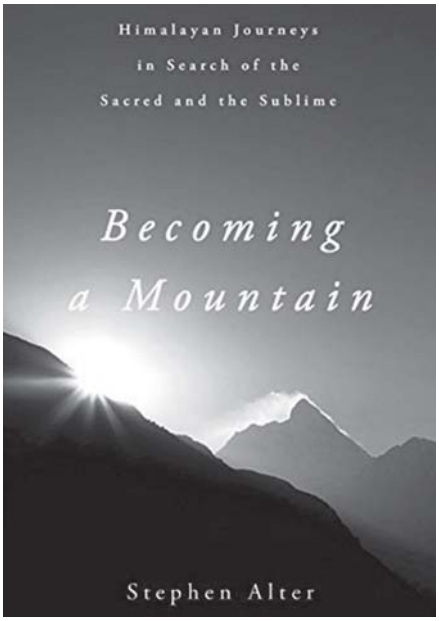
BECOMING A MOUNTAIN: HIMALAYAN JOURNEYS IN SEARCH OF THE SACRED AND THE SUBLIME
By Stephen Alter
Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 262, ₹495.00

It is only at a time of crisis that we experience the vulnerability of human existence—in a flash the whole world may change for us and take on new meanings.

It was a gruesome early morning of 3rd of July 2008 when four armed intruders waving knives and pistols broke upon Oakville, Stephen Alter's house in Mussoorie. They first knocked his wife to the floor. Her screams awakened Alter who was then repeatedly stabbed by one of the masked intruders demanding money. They were told there was no cash in the house. Then they tried to smother him. Taking the couple for dead and getting exasperated on finding no money they left. The couple were rushed to the hospital and they survive to tell the tale. The charade of police investigation went on for a long time but the attackers could never be traced. The act of evil and violence unsettled the author as he ruefully remarks, 'Having been touched by evil leaves you with a sense of anger and violation, as well as a constant fear that the evil might return.'

One needs to find a way to heal the psychic and physical wounds and Stephen Alter, author and a former professor of creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, adopts his own course to rise above his suffering and traumatic memory. Following his convalescence Alter sets forth on a journey to the Himalayan summits. *Becoming a Mountain* is a saga of that adventure—a fascinating narrative of a series of treks he makes to the Tiger's Nest, Bandarpunch, Nanda Devi and Kailash Manasarovar. Of course this was not his singular tryst with the mountains, for born and brought up in Musssorie in the hills of Garhwal, Alter has lived in the proverbial lap of nature. His house Oakville is a 1840 bungalow, surrounded by twenty acres of forest. His parents were Presbyterian missionaries, and his father spent most of his life as a teacher and Principal at Woodstock school in Mussoorie.

When Alter heard the call of the mountain in his heart, he started preparing himself physically, mentally and emotionally to undertake the extremely challenging pilgrimage to Nanda Devi, the mountain of 'the bliss-giving goddess', worshipped in the pahadi speaking regions of Uttarakhand,



Nepal and Tibet, but especially in Garhwal and Kumaon. This beautiful yet forbidding mountain remains the highest peak inside the borders of India. In the popular lore Nanda Devi is a mountain goddess and hymns in praise of her are sung throughout Uttarakhand, celebrating her maternal power and cosmic benevolence. When the inveterate trekker and author Bill Aitken went to Nanda Devi he described his 'darshan' of the mountain as 'a supreme moment of cosmic consciousness.' Every twelve years the Raj Jat re-enacts the journey of the mountain goddess from her paternal home to the mountains of her '*sasural*', Shiva's abode The most arduous part of this 280 km long ritual journey to Nanda Devi is through Roopkund, a glacial pond at 5029 metres above sea level, which remains frozen most of the year. For a period, when the ice and snow recede, hundreds of human bones are revealed in the shallow, green waters of the lake and along its rocky shoreline. The presence of skeletal remains is a mystery. Nobody knows for sure why they are there. Alter thinks that the most plausible explanation is that a cataclysmic storm or avalanche killed a party of pilgrims across the lake.

There is detailed description of the author's climb toward Taktsang, the Tiger's Nest, in Bhutan where he enters into a tenuous state of emotional equanimity. He feels happy but is not impressed by Bhutan's investment in Gross National Happiness wondering if it is really possible to find genuine happiness in a place where authority dictates its own terms of cheerful equipoise.

Alter gives a fascinating account of his ascent to Kailash and Mansarovar Lake. Heading for Kailash was an impulsive decision but he was also desperate to come to terms with his violent memories and fear: 'Though my wounds had healed, the scars continued to erode my physical and mental confidence.' And so he wants to find solace and redemption in the sacred aura of Kailash, one of the world's most venerated mountains. On Kailash, the Hindus believe, sits Shiva in a state of perpetual meditation, generating the spiritual force that sustains the cosmos. The Jains call the mountain Astapada where Rishaba, the first Tirthankara attained salvation. Tibetan Buddhists call it 'Kang Rimpoche' or the Precious Jewel of the Glacial Snow.

As the highest and most dramatic features of the natural landscape, mountains have an extraordinary power to evoke the sacred. A ridge enveloped in mist, the glint of moonlight on ice, the golden sun speckled on a distant peak—offer glimpses of transcendent beauty and peace. Indeed the sublime finds its most evident manifestations in the spectacle of nature in all its splendour, power and awesomeness. Thoreau and other American Transcendentalists knew this when they revered nature so passionately. Nature gave Wordsworth that 'blessed mood' in which the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world is lightened.

Alter also writes about the Kedarnath diasater of 2013, the 'Himalayan Tsunami,' when flash floods hit the entire hillside of Kedarnath, which crumbled to a slushy graveyard of residents, pilgrims and trekkers before anyone knew what was happening.

To return to the traumatic incident at the Oakville, the physical jolt apart, what Alter seems to suffer most is a loss of sense of belonging to this country as he writes, 'Earlier growing up in India, I never felt that I belonged anywhere else, despite my American passport. Whenever I left for the Himalayas, an instinctual urge pulled me back, a sense of surety that this was home. Only in recent years have I begun to experience doubts and discontentment, the uneasy, persistent ache of alienation.' It is a sad comment that the rest of us should deeply reflect upon to re-imagine the idea of India.

Ananda Coomaraswamy says that art experience is profoundly transformative. *Becoming a Mountain* alters Alter's perspective on the human situation as it does so, I am sure, of the readers, transforming and elevating them. The author is a self-confessed atheist but a deep undercurrent of spirituality runs through his narratives recounting a pilgrim's progress.

Satish C. Aikant is former Professor and Head of the Department of English, H.N.B. Garhwal University.

Patchwork Quilt Of Poems

Saleem Peeradina

THE RINGMASTER'S APPRENTICE
By Oz Hardwick
Valley Press, UK, 2014, pp. 53, £7.99

DO YOU HEAR THE STORM SING?
By Debjani Chatterjee
Core Publications, UK, 2014, pp. 73, £8.99

Both poets under review live and work in the UK. Oz Hardwick is the author of five previous collections of poetry and editor of three other titles including *New Crops from Old Fields—Eight Medievalist Poets.* He is also a photographer and musician, and a professor of Creatiive Writing at Leeds Trinity Unversity. He has collaborated on a pamphlet of Tanka verse with Amina Alyal.

Hardwick's work draws from all of his interests including snapshots from travel in foreign countries. Especially appealing are his poems on flowers, birds, animals, reptiles, and other creatures wild and domesticated, following a well-established British line that stretches from Chaucer to Ted Hughes. He has a weakness for foxes and we meet one in the very first poem. While a train makes an unscheduled stop between a chemical factory and a sewage plant that creates an overpowering stench, he observes:

> Our eyes meet
> And, between a bland train and an unconcerned fox,
> Hangs more poetry than I will ever write.

And true to English tradition, there is the 'falcon' born to kill, 'Bird rebooted/to ripping machine of beak and talons.' In three parts, this is one of the strongest poems packed with a frightening power in the bird's own words. The predator is merciless when swooping in for the kill, but

> No, it's when I'm still
> That you should fear ne,
> For when I've nothing in my grasp
> I have your whole world in my eye. ('Falcon Explains')

Recently, a surprising bestseller in Britain is called *H is For Hawk*. It is a daughter's memoir of grief at her father's death, and her long process of recovery through the training of a hawk—a passion father and daughter shared.

Hardwick has the photographer's eye for detail. 'Immigration' features a thin girl, 'maybe Hispanic or central European', waiting tables at an American airport 'since her first ancestors came,' where 'dogs sniff old air in the New World' and 'Barefoot queues do not move'. It could be a scene straight out of Edward Hopper.

Other poems however are caught at a remove, the goings-on not quite revealed. In 'Sacrifice', an ancient ritual is under way, and at least some of the participants are there under compulsion, 'measured in steps/and the weight of their fathers' religion.' There are some poems that offer no keys to unlock their mystery ('Beneath the Bridge'), others tease out some mythic allusion ('The Secret Library'), and still others ('Gaslight') hold a dark secret. There is wit and humour and clever turn of phrase ('Kid Auto on the M25') and pure lyric, ironically about lizards, descendants of dragons sharing space under his bed ('Sleeping With Dragons') and 'in the weeds in the reeds/at the lip of the lake'.

As in his previous book, *The Illuminated Dreamer*, Hardwick's language has a shimmer and a glow that lights up the page. The title poem, and 'The Alchemist's Cat' are examples of this magical effect. The woman who works tirelessly behind the scenes, emerges in the ring with a climactic flourish,

> Her scarlet mouth as wide as a lion's
> Her tongue a tightrope where promises dance
> Like careless acrobats falling into fire.

There are poems about bands and musicians with references to The Beatles, the Pistols, and the author's own fantasy of being a star some day. Of course there is a lookalike Elvis in every town and a karaoke singalong 'swiveling his replacement hip/as he hollered "Jailhouse Rock".'

There are the failures who turn 'Bad' and meet a premature death. There is a mentally-disabled boy of twenty-five who lives under the railway arches and dies in an accident. One of the strongest poems is 'Asylum' spoken through a collective monologue of inmates. And 'Moon Ballet' is pure lyric—soft and tender, taking in fields, grass, wing-beats and split-milk galaxies splashed to heaven. Truly, 'this madness is divine'.

The rare appearance of a strong political poem, 'Monument', makes me want to see more of this side of Hardwick's ouvre. Altogether, a highly satisfying and pleasing volume of poetry.

Debjani Chatterjee is a prolific writer having published nine collections, several books for children, and eighteen books edited as anthologies and/or translations. A disclaimer may be appropriate here: This is my first acquaintance with Debjani's poetry.

The first few pages seem like a warm-up exercise with group poems by several women belonging to Roshni Asian Women's Centre, Bengali Women's Support Group, and Pakistan Muslim Centre, for whom poetry serves a therapeutic purpose. A two-time cancer survivor, Debjani is also a patron of Survivors' Poetry and founder of The Healing Word. The purpose of these verses is not to prove their literary worthiness, but to provide a medium for empathy and sharing. Mostly, these are about mother-daughter bonds, and even if the language is simple, it is spoken with authority. In 'Amma Says,' the advice is 'forget cutlery; eating by hand is best'. 'My Granny' is a composite of colours—yellow sweet-corn, henna-red hair, and red mouth from chewing *paan*—'heart-shaped leaves that remind of mother-love'.

Speaking of cutlery in 'I am the Knife', the knife, fork, and spoon are turned into instruments of justice. The tone is bold and the voice, confident. There are heavier poems like, 'Here at Mamilla' after Shelley's 'Ozymandias', commemorating the historic cemetery in Jerusalem. In 'Salaam, My Poet-Friends', the dust proclaims its supremacy over poets, saints, and social reformers. Figures from Hindu mythology are strewn everywhere and explained in footnotes.

At times she can be jokey and sarcastic as in 'Victoria's Statues':

> It amused Queen Victoria
> To be Empress of India.
> Although she never travelled there,
> She left her statues everywhere.

In one of her best poems, 'What I did Today', the speaker who is a patient in a waiting room, gives voice to a fantasy of destruction that every reader can identify with who has been at the mercy of hospital gowns, consent forms, and arrogant doctors.

Sometimes the tone is agreeably conversational but what is said is too obvious as in 'Bride's or Groom's?' The book in its entirety is a miscellany with no over-arching theme. Or you could say it is a quilt of many-coloured patches and threads. I will end with an offering of a haiku:

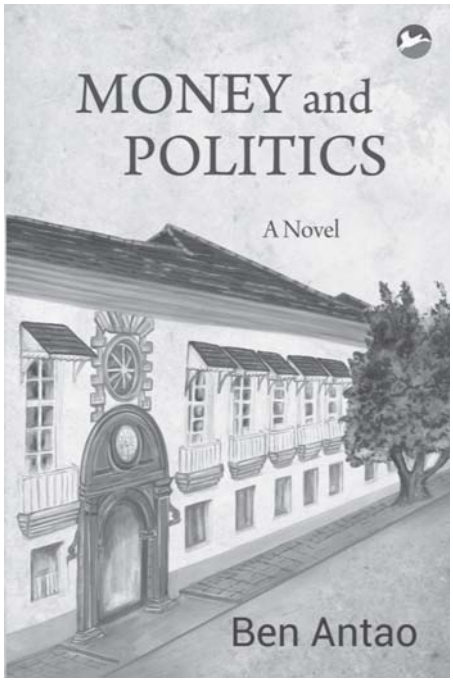
> Polishing a lie
> Can never create the shine
> Belonging to truth.

Saleem Peeradina is Professor Emeritus of English at Siena Heights University., MI, USA. He has published four books of poetry, the most recent being, *Slow Dance (2010)*. His prose memoir, *The Ocean in My Yard,* came out in 2005.

An Unholy Nexus

Shane Joseph

MONEY AND POLITICS
By Ben Antao
CinnamonTeal Publishing, 2015, pp. 226, ₹325.00



Ben Antao has tackled the birth of Goan Independence with humour and an unrepentant pen. That politics *is* money is unquestioned in this novel. That politics *is* business is also boldly stated. And with the events in this tale taking place in the early 1960s when, for those of us who were raised in a more idealistic time and were led to believe in statesmanship and leadership (Kennedy, Gandhi, Churchill et al), and in altruistic nation-building in a post-WWII era, this book comes as a bit of a shake-up and a wake-up call.

The novel is based on true events. The real-life protagonists, Dayanand Bandodkar, a miner, and Jack de Sequeira, a merchant, formed two political parties, Maharashtrawadi Gomantak (MG) and United Goans (UG) respectively, in the aftermath of the liberation of Goa in December 1961 from Portuguese dictator Salazar by the Indian military. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promised Goa that it was free to shape its destiny within India. The MG party contested the elections for ruling the new territory on two pledges: to merge Goa with neighbouring Maharashtra, as most Goans spoke the Marathi language native to the larger state, and to return Goan lands back to the tillers. The UG, on the other hand, stood for a separate state for Goa within India, with Konkani as the official language, and with land remaining in the hands of the existing landholders, many of whom were UG and MG candidates vying to be elected. The MG ultimately won the election, but were unsuccessful in merging Goa with Maharashtra as an opinion poll (more a referendum) held within the tiny territory overwhelmingly called for a separate status.

Within this frame of history, Antao spins his tale. Bandodkar is named Fondekar and de Sequeira is named Gaspar. Both men launch their political parties and campaigns with the complete understanding that only money will buy success. They are blatant in their offerings of 'help' to likely supporters, and are equally bullish in obtaining 'deposits' by business people who are eyeing lucrative development contracts in Goa when the right political parties come to power. Their two assistants, Euseb (Gaspar's) and Vishnu (Fondekar's), are wily characters. Euseb wears dark glasses even at night, and when he takes them off it's an occasion. Vishnu is particularly adept at sussing out potential supporters for his boss's cause. The play of idealistic master and street-smart servant reminds me of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and here we have them in double-form, lending verisimilitude to this picaresque tale. The third party in this battle is India's ruling party, the Congress, led by a rather ineffectual and indecisive local leader, Shankar, who cannot make a decision unless it's sanctioned by HQ in Delhi. Instead of votes, all Shankar is able to collect is money from those same scouting business people who are hedging their bets with every political party in the race.

When the result is declared, with the MG obtaining 14 seats to the UG's 12 and the other two seats going to independent candidates, the bribing game notches up into higher gear to secure a majority, or to prevent one. The MG prevails, and Fondekar is proclaimed Chief Minister with Gaspar as the Leader of the Opposition. But the new regime lands in hot water no sooner it introduces the land reform bill, for many landholders are among the ruling party, and 'exceptions' have to be made in case members defect and break up the MG's slim majority. What follows is a travesty of the legislative process. The MG re-introduces a watered-down and more equitable-looking piece of legislation, but makes its 'exceptions' in the implementation of the new bill.

Land reform ends in failure, for the tillers who now have acquired this new-found wealth cannot be bothered to work any more and become landlords themselves and rent their land to a fresh crop of tillers.

At the end of the novel, which is by no means the end of the ongoing saga of Goan politics, the two rivals stand in a 1-1 tie, for the opinion poll—also fuelled with lots of money to swing voters and further infused with patriotism for Goa remaining Goan—ends in a win for Gaspar.

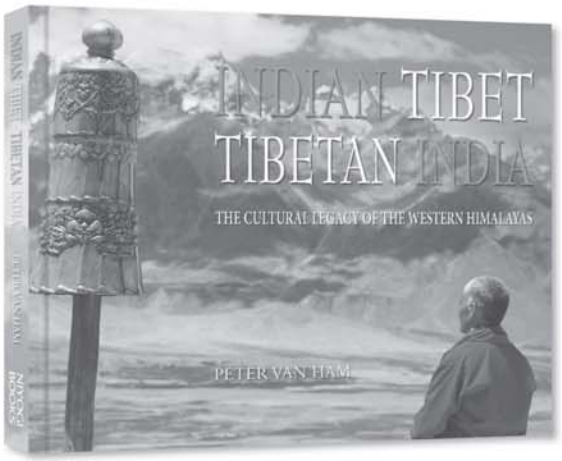
I have read all of Antao's novels and stories, many written about Goa, but unlike the others which have more flesh-and-blood types, the characters in this novel exude only money and politics, hence the title, I suppose. We do not get any glimpse into the factors that made them who they are or what drives them in such a devious fashion. While this book may not earn the author any fans from among the Indian political establishment, we suspect that he is writing from personal experience, for there is a reporter named Tony in the novel who is constantly in the face of all the political leaders, whose resume could well have been that of a younger Ben Antao's.

This novel adds to the growing body of Goan literature in English to which the author has contributed. The style is colonial, Shakespearean in places, reflective of Antao's education and his passion for the Bard, the dialogue is infused with humour, the manners of the protagonists are businesslike (opening statements of a meeting run like 'So, what can I do for you?' or '*Arrey*, how much money do you want?'), and scenes of Goa are vividly drawn, with the Mandovi River constantly weaving in and out of the narrative.

This is an insightful novel, tempered with humour to make it palatable, for those wanting an inside look into Indian politics, told by someone who once had a grandstand view, and who is not afraid to 'call a spade a spade'.

Shane Joseph is the author of four novels and two collections of short stories, and was the winner of the best fantasy novel award at the Canadian Christian Writing Awards in 2010. His short fiction has appeared in international literary journals and anthologies. His latest novel, *In the Shadow of the Conquistador*, was released in October this year by Blue Denim Press.

The author explores the entire region of Western Himalayas referred popularly as Indian Tibet and highlights the Cultural Exchange, Cross-relations and Interactions in this region.



978-93-83098-93-4
₹2495 / £45 / $75

Indian Tibet – Tibetan India: The Cultural Legacy of the Western Himalayas is a meticulously researched and brilliantly photographed book giving a detailed textual and pictorial documentation of the entire Western Himalayan region with special emphasis on the Indo-Tibetan and early Indian culture, Buddhist art and ethnicity of the region and peoples.

Inspired by the first cultural expedition into the Western Himalayas by August Hermann Francke in 1909, the author has travelled for years in the long inaccessible Indo-Tibetan border regions after they were opened to the public in the beginning of the 1990's.

With the aid of rare archival and contemporary textual and visual materials the author draws a comprehensive picture of the fascinating history of the exploration of the present Indian border region towards Tibet.

German author and photographer **Peter van Ham** is an expert on Himalayan cultures and has written extensively on India's many border regions. He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic and the Royal Geographical Societies, London, as well as of the Explorers Club, New York.

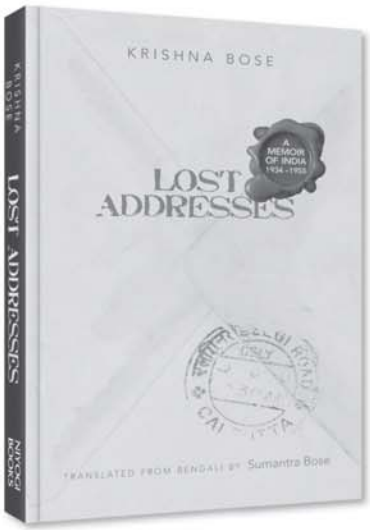
Lost Addresses should interest readers of modern histories as well as autobiographies.

Krishna Bose was born Krishna Chaudhuri on 26 December 1930 in Dhaka, to East Bengali parents settled in Calcutta. In December 1955 she married Sisir Kumar Bose, son of the barrister and nationalist leader Sarat Chandra Bose and nephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Lost Addresses is Krishna's story of her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. It vividly describes Calcutta, Bengal and India in the 1930s and 1940s and the early years after Independence. Krishna re-lives how she experienced World War II, the Quit India movement of 1942, the Bengal famine of 1943-44, the Red Fort trials of the Indian National Army (INA) officers in 1945-46, the Great Calcutta killings of 1946, and Partition and Independence in Delhi in 1947. Illustrated with old photographs, this memoir is a valuable historical record, told in flowing literary style.

Krishna Bose taught English from 1955 to 1995 at a women's college of Calcutta, where she became the Principal. She joined politics in 1996 and was elected Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) three times from the Jadavpur constituency in Greater Calcutta.

The book is translated by **Sumantra Bose** who is the youngest of three children of Krishna and Sisir Bose.



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A New Scribe for the Mahabharata

Dipavali Sen

THE LAST KAURAVA A NOVEL
By Kamesh Ramakrishna
Frog Books, an imprint of Leadstart Publishing, Mumbai, 2015, illustrations by Junuka Deshpande, maps Harshad Marathe, pp. 532, ₹525.00

It is so difficult to achieve a combination of the ancient and the modern, the historical and the imaginary, the authentic and the innovative. But in *The Last Kaurava* by Kamesh Ramakrishna we have it. In it, the Mahabharata comes alive with a twenty-first century zest.

The author who grew up in Bombay and studied at IIT-Kanpur, holds a PhD in computer science from Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh. He has made significant contributions to software engineering and architecture and lives at present in Massachusetts. But, as he states in the Introduction of this novel, his interest in the Mahabharata is long standing. 'As a child, the Mahabharata fascinated me—not only did it have heroes, heroines, villains, and fast-paced action, but it also raised profound human questions about fairness, the need for revenge, the horror of war. When I became interested in history and pre-history, I struggled to fit the stories into what the archaeological record showed on the ground' (p. 9).

As a key reference, Ramakrishna has used J.A.B. van Buitenen's translation of the critical edition of the epic brought out by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (B.O.R.I.). Other influences range from A.K. Ramanujan and Iravathi Karve to Marvin Harris, Robert Graves and Gore Vidal. The core ideas of the novel have been published in the journals *The Trumpeter* and *The Indian Journal of Eco-criticism*. Other books by the author include *The Making of Bhishma* (an Amazon Kindle book incorporated into *The Last Kaurava* in prose and with less detail) and *Little Bird Learns to FLY* (a children's story written with daughter Jaya Aiyer, published by Pratham Books, Delhi, and Kashi Publishing (Cambridge, MA, USA) in Japanese.

The Last Kaurava is in seven parts, viz., The Prisoner, The Son, The Crown Prince, Interlude, Bhishma The Terrible, The Son(again) and the Appendices . Each part contains several chapters, sometimes broken into sections.

There is a 'frame story'—the penning down of the epic by scribes as narrated by bards forming a Kavi Sangha or Society of Poets. The author has 'imagined a highly evolved, non-literate and orally based culture in 850 BCE' (p. 10) and taken it into one where there was a guild or collective that recorded and archived oral material. The 'project' was 'expensive', and delays were not encouraged by 'the city'. This is a brilliant interpretation of the familiar tale of Ganesha taking down Vyasa's dictations non-stop.

Within the frame, there are the epic events as seen through the dying eyes of Devavrat Bhishma, called 'the last Kaurava'. (What about Dhritarashtra himself? Wasn't he the last one?)

This allows an entirely new approach to the tale—to my knowledge, never attempted before.

The usual understanding of the Mahabharata is inclusive of fantastic elements, magical weapons, gods and goddesses, rebirths and reincarnations. This novel steers clear of all that—which is by itself a novelty. No horses! No horse-driven chariots! This revolts against the concept of Parthasarathi Krishna who is so pivotal to the general impression we have of the epic. But the author has made it his 'ground rule' to be firmly rooted in 2000 BCE as per evidence.

He has set the novel against the background of an ecological crisis—the drying up of the river Sarasvati (a border of the area known as Brahmavarta, the other border being defined by the river Drishadvati). This, according to the author, caused refugees (such as the Nagas) to overcrowd Hastinapur, a city situated on the Ganga and ruled by the Kuru dynasty. Devavrat, as the caretaker of the dynasty, dealt with it in his fashion. But the Pandavas laying claim to the throne are likely to undo what he did. This provides Devavrat to stick to Suyodhana (Duryodhana) rather than side with Yudhisthira. This, in turn, leads to war and destruction.

An ingenious innovation, this issue of immigrants and ecology. But while the Mahabharata does not contradict it, does it have enough to provide this hypothesis a launching pad?

The most startling innovation of the novel is making Devavrat Bhishma realize on his deathbed that he has killed Shikhandin, who is Amba's son and his own as well. This is revelation to the old grandpa (*pitamaha*) as he lies dying of his war wounds, and a revelation to most readers as well!

The Mahabharata quite clearly says that Bhishma did not even shoot at Shikhandin because he knew he was really a woman, that is, Amba reborn. If there is a gap in any statement, it can be filled by 'poetic license'. If there is already a full statement, imagination is contradiction. Can it pass as re-interpretation or trans-creation? This puzzles me especially because the book is otherwise so erudite and informative.

The text carries short but useful footnotes. In the seventh part (which is entirely the Appendices), Appendix A provides Endnotes (e.g., on Trade Routes in India, Measures of Time and Distance) while Appendix B is a Glossary of Sanskrit Names).

(I do have a minor issue here. 'Devavrat' is not consistent with Bhishma, Yudhisthira, Suyodhana and the like. Why not put an 'a' at the end, for one who performed his *vrata* with lifelong dedication. In that same vein, Panchanada, not Panchnad.)

Plus, the book has a map (in colour) of the Mahabharata country, and a family tree (also colourful) of the Kauravas. The map shows ancient cities with their modern names, the Kururashtra, the Naga territory, and the migration routes.

So read this book. Read this book with tolerance, no, respect for new views. The Mahabharata has never been completed, whether by a single author or a Kavi Sangha. It is being translated, abridged, retold, dramatized, serialized, digitalized and so on ... continually. It is always evolving. Kamesh Ramakrishna is yet another of the contributors to it.

Dipavali Sen is Associate Professor in Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi University, and a free-lance writer.

Book News ***Book News***

Babur: Conqueror of Hindustan by Royina Grewal narrates the story of the first Mughal emperor—poet, warrior, lover, aesthete and inspiring general, and the gentle prince Humayun. An evocative narrative, this book brings to life the era of the mighty Mughals.

Rupa, 2015, pp. 421, ₹395.00

Fields of Play: Sport, Literature and Culture edited by Poonam Trivedi and Supriya Chaudhuri examines the many dimensions of sport in India combining theoretical engagement with close analyses of texts.

Orient BlackSwan, 2015, pp. 308, price not stated.

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