

Book Reviews

Ahmad, Imtiaz, 'Explaining the Status of Muslims in the Economy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLII (35), September 15, 2007, pp. 3703-3704.

Imtiaz Ahmad presents a critical review of Omar Khalidi's book *Muslims in Indian Economy* (New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2006). The conventional discourse on Muslims was a natural outcome of the Hunter Commission, which reported on the prevailing social situation of Muslims and made recommendations for their amelioration. One of the predominant views that emerged for extensive public discourse on Muslims was that Muslims had been the victims of a process of invidious discrimination and it was the responsibility of the state to rectify the situation through appropriate policy initiatives. The paper flags a few important aspects of the Muslims' status in the Indian economy.

The gross obsession or preoccupation with the public discourse, the reviewers observe, closes the door for searching exploration for assessing the place and role of Muslims in the Indian economy. Unlike the Hindus, the Muslims are under-represented in the trade and industrial sectors. The author, however, attributes this under-representation to discriminatory public policies rather than to political economy of conversions and the preference patterns of the community. This pattern – sticking to one sector of the economy persisted despite the British rendered the occupational structure more open.

Two plausible reasons for unwillingness and inability of Muslims to move to higher levels of economy are: lack of entrepreneurial spirit among the Muslims, and the rigid adherence to the Islamic values i.e., adhering to petty trade and commerce. One disturbing pointer, as highlighted in the review, is the pervasive sense of physical insecurity of Muslims arising out of communal conflagration.

Chandhoke, Neera, 'Centrality of the Political Once Again', a review of Ramchandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLII (34), August 25, 2007, pp. 3459-3464.

This article is an incisive and critical review of historian Ramchandra Guha's book on India. The reviewer, Ms. Chandhoke's statement on Guha's book is deceptively simple: "Guha tells us straight story of India, and tells this story rather well." The book tells about, how India has held together as a single entity after 60 testing years of independence despite various developments and challenges that tended to tear India apart as the world's largest democracy. Guha, the reviewer says, dwells on four things, that define the making of post-independent India: (a) the forging of the post-independent state;(b) the challenges of anti-caste and communal movements, and the Naxalite rebellion to the state;(c) the shifts in India's relations with he rest of the world, particularly the US; and (d) the economic projects.

According to the reviewer, the economic project, the fourth theme of Guha's book is least discussed- only two chapters, i.e., chapter eight and chapter twenty-nine deal with this aspect, albeit with low-ebb articulation and insight. However, the bulk of the work is devoted to discussing the processes of state formation in relation to two aspects of the polity: challenges from within the country, and challenges from without, from other powers and predicators of doom. The author, as the reviewer puts it, is an unabashed Nehruvian, and therefore, a presentation of Nehru as independent India's towering political personality, giving the shape, direction and depth to the country's development. The reviewer justifiably accuses the author being "soft" towards the first Prime Minister. The reviewer adds on that, the author shows "scant" regard for the power of the religious rights.

Guha chronicles the troubled history of the government with Kashmir, and to some extent with the Nagas and the Mizos. As the facts testify Nehru was responsible for making of the "Kashmir problem", but the author, according to Chandhoke, abandoned the issue uncritically. In a sheathing attack on Indira Gandhi, the author observes that, what were deviations from political norms in Nehru's time became the norm during the reign of Indira Gandhi. Though Indira Gandhi purposefully destroyed the values her father stood for, she is still remembered as the saviour of the poor and the defender of minorities. Guha, however, dwells little on this irony.

The decline of Congress started after 1967, and it never completely recovered its once unquestioned monopoly thereafter both at the centre as well as in states. Two reasons are prominently

loud and clear: first, “organisational atrophy”, and second, rising expectancies of people from political parties and the government. Coming to Rajiv Gandhi, the reviewer observes, it was uneven “ on one hand he gave to the country modernisation in a technology, and on the other, his policies enabled an infinite, regression towards the values of primeval India, i.e., communalism.

In the last chapter, Guha zeroes onto the plus points of Indian democracy, of particular significance is secularism. However, the author’s assertion about practice of secularism in India stands on feeble foundation. At the end, the reviewer suggests; first, as long as Kashmir problem remains, communalism will continue to bedevil the inter-community existence; second, civil society groups can work as a force, if they eschew, independent or partial agenda; and third, it is important to recover some of Nehru’s commitment to shimmering solidarity with other countries of the south.

Kapadia, Karin, ‘Voting for Ourselves’, *Economic Political Weekly*, XLII (15), April, 14, 2007, pp. 1349-1350.

Karin Kapadia presents a fascinating review of Hugo Gorringer’s book *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005). The credibility of the book lies in the author’s wide-ranging exploration of literature in politics, sociology, anthropology and social history, coupled with his insightful and incisive analysis of various theories and constructs, and above all his searching interviews with frontlines dalit activists. The freshness of the subject: Tamil dalit movements are hardly a decade old, unlike those in north India – makes the book an absorbing reading. The new Tamil dalit middle class that provided resources and educated leadership to the pollar political party – the Puthiya Tamizhagam (PT) and paraiyar party, the Dalil Panthers of India (DPI). The new dalit parties, intensely leader-driven, challenged head on the long-standing political subordination and subservience to the upper-caste leadership. Even the dominant backward castes posed powerful hostility towards the new political mobilization. Thus, the dalit castes of Tamil Nadu are deeply divided and dissension-ridden, leading to intermittent bloody clashes between these two dalit political parties. The realization that a broad-based caste mobilization is essential was often proved to be a rhetoric.

The predominant patriarchic perspective of dalit male leadership and increasing marginalization of dalit women together with leader centeredness of dalit movements and organization proved to be formidable obstacles to nurturing a democratic and egalitarian ethos. A major pragmatic development in DPI was the decision to enter representative electoral politics and to fight for their entitlements from within. The strategic alliance of DPI with other political parties such as the DMK, the AIADMK and TMC at different points of time to grab power, Gorringer feared, may deter DPI from its mission – to represent the concerns of the dalit poor.

Gorringer concludes with the warning that the dalit political parties will not be able to forge ahead with the central agenda to do away with the caste affiliation and caste-based identity, if they themselves make caste identity the central marker of their own political identity. The central challenge for Tamil dalit political leaders, Gorringer argues, is to unify the various dalit political fractions and to simultaneously broad-base their politics. Together they can do.

Possibly, Gorringer has missed a dominant link in dalit dialogue and discourse for unification, viz. place of religion in the lives of Tamil dalit.

Jain, L.C., ‘Children robbed of Schooling’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLII (17), April 28, 2007, pp. 1505.

This article is a review of a book:

“Locked homes, Empty schools: The Impact of Distress Seasonal Migration on the Rural Poor” by Smita and her camera companion Prashant. The book, combining description and photography, brings out the travails of millions of migrant families and their ill-fated children from rain fed areas of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Orissa, who are pushed out of their villages for lack of work and earnings. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in his foreword to this publication differentiates this “survival migration” from migration of people for “accumulation”.

In a way, the migrants lead an ‘uprooted’ life belonging neither to their villages nor to the place where they go under pressing circumstances. The children of migrant parents who accompany them live a life of untold hardships and deprivations of all forms-

health, education and security- entitlements. The study captures the macro as well as the micro reality relating to the phenomenon of distress migration in its all encompassing elements, such as its spread and scale, the seasonality factor, the varied contexts, employer-labour relationships, the working and living conditions of migrant families and children and child labour as a fall-out. More importantly the study highlights the conditions of schools in the host areas and the overall response of the education system towards the migrant children. Sen has focussed on two aspects of this “distress seasonal” migration, viz., its magnitude and its causation.

In drought –afflicted areas, animal husbandry is the most common traditional occupation next to agriculture. Driven by drought-triggered scarcity of fodder for animals, the poor families migrate to other places, lest the only option is to starve. The author extensively draws upon SEWA, which works with poor families in Sabarkantha of Gujarat. The SEWA initiative consists in pulling in place fodder banks in the scarcity ridden areas, which ensured assured supply of fodder to milch animals, and milk supply and thereby sustained income to the producers throughout the year. However, government managed fodder banks failed in their mission. Result: SEWA was entrusted with the making of the fodder banks effective and efficient under the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP). The long term solution for distress migration: to create livelihood options in villages.

The review, it appears, hardly justifies the title: “Children Robbed of Schooling”.