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BOOK REVIEW

Gender-related themes

PADMINI SWAMINATHAN

It provides an opportunity to appreciate gender-related issues in all their varied dimensions and nuances

THE POWER OF GENDER AND THE GENDER OF POWER -
Explorations in Early Indian History: Kumkum Roy; Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi-110001. Rs. 850.

This is an anthology of brilliant essays written over a period of 25 years. For non-historians, and historians who are not gender sensitive, it provides an opportunity to appreciate gender-related issues in all their varied dimensions and nuances. At the same time, it also reveals the breadth of the themes covered and the painstaking manner in which the author has gone about the exercise of contextualising and reading the texts between the lines.

Focus

Most of the texts drawn upon are Sanskrit works — the Grhya Sutras, the Dharma Sutras, and the three major Sastras (the Arthashastra, the Manusmṛti, and the Kamasutra) which are all, by definition, prescriptive. Occasionally, Pali textual tradition and inscriptions in Prakrit have also been sourced. Roy's focus, as she says at the outset, is on the content and structure of the texts rather than on critiquing their histories.

This volume has 19 essays arranged in two sections and in terms of the widely accepted chronological segments, ancient/early medieval Indian history. In the first section, Roy attempts to show that “a gendered

analysis of institutions and processes, ranging from the household to urbanism and renunciatory traditions, is critical for an understanding of early Indian history.” The second section highlights the strategies of textual analysis, and Roy argues: “Given that many of these texts are gendered in overt and covert ways, gender provides an undercurrent to several of these discussions as well. Since several of the texts were produced by [the elite] and for elite consumption, issues of power run through as an underlying strand.” Some of the several interesting and thought-provoking observations of Roy are highlighted in this review.

In ‘The Other Ksetra’, Roy speaks of possible links between production and reproduction, suggesting that the revenue demands of the new states that emerged in the post-Mauryan period would have created a demand for labour. “It is in this context that the issue of ownership acquired a certain centrality... Two kinds of ownership were focussed on — one, the ownership of land, and, second, the ownership of potentially or actually procreative women. In a sense, the two kinds of ownership were interwoven.”

The Arthashastra and the Manusmṛti gave a systematic account of the manner in which women in general, and their procreative powers in particular, are to be controlled. Roy says: “The notion of women as property or as instruments of procreation was, in itself, not new... What was new, however, was an attempt to buttress this notion through a range of prescriptions that focussed on regulating the day-to-day lives of women.”

In ‘Defining the Household’, she critically engages with Medhatithi's commentaries on the Manusmṛti, in particular those related to the domestic realm. By explaining the significance of the chronological gap between the text and the commentary, as well as the shift in geographical focus,

Roy is able to show how and why Medhatithi's agenda of incorporating norms for the establishment and perpetuation of a hierarchically ordered

society ran into problems against an empirical situation that was less neatly ordered and in which gender roles were relatively unstructured. By historicising the household rather than accepting it as a natural, permanent, harmonious institution, Roy allows for conceptualising patriarchies as a plural, not a monolithic, structure.

'Re-presenting the Courtesanal Tradition' is a powerful essay, wherein Roy draws attention to that category of skilled, articulate women in early India whose existence has been a perennial source of unease. Focussing on three texts within which courtesans acquire a distinct visibility (the Kamasutra, the Mrichakatika, and the Jatakas), and, after exploring the phenomenon through the axes of networks of exchange and within the socio-political contexts of their location, she concludes thus:

“Courtesans could be viewed as mercenary, but they could also represent simple notions of justice and fair play. They could be projected as seductive, but they could also be regarded as ordinary, practical women surviving in a complex world.”

Historical connection

Similarly, the 'Politics of Reproduction in Early India', while reconstructing attitudes toward procreation, explores whether, and in what way, son-preference is linked to ancient traditions, as is often suggested. There is much to learn from every one of the essays for scholars who want to look at issues from a historical perspective, and for historians who want to read texts from a gender perspective. In several of the essays, Roy begins by alluding to the present before going on to provide a historical-cum-gendered perspective to the theme dealt with. However, the historical connection to the present is not always clear. In the Introduction, she sketched the context for the collection. By way of conclusion, she could have provided the much-needed connection to the present.

HINDU 25.1.11 BOOK REVIEW

A wake-up call on higher education

P. K. DORAISWAMY

UNIVERSITIES AT THE CROSSROADS: Andre Beteille; Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110001. Rs. 550.

This is a compilation of lectures delivered before different audiences and at different points in time. Consequently, there is some overlapping and repetition of points and arguments. The lectures cover a wide area related to higher education, from the state of universities to the making of an inclusive society to social theory and social science research.

Taken overall, the book is a sociological study of university, prompted by the strident demand for equality, on the one hand, and the persistent inequality, on the other. It also highlights the consequences, even if unintended, of the reckless expansion of universities, driven mainly by social and political expediencies rather than academic imperatives.

Coming as they do from a man of eminence and stature like Andre Beteille, the views and comments on the higher education scene carry enormous weight and demand greatest attention.

To put briefly what Beteille has to say on universities and the state of university education, the earliest universities were, in theory, open institutions but they did not work for social inclusiveness. It was only after Independence did governments think of reducing inequality in education through starting more universities and providing for caste-based quotas in admissions and appointments.

Maintain standards

As a public institution, the university has to be socially inclusive. In fact, drawing upon a larger genetic pool, it can attract diverse talent. But as a centre of learning and research, it must also maintain academic standards. In India, the two objectives, important in themselves, could not be harmonised. This is because the government did not do enough at the school level by way of enabling the students from the disadvantaged sections and those in the rural areas to equip themselves for higher education.

As a result, while attempting to achieve inclusiveness, the academic standards got short shrift. The government failed to realise that equality demands not just the removal of disabilities but the creation of abilities as well. Those in charge of running the universities meekly submitted to pressure by relaxing standards in order to fulfil the quota requirements.

In consequence, universities proliferated and grew in size, but could no longer conform to the original concept of a self-governing community of scholars — they are neither self-governing nor do they have a sense of community or scholarship.

Beteille puts forth a strong case for the government taking steps to expand and improve school education and to ensure that students from the disadvantaged sections are well groomed for higher education.

Arguing against mindless quantitative expansion, he wants universities to be compact entities, each one having its own core of disciplines, with a supplementary list of studies chosen to suit the resources available — academic, financial, and infrastructure.

On the question of social inclusiveness and diversity, he says that, once the standard of school education is raised to the desired level, the responsibility on this score could be shifted to universities, without any interference from the government, as is the case with foreign universities. Affirmative action with academic autonomy should be the goal.

Self-defeating

While social discrimination is despicable and needs to be ended, in matters academic there has to be differentiation on the basis of ability, aptitude, and performance. Without improving the social and economic status of individuals, he argues, any attempt to achieve equality through identity politics (which is electorally attractive) will be self-defeating in the long term.

Discussing social science research, Beteille says that, after Independence, it got linked to the government's development programmes. Social science should not be confined to economic development or areas where funds are easy to come by. It should go beyond contributing to policy formulation and help create an informed citizenry. Training in social theory helps one to step back and look at problems dispassionately and in a holistic fashion. Institutions of higher learning should encourage such a perspective in social science research.

In essence, the book seeks to impress on the government the need to correct the lopsided emphasis that is being placed on identity politics as a solution to social inequality in higher education.

To those in charge of universities, it is in the nature of a wake-up call. It calls upon them to recover their 'nerve' and do everything to preserve academic autonomy and protect it against erosive elements.

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PIONEER 30.1.11 BOOK REVIEW

Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilising a Savage World

Author: Nayantara Sahgal

Publisher: Penguin

Price: Rs 350



The book fails to explore its central theme of Jawaharlal Nehru as a ‘civilising’ force in a savage world, says Sanjoy Bagchi

Hordes of authors are attracted to write life histories of charismatic leaders to satisfy the curiosity of their followers. They churn out biographies with less attention to historical facts and more to build up mythical figures for eventual deification. Jawaharlal Nehru has not escaped from such attention; there is a huge collection of printed material about him. Very few works among them, however, deserve to stand out. Judith Brown’s political biography is exceptionally balanced and authentic. MJ Akbar’s life history is excellent for the early part of Nehru’s life while the post-1947 account is rather patchy, perhaps for want of access to official records.

S Gopal’s *sarkari* biography, like all others of the same genre, is so sanitised as to resemble the hagiography of medieval saints.

Nayantara Sahgal, Nehru’s niece, has now written a book to show the first Prime Minister’s attempts to civilise “a savage world”. Being a part of the family and living together, Sahgal had an opportunity to know Nehru intimately. She had also been given access to Nehru’s archives; in addition, she had the benefit of her mother’s papers as the ‘ballast’ for the book. Nehru had always been very close to his sister, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, and the two were the joint-architects of India’s foreign policy in

its nascent period.

The book revolves around Nehru's prime objective of peace "as a fundamental human need and as the condition for lifting India out of colonial stagnation and building a modern nation". He sought the removal of colonial domination everywhere and "his commitment to socialism within a democracy" was towards this objective. It is a pity that his attachment to his ideals prevented him from seeing the neo-colonialism of the erstwhile Soviet Union or the totalitarian character of socialism.

When Nehru came to power, the world was already divided by the Iron Curtain into two antagonistic groups. Worse, Nehru's policy of non-alignment was regarded with suspicion by both the Americans as well as the Russians. In the US Nehru was regarded as a communist fellow-traveller, while Stalin called him "the running dog of imperialism". Shortly the matters came to a head with the Anglo-French invasion of Suez and the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Sahgal asks, "Did Nehru speak louder against the attack on Egypt than on Hungary?" She seems to find the answer in *BBC*'s comment on Nehru's statement on Russian aggression in Lok Sabha: "Never before has Mr Nehru spoken out so positively against Russian imperialism and for the oppressed peoples behind the Iron Curtain."

Sahgal claims that non-alignment was a deterrent to war, "making it possible for nations to co-exist and co-operate regardless of their internal political systems". She rightly asserts that non-alignment marked "the coming of age of developing countries and the beginning of their voice in world affairs". It certainly provided Nehru with a platform to play a leading role on the global stage in accordance with his cherished convictions. Its *raison d'être*, however, vanished with the collapse of the USSR, though the movement has continued to limp along.

Nehru's trinity consisted of non-alignment, secularism and socialism. In

foreign policy, his approach was not contested. The rank and file in the Congress was ignorant of the outside world. But Nehru “felt obstructed by his party and cabinet’s resistance to his economic priorities and his anti-communal stand”.

A “militant Hindu revivalism” in the Congress threatened to move the party from what Nehru considered “its basic ideals”. He fought hard against the right-wing elements and forced them out of the party. He dethroned the party’s elected president in 1951 and took over the presidency himself, transferring it later to a nonentity like UN Dhebar who would not dare to raise his head against his ideals.

Sahgal seems to imply that Nehru was influenced by his American adviser’s views in the creation of the Planning Commission. On the contrary, he had been impressed by the Soviet five-year plans in the 1930s and had established a Planning Committee in the Congress before World War II. He carried that idea forward when he got into power, creating the Planning Commission in 1950 and began the centralised planning process with the five-year plans which has continued today.

Nehru consecrated his brand of socialism at the Avadi Congress in 1955 that adopted the “socialistic pattern of society” as its creed. The country embarked on a massive development of public enterprise in all strategic and other areas. The country had indeed “entered a new dynamic phase”. Like Sahgal’s friend Vaishnav, I too was enthusiastically carried away by the concept of state enterprises and fought hard against the vested interests in the private sector to establish a couple of new ones. Unlike Vaishnav, I was, however, disillusioned when later as chief executive I found them riddled with inefficiency, overstaffing and politicised pricing.

The book, then, wanders through the wrangling over the Hindu Code Bill, the launch of the community development programme and the removal of the last colonial vestige from India until it reaches Nehru’s

nemesis, the Chinese invasion, which knocked him off his pedestal and killed him.

Britain had treated Tibet as a buffer zone between an ever-expansionist China and India. In his new-found goodwill for communist China, Nehru accepted “some kind of suzerainty or sovereignty of China over Tibet, and Tibetan autonomy” (a delightfully vague formulation) and “repudiated the extra-territorial privileges” enjoyed by India in Tibet as “relics of British imperialism”. Under a mistaken notion, he claimed that “what had been given up has been replaced by something more important, a friendly frontier and an implicit acceptance of that frontier”, which was nothing more than wishful-thinking. China’s occupation of Tibet and the Dalai Lama’s flight to India seem to have spurred Beijing to teach Delhi a military lesson and the rest is history.

Nehru’s creed is now in tatters. Non-alignment is dead; market forces have replaced socialism; and, Islamist terrorism along with Hindu revivalism is threatening secularism. Yet, despite these failures, Nehru remains “a lone figure in his determination to establish scientific progress, participatory democracy and secularism as permanent fixtures in India”. It is a pity that the book does not explore its central theme of Nehru as a ‘civilising’ force in a “savage world” to its full intellectual limits.

The reviewer, a retired IAS officer, is a Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society, London

CIVIL SERVICE

MAKING CIVIL SERVANTS DELIVER

After his re-election, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar plans to give the people a legal right to avail government services. The new law, which has also evoked interest in Punjab, will ensure the delivery of services in a time-bound way and fix responsibility on the civil servants for delays.

R. K. Luna

THE intense competition brought about by economic reforms has left one definite advantage for the Indian consumer, and that is, a quick delivery system in the private sector. Pizzas are delivered at your home in half an hour, internet connections are installed within 24 hours and a car loan is sanctioned within 48 hours.

However, the movement of files in government offices still remains sluggish. War widows have to wait for months to get pension. Scheduled Castes students have to pass through a rigorous exercise to get a caste certificate issued. Compensation to the 'refugees of their own land' is delivered after years of the acquisition of land. An ambulance rarely reaches the patient in time. Trains and public transport buses usually run behind schedule, sometimes 12 to 24 hours late.

ISSUES IN FOCUS

- Competition has improved the delivery of services in the private sector.
- The poor are more dependent on public services than others.
- Government departments are marred by plethora of rules, complicated procedures and jurisdictional approaches.
- Enacting a law to make public services a legitimate right of people will fix responsibility on civil servants to deliver services.
- The Right to Service Bill will identify services and notify designated officers who are required to deliver within the prescribed time limit and a penalty clause for those who do not deliver within this limit.
- Reinventing governance by replacing a centralised, top-heavy bureaucracy with a decentralised and people-friendly organisation.
- The government should encourage competition, simplify rules and procedures and redefine accountability.

India is known to have the best of laws and regulations in the world, yet they help little to deliver services to people in time. For this reason a World Bank survey in 2007 ranked India at 134 out of a total of 175 countries. The rank rose to 120 in the 2008 survey.

The report states that it takes 35 days in India to start a business compared with an average of 17 days in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and two days in Australia. The official cost to start a business is high at 74 per cent of per capita income compared to 9 per cent in China, 43 per cent on average in East Asia and 47 per cent on average in South Asia.

It notes that rigidity in labour laws imposes significant costs. As a result, India has failed to create almost three million formal manufacturing jobs due to certain provisions in the Industrial Disputes Act. In the case of registering property, India ranks 110th, taking six procedures and 62 days, compared to one day in Norway, 32 days in China and 47 days in Brazil. The costs of registration are high at 8 per cent of property value compared with 3 per cent in China and 5 per cent on an average in South Asia.

There is a widespread perception that governments are not delivering what is expected from them. In a country like India, where the socially and economically weaker sections of society have fewer alternatives to public services, there is a growing demand to improve the delivery system in the public sector. Governments are not only required to do the right things but are also expected to do them right, more efficiently and effectively. Enhanced government effectiveness not only improves the welfare of the citizens in the short-term but also in the long run. Conversely, the failure to deliver welfare and social security services, especially to the disadvantaged, adversely affects the health and productivity of people and also brings down the country's competitive advantages in a globalised world.

Traditionally, governance structures in India have been characterised by rule-based approaches. There are a plethora of rules and regulations in the governance business, rules for budget estimates, accounting procedures, for conducting enquiries, awarding punishments and observing protocols in the services, but there are no rules for making a civil servant responsible for the delivery of services.

In fact, there are many outmoded rules and procedures that restrict the civil servants from performing effectively. The civil servants spend a lot of time in maintaining and clarifying their jurisdictional rights and boundaries, clearing their decisions through increasingly complex internal processes and coordinating their activities through a number of agencies wasting energy and resources.

With the focus on processes, systems in the government are oriented towards input usage, about deployment of resources, staff and facilities in a programme or project, and not towards completing the job efficiently and effectively. With top-down approaches, thinkers and doers are usually separate emphasising more on control and less on performance. The success of schemes, programmes and projects is generally evaluated in terms of money spent and compliance of rules. This has led to a situation in which civil servants are rarely held accountable for the outcomes.

The biggest challenge, therefore, confronting the government is how to deliver the services to the people in a time-bound and effective manner. The recent Vidhan Sabha elections in Bihar have reiterated that it is the development plank that is going to win future elections. In the democratically elected governments promises made to the people through the election manifestos have to be translated into government programmes to address the woes of the people.

The Preamble of the Constitution promises to secure justice, “social, economic and political” for the citizens of India. However, despite a number of ambitious Five Year Plans, one-third of our citizens live in

poverty, 28 per cent are illiterate and 58 per cent are deprived of basic amenities of sanitation.

There has been no dearth of programmes and schemes. For example, the government has launched several programmes intended to help the poor such as the public distribution system, Antodaya, school assistance, mid-day meals programme, Integrated Child Development Services, Food for Work Programme and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, but they are not delivering benefits to the masses as desired.

Bihar has shown that given the opportunity and resources, people can bring up productivity and the Gross Domestic Product. The Bihar Chief Minister's novel idea to move the Right to Service Bill to ensure smooth functioning of the delivery system of public utility services is a step forward in the direction of bringing justice to the people. Surely, such legal framework is required to be emulated in all states to end the sufferings of the countless poor people at the hands of powerful babus.

In Punjab, though the Governance Reforms Commission has suggested a number of reforms, how many of these are implemented remains to be seen. It is high time that the government brought up the Right to Service Bill to ensure the delivery of services within the prescribed time limit on the lines of Bihar Rajya Sewa Dene Ki Guarantee Vidhayak Bill.

The proposed Bill envisages to provide 46 most common identified services to the citizens within the stipulated time limit (see box). The Act is also to notify designated officers responsible for the delivery of these services, making a further provision for the quick disposal of appeals and fixing responsibility for those causing unnecessary delay and deficiency in service. The officials at fault may have to pay Rs.500 to Rs.5,000 as penalty after the deadline is over. The government may also award compensation to the aggrieved citizen out of the penalty imposed on the civil servants, besides taking disciplinary action.

Only a law of this kind can provide relief to the people who have to wait inordinately and make multiple trips to government offices to seek public utility services. The Act is likely to tackle red tape in offices, bring transparency and weed out corruption to a large extent. The Right to Service Bill will also make the RTI Act more meaningful and useful as information alone is not enough. The information will have to be supplemented by giving people the right to demand service. The Act can, therefore, go a long way in the implementation of decisions.

Besides, there is a strong need for reinventing governance in India. While the freedom to compete is the driving force that keeps the markets vigorous and dynamic, the absence of competition among government organisations is mainly responsible for the inefficiency or low productivity in government systems. Countries across the globe are reforming their economies and undertaking privatisation and deregulation. In the US alone, since 1905, there have been ten commissions aimed at trying to make the federal government more efficient and effective.

The urgency for reinventing governance is dictated as much as by the imperatives of global developments as by the forces of new technology and communication, bringing out global competition, by shrinking distances and rendering conventional approaches and practices of administration obsolete and dysfunctional. Towards this end, a number of measures have to be taken for the simplification of rules and procedures, delegation of enhanced powers, better enforcement and accountability for speedy delivery of goods and services to the people.

Reinvention is not just about finding faults or monitoring results. It is about replacing large, centralised and top-heavy bureaucracies with decentralised, entrepreneurial organisations that are driven by competition and accountability to people for the services they deliver at the public expense. Voting in favour of governments that work, people have shown that they want better schools, better hospitals, lower crime

rates, better public transports, and if governments want to deliver, they have to govern differently, in a business-like manner.

Leading business houses are getting rid of layers of middle management for years. Now the governments should also do so. Creating regional offices and promoting officers and transferring them to the head offices is more than harming the delivery mechanism. In fact, once a ministry, department or a division is created, it is difficult to abolish it even if its functions become redundant.

Reinventing governance is a challenging task which cannot be accomplished without an intense political will. The public servants are to be reoriented to their jobs through continual learning, shifting paradigms, setting standards and applying innovative methods. They should be clear about the differences between outputs and outcomes.

TIME LIMITS FOR PUBLIC SERVICES		
Service	Designated officer	Time limit
Postmortem report	Section Medical Officer	3 days
New electricity connection	Executive Engineer	30 days
Issue of caste certificate	Block Development Officer	15 days
Issue of income certificate	Block Development Officer	15 days
Issue of driving licence	District Transport Officer	1 week
Registration of new vehicle	District Transport Officer	1 week
Verification of passport papers	Station House Officer	1 week
New Ration Card	Sub Divisional Officer	2 weeks

The writer is an IFS officer.

CONSUMER WELFARE

Display list of approved doctors

Pushpa Girimaji

DURING the first half of January, the Delhi Medical Council issued advertisements warning consumers not to fall prey to quacks. Unfortunately, the ads failed to give the most crucial information to the public — on how to identify a quack, or how to make sure that the allopathic doctor that they are consulting is really qualified (vis-à-vis the relevant medical education and registration) to practice in that system of medicine, and that he or she is not making a false claim about the educational qualifications or registration.

In fact there is an urgent need for all state authorities that register medical practitioners (including those practicing Indian systems or alternative systems) to ensure that the list of such registered doctors is regularly updated and made easily available in local languages at every village post office (through the Internet). Education and awareness about the availability of such lists will also go a long way in protecting the interests of patients and ensuring that they do not become victims of false claims.

An order of the apex court delivered on January 13 illustrates how in the absence of such information, people can fall prey to false claims and misrepresentation.

In this case, on noticing that his eight-year-old-son was getting two new teeth behind the existing teeth in the lower jaw, Vijay Kumar Srivastava took the child to Kumar Dental Health Care Centre in Goplaganj, Bihar, in the belief that "Dr Kumar, BDS" was a dentist with a BDS degree and registered with the Dental Council. Kumar's letterhead, for example, said: " Dr M. Kumar, BDS. Registration No 145/99." Kumar examined the child and advised extraction of the two old teeth. However, after the extraction was complete, the father noticed to his utter shock and dismay that all the four teeth had been removed. On his complaint, Kumar

apparently admitted that it was a mistake, but assured the parent that two new teeth would come up within three weeks. However, that did not happen, and the child had lost two teeth permanently.

Highly aggrieved, Srivastava filed a case before the district consumer disputes redressal forum in Gopalganj. While the forum dismissed it, saying that the complainant had not produced adequate evidence to prove his allegation in the form of X-rays or expert witnesses, the state commission held Kumar guilty of misrepresentation and, thereby, an unfair trade practice. The doctor, the commission found, had misrepresented his qualification and given an impression that he had a degree in the allopathic system of medicine, while what he had was a degree in alternative system. The commission, therefore, asked him to pay the complainant Rs 50,000 as compensation and Rs 5000 as costs.

In reply to a revision petition filed by Kumar, the national commission upheld the view of the state commission. It pointed out that Kumar had told the commission that he did not have a BDS degree from a college imparting allopathic system of medicine, but a BDS in alternative system. Said the commission: " According to this certificate, having passed the relevant examination in 1998, the revision petitioner is entitled to use the designation 'B.D.S. (Alt.)' for the development of alternative medical system. "Thus, going by his own admission and record of the case, the revision petitioner can call himself 'B.D.S (Alt.)' only and not 'B.D.S.'

Through the Department of Ayush, the government has recognised the importance of Indian systems of medicine such as ayurveda, sidha, unani, yoga and naturopathy and is promoting standardisation of education, research and practice in these systems, and also integration of these systems in the national healthcare system. So much so that today, at many hospitals and clinics, consumers have a choice. However, in order to exercise that choice, consumers must know the system of medicine being practiced by a doctor and whether that person holds the relevant degree and registration to practice that system. There should be no misrepresentation of facts.

CORRUPTION

PIONEER 31.1.11 CORRUPTION

Treat corruption with zero tolerance or quit complaining

Meenakshi Rao

Yashwant Sonawane's unimaginably brutal and lawless killing may shock you no ends, but the real shocker is another truth not many can either deny or brush aside as cynicism. And that truth is: There will be many more such cases all over India, on different issues, at different times and despite all such heinous crimes, life will go on — uninterrupted, unhindered and, largely unmoved by corruption.

When India's climb on the corruption ladder started just after Independence, the acts of graft for both givers and takers was a relatively small and gentle act — an act that had some kind of fig leaf over the illegality of it all. Money would exchange hands, mostly under the table, in a *mithai ka dabba* or wrapped in Diwali gifts. There were no murders then and definitely not the kind that happened behind the infamous Sagar *dhaba* in Manmad the other day. Of course, that did not really bring down the corruption quotient of India's fast growing corrupt population and neither did it do any less in sucking the national wealth hollow.

Then came the suitcases, the much bigger deals, the hooded men, the conglomerates infiltrating Government agencies, fast-track international involvement and a much more varied network of politicians becoming politicians only to make money from development. The good old commitment to social service and national improvement fell from grace and public imagination of what was popularly called "arriving on the

social scene.”

Fixers, middlemen, *hawala* racketeers and the newest of them — the suave lobbyist — made the corruption sector totally organised, well-represented, impeccably executed and finely oiled. From the fait accompli veneer that corruption at high places had enjoyed till then, there came in a hint of legitimacy and chic too.

Million dollar deals through glib-talking PR agents, on-the-payroll media, always obliging politicians and bureaucrats making a career in clearing files for money became a well-known, and most alarmingly, well-accepted fact which some would publicly defend as a necessary evil of a fledgling democracy like India.

In this context, you can call Sonawane’s killing just a post-graduation degree in corruption and a superspecialisation in lawlessness that mostly had the cushion of going scot-free.

Unfortunately for all of us, public memory is genetically modified to be short and spurty. Haven’t we already forgotten Satyendra Dubey? He was the whistle-blower of the corruption in contracts for NHAI project. Somebody, some corrupt body in the Government, leaked his name so as to have him removed from the system. Some public outrage later, people fight hard to remember what the first name of this great crusader was.

Same was the case with S Manjunath, an IOC marketing manager who was killed for sealing two petrol pumps in Lakhimpur Kheri for selling adulterated fuel in 2005. His bullet-riddled young body was found in the backseat of his car. Seven persons, including pump owner Pawan Kumar Mittal, were arrested and their bail appeals are now being heard at the Lucknow bench of the High Court. The case was talked of for some months before the media spotlight turned from him and the inherent corruption that had not merely eaten up into the insides of national pride but also gotten more corrupt, more brazen and more violent, not to

mention having gained more impunity to punishment.

With such precedents before Sonawane's case, one can only live in hopelessness if one still desires a clean-up. The Indian system is too seeped into a no-return zone to actually be pulled out of the malaise. As parents, we often rue how values have changed in the younger generation. how we are more westernised. how family values are dying. And how, all this and much more corruption of the mindset is inevitable with the changing times. That's where we go wrong. If we, as guardians of our nation, can adjust to honesty being a lonely word, we are doomed to pay the price of corruption and then we have no *locus standi* to mourn the inevitable killing of the likes of Sonawane. Because we, in rearing up a younger society, are actually inculcating the softness and acceptability to crime, lawlessness and corruption.

It is a defective population we are nurturing and preparing for the future. And if we are doing so, why lament? Just vote them all back to power and sit back and enjoy — till that mafia — oil mafia, parking mafia, onion mafia, spices mafia, vegetable mafia, school mafia, college mafia, drug mafia and all those other ones too long to list — get to you through your near and dear ones — like they did to Sonawane.

ENVIRONMENT

TIMES OF INDIA 24.1.11 ENVIRONMENT

Environment ministry, industry forum to advice firms on green laws

NEW DELHI: The environment ministry and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) will set up a facilitation centre to advice small and medium enterprises (SME) on environmental rules and regulation, environment minister [Jairam Ramesh](#) said Monday.

"The environment ministry and [FICCI](#) will establish a compliance facilitation centre which will be a advisory service to the industries particularly for SME on compliance with the environmental rules, regulation, laws and standards," he said after a closed-door interaction with FICCI officials.

He said the centres may have a 50-50 partnership mode, similar to the one FICCI had with the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

He also said that next open house will focus exclusively on the environmental concerns of SMEs.

Besides this, the other important discussions related to plastic waste management rules that the environment ministry is in the process of notifying, Ramesh said.

He stated the plastic management rules had two objectives - firstly, minimising the environmental hazards caused by the large-scale disposal of plastic waste, and secondly, ensuring the labour-intensive sector is not strangled.

"The objective of the plastic waste management rules is not just to manage the environmental hazard posed by plastic disposal but also to ensure that we don't kill the plastic industry," he said.

He also said he was not in favour of a blanket ban on plastic all over the country.

He cited examples like Tirupathi (Andhra Pradesh) and Himachal Pradesh as being plastic free.

"I don't think [India](#) can afford to take the position of a blanket ban on plastics all over the country," he added.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WHY REVOLUTIONS OCCUR

- Surrendering authority and giving up dogma are most difficult

Ashok Mitra

To climb down from power is an excruciatingly difficult exercise. Consider, for instance, the controversy currently engulfing the International Monetary Fund. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the institution got known for its authoritarian ways. Countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America, embarking on ambitious development programmes, would face awkwardness in managing their balance of payments and approach the Fund for short- or medium-term accommodation. The Fund, in the tight grip of the Western powers led by the United States of America, loved to indulge in the ideology of the free market. It would accommodate the poor countries approaching it for emergency foreign exchange assistance, but only on the basis of strict 'conditionalities'. Countries incur balance of payments problems, the Fund was firm in its belief, because they spend beyond their means and their governments, profligate in expenditure, land themselves in budgetary deficits which in turn set in motion a price spiral, thereby severely affecting the prospect for exports as well as enlarging the size of imports. Such countries need to be disciplined; the Fund would have a standard list of prescriptions for them: they must devalue their currencies so as to both boost exports and restrain imports, and cut back on public expenditure. They must, besides, liberalize their economies, move towards eliminating trade and exchange controls, encourage foreign investment, reduce direct taxes so as to stimulate incentive, and so on *ad infinitum*. Never mind if the internal conditions obtaining in the countries happened to be vastly different, the Fund would insist on imposing the same 'conditionalities' on all of them. This kind of rigidity on the part of the Fund would often create more trouble for the countries

concerned: a drastic reduction in food and social welfare subsidies ordained by the Fund would provoke widespread social unrest; the economy would therefore get further destabilized and public expenditure, instead of shrinking, would bulge even more menacingly because of the greater outlay called for to restore law and order.

There would be outcry in country after country against the Fund's whimsical ways, but it would remain unmoved. Its letters of agreement lay it down that all its decisions must be endorsed by at least 85 per cent of its stakeholders. Since the same letters of agreement assigned more than 16 per cent of voting rights within the institution to the US, the US administration would have a stronghold on its policies and programmes. The 'conditionalities' enforced by the Fund reflected the official American view on how the world economy needed to be governed.

The past two decades have transformed the picture. The US is in deep recession, the West European countries are faring no better. In contrast, a number of Asian countries have been able to maintain impressive rates of growth despite the global crisis; they have been kept company by quite a few Latin American countries as well. Economic power is shifting away from the countries of Western capitalism. This has sparked off a demand that the IMF must be forced to climb down from its high horse, accept reality and reappraise its general stance; it must, in particular, shed its dogma of a uniform set of prescriptions in the name of 'structural reforms' without taking into consideration the specific problems afflicting individual countries.

Changing the Fund's policies, however, necessitates changes in its internal managerial structure and reallocation of the voting strength of the member-countries. Unless the Western powers agree to shed some of their voting rights in the Fund's executive board, no meaningful shift in policies would seem feasible. Pressure has been mounted within the Group of 20 nations which acts as a sounding board and forum for mutual exchange of views for both the advanced industrial economies

and some developing countries to coax the Western governments to relax their control over the Fund's activities. Following a meeting of the group in South Korea a couple of months ago, the Fund management announced with much fanfare that a revolutionary change is being effected in its organizational structure: the economically advanced nations have agreed to a voluntary scaling-down of their voting strength in the executive board, the developing countries would, therefore, have a greater say in its affairs. At about the same time, a so-called informed piece of gossip was set afloat. An even more spectacular change was reported to be in the offing. Ever since the birth of the two institutions, the World Bank and the Fund, the US had the exclusive right to choose the Bank's president while the West European countries would name the managing director of the Fund. That monopoly, rumour said, was going to disappear; the West European countries would surrender their right to choose the Fund's chief executive officer.

It has taken a bare few weeks to realize that the promised re-ordering of the Fund's organizational and managerial structure is just an eyewash. For real change to take place in the Fund, three preconditions must be fulfilled: (a) a major fraction of the total voting strength in the Fund's executive board has to be transferred from the advanced industrial countries to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America; (b) the letters of agreement of the institution need to be amended in order to divest the US of its veto over decisions taken by the Fund, and (c) the crucial post of the Fund's managing director must cease to be a monopoly of the richer countries.

A scrutiny of the contents of the decisions announced in November reveals that while the voting share of the advanced economies has been pared down, the paring is by only 2.6 per cent, from 57.9 to 55.3 per cent of the total. This marginal shift in voting strength is laughably insignificant and cannot change the balance of power within the Fund. There is no proposal either to change the letters of agreement so as to deny the US its veto. Finally, the West European countries are evidently

in no mood to relinquish their claim to the post of managing director.

The more it changes, it is obvious, the more it remains the same. But are not the countries of capitalism being extraordinarily short-sighted? By stalling attempts at reforming the Fund, they are actually endangering the future of the institution itself. The US as much as the Fund management have of late been expressing much concern over the danger of competitive currency devaluations by countries in their anxiety to promote exports and thereby improve the state of their economies. Competitive currency devaluations, it is justifiably argued, constitute a suicidal course, since these end up leaving each country equally disadvantaged and create grave instability in the international currency market. Should the Western powers, however, not agree to change the Fund's managerial pattern, and, by implication, its overall policy framework, countries experiencing balance of payments difficulties might begin to seek other alternatives rather than approach the Fund for bailout measures; they might try to build their own foreign exchange reserves, so as to enable them to cope with the problem of a sudden jump in their balance of payments deficits. In their endeavour to build their own stock of foreign exchange, they could well be lured into taking recourse to devaluating the currency, thereby encouraging a spree of competitive currency devaluations. By resisting a change of guard in the IMF, the Western countries might therefore be directly responsible for creating a situation where chaos should invade international currency movements; the advanced industrial economies could be the worst victim of such chaos.

Abdication of authority is no easy task. Moving away from dogma is equally difficult. If things were otherwise, no revolution would ever take place in human societies.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

TIMES OF INDIA 26.1.11 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

We the people

In 1950, free [India](#) formally became a [sovereign republic](#) where the popular will is king. Fast forward six decades, and pride in constitutional democracy and its achievements remain undiminished. Today, Indians aren't alone in feting their success story scripted by marrying political freedom with economic progress. The world too recognises us as an emerging powerhouse drawing strength from deep-rooted democratic traditions. But on this occasion, let's remind ourselves that the republican ideal is ultimately about people's empowerment. For countless Indians, growth is a mere statistic. How can we make prosperity touch more lives?

While welfare policies promote social justice, they can't substitute for equality of opportunity. However well-meant, disbursement of state largesse makes citizens dependent on political paternalism; genuine empowerment weans them off it. It's by increasingly shifting public resources away from a dole culture toward robust returns-oriented investments in health, education and infrastructure that we can best enable and empower citizens. Give people crutches and they may never walk without needing help. Give them schools, colleges, vocational training, medical facilities, electrified homes and workplaces linked to road and communication networks, and they'll race ahead on their own steam.

But India's demographic dividend can't pay off without economic opportunities. So, reforms must be geared to creating productive employment. While boosting services-led growth, we must also think beyond it since it demands the kind of skilled manpower we're yet to produce on a mass scale. With the vast majority subsisting on agriculture, farming as well as rural infrastructure and markets demand urgent modernising. Equally, large-scale factory employment is key to poverty alleviation. Labour reform is a must to deliver job security and the skills upgrade that a high-growth economy will increasingly want

from its workforce at all levels. Faster industrialisation, in turn, will need support from supple land acquisition rules.

Affirmative action itself must take 21st century forms. Reassuringly, [NREG](#) or cycles for schoolgirls, welfare is catering more to economic need than special interests. But social spending needs targeting. Why not route benefits directly, not via intermediaries or leaky distribution systems? Why not use innovative channels like phone banking-based access to funds and services? IT can revolutionise everyday life, whether by digitising records or expanding banking cover. Countless Indians are officially faceless, and hence feel socially powerless. Via UID and financial inclusion initiatives, they can acquire a sense of belonging. That's really what empowerment is all about: turning passive, indistinguishable recipients of state crumbs into active agents with a personal contribution and stake in national prosperity. Achieving this will, finally, depend on quality of governance. We must combat corruption and criminalisation of public life. And we must promote accessible and accountable leaderships. We the people deserve nothing less.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

TRIBUNE 31.1.11 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable inclusive growth Need to focus on rural economy

S. S. Johl

THE classical growth model states that the agriculture sector is the prime mover of overall economic growth and development of the agrarian economy through the process of generating wage goods (capital) and surplus labour as the sector moves on a higher production curve through the medium of improved production technology and management efficiency. Here overall factor productivity improves to generate surpluses of agricultural commodities for the market. There are also an improvement in productivity per worker through the modernisation of production technology and better management techniques and skills. The labour employed in the sector is also rendered surplus successively.

As a result, when the capital and labour move to the secondary and tertiary sectors, that stimulates growth in these sectors, and the economy is put on a higher growth path. No doubt, the capital investment mobilised from outside does provide exogenous stimulation, but in an agrarian economy the role of agricultural growth in providing a solid base to the growth process of the economy cannot be denied. In India, more than two-thirds of the population is directly dependent on agriculture. With the growth of this sector lagging behind the overall economic growth of the country, the exclusiveness of this large segment of the population increases from the development process.

It is, therefore, essential that the agriculture/rural sector must register a matching growth to make the growth and development of the country inclusive in its nature. Further, substantive growth must take place in rain-fed areas for the sake of inclusiveness, because the poorest sections of the rural population live in these areas. Growth in these areas on a sustainable basis reduces the yearly fluctuations in the over all agricultural production of the country.

No doubt, in the agriculture sector in India, productivity levels per unit of land have gone up owing to the improved production technologies, adoption of high yielding varieties of crops and higher use of inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, water, power, machinery and labour, productivity per worker trapped in the agricultural/ rural sector has remained low due to various natural and man-made constraints. Sufficient surplus labour has not, therefore, moved out of this sector due to the non-availability of matching off-farm gainful employment opportunities. In developed countries and also in many developing countries, farm workers are getting older while young people are moving out. In developed countries, even the overall growth of population is going negative.

In India, in spite of substantive development of the secondary (industrial) and tertiary (services) sectors of the economy matching gainful employment opportunities have not been generated to absorb the surplus labour moving out of the agricultural/rural sector. Hence, whatever labour moves out that ends up in slums in the urban areas, where the people live under unhygienic conditions, with no clean drinking water, sewerage or power facilities. For instance, Ludhiana in Punjab alone has 180 such colonies, where it is difficult to find even a few matriculate youth who can be trained for employability.

On the other hand, the agriculture sector cannot fully absorb the rural labour and farming population gainfully in agriculture. Except during the planting and harvest seasons, farm workers remain underemployed or suffer disguised unemployment. All this is evident from the decreasing size of the operation holdings. For instance, in 1980-81, average operational farm size in India was 1.81 hectare, down from 2.30 hectare in 1970-71. In Punjab, the average operational size of the land holdings was 2.89 hectare while in Haryana it was 3.78 hectare in 1970-71.

In 2001, this was reduced to 1.33 hectare in India and 2.32 hectares in Haryana. It is only in Punjab that the holding size increased to 4.03 hectares due to reverse tenancy and large number of village youth moving out to foreign lands. In rest of the country, the holding size has decreases continuously. Further, the farm size distribution shows that in 1981, farms below two hectares were 74 per cent of the total farms in India. The percentage of farms in this category increased to 81.8 per cent in 2001.

This shows that in spite of all the programmes and projects as well as development of industrial and services sectors and overall accelerated growth of the economy, the pressure of population on land in the agriculture sector is increasing, especially in the rain-fed areas. Consequently, the economic development of the country is bypassing these segments of the economy.

It needs to be realised that the income problems of farmers and rural populations cannot be resolved within the agriculture sector alone. First, the rural economy would need to be diversified and second, the agricultural production pattern would require to be diversified and third, within the production system cropping pattern would need to be diversified. It is only then the rural and agricultural economy would move on a higher growth path that would fuel the inclusive higher growth of the economy. Planners and policy makers, therefore, must realise that the agrarian economy of India cannot achieve the objective of inclusive higher growth without diversifying the rural economy and within that. the agricultural economy of the country.

In order to diversify the rural economy, industrial and services sectors, small and clean units and ancillaries should be encouraged to shift to rural areas. The affluent, if any, from these units must be treated on their premises without polluting underground water and disturbing the healthy ecology of the area. For this purpose, if need be, capital subsidies should be given to such units. Further, substantive tax concessions should be

given to such units for at least 10 years to begin with. Necessary condition should be that these units would employ at least 80 per cent of their employees from the local population within the radius of say 10 kilometers. This would help turn the small farmers into part-time farmers. This would increase rural incomes and capital would flow to agriculture for mechanisation and other improvements.

The extent system of industry and services concentrated in cities does not attract the rural youth due to paltry wages and the system, therefore, creates innumerable slums with migratory labourers, leaving the rural youth unemployed that creates socio-economic problems in the rural areas leading to drug addiction and suicides. This model would certainly help create gainful employment opportunities at the place and overall growth in these areas would become effectively inclusive in its very nature. However, all this can happen if our political leaders take to development through rational policies.

The writer, a former Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala, is a well-known agricultural economist.

WOMEN

BABY STEPS

NAYANTARA MAZUMDER



The Indian government had declared 2001 to be the year of women's empowerment. Ten years later, it is still not easy to do justice to the story of the struggles and triumphs of the women of India. Almost every attempt to tell that tale, no matter how sincere or brave, has often only scratched the surface. But in the face of every imaginable impediment, Indian women have kept their story alive.



An exploration of the lives of women in different parts of the country and from different socio-economic backgrounds — from villages to the star-spangled Hindi film industry and even the Supreme Court — gives one a sense of the enormity of their losses and achievements that is difficult to express adequately in words. Edited by Urvashi Butalia and Anita Roy, *WOMEN CHANGING INDIA (Zubaan, Rs 1,995)* seems to recognize that, and lets its photographs tell the tale.

Some of the stories of positive change in the book explore the formation of self-help groups by poor women and their growing confidence and willingness to use banking services. This helps them create small, profitable businesses for themselves. With photographs by Martine Franck, Alex Webb, Patrick Zachmann, Alessandra Sanguinetti, Olivia Arthur and Raghu Rai, the book is vivid with the proof of the innovative ways in which women have chosen to move forward. *Left* is a picture of a cart-loader and a member of the Self Employed Women's Association, an Ahmedabad collective that pooled resources and started the SEWA bank that has now spread to many villages and manages numerous self-

help groups. Women in India have also sought and found empowerment in being the driving force in their own lives — literally. *Top middle* is a photograph of recruits of Mumbai's hugely innovative For She, an all-women's taxi service that equips its drivers with basic self-defence skills as well. Even the village *panchayats* now have proactive women at their helm. *Bottom right* shows a former *panchayat* leader, Salma, with women from the village of Thuvanakurchi in Tamil Nadu. As Amita Baviskar says, women will change lives simply by entering the public domain.

No account of the prowess of Indian women can exclude mention of the competitive film industry, where women are still paid a fraction of what men earn. While reading the stories of women like Farah Khan and Kiran Rao, one also reads the less-known success tales of production and lighting designers like Manisha Khandelwal and Hetal Dedhia. *Bottom middle* is the choreographer, Vaibhavi Merchant, on the sets of a film, while *top right* is a picture of the costume designer, Shilpa Bhatia Sethi.

While this book is often too simplistic, it must be applauded on one count — it adopts an unusual approach towards the story of women's empowerment, by honouring the small steps women take to create history.