

## **Book Reviews**

### **Development Issues of Contemporary India**

M. R. Biju, ed., 2010, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 13: 978-81-8069-714-2, hard cover, pp.xxxiv+606, price: Rs.1500

Development is a hotly discussed issue all over the world. India is a fast developing country eager to join the ranks of developed nations. Development is the current topic of deliberations among economists, sociologists, politicians and even ordinary citizens of our country. The title of the book under review may therefore indicate serious discussions on the pros and cons of various developmental issues in the light of controversies arising out of ambitious development projects taken up in the country. However, in the introduction to the book itself the editor of the compilation has made it clear that the book deals with issues of governance arising out of democratic practices in contemporary India. The topics selected for inclusion in the publication are from a wide spectrum of issues related to governance rather than development per se. Yet, as development is considered the basic factor underpinning the success or failure of democratic processes, the topics dealt with in the book have great relevance.

The book contains 29 articles and research papers by different authors. M. R. Raju, the editor has stated that the authors of the contributions are renowned academics well versed in their respective areas of interest. However, no further details about the authors are included in the book, which would have helped the discerning readers to appreciate the contents of the articles better. The volume is broadly categorised into five sections, each of which contains several articles. Even though sections are categorised and titled, the topics included in the sections appear to lack focus as the subjects seem to have been chosen randomly from a wide field of allied areas.

In section I, titled “Development Projects, Action Plans and Good Governance,” the first article highlights the key concepts of social impact assessment and resettlement action plan for infrastructure development projects involving roads, highways, flyovers etc. The second article is a theoretical exposition of the concept of environmental economics as a subfield of economics concerned with environmental issues. The third article narrates the various administrative and organisational issues involved in environmental policy making. The next two articles are on Special Economic Zones (SEZs), one examining the future role of these zones and the other dealing with the question of creating a model of land acquisition for establishing SEZs in the face of intense resistance from the land owners, especially farmers. The sixth article is a plea on the need for public–private participation (PPP) in the health care system in rural India. The next one is a case study on stress management of women in the IT (information technology) sector. Another study is on the possibilities of good governance through E-governance with an analysis of its emerging prospects in rural Bihar under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The section ends with an exposition of the security challenges in E-commerce.

Section II discusses the scope of human rights in democracy. The section starts with a comprehensive article on various outlooks on human rights and social justice with particular reference to the Indian constitution by the editor himself. This is followed by five more essays dealing with human rights issues in relation to mass media, right to information and democratic political system, education, equal opportunities for depressed groups and the role of judicial activism in protecting human rights. The section also includes an informative comparative study of the historical background and genesis of the problems of the tribal population of Chakmas in India and the Biharis in Bangladesh in the context of the vexed issues of refugee status of people and their human rights.

Section III, which delineates the relationship between education and development, starts with a critique on the progress and pitfalls of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in achieving basic education for all in India. The next article analyses the problems of educating the children of the urban depressed groups in slums as a complex issue and a barrier in the universalisation of free and compulsory

elementary education. This is followed by a case analysis of rural urban divide in the education sector in the state of Assam which is very relevant to other backward states of India also. The last article in the section is a theoretical exposition of the psychological basis of value education.

Section IV, which is about the development of the marginalised, contains three case studies. The first one examines the extent of political participation of tribal leaders of a very backward district of Orissa. The study analyses the avenues available to tribal leaders for participation in political activities and how far they utilise them. The case ends with a positive note which may serve as a pointer for similar assessments elsewhere in the country. The other two cases are from West Bengal, one a critical analysis of the role of panchayatiraj in alleviating rural poverty and the other on the role of milk cooperatives in rural development. The studies conclude that both these institutions play important roles in poverty alleviation in spite of severe constraints of corruption, inefficiency, political and bureaucratic interference etc. The section includes a conceptual analysis of the relationship between political communication and mass media, bringing out its pitfalls and limitations. The section ends with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the National Rural Employment Act conceived and implemented as a revolutionary step in support of India's poor. The article provides a detailed view of the legislation which is helpful for the uninitiated on the subject.

The last segment of the volume stands apart from the rest as it examines some of the emerging trends in the democratic political systems in the country. These changes, even though not directly related to development issues, may have impact on the development processes for good or bad in the times to come. The section deals with two recent but important developments in the political course of the country, that is, the growth of regionalism and the emergence of coalition system of government. Both these are surely to have far reaching impact on governance. Indian constitution is essentially federal in character with provision for a strong central government. But the emergence of coalition politics and rising influence of regional parties at state level and at the centre would give a

new meaning and direction to the structure of our governance systems. Authors have tried to explain the above phenomenon through typical cases from some of our states. A study of Punjab politics, where two disparate parties standing poles apart in the political arena namely Akali Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party formed a coalition, may be for self interest and political survival to start with, but subsequently consolidated into a stable formation to rule the state repeatedly, is an interesting exposition of the development of coalition politics in India. The origin, role and decline of Asom Gana Parishad in Assam politics and the future of regionalism in the state are the subject matter of another study, which is informative and thought provoking. The problem of finding identity and space for various minorities in the majority regional politics of Mizos is an interesting pointer to the issue of minority politics in India. Finally the fall out of the above dynamics in the political systems and its possible impact on the development scenario through the emergence of inter-state disputes over state boundaries, sharing of river waters and other resources etc are brought out through a write up on the historical background of Krishna water dispute.

As mentioned earlier the volume may be lacking in focus on the selection of topics, but the collection yields valuable information and data on a variety of subjects creating a wide scope of ideas. The articles are descriptive in style helping the uninitiated to grasp the fundamentals of the subjects dealt with in the volume. Even though all the articles in the book may not be of interest to every reader, the volume is suitable for selective reading in the areas of one's own interest. Therefore I would rate this compilation as a reference book of some value. The articles are generally well written even though some of them particularly the research papers may appear to lack depth. Since the book is an edited compilation by different authors, general comments on the language and writing styles may not be relevant. In general the volume is well compiled and will be useful for a large number of readers as there is something of interest in the book for everyone.

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