

BOOK REVIEWS

Victims of Social Injustice: A Study of Women Landless Labourers

Hajira Kumar and Jaimon Varghese, 2008, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 10: 81-8069-473-9, hard cover, pp.224+xv, price: Rs.500

The book, jointly authored by two social work educators and practitioners from New Delhi, is dedicated to all marginalized women of India. It contains information from both primary and secondary sources presented in nine chapters. The findings of an empirical study, conducted by the authors, substantiate the reality of the landless women labourers, the subject matter of the book.

The book brings out the reality of the landless unorganised female labour force as the situation of probably the most miserable section of the society. The landless women labourers work on the farms of others during the season of agricultural operations and remain unemployed rest of the time. Even at the global level, the authors point out, agriculture is the most important sector which generates employment especially among women. In developing countries women farmers grow at least half of the world's food and up to 80 per cent in some African countries. The same is the case in Latin America, United States of America and Canada.

The authors have reviewed several studies on landless labour conducted in South Africa, United States and in different states in India which throw light on the status of landless women labours across the world, viz. gender based division of labour (women in operations of transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing etc.), problems of landless women labour (lack of ownership reflecting the economic power structure within the society), bonded labour, issues of migrant women labourers (such as discriminatory wages, unregulated working hours and payment of below the minimum wages), unorganised nature of work, illiteracy and exploitation, casualisation of labour, health hazards of landless women labours (such as uncomfortable posture,

backache and leg pain, chemical reaction, sexual harassment etc.), and mechanisation of agriculture and rising unemployment of women.

Chapter three of the book gives a good description of several government and non-government initiatives to mitigate the problems of the landless women labourers in the form of the programmes in the five year plans, welfare schemes, and legislative measures. The programmes of the first four five year plans, discussed in the book, are provision of land focussed on lower caste people, house sites, labour cooperatives and resettlement schemes for landless workers. Welfare schemes for the rural population described in the book include Employment Assistance Scheme (EAS), Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Balika Samridhi Yojana, Mahila Samakya, Women Component Plan, Million Wells Scheme (MWS), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), and Drought Prone Area Programme(DPAP). With regard to the legislative measures, the book mentions 12 laws meant for rural workers, most of which are for the agricultural sector. A special discussion is undertaken on the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976. In addition, reference is made to the ILO Standards and International Convention for Rural Workers. Special mention is also made of the Charter of Demands adopted by more than 3000 landless delegates from communities in South Africa and their landless allies across the world at the Landless Peoples Assembly in Durban in August 2001.

Chapters 4-8 deal with the empirical study conducted by the authors which highlights the empowerment problems of landless women such as sexual and work harassment, inequality in wages, gender discrimination at home, and lack of ownership of property and right over own earnings. The respondents of the study, representing over 70 million women workers in India, comprised of the landless women labours from the states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana in India. A sample of 750 women labourers from five agriculture dominated districts of the three states - 250 respondents from each state - was drawn for the study. No mention is made of how the samples were selected and when the data collection was conducted. Field data collection was reported to have been undertaken with the use of interview schedule, check list for focus group discussion in every village, and observation sheets.

Chapter five deals with the demographic and social profile of the women landless workers covered in the study like age, literacy level, marital status, headship of the household, type of family, and caste/community belongingness. The economic and occupational profile of landless women labourers is presented in the sixth chapter of the book. It is found that the respondents in the study are engaged in unskilled agricultural activities earning a meagre monthly income. They get work for less than six months in a year and are engaged in construction related work during the lean period. In addition to the wage labour, women are also engaged in household duties, looking after the elders, children and guests, and managing the cattle. Most of the income earned by the women labourers is spent on food and only a meagre portion is available for education of children or saving and any investment.

The problems faced by the landless women labourers are multifarious. The most serious problems discussed in the book (chapter seven) are sexual harassment, discrimination in wage and indebtedness. The authors conclude from their study that the various schemes for their empowerment have not produced the expected results largely because the illiterate landless women labourers are ignorant about the various government efforts to emancipate them. What the landless women labours need, as reflected in this study, in the first place is land ownership, and then real opportunities for education, skill development and employment in the government sector, provision of community health services, allotment of house sites, and widow pension. The authors suggest affirmative action on the part of the government, international agencies and non- government organisations (NGOs).

The annexure to the book contains the following important legislative measures: UN Charter of Demands of Landless Women, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, Agriculturists' Loans Act 1884, Minimum Wages Act 1948, and Workmen's Compensation Act 1923. These are quite informative and useful.

The book really draws the attention of the readers to the issue of social injustice to women landless labourers. The title of the book matches the contents. The book could be useful to those engaged in programmes of social work intervention and women studies. Also it points out the need for

intervention for women's empowerment on the part of the NGOs working in rural communities and social work practitioners. The reviewer has gained an insight into the plight of the landless women labourers in India.

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Informal Sector: Concept, Dynamics, Linkages and Migration

Kishor C. Samal, 2008, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 81-8069-545-X, hard cover, pp. 214, price: Rs.450

Informal sector, also known as unorganised sector, has been under academic debate over at least two decades in the past and many works on informal sector are now available. This volume in six chapters is one such work and deals with various issues concerning formal and informal sectors. The author starts with the evolution of informal sector in which he highlights the macro-dualism in society and the formal-informal dichotomy. Then the book discusses the stages of migration proposed by Todaro and Lewis. From there the author goes on to the discussion of the features of peripheral capitalism which provides a new perspective to the field of migration study.

The author describes very well the concept, features and dynamism of rural non-farm sectors (RNFS), its inter-linkages and determinants. A comparative analysis of the Lewis-Ranis-Fei model on one way migration and the Todaro's push-pull factors of migration is also given in a very comprehensive way. This portion of the book provides the reader an adequate literature on the dynamics of the RNFS and its various assumptions, theoretical models, linkages etc. The linkages between informal and formal sectors have been clearly presented to suit the need of an average reader. The author is insightful in his analysis that, while the linkages between the informal and formal manufacturing sectors are encouraged, their exploitative nature is not checked. He also suggests measures to check the same. Theories on the linkages, theoretical models and approaches presented in the book provide a thorough understanding of the issues of migration for employment in both formal and informal sectors.

Another theme that is discussed in the book is the interrelationship between migration and development. In this context the author presents two leading theories of migration, namely the Todaro and the Stark models. The former views migration as a two stage phenomenon whereas the latter focuses on a two-pronged planning horizon in which the migrant waits for better opportunity with better payment options during his/her initial days of settlement and then searches intensively for a full time formal sector opening in the first period. If formal sector employment is not secured, in the second

period an attempt is made to join the informal sector. The author has tried to explain the types of migration with the analysis of the different variables related to migration. Another point presented in the book is on the various policies in relation to movement of people. The book further gives the criteria for selecting the destination in migration, the nature of migrants, the reasons behind migration etc. The dynamics and growth of the informal sector vary among urban areas depending on the dominant activity. The various dimensions of the growth of the informal sector are discussed in brief in the book. Some case examples from different areas drawn from different studies are also presented in the book.

The book finally gives certain criteria for the classification of the informal sector. It also says that the RNFS is promising and has a positive role in promoting the growth and welfare of the rural people. The RNFS includes all activities in rural areas except agriculture, livestock, fishing and hunting. There is also a distinction made between traditional and modern RNFS. The author says that linkages between the formal and informal sectors are heterogeneous and under integrated condition the informal sector is exploited by the formal sector. The rural-urban migration generally follows the pattern of people from the low income area moving to the higher income area. The book concludes with pointing out the policy implications for informal sector.

Thus, this book on the whole depicts the evolution of the concept of informal sector, macro dualism, rural-urban dichotomy, formal-informal dichotomy, informal sector and liberalisation, concept and features of the RNFS, inter-linkage hypothesis in India, theories of rural-urban migration, and policies, dynamics and growth of the rural sector. Agro based developments have paved way for the growth of the RNFS positively which is very well explained in the book. It gives a clear picture of the nature of the informal sector and the interplay of various factors influencing its growth. The book is very helpful to gain an understanding of the developmental issues concerning migration and RNFS. It would have been much more beneficial if the language of the book were simpler. That would have increased the readership and understanding of the book. On the whole the book is a good reading material for anyone interested to study labour migration or the dynamics of the informal sector.

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Care and Education of Differently Abled

G. Pankajam, 2009, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 13: 9788180695773, hard cover, pp.160, price: 400

Eight categories of differently abled, the subject matter of the book, are presented in the book and they pertain to (i) physical and health impairment (orthopaedic disability and cerebral palsy), (ii) sensory disabilities (visual, speech and hearing impairments), (iii) mentally challenged, (iv) gifted children, (v) autism, (vi) creative children, (vii) educational backwardness, and (viii) behavioural disorders and emotional disturbances.

The book is divided into 11 chapters. Three of them can be considered as general in nature and the remaining eight present the eight categories of differently abled listed by the author. Chapter one, entitled “Children with Special Needs” is a general discussion on children with special educational needs. In so far as the children with special needs are those who have different learning capacity, the chapter serves as an introduction to the whole book. Chapter six deals with learning disabilities in general (viz. characteristics of children with learning disabilities and different types of learning disability such as in reading, writing and mathematics). Chapters 2-5 and 7-10 of the book are devoted to the eight categories of children who are distinguished by their different learning abilities. Presentation of the various categories of differently abled in these eight chapters follows a set pattern, viz. definition, characteristics, classification, and the educational provisions available. The 11th and final chapter on “Rehabilitation Services” is general in nature and makes the point that the disabled need to be suitably rehabilitated. The author has made an attempt to use the method of presenting a few cases of individuals with certain differential abilities. Although the attempt is to be appreciated it has not been as successful as it should have been. When such cases are presented they are meant to be illustrations that explicate the issue or situation discussed. The information on the cases provided by the author in the book is so trivial that they have not functioned as illustrations.

The notable merit of the book is that it has put together a comprehensive list of the categories of differential learning ability (or leaning disability) and has given a more or less compact description or definition of each of them. The book has also touched upon some pertinent issues of education of the differently abled children and pointed out the importance of the specialised, professional approach to education of the children with differential educational needs.

Although the effort of the author to include everything possible under the notion of differently abled has had its advantage of being comprehensive in dealing with the subject matter of the book, it also seems to have been the cause of certain drawbacks of the book. It affected (i) cohesiveness in the conceptualisation of differential ability, (ii) organisation of the book as a whole and (iii) depth in the discussion of the subject matter.

The author has two streams of conceptualisation of the differently abled. First, the differently abled are conceived as those who have certain characteristic features (or disabilities in the conventional usage of the term) that interfere with their learning capability in the learning situation designed for others. Second, some individuals have certain exceptional characteristics that enable them to have differential (exceptional, superior or special) learning ability. Literally these two categories of persons have differential learning ability. But substantively, they present quite different issues in education and the societal concerns for them are also different. The author’s notion of the mentally challenged and educational backwardness seems to lack conceptual clarity. The author treats mentally challenged and educationally backward as two categories of differently abled and devotes separated chapters for their discussion. However, in the general categorisation of differential ability the gifted, backward and “retarded” children are classified under the mentally challenged (p.17). Yet another case of lack of precision in conceptualisation is regarding behavioural disorder and emotional disturbance which are discussed together in the book. Do they represent or give rise to two types of differential ability? Or, do the two terminologies refer to the same reality? If they are the same, it should have been stated so. If they are different, it should have been conceptually clarified.

Conceptual confusion is partly created by the uncritical borrowing of the different terms and concepts used by other authors. In the first chapter

the author presents three broad categories of differently abled children: (i) mentally challenged (comprising the gifted, backward and retarded), (ii) physically challenged (comprising the orthopaedically handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired and speech impaired) and (iii) socially and emotionally challenged (comprising delinquents and problem children). Autism and creative child, discussed in the seventh and eighth chapter respectively, do not figure in this categorisation presented in the introductory chapter. If at all the terms “gifted” and “creative” are used interchangeably, it should have been clearly stated in the book. Delinquents and problem children, listed as two groups of socially and emotionally challenged in the first chapter, do not appear as such for discussion in the subsequent chapters. Are they presumably treated in chapter 10 entitled “Behavioural Disorders and Emotional Disturbances?” The author could have avoided this confusion, even if it is apparent.

From the point of view of organisation of the book and relevance of the contents, one finds it difficult to understand the place of chapter six entitled “Learning Disabilities.” If the learning disabilities discussed in the chapter are common to all categories of differently abled, why was it not placed together with the introductory chapter? Secondly, as the learning disabilities discussed in this chapter are issues of learning common to education in general, a reader would have expected to know what is special about these general disabilities in the case of the differently abled.

The matter, sought to be discussed in this relatively small book, is so large and diverse that the author could not discuss the pertinent issues in some detail. As a result the book has turned out to be more a listing than discussion of the differential abilities or disabilities. The educational issues in terms of the nature, causes and remedies are different for each of the categories of the differently abled children covered in the book. Obviously a small book like the present one could just identify and define the differential disabilities, and speak in very general terms about the societal concern for them and the need for differential strategies and programmes for the education of each of these groups. If one were to deal with the care and education of each of these categories, one would think of a separate book on each of them.

The title of the book would indicate that it deals with the *care and education* of the differently abled (or disabled). Those who look for it in the book are likely to be disappointed, because the actual contents of the book are focused on not the care and education of the differently disabled but the nature and types of differential learning ability. In this respect the book is useful to those interested in knowing about the nature of differential learning achievement and the issues associated with it.

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Reservations in India: Myths and Realities

Mulchand S. Rana, 2008, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, ISBN 13: 978-81-8069-560-5, hard cover, pp.400, price: Rs.750

The provision of reservation for the benefit of the backward castes in the educational, employment and electoral fields is an issue of much contemporary relevance and constitutes a subject of crucial importance to the caste based society of India. Debates about its impact on the Indian society occur frequently among politicians, social scientists and the public in general. Many a struggle is organised either for the abolition of reservations or for getting the scheduled list enlarged so that the agitating communities can benefit from it. The problem is constantly highlighted and kept alive by its protagonists as well as antagonists. The policy of reservation is a theme which affects everyone, especially in the realm of the job market.

Mulchand Rana has rather comprehensively dealt with this sensitive problem so as to acquaint the general readers about the various facets involved in it. The book has four delineated parts each of which contains several chapters. The first part examines the overall social conditions in India which necessitated the introduction of the positive discrimination of reservation in favour of the marginalized castes and tribes. Some of these social situations are historically reviewed in the book. The policy of special protection for the oppressed had its roots when the Maharaja of the erstwhile princely state of Kolhapur, now part of the state of Maharashtra in India, introduced reservation in jobs for the 'Antayaj' or the Shudras in the year 1902. The princely state of Mysore, presently part of the state of Karnataka in India, followed suit in 1921 with an enlarged coverage of the lower castes. Later on, the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay under the British rule made special provisions for giving government jobs to the backward communities. Finally, reservation for the backward became mandatory in post-independence India when the Constitution of India with its Article 16 (4) providing for the fixation of quota in the electoral, employment and educational institutions came into force. Reservation was initially for the scheduled castes (SCs)

and scheduled tribes (STs). However, it was extended to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from the year 1992 onwards in the educational and employment sectors, but not in the electoral arena.

The age-old practice of discrimination based on caste stratification in India has been a blot on the dignity and equality of its citizens. The lower castes suffered untold indignities and the disabilities. Although those who drafted the Constitution of India made the reservation policy a time bound remedial measure, the author of the book under review explains with illustrations how those initial conditions still remain even after sixty years of India's independence. Because the stigma of casteism still persists, the author argues, it is meet and just that the privilege of reservation should be retained.

The central issues discussed in the second part of the book are the debates concerning the criteria of reservation, namely, merit, caste or economic status. There is a view that our policy overlooks or dilutes the issue of merit in individuals. But the so-called merit itself is socially conditioned and interpreted, and it can vary from society to society. Marks obtained in the examinations need not be the sole criterion of one's abilities. Educational excellence itself is shaped by one's access to good institutions, thus making it context specific. Therefore choice based on some criteria other than educational qualification does not negate merit. Caste-based reservation is in some way recognition of merit by a different yardstick among the oppressed and subjugated classes. If the basis of reservation is on economic status alone, then there is a likelihood of the reserved posts being snatched away by the poorer sections of the traditionally advanced classes. Therefore, economic criterion clubbed with the caste criterion will dilute the present policy which is intended to uplift certain strata of society based on solid historical realities. The policy is conceived to mitigate the inequalities heaped on the SCs and the STs over centuries. The concept of creamy layer for excluding the well-off sections of the OBCs need not be applicable in the case of SCs and STs. The primary point is that the object of specific institutional provisions is not to improve the economic status of a few individuals, but to ensure the advancement of the traditionally neglected communities. The author has in this manner argued for continuance of the reservation based on caste based criterion.

Legal aspects of reservation constitute the theme of the third part of the book. The statutory provisions of the Constitution of India have undergone many amendments. Office Memoranda of the Union Government pertaining to various operational aspects of the reservation have important bearing on the policy. The judgements of the Supreme Court on the issue are vital to its implementation. This section of the book mostly contains a narration of the important provisions and judgements mentioned above. This part of the book can be usefully perused by those who want to be enlightened about the legalities concerning reservation.

The concluding part of the volume deals with some wider perspectives such as globalisation and liberalisation. The new trends in the economy have an impact on the backward communities in several ways. The reducing role of the governments in the direct employment sector minimises the intake of employees from the backward sections. Privatisation of education and the mushrooming of the self-financed educational institutions are likely to further reduce the educational opportunities of the underprivileged. Drastic land reforms favouring the industrial firms (e.g. special economic zones) carry the risk of displacement of the backwards dependent on the agricultural activities. The author thinks that even with the existing reservation policy, there is a long way to go before the backward communities can achieve some measure of equality among India's citizens.

Overall, the book is an asset for a lay reader. Nevertheless, the quality of the volume suffers mainly from two counts. First, there is a lot of repetition which has made the book needlessly bulky. Second, most of the references are incomplete and the style of their citation is not in the standard form.

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