

Nehruvian Modernity and Its Contradictions

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The Idea of India by Sunil Khilnani; Hamish Hamilton, London, 1997.

AS an obligatory ritual, books and discussions about India ask the question: how is it that a country so diverse in its languages, religions, and castes, and so deeply traditional in its mores, has survived into modernity not merely intact, but with the thoroughly non-traditional apparatus of formal democratic representation and statehood. Sunil Khilnani erects one familiar answer to this question into his eponymous 'Idea'. The idea of India is apparently the idea of a nation which is at once diverse and modern in these ways, in the face of the odds against its being so. His book raises this question repeatedly, with intelligence and with a pervasive and decent-minded commitment to the answering 'idea' being a good one. Khilnani is also a very good writer, though one sometimes wishes he was not so aware of it: after a point the accumulating phrases gleam a little too much ('solipsistic lair', 'galactically removed', 'talismatic moment', 'twilight world of spectacular impotence'..) and begin to sound like brassy asides.

The term 'nation' is ambiguous between a site and the *basis* for a movement or claim to gain control of that site. *Qua* site, a nation is not defined only territorially, though boundaries are inevitably important; it is also defined upon the detailed principles and institutions of a state. *Qua* basis for a movement, a nation is defined upon a people with a common history and shared natural and social attributes; exactly which shared attributes is a matter of much longstanding debate among political theorists and of course often among the people themselves.

India poses an especially complicated problem because it came to be a site initially as a result of the imposition of a colonial state by the British over a very disparate historical and geographical region with highly scattered centres of power issuing from hierarchical structures of caste and a variety of forms of local rule, and then later as a result of the successful effort by native populations to overthrow the British colonial state and capture it for themselves. But, being disparate, these populations lack and have always lacked the shared

unifying attributes required by the second of the ambiguous meanings of Nation'. In fact, many of them could *each* easily be the basis of movements that define nations in this second sense and that is partly why the ritual question with which I began looms so constantly.

From the time of Gandhi's arrival from South Africa, roughly the three decades before India wrested independence from the British in 1947, the leaders of the national movement mobilised an extraordinary mass of people and for most of that period they did so by finessing their widespread potential for difference and division, to work instead towards the common goal of acquiring freedom. Even the Muslims, who later became the focus of a divisive movement that eventually led to the creation of Pakistan via the partition of India, fell under the spell of the leadership of the Indian National Congress, the party which had early on taken command of the movement. It was only towards the very end that there was some mass feeling among Indian Muslims for the idea of a separate nation. Until then that idea was entertained by a relatively small group of careerist Muslims mostly in the region known as Uttar Pradesh, who thought that their futures would be better heeled if they were not part of a minority in an undivided India dominated by Hindus.

Despite this prodigious mobilisation, however, the Congress Party did not lay down deep social roots nor, for all its populist rhetoric, did it ever represent or over the years come to represent the interests of the vast mass of people it mobilised. For about two and a half years in the 1930s during a particular phase in Nehru's political thinking, it seemed possible that it might do so. But Nehru, perhaps realising that the conservative elements in the party were too powerful and that he would be marginalised if he kept up with the radical position, slowly pulled in the reins, even though till the very end of his life he himself always kept a measurable distance from the Hindu Right within the party for whom he seems to have had a genuine and temperamental detestation.

Nehru is the explicit hero of this book. It is his 'idea of India'. In fact he often stands in for the idea. Khilnani frankly refers to him as an "icon" and promises a fuller study of him, for which the present book seems to be a prolegomenon. Nehru's reputation has receded in India today partly due to the frantic abandonment everywhere of his views on socialism and a centrally planned economy, for an India integrated into global finance capitalism; and partly because of the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its hindutva ideologues who see in his secularism a soft option that has served against the prospects of an Indian nation in the second of our ambiguous meanings — a nation with a common and robust Hindu culture and tradition going *back*, so it is envisioned, to a golden age of the past before the Muslim invasions and British imperial presence, and coming *forward* into the modern age without any weakening diversity and with the renewed strength of international standing as a nuclear power. But perhaps most unkindly, the fall in Nehru's prestige has been helped along by a distaste for his vision which has developed among some influential intellectuals and scholars in India, who have no particular sympathy either for the 'market' or 'hindutva.' but rather who think of him as having created the source of both these unpleasant developments by being too unthinkingly committed to modernity and taking India too far away from the uncontaminated and unselfconscious pluralism and organic communities which a more traditional India had fostered, and which Gandhi's thought and practice better represented. Nehru's Idea of India' was one of a modern nation with an active state which interfered not only with the economy but with lagging communities that were holding things back with their hierarchies and inhibitions. But this idea, it is said, fails to see the inherently tolerant and non-violent heritage of traditional communitarian ways of life.

It seems more and more to me that in India today, the three most important factors for properly understanding criticisms of Nehru and his 'idea' are: location, location, location. Khilnani and I and others like us have grown up in generations and with backgrounds in which we were brought up, by our parents and the books we read, to love Nehru as we would love an elderly member of our own family, even if we had never laid eyes on

him. (I am sure that this is so of others similarly situated in other countries - I imagine something like this feeling must exist for many in Egypt and Tanzania about Nasser and Nyerere.) For such people criticisms of Nehru raise immediate suspicion, since all around us it seems that everything he was against is now coming to be. We may have once been prepared to consider him a failure for not having done better by his own ideas, but now we see him as a symbol of what was worthy and is fast disappearing, and will not hear criticism of him without interpreting it as being located in some wholly degenerate right wing or anti-secular tendency. Located as we are, we will see all critics as also located - in the wrong place, by our lights.

As one might expect, there is in all this an odd combination of sentimentality and intellectual and political passion, which does not always make for clear thinking about Nehru and his Idea of India'.

One thing which perhaps is clear about Nehru's politics is that he set in motion for over 20 years (17 of which he was the prime minister, until his death in 1964) something that political theorists have called the "Congress system".² The Congress Party which in the struggle for independence had unified all sorts of different interests and points of view, became after independence not merely one party among other parties in the political field, not even (again, merely) the victorious and most popular party in the field; it became metonymically a stand-in for the entire political system of the country. In this system, the party at the centre in charge of government allowed relative autonomy, both organisational and financial, to its provincial wings, thus allowing voice to dissident elements. All of the country's voices were thus active within the party itself, and this gave the national party the task of coalition and consensus-building in order to carry out its commitment to using the state as an instrument for social change to promote diverse interests. Thus democracy, thanks to the umbrella nature of the Congress Party, did not succumb to its own potential for becoming a cynical electoral calculus where vote banks are the primary targets of competing political parties and determine all their political exercises even when in power after elections, leaving them no motivation or initiative to use the state for purposes of reform and social change; rather, democracy became an exercise in pluralism trying to accommodate different interests within the electoral domination of one party. To the

extent that this process was successful, it was India's answer to the question I began with, of how to combine the modern institutions of democracy and a centralised state with the deep traditions and diversities spread across the country.

Also clear, is that this system was corroded after Nehru's death by the political transformations that came with Indira Gandhi's far more authoritarian Congress Party, which was so obsessive in its drive for control at the centre that it undid the autonomy of the provincial outposts of the party. Despite an interim setback with the loss of an election in the late 1970s after an unpopular flirtation with autocracy during the "emergency", Indira Gandhi had a long reign. This period started two trends which flowered later in the hands of her son Rajiv Gandhi and his successors. *First*, though it retained and initially even surpassed Nehru's socialist rhetoric, it began to undermine Nehru's conception of the state. It now was no longer to be conceived as a means for social transformation based on goals formulated via a rough consensus of different regions and interests. It became instead an instrument in the hands of a small body of advisers close to the prime minister, with an unblushing commitment to promoting the interests of the elite classes, with no regard or even knowledge of the needs and demands of the countryside, in thrall to the prospect of throwing open the economy to international capital and the latest technology. This process of corrosion of the 'Congress system' did the party in because it destroyed its organisational strength at the lower levels - levels where in India elections are still fought and won.³ As a result the mighty Congress now finds itself in the opposition, its power restricted to making trouble for weak coalition-style governments, dependent on it for support in parliament. The *second* trend was to begin a slow destruction of Nehru's secular and pluralist aspirations for Indian democracy. With the populist socialist rhetoric sounding increasingly hollow to the populace in the face of policies that were manifestly intended to benefit the elite, the Congress Party realised that elections would have to be won on a different basis. So, first under Indira and then under Rajiv and Narasimha Rao, the party decided that its future lay in the most debased path to success in a democracy: majoritarianism. It tapped and encouraged Hindu sentiment in public life and increasingly allowed, even promoted, hostility against Sikhs and Muslims until it was landed with two hideous moments of climax - the pogrom

against the Sikhs in Delhi after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya and the ensuing riots all over the country. Here again the eventual result of this trend was to work against the Congress, since the effect was to so increase the dubious charm of the BJP (a party which can more openly and consistently play this majoritarian game) that it has unsurprisingly begun to defeat the Congress in national and regional elections.

Both these points ought to be clear to clear-headed people. It remains a real question, however, whether this way of putting them which makes a tidy distinction between Nehru's civilising and humane democratic politics and the cynical electoral manipulations of his successors, does not hide the systemic flaws that existed during his time and which he quite failed to address. Nobody denies the decline since his time. But does the fault-line begin somewhere and sometime earlier than his devoted (even sometimes mandarin) biographers have found it in themselves to say?⁴ Even the perfectly understandable qualm that to come out and say it today might be heard as joining a harsh chorus of Hindu nationalists and their fellow travellers, should not inhibit us from taking this question with the utmost seriousness. Despite the real virtues of exposition in his book - a tolerably accurate conversance with the details of recent Indian history, a bracingly jargon-free survey of the broad aspects of its political economy - Khilnani does not in the end show the clarity and diagnostic depth that is demanded by this question, and one worries that this is because he has given in to the locational prejudices I mentioned earlier.

It is arguable that, on both counts on which it is clear that Nehru's successors failed to push through on his commitments (the pluralist secularism and the use of the state to transform toward social and economic justice), a harder look points to antecedent weaknesses.

The issue of secularism and pluralism, of "Who is an Indian?" as Khilnani asks in his last chapter, is one whose importance cannot be deadened by the endless clichés it has inspired over the decades. The slogan "Unity in Diversity" has always seemed a particularly fatuous and overworked example, yet the principles which defined the "Congress System" gave this slogan some detailed practical reality, and it seemed a far better solution in the Indian context than a more Kamalist form of the secular ideal. Its accommodation of difference matched the peculiarities of the

Indian experience and the genius of its people. But the plain fact is that even during the Nehruvian days of the Congress, the actual actions of the state were frequently at odds with these principles. From the very beginning, the state and Nehru himself went against his own tendencies and surrendered to the traditionalist Hindu politicians within his own party, who suffered his (and indeed the constitution's) secular announcements, while working at crucial moments toward a quite different agenda of their own. Apart from a powerful personality like Vallabhbhai Patel who died early, other very prominent figures such as Govind Pant took the view that if the Muslims did not trim their attitudes and "adapt to Hindu culture, then the establishment of a purely Hindu raj was inevitable".⁵ Such an attitude made all the difference to vital policies such as (to take just one instance) Nehru's inability to save Urdu as one among other languages of instruction in north India (nor to prevent the outlawing of cow-slaughter) because traditional Hindu Congress politicians such as Sampurnanand had manipulated communal feeling among a few key politicians against these things. Thus in a fit of nationalistic pique against the creation of a Muslim nation next door, a rich and beautiful language, more important a language of both Muslims and Hindus of much of north India, was handed over as an exclusive gift to Pakistan, while Nehru and his supporters in the Congress Party simply stood by and were unable to do anything about it. Such failures were made worse by the fact that the government would then, in order to appease the offended Muslim sensibility, concede to the most reactionary Muslim demands in order to keep the peace, in turn inspiring further backlash against Muslims. Right from the start, then, pluralism which was intended to give some form of autonomy to groups, often slid into the rather less principled and more instrumental model of governance in which the state made expedient compromises with the more extreme demands of a *small* but highly vocal ('fundamentalist') *faction within* the groups, in order to make life easier for itself

This raises a subtle and very specific issue about democracy, which for all of Khilnani's words of admiration for the ideal, goes undiscussed in the book. It is a conspicuous inconsistency in avowedly (as well as *de facto*) secular nations all over the world, that the state will repeatedly assume that the opinion of a small extremist minority within a group is the group's

representative voice, simply because it makes the loudest noise. And as a result, it will make some wholly anti-secular compromise with it, in the name of respecting the entire group's beliefs and cultural sentiments. As an empirical observation, it is perfectly accurate to say that extremists or, as they are called, 'fundamentalists' almost anywhere in the world, including Iran, are a relatively small fraction of the community on whose behalf they make their demands. Most members of these communities are either hostile to this absolutist minority within it or too busy with their own occupations and preoccupations to pay much attention to its extreme attitudes. Yet states, even proudly democratic states, everywhere tend to proceed as if the extremist minority is the voice of the community, simply because it is shrill and insistent. What this shows is that there is a gaping distance between the articulations of *democracy* in constitutions intended to constrain the state and *the democratisation* by the state of the communities over which these articulations are supposed to hold sway. Liberal political theorising has made remarkable advances in the former, but has been made so anxious by the Jacobin aftermath of the French Revolution that it has altogether failed to focus on the latter. Yet, once the former is securely in place, one may without anxiety explore in the latter a whole new field of liberating possibilities for a democratic political culture. If the Nehruvian 'Congress System', which was for years the very Idea of India' and the practice of its cherished democracy, had made some effort to democratise the Hindus and Muslims of India, it would never have had to assume that these small and unrepresentative groups within the communities were their representative voices.⁶ It is not as if Nehru was not aware of this distinction between democracy and democratisation. He was a primary force in an effort to democratise the Muslims of India in the remarkable but alas short-lived "Muslim Mass Contact Programme" during the nationalist movement in the late 1930s. The programme was aborted only because Nehru and others in the movement were unable to withstand the pressure of more traditionalist Hindu politicians within the party, who wanted it called off. The failure to resist these pressures against democratisation continued through the long and uneven history of the Congress Party and is the cause of these early antecedents to the party's dismal recent record on its own secular and pluralist promises. The antecedents date much earlier than Indira


Gandhi's more brazen lapses, where Nehru's admirers tend to lay the entire fault.

Nehru's compromises with his own socialist commitments were far less concealed and indirect than his inability to resist the pressures of the communal Hindu element in his own party. Ever since the late 1930s he had been back-pedaling from these commitments: talk of socialism gave way to the coyly evasive "socialist pattern of society" and after independence a large private sector mostly geared to consumer goods was allowed to flourish, with the claim that it would generate enough wealth before the public sector expanded to establish a fully socialist economy. All that happened of course was that different elements of the government conspired to make the public sector weak and often incompetent, even as those very same elements worked in the interests of an alliance of the landed classes, the

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industrialists, and the professional classes in both the private sector and in the government administration itself. Let us not forget, and let us even perhaps admire the fact that under Nehru these classes, with the help of the state, more or less succeeded in doing something that had not been done anywhere else in the history of the world, which was to bring about an industrial revolution via capitalism within the fully representative institutions of universal suffrage. But to describe the achievement in these terms - which is just to give a more explicit description of what Khilnani does in fact admire - is to be candid about the interests that Nehru's Congress Party served. Events throughout his career made this evident: the retaining of the British civil service structure which was bound to work against any distributive economic policy, the inability to restrain the more centralised levels of government in the various regions from constantly undermining the radical urges for land reform at the most local levels of the party,⁷ the refusal to allow the major socialist figures who before independence had departed from the party to return to it on the disingenuous ground that they would do more good outside the party, the constitutionally questionable sacking of the communist government in the state of Kerala in the late 1950s...all these things betrayed the Congress party's real commitments, commitments which when looked at from the point of view of a systematic understanding of the economy, make it clear that the decision in India today to simply accept the latest developments in the evolving logic of capitalism is not *de novo* but itself evolved surreptitiously out of the internal contradictions of Nehru's own "idea of India."⁸ Khilnani is perhaps most naive in the chapter on the economy where *he* chides the Indian Left for worrying irrelevantly about things such as loss of governmental autonomy under global capitalism to steer the future of the nation. He advises the Left to worry instead about placing the right constraints on globalisation so that the needs of the people can be better met - as if retaining autonomy against the demands of finance capitalism and the international credit agencies which minister to it, is not crucial to meeting those needs.

The underlying naivete on both the questions we have been discussing is to fail to see that the very state which Khilnani thinks essential to pluralist democracy and to social and economic transformation has always (not since Indira Gandhi and her successors, but always) stood for the Hindu upper and middle castes as well as the

alliance of classes which I had mentioned earlier. So even as we are clear that things deteriorated greatly after Nehru's passing, a deterioration which Khilnani ably describes, a less wide-eyed understanding of Nehru's own achievement would have allowed him a diagnosis of how we have landed here.

That leaves open the question about the future. The anti-modernist intellectual critics of Nehru I mentioned at the beginning will tell us that the very conception of the modern nation-state is responsible for the problems, so the solutions must lie outside of its orbit altogether. I myself deeply disagree with the generalised and almost *a priori* hostility to the state current among communitarians and some of Foucault's intellectual disciples. But I do think that in the hands of (at least some of)⁹ these critics of Nehruvian India, it comes from a point of view which has a much clearer and better understanding of the actual history of the Indian state than Khilnani does. It is precisely because these critics see through a beloved and charismatic leader's personality to the deep social and economic commitments of the Indian state which he ushered in, that they despair of a future shaped by such a state. If no more radical idea than Khilnani's of the scope of a state to transform the social and economic conditions of a people were so much as conceivable today, then I too would share the despair of the anti-modernists, and lay my hope instead in the popular resistances and structures that might develop in those spaces which lie outside the domain of both state sovereignty and orthodox civil society as recognised by the state. Whether that pessimism is justified or not remains, as I said, an open question, and it is a question of the most pressing intellectual and political urgency. We must hope that Khilnani's promised book on Nehru will move away enough from the intellectual and political drift of this one to do that question justice.

Notes

- 1 As opposed to other more authoritarian ways of achieving modernity such as Attaturk's Turkey; and the less pluralist and more homogenising nationalist attempts to build a modern India proposed by the Hindu ideologues of the present ruling party.
- 2 This is Rajni Kothari's phrase and analysis in his many well known and thoughtful writings on Indian politics. Khilnani in his bibliography acknowledges the deep influence of Kothari. In a sense the Idea of India' of this book has all the features of the 'Congress system', and the figure of Nehru for Khilnani becomes a son of personified gloss on this system, an understandable terminological manoeuvre

given his importance in shaping it and keeping it going in the face of anti-secular and anti-pluralist pressures from within and from outside the Congress Party. But see below for questions about whether the extent of his success in doing so amounted to much more than a holding process.

- 3 By contrast with much of the west where effectiveness in the media seems to be arguably more important than local organisational strength in winning elections.
- 4 Nehru has not been well served by his biographers. The three volume work *Jawaharlal Nehru* by one of India's distinguished historians, Sarvepalli Gopal, undoubtedly has some very useful things in it, but is far too uncritical: more recent books like M J Akbar's *Nehru* are insufferable in their sycophancy toward the Nehrus and the Gandhis.
- 5 Quoted in Christopher Joffrelot's *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (Columbia University Press, 1996), p 160
- 6 I discuss the issue of democratisation in liberal politics and liberal doctrine at length in my *Politics and the Moral Psychology of Identity* (forthcoming. Harvard University Press).
- 7 As a result, only states such as West Bengal and Kerala where there have been long periods of communist rather than Congress rule have had successful land reform programmes.
- 8 The surrender to these latest developments of a fully globalised capitalism which came with the acceptance the IMF loan with all its conditionalities some years ago was a result of a fiscal crisis that was a symptom of just these internal contradictions. At that time, the surrender was announced as inevitable, with no foreseeable alternatives whatever. (This inevitability is presupposed in Khilnani's passing criticism of the Indian Left which I mention in the next sentence of the main text' What is meant by 'inevitability' here is that if you are committed to a certain version of state capitalism as India was under Nehru, which protects and allows monopoly capital within the country to grow and flourish, then within that very commitment and from the point of view of its own interests, there will emerge internal contradictions which will later force you to remove the protection, and that will in turn, also force you also to cut down on your own proclaimed commitment to the constraints that are supposed to bring about economic justice. With the decision to remove the protection and accept the IMF loans under certain conditionalities, it became clear that various options for addressing the fiscal deficit such as, for instance, imposing higher taxes on corporate and individual income and wealth were unavailable, and so the fiscal deficits have to be addressed by putting greater burdens on poor and working people.
- 9 Here I should distinguish between on the one hand someone like Ashis Nandy, who despite some strikingly original and interesting claims, is prone to a quite unrealistic and uncritical yearning for an India uncontaminated by modern institutions, and on the other someone like Partha Chatterji who over the years has written most penetratingly of the longstanding class character of the national movement and

the Indian state. What makes Chatterji fall in with the anti-modernists is that he often equates (or derives) this quite correct understanding of the Indian state with a more generalised rejection of enlightenment

conceptions of sovereignty - an equation (or derivation) that requires more steps of argument than he gives, or perhaps can be given. But even so, his work is not at all marred by Nandy's nostalgia.

Universalising Primary Education

G G Wankhede

Crisis in Primary Education (Social Work Perspective) by B L Ageria; Y K Publishers, Agra. 1996; pp 230, Rs 295.

EDUCATION is taken as an important mechanism for the development of an individual and for human society. It is also conceived as a medium of the empowerment of marginalised groups like women, the SC, the ST and the poor. However, the theoretical questions that come to one's mind are: Is it pertinent to expect education to bring about expected change especially when it is alien in nature, not directly relevant to local conditions and it being urban, rich and language (English) biased? What have been the achievements in developing countries after they freed themselves from colonial rule, (especially the vast and diverse society like Indian) during the last five decades? Is it that the education itself is perpetuating inequality, leading towards neo-social stratification and creating a new educated minority class that is continuing to dominate over the majority? The educational achievements in the Indian context generally give misleading quantitative achievements in terms of literacy, adult education, non-formal education and enrolment in formal education. Yet the majority population in India remains distant from education.

The book under review is an outcome of the doctoral thesis submitted to the Agra University, which analyses the issue of universalisation of elementary education in India. It extensively reviews studies in the area and examines the factors responsible for the lack of progress in children's education and highlights existing policy options and peoples perceptions regarding free and compulsory education. The analysis is done both at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the state of primary education in the rural areas of Karnataka has been examined critically, and at the macro level the constitutional provisions, legislative position, policy perspective, etc, have been discussed at the national level.

There are altogether six chapters and contain a lengthy foreward by the scholar's guide which appears to be totally unnecessary. Chapter I deals with problems and

perspectives in primary education where the author attempts to understand universalisation of primary education from the social work point of view. And to do so, she gives a brief history of the emergence of social work in India. The major factors, according to the author, for not being able to achieve the universalisation of primary education in India are population explosion, poverty, unhygienic conditions, unemployment, etc. Further, she gives educational statistics and the administrative set up of education system at the central level. The issue of education and human right has also been discussed briefly. Finally, she gives the brief sketch of the methodology of the study. While referring to the universe of the study the author fails to give rationale for selecting the slate of Karnataka and further selecting the two villages and the SC-ST population therein besides the number of families forming the universe of the study. The household has been the unit of analysis. Similarly, no rationale has been given while selecting the schools. Various types of interview schedules have been used to collect primary data, and secondary data have been collected from different reports, documents, school records, etc. Thus the first chapter deals with the introduction, problem and method of study.

The second chapter is devoted to analysing the issue of universalisation of primary education based on review of literature classified into four sub-titles, i.e, present situation, policy, priorities and resources, educational system and infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints in the universalisation of primary education. The author reproduced the data pertaining to population, literacy, enrolment and budget allocation during the five year plans. Chapter III deals with socio-economic profile of the villages selected for the study. Various data relating to sex, literacy, education, occupation, income and caste have been given; although the chapter lacks an analytical approach.

Chapter IV gives description of governmental efforts and people's participation in universalisation of primary education by using facts and figures on expenditure from various plans of the government at various stages of the education. In order to examine people's participation, the researcher uses awareness of people about educational facilities provided by the government. Further, she seeks the opinions of the residents of the selected villages about schools: quality, facilities, etc. It is revealed that the majority of respondents perceived it as governmental responsibility to provide and achieve the universalisation of primary education. And that people's participation in the school system at the grass root level is minimal. Chapter V assesses the impact of universalisation of primary education among the 'savarnas' and the 'avarnas' of the selected villages. The impact is measured through the discrimination level of the weaker sections, their attitude towards education, the gender bias, etc.

Finally, in Chapter VI the author discusses a developmental model of universalisation of primary education. The problem of universalisation of primary education is considered a 'Social problem' and as an issue of justice to the marginalised groups like SC, ST, OBC and women and argues that unless education reaches to the bottom strata it cannot be considered an achievement of the goal of social justice. She substantiates the argument that though our policies accord a high priority for the universalisation of primary education, the resource allocation in the five-year plans does not reflect the same. Section II of the chapter discusses social work strategies in universalising primary education which has been nothing but a call for professional social workers to take up the cause of education.

The major inadequacy of the book is that it being an empirical work; lacks proper theoretical framework besides lack of empirical approach. The study has methodological flaws and it appears that the scholar has tried to cover many issues in a single slot that perhaps resulted in a lack of qualitative and analytical approach. The mere collection of facts is not sufficient; rather the facts need be analysed in a logical sequence within the given framework. There is no special social work perspective as such in the book.

On the positive side, the book is informative and the issues raised therein are relevant for academicians, scholars, planners and policy-makers and very importantly for social workers. List of references has been given at the end of each chapter,