
I had first met Professor A.M. Shah more than four decades ago, in 1968, when he had come to Shimla to participate in a Conference on ‘Urgent Research in Social Anthropology’ held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, and I have followed his work quite closely ever since. A.M. Shah is undeniably India’s best known sociologist of the Indian family, and his numerous writings on the subject—from his seminal 1964 paper on ‘Basic Terms and Concepts in the Study of the Family in India’, his landmark book, *The Household Dimension of the Family in India* (1973), which instantiated the crucial conceptual distinction between ‘household’ and ‘family’, his treasure chest of essays, *The Family in India* (1998) and his more recent contribution to the historical study of kinship, caste and land relations in rural Gujarat, *Exploring India’s Rural Past* (2002)—are mandatory reading in this field.

Not unsurprisingly, therefore, I had expected that this *festschrift* in A.M. Shah’s honour, edited by his former colleagues and students, B.S. Baviskar and Tulsi Patel, would consist largely or at least partially of contributions to the study of the family in India. I had also anticipated that the volume might contain contributions inspired by his insightful article, ‘Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat’, initially published in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1982) and subsequently the cornerstone of a remarkable volume by the same title (1988) which was the product of his long term and constructive disagreement with fellow Gujarat sociologist I.P. Desai; or papers reflecting on his path-breaking ‘Sects and Hindu Social Structure’ (2006), which I had the privilege to edit for *Contributions*; or perhaps tributes to two early and pioneering ethnographic notes—the one on the Barot caste of genealogists (1958) and the other on the Hijadas (hijras) of Gujarat (1961). Indeed, the editors themselves list A.M. Shah’s contribution to Indian sociology along rather similar lines as pertaining particularly to the areas of family, the caste system, Hinduism, village communities and historical sociology; all of them, interestingly, being themes that Shah himself had identified as requiring ‘urgent’ disciplinary attention in his parsimonious contribution to the Shimla conference some 40 years ago.
Rather curiously, none of these prominent themes of Shah’s own work is centrally reflected in the thirteen essays in this volume, which are grouped around the four themes of ‘Gender Issues’, ‘Sociology of Religion’, ‘Development and Modernisation’ and ‘Disciplinary Concerns’. Moreover, and curiously again, only one of the thirteen articles explicitly derives its inspiration from Shah’s own writings. This is Shanti George’s self-critical reflection on the ‘unheard’ voices of children in household ethnographies, which takes off from Shah’s rather by-the-way comment that ‘every member of the household, male or female, old or young, is important’, and that ‘the terms, concepts, methods and techniques’ of ethnographic research should enable this inclusiveness (p. 331). Nor do any of the articles engage critically with Shah’s theoretical perspective, methodological prescriptions or empirical findings. There is no sense of the unfolding of an Oedipal drama here; but thankfully, not uncritical sycophancy either.

The prominence of ‘Gender Issues’ in the volume comes as something of a surprise for, the famous paper on the Gujarat hijras notwithstanding, one had not thought of A.M. Shah as a Gender Studies scholar, any more than one had thought of him as a ‘Gandhian’ (as N.R. Sheth’s epilogue to the volume positions him). But the volume not only has a section under the explicit head of ‘Gender Issues’ (containing papers on Muslim women in the Old City of Delhi, on poor Muslim women of Bangladesh and on female infanticide), but also gender-related papers in other sections—altogether, six of the thirteen contributions. Under ‘religion’, there is Ragini Shah’s study of a woman ascetic (sadhavi), Anuben Thakker, whose ‘engaged’ Hinduism challenges Max Weber’s presumption of Hindu ‘other-worldliness’; under ‘development’, T. Scarlett Epstein’s reflection on the potential of grandmothers for effecting (and not merely obstructing) social change in traditional societies; and under ‘discipline’, Rajni Palriwala’s account of the tortuous process of ‘gendering sociological practice’ in a pedagogic setting.

The emphasis on ‘Disciplinary Concerns’ in a volume in honour of A.M. Shah is well taken. As friends, colleagues and students well know, Shah is a living encyclopedia of the history of Indian sociology, its practice in Western India and the Delhi School of Economics in particular, and he is intermittently provoked to ‘put the record straight’ in the face of the biased opinions of partisans of other schools of Indian sociology, or the uninformed judgements of a younger, iconoclastic generation. In this he surely has his own axes to grind and personal loyalties to affirm, as we all do. But his several contributions to debates on disciplinary history are a painful and timely reminder of how truly ignorant we are of our discipline’s past, especially of developments elsewhere in the country and outside the metropolitan centres of Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai; of how little is being done to archive disciplinary history, individually or institutionally; and of how very easily memories and materials are lost. Shah was also actively involved for many years with the Indian Sociological Society and its flagship publication, the Sociological Bulletin, and in the production of landmark disciplinary reviews, including (with M.N. Srinivas and M.S.A. Rao) the foundational ICSSR Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology in three volumes (1973–75) and
(with B.S. Baviskar and E.A. Ramaswamy) the comprehensive five-volume tribute to his teacher and colleague, the eminent sociologist M.N. Srinivas.

In his sociological precept and practice, as is well known, A.M. Shah was a staunch empiricist, combining his demand for intensive and systematic fieldwork as the privileged methodology of social anthropology with an undisguised distaste for high theory and deductive approaches in general. He did not seem to countenance the idea that there is also a ‘theory’ to empiricism and to the practice of fieldwork observation and ethnographic description, which can so easily masquerade as mere common sense. Many former ‘D’School associates will recall the departmental Friday seminars of yore, the proceedings of which have been described in jest as resembling a formal tea party, with faculty offering comments and observations in order of status and seniority—professors first, of course. The Friday seminar was regularly the site for Shah’s showcasing his scepticism regarding high-sounding and pompous theorising, and his insistent demand for ‘facts’ to substantiate the claims made. Notoriously, these expressions of scepticism were often prefaced by the stern observation that ‘it’s not like that in Gujarat’, or ‘it’s not like that in my village’, comments that would immediately demolish the speaker’s pretensions. Notwithstanding his dyed-in-the-wool and unrepentant empiricism, it should be recorded that A.M. Shah was supportive to young researchers and colleagues working on a wide variety of themes beyond the frame of caste-village joint family, and through perspectives other than his own recension of the Structural Functional approach. The essays in this volume bear ample witness to this catholicity. Indeed, it should be appreciated that A.M. Shah did not invariably insist on ‘fieldwork’ as a *sine qua non* of sociological research, but supported young scholars utilising survey materials (P.D. Khera’s work on the family in the Indian Census), the colonial archives (L.S. Vishwanath’s studies of female infanticide) and even mythological texts (Veena Das’s analysis of the caste *puranas* of Gujarat) and so on, so long as they were analysed with critical rigour.

Every reader will have his/her own favourites, according to taste and inclination, in this diverse collection of themes, styles and perspectives. Personally, I much enjoyed the lucidly written opening essay, Mohini Anjum’s thoughtful account of the ‘assertive voices’ of the veiled women of Shahjahanabad. Contrary to the general academic and popular perception of *purdah* as an instrument of patriarchal control and women’s oppression, Anjum depicts her subjects as confident, resourceful women, community leaders in their own right, whose assertiveness as grandmothers, mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters (if not equally as daughters-in-law!) set them apart, in Anjum’s estimation, from similarly placed women of other communities, the local Hindu women in particular. She sees this relative autonomy as being actively enabled by ‘some of the institutionalized mechanisms built into the structure of Muslim society and sanctioned by Islamic ideology, …empowering Muslim women within a patriarchal system’ (p. 41). Anjum’s account of the institutions, customary practices and ritual spaces through which these conservative Muslim women enjoy considerable autonomy of action.
stands in contrast to the essay immediately following, Tulsi Patel’s account of impoverished Bangladeshi women’s life experiences, ‘Heart beating with fear and eyes filled with rosy dreams’, in which seclusion, exclusion and subjugation are the dominant motifs. The editors do not comment on this asymmetry of interpretations, though obviously the extreme poverty of the rural Bangladeshi women is pertinent to the contrast; but so too is the fact that Patel’s data set comprises what can only be called ‘redemptive’ personal narratives generated in the context of the Grameen Bank’s worthy efforts to provide poor women with minimal economic security.

I have long been familiar with the late Aneeta Minocha’s writings on the Indian hospital as an institution and on the medical pluralism characteristic of the Indian health-seeking environment. Her paper in this volume on ‘The socio-cultural context of informed consent in medical practice’ breaks new ground in turning a critical eye on to the underlying individualist assumptions of the doctrine of ‘informed consent’ and its social and cultural inappositeness in the context of Indian medical practice where, as she says, in addition to the limited exposure of many patients to the principles and procedures of modern medicine, the sick person is treated not as an autonomous individual but ‘as someone dependent on others, with the family playing a crucial supportive role in the treatment as well as in the patient’s interaction with the doctor’ (p. 278). Indeed, Minocha goes a step further to suggest that ‘the assumption underlying the doctrine of informed consent, [namely] that information leads to empowerment which enables rational choices’ is problematic in itself and not merely in its lack of fit with the culture of the doctor–patient relationship in a developing society such as India.

As regards the pedagogic aspect of sociological practice, André Béteille’s discussion of ‘Empirical meaning and imputed meaning in the study of kinship’ will surely come as a boon to generations of students who have struggled in vain to understand the basis of the contrast between the Radcliffe-Brown/Fortes concept of the ‘elementary unit of kinship’ and Lévi-Strauss’s ‘alliance theory’ model of the ‘atom of kinship’. But the paper that I found close to my heart, having many years ago designed and taught at JNU what was possibly the first post-graduate Women’s Studies course in India, was Rajni Palriwala’s narrative of the everyday practice of academic syllabus reform in the area of the Sociology of Gender. Apart from her amusing account of her tactics to ensure the passing of the course through the departmental committee by co-opting to her sub-committee ‘one of the two senior professors whom I knew had strong views, as all professors do, and who would raise objections’, she provides a candid—indeed brutal—outline of the overall ‘institutional culture’ of the ‘D’School Sociology Department which was A.M. Shah’s ‘habitus’ and to which he had also actively contributed, both as a self-conscious bearer of the legacy of M.N. Srinivas and in his own right as well. In the light of her account, it seems almost a miracle (or a testimony to her ability to charm the opinionated senior professor) that the gender courses were passed and implemented, or indeed that syllabus reform per se ever succeeded, howsoever glacially!

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Returning to A.M. Shah’s own work, to which this *festschrift* is dedicated, I would like to add two further comments. In my observation, Shah routinely chose to present himself as a person of relatively humble social background, just a ‘*bania*’ among the brahmins of Indian sociology and those of manifestly privileged, anglicised or ‘foreignreturned’ backgrounds. As a long-term editor of Indian social science writings, now grown very impatient with rhetorical flourishes and impenetrable language, I can only say that Shah’s writing is a model of clarity and, in this sense, of genuine elegance. Second, as one can appreciate from the bibliography of his writings appended to the volume, Shah is one of the very few well-known sociologists to have taken pains to write in the vernacular—Gujarati in his case—or to encourage the translation of his own and other sociologists’ writings into vernacular languages, frequently himself labouring hard to re-translate poor translations. It is surely a pity that very few established sociologists nowadays aspire to address the *mofussil* hinterland of vernacular education. Increasingly, professional ambition is focused exclusively on the global stage.

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The most mind boggling issue of the 21st century has been identity politics linked with caste, ethnicity, race, religious and gender identities. It has played havoc in innumerable life situations: in personal lives, in the community, in national politics and in the global scenario. Whether is it communal violence in India, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, apartheid in South Africa, crisis in Afghanistan or war on Iraq, genocide in Rwanda or civil war in Sri Lanka, it is these grave socio-political and cultural contexts that make this seminal contribution by Bhikhu Parekh worthy of debate and discussion.

The book is very lucidly written with an interdisciplinary perspective that touches upon all contemporary concerns of civilization, related to instability in personal identity and crisis of legitimacy of the nation state. It examines political economy, history, ethnography and the material basis for perpetuation and strengthening of a new politics of identity in the context of revolutionary changes in communication brought by globalisation. It vividly captures struggles and sufferings caused due to ruptures created by identity politics as a result of globalisation challenging conventional cultural and national identities. In the Introduction (Chapter 1), the author avers, ‘Identity politics so far has been defined and conducted in terms of particular collective identities, such as those based on
gender, ethnicity and nationality. While this is important, it is just as crucial to affirm our universal human identity’ (p. 2).

Human beings are bearers of universal and particular identities which are complimentary in nature. Struggles around identities based on gender, race, sexual preference and religion have grown exponentially in the 21st century due to uncertainty and the resultant insecurity generated due to globalisation. Need of global interdependence makes us act ‘in the spirit of human solidarity and activate our human identity’ (p. 3). Both particularists and universalists are facing moral and political challenges.

Chapter 2, ‘The Concept of Identity’ deals with dialectics of three dimensional identities—personal, social and human, determined by ‘desires, memories, fears, anxieties, phobias, complexes, emotions and passions acquired during the course of one’s life’ (p. 13). Critical self reflection plays a vital part in the formation of all the three identities. All of us have plural social identities that are unequal in their reach and depth.

The author examines collective identity, an important subset of social identity in Chapter 3. He highlights the way in which collective identity is constructed and contested. He deconstructs its politics by giving examples of marginalised identities of gays, women and blacks who are questioning their inferiorisation and subjugation and who are also challenging mainstream views on race, rationality, history and progress. They are demanding recognition of their rights and a redistribution of space and power.

National identity, one of the most dominant forms of collective identity with a dominant public agenda is discussed in Chapter 4. The colonial past of Great Britain, Nazi rule in Germany, institutionalisation of Brahminical norms of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ and untouchability in India, slave trade in Europe and America, all generate agonising collective memories and perplexing problems. In Canada since 1970s, the question of national identity has dominated debate. But because of the cumulative effect of urbanisation social atomisation, secularisation and the immigration of people of different races and religions, new multicultural identities have emerged. Chapter 5 of the book delves into ‘Multicultural Society and Convergence of Identities’. The mainstream treats immigrants as archetypal strangers and their beliefs and practices meet with resistance. The receiving country’s authority demands either ‘assimilation’ or ‘integration’ in political, economic, social, moral and cultural spheres. Earlier immigrants came as refugees and were grateful to the receiving country for accommodating them and were ready to assimilate. Contemporary immigrants have been recruited for their labour and skill, so their relationship with the receiving society is contractual (p. 82). As the political community becomes more at ease with a multi-ethnic composition and a plurality of images, society develops tolerance towards heterogeneous composition and becomes capacious.

In Chapter 6, ‘European Liberalism and the “Muslim Question” ’, the author analyses the emergence of Muslim identity. ‘As the politically visible Muslims began to define their identity in religious terms from the late 1970s onwards,
Europeans began to wonder how to integrate them and turn them into loyal citizens’ (p. 103). Today, there is an extensive moral panic due to widespread distrust of Muslims and belief that the Muslims are averse to integration. A spate of terrorist attacks before and after the 9/11/2001 attack that crashed two airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, has resulted in demonisation, criminalisation, persecution and brutalisation of millions of Muslims the world over.

The author makes a plea to evolve an understanding of economic, political and ideological factors responsible for cultural diversity in Chapter 7, ‘The Pathology of Religious Identity’. The author finds Huntington’s thesis of ‘Clash of Civilization’ extremely flawed as it takes away the scope for dialogue and does not show the way for containing and managing clashes. He also shows the limitations of scriptural literalism that is not amenable to rational investigation and criticism. Fundamentalism has a connotation of a religious dogma that aggressively furthers/promotes and even imposes, traditionalist beliefs and practices, including patriarchal gender roles. It is viewed primarily as a rejection of secular modernity. Fundamentalists are totalitarian as they seek to remake all aspects of society and government on religious principles. It is oppressive because it asserts that women should be confined to care for the home and children and must always submit to male rules and regulations. It insists that patriarchal control over women’s sexuality, fertility and labour are God given and should not be contested. It reinforces its ideology by using vehicles such as family and kinship networks, media, state apparatus, the criminal justice system and cultural constructs. Fundamentalism is a response to modernisation, socio-economic changes, demographic shifts and multiculturalism. Two centuries back, communalism had a connotation of identity based on community. In the post-colonial discourse, communalism is understood as an antagonistic collective mobilisation on the basis of religion leading to the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan and recurrence of communal conflicts/riots and carnages.

Chapter 8, ‘Challenges of the Multicultural World’ focuses on the homogenising impact of globalisation on local cultures. The author argues on the five propositions of Samuel Huntington:

1. The quest for identity is a central human concern.
2. No society can be based on a political creed or economic and political institutions alone.
3. Countless cultures and cultural groups can be grouped into six or seven Civilisations on the basis of their shared values and worldviews.
4. Western civilisation is deeply shaped by Greco–Roman and Judeo–Christian heritage, and has a distinct identity reflected in its commitment to individualism, individual rights, liberty, equality, tolerance and the spirit of critical inquiry.
5. Since every civilisation has a distinct identity, none can claim universal validity.

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The author feels that Huntington’s distinction between culture and civilisation is unclear. Every civilisation is eclectic and not homogeneous. Huntington’s placing of religion at the heart of civilisation marginalises various socio-economic, political and international factors. Hence his generalisations about Muslim societies and countries with Christian traditions are historical. The author believes, ‘As different cultural communities come together in our globalizing world, possibilities of both cooperation and conflict increases. History is witness to the fact that well organized popular movements at both national and international levels play an important role to achieve just and peaceful resolution of conflicts’.

Prof. Bhikhu Parekh rightly states that globalisation is not a new phenomenon, in chapter 9, ‘Globalization and Culture’. In the 21st century, the relationships between countries have changed due to decolonisation. ‘As a result there has been a considerable exchange of technology, modes of production, knowledge, beliefs and social practices’ (p. 181). Fear of homogenisation and Americanisation makes many cultures more inward looking. US cultural industries have a hegemonic presence due to control over electronic media and the Hollywood Film industry. Still cultural boundaries have become porous in the areas of cuisines, music, dress-code, forms of spirituality, literature, paintings, images and sensibilities. Fusion has become a buzz word in the arena of Fine Arts. It is possible to strive for reconstitution of cultural communities based on global solidarity with twin purposes, as a survival strategy and as an inherent appeal.

The most mind-blowing chapter in the book is 10: ‘Principals of Global Ethics’. Here he highlights the historical specificity of global ethics to reduce human sufferings. While exploring nature, basis and content of global ethics, the author emphasises that it should be substantive enough to guide our choices, but not so much as to institutionalise a narrow vision of the good life; global ethics should be based on global consensus and human solidarity. It should be grounded in our historical context, including our current self-understanding, needs, aspirations and circumstances. It should be concerned with principles, not institutions, practices and policies. Rational deliberation is the only way to arrive at it. Global ethics should be based on equal worth of all human beings as equality leads to richer and more relaxed society than does inequality.

Chapter 11, ‘Moralities of Partiality and Impartiality’ studies ‘special ties arising out of mutual commitments, promises, participation in common practices and membership of organizations’ (p. 228); even after accepting the proposition that all human beings are morally equal and make equal claims on each other. How to resolve a tension between moralities of partiality and impartiality in this context becomes a challenge. In the ultimate analysis either religion or values based on ideologies of human rights or distributive justice guide our actions.

While discussing ‘Citizenship in the global Age’ in Chapter 12, the author challenges exclusivist paradigm by a statist view. According to him, ‘Sovereignty of state, as traditionally defined, is a deeply problematic notion’ (p. 240). In the name of sovereignty the dictators, autocrats and tyrants in almost all countries have thrived and tortured minorities, ethnic tribes, women and people pursuing alternate...
sexuality. Globally oriented citizenship has provided democratic space and voice to persecuted and marginalised sections of all countries. Moreover, human beings are citizens of particular nations, but also members of the global human community. This fact guides global humanitarian interventions at the time of manmade or natural disaster in particular nation may it be a tsunami or volcanic eruption or ethnic tension, civil war or war between two or more than two nations. Global human rights movement can ensure such intervention is freed from the corrupting moral and psychological climate associated with the Afghan war or American invasion of Iraq, and becomes instead a way of expressing and nurturing global solidarity.

The last chapter ‘Promoting Democracy’ brings to the fore the hotly debated question in the post Afghanistan war and post Iraq American invasion: whether democratic societies should promote democracy in non-democratic societies. This type of ‘white man’s burden’, a so-called civilizing mission is perceived by the developing countries as specious, self-serving and dangerous. This brings us to the fundamentals of democracy and its historical growth. ‘The communitarian democracy of classical Athens is quite different from modern liberal democracy, and both again differ from the bottom up radical democracy advocated by Marxists and others’ (p. 261). Democracy has universal validity as it institutionalises and nurtures human rights and ensures human dignity and a sense of self-worth. Democracy gives a voice to the marginalised people. The message is clear and sharp. We have a duty to promote democracy as it encourages a plurality of views, holds the government to account, does not allow suppression of dissent and gives scope for learning from past mistakes. Democracy can be legitimised when economic development and distributive justice are ensured.

This book is a must read for political thinkers, philosophers, ethicists, religious leaders, practitioners in development, human rights activists and participants in social movements. The simple style of narrative and optimum mix of theory and examples make the book an effective tool for study circles for the youth who are often treated as cannon fodder for violent identity politics.

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The only thing bland about this otherwise hard-hitting and politically compelling book is its title. This is a systematic, and more importantly non-technical,
exposition against conventional wisdom and received knowledge, and therefore it is difficult not to be convinced by the end of reading it that there is nothing irreversible about the process of globalisation and the unabashed flow of global capital purely on the terms that are favourable to its own modes of accumulation. In fact, irreversibility is the ideology that was vigorously propagated by Thatcher’s infamous TINA epithet, which is essential to push a model of development that runs against the interests of the majority populations of the world. Amit Bhaduri captures the entire pattern of changes in contemporary political economy through what he refers to as the growing ‘developmental terrorism’ (p. 42), marked by a ‘remarkable degree of political convergence on the model of development’ (p. 47) where ‘elections change governments without changing the model accepted for development’ (p. 47). This ominous ‘political convergence’ has parallels with the logic of corporate management that treats the ‘whole economy as a giant corporation’ (p. 49) ignoring its dramatic social and economic diversity in order to reduce the national economy into a ‘homogeneous corporate interest’ (p. 49). This terrorism of the global elite works on the crutches of a series of rules and norms (myths?) it builds, through various international institutions including the IMF and the fund-bank, and then violates with impunity. The task of an intellectual then is not to take these rules as given or to believe that the game is actually played in accordance with the rules, but to expose the modes of intervention which constitute a complex labyrinth of imposing, reframing as per convenience and resignifying, followed by plain flouting of the very norms that are imposed on others. Amit Bhaduri attempts to expose precisely such an incessant global process that is ominous and yet insidious, in this eminently readable book.

To begin with, the market homogenises while democracy professes to augment diversity. What is therefore integral to such a model of growth is not efficiency, but its inextricable dependence on the violation of rights of various social groups including the workers, peasantry and tribals who inhabit land that is rich in minerals. The discourse on the need to create ‘alternative dignified livelihood’ is surreptitiously converted into one of giving a ‘fair compensation’ for the dispossessed and is projected as an inevitable phase before a golden era that ushers in massive growth that ‘eventually promises’ to benefit everyone. While it’s a classic case of ‘primitive accumulation’, the only difference now seems to lie in stressing more on the ‘primitiveness’ of the groups who are being dispossessed, rather than the barbaric nature of the accumulation. Citing the example of Orissa, Bhaduri observes that ‘the acquisition price of their land was reportedly about one-tenth of the price at which the government gave it to the Tatas, and even that price was well below the market price. Singur was a variation on the same theme, again with the Tatas and this time the CPI(M) and not the Janata Dal (Biju) as the pair doing the tango’ (p. 43). The market is not all about efficiency, nor is it all about free flow of information either. It tames the democratic processes to restrict information in the name of ‘trade secrets’, as a result of which there is very little information available about the MoUs signed in Chattisgarh, or about the nature of land acquisition in Singur. It is through alternative channels that one learns that ‘the
West Bengal government gave Rs.140 crore in compensation, while the Tatas will give only Rs. 20 crore for the land, without stamp duty and with the provision of free water’. One needs to really revisit the thesis extended by Amartya Sen, that in democracy due to the presence of free media and the opposition there is unrestricted information available, but in a situation where these centres of power reach an unhesitant consensus then there is always a possibility where the freedom granted through the promulgation of acts such as the RTI becomes again a legitimating strategy rather than a substantive right to either contest or break the ruthless consensus amongst the rulers. The absolute lack of transparency then allows democracies to construct myths, very much like the communal parties that manufacture rumours and myths about the minority groups, where it is difficult to differentiate the reality from the talk, for instance, with regard to the employment scene in the new era of globalisation. As Amit Bhaduri argues, the high growth rate of 7 per cent in the last two decades has resulted in employment growth at only 1 per cent, while during the earlier decades, ‘when GDP grew on an average less than 4 per cent, regular employment grew at an annual rate of 2 per cent’ (p. 27). It is then strange that most of the reforms are sought to be carried out in the name of expanding opportunities. The mythical side partly explains the necessity to carry out ‘reforms by stealth’ in India.

However, notwithstanding this overwhelming drive of ‘developmental terrorism’, what remains unexplained in Bhaduri’s account is the shift in policy direction between the early and the later phases of the process of liberalisation. Between the general elections in 1999 and then in 2004 to 2009, there is a marked return to welfarism. In fact, most of the parties that came back to power, for instance the Congress under the leadership of Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy in Andhra Pradesh and the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, did so by systematically bringing back and implementing welfare policies such as free electricity, housing, subsidies such as Rs. 2 per Kg rice schemes, among others. Agriculture, unlike the previous phase, was the centre of campaign for all political parties, partly in response to the agrarian crisis, a glaring part of which was the series of farmer’s suicides. Such wide-scale policies targeting a vast majority were possible precisely because of the growth rate remaining at around 7 per cent. Welfarism, due to electoral pressure has returned to the political centre stage, marking a sharp difference from the earlier phase of liberalisation and Amit Bhaduri does not really engage with some of these shifts, even if he does believe that these are temporary in nature and cannot be sustained both due to the pressures of the neo-monetarists and the growing structural inequalities.

Bhaduri also points out that the ‘predominance of private finance capital has become by far the single defining characteristic of the modern phase of globalization’ (p. 50). Apart from finance capital contributing to the singular focus on creating an ‘investment climate’ to attract capital flights that Bhaduri points to, it has also gravely impacted the character of the state with the growing influence of the middle-men classes, such as the civil, liquor and mining contractors and land mafia that flourishes on speculative price rise of urban land around the
metropolitan cities. In a state such as Andhra Pradesh these classes are a part of the cabinet and wield tremendous influence on state policy, not to mention the recent instances of the Karnataka Government wilting under the pressure of the infamous Reddy brothers. In a study of this nature with a focus on the political economy it would have been instructive to study the growth of new type of classes and their relation with the old productive classes, both agrarian and industrial, and their relation in turn with the state that is moving fast from being a contractual state to a contractor–state.

To conclude, while this book would undoubtedly contribute to clearing quite a few myths about the development model being pursued, it should have focused a lot more on discussing the feasible alternatives to give courage to the sceptics and concretely demonstrate the practical alternatives that can be pursued. While it does hint at the Scandinavian model in passing, it should have discussed the feasibility of such a model in a country like India given the difference in terms of size and population. Similarly, a commentary on the nature of changes in Latin America under the leadership of Hugo Chavez and his proposed ‘Bolivarian revolution’, including his proposal to integrate the economy under new programmes such as MERCOSUR and ALBA, would have concretised the idea of what constitutes an alternative model of development. Are such regional alternatives available to India, and again what could be the common grounds to drive economies in Asia towards an alternative globalisation? While Bhaduri suggests some alternatives by way of the need to bank on the PRIs by giving them financial autonomy routed through the nationalised banks and giving more effect to Acts such as the PESA of 1996, it is not clear as to how this could be as unproblematic as he seems to suggest, given the social hierarchies and discrimination that is debilitating in the rural hinterlands. However, what gets foregrounded is the dependence of the new development model on the ‘eventual promise’ to deliver in the future on the one hand, and the need to undermine the utopia that political mobilisations create for those without hope, on the other. This book will go a long way in giving back that hope and lending clarity to the unrealisability of the false promise.

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Human Rights discourse is one of the most persuasive yet disagreeable themes in politics. The idea of human rights had emerged following the horrors of World
War II, to reaffirm an individual’s right to life with human dignity across all cultures and societies. The norms believed to be embedded in the Enlightenment philosophy got internationally negotiated and further ratified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) in 1948. However, since its inception, it has invoked highly contested debates around its philosophical foundations, contents and applications.

However, Human Rights are at crossroads today. On one hand, in spite of its universal appeal, we find a litany of its appalling violations in the lives of most oppressed groups like women: sexual abuse, under-age marriage, child prostitution, trafficking, beatings, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, female infanticide, burning of widows, wife-battering, starving, rape and denial of property rights continue to mar the world. On the other hand, it is struggling with its own existence and identity as a universally acceptable idea against cultural claims.

Thematically there are three main challenges that have engaged theorists and states: the resistance from cultural relativism to seemingly culturally imperialist dominance of western ideals through human rights; difference over the content and relative preference of norms in different nations; and debate over the appropriateness of the language of ‘rights’ to establish these human ideals.

There have been numerous responses on how to reconcile the element of universal essentialism with the necessity to recognise cultural relativism for making human rights really viable, crosscutting all cultures. Many thinkers like Dunne and Wheeler, B. Parekh and Donnelly have suggested improved communication, cross-cultural dialogue, intra-cultural debate and change, understanding of the other and education as the basis for moving forward and finding agreed values in the human rights. Parekh advocates that universal values should be culturally mediated while retaining their normative and critical drive.

The commonality amongst most of these responses and others in this debate is the assertion of the separateness between the two camps, that is, universal essentialism and cultural relativism, and thus to great extent a reluctance to cohesively engage with each other resulting in two different monologues without any real mediation or dialogue.

Kate Nash’s latest book ‘The Cultural Politics of Human Rights—Comparing the US and UK’ is a plausible attempt in this direction where ‘culture’ is not a challenge but at the heart of realising human rights in each society. What makes her approach intriguing is the insertion of ‘politics’ as the site of engagement between ‘culture’ and ‘human rights’ for an understanding of ‘how human rights are contested within states’ and ‘the difference between essentialist understandings of culture as a way of life and contemporary understandings of culture as inherently unambiguous, contested and structured by power’.

Nash begins with a concern that differently interpreted meanings of human rights and the impact on their institutionalisation in state and other institutions have not been dealt with in a substantial way in the study of human rights. This subject matter which she terms as the ‘The cultural politics of Human rights’ is at the core of realising human rights. She criticises the preoccupation of many
theorists with ‘human rights culture’ as an alternative to establish human rights by drawing out its limitations in terms of its narrow and static meaning of culture and its inability to capture how culture impacts the theory and more overtly the practice of human rights in different social and political institutions. Replacing ‘human rights culture’ with ‘the cultural politics of human rights’ to establish human rights, she broadly defines cultural politics as ‘more or less organized struggles over symbols that frame what issues, events or processes mean to social actors…public contests over how society is imagined…how social relations should be organized’. Her main argument is that human rights are embedded and given meaning in the cultural politics of each nation and thus it is only through cultural politics that human rights could be fully realised.

Her second important argument is the centrality of state institutions for the enforcement and formal realisation of human rights. Her focus is on the need for state transformation from a national to a cosmopolitan form, a much required change to actualise human rights in the contemporary globalising era, possible only through cultural politics. Along with this, increasing enforcement and practice of human rights would also facilitate this transformation. Thus she asserts that both are mutually dependent and facilitative for establishing a broader framework of global justice.

These two arguments form the main thesis of Nash’s project. Keeping these ideas at the centre, Nash develops an in-depth comparative analysis of the nature of cultural politics in two unique cultural contexts, of the US and UK, explores the way this politics is giving meaning and practice to human rights at different levels, what are the main constraints within cultural politics in the two states that are limiting the state transformation, why these constraints exist and what the implications of these constraints are on human rights, their relevance and state formation in the present time of the globalising state and citizenship.

Nash approaches the study through an innovative methodology of ‘human rights field’ to enable an analysis in various critical settings, mentioned in the first chapter. In the second chapter she elaborates on four main fields or domains as ‘sites of contest’ where human rights are being constructed and deconstructed through cultural politics in the US and UK: juridical or law, governmental, activism and mediated public understanding. Legal discourse is a dominant site of intervention where international human rights are literally brought in national contexts, legally contested and counter-challenged by the governmental officials and lawyers. Legislation and government institutions are other sites where culture is continuously affecting human rights as legislators express the moral aspirations of the people of that state and what matters to them. Third is mediated public understanding of human rights, that are dominated by popular political ideals of their civil and political rights and citizenship. Fourth, within activism, human rights activists envisage a political community beyond nation states but challenged by nationalists who are against shedding boundaries between citizens and non-citizens. Media, according to Nash contests human rights in a different language from a government, a more expansive and cosmopolitan language.
In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 she discusses the cultural politics of human rights in the four domains or fields, taking a comparative case study of the US and UK, to assess the nature of possible state transformation and possible success of human rights. She illustrates this study with important legal cases and legislations passed in both the countries. Her choice of the case studies is noteworthy because the UK shares the legacy of European origin of human rights and yet remains a difficult case when it comes to abiding by the human rights norms. The four domains reflect the politics of cultural interpretation and reluctant acceptance on the part of social and political actors involved. The US, as Nash points out, is a case of ‘exceptionalism’ because of its vocally profound advocacy of human rights and support to numerous organisations working for it, as well as for being an open violator in the name of ‘war on terror’ in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Chapter 3, she focuses on the cultural interplay between national sovereignty and intermestic human rights. She argues that in spite of the commitment to human rights, both countries justified violations in the name of ‘national interest’ or ‘national pride’. In both the US and UK, the ‘global war on terror’ has changed the cultural political contexts in which legal judgments are taking place. She illustrates this through a detailed discussion of the case concerning torture of the detainees of Guantanamo prison in the US and the Belmarsh detainees case in UK. This negative cultural politics of human rights reaffirm the dominance of the national over the cosmopolitan in various legal and legislative domains and thus what results is a half-hearted approach, with a tendency of dropping it whenever human rights do not align with national policy.

Chapter 4 is a further study of these complex engagements of cosmopolitan ideals, nationalism and human rights. Here she takes up cases which are pro-human rights ideals pursued by the activists and judiciary to advance global justice. She discusses the ATCA cases in the US and Pinochet cases in the UK to bring out the nature of cultural politics of human rights. The problem here, according to Nash is the competing visions of activists on the idea of political community or nationalism because there are some who construct a narrow nationalistic ideal exclusive of non-citizens and others who want to deconstruct it as a political strategy which may or may not coincide with human rights ideals. Thus, the state transformation depends on how the cultural politics construct human rights amidst these conflicting visions.

Chapter 5 is an attempt to envisage cosmopolitan solidarity through cultural politics of human rights, directed in a way that positively brings about state transformation from a national to cosmopolitan ideal laying foundations of global citizenship. This, she argues would require redistribution of wealth between the global North and South, fairer trade between the two, international campaigns against global poverty and terror and more importantly, a national frame of justice that includes non-citizens and reform of state institutions.

Finally she makes some important submissions on how the cultural politics of human rights could be constructed to realise cosmopolitan states and how this
transformation is a necessary condition for actualisation of human rights itself. She avers that within the legal institutional framework, it is workable when international human norms are codified in the national law of the land. However, even in such cases, she argues that judges are found to be reluctant in conceding to cosmopolitan values due to lack of commitment. Thus, cultural politics in this domain are limiting as the national supersedes the cosmopolitan. Further, she suggests that legislation by elected representatives could be a better way of state transformation as adherence to human rights ideals could be institutionalised in the form of an act in the state. However, this domain too has restraints because legislators, to gain votes, are preoccupied with the aspirations of their citizens and thus do not bind themselves to human rights values at the cost of their vote bank issues.

Nash then defends the establishment of human rights as the ethical-cosmopolitan framework for its deeper and more stable groundings in cultural politics, for raising meta questions on justice in global and local way and for being beyond the narrow margins of citizenship. However, she argues that this is a greater challenge as it requires the acceptance and recognition by citizens to respect and value human rights. They would need to move beyond the narrow echelons of national citizenship and join hands with non-citizens in their fight for human rights. She also recommends translation of human rights into the language of local vernaculars for contextual conformity. Thus it is the cultural politics within mediated public understanding that Nash finds to be a potentially active site of change from nationalism to cosmopolitanism. With the consent and affirmation of citizens through the cultural politics of human rights, the institutionalisation in legislature would pave the way for real democratisation of human rights. She calls this cosmopolitanism from below.

She ends the book by reaffirming that State transformation from a national to a cosmopolitan state is an essential condition for the realisation of human rights, possible through cultural politics within a state and other institutions. She therefore suggests an idea of cosmopolitan nationalism. It would ask the right kind of questions, like which human rights are relevant in a particular context and not whether they are relevant at all; subjects would not be limited to citizens but inclusive of all oppressed groups in society and would not be forced upon the judiciary but democratically established by the people of the state. She acknowledges it is a difficult and slow process especially in countries like the US and UK, yet a very important one to protect each individual’s human dignity beyond national boundaries.

Nash’s work is a great proposition that brings cultural conformity and universality of human rights on the same side, thus moving beyond their conflicting relationship to their mutually enhancing and conducive one, which lies at the very heart of realising human rights in each country. Her articulate and empirically strong analysis brings out very clearly the challenges to this mutual cohesiveness. Keeping in view the changing global scenario of increasing war crimes, assaults on migrants and war prisoners, her assertion on the need to look beyond narrow
frontiers of citizenship and accept cosmopolitan nationalism is the need of hour. As she says human rights are ‘intermestic’, that is, international and local, and this work captures the interplay of international, national and local forces through cultural politics at the main sites of contest, an interplay that could expand the state towards cosmopolitanism and make human rights work.

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