
(The Indian print of the book has been brought out by the Public Health Resource Society and is available at a nominal price of ₹120)

This book is of great significance for anyone who believes in a universal, comprehensive and free public health services system and advocates strengthening the public health system for greater equity as opposed to leaving health to market forces. It is also of importance to anyone attempting to make sense of systemic transformations that take place in health services systems that is determined by the dominant politics and economics of the times. The health services system in question here is the National Health Service (NHS) of England that was built as a free, universal system for the people of the country based on principles of equity and social justice and has been a ‘fixture of British life and values’ (p. 1) ever since it came into existence post-Second World War. It gives the reader an account of the transformation of the NHS from a public service to a market place of health services. The authors’ concerns are raised in the first few pages and give the reader a sense of what to expect from this book—‘The NHS has been a fundamental component of social solidarity and equal citizenship for over 60 years. If it goes, we will eventually find ourselves living in a very different kind of society’ (p. xi). The purpose of the book is to reach out to a wider audience, not only professionals or scholars in public health but all those who feel NHS is a public service and must be saved from market forces.

The book is highly relevant today in the Indian context in light of the 12th Five-year Plan that proposes a system of managed care that will be driven by for-profit interests within the public health system and outside it. This is a critical juncture for us where the pendulum could sway either way—further marketisation and privatisation or bringing back the central role of the state and strengthening the public health systems. In India we have witnessed greater privatisation of public health services at different levels over the past two decades in the name of reforms. These have been in the form of user fees in the public institutions; forms of public–private partnerships in clinical and non-clinical services; and more recently the newer forms of financing that show a clear purchaser-provider split and greater role for the private sector.
The book unravels what the authors call a ‘plot’ to dismantle the NHS and gives a detailed account of what was happening at the policy level in the name of administrative reforms from 2000. The narrative reaches to the end of the decade when the Conservatives come in to power in 2010 and introduce massive cuts in the NHS and propose further radical reforms but the authors emphasise that the radical moves would not have been possible without the spaces that were already created by the New Labour Party before them. In the context of UK this was a significant move as the private sector always had a minimal role to play as compared to any other European country due to the state funded, provided and regulated NHS that reached out to all. Opening the NHS to the markets was first witnessed during the Thatcher regime where outsourcing of the non-clinical services was introduced. The authors stress on the decade beginning 2000 because there is a distinct and qualitative shift in the market principles that get introduced in the NHS. In the next few chapters they provide a detailed analysis of what transpired within the Department of Health, the insiders who were involved in subtly pushing and lobbying for opening the NHS to the markets and corporatising it. This is where the story seems to lie that requires the readers to see the systematic dismantling of a comprehensive and universal public health system that has been around for more than 60 years. The authors stress on the word ‘plot’ as these changes were introduced without a democratic mandate within a system such as the NHS that was created by and for the people. They see it as a well-thought and conceived plan to slowly fragment the NHS and create a market leaving the NHS to serve simply as a ‘kitemark’ (p. 1).

The authors, step-by-step, spell out the process by first listing three major reforms that were undertaken and necessary to progress to the next stage of reforms. First, openings were created for private companies to provide health care for high volume treatments at secondary level like cataract surgery and knee and hip replacement. The primary level NHS trusts were arm-twisted into signing contracts with privately owned Treatment Centres. Second, NHS bodies were converted to foundation trusts. Each hospital was given managerial independence but was to be supervised by an independent private regulator that set target-based contracts that were legally enforceable. Hence, if the institution went bankrupt due to non-performance, a new set of providers would take charge which in all possibilities would be the private sector. The third and the most important reform without which the authors feel the process of reforms would have been incomplete was that of ‘detaching the clinical workforce from the NHS’ and this included the consultants, GPs and community health staff. The authors here show how the plan was put to work by creating an environment to lure the GPs by hiking their pay and creating spaces in out-of work hours where the private companies could contract their services. For consultants first there was a ploy to create dissatisfaction by linking increase in payments to performance but later they were allowed to come together as groups to form companies and sell their services back to the NHS. While the links of GP and consultant workforce had significantly weakened from the NHS by 2010, the policy-makers were unable to detach the
third of the workforce, that is, community health staff from the system due to a political uproar for millions of votes depended on them as they were under the local authorities. All this provides evidence towards the flow of public money to the private sector.

While these reforms gradually took shape, the book highlights in the following chapters, how policies in health were dictated and influenced by US policy advice. The Department of Health over this decade had brought in innumerable management consultants from the US to put forth proposals of reform who become the main actors in the plot. There seemed to be an urgent need to accelerate this process of reforms and several proposals were developed and piloted during this period. Two significant proposals were that of the introduction of polyclinics at the primary level to be operated and owned by private firms; and the other was the Kaiser model of insurance which is a competitive model of care and talks of integrated care and private sector provisioning.

In the chapters that follow, the reader gathers the emergence of several private companies that have established themselves in England and have created a complex set of provisioning. Each of them works at providing different set of services. Some specialise in acute care, some have contracts to provide GP services, while some are engaged in out-of-hours primary care and so on. This clearly shows numerous possibilities of entry created by the government for the private sector that has fragmented a comprehensive system. The role of private equity firms and big capital in transforming the NHS into a health care market is significant where US based firms play a significant role. The authors provide an interesting flowchart of network of actors who quit government positions to join key positions in the private firms. The nexus between the public and the private comes out well in the illustration. Most of those who have benefited from these reforms seem to be these individuals.

What emerges from this entire narrative is that in the guise of administrative reforms, each document that was presented in the parliament became a new entry point for privatisation. The impact of a market driven system has already had effects on quality, has increased costs of operation due to the price competition and the authors note an increase in malpractice, irrationality of services and unequal treatment. All these qualities are an anti-thesis of what the NHS stood for in the past.

The authors end by showing how Scotland and Wales have retained the NHS as a public service with minor reforms. Scotland, in fact, did a reversal of the purchaser-provider split and took over the direct administration by closing market options and Wales did not adopt the foundation trust model and have re-emphasised free access and commitment to social democracy. They have been able to move away from the dominant 'there is no alternative' slogan. As a public health scholar it is important to note how governments represent and facilitate private and corporate interests and have increasingly started behaving like the for-profit sector in the name of choice, plurality and financial efficiency and have moved away from values like justice and equity.
By the end of the book the reader realises the significance of the word ‘plot’, that may have seemed value laden in the beginning, but through the excellent unravelling of the process and sequence of events that follow over the decade, the word used seems apt. The book demands the reader to see the need to defend and strengthen public health systems. Probably, the only thing lacking in the book is the public perception to the changes. Even if people were unaware of the changes at the policy level what were their experiences with the system? There is only one instance given where the community health staff resisted major changes but it would be interesting to note other voices of resistance and dissent within the system and the Labour Party itself, the Party that created the NHS as a public service in 1948 and was considered its proudest achievement.

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Naveeda Khan, Muslim Becoming: Aspirations and Skepticism in Pakistan, New Delhi, Orient Black Swan, 2012.

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Writing an affirmative book on Pakistan, while critiquing its past and present, is undoubtedly a challenge. It becomes especially so for a scholar living and working on US soil at a time when the US Secretary of State is at pains to underscore the existential threat posed to the state of Pakistan by Islamist forces it seems unable (or unwilling) to rein in. Naveeda Khan, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, attempts to do the impossible; she makes a valiant effort to pick out signs of plenitude from the chaos of contradictions and controversies and build a case for the future. Muslim Becoming: Aspirations and Skepticism in Pakistan—as the name suggests—tries to look at both sides of the coin. She uses a range of vignettes to bolster her argument: the religious conflicts and violence emanating from neighbourhood mosques, the appropriation of Iqbal’s poetic legacy for political purposes, the nuances of religious praxis among ordinary Pakistanis, the threat of violent disagreement that simmers below the surface of civilised discourse on state and society.

Khan studies mosques as spaces of Muslim aspirations, as sites that allow Muslims to become better Muslims, as scenes that witness public piety but also as spaces for conflagrations to burst out through killings and bloodshed. Working on the oft-repeated assertion that Pakistan, the Land of the Pure, is a mosque, she goes on to probe what it means to be a Muslim in Pakistan today. Spelling out the different ways in which a mosque is appropriated (‘qabza karna’)—be it illegal occupancy of its land or building or hijacking it for sectarian differences among the Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-e-Hadis et al.—Khan views the proliferations of mosques in post-1947 Pakistan and their functioning either through elected
mosque committees as in the early days or the more blatant use of muscle power in recent times as a form of striving: ‘These expressions of striving not only tie religious and moral developments to the development of the nation-state but also to the imagination of an earlier era of Islam’. In tracing the increasing politicisation of these essentially religious spaces she delineates the ties and tensions, the aspirations and scepticism within social groupings. Khan also takes in, among other things, ‘everyday expressions of religiosity (that) simultaneously impinge upon the local, the political, and the spiritual, in the temporal registers of possible pasts and futures’.

Khan also revisits the legacy of Muhammad Iqbal, the visionary poet who first propounded the idea of a separate Muslim homeland. It was Iqbal who expressed—in hauntingly evocative poetry—the disquiet that afflicted the Muslim mind in a manner that no one had ever attempted before. This disquiet found expression in different ways: there was the sorrow over the loss of freedom or power of any Islamic race, whether in the distant past or the present; concern about the future of the Islamic countries subject to European hegemony; and suspicion and distrust of western powers that had, in the first place, plotted and brought about the downfall of Muslim rule everywhere. In a rejoinder to his own famous *Shikwa* (Complaint), *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (Answer to the Complaint, both published in *Bang-e-Dara*, ‘The Call of the Road’, 1924), Iqbal had declared:

> The tumult caused by the Bulgar onslaught and aggression  
> Is to rouse you out of complacency and gird your loins for action.  
> Presume not that to hurt your feelings, it is a sinister device  
> It is a challenge to your self-respect, it is a call to sacrifice  
> Why tremble at the snorting of the chargers of your foes?  
> The flame of truth is not snuffed out by the breath the enemy blows. (Iqbal, 1981)

Iqbal is also single-handedly responsible for introducing modern philosophical concepts, gleaned from his study in Europe, and vastly broadening the scope of the existing intellectual discourses among educated Muslims, keeping it all the while tethered to a quintessentially religious mooring. Khan places Iqbal’s political and religious doctrine with other Muslim thinkers whose writings continue to influence modern-day Pakistanis—Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi of a generation before and contemporaries such as Maulana Abul ala Maududi and Muhammad Asad, an Austrian Jew who converted to Islam in 1926. She writes:

Comparing the three thinkers, Iqbal, Asad and Maududi, it is clear that each was interested in Muslims yet to come. In some ways Asad’s understanding of Muslim aspiration was most similar to Iqbal’s. He drew upon similar language of the Muslims to reconstitute themselves. He advocated a project of Muslim self-making that aligned itself both to the past of Islam and the historical present so that the new Muslim might be the best expression of Islamic renewal in the modern world. And he urged that Muslims always keep in mind their own finitude in striving towards absolute perfection. (p. 87)
Of course, it is a different matter that the aspirational model held out by early Muslim reformers and vision sullied soon after the dream of a separate homeland was achieved. The mard-e-kamil (‘perfect man’) — an archetype for a Muslim who would strive ceaselessly towards self-perfectibility — fell prey to sectarian strife. Khan studies the treatment of the Ahmadis, the anti-Ahmadiyya riots of 1953 and the role of the State in severing their relations to Islam through the constitutional amendments of 1974 declaring them non-Muslims and explores the consequences of this bit of ‘legal history’ in the everyday life of Pakistanis. She then goes on to include Urdu writers such as Mumtaz Mufti and the voices of dissent that make the literature coming out of Pakistan a valuable site for ‘alternative visions and dissent’. She notes that the question ‘Who is a Muslim?’ is asked again and again by different writers with varying degrees of despair.

Regrettably, the affirmative note that Khan sought to strike sounds shaky and frail at best; the realities on the ground, attested by recent events, do not bode well for ‘Muslim becoming’, a theme that underscores every argument in this book. Surely it is a sad day when a scholar, ‘making the argument of a contrarian’, concludes by drawing satisfaction from the ‘consistency’ in the Pakistani State’s relationship to Islam, ‘a consistency in its myriad, many say insincere efforts, to establish authority over Islam’. One is also hard pressed to applaud Khan’s eagerness to ‘affirm’ the aspiration she records among modern Pakistanis, the aam admi, while acknowledging its capacity towards violence.

Reference


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At the very beginning entire team of contributors is to be complimented for their effort to highlight various aspects of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme MGNREGA—both positive and negative, which will help in making corrections and modifications in the programme. Also the book is extremely timely as the Ministry of Rural Development is in the process of bringing about certain changes for better implementation, and therefore the insights presented in this book will be useful to the policy-makers.
The chapters in the book are classified into different subsections which addresses the following issues:

1. Why we need MGNREGA; and puts it in a broader developmental context.
2. How it is being implemented in different parts of the country.
3. What are its impacts?
4. What can be the future prospects associated with this programme?

MGNREGA has been relatively much more successful as compared to any other employment generation programme in the past, and this can be attributed to both economic and political factors. High economic growth but rising inequality, decline in the incidence of poverty but absolute number of poor remaining almost stagnant, decline in share of agriculture in GDP but more than half of the workforce still depending on agriculture—all these contradictions necessarily point towards impoverishment and great economic hardship of the working masses. Employment elasticity during the last decade of rapid economic growth has not been rising, and in fact, declining in many sectors. Declining employment elasticity calls for effective promotion of labour intensive sectors and the opening paper by Indira Hirway identifies the ways and means of achieving productive and sustainable employment generation through proper implementation of this programme. Gerry Rodgers in fact argues that MGNREGA should not be seen as merely as an employment goal, but rather should be expressed as development goal encompassing different policy parameters. Citing various international experiences Eduardo and Alarcon argued that such large scale programmes exert tremendous pressure on national capacities and institutions and therefore for any successful implementation local institutions should have the capacity to implement it. Therefore, all the three papers in the first section tries to put MGNREGA in a broader perspective (not limiting it to a rights-based approach) and links this programme with overall sustainable development through people’s participation. Good economic logic often fails to yield the desired results if it is not backed by political will. The book therefore correctly identifies the strong political compulsion of the Congress Party to get back its pro-poor image as one of the success factors.

Section 2 looks into the working/implementation of MGNREGA across different regions of the country through primary field-based survey. The overarching message that emerges from this section is that in spite of being a demand driven programme, for successful implementation of MGNREGA, either the State or civil society has to play a leading role. If either of them is found lacking, this programme is never going to achieve its stated objective given the extremely low ability of the poor to realise their entitlements. The first chapter in this section (Chapter 5) analyses the implementation of MGNREGA and delivery gaps in selected areas of Bihar and Jharkhand. Both these states are relatively backward States with low agricultural productivity, low human development achievements, and low per capita income. Also, a considerable proportion of the population in
these two states belongs to the marginalised groups. Though this programme is universal across rural India, the marginalised groups are the ones who are likely to benefit maximum from this programme. In both the States, SCs and STs were the major beneficiaries of this programme. Lack of government initiative and civil society intervention has primarily resulted in poor implementation of this programme in the state.

An interesting fact brought out by this study is the decline in the proportion of households at successive stages of implementation of this programme—right from awareness up to getting jobs. For instance, in Bihar, 94 per cent of surveyed households were aware about this programme, 72 per cent were interested, but only 25 per cent ended up getting jobs. Lower literacy, low administrative abilities at local levels and the absence of civil society mobilisation have been sighted as possible reasons for this enormous demand and delivery gap. However, this being a primary field research based study, the paper should have been more specific in pointing out the lacunae/drawbacks at different stages of this programme (may be through case studies). Moreover, there is no social group-wise segregation of days of employment, wages, period of payment of wages in the paper for the villages surveyed. This would have really highlighted the extent to which the marginalised groups have benefited from the programme, and would have further enriched the analysis.

The study on Rajasthan in the following chapter brings out more succinctly the ground realities associated with the implementation of this programme. One of the primary reasons why Rajasthan is doing much better in various aspects of implementation of this programme is the awareness among the masses through right to work movements which had been organised by various civil society organisations for several years prior to the implementation of this programme. What is really interesting about this study is that through case study evidence it brings out the local power dynamics, and hence, it points out that Rajasthan is no way better than poor performing states in terms of corruption and malpractices associated with this programme (paying bribes to the sarpanch, the sarpanch preferring his own associates in providing employment, etc.). Despite corruption at the local level, high degree of awareness among local people facilitated through long history of civil society intervention has resulted in better implementation of this programme in the state.

The success in Andhra Pradesh can be primarily attributed to the synergy between local administration and civil society organisations. Lack of demand for work has been cited as the principal reason for poor implementation of this programme in the Punjab (mentioned in Chapter 8). Despite having the highest Scheduled Caste (SC) population among major states, implementation of this programme has been rather lacklustre, and this according to the authors has been due to high demand in agriculture during peak season (three months) during which agricultural wages are thrice that of MGNREGA wages, and work availability in construction sector in urban and semi-urban areas during the rest of the season. However, if this had been the case then unemployment rate in Punjab should have
been lower than the national average. This is not the case, and therefore deserves some explanation.

Creation of productive assets and ensuring rural livelihood are among the primary objectives of this programme. The following section brings into focus the impact of this programme on a whole range of parameters in rural India and comes out with some very constructive policy recommendations based on grass-root evidence from various micro-studies. Analysing different kinds of works undertaken in this programme Amita Shah (Chapter 9) noted that issues concerning durability and future maintenance of the assets created remain un-addressed and more emphasis is given on work selection rather than on future management mechanisms of the works already carried out. This will inhibit sustainable development of rural areas and this programme will remain only as an employment generation programme without any developmental objective. For MGNREGA to play an important role in rural development she recommended convergence of this programme with various other developmental programmes without substituting funds earmarked for MGNREGA. The importance on convergence was highlighted in the following chapter as well (Chapter 10) by T. Haque who further argued that in the absence of proper education and skill training of local people at village level the potential of durable assets created under this programme will remain under-utilised.

Collating various micro-level studies related to impact of MGNREGA on agricultural labour market, and agricultural output, D. N. Reddy (Chapter 11) noted that the blanket blame on MGNREGA for labour shortages and higher wages in agriculture could not be established from the evidence emanating from such micro-level studies. Studies have indicated that peak-time agricultural wages and several types of non-agricultural wages were much higher than MGNREGA wages. The process of agricultural mechanisation has been going on for the last two–three decades and this has resulted in reduced days of employment for the migrant workers which in turn has discouraged migration for agricultural work. The often quoted argument that MGNREGA has resulted in labour shortage causing mechanisation is not always the case. The paper therefore correctly suggested that though the micro-level studies should not be generalised they are at least indicative of emerging trends. The author pointed out that in general some procedural changes like labour calendar at the regional level (basically indicating peak agricultural season during which MGNREGA should be suspended) can correct this problem of labour shortage in agriculture.

The female participation in MGNREGA has been much higher than the stipulated minimum of one-third and this has resulted in empowerment of women giving them increased consumption options, and more importantly increased participation in household decision making. This has been an unintended positive outcome of this programme (Chapter 12). However, greater awareness campaigns and grass-root mobilisation are needed to bring about a significant change in socio-economic participation of females.

Finally, the last section deals with governance issues associated with the implementation of this programme. Inadequate support structure at the grass-root
level has been the primary reason why outcomes have fallen short of expectations. In addition to grass-root mobilisation, creation of a national authority for monitoring, and proper deployment of human resources has been suggested to achieve the twin objectives of creating productive assets through employment generation.

This book is a must-read for policy-makers (who can try and implement policy changes in order to bring down the loopholes in the present system) as well as researchers who can get a clearer picture on what to evaluate, how to evaluate and how to place a specific national programme in the larger framework of development economics.

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Conflicts and disasters are more common and affecting more people now than ever before. Millions are fleeing from their homes to escape persecution and pain, inevitable in such situations. In the new, unfamiliar place they, however, end up worse off, suffering some of the most traumatic experiences, and where even for their bare survival they depend on help. The effort of the international humanitarian community in assisting and protecting people affected by conflicts and disasters is the subject of this fascinating book.

Most of those involved in humanitarian work generally see their role simply as rushing relief supplies and deploying medical personnel to wherever they may be needed. However, for Elizabeth Ferris, the author of this brilliant book, ‘the essence of the humanitarian enterprise is protection’. Protection is concerned with the real life-and-death issues: ‘taking action to stop refugees from being pushed back across borders, civilians from being massacred by vigilantes or insurgents, and women being raped by marauding gangs and providing support to desperate people who use desperate measures to try to find safety in distant lands’. Its key concern is the protection of vulnerable groups.

Protection has now acquired a new prominence on the agenda of the international humanitarian community. Policies, manuals, guidelines and monitoring indicators are being churned out incessantly, with protection becoming a part of mainstream practice. This has also emerged as a popular subject for discussion in conferences, as also with the authors of books, journal articles, and so on. But the indiscriminate use of protection in all kinds of activities—from preventing violence by determined terrorists groups to protecting women from being raped—is robbing it of its distinctive meaning. This is becoming worrisome, especially to the author of this book, a strong protection protagonist.

The author provides in her inimitable manner an excellent overview of the entire humanitarian enterprise. The book, covering all aspects of humanitarian work, is neatly divided into 10 chapters, each dealing comprehensively with diverse topics: international law, human rights, humanitarian assistance, the role of UN and NGOs, global governance, humanitarian dilemmas, natural disasters, financing issues, challenges facing humanitarian actors, and finally observations and conclusions. The chapters on humanitarian principles and international law, the UN and NGOs in humanitarian operations, and global governance, in particular, provide information on many new developments and are highly illuminating.

The author provides a brief history of protection, describing how protection as a concept emerged from international humanitarian law, refugee law, and human rights law. The human rights law emerged later in the aftermath of Second World War. The lawyers in these three specialist fields of international refugee law, humanitarian law, and human rights law dominated the 1980s. But all these laws, international standards and peacekeepers proved insufficient to protect people on the ground. These failed to prevent ethnic conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia, for example. In the 1990s, protection thus emerged as a reaction to the failure of the international community to prevent widespread bloodshed. Both human rights and protection have since emerged as areas of wide concern today, and as the author points out, ‘many use the term “protection” as shorthand for a person’s basic human rights’.

The author while focusing on the many actors who are involved in assisting and protecting civilians quotes from a study, which concludes that ‘most people survive and do so without assistance from external parties’. She also agrees with this widely held view that in emergencies, such as earthquakes, it is essentially the initial local effort that saves most of the lives. Subsequently, other actors arrive on the scene (governments, UN, NGOs, and other agencies, even celebrities) and share the responsibility to provide further relief and resettlement assistance.

Traditionally, victims of disasters are provided urgently needed basic relief supplies, such as food and medicine, but the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami experience brought to the fore the need for their protection as well. Even in the face of this tragedy, widespread human rights abuses were reported in providing relief and long-term assistance. The international humanitarian community is now of the view that those affected by floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions also deserve protection by the humanitarian community the same way as the people rendered as refugees due to conflicts. In addition, the author also sees climate change related displacement as a major future challenge for the international humanitarian community.

The task of delivering humanitarian assistance is becoming complex and a challenging one. It is getting more difficult, risky and politicised. Well-meaning humanitarian workers increasingly face a danger to their lives. In fact, they have been attacked in many places just for doing their duty of protecting innocent civilians from being massacred. Governments and even non-state actors often prevent humanitarian aid from reaching its intended recipients for their own reasons. This
happens because in some countries international humanitarian aid is seen as a cover for the designs of Western nations to promote activities that have no resemblance whatever to the proclaimed lofty international humanitarian principles.

The perception that humanitarian actors should be allowed to function freely because they are independent and impartial has changed, particularly in parts of the Islamic world, where much humanitarian work is focused. The author seems inclined to agree with this changed perception: ‘as a social scientist, I have recognised from the beginning of my engagement in humanitarian efforts that the international response to the victims of war and disaster depends more on politics than on altruism’.

The conclusion of this study is that while the role of humanitarian agencies in protecting people affected by conflicts and disasters is vital, that is not a panacea for all their sufferings. In spite of the growing focus on protection, and a plethora of international standards, guidelines and manuals, neither the risk to people of losing their lives has decreased, nor the gender-based violence as a weapon of war has ceased to be used against civilians. In the Middle East, even the efforts of the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) could not ensure protection of the Palestinian civilians against the repeated Israeli attacks in Gaza. Donor pressures on the Sri Lankan government to evacuate civilians in the final stages of military action against insurgents simply did not work. She argues that it is therefore important that international community holds political leaders and leaders of armed groups accountable for protecting their own people. There is a limit to what humanitarian protection can do, and recognising this limitation may well pave the way towards more effective measures that would ensure the physical protection of civilians.

This book is focused on issues surrounding humanitarian aid for victims of conflicts and disasters. The kind of international humanitarian resources to assist and protect these victims, as discussed in this book, does not however exist for those displaced by development, though they also undergo similar horrendous experiences. They also lose their lands, homes, jobs, social networks and cultural moorings, to name a few of their precious possessions—a phenomenon which Michael Cernea has termed as ‘the risks of impoverishment’. Human rights abuses abound in their situation as well. It would this seem unfair to treat victims of development differently. Often, even national efforts also fail them. Governments are generally hesitant even to adopt resettlement policies to protect displaced people, and where they exist, to implement them firmly.

The fact is that there is much that development actors can learn from the international humanitarian experience. Similarly, humanitarian actors involved in managing conflicts and disasters can also learn much from the experiences of those managing displacement from development. Their approach to resettlement involving advance planning, including initial social impact assessment, relocation, resettlement and development, has some useful lessons. It must however be admitted that the resettlement planners of development-induced displacement are helped by the fact that displacement can be foreseen much before it occurs, which
is not the case with disasters. For example, an earthquake hits an area without any warning signal and the first priority then is to rush relief and to save the lives that are in grave danger. This does not permit the humanitarian actors the luxury of time required for meticulous prior planning of long-term resettlement assistance and development. Still, what they can learn is to go beyond short-termism in rebuilding the lives of survivors, as the resettlement planners must do for those affected by development projects.

The author’s own personal experiences with humanitarian work beginning since 1985, and years of research work supported by an incredibly extensive review of the existing literature have gone into the writing of this remarkable book. Ferris’s book should be essential reading for students pursuing courses on humanitarian aid, refugees, disaster management, human rights, international relations, international and UN studies, and also development displacements. Overall, this is an outstanding contribution to the literature on one of the most challenging tasks confronting the international humanitarian community today.

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Rights of Adolescent Girls in India: A Critical Look at Laws and Policies by Saumya Uma is a timely publication about the most neglected segment of our society, namely adolescent girls. Perceived as burden by their parents, neglected by policy-makers, subordinated by a patriarchal system, crushed before they bloom due to omnipresent misogyny; adolescent girls in India have to tread a tight rope.

The author rightly avers that in India experiences of adolescence for girls are greatly different from that for boys. For boys, adolescence is marked by greater autonomy in decision making about their careers, financial independence, enhanced status and expanded participation in family, community and public life. While for girls it is always differential treatment as compared to their male counterparts. Amartya Sen has highlighted seven types of inequalities that women and girls have to face throughout their life cycle—from womb to tomb.

Chapter 1 defines the analytical perspective informed by ‘theory of social exclusion’ of the book that discusses six crucial issues pertaining to adolescent girls’ rights: health, education, right to and rights in work, age of marriage and agency in marriage, violence against girls and juvenile justice.

In Chapter 2, while providing situational analysis on the subject, the author highlights major indicators for Status of Girls in India. She focuses on the most mind-boggling problems faced by adolescent girls such as decision-making in the
day-to-day life, self-dependence and career. Dictatorial atmosphere in the family, educational institutions and in the community life, make adolescents feel left out of the decision-making processes affecting their lives. Both, in private and in the public spheres, we need to give more space for development to the adolescent girls.

In Chapter 3, on Law and Policy Framework, the author shows the apathy of government towards adolescent girls. Even in the Youth Reports churned out by the Ministry of Youth Affairs hardly any serious consideration is given to rights of girls as citizens. Most of the schemes and programmes for girls are guided by a stereotypical understanding of girls’ roles as future wives and home-makers. The author has meticulously described existing provisions for girls in the law and has critically examined the minimum legal age as defined by the national legislations in India.

Adolescent girls’ struggle for formal and vocational education is discussed in Chapter 4 titled ‘Education as a Tool for Empowerment’. The most challenging issue is the dropping out of adolescent girls from school due to their inability to pass in mathematics, science and English. There is an urgent need for bridge courses, remedial education, distance- and IT-enabled courses and vocational training to be made available to girls from marginalised sections. Industrial Training Institutes run by the Government of India have a strong gender-bias and give training to girls only for beautician, secretarial practice, stenography, Computer Operator and Programming Assistant (COPA) and tailoring, while boys get training for hundreds of courses.

Chapter 5 on Girls at Work focuses on both paid and unpaid work of adolescent girls. In the intra-household distribution of labour, girls shoulder the major burden of economic, procreative and family responsibilities. Sexual abuse at the work-place is a hidden burden that a girl worker endures. The child labour policies, however, do not spell out anything specific to girl child workers. There is no implementation of prohibition of girls working in hazardous occupations as per the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

Transnational corporations and multinational corporations have long realised that the best way to reduce the wage bill and to enhance profits is to move parts of the production process to the informal/unorganised sector of poorer countries like India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, etc. The cheap labour of Asian adolescent girls and young women is regarded as the most lucrative way to enhance profits. Globalisation is riding on the back of millions of poor girls and women and child workers in the margins of the economy.

Chapter 6 provides the health profile of adolescent girls. The chapter examines factors that contribute to a healthy life. Health challenges concerning a girl child cover mortality, morbidity, nutritional status and reproductive health and linked to these are environmental degradations, violence and occupational hazards, all of which have implications for her health status. It is intricately related to the socio-economic status of the households to which she belongs. Due to the competing demands on their time and energy as well as their socialisation, girls tend
to neglect their health. The lesser access to food coupled with neglect invariably leads to a poor nutritional status and a state of ill health for most of the girls. Changing determinants in the survival struggles of girls have created an alarming situation that prevents India to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Chapter 7 on Age of Marriage and Agency in Marriage is historiographically illuminating. Many girls already in poor health, are married between the ages of 14 and 16. They bear children while still young and malnourished themselves. An upswing of female deaths in the age group 15–19 years indicates the high mortality rate of teenage mothers. Nearly 45 per cent of Indian girls are married off before they attain majority. Child marriages and teenage pregnancy with and outside marriage are the major problems faced by girls in the developing world.

Chapter 8 on violence against girls in their private and public lives shows that adolescent girls account for more than their share of abortion related complications and deaths. Unwed pregnant girls when faced with unintended pregnancy, take desperate measure resulting into health risks of unsafe abortions. Domestic violence in parental and matrimonial home, battering, physical tears, death due to bleeding, rape, sexual harassment at home, workplace and public places, eve teasing, kidnapping and abduction, prostitution, sexual assault, molestation, rape, child sexual abuse, nuisance calls cause psychological disturbances among girls and women and throw a major health burden on girls. The trauma of sexual violence sparks off tension and anxiety at a dangerous level.

Engaging with the juvenile justice system, Chapter 9 brings out operation of The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 that covers functioning of five types of institutions dealing with adolescents: observation homes, children’s homes, special homes, shelter homes and after care organizations. Bureaucratic lethargy, political vested interests, sexual exploitation of girls, embezzlement of funds earmarked for food, education, vocational training, and lack of transparency have eroded credibility of the Act. NGOs and social work institutions are the only conscience keepers.

Chapter 10 on state responsibility locates the framework of state responsibility under international human rights law. The National Commission for Children has a special mandate for girls. The very first sentence in the chapter aptly projects needs and aspirations of adolescent girls, ‘Adolescent girls are not merely “claimants” or “beneficiaries” of pre-defined rights; they play an important role in defining the contents of rights’.

Chapter 11 on ‘Claiming Ownership of the Future: Some Adolescent Girls Visions’ brings out voices of girls through survey research based on a representative sample of 112 adolescent girls from underprivileged communities in Mumbai conducted by Vacha. The main highlights of the study speak volumes about agency of adolescent girls who are convinced about the importance of education for empowerment; perceive child/early marriages as a major impediment to their growth; aspire to be economically independent in their future life; are extremely concerned about personal safety and security; deplore honour crimes and assert the right of girls to choose their life partners; are conscious of societal
discrimination and injustice against girls, and wish to see it eradicated; do not give adequate importance to aspects of health, food and nutrition; feel positive about government schemes, but also emphasise the need for increased focus on education and personal safety of girls; reiterate the need for proper implementation of laws; cherish spending time with friends, going out, playing and studying; wish to focus on personality development and improving life skills, such as acquiring self-confidence and skills in independent decision-making; and believe that self-assertion of rights is a key to their empowerment.

Let the Girls Bloom

Adolescent girls are surpassing earlier milestones in the area of education, vocation, sports and cultural activities by displaying tremendous grit and hard work. They are setting new benchmarks in their success stories in spite of socio-economic and cultural hurdles. Now the state and civil society need to remove the institutional and cultural constraints so that the adolescent girls can realise their dreams. Providing good and healthy role models for adolescent girls is very important.

This book is a valuable contribution in terms of its analytical rigour, right based perspective and crucial strategic thinking for empowerment of adolescent girls. This book is a must-read for educationists, thinking youth, policy-makers and practitioners dealing with problems and challenges of girls and youth in general.

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Women have played a hugely important role in the politics of Manipur, which is clearly the most conflict-affected state in the North-east today. The author’s study is therefore to be warmly welcomed. She deals with women’s contributions in the areas of socio-economic and political development in Manipur. It looks into the impact of processes such as modernisation, industrialisation, globalisation and science and technology in the context of women’s movements in the state. It also examines the issues of marginalisation of women, their values, rights, liberties, education and other related activities of women in the state in the national and global context drawing liberally on various official and non-official reports from the government and non-government agencies including the UN reports. Bimola Devi, in her Foreword, notes that women’s organisation as ‘pressure groups’ is a comparatively recent field of study. In Manipur, the history of women’s groups

though not organised formally have acted as ‘pressure groups’ for a long time
stretching back into the monarchical past. She explains their origin in the ‘Lallup’
system, by which every male member of the family had to work in the palace 10
days out of 40 and join the king in his frequent military campaigns. This made
women familiar with the social, economic and political affairs of the state, which
had an impact on their families. They became aware that womenfolk could act as
a collective force to correct even wrong-doings in administrative and political
affairs.

The author has examined the working and role of women’s organisations in
different communities of the state such as the Meiteis, the Nagas, the Kukis and
Meitei Pangals (Muslims) especially during the period after the state’s integration
with India in 1949. The book is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter the
author stresses the importance of women’s associations as ‘pressure groups’ in
the socio-economic and political context of Manipur today. The increasing dis-
contents of the women and the general public in a variety of areas in social life are
articulated through ‘pressure groups’ and their activities, which the author views
as a positive feature of democracy. These make democracy in an underdeveloped
society more functional. This chapter also explains the objectives and methodol-
ogy of the study, reviews the literature and highlights its importance. The second
chapter is a theoretical discourse on the meaning and role of ‘pressure groups’ in
society. Such ‘pressure groups’ arise in a democratic society with particular inter-
ests, aims and aspirations to exercise pressure to advance their interests. They are
thus relevant and important in a democracy. The third chapter deals with women’s
organisations and ‘pressure groups’ especially in Manipur. In spite of gender
inequality and patriarchy, Manipuri women are contributing to social change in
the state. The author deals with the First Nupi Lal (‘first women’s war’) of 1904
and the second Nupi Lal (‘second women’s war’) of 1939–40. The first Nupi Lal
1904 was a protest by women against the ruling of Political Agent Maxwell that
the Meitei men should rebuild colonial bungalows destroyed by arson. The activ-
isim of the Meitei women forced Maxwell to rescind his order and reach a com-
promise. Protests about the control of the rice harvest began in the 1920s. These
culminated in the ‘second Nupi Lal’.

The agitation began in 1939 at the huge market of over 6,000 women in the
capital Imphal. The British officials were never successful in imposing order on
the market. Manipuri women were seen by the British as very independent and
prone to take direct action to get their way.

The Second Nupilal of 1939–40 was a watershed in Manipur’s politics. It began
as a mass protest against the economic exploitation of the rice supply by Marwari
traders, who were aided and abetted by a corrupt king. It developed into a catalyst
for the movement for democratic reform, providing a popular platform underpin-
ing the political activism of the elites which overthrew the feudal regime. It
witnessed the emergence of Hijam Irabot Singh, the radical social reformer. The
‘second women’s war’ succeeded in opening up to public debate issues which
had previously been the concern only of the small emergent political elite, the
incompetence, nepotism and corruption of the rule of Maharajah Chura Chand and the need for constitutional reforms. The British had noted the high social and economic status of women in Meitei society. Despite the dominance of Hinduism in the plains, Meitei women suffered none of the humiliating oppression of their sisters elsewhere. Women controlled the food supplies and the market and were a dominant economic force. From early British days they had shown themselves organised enough to take mass action.

Chapter IV deals with women’s organisations and movements after Manipur’s integration with India in 1949. After 1950, women started working within the framework of formal organisational structures and sometimes with other frontal organisations. In the 1980s, the law and order situation became critical in Manipur. Heavy combing operations against militants made for civic unrest on a wide scale. After a militant attack on a CRPF camp in Patsoi Khunnou bazaar, there was a combing operation, which resulted in harassment of innocent citizens. Women were raped and one woman who was hiding in the paddy store with her child was killed. All the people in the area including women were made to stand in the sun for long without food. Women’s activism came to the fore and they started guarding the locality from the armed forces of the state. Such activist women have come to be known as ‘Meira paibis’ (‘women torchbearers’). This is a movement which still continues taking up social issues. The author notes the ripple effect of peripheral social movements. She notes women’s naked protest in front of the Assam Rifles headquarters in protest against the soldiers’ rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama Devi in 2004. She also notes the indefinite fast demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) undertaken by Irom Sharmila Chanu who has drawn worldwide attention.

In Chapter V, the author begins by noting that while the formal structures of power consisting of the judiciary, executive and legislative have failed to empower women, the third structure of power consisting of unofficial ‘pressure groups’ are coming into their own. Democratic liberalisation too, she boldly asserts, has not led to any liberation for women because of the ‘dominant patriarchal philosophy, the archaic traditions of the past, the obsolete middle class morals, false consciousness of liberation and the tight noose of modernism, fusionism and consumerism’. So far not more than three women have been elected to the state legislative assembly in Manipur all of them wives of top politicians! On the other hand one witnesses the active role of women in informal organisations such as the ‘Meira Paibis’. Democratic decentralisation in the form of elected Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), as a result of which more than a million women have entered local politics, may be a way forward. But district councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in the hill areas of Manipur have not yet come into existence and the states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, remain out of the purview of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution.

The author movingly states that though much has been written about women’s contributions, such writings have actually failed to deepen our understanding of the needs and deprivations of women. Women’s movements therefore have to
save women from further marginalisation and provide empowerment for women’s achievement of self-respect, equity and equality.

The final chapter calls for the political empowerment of women to pass appropriate legislations for enhancing women’s participation. After reading this brilliant work one is left in admiration of the author’s courage clarity and commitment to the cause of women’s welfare and development. The book is not just an academic treatise but an activist document coming out of the turmoil that affects Manipur today. One is compelled to wish best of luck for the author in her future endeavours both academic and activist so that the brave women of Manipur are able to enjoy their rightful position in society. The book is very well produced with an attractive cover page.

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