

Geographies Do Matter

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The publication of this book has to be heartily welcomed for its significant contribution to critical geographical work on India. The collection of 15 essays draws on contributions of scholars situated in India, western Europe, and the US. These essays are on different topics and may look very diverse, without a common base. However, the authors have woven a persuasive tapestry around concerns of emergent socio-political-economic formations in national, urban and rural settings that underlies the connectedness between global and local. The geographically embedded treatment of historical as well as contemporary themes reasserts the reconfigured territorialities and spaces in a (presumably) borderless globalising world.

The chapters are as varied as 'Idioms, Symbolism and Divisions: Black and White Towns in Madras, 1652-1850' to a discussion of 'Carbon Colonies, from Local Use Value to Global Exchange in Climatic Forestry'. Each study has a quality and standing of its own. Anyone who is interested in India's historical and contemporary developments – in India or abroad – will find the approaches interesting and informative.

New Geographical Concerns

The book is more than a collection of interesting essays. It is geographically rooted – often expressing the specific value of such roots. The authors have brought out the contextual specificities of the spatial embeddedness of human experiences within India and her relations with the outside world. The treatment of various topics in the book draws upon the interlinked key questions within the overall realm of geography: who, what, where and why. In doing so, the book foregrounds notions such as place, space and territory as essential for understanding the "ins" and "outs" of people in the way they (have to) organise their living environments, their villages and cities, regions and nations as well in their world at large. Indeed, geographies do matter.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Geographies of India

edited by Saraswati Raju, M Satish Kumar and Stuart Corbridge; *Sage Publications, 2006; pp 368, Maps, Rs 695.*

In the past, geography was linked strongly with the exploration of places elsewhere. "Classical geography was the geography of the world and in particular of the non-Greek world".¹ In the 19th and 20th centuries, during colonial times, geographical descriptions and analyses were strongly linked with political interests. For Stanley, the well known scout, the task of geography was evident: new geography and new imperialism. "And whereas you owe so much to geographical knowledge, you must cherish that knowledge and go on acquiring it, you must teach it to your youth so that when they arrive at manhood, each may know that beyond these islands [Great Britain!] there lie vast regions where they also may carve out fortunes as their forefathers did in older times."² This was also true for British India. India's first departments of geography were encouraged by the colonial authorities to take part in the "monstrous machinery of descriptions" (p 14). And there is no information, as the editors observe, "in which way Indian geographers have challenged the imperial geographies in which many individuals must have been trained" (p 15).

The editors point out that the discipline changed significantly in the post-independence years, with much attention for issues of economic development and national reconstruction in the wake of India's Partition in 1947 (p 17). The applied nature of much of this research was encouraged when the National Planning Commission made regional planning a priority in the 1960s. The editors mention the role and position of Moonis Raza as a key person in the promotion and application of interdisciplinary research between geographers and economists, as developed in the Centre for the Study of Regional Development at the Jawaharlal

Nehru University, New Delhi. It has been a privilege and honour for me to have learned much from Moonis Raza, even during his weeks in the hospital.

New geographical concerns are emerging, which are linked with worldwide trends in geographical research such as territories and spaces, networks, agencies, livelihoods, resilience and vulnerability, resources and environments, distances, access, mobility as well as gender in itself and as a cross-cutting concern. However, as the editors observe, contemporary geographical research in India has not maintained the status it deserves and it has also often been unappreciated.³ It must be pointed out that geography has a very crucial subfield, known as human geography. That wording underlines that geography has an ethical imperative: not to behave as inhuman geography. Geographers thus not only investigate why people's places are organised the ways they are, but they also engage in issues why are they the way they should not be – due to internal and external forces (see also Swapna Banerjee-Guha, p 222 in this book).

Wide Canvas

The book has a wide canvas. The historical geographical analysis of Chennai by M Satish Kumar underlines implicitly how India is not an "easy" country to understand. His essay will be of much value for those interested in learning India's spatial organisation – also that of cities – which historically has differed and still differs much from other regions and cities elsewhere. Kumar analyses the socio-spatial formation of Madras in the 16th-18th centuries. At first he traces the colonial division, even separation, between "black" and "white" towns. Then he explains how the formation of the changing urban fabric of the city was linked to battles not only between the British authorities and different caste groups but also between caste groups as such.

The conflicts about the use of space as well of symbols and practices between the so-called right and left-hand caste groups have been intense. They originated around the use of symbols and the right to ritual and social privileges, and had led to interventions by the colonial government

in which it tried to separate parts of the groups spatially. Important at one time, this distinction has disappeared in present-day Chennai. But a detailed analysis of present-day divisions will show that the outlay of the city is not characterised by socio-economic and demographic differences only. In later chapters, the present-day production of urban space and urban politics and corresponding ideas about government, citizenship and participation are discussed. For example, in his study 'Post-Colonial Developmentalities: From the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) to the Delhi Development Authority' Stephen Legg, adopting Foucault's work on governmentalities, argues that much of the debate that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s on the remaking of Delhi were based on colonial forms of governmentality in which security and order are prevalent. He examines the work of the DIT as well as the studies of the Delhi Municipal Organisation Enquiry Committee, and shows how new plans for Delhi's developments did not solve "the question of citizenry and society previously governed by a colonial form of bureaucratic authorisation that had done little to encourage education or popular governmental participation" (p 195).

Political Geography

From a geographically based perspective, the book also deals with the present-day globalisation. Globalisation does not throw away territoriality – on the contrary it gets asserted, as two chapters illustrate this. Bradnock's analysis of 'Territoriality, Kashmir and the Evolving Geopolitics' shows that the ongoing dispute in Kashmir can only be properly understood through the lens of geopolitics. The crisis in Kashmir is undoubtedly bound up with the legacy of British rule in south Asia and the well known economic and security concerns of India and Pakistan. However, as Bradnock clearly demonstrates, it is India's location with reference to a set of more globalised trade routes and geopolitical concerns that Russia, China and the US have stakes in Kashmir, and they are actively involved in the shaping of its political geography. He concludes: "It may be well that if a permanent solution is to be achieved, conceptions of absolute territorial sovereignty will have to be discarded in favour of more subtle,

more nuanced and more reflexive forms of sovereignty, in which the realities of the diverse interests of Kashmiris can be given legitimate expression without threatening the territorial integrity of either India or Pakistan" (p 92). It is a realistic view, but also an optimistic one.

National mapping may also be based on politics and ideology. Historically, in his move for freedom of his country Gandhi walked to boundaries. Stuart Corbridge and Edward Simpson analyse much different forms of present-day mapping of India in their essay 'Militant Cartographies and Traumatic Spaces'. They explain why and how the political geography of India are being imagined anew, contested and partly rewritten by the sponsors of Hindu nationalism in the late 1980s and 1990s. "India was being represented as Hindustan or as Hindudom, an ancient country whose natural borders ran from the Indus to the Eastern Sea and from the Himalayas (including Kashmir, of course) to Kanyakumari". Ayodhya and Banaras are at the centre of this civilisation, and in that context the authors discuss the mapping of the chariot processions for Hindu-based unity as well as the ideological background of the events of December 1992. They also discuss factual

re-mapping on a lower spatial level as took place in Bhuj, after the earthquake in 2001, as the reconstruction reshaped the town and has led to much more separation between different socio-cultural groups. This reconstruction is linked with global networks as NRIs have donated large funds to related groups in the area of Bhuj.

Polarisation of City Space

In 'Post-Modernism, Post-Fordism and Flexibilised Metropolis: Dialectical Images of Mumbai', Swapna Banerjee-Guha discusses the relations between global and local in another context. She analyses Mumbai as "the" Indian metropolis that portrays dialectical images with contradictory articulations of growth and decline at the same time. Globalisation of capital, labour and culture are found to be intrinsically associated with the restructuring process of Mumbai, which goes on to produce extreme heterogeneity. Mumbai demonstrates a new geography of centrality and marginality, a link between ideology and socio-spatial formations and the role of power in controlling urban space. Although Mumbai's position in India as global centre in its economy and all its contradictions, is more or less of common



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knowledge, Banerjee-Guha's analysis of Mumbai as a "heteropolis" of rich and poor is not only informative but also shocking. Heterogeneity has not only lead systematically into "the dualism of the labour market with a distinct division between highly-paid professionals and less skilled or unskilled labour, right up to the architecture and design of the built environment", but "it systematically leads to a greater marginalisation of the poor and a polarisation of the city space" (p 220), which has not been stopped.

In 'From Global to Local: Gendered Discourses, Skills and Embedded Urban Labour Market in India', Saraswati Raju demonstrates the different ways "global" and "local" are linked in Indian urban production. Using data and views from the IDPAD collaborative research project 'Human Resource Development, Gender and Labour Market' carried out with I S A Baud, she shows the effects of globalising processes on the formal employment of women in Delhi as well as in Chennai by analysing vocational training and work activities. She discusses the recent trends in the urban labour market and the demands they make on the labour pool, particularly on women working lower down in organisational hierarchies. She also analyses the institutional structures available for the creation of such labour pools, and reports about the gendered experiences of men and women trainees in vocational institutes in Delhi who later on enter the workforce in export-oriented garments and electronic firms. She focuses on "the centrality of gendered discourses informing labour market opportunities that on the one hand aim for an international reach, but on the other hand remain firmly embedded in the local/national context in which labour and skills are produced and institutionalised" (p 103). She explains how globalising processes intersect the local.

In addition to regional differences that remain crucial, localised caste hierarchies and regional policies impact the composition of the student's pool at the vocational training institutes – ITIs and polytechnics. In Delhi and Chennai, gender and caste intersect with each other in very different ways. Chennai is characterised by an educationally progressive environment for women and as such the avenues of

vocational training, placed as they are at the lower end of educational hierarchy, did not hold much attraction for high castes and a disproportionately higher numbers came from the lower castes. In contrast, "for the generally conservative high and intermediate castes in Delhi... sending daughters to educational institutes was seen as a progressive step in itself" (p 111). Thus, the students were a mix from all caste groups. Delhi and Chennai also had different hiring practices. In Chennai the enterprises were more professional in their outreach to prospective workers because of which the trained women could access the available opportunities. In Delhi only big firms were advertising through employment exchanges or newspaper advertisements and other firms resorted to "word of mouth" or displays at factories for employment which were out of reach for most women in Delhi with relatively more restricted physical mobility and social sanctions. Thus, "the bigger the firms the lesser was the bias towards employing women" (p 114). Also, the differences were striking between Delhi and Chennai regarding the impact of patriarchal structures on vocational training and choices for work by younger women. "In addition to the more liberal environment for women in the south, the low-caste composition of women student/workers has a much weaker patriarchal hold on their lives" (p 117). Raju's essay clearly shows how labour market dynamics are not straitjacketed economic responses to global demands. Analysis of global issues asks for territorially entrenched and much nuanced research.

Geography of Power over Labour

Sharad Chari uses Marxist views in his analysis of 'Social Labour and the Geography of Work in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu'. Work in Tiruppur's industrial units centres on the manufacture of banians or knitted undershorts for the domestic market, as well as fashion garments, primarily for the export market. Sharad Chari explores the social character of the variety of labour that makes an entire town work for the global economy. Travelling through Tiruppur's "baroque industrial cluster" he tries to explain by detailed analysis the geography of power over social labour by sketching the social organisation of the networked

production and key forms of power over contracting in the town. Further, he analyses labour and gender in spatially and temporally fragmented work, and aims to show how, "through the work of social labour, value, which is a product of cooperation and coordination of diverse labours, is offered to capital as a gift" (p 145). He sets forth how "places like Tiruppur don't just offer cheap labour, they offer the benefits of a complete package of social relations, of which low wages and insecure workers' rights are ingredients. More important are 'local work rules', forms of knowledge and control through which work across dispersed workers is integrated; in other words social labour" (p 156). The conclusion is that "the mode of deployment of social labour becomes a means for securing relative surplus value as well as for dominating a differentiated and insecure workforce" (p 160).

Regional disparities within the country do not get much attention in the book. As such Martina Fromhold-Eisebith's study on 'Infotech Industries on the Regional Disparities in India' is a very refreshing inclusion. Her questions are: "does the infotech boom... provide a decisive thrust to regional development? To what extent have areas outside large agglomerations been able to profit from the remarkable increases in firms and employment numbers? What can be expected for the future with respect to the spatial development trends that are merging today?" (p 163). Her answers, based on detailed data, are nuanced. Although the big metropolises are, as usual, the winners of the recent boom, she also mentions signs of some trickle-down and spillover effects to the less advanced urban regions in the country. There is hardly any major region in the country without infotech activities. But "a good future may be on the horizon only for urbanised regions that offer pools of educated people and are endowed well to attract such a labour force, adequately fulfil infrastructural needs, and possess some industrial base and image that can appeal to top entrepreneurs and investors" (p 179). However, as she also underlines, large parts of the country, due to the conditions of their infrastructure and human capital supply, will not be positively affected at all directly. But as a field of application, IT can be of much

use everywhere. That needs a diffusion of the use of IT equipment in the country, which asks for a pronounced strategy of supporting such use. Who will promote such strategy, the IT industries and/or the policymakers?

However, "large parts of the country" are not isolated regions. Also the inhabitants of poor and remote areas are incorporated in the effects of global developments. Although cast in a different mode, the study by Craig Jeffrey and Patricia and Roger Jeffery on 'Schooling, Job and the Quest for Civility in Rural North India' is also about the connection between global transformations and the lives of local actors as they talk about how events such as the September 11, 2001 attacks directly affected the lives of young people growing up in the Bijnor district in western UP. Many youngsters spend long periods debating the events and their implications. Moreover, the fieldwork has shown how educated young people in this district, including committed Muslims with a

madrasa education, were not ideologically opposed to the western models of development and personal progress. But education is still not a common good in Bijnor district as many children, in particular Muslims and Dalits, are not in mainstream schooling. Nevertheless, the number of boys educated in secondary schools rose sharply among the Chamars and the Muslim during the last 15 years "as a result of perception within both groups of the value of Hindi education. Also, economic necessity forces most Muslims and Chamars to send their children to local schools for education" (p 231). And yet education seems to act as a contradictory resource for educated young men. Many were not only excluded from education per se, but also from jobs consonant with their educational status and some felt disillusioned. The trajectories of educated unemployed young men differ and "broadly, it is possible to distinguish between poor and socially isolated Chamars, who frequently fail to find suitable work; poor but socially

well-connected Muslims, who have managed to obtain skilled manual work to building up their urban links; and wealthy and well-connected rich Jat young men, who have used their privileges to find status-preserving employment to fall back on" (p 238).

Political Ecology

At present, within geography much attention is paid to environmental issues. Glyn Williams and Emma Mawdsley's well-argued review piece on 'India's Evolving Political Ecologies' vividly trace the train of thoughts on environment since the Chipko movement. The studies of Gadgil and Guha are critically analysed although the authors recognise the importance of their work. In their opinion, their studies were necessary in challenging dominant narratives of poor people's ignorance, irrationality and responsibility for environmental degradation. "However, a political ecology concerned with environmental justice for the poor needs to look beyond the poor

in its analysis, and a more detailed understanding of India's middle classes is likely to be crucial here" (p 274). The middle classes wield a very significant influence over the operations of public and private institutions. Therefore, it is essential as the authors emphasise, in particular in these neoliberal years that the "environmental conflicts" are not conflicts mainly with the state as such. "A liberation ecology that takes aim at the all-encompassing power of the state may be increasingly at odds with Indian realities" (p 275). As is the case in other developing countries, the state is neither a single or uniform actor, neither always a conspirator in projects of resource extraction from the rural poor. The authors are of the opinion that in a neoliberal India, there has to be a shift from an analysis of the environmental policy of the state to analysing forms of environmental governance, also including the pros and cons of transnational actions, policies and concerns.

Paul Robbin's well-researched analysis of "carbon colonies" critically discusses the changes from "local use value to global exchange in climatic forestry". Given the problems of global warming, there is "the urgency of remembering the relationship between trees, global economy and the hegemony of imperial power" (p 279) as it was through "the logic of colonialism [that] the north passed the burden of sustainable development of the south" (p 296). To a large extent, his position is valid, but in my opinion, it should not be used as an apology for the policies of governments and entrepreneurs in the south to neglect environmental protection and sustainability.

Gendered Geographies

I must add that the essays which I have not discussed do make vital observations, i.e., Vandana Desai's study on 'Women's Social Transformation, NGOs and Globalisation in Urban India', and Annapurna Shaw's 'Decentralisation and Participation in Urban India: Women Community Workers in a Small Town of West Bengal'. Both studies pose the issue of the unequal position of women and their struggles in negotiating urban spaces.

Alison Blunt's gendered geographies on 'Home, Community and Nationality: Anglo-Indian Women in India before and

after Independence' needs special mention as it is of much interest to this Dutch reviewer. In Indonesia, the former Dutch East Indies, the 'Indo-Dutch' [Eurasians] have left the country almost for good and now form a much acculturated faction in the Netherlands. In India the "microscopic community" of Anglo-Indians are recognised as a specific group and have two reserved seats in Parliament. Many did not leave the country, although some created, even before independence, an internal "homeland" in McCluskieganj in rural Bihar. Drawing on archival research and well-articulated interviews, Blunt portrays the historical and actual position of the community. Before independence, Anglo-Indians – English speaking, Christian and culturally more European than Indian – revelled in images of Britain as fatherland and India as motherland, with a dual attachment to two places. Since independence that attachment has been recast as they identify themselves as Indian by nationality and Anglo-Indian by community. They were mainly endogamous in the 1940-50s, but by the 1990s more than half of them were marrying outside the community. Thus, at present, the community is much more assimilating within the society. However, anxieties about the future and status of the community are embodied by Anglo-Indian women and revolve around intermarriage and their ability to raise their children as Anglo-Indian. It is interesting that while the constitutional definition of what it means to be an Anglo-Indian rests on paternal European ancestry, the possibility of maintaining the Anglo-Indianness is in mixed marriages/partnering – better if the mother is Anglo-Indian as she mainly educates the children – although in joint families problems may arise. Overall, at present, Anglo-Indian women are much more assimilating in Indian society, whereby "the very existence of arranged marriages for Anglo-Indians in Calcutta reverses one of the key tenets of a western modernity embodied by women" (p 68).

Reflections

Often reviewing a book is a moment of reflecting on other possibilities, seeking more avenues of information and analysis. Geography books on India are rather

scarce. There is so much to explore. A theme that in my opinion needs renewed attention from a geographical perspective is India's regional differences. Too often regional analyses are confined to macro-level economic data at the expense of substantial regional differences in physical endowments, climatic conditions, social traditions, religious settings, languages as well differences in levels and nature of social and economic development. Research on the linkages between different parts of India from a geographical point of view – centre-state/state-district relations, food distribution, "overpopulation", migration (also marriage migration) as well as the involvement as such with other parts on the country would be fascinating. What intrigues me is how India's joint identity functions? I still remember how a junior colleague in Chennai told me that going to Delhi for him was like going abroad – other people, other languages.

The editors note that the "work of a younger generation of Indian geographers who have begun to engage in traditions of social and cultural analysis that depart from the narrowly 'economic' viewpoint is less well known outside the subject than it should be" (p 18). This lucid book is an invitation to promote the discipline.

I understand that the editors were interested in showcasing what engages geographers in India and abroad about India, which prompted them to bring together authors from across continents for this collection. With this broad-based authorship and variety of well-researched content, I hope that their work would receive the attention it deserves not only in India, but also elsewhere – not only within the geography fraternity, but also from those who are keen observers of India.

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NOTES

- 1 Christian van Paassen, *The Classical Tradition of Geography*, Groningen, 1957.
- 2 Cf Brian Hudson, 'The New Geography and the New Imperialism: 1870-1918', *Antipode*, 9(1977) 2, pp 12-19; p 17. See also Alison Blunt and Jane Wills, *Dissident Geographers*, Harlow, 2000, pp 193-95.
- 3 See also Ana Kapur, *India Geography: Voice of Concern*, New Delhi, 2002.