

SUJATA PATEL (Ed.), *Exploring Sociabilities of Contemporary India*, Orient BlackSwan, 2019, 328 pp., ₹945, ISBN 9789352878475 (Hardcover).

DOI: 10.1177/00490857231188209

Amartya Sen in his richly engaging book *The Argumentative Indian*, while reflecting on ‘Indian Traditions and Western Imagination’, drew our attention to two emerging trends. First, critical responses to colonial hegemonic traditions in the form of new intellectual movements and post-colonial theoretical frameworks. This was aimed at the interrogation of ‘westernised’ readings and interpretations of India that allured to creating a contrasting binary between the West and India and therefore validations of imperialism as the white man’s burden. Second, an urgent need to reclaim the ‘uniqueness’ of Indian tradition through an ‘indigenous’ approach that drew upon a characterisation of Indian culture and society. In light of these emerging trends, he observed that the epistemological moorings of knowledge discourses are produced through forces of dialectic power relations, and second, homogenised interpretations to retrieve and reclaim ‘Indian’ intellectual tradition could overshadow the deep-seated heterogeneities and diversities of India (Sen, 2005, p. 140). Sen’s arguments indicated prominent trends in social and political theory with an upsurge in multiple de-colonising knowledge discourses and post-colonial perspectives along with new epistemological and methodological frameworks rooted in indigenous perspectives.

‘Exploring Sociabilities of Contemporary India’ by Sujata Patel is an exemplary attempt at an in-depth study of these issues with a focussed analysis of how these trends have unfolded within the paradigm of sociological scholarship in India. The book intends to explore, reflect and reconfigure the three most significant themes in the scholarship of sociology in India: kinship-marriage-family; caste-tribe and religion-religiosities, in the broader context of contemporary debates on decolonising ‘academic colonialism’, critiquing ‘methodological nationalism’ as a response and enormous influence of global forces, processes and sensitivities in contemporary times.

The book is a rich compilation of chapters from experts in their specialised fields bringing forth scholarly interventions in response to contemporary debates and dilemmas in sociological discourses and taking forward the discourses in new directions. Each chapter is a significant contribution towards destabilising the ‘given’ constructs, ideas and theoretical tools and pushing towards reimagining and reshaping of concepts, debates and methodological frameworks to find new ways to envision the academic scholarship on sociology in India.

Sujata Patel in her introductory chapter (pp. 3–7) elaborates on contemporary and contextual debates in the discipline and the need to address these concerns in the light of new forms of growing inequalities, social intersections of power, structures and hierarchies and intricate webs of contesting multiple identities. She has established that the theoretical terrain of sociological scholarship in India is rooted in ‘colonial modernity’ where the Eurocentric hegemonic discourses defined and locked the ‘social’ in terms of the study of traditional institutions like family, kinship and caste, religions and tribes. The antithesis to this in the form of ‘methodological nationalism’ (pp. 33–34), to reclaim and recover indigenous approaches, confined themselves to the same categories to produce singular

theories based on a 'glorious past' and therefore an exclusionary understanding of Indian intellectual traditions. The chapters henceforth emerge as dialectic responses of synthesis to address these challenges in more specific contexts, spaces and processes at global, national and regional levels. They make an assertion to re-examine the issues and debates in terms of their manifestations in the everyday lives of people and how they shape people's politics, positions and power relations. In her own words, the book 'argues for a methodological focus that combines a discursive deconstruction, a historical sensitivity and an empirical emphasis on practice' (p. 7).

The structural integration of the chapters is organised through three sections in the book that strive to locate the specific debates and challenges within the larger context of themes mentioned and systematically map out a nuanced approach to engage with the issues, keeping it relevant to the present currents. The collective insight of the volume navigates through multiple terrains mapping across the historical, comparative, empirical, structural, institutional, and ideological social constructions.

The first section critically elaborates on the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological frameworks that have defined with limited perceptions, the assigned 'traditional' themes in sociology, that is, family-marriage-kinship, tribe-caste and religion in India. The chapters make a plausible argument to move beyond the academic scholarship on these themes produced from epistemes of colonial modernity and methodological nationalism (p. 26) and reimagine social structures, processes and practices in the context of existing unequal power relations, structural forms of violence and shifting contours of negotiations. As the section interrogates to expand landscapes of the 'social', a discussion on the tensions between social and contentious 'political', in the light of waves of new forms of dissent, protests, and resistance from all sections of society that gripped the nation in the last couple of years would have nuanced the discourse.

The second section takes forward the project to de-centre the singular and hegemonic discourses that have dominated the scholarship and steps into discursive and critical spaces that acknowledge and seek to include diverse and disparate experiences, structures and processes in various layers of the social system (p. 139, 171). The section is highly relevant to the discourse as the chapters provide a rich illustration of how there is an urgent need to re-evaluate the concepts, themes and debates in the light of changing globalising forces as well as specific regional contexts. Second, it also captures a broader understanding of how multiple identities like caste, religion, gender, and region interact with each other to produce a matrix of power relations impacting the vulnerable and marginalised sections of society (pp. 199, 223, 252). Though there is a chapter that dwells on agency of young women in domestic spaces (p. 137), reflections on more recent trends of new forms of agencies and shifting bargaining positions of women that are continuously transforming the social, political and cultural power dynamics of Indian society, would enrich the discussion.

The third section raises a significant question on the need to incorporate these academic interventions, critical questions and reformulation of pedagogical tools in sociological scholarship in higher educational institutions (pp. 272–276).

The university campus is a vibrant public space and a site of contestation that exhibits and reflects the social power dynamics based on caste, class, gender, language and region, which define the social hierarchies and demarcate spaces of inclusion and exclusion between the powerful and vulnerable. The chapters in this section bring forth the process of knowledge production and dissemination as a part of power politics along with raising concerns around administrative structures, budgetary restraints, lack of institutional autonomy and narrowing of critical spaces in higher educational institutions (pp. 299–301) This section adds up to the discourse by making a strong case for the need to assimilate the critical academic interventions as discussed in the first two sections to actual classroom spaces by introducing new methodological frameworks, opening up avenues for a robust and research-oriented academic culture and envisioning of educational institutions as a transformative space for the marginalised. There has been a plethora of deliberations on university spaces and academic freedom as well as students' protests in different parts of the country which have impacted 'socialibilities' on campus in a different way. A note on that would take forward the discourse on understanding academic scholarship on sociology through a lens of everyday social practices.

As the world is coming to terms with redefining 'normalcy' post-COVID-19, there are paradigm shifts happening on 'social' terrains as well. The reconfiguration of work and home spaces, new forms of migration and mobilities, social distancing to breaking down of social fabric and exposure of new forms of old deep-rooted hierarchies and inequalities have led to more complex 'sociabilities', interacting at regional, national, and global levels. The book is a timely intervention to engage with these concerns at a deeper level.

## Reference

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CHULSU KIM, *Tongsang-eul Nyum-yuh Byun-young-eu-ro - Kyung-je Bal-jeon-goa Hankook-yui Tongsang* [Beyond Trade, Towards Prosperity: Economic Development and Korea's Trade] (Korean), Good Soil Publisher (좋은 땅), 2014, 565 pp., ₩25000, ISBN 9788964498484 (Paperback).

DOI: 10.1177/00490857231188217

This Korean book is a collection of writings on Korea's major trade issues by Chulsu Kim, who participated in the development of South Korea's trade policy