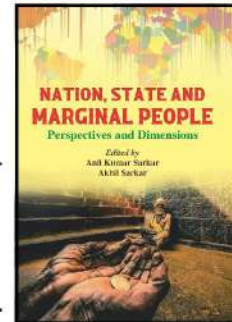


Book Review-2

Anil Kumar Sarkar and Akhil Sarkar (Eds.), Nation, State and Marginal People: Perspectives and Dimensions, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., 2022, Hard binding, Page. 232, Rs. 1000/-



Lab Mahato

Ph.D. Research Scholar, University of Kalyani

The edited volume titled “Nation, State and Marginal People: Perspective and Dimensions” well-elaborately documented the challenges faced by the marginals. Their everyday life, ritual practices and distinctiveness with the majority have given importance in the chapters. The authors discuss subjects like government initiatives to eradicate the social alienation of the marginals and create an enabling environment for them to enjoy productive, healthy and creative lives and appreciate their heterogeneity. The book’s authors tried to shape out “who are the marginals”. In a simple term, ‘Marginalized groups’ or marginalised people is used to describe a certain tendency of society or social relation where some specific section of the population of human society is considered less valuable or less desirable by the other excluded from mainstream society. The book’s authors have visualised marginals in four segments; they were socially excluded or neglected based on caste, gender, physical disability and unnatural sexual practices.

In chapter one, Professor Anil Kumar Sarkar in ‘Dalits and Land Reforms in West Bengal’ connects the linkage between the land reforms and Dalit welfare. It has been described through land reforms, achieving equity and reducing inequalities in a highly unequal society. From ancient times the land was owned by the upper castes. And the domination of powers was also backed by them. However, the scenario changed and increased the landholding by Dalits from 1982 to 1992.

West Bengal is one of the states that implemented the ideas of socialism through land reforms in a limited way. The vast section of Dalits and Adivasis benefitted from the land reforms. Whereas the initiatives were not a soul one, Congress and the left front both chased the policy for electoral competitiveness. The author raises the issue that without grassroots mobilisation and peasant movement, land reform alone can’t provide social justice and demolish the structure of subordination for the scheduled castes. However, it appreciates the West Bengal government through implemented

land reforms lowering the inequalities across all social groups in West Bengal.

Chapter two, titled 'Challenges and Changes of the marginal Community in Bengal: A Study of the Namasudras by Bipul Mandal, dealt with the origin the term of 'Namasudra', their complex relationship with the upper-caste zamindars, for political and social acclamation, unification of Namasudras under 'Matua' sect leadership of Harichand Thakur. From the middle of the nineteenth century, socio-religious movements started in British India, and English education played a vital role in awakening the masses. The social movement of the Namasudras began in 1872-73, and it had two physical characteristics, one played against the colonial administration and the other against the upper caste domination. However, Namasudras neither joined the Congress-led nationalist movement up to the 1940s nor questioned the legitimacy of British rule. The British government had shown favour to the depressed classes to fulfil their twin objectives, winning the support of these castes to curb the rising tide of nationalism and playing the role of responsible government by removing the inequalities in the socio-economic sphere. The Namasudra movement started as a socio-religious movement but later transformed into a sign of a separate political identity.

Chapter three, titled 'The Local Deities and Subalterns of Sundarban: A Historical analysis', highlights the ritual practices and livelihood of the subalterns and the demographic proportion of Sundarban. It is located at the periphery of Bengal. This area's inhabitants are mainly lower caste Hindu and aboriginal people, whereas the Brahmanical influences are limited to the society. The ritual practices observe in a cosmopolitan way and worship mostly the local deities and gods. The idea of local deities (*Sitala, Banabibi*) developed as the fear of the environment and getting relief from disease and oppression.

Chapter four, the article 'Socio-cultural Changes on Traditional Medical Practices of Santal Community, discusses Santal's dependence upon traditional medicine for recovering from diseases. The modern health system has not reached the doorsteps of Santals because of geographical barriers and government apathy. However, wherever it is acquainted, it crushes the traditional medical practices of the Santals.

In Chapter five, titled 'Criminal Tribe to Primitive Tribal Group: Ecological changes of the Lodha Tribe In West Bengal', author Kausar Ali discusses the origin of Lodha tribes and their demographic areas, living conditions and occupational transition from the colonial times. Lodhas are forest dwellers and had a link with criminal activities. Facing difficulties in running administration, the British declared Lodha a criminal tribe in 1916. Later in 1952, they were released from the tag of the criminal tribe. But the general perception of "Lodha as a criminal tribe" has not changed. Lodha killing was a common feature in West Bengal. The government effort to rehabilitate the Lodhas to a life of dignity and self-respect did not, however,

fully succeed.

Chapter six deals with the article 'From Barter to Cash: A Review of Changes in Commercial Activities of the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh, 1947-1987' by Arindam Ghosh. The author argues trade has always been an important activity in Arunachal Pradesh. Apatanis were one of those who had a well-developed commercial economy. Before the independence of India, the trade flourished in Apatani Valley on the agricultural surpluses, and the exchange system lies in a barter economy. But after independence, it brought the North-East Frontier under the regular administration of the Indian union in 1954. As a result, Apatani valley experienced drastic changes. The new town established tourism developed and introduced a cash economy. The Apatanis transformed from marginal to the affluent regional class. Their traditional culture has intermixed with the Indian mainland cultures.

The following two chapters deal with Santals and Rabha's society, culture and economy in North Bengal. Both Societies were living on the periphery, and their culture was not a dominant one. In chapter eight, titled 'The Rabha and Their Cultural Life: A Case Study of Tufanganj', the authors dealt with the ethnicity of the Rabha tribe; the author discusses the impact in society and culture of the marginal castes like Rabha's on living in a Multicultural environment and the influence of Brahmanical tradition. Rabha is the non-Aryan and the aboriginal community originating from the Indo-Mongoloid race. Their society is different from the mainland and matriarchal. However, because of the influence of Brahmanical tradition, they imitate the worship of the Hindu gods. Not only that, their society has transformed into patriarchal in modern days.

The second part of the book deals with women's position in society, their empowerment and facing challenges during the partition. The ninth chapter in Manusmriti talks about the status of Hindu women in Ancient Brahmanical society. He annotates, "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence". Gerda Lerner, in her book "The Creation of Patriarchy: The origin of women's Subordination", argues that patriarchy is the first condition of the creation of the slave system. Before the slave system, a patriarchal society emerged, which developed through figuring out gender inequalities in society. The articles in this part dealt with particular contexts.

In chapter nine, titled 'Traditional views of women in Vaishnava religion in Bengal', author Akhil sarkar discusses the origin of Vaishnavism and the development of women's condition under it. He periodises the women's position in pre-Chaitanya and post-Chaitanya phases. Ancient Brahmanical scriptures had not so much power given to women. But Chaitanya could not follow the strict regulation of scripture and advocated an egalitarian society. He also argues that the ecclesiastical nature of Vaishnavism empowered

women and gave them the right to education. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Vaishnava women played a leading role in educating the girls of the aristocratic families of Bengal.

Chapter ten deals with the article 'Women's Emancipation in the Nineteenth Century Bengali Periodicals: A Research' by Md. Mainul Islam. The author attempts to understand the role of newspapers and periodicals in the rising consciousness and social awakening. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, many periodicals published with a central theme was women's rights published by male reformers. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, Periodicals like *Abalabandhab*, *Bangamahila*, *Binodini*, and *Bamabodhini* were published by women for the emancipation of girls.

Chapter eleven, titled 'Women Empowerment as viewed by Mohendranath Dutt', deals with the views of Mohendranath Dutt on women's equal participation in education and producing national wealth. Dutt argues the prosperity of a nation determines by the place of women in that community and nation. He argues in Indian society, women have a contradictory position; on the one hand, women are worshipped as Devi (goddess) and on the other hand, women have been the subject of exploitation of religious and social prejudice, customs like *sati*, girl child infanticide prevailed. He advocated for unless women thinkers are not involved in women's difficulties.

Chapter twelve highlighted the contribution made by Pranab Kanya Sangha, founded by Swami Advaitananda, dedicated to alleviating deprived women. It was a religious, social service organisation administered by a group of devout sannyasins and Brahmacharinis having firm faith in ancient religious tenets of Hinduism. The main idea behind the sangha was "if women can enjoy their rights in the fields of nationalistic ideas, education, politics, then why should they be barred from participating in religious movement"? The author argues that one of the drawbacks of the movement is that the sangha speaks of secular ideals; in practice, it is more inclined to assert Hindu nationalism, which failed to reach the masses.

Chapter thirteen deals with 'partition and Women Sufferings: A case study of Jalpaiguri District, 1947-1962 by Agnita Pal. The author writes the history from several new perspectives. The experience of partition describes gender centric and the North Bengal perspective, whereas Jalpaiguri is the core area of research. The article portrays, on the one hand, that women were the victims of partition; secondly, they developed as new contributors to the family. She argues that partition in one single stroke brought many women into active public life. The women succeeded in overcoming the traumas to some extent. Many women had engaged in various activities to face their economic needs and for the well-being and betterment of their families and family members.

The book's third part deals with the identity politics conducted by the marginals to resist marginalisation. From the 1960s, a new social movement had developed, whereas Groups or the people organised campaigns for their recognition or demands. The last segment deals with the protest against marginalisation by marginals.

Chapter fourteen deals with the heroic emergence of Palwankar Baloo as the first Dalit International Indian cricketer who remembers for his unending battle with the oppressive caste system in India. Cricket was the product of colonialism. The British and the aristocratic Indians dominated the game. The current article explores how sport has become a significant element of society and a credible platform through which vulnerable populations have empowered themselves by resisting marginalisation in society. The author also argues that cricket in colonial times had linked up with the growing nationalism.

Chapter fifteen focuses on the impact of industrialisation on the environment. Chapter sixteen discusses the experience of the refugees of East Bengal as marginal and their struggle to achieve rehabilitation. He argues that after the partition, the mass migration of Hindus from East Pakistan as marginal people was caused by communal violence and the psychological oppression the minority Hindu community suffered. For the rehabilitation and the rights of the refugee, the refugees were inclined with both congress and leftist politics. The author also argues that the communist party's popularity and mass acceptance was limited after independence. Therefore, they tried to establish a hold over the refugees by supporting their demands. He argues that by supporting refugees' demands, the communist party became refugee-centric.

Chapter seventeen deals with people with disabilities (PwDs) as a marginal segment in English Bazar Municipality. The author highlights the type of disabilities like locomotor disability, visual disability, mental illness, speech and hearing disability, learning disability etc. She also argues that the government took several initiatives and best practices for improving social conditions and opportunities, but PwDs are treated here as a marginalised group. The ministry's main objective was to promote services for disabled people through government and non-government organisations. The disabled people are encouraged to become functionally independent and productive members of the nation through opportunities like education, vocational training, medical rehabilitation and socio-economic rehabilitation of the disabled.

Chapter eighteen discusses political impacts in the society and culture of the marginal autochthon communities of the Western Dooars since the colonial period. The author argues the constitution envisages a two-way approach to the tribal question. One is to protect them from levels of

exploitation, and the other is to promote their development at all levels; however, despite all constitutional guarantees and legislative measures, the tribe remains marginalised and vulnerable. Since colonial times, the British influences harmed the traditional culture of indigenous and migrant tribes. Later, Government schemes have changed the perception and attitude of tribes towards their cultural practices. Indigenous culture is overpowered by modern culture. By marginalisation in society, they started identity politics in the nineteenth century.

The last chapter deals with the subject of homophobia, how the state-sponsored homophobia and legislation against homosexuality were introduced in India for the first time by a colonial authority which made homosexuality a criminal offence under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. After the banned of 377, the phobia against homosexuality has not been erased. The author argues Victorian morality, in which patriarchy and masculinity got important, played an essential role in the policies of the colonial government in case of criminalising homosexuality. In conclusion, the author argues that British colonialism or colonial rule was not the fundamental factor for making the Indian homophobic. Homophobia is a prolonged phenomenon that has continued in India since ancient times. Homophobia is very much related to patriarchy.

The edited volume elaborates well on the living condition of the marginal and the challenges they face. The marginals started identity politics to protect their culture and resist marginalisation. The government initiatives had not well enough to establish an egalitarian society. In the age of capitalism, the governments follow the path of social Darwinism. Following Malthus, Spencer argued that "population pressure on resources led to a struggle for existence among people, with the most intelligent people surviving this struggle". Spencer felt that this process would lead to increasingly intelligent human beings and increasingly strong societies, with modern capitalism as the pinnacle of human evolution. He, therefore, argued against any interference with this evolutionary process and the struggle for existence, especially by the government. He opposed government programmes that might assist the poor or the weak, including state support for education and healthcare, anti-poverty programmes, or state housing regulations. In his essay "Poor Laws," published eight years before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Herbert Spencer wrote unblinkingly about the necessity of the poor to endure the consequences of this struggle. However misery of the marginal's is not only the consequence of capitalism; it has linked up with the old-age tradition of patriarchy and caste systems, as argued by the authors. Therefore abolition of the patriarchy and caste system is the first step to developing an egalitarian society.