

Book Reviews

Tommy Nishaant, *Musahars: A Noble People, a Resilient Culture*, Media House, Delhi, 2019, pp. 496, Price ₹ 695.00/- only.

This book is an ethnographic study of the Musahars, the third largest group next only to the Dusadhs and Chamars among the scheduled caste groups in Bihar. They are placed at the bottom-most rung even among the Mahadalits. Therefore, the author who has been associated with this community since 1989, developed a methodology that enabled him to capture the cultural deficits in the development and diverse fields of their social life through both quantitative and qualitative methods.

In his Foreword, Sukhdev Thorat introduces the study. Regarding the findings, he observes, “The study throws inner insight into the life of the most deprived community, blow up the myth constructed by earlier upper caste social scientists about the negative attributes such as Musahars being unreliable, unmotivated, useless, dirty, etc.” But the author has found positive and constructive values, and a positive desire among them to build up their lives by responding to the modern development efforts.

It is a doctoral work of the author after a good deal of field work. It covers 74 villages out of which in 68 villages Musahar population is dominant and in six villages where it is non-existent. Being an anthropological study, both observation and interview techniques have been used. Archival sources, government and non-governmental records, as well as oral history have been availed of too. This study has all the limitations normally attributed to micro studies.

The first two chapters deal with the genesis, origin and growth of Musahars. Some other chapters take the reader through their assets creation, starvation deaths, social development indices and political life. Practices of untouchability, religions and rituals, culture, and paradigm for integral development are discussed in the other chapters. In the introduction, which also deals with the methodology of the study, the author elucidates the contours of socio-political-cultural and religious life of Musahars as an extension of social anthropology. He explains that as a community, they are divided into various divisions like Magahiya and Trihutiya, etc. However, these two divisions are the main groups found in Bihar. While studying their life and culture, he stayed with them in Sikanderpur village of Danapur, Patna for nine months in order to understand their cultural life. Though he claims that he utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods, the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data has not been systematically dealt with.

However, the book draws from a variety of scholarly works and is a good contribution to the construction of the present response of the Musahars to the mainstream social life and their historical-cultural revolution aiming at their liberation. The author calls it a cultural revolution. The extent of their poverty has

left deep scars on their personality and behaviour. Due to socio-economic deprivation, they fear to take initiative in any work, are totally submissive and agree to any suggestions given by powers-that-be without applying any reason of their own. To think of any values - moral or spiritual - for them would be unrealistic. Their society suffers from deep-seated inertia. Unfortunately, the development programmes have left the community largely untouched. Therefore, there is a need for separate policies for it. The approach has to be to pull them out from the depths of inertia and despair.

On the whole, this book is a welcome addition to the existing literature on the dalits or Mahadalits in general and Musahar community of Bihar in particular. It is a case study of applied anthropology and Musahars' development. It will be useful for social activists who want to work for their liberation. The task of their upliftment is humanitarian and an overhaul of the national polity is required. It is, therefore, necessary to see the integral development of Musahars in that perspective. This book will serve as a handbook for those seeking to serve the poorest of the poor.

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Anirudh Prasad

Meena Bhargava, *Understanding Mughal India Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*,
Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2020, pp. 365, Price ₹ 395/-.

This book is purported to be a text book. Therefore, much of what it contains is already known for it is more or less based on known secondary sources. It is an overall history of Mughal India covering political, social, economic, religious and art history. But it is more than that in the sense that it contains some other information on these aspects. For example, the author gives biographical sketches of the contemporary writers which are not so known. The pictures given in it are interesting and the glossary at the end is especially useful. But it has some minor but avoidable errors.

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