

Book Reviews

James Chiriyankandath, *et. al.*, *The Politics of Poverty Reduction in India: The UPA Government, 2004-2014*, Orient Black Swan, Hyderabad, 2020, pp. 192, Price ₹ 575/- only.

This small book has seven chapters, apart from introduction. The authors claim that it is the first systematic review of the politics and policy-making that lay behind the array of anti-poverty programmes undertaken by the UPA coalition. It examines how far the UPA delivered on its promise to meet the needs of the poor. It analyses official Indian thinking and policy making on poverty in the early twenty-first century. It reveals the politics behind the design and implementation of these programmes and the important roles played by senior political leaders, bureaucrats and civil society activists in influencing the UPA's adoption of a rights-based agenda. Perhaps more important than any direct role in the policy making process was the indirect role that the left front parties played. Sonia Gandhi also used her influence to facilitate and promote social policies in several other ways.

Ch. 1 deals with the politics of poverty and the UPA government's policies. While the 'garibi hatao' was strikingly successful as a political slogan, the economic policies for it were not. Here the book refers to MGNREGA, Am Admi Bima Yojana and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana. It shows that significant progress was made in advancing human development which made an appreciable impact on diminishing poverty. The government abandoned the thought of the public sector occupying the commanding heights of the economy and instead opted for an alliance with the private sector in pursuit of the goal of rapid economic growth. Ch. 2 deals with MGNREGA. Despite disappointments, it generally worked well to provide the poor with significant extra earnings. They had a hedge against destitution and even made modest investments in assets like livestock. The programme paid political dividend also. Its beneficiaries voted in large numbers for the parties in the alliance than for their rivals. The book says, "The MGNREGA has yielded crucial insights into the character of the Indian state. It shows us the State at its best... but it also reveals it at its worst. ... political actors (especially bureaucrats, but also politicians) at all level, from state capitals down to villages, have an acute allergy to transparency and downward accountability" (p. 38).

The subject of Ch. 3 is National Food Security Act. It had the personal attention of Sonia Gandhi. With India rating high in terms of hunger and under-nutrition in the world, its need can hardly be exaggerated. In the background of drought-induced hunger despite enormous food stocks that the country had built up, a civil society movement emerged around the right to food. The Act sought to ensure access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to lead a life of dignity. For writing this chapter, the authors interviewed politicians,

civil society activists, officials, academics and NAC members. Ch. 4 deals with the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The book sees several failures in its implementation. It says, "Many eligible claimants were denied rights set down in the Act, and claims to rights by non-tribal forest dwellers were overwhelmingly rejected in all states. In several states, rejections occurred even when claimants submitted full supporting evidence" (p. 79). All the same, the Act has provided a safety net to sections of forest dwellers.

Ch. 5 covers integrated child development services. India's performance at ensuring child welfare has been woeful. Almost 40 per cent of the children under five are stunted, over a third are underweight and over a fifth are wasted. There is a shortage of the staff, on the one hand, and over-centralization of the programme on the other. Failure of inter-ministerial coordination has further aggravated the problems. Even when food is available, the diet is not balanced. The UPA I and II restructured the programme with much success. The last chapter is on Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission in relation to urban poverty. There were serious drawbacks in its design which hampered its implementation. The book concludes, "Perhaps the most important impact that JNNURM has had is to make urban issues, and thus also urban poverty, part of the national policy agenda. Although this has not yet translated into the national political agenda, there is now a greater likelihood that it may and that a national urban programme is here to stay" (p. 147).

These are the contents of the book. Since it has covered a recent period, much of what it says is already known. It makes not many observations on them. It has also some editorial flaws. For example, on p. 44, it says, "... the NFSA (National Food Security Act) was eventually passed by the Parliament in late 2013...."

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics
Pune 411004.

Rajesh Danane

Santosh Mehrotra (Ed.), *Reviving Jobs - An Agenda for Growth*, Penguin Random House India, pp. 295, ₹ 599/-

During high growth years, 2004-2012 India achieved an average of Eight per cent growth rate. But on the job front, it didn't see much growth and real wages were almost stagnant. We have now the world third largest economy based on real GDP. But based on per capita income we are at 138th position as we have failed to create enough jobs for our labour force. This book addresses both the problem as well as its solutions. It explains India's growth story since independence and some lapses in policy such as regulatory barriers, inspector Raj, closed economy, low productivity in agriculture, low skill levels, etc. This book compiles article by various authors who have long experience in the field of economic policy formulation, industry, international organisations, civil society, etc. Mehrotra