

Book Review

Awadhendra Sharan, *Dust and Smoke Air Pollution and Colonial Urbanism India, c. 1860-c. 1940*, Orient Blackswan, Noida, 2020, pp. 319, Price ₹795/-.

Of late there has been a growing interest in environmental degradation. This book is an illustration of this tendency. It is with reference to India in general but Calcutta and Bombay in particular. At the very outset Sharan points out, "... while Bombay had access to cheaper and cleaner hydroelectric power from the Tata hydroelectric plant set up at Lonavala in 1911, the prospects of water as a source of energy in Calcutta always remained rather bleak.... All this had a significant bearing on the issue of smoke..." (p. xvi). He points that the first laws of smoke were made in India shortly after they were enacted in England. As early as 1862, Bombay Legislative Council passed an act to abate the smoke nuisance. But in India inspections were both rudimentary and amateurish. In both Bombay and Calcutta rhetoric mattered more than practical action and there was an implicit assumption that the abatement of smoke should not be at the cost of the industry. Therefore, warnings were more common than fines and even when they were levied, they were often less than what was mandated by the law. However, the industry viewed the situation differently. It complained against the poor quality of Indian coal, unskilled firemen and absence of suitable technology. More importantly, its engineers were better trained and were qualified Europeans than the native inspectors who were not well trained. Thus, while occasionally the mill agents grudgingly admitted that industry did cause smoke, they pressed the point that they could do little to abate it. In Calcutta small river crafts also contributed to the problem, especially if two or three of them followed each other. Smoke also emanated from blacksmith shops, construction works, bakeries, cooking shops, etc.

Sharan then passes on to the Smoke Nuisances Commissions. He talks about the circumstances under which they had to be established and what they sought to do to cope with the problem. He says that with the passing of time, there was a change in the attitude of the Commissions. Apart from the means which had been adopted for the abatement of smoke, the stress was on the various densities of smoke and it was recorded more scientifically. In Calcutta more than in Bombay, there was more emphasis on prosecution for establishments emitting excessive smoke. At the same time, the millowners in Bombay retorted that the municipality would do well to set a good example by curbing excessive smoke from its pumping station or air compressor. However, it was conceded that abatement of smoke was a herculean task. Sharan points out that the Boiler Commission in Calcutta noted that "... the smoke nuisance was unlikely to be entirely eradicated so long as coal was used as a source of power in the mills and factories around the city" (p. 162). He also quotes the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* to the effect that electric power was the

only proper remedy for abating smoke although it might mean extra cost for business and increased taxation for the public. Gradually there was greater involvement with industry by giving advice regarding furnace and chimney designs.

Sharan further talks resource conservation and scientific abatement of smoke. For instance, half of the heat of coal and often even less was used in making steam, the remaining was lost in smoke and gases. Advances in combustion engineering had made boilers better heat-absorbing machines with more of heat in the coal transferred to making steam. The commissions gradually changed their orientation, preferring advice on good stoking, careful firing and use of appropriate technology over fines and punishments to mills.

The issue of domestic smoke nuisance has also been touched. Ventilation in kitchens was almost impossible. Domestic smoke had much to contribute to air pollution and consequently to respiratory diseases. However, street food was again a contributor. There was also the issue of smoke from coke made in the open. Although attempts were made to stop it legally, but the practice continued. Wind is a natural air purifier but it is confined only to a limited period in a year. The use of gas was a possible solution and it was happily growing in Bombay. Attempts were made to popularize it in hotels, boarding houses, clubs, etc. Advertisements also appeared to educate the public regarding the use of electricity.

The book covers a new subject and uses varied sources both published and unpublished. It has rare pictures which adds to the interest of the readers. At the same time, it has a glaring shortcoming. While the title says both smoke and dust are covered, in fact it is confined only to smoke nuisance and there is hardly any reference to dust. Overall, it is a good study.

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics,
Pune 411004.

N. Benjamin

Das, M.R. (2020), *Safe and Sound Banking: Deposit Insurance and Resolution in India- Developments, Issues and Policies*, Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai, pp. 365, Price ₹1495/-.

Even though the entire Indian banking system has undergone substantial changes for the last few decades in terms its operations and scope of activities, Deposit Insurance System (DIS), formally began with the establishment of DICGC in 1978, in it has not been given much attention till recent time. Deposit insurance is a guarantee that all or a portion of the deposits made by depositors with a bank will be paid if the bank fails. The DISs in the world have been established with a primary objective of creating a trust in the banking system and thereby enhancing the safety and soundness of banking system. The book has come in right time as government of India has decided to revamp resolution mechanisms in the country in general and deposit insurance in banking in particular. In fact, government has