

BOOK REVIEWS

processes help in forced acquisition of land from the urban poor and encroachment of public places by the powerful elite in the name of 'public good'. Details are provided by Pakalapati for Hyderabad. Zerah details similar happenings in Mumbai, where a Vision Mumbai report prepared by the consulting firm, McKinsey, gets accepted by the Government without a political process involving the non-elite. She finds that many NGOs using environment as their *raison d'être* and others supposedly working for the poor have actually become contractors for powerful interests operating in the city. Bhowmik agrees, but says that though NGOs genuinely representing the poor do exist and their membership is several times larger, their views are not publicized by the media or considered by the authorities.

The picture painted in this collection of articles is in shades of grey, and also, somewhat grim. All the authors are known for their Marxist or left-of-centre views. The views reflected above, therefore, would be rejected as invalid by those in support of the prevailing neo-liberal order – international multilateral organizations and consultants, business and industrial federations, mandarins in the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry, and probably the upper-class NGOs. However, the picture also contains details of suffering and disconnect on the ground. This is real and has to be taken seriously. As I write this, thousands are marching and protesting in Cairo. This outpouring of anger, though in this instance, sparked by a demand for 'democracy', is in a way predicted by a few of the authors in this book. SBG puts the blame on a universal backtracking of the welfare state and dismantling of institutional constraints upon marketization. This she claims results in intense gentrification of the urban space, closure of small-scale manufacturing and retail units, and harassment of and regulations against informal workers, hawkers and workers' associations. SBG, Harvey and Benjamin see this resulting in contestation and protest, and what has been called 'opaque politics'. Harvey and Sassen also see this as an international phenomenon, including locations in the rich world. The violent protests a couple of years ago by the dispossessed in Paris give us proof that this reading may have substance.

For those of us involved in the making of our cities, in theory and in concrete, this is a book to be read. It puts what we see around us in some theoretical perspective and also provides us with details of happenings around the country. These details provide evidence that some of the anti-poor policies and projects that we see around us may not be just the result of some local decision makers, but a part of a larger process which cannot be halted by a few individuals. This is what leaves the reader somewhat empty-handed. The authors do not really give us many clues on the way forward, on what must be done in the interregnum before the neo-liberal order runs out of steam. Though, in the end SBG does place some hope in the idea that social justice is not always and only a product of militant movements. This book is worth reading by those interested in cities with 'an underlying basis of social justice' and 'development of counter-institutions capable of reframing issues in broad terms, of mobilizing organizational and financial resources to fight for fulfilling the aims of a larger section'.

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Bamboos at TBGRI. K. C. Koshy. Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Palode, Thiruvananthapuram 695 562. 2010. 104 pp. Price: Rs 800/US\$ 30.

I did not know that 18 September is observed as World Bamboo Day until I came across the book *Bamboos at TBGRI*. TBGRI stands for Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute where the author, K. C. Koshy, has been the key person behind developing a 'bambusetum', a living collection of bamboos for display, education, conservation and related studies. Other bambusetum in the country can be found at Van Vigyan Kendra, Arunachal Pradesh; Indian Botanic Garden, West Bengal; Forest Research Institute, Uttarakhand, and Kerala Forest Research Institute, Kerala.



Bambusa baccifera

Acknowledging the economic and taxonomic importance of bamboo, the book briefly describes the development of bambusetum at TBGRI and provides information about 68 bamboo species and 12 hybrids developed at the institute. Many of the species have been collected from the Western Ghats, northeastern and northwestern parts of India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, South America and Japan. Because the vegetative and reproductive phases of these fastest growing plants on earth are separated much in time, it is relevant to have a resource guide like this book for those interested in bamboo research.

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