

From Individual to Community: Issues in Development Studies. Essays in Memory of Malcolm Adiseshiah. R. Maria Saleth (ed.). SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044 and Madras Institute of Development Studies, 79 Second Main Road, Gandhinagar, Adyar, Chennai 600 020. 2012. xvi + 259 pp. Price: Rs 695.

While reading *From Individual to Community: Issues in Development Studies* (FIC) my mind went back to another monumental work on development studies that was written soon after post-modernism became the favoured rhetoric of academicians, Wolfgang Sachs' *The Development Dictionary* (TDD)¹. What TDD tried to do was to take up certain concepts that had become standard usage in development practice and to interrogate these from the point of view of the disempowered. Development was thus seen to be another form of colonialism. It was a discursive formation that sought to achieve a hegemonic understanding of who needed to be developed by whom, and how this was to be done. The scope of TDD was global development practice. FIC on the other hand, is built up around substantive issues (e.g. education) rather than concepts. It is also restricted to mainly the Indian context and it does not presume coverage of every substantive issue that has been discussed in the Indian context. But even so, its scope is wide and like TDD could serve as a good introduction to development studies for any undergraduate course dealing with the Indian context. It is also similar to TDD in the sense that it seeks to interrogate development as it is prac-

tised in India from the point of view of the disempowered. Most of the articles reach a similar conclusion to TDD, i.e. development practice has achieved a hegemonic status and benefits the elite more than it benefits the poor.

The essays in this volume are a selection of talks that were delivered as part of the Founder's Day Lecture or the Malcolm Adiseshiah Memorial Lecture. The book is dedicated to the memory of Malcolm Adiseshiah who founded the Madras Institute of Development Studies. Authors come from varied disciplinary backgrounds like literature, economics, sociology, political science and law. This adds richness to the text, as they all speak of development from their own vantage points.

The first article by the well-known Kannada litterateur U. R. Ananthamurthy, is a fine balance between the danger of losing oneself in a pastiche of global culture and of the limitations of being overly parochial. He uses the image of the 'koopamandooka' (frog in the well) of Adiga's poem to explore this tension. For instance, an overemphasis on tradition might lead to maintenance of caste oppression, while getting overly globalized might mean losing one's unique cultural identity.

The second article by the renowned development economist, Amit Bhaduri explores another image, that of growth as a 'wasteland'. He tries to provocatively show that inequality it is not just the outcome of growth, but that it is necessary to fuel growth. High rates of unemployment and unsustainable use of resources have resulted in an internal colonization of the poor. Ultimately our minds too are colonized to accept this situation as natural.

Dipankar Gupta's article shifts focus to our perception of the 'rural' either as an idyllic place of tradition or the space of backwardness. Using the insights of social anthropology he invites the urban intelligentsia and the policy planner to get rid of their romanticized perceptions to see that rural India is collapsing. Caste identities, unequal landholdings, unequal livelihood opportunities and changing aspirations are giving rise to a tectonic shift in rural India.

Bina Agarwal, one of the first academicians to look at economics from a gender perspective, examines the complex relationship between gendered norms and perceptions, command over

property and the practices of emergent social institutions. For instance, it is due to social norms that do not recognize women's capacity to organize, and ignore their knowledge of forests, that results in women being marginalized in the working of emergent social institutions like community forestry projects. She makes a strong case for increasing women's bargaining power through collective action.

Amita Baviskar's paper takes us to the urban dichotomy between bourgeois upper class environmentalists and the needs of poor migrants. While one side fights for clean air and aesthetically designed cities, the other side struggles for shanties to live in, places to defecate and basic livelihood. Most academicians have valorized the intelligentsia, but Baviskar nuances this to show how the intelligentsia sometimes supports empowering movements like the Narmada Andolan, but more often secures its own privilege through a rhetoric of environmentalism.

While the pedagogies of educational practice are much debated, a field that is undertheorized is the economics of education. Jandhyala B. G. Tilak's article fills this gap. He links together three domains – the individual and family's willingness and ability to spend on education, the state's role in education and the role of markets in education. Tilak points to the unwillingness of the state to spend on education, the exploitative business of education that fills this gap and the trap faced by poor households that are forced to spend more to fulfil their aspirations for a better life.

Upendra Baxi schematically reviews the case for the Enlightenment's idea of progress and reason as it transforms itself into 'the Idea' that instates racism, patriarchy, genocide and imperialism. Parallel to this development is the ideology of 'developmentalism' and human rights that favours capitalist wealth maximizers. At another level, the state begins to take on the role of the king and development begins to be seen as a political largesse bestowed by the state. Caught between these two discourses are the poor.

While Baxi's article leaves us with no escape routes, Mihir Shah while accepting that Enlightenment thought valorized reason and order, makes a case for 'uncertainty'. If we accept that time, context nor nature can be neatly controlled and predicted, we then make space for uncer-

tainty. Acceptance of uncertainty will result in acceptance of a plurality of ideas and the democratization of institutes. Unfortunately, as a former Planning Commission member, he valorizes this as the process that the Planning Commission actually takes! There is thus a subtle attempt to defend the indefensibility of many Planning Commission documents.

Partha Chatterjee while accepting that Enlightenment instated the normative idea of a secular democratic state, like Baxi and Shah, goes on to question this normativeness. The law-enforcing state today begins to look like the state which favours the rich. He thus calls for a rereading of the aspirations of the poor for justice and their espousal of violence. Pratap Bhanu Mehta's article develops this further to examine what a politics of social justice might mean in a democracy.

At the theoretical level, most of these papers are framed by a post-modern reading that tends to constitute development as a hegemonic discourse that leaves very little space for ambiguity and engagement by the poor. In this sense it is in continuity with the way TDD framed development. Contemporary development studies as informed by the work of scholars like Anna Tsing², Donald Moore³ and Michael Taussig⁴, have begun to examine the complexity and fissured character of these discourses. The poor can use these in strategic ways to enable outcomes that are not always predicated on these hegemonic discourses. While this kind of engagement does not result in the pure revolution of the Marxian kind, it still leads to more empowering outcomes.

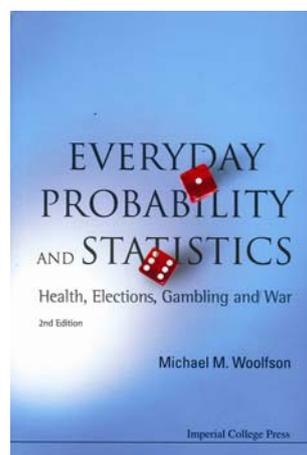
As the book is a collection of talks, and not a commissioned book, it does not cover every important substantive issue, a notable omission being agriculture, food and the introduction of genetically modified seeds. Another lacuna is that we are not told the dates on which a particular paper was presented. For instance, I noticed that Dipankar Gupta's paper⁵ has already been published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 2005. Dates would have given the reader a sense of the historical context in which the article is framing its debate and would allow us to examine how contemporary academia has developed the debate further. Each of the papers has been presented by an eminent scholar, hence its quality is good and yet it

retains a simplicity of style. Thus FIC is a rich treasure trove of the development debates that have taken place in Indian academia. It would hence be a useful text for any beginner student in development studies and social sciences. Scholars in development studies could use this as a ready reference for issues in Indian development discourse. I would highly recommend it as a must have for all university and college libraries.

1. Sachs, W. (ed.), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (Indian edition), Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 1997.
2. Tsing, A. L., *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004.
3. Moore, D. S., *Am. Ethnol.*, 2000, **26**, 654–689.
4. Taussig, M. T., *My Cocaine Museum*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004.
5. Gupta, D., *Econ. Polit. Wkly*, 2005, **40**, 751–758.

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Everyday Probability and Statistics: Health, Elections, Gambling and War. Michael M. Woolfson. Imperial College Press, 57 Shelton Street, Convent Garden, London WC2H 9HE. 2012. 2nd edn. x + 278 pp. Price not mentioned.

It is sometimes argued that in addition to the 3 'R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), in modern times, one needs basic familiarity with statistics. Who exactly

says this? Is it statisticians interested in furthering their own importance? And why is this numeracy needed? The present book argues, rather well, that the skill may be useful in making many a choice in daily life.

Books on statistics come in two main forms – theory and cookbook. The former type develops the analytical description/justification of statistical tools. The latter type is 'How to' books for users. A rare third genre of books is one that tries to explain to laymen the rationale behind statistical methods. Two classic books, belonging to the last category, are *How to Lie with Statistics* (by Darrel Huff) and *Facts from Figures* (by M. J. Moroney). Many a student in the earlier generation has read these and enjoyed a few precious moments in which one appreciates the logical elegance of statistics unfettered by the drudgery of formulas and number-crunching. The book under review is also of this type.

The book begins with coin tossing (2 outcomes) and dice throwing (6 outcomes), but points out that there can be experiments with any number of possible outcomes and shows figures of 4-faced and 12-faced dice. Of course, these are just pedagogical devices. Perhaps the most significant practical situation involving counting and probabilities is in genetics. The book introduces this application without hesitation.

There are the mandatory graphs and photographs of scientists and roulette wheels, etc. and a few caricatures as well (e.g. p. 60 and p. 76). But the caricatures are nowhere as good as in Darrel Huff's book.

One irritating aspect of statistical reasoning is that the same set of circumstances may not always lead to the same result. Breast cancer has a strong genetic element. But not all female offspring of a patient of breast cancer will develop it. Smoking causes cancer, but Winston Churchill could get away with endless smoking of fat cigars. The author calls this the smoking lottery which is an attractive appellation (p. 195). But then does it mean that all the talk of using information on risk factors to give a prognosis is not meaningful? Quite to the contrary! In fact, there is evidence that given enough background information, statistical prediction comes out to be better than a clinician's informal prediction. (See *Clinical versus Statistical Prediction: A Theoretical Analysis and a*