

## *Shorter Notices*

**John G. Sommer.** *Empowering the Oppressed: Grassroots Advocacy Movements in India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001. 206 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 225.00.

This book is an introduction to some groups in India working for the betterment of the poor in effective ways. Their approach differs from the traditional development approaches. They try to empower those who are socially, economically, and psychologically oppressed. In their opinion, sustainable and qualitative improvement in the lives of the poor can be achieved only when the root causes of their oppression are addressed and not just the symptoms. These groups have followed highly efficient and innovative ways to secure human and civil rights of the people. They have also facilitated the marginalised poor to pursue their own interests and their own struggles for justice and equality. They organised the poor to enable them to challenge the inequality in power relationships, so that they can take decisions for themselves. These unique groups acknowledged the necessity of both development and political action approaches together, to guarantee that development benefits reach the deprived.

The book also highlights the significance of outside assistance and its role in the empowerment approach to development. Donors often have the tendency to influence the activities they fund. The organisations discussed in the book no doubt accept outside funding, but after making sure that such assistance is in line with their principles and priorities.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first five chapters describe the groups and their organisations; types of situations they come across; selected activities in which they are involved; and explanations of how they carry them out. Their stories help in understanding their meaning of empowerment, and the additional role of traditional development projects in the process of empowerment.

The sixth chapter reports on variations on the theme of empowerment. For example, it demonstrates the difficulties faced by one of the organisations in shifting from the traditional development approach to empowerment, another organisation's progression into a very different response to poverty and oppression, and some others' application of the empowerment approach in responding to disasters such as the dreadful Gujarat earthquake in 2001.

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Chapter Seven brings together the major points raised in the previous chapters, analyses the issues based on leaders' reflections, and the lessons they have learned from their experiences.

Chapter Eight is the story of the Unitarian-Universalist Holdeen India Programme (HIP), partner to all the groups described in the previous chapters. The programme provided resources (both financial and human) to strengthen the leadership and capacity within Indian organisations, and to fill gaps that other funding sources would not or could not fill. It supported empowerment by constantly developing relationships with partner organisations, by providing the resources that help them in defining problems and finding the solutions.

The ninth chapter, which concludes the discussion, brings together the two themes of empowerment and donor roles. This book is an important contribution to development studies and public policy.

**Naila Kabeer.** *Bangladesh Women Workers and Labour Market Decisions: The Power to Choose.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001. 464 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 575.00.

The book compares the lives and situations of two groups of Bangladeshi women with similar cultural backgrounds and values but living in two different parts of the world. Both the groups are working in the clothing industry, one in Dhaka and the other in the East End of London. They have been involved in a very different form of employment. In Bangladesh, where strong norms of *pardah* or female privacy have always confined them to the boundaries of the home, women here have abandoned the old norms and are working in public. In contrast, in Britain, a secular country used to the public presence of women for a very long time particularly in the clothing industry, Bangladeshi women are mostly working from home, in compliance with *pardah* norms.

The clothing industry in Bangladesh is mainly export-oriented and is relatively new. Representatives of the major retailers and mail-order firms in Europe and the US have either direct contact with factory owners or work through middlemen located in Hong Kong or Singapore. The industry in London, on the other hand, is producing for the domestic market, for high-street chain stores as well as small boutiques. Different industrial organisations in the two contexts of garment manufacturing and corresponding differences in labour force requirements justify, to a certain extent, the differences in the way in which Bangladeshi women have been incorporated in the Dhaka and London industries.

The book has 11 chapters. The first chapter elaborates on the changing international division of labour in garment manufacturing in the context of two different experiences. Rising cost of labour in the advanced industrialised countries was the major factor responsible for the global restructuring of the garment industry.

This had generated changes in the geography of production and created new employment opportunities in Dhaka and London.

The second chapter deliberates on the social science literature dealing with women's labour market behaviour, i.e., the 'supply side' of the story, distinguishing between economic accounts, which concentrate on individual choice, and sociological accounts, which stress structural constraint and the integration of choice and constraint.

Chapter Three traces the history of textile manufacturing in Bengal and the role played by 'protectionism' in its decline. It gives the details of economic and social trends in Bangladesh after its independence, and also describes, to some extent, the emergence of a female industrial work force. Finally, it deals with some of the factors responsible for female preference in the labour market, in a country where men are mainly regarded as the sole-wage earners in the family.

Chapter Four highlights the factors responsible for women's decisions for that particular form of paid work in Bangladesh.

The fifth chapter explores the impact of women's access to wages on various aspects of their lives.

The next three chapters, Six, Seven, and Eight, elaborate on the London component of the study. Chapter Six provides background information on the women and the families of Bangladeshis settled in the East End of London. This chapter also analyses the historical development of the clothing industry in Britain. The next chapter focuses on the decisions of Bangladeshi women to enter paid work. Chapter Eight gives details of the impact of women's earnings from home-based piecework on their relationships within the household.

The last three chapters of the book discuss the three objectives of this research highlighted in the Introduction. These are to find out the reasons for the paradoxical labour market choices made by Bangladeshi women in the two different environments of Bangladesh and Britain; to compare the 'fit' between the accounts of their labour market behaviour in the two situations and the theoretical explanation of women's labour market behaviour suggested in the social science literature; and, finally, to consider how ethical standards in international trade might look when the perspectives of working people, particularly working women in the third world, are taken into account. This book would be of special interest to those researching gender studies and women's role in the labour market.

**Muhammad Mahboob Ali.** *Determinants of Supply and Demand for Money: A Case Study of Bangladesh.* Dhaka: Student Ways, 2001. 126 pages. Hardbound. Bangladeshi Tk. 130.00.

This book investigates the supply and demand for money in the Bangladesh economy. Both the demand and supply are simultaneously related to each other, and

the study also empirically explores the multi-flow influences of variables in achieving equilibrium between the supply and demand for money. The study observes that GDP, high-powered money, deposit-to-GDP ratio, and interest rates on advances and deposits are interrelated. The book elaborates on the policy implications of the supply and demand functions of money. It also investigates the impact of the financial liberalisation programme on the money supply and money demand functions in Bangladesh.

**K. Seeta Prabhu.** *Economic Reform and Social Sector Development: A Study of Two Indian States.* New Delhi: Sage Publications. 2001. 370 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 550.00.

The impact of economic reforms (in the form of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies) on social sector development has been the subject of academic and policy analysis for many years. As the experience of these reform programmes in Africa and Latin America in the 1980s had shown an adverse affect on the level of poverty, therefore the reform programmes in the 1990s were accompanied by measures to prevent impoverishment.

The stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes were also introduced in India from 1991 onwards. This book explores the impact of these reforms on poverty in the two states of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The two states are selected because of their better performance in terms of Human Development prior to these reforms. However, both followed different approaches. Maharashtra had relied on the better performance of per capita incomes, while Tamil Nadu had tackled poverty through social expenditures.

This book is a revised version of a study undertaken in 1994-95, "Financing and Strategies for Human Development" sponsored by the UNDP and the Government of India. It is arranged in four parts. In the two chapters of Part One, the background setting is provided as a basis for subsequent analysis. Chapter One gives the definitions of the key terms used in the analysis, links between economic growth and human development, factors influencing the social sectors during the period of economic reform, and some issues relating to the measurement of such impacts. A brief review of the evidence and details concerning the selection of the states is also provided. In the second chapter, similarities and differences between the two states are examined. The initial conditions prevailing prior to the initiation of such reforms, in the two states and in India as a whole, are also discussed. The discussion covers both private and public channels that influenced the social sector achievements.

In Part Two, there are four chapters. These chapters reflect upon the macro dimensions of the reform programmes. The first chapter examines the main economic indicators, fiscal trends, and trends in social sector expenditures at the level of the union government. The next two chapters undertake similar analysis for

the two states under study. The fourth chapter in this part discusses the distribution of social sector expenditures at the district level.

Part Three is divided into two chapters. These chapters present case studies of selected villages in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The first chapter reflects on the supply-side factors in social sector attainments; that is, the details of social infrastructure existing in the selected villages. The second chapter deals with the demand-side factors. It presents the findings of a household survey conducted in five selected villages to assess the extent of utilisation of social sector services, and the expenditure incurred on such services by various income groups.

In Part Four, there is only one chapter that summarises the major findings of the study and discusses their implications for social policy.

**Ranjani K. Murthy (ed.).** *Building Women's Capacities: Interventions in Gender Transformation.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001. 383 pages. Paperback. Price not given.

Despite constitutional guarantees on women's equality and significant development effort, gender discrimination is still an important feature of the society in India. The condition of Indian women has improved in terms of literacy, life expectancy, and maternal mortality, but that also applies to the women from the privileged class (especially to the women in South India). However, in economic, social, and political spheres of life they are still in a subsidiary position in comparison with Indian men. It is expected that globalisation of the economy and the localisation of the political forces (developments of the 1990s) will have an impact on Indian women. So far, the trends reveal different impacts on women and men, and various effects on different groups of Indian women. Women in India are facing two major problems. The first is poverty, which particularly affects women from the economically and socially marginalised groups, and the second relates to human rights violations affecting all groups of women.

Against this background, there is a need to work towards the economic, social, and political empowerment of women belonging to the marginalised sections of society. This book is an effort to put forward a wide range of experiences from all over the country aimed at strengthening the capacities of women from the marginalised sections. The book is based on the assumption that women learn through their daily struggle for survival, security, and autonomy. And this learning can be enhanced if appropriately facilitated. Therefore, the fundamental task should be to build the capacity of women, to empower them so that they can bring about the change for themselves.

The book documents fifteen case studies covering a wide range of issues and sectors—health, education, dry-land agriculture, irrigation, non-farm livelihoods, legal literacy, political participation, and violence. These case studies highlight the

practices in building capacities of rural women. The selected cases are those in which the staff of non-governmental organisations and women activists have played a significant role.

The book is organised in four parts. The fifteen case studies are distributed in the first three parts in the following manner. The first part comprises six case studies on building capacities of women on specific issues that confront them in the context of the development policies of the 1990s. The first case study is on the issue of health. It highlights how the 'self-help methodology' can be used to increase the ability of women to gain control over their bodies, fertility, sexuality, and their identity—rather than draw on the medical, welfare, or instrumental point of view. The next three case studies are the examples of capacity building of women to enable them to earn an income for themselves and for their families and to have control over it. The last two case studies in this part are based on the examples of increasing women's political participation.

In the second part, there are three case studies. The focus in these studies is on the experience of strengthening the capacity of both men and women of different age groups, to enable them to recognise certain interrelated issues affecting the survival of women in the family and the community.

Part Three is composed of six case studies. These studies examine the "training and non-training strategies" that could be used for "gender-transformative" capacity building of women at the grassroots. These studies also highlight the significance of intermediary organisations in building capacities of women for empowerment.

The fourth part concludes by summarising the main findings of the book. It draws the conceptual, methodological, and institutional lessons from the fifteen case studies discussed in the previous three parts, and reflects on factors crucial to gender-transformative capacity building. This book is a useful addition to gender studies.