

Shorter Notices*

Brij Kothari, P. G. Vijaya Sherry Chand, and Michael Norton (eds.).
Reading Beyond the Alphabet: Innovations in Lifelong Literacy. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 282 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 350.00.

‘Lifelong literacy’ is mainly concerned with the retention and improvement of basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills throughout the course of human life. In a broader sense, the more appropriate phrase for this concept is ‘lifelong learning’. This volume is compiled as a reaction to a serious shortcoming of the national literacy movement: people counted as literate in the national census can hardly read or write with understanding in their everyday life.

The editors of the volume have assembled 14 innovations in ‘lifelong learning’ that recognise the centrality of ‘lifelong literacy’ in a variety of social development objectives; innovations that pivotally need and include the retention and further development of the 3Rs. The editors divide these 14 innovations in six broad categories. The first one is ‘empowerment and literacy’. Three cases under this broad heading illustrate the relevance of literacy for empowerment. The second area focused on is ‘reading material for early literates’. In this category, the first case is of the Gujarati drama from the colonial period being translated into Hindi for neo-literates. The drama itself is set in the context of a library where literacy classes are also held. The importance of a library as a community centre is thus established. The next two innovative efforts in this category are *Pitara*, a bi-monthly magazine in Hindi published for early literates; and *Ujjas*, a Gujarati-Kutchi language newsletter, created by rural women focusing on women’s empowerment issues and activities undertaken by the collectives.

The third area is ‘promotion of reading culture and publishing for rural areas’. Two experiences are discussed in this category, where the importance of reading culture is expressed as a pre-requisite for reading. The fourth category, ‘libraries and literacy’, highlights the significance of libraries. Three cases are presented in this part. The first one historically traces the development of the library movement from its birth in Andhra Pradesh to the other parts of India. The second and third cases reflect on the theme of libraries in the slums of Mumbai, Pune, and Kolkata respectively.

The fifth category is ‘media and literacy’. Two chapters in this part argue the potential role that media can play in ‘lifelong literacy’. The only contribution in the sixth category ‘bridging people’s math and formal numeracy’ critically deals with numeracy in adult literacy classes, arguing that these often impose a mindless

*By Afia Malik, Research Economist, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

approach without adequate care to relate the subject to people's lives. The author also discusses different strategies under experiment.

A variety of experiences in lifelong literacy is presented in this collection. It is a valuable addition to the academic literature on literacy.

Sanjeev Prakash and Per Selle (eds.). *Investigating Social Capital: Comparative Perspectives on Civil Society, Participation, and Governance.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004. 315 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 550.00.

It has become a common practice in the developed world to understand the concept of social capital while doing empirical studies on civil society, voluntary organisations, and democratic institutions. Social capital has also gained importance in the research projects dealing with the problems of economic development, poverty, and governance in developing countries to understand the institutional variables required for sustainable development and democratic governance. Despite all this, a lot of confusion still surrounds the concept of social capital.

This volume is an attempt to present a set of empirical and conceptual analyses of the contexts, causes, and consequences of social capital. The editors have combined different cases and contexts to construct a broad comparative perspective. The scope of the volume is not limited to societies in the North or the South, or to democracy, civil society, and economic development in isolation from one another. Rather, the book presents a wide range of analytical studies that cross disciplinary and thematic boundaries to look for practical explanations and further hypotheses.

The volume is divided in three sections. In the first section, 'introduction' is followed by three more chapters reflecting on the relationship between social capital and democracy, standard Western notions of associations and civil society, and the degree of correspondence between two empirical approaches to social capital, the first based on social structural variables as developed by sociologists and the second based on personal norms and values as developed mainly by political scientists.

The five chapters in the second section discuss different empirical approaches being adopted to understand the concept of social capital. These include social capital and institutional legitimacy; network sociology approach; organisational memberships and cross-cutting ties; regional differences in social and institutional trust; and finally, variations in social trust in relation to local government performance.

The third section, a combination of three chapters, investigates relatively new directions in organisational participation, that is, whether social trust and capital accumulated in one associational domain can be transferred to other contexts; the manner in which social capital affects development performance, and the importance of agency in development efforts; and the role of information and communication technologies (Internet) as sources for social capital.

Shirley A. White (ed.). *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 412 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 380.00.

In this era of information technology, the volume reflects on the powerful role of participatory video in the process of development. It is based on the experience of individuals and organisations from all corners of the globe, in addition to the author's own lifelong experience with video, participatory development, and social change. The contributors have shared their knowledge as gained from extensive field-level research. In brief, the volume has endeavoured to establish the video as a strong device in transforming deprived or marginalised individuals and communities by identifying for them their problems and the solutions that are within their reach.

The volume is divided in four parts, each containing four chapters. Part I 'The Power of the Process' traces the historical aspects of participatory communication and the role of video/film media in promoting and facilitating social change. This section explains important concepts relating to participatory video and sets the stage for further explorations in the area. Part II, 'Video that Transforms', gives graphic evidence of the power that images exercise in transforming lives. The contributors have raised a concern regarding insufficient work done to further develop the conceptual foundations for participatory video. The four studies in Part III, 'Video That Empowers', focuses on the video as a tool for empowerment, particularly of women. Part IV, 'Video, Action, Access, and Impact', is based on the successful cases of how video power is being used in development projects. In the concluding chapter, the author takes a kaleidoscopic view of video. It provides the summary of 20 projects that are representative of the role the video can play in development. She also identifies several websites that can be of help to development professionals. The book is interesting to read and useful specifically for those in the practice of community development.

Ghanshyam Shah. *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004. 281 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 295.00.

This book reviews different studies by social historians who have done some very stimulating work on social movements in India. These studies have focused on social movements in general and peasant movements in particular. The author divides these studies in nine different categories. These are peasant movements, tribal movements, dalit movements, backward caste/class movements, women's movements, industrial working class movements, student movements, middle class movements, and human rights and environmental movements.

The author critically reviews the social science literature on various social movements of the colonial period and the five decades of independent India. He

identifies various gaps in the social science literature that need to be addressed in future research. The areas highlighted include political movements where the focus should be on the 'politics of the masses'; as without understanding it, reading the politics of any society remains superficial. Moreover, future research should pay more attention to contemporary movements. It is proposed that scholars should pay more attention to the methodological issues in the study of various movements. Besides this, they need to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework to study social movements as very few Indian political sociologists have done this so far. Another gap in the literature is of comparative studies, that is, comparative analysis of movements of the same type from different regions or of different periods. And, finally, studies that have been published so far are uneven in their content. A large number of scholars have focused on peasant movements, whereas very few have focused on the movements launched by industrial workers or by women or by the poor and oppressed sections of society.

R. Govinda and Rashmi Diwan (eds.). *Community Participation and Empowerment in Primary Education*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 255 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 295.00.

This volume highlights the role of community in promoting primary education in five Indian States—Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Kerala. These five states have been selected on the basis of their distinctive efforts and experiences of community involvement and participation, leading to community empowerment in primary education programmes. It provides the grassroots experience, the problems encountered, and the lessons learnt from initiatives launched in these five Indian states. The objective given for the compilation of these case studies is the understanding of the manner in which partnerships between civil society, government, and non-governmental organisations function in the drive to achieve universal primary education. This is also meant to help understand the dynamics involved in empowering the community for management of primary education.

The case studies highlight the fact that the problem of community participation is much deeper and complex than its general conception presented in the available literature. The contributors cover a wide range of important issues, including the manner in which community participation works in an environment characterised by deep-rooted socio-economic divisions; the equitable distribution of participation; identifying and defining the community; and ensuring the genuine representation of those who are traditionally excluded from decision-making in the rural areas.