

ISSN. 0972 - 8406

The NEHU Journal, Vol XIII, No. 1, January-June 2015

Book Reviews

M.O. Grenby, *Children's Literature (Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature)*, Second Edition, Edinburgh University Press, 2014. Pp. 264. ISBN 978 0 7486 4902 0, Price Rs. 1,840.79.

The mention of children immediately carries with it certain expectations. One such expectation is that we are dealing with a topic that is not to be taken as seriously as more 'mature' musings regarding the human experience. In short, anything related to the child is easily dismissed as being simple or unchallenging. Recently however, this notion has been contested and the recent discourses regarding children and their place in society have shown that issues concerning children are anything but a straightforward dialogue. Looking at the sweeping popularity of books like the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling or the *Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis or the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien relating to the fantasy realm of 'Middle-Earth', we are confronted by a phenomenon that has swept the imagination of not merely children but adults alike. To dismiss literature for children as merely a simplistic endeavour would risk simplifying a force that can spawn a cultural phenomenon. The Hollywood rendition of the Marvel Comics and their hotly anticipated movie releases also bear testimony to this power to capture the cultural imagination and societies' interest with the fantastical highlighting the alluring impact that this literature has over its captive audience.

M.O. Grenby has written extensively on the topic of children's literature publishing many books and articles relating to children's literature. This book is the second edition of *Children's Literature (Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature)* which is reflective of his expertise in this particular field. As Grenby himself admits, the book's main aim is to 'deepen understanding of individual children's books, and of children's literature as a whole'. Given the misconceptions that have persisted regarding this subject, it becomes necessary to trace the origins of children's literature. This the book helps to showcase the evolution that this genre has experienced through the years. This becomes especially insightful as it focuses on the changing approaches employed in relation to the education of a child. What is a child and what's best for him/her? The ideas that have been imposed on children therefore become ideological positions. The literature they are exposed to then becomes a powerful means of ideological identification.

Children's stories attempt to teach important and valuable lessons about the world around them. It is no surprise then that fables formed one of the earliest forms of children's literature and Grenby showcases the allegorical nature of these tales and their ability to be easily relatable to children owing to their engaging characters. Through the ages, different fables have been constantly reworked in order to 'suit changing cultural and political values' and this medium of instruction therefore has served as a vehicle for this ideological exchange.

When addressing the child, various literary models have been employed to entertain as well as teach the child. Poetry is one such medium that had been widely used in the pre-modern culture. But it is to be noted that children's poetry is not a static genre. It has changed owing to the changes in the conceptions regarding the child and childhood. Peter Hunt, a renowned critic of children's literature, critically comments that there is no such thing as a continuity regarding the idea of a child as each generation differs dramatically from the other. Though his argument is premised on the idea that childhood now is different from childhood in earlier times, this assertion, however, has generated indignation from many other critics. Seeing how things are inter-related and follow from some historical background, dismissing the contributions of the past is likely to miss the bridge that helps to link the present to the past.

Didacticism has been a key element in children's literature and its representation has been found in the Moral Tales and Problem Novels. This genre however began to exhibit changes in the way the stories were presented to the child. The morality that was very directly expressed began to wane and a more subtle approach was evolved. Grenby notes this changing trend by underlining the fact that there was the belief that lessons ought to be 'intuited rather than imposed.' This approach however is not free from faults as it raises questions of what the 'intuition' may lead to. This appeal is essentially prompted by the idea that there exists some universally accepted response to life situations though the very notion of the universal raises issues in a postmodern world that has progressively privileged the celebration of the particular over the universal.

To further highlight the continuity found in the genre of children's literature, we look at some of the thematic elements used during earlier periods which have been successfully employed in modern day children's literature. The *Harry Potter* series is one such example of a book that has

used the model of the school story to great success. The thematic elements found in the genre of the School Story focuses on the central theme which is 'the balance between submission and defiance, authority and autonomy.' The power politics that exist within a school setup become an interesting area of discourse raising questions of identity and the child's place in social institutions and structures.

When we speak of institutions, one of the fundamental institutions in societies is the family unit. It is no surprise then that the genre of 'The Family Story' found in children's literature tries to tackle with the many intricacies involved within a family setup. It may portray disorder or dysfunction but in the end the focus is generally on the reconstruction of the family unit. The importance of this institution in society cannot be understated and its portrayal in children's literature attempts to emphasise this point to the young readers.

The quest for identity and purpose are fundamental objectives of the human experience. But why should this quest be confined only to the adult? Children are as much in need to find their footing in the world and so Fantasy affords this platform for their quest for identity and purpose. Fantasies often involve alternate realities bound by certain rules but the main element found in the fantasy genre is according to Grenby 'the process of self-discovery and questions of identity remaining fixed despite external change.' Closely related to the Fantasy genre of children's literature is the Adventure Story genre. The politics of identity and power once again become key elements in this genre as it highlights the desire of the children to be of consequence while at the same time there is yearning for protection and supervision. This genre provides a fantasy of empowerment for children according to Grenby as it describes a heroism which has the potentialities to make their real-life powerlessness rather appealing.

Another misconception that exists when reading children's literature is the simplification of the genre in terms of Illustrations and Picture books. Grenby points out that the concept of a book with pictures does not necessarily make the reading process easier. In fact it makes different demands of readers and this in turn, according to Grenby, 'offers different rewards.' The relationship between the images and the words may either be complementary or stand in opposition to one another. The possibility of physical and intellectual interaction with images that this genre affords its readers complements the reading experience so that image and text 'works to intensify and expand the other.'

The book admits to its limitations as it cannot give a complete account of children's literature as that would be too vast an endeavour to take up within the limit of the current book. The texts that are primarily focused are books from Britain and North America. Though the author admits that books from other world literatures were not included because of the brevity of the book, perhaps it be of greater significance a further edition of the book can include within its ambit the European and Asian literatures which would help immensely in the universal discourse of children's literature. Considering the fact that Grenby is an experienced critic of children's literature, his critical analysis of the literature for children in these other world literatures will perhaps reveal interesting insights into this genre. Despite this shortcoming, the book provides ample resources for an introduction to the study of children's literature and its notes and references offer us useful pathways by which readers may take in order to pursue and further explore this literary genre for a more in-depth and critical enquiry.

Reviewed by

Mankhrawbor Dunai
Research Scholar
Department of English
NEHU, Shillong.

Colin Leys, *Market- Driven Politics: Neo-Liberal Democracy and Public Interest*, Verso, London, 2003. Pp. 280. ISBN: 1859844979 Price \$ 14.64 (paperback)

Ever since the term globalisation was first used to make sense of large scale changes primarily in economic domain, scholars have debated its meaning and consequences. As the term became a buzzword, it served to crystallise the debate regarding its impact on a nation's political, cultural and social spheres. As globalisation paves the way for market to play a decisive role in economic domain, both proponents and opponents of globalisation are equally vocal and up against each other in counting the merits and demerits of market in restructuring the present world order. In that context, the book provides a stimulating and well researched account of the sweeping changes that took place in British politics from 1975-2000 under the impact of neo-liberal policies. Neo-liberal policies were first embraced by Mrs Margaret

Thatcher with her famous slogan ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA). Later, same was endorsed by the so called ‘New Labour’ in a subtle way to be in the electoral fray. The process culminated in restructuring state institutions within the parameter of global economy and in erosion of non-market domain with disastrous consequences for social democracy.

The book is a searching analysis of the ways global market forces operate to bring desired structural changes in economy and how that results in narrowing the scope of democratic politics in nations to the detriment of public interest. Neo-liberal democracy which is an oft repeated but little understood political notion, gets a comprehensive treatment in the book. This is an empirical work backed by detailed case studies of commodification of two fundamentally important spheres of public life in Britain- the National health and television broadcasting services. Though the book exclusively draws on British politics, the experience can easily be contextualised in case of any nation to understand the long term impact of market economy on national politics. Very few studies have examined with such precision the extent to which politics and policies of a country is conditioned and even determined by global economic forces. The book offers an incisive account of invasion of public spheres by market and demonstrates how the incursion was assisted by ruling regimes in Britain. The work throws a challenge to those protagonists of the ‘new wave’ within the labour party who supported the neo-liberal reforms under the garb of ‘third way orientation’.

The book is divided into seven chapters; each chapter revealing a new dimension of market driven politics. Introduction (Chapter 1) provides a brief sketch of the work. The readers are introduced to the central argument of the book i.e. all policies everywhere are now tailor-made to suit market sentiment and the regulatory demands of TNCs. The profound statement of the author that *politics everywhere are now market driven (p1)* provides an outline of the content of the book. How the present phase of global economy by its sheer scale of spatial expands, wider choice of locations for capital investment and omnipresence of TNCs is impacting the states is what the author has explored in the chapter. Set in the context of British politics, this section demonstrates how state institutions in Britain have gradually remodelled its internal operation to serve business interests without exposing the Government to political pressure either from the electorate or from the anti-globalisation forces.

Chapter 2 is a narrative of the expansion of global economy in post Bretton Woods era. How the present phase of global economy came into being, how the market forces operate, who the chief actors in it are and how the forces tend to determine national policies of states and in that process how those forces shape and reshape social structures and relations in nations are certain issues which have been addressed by the author in this chapter. Post -Bretton Woods phase is marked by certain distinct features which place it in an altogether different plane in the history of global economic expansion. The author has analysed how trans-border capital mobility- a distinguishing feature of capitalist expansion has led to 'the political dimension of shift of power from voters to capital (P.6). The chapter offers a powerful insight to the forces that are shaping the world economy and provide a prelude to the next chapters in which readers are exposed to the changing dimension of international political economy and simultaneous transformation in domestic arena attuning to the demand of market.

The flashpoint of the next two chapters is the gradual shift of power from state to market. How the public domain in Britain was under siege and pushed open for private openings day by day, week by week in a span of twenty five years, forms the core of these chapters. The chapters demonstrate how a small opening inexorably leads to greater opportunities for private interests to make deeper inroads to society.

In Chapter 3 the author has explored the evolving relationship between the state and politics in Britain during 1975 -2000. The chapter is a brilliant exposition of the author's observation on the deep impact of global market forces on British politics, society, culture, state, state institutions, political parties and other participants in politics. The chapter unravels the extent of transformation of these institutions within the neo-liberal parameter. In a non-judgemental way the author has unfolded the subordination of national policies to the demands of mores of market. In this chapter, Colin Leys has analysed in detail the ways the political institutions in Britain have initiated, adapted and adjusted policies to the requirement of the global economy. The analysis of national policies framed in Britain during the period reflects the underlying succinct changes in socio-political and economic structures.

In Chapter 4 the author has explored the core theme of the book i.e. the fall out of marketisation on society. It narrates how market completes its invasion by initiating and accelerating the commodification of public services. It is a process which aims at converting non- commodified services

to commodities leading to the pernicious consequences of displacing social democratic values. It is a telling account of how commercial interests lobby to secure the supports of the leaders of major political parties to have a bigger take on non-market domain. Non-market domain primarily caters to the needs of mass and thereby becomes the target of commodification because of its huge commercial potentials and revenue returns. Such sectors are seen as the last barrier to marketisation.

Using this framework the author, has explored in Chapters 5 and 6 the social ramification of capitalist competitions in non-market domain in Britain. Two sectors British broadcasting (BBC) and National Health Care Service (NHS) were selected by the author as case studies to drive home his points. The chapters mirror the dangers inherent in increasing commodification of public spheres and unravel the process through which the television and health care in Britain became a field of capital accumulation. Both BBC (a free to air service) and NHS –a public utility service offered excellent services to people at minimal costs. The chapters recount how in a gradual and incremental manner, these two sectors were subjected to de-regulation and the re-regulation by the state in a span of twenty five years to fulfil the demand of market. Committees were established, policies were drafted to give a shape to the intended transition. Neither the public nor the parliament was ever told in detail what was intended through the policies. The whole project of privatisation was thus kept out of public radar. Though the transition was orchestrated by the non-state regulatory agencies, it had the tacit or explicit permission of the state. The author has mentioned that the process was greatly assisted by various governments in Britain. The chapter is a powerful interrogation of the ways the successive Governments in Britain have worked for creating space for penetration and subsequent proliferation of market in every spheres of life. It did not make any differences whether the governments were of Tories or of the Labour. While analysing the transition of BBC television network services, the author lamented that the approaches of the authority has changed the ethics of broadcasting. The earlier approach of what ought to be transmitted to the society for larger good was replaced by ‘What could be sold to public and how could be sold has for more revenues’ (p42). The fear was expressed by the author that with the proliferation of private channels, the service is less likely to remain a medium of delivering collective good rather it will turn into a commodity to be individually consumed. Going through the chapter, anyone could relate to somewhat similar experience in

our country. It reminds us how viewing television has changed from free to air service (Doordarshan) to cable network and latest to pay channels (DTH) system and how purchasing set top box was made compulsory in metro cities, thereby laying the foundation of the demise of free to air services.

NHS was a big challenge to the neo-liberal project. Health care sector was not only the biggest source of employment in Britain; it was regarded as an elaborate and comprehensive health care system in the world, being financed out of general taxation. Such a sector with an array of services like medicines, equipments, machines, human resources and other auxiliary medical supplies offered a major spheres of capital accumulations from which capital was excluded. The chapter unfolds the ways the privatisation was pushed incrementally in this sector. Starting with Thatcher's small step of introducing private health insurance, the sector eventually turned out to be a wholesome privatisation project. First target was the ancillary services like cleaning, catering, pathology tests which were followed by the appointments of new set of managers to supplant the doctors' decision making power and increase the power of private hands. The final blow came with 'outsourcing' essential services, budget cut, reduction in workforce and removal of dental care from public sector domain. At each stage the corporate interest was better served by shortening the interval of next reform. Thus 'health care' became a commodity to be sold under the new management system to be bought by the patients, at times paying for unnecessary tests which are offered as a package and requirement for treatment. The statement of the author that such language of buyer and seller, producer and consumer does not belong to public domain (p 24) reflects the transformation in this sector and its resultant consequences for the larger society.

In the last chapter (Chapter 7) the author addresses two significant issues-(a) whether it matters if politics are allowed to be driven by market? (b) Why there was so little resistance to market driven politics in Britain? The author answers to the first issue by way of recapitulating the danger of commodification of public spheres which is inherent to market driven politics. To the author, reduced public domain leads to the narrowing of democratic politics which is the biggest fall out of the process.

To Colin Leys, the second issue has more to do with globalisation which brings changes to class and caste identities, class relations and class structure by sorting people out into two categories-those with power and those with little or none. The mention of caste identities is interesting though

it has no relevance in case of Britain. Probably it was mentioned to refer the erosion of working class solidarity and the weakening of class resistance to globalisation in the wake of the rise in disproportionate income, minoritisation of poverty and weakening of trade union movements which are endemic to globalisation. The chapter further brings into focus the unwillingness of the Labour Party to back the resistance movements of the working class which placed all other anti-globalisation forces into disadvantageous positions. The book is a powerful insight to the Labour Party's abandonment of its traditional base and historical role of supporting, defending and educating the working class. Further, the commercialisations of everyday life and increased mediatisation of market driven politics made people to accept the penetration of market as natural and inevitable.

The book is an absorbing window to understand the agenda of privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation and the means and ways market determines designs and delivers its agenda. It is an inside look at what goes on behind the doors of market driven politics.

Reviewed by

Suparna Bhattacharjee
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong.

Lenka Laxminarayan, Quine's Philosophy: Anti-foundationalism through Indeterminacy and Other Theses, Northern Book Centre, 2014. 206 Pp. ISBN 81-7211-330-7. Price: 600.

This book situates Willard Van Orman Quine's philosophy in contemporary epistemology in which theories of justification play a major role. A philosopher sympathetic to empiricism and pragmatism, and a logician of the highest order, Quine's enduring legacy would be his challenge to the *apriori* status of Philosophy, an outlook that took root and flourished since the inception of the subject.

In this book, the author, Laxminarayan Lenka makes the claim that Quine's philosophy understood as an integration of his four major theses

namely, 1. Refutation of Analytic-Synthetic distinction, 2. Indeterminacy of Translation, 3. Ontological Relativity and 4. Naturalized Epistemology, is an anti-foundationalism. Through the advancement of this claim the author makes explicit these theses as facets of the one thing, namely, anti-foundationalism, which Quine has tried to represent through his four famous theses. The author in situating Quine's philosophy has brought in his own arguments to fill in gaps in Quine's position. Aligning his arguments with Quine's philosophy, he critiques what he identifies as some representative theories of foundationalism. The book could be seen at one level as an attempt to interpret Quine's theses as anti-foundationalistic, and hence discern a holism in these theses. At another level, the author uses these theses as springboards to construct his own argument against foundationalism. The book is therefore not just an exposition of Quine's theses but is an appropriation of them to forge a novel critique of foundationalism.

The first worry for the author is the delineation of foundationalism. To separate foundationalism as completely severed from naturalism would be to commit to the core of foundationalism, to have fallen in the ploy of foundationalism – that there is a distinction between these two methods from a position above these two methods. Foundationalism as a pursuit for knowledge, and Naturalism too as an investigation towards knowledge, do not conflict as long as they are in search of the same thing - Truth. Another point of contact which makes it difficult to put foundationalism and naturalism poles apart is that there are different varieties of these two epistemological positions, some of which admit of a continuity. But the author on the ground of a core and irresolvable difference which he insinuates to be on the camp of the foundationalistic theory finds a foothold to distinguish the two positions. Thus, he convincingly enough pits naturalism against foundationalism as anti-foundationalism, which is not to mean a position against foundationalism *per se*, but naturalism as anti-foundationalism in its irresolvable difference with some of the representative foundationalistic principles. The author identifies some of these as the analytic-synthetic distinction, determinacy of meaning, method of intension or absolute reference in terms of semantics or linguistic analysis. The anti-foundationalism of Quine, therefore, consists in the philosopher's refutation of these theses identified with foundationalism.

In the above spading, the author comes to the observation that 'ought', which stands as a conceptual representation of foundationalism, is not

completely independent of 'is' though 'is' represents naturalism. In this observation which he crosses over too soon enough, I find there to be an important ground upon which if delved deeper would come to the 'ought' of prescription and 'is' of description converging in the nature of the epistemic subject. They converge at the very conditions which makes a subject epistemic with the capacity to be in sync with the world both within and without. For the foundationalist one can argue that there are certain 'is' which one cannot but follow, hence these 'is' become normative by default. The naturalist need not balk at the prospect of uncovering transcendentals in these conditions, for these principles are descriptions of the principles that make knowledge possible. Yet, they are foundational descriptions.

The author makes another framing, this time to situate Quine's philosophy as against Justology. Towards that end he assimilates foundationalism and coherentism as strange bed fellows. The author makes use of Kornblith's argument on paper thesis which standardizes and characterizes the accounts provided by foundationalists and coherentists into an apsychological account. He defends Kornblith's argument against Audi's serious critique by taking the lynchpin out of Audi's critique i.e., his idea of conceptual naturalism. This, according to the author, is an untenable proposition which is not short of being based on a dogma.

The author through Quine's refutation of the Analytic-Synthetic division (ASD) opens up the project of uncovering the anti-foundationalistic character of Quine's philosophy. He achieves this in his claim that Quine's refutation of the ASD leads to the refutation of a kind of foundationalism that presupposes the validity of the ASD. He takes two variations on the same theme of the *apriori* - an epistemic concept that necessitates the foundation, transcendental or linguistic, that renders the distinctiveness of epistemic norms. These two variations are the Kantian foundationalism in his *apriori* categories, and the Carnapian linguistic *apriori*. Kant's synthetic *apriori* rests upon a synthetic-analytic distinction. This synthetic *apriori* is a foundationalism as far as it tries to stem the Cartesian doubt and the regress it generates, the Cartesian rot. The Carnapian enterprise to logically construct the world from sense experience also assumes the synthetic-analytic distinction. The Carnapian enterprise is also a reaction to the Cartesian doubt and hence a foundationalism. Quine's refutation of the ASD, therefore, the author argues, is a refutation of the grounds of foundationalism in the above two philosophers.

Having established an argument to this conclusion, the author defends this thesis of Quine against the well-known rebuttals of Quine's thesis from

Grice and Strawson (GS). To each line of their multi-pronged rebuttal, a respective counter argument is given by the author. To GS's contention that Quine's standard of intelligibility of the terms that he analyses are too exacting and high, the author maintains that GS's point of argument misses the point because they have misunderstood the concept of synonymy to be common place understanding of the concept whereas Quine's uses of the term is a technical usage introduced in an extended sense with certain epistemological interest. This is a fair enough point but when he says that the illusion of playing a game does not entail the existence of the game, there is the feeling that the author is going for overkill. For one can understand it to be saying that not even the common understanding of synonymy of linguistic terms is available in reality.

The author then makes an exposition of Quine's indeterminacy thesis (IT) with an orientation against foundationalistic semantics. Its underlying objective is to argue in favour of a naturalized semantics (analogous to naturalized epistemology). In the project of the book, the author's treatment of the indeterminacy thesis is one strand that binds epistemology naturalized. The other strand would be the thesis of ontological relativity. These two theses for the author are two sides of the same coin – the coin of naturalized epistemology. The philosophical insight that the author recovers from Quine's indeterminacy thesis is that no manual of translation can, in principle, be said to be *the* correct one. To say there is a correct manual would be to give a foundational reference point. Thus, the author brings out the anti-foundationalism of IT. There are no incorrigible truths, at least as a consequence of IT. This is something that is reached via the refutation of ASD. This conclusion in a different formulation would be the denial of truth solely on consideration of meaning. Whether this could be accepted without any controversy is doubtful. One can at least say that the game is still on, on the matter. In this chapter, on IT, the author embarks on clarifying, piggybacking on Dummett's observation, how Quine's holism is different from Duhemian holism. In this chapter one finds a clear clue to the author's problem in identifying Quine's philosophy as anti-foundationalism *per se*. This is because the author is convinced, on good grounds, that Quine's philosophy could be characterized as modest foundationalism as far as there are defeasible foundations in the hierarchy of what is at the periphery and what is inside in the structure of the web of our beliefs.

Ontological relativity (OR), which is a refutation of absolute determination of ontology is understood as a condition of 'reciprocal

containment' between epistemology and ontology which is an important aspect of Quine's naturalized epistemology. The author claims that "Quine's scientific realism retains reality without entering into the 'metaphysical jungle of Aristotelian essentialism' or adhering to Carnapian linguistic absolutism". This observation is towards the claim that this thesis is anti-foundationalistic vis-à-vis the foundationalistic theses especially the Carnapian kind. Foundationalism, according to the author, is deep-rooted in Carnap's emphasis on the division of ontological questions to internal and external questions. This division is in line with the trajectory of analytic philosophy from Wittgenstein to Carnap in its endeavour to map a logical space that accommodates world and language; the proper logic or grammar of our language as to determine reality in an absolute manner. One would tend to agree with the author's observation that Quine's philosophy is tangential to that arc. In his words Quine's philosophy is beyond Analytic Philosophy. This escape trajectory puts him in the camp of naturalists. Yet, here again he is different from the others.

The author draws a place for Quine's naturalism regarding epistemology, within the matrix of Naturalized Epistemology (NE). The author divides Naturalized epistemology *sans* Quine's Naturalized Epistemology (QNE) into two broad groups – one which harks for annihilation of the age old epistemological questions, the other which tries to encapsulate epistemology within natural science without reciprocity. QNE is different from these two kinds in its accent on the 'reciprocal containment' between epistemology and natural science. They are to inform one another without conceding a privilege position to anyone. One can find arguments for QNE against the other two broad categories given representation to Rorty and Goldman, respectively. The significance of QNE according to the author is that it investigates the old epistemological problems differently. The question that makes it different is on the relation between the 'meagre input' of stimulus on the basis of which we come to know the world through the 'torrential output' of beliefs. Unlike Carnap and others who gave apriority to the relation between the meager inputs of sensation and the torrential, for Quine, this relation is also part of the world and therefore, subject to natural investigation. There is a problem with this idea and its corollary which is expressed as, 'In QNE, logical truth is after all a convention and, thereby, it is not immune to revision'. If logic is to be understood as another theory of ours, then there is no problem. But, if logic is understood as the pre-thereotic 'something' through which we get understanding to start with, then I find

that neither Quine nor the author has explained enough how this pre-theoretic logicity could be revised. The author strengthens QNE by examining Barry Stroud's challenge against it, but the author summarily neutralises the challenges by pointing out that Stroud's challenge is damaging so far as Epistemology is delinked from Ontology.

Laxminarayan Lenka, in his understanding of Quine's philosophy has successfully brought the unity of thought in the latter's theses. The book is recommended for a rewarding study in its clear yet in-depth analysis of Quine's philosophy.

Reviewed by

Aribam Uttam Sharma
Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy
NEHU, Shillong.

Bhola Nath Ghosh, *Empowerment of Women in North-East India*, published by Concept Publishing House Company Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2015. 182 Pp. ISBN no. 93-5125-104-7, Price: Rs. 650.

The concept of gender equality has been one of the cardinal principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution resolved to secure to all its citizens- social, economic and political justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, irrespective of one's gender. To help realise this ambitions, the Constitution guaranteed fundamental rights and freedom to the Citizens of India (Part III of the Indian Constitution). Women and men, and girls and boys are supposed to be the equal beneficiaries of these rights. However, the reality is that, far from achieving equality between the genders, the status and position of women and girls in India has alarmingly worsened. The Government of India's 1974 "Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India", titled "Towards Equality" was not only an eye opening to the real status and situation of Indian women. The Report injected a new thinking and the need to reconceptualise hitherto gender discourse in India. The goal towards gender equality can be addressed or approached from different perspectives. In the process, there is always the possibility of "equality" taking a secondary importance. Maithreyi Krishnaraj

noted,

“We have moved away from the notion of the “Towards Equality” report to empowerment. One wonders how this transition took place. Is it more threatening to talk of equality of men and women? Is it that women claim they are different?” (Maithreyi Krishnaraj, “Is ‘Gender’ Easy to Study? Some Reflections”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 21, 2006, 41(42): 4442).

There is in substance Krishnaraj’s view. There can be different means of addressing gender inequality. But there can be only one end, and that end is “gender equality”. Empowerment is just one of the means, and it cannot be an end in itself.

The book under review is organised into eight chapters. In the introductory chapter, the author briefly talks about “empowerment of women” and the means for achieving it. To quote the book, empowerment of women is

“the questioning of the social, economic and political discrepancies and distortions, in terms of gender. As an enabling concept for women, it pertains to challenging her own subjugation and thereafter gaining control over the resources of every conceivable sphere, in the process transforming radically the structural, systematic and institutional inequalities through her own participation, priorities and perspectives... a process where women can gain access, have space and scope to examine and extricate their lives and gender relations critically and collectively” (p. 2).

The titles of the subsequent chapters are “Objectives and Aims of the Study”, “Justification of the Study”, “Literature Review”, “Research Methodology”, “Data: Observations and Findings”, and “Conclusion and Policy Implications”. The specific aims of the book is “to identify the aspiration and analyse the performance of different sections of women in the villages, to examine the process of empowerment of women in terms of social, cultural, economic, political, religious, legal, health and environmental aspects; and to identify the limitations and successes of the women who has set their goals in terms of empowerment”. The author has chosen four villages in the North-East as the universe of his study- two villages in Meghalaya, located under the East Khasi Hill district of Mawlyngknang block. The other two villages are in Tripura located under the Paschim Noabadi Gram Panchayat of Jirania block, West Tripura district. The author has selected these villages due to the following reasons,

- i) 73rd Constitutional Amendment : The provisions of this Constitutional amendment has been implemented in Tripura, while that was not the case in Meghalaya;
- ii) Ethnic composition of the villages: The two villages in Tripura are multi-ethnic, while that of Meghalaya is not but inhabited by the Khasi community.
- iii) The society in the two villages in Meghalaya followed matrilineal system, while that of Tripura is basically patrilineal.

The author gives equal weightage to the views and opinions of both women and men, which is very much prerequisite for understanding the level of one's awareness and attitude, and the overall gender atmosphere of a given context/situation. The book provides insights into the level of awareness and empowerment enjoyed by the women in the economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological aspects. It also gives insight into the attitude of men towards their women counterparts on some fundamental issues/indicators which are basic to gender equality. One interesting findings of the book is on the issues of child preference by sex where male and female children are treated alike in the villages. Another interesting thing is on "psychological empowerment" of women, which is about one's attitude, perception and understandings. A large proportion of the women in the villages did not think their status and position vis-à-vis men. Instead, they profess that women need not depend on their male counterpart. Men folks in the two villages of Meghalaya also subscribe to the idea of the equality of men and women. However, an overwhelming number of men in Tripura see women as subservient and dependant on them.

The first six chapters can be a part of the introductory chapter. Some of the variables identified by the author and/or his interpretation/analysis appear to have no relevance for understanding the process and level of empowerment enjoyed by women. There is inconsistency in the statements made, generalisation done without much theoretical position. One simple example that can be cited is the universe of the study. The focus of the study is supposed to be on the four villages. However, one gets the impression that the author is studying Meghalaya and Tripura. Related to this is Chapter 3, where one expect to get general background of the "Area of the Study". The author has failed here. Only eight lines talks about the villages while the rest is all about Tripura and Meghalaya.

Though the book has limitations, its merit lies in its ability to give grassroots information on issues necessary for understanding the prevailing status and position of women in the select villages. Overall, what the book attempts to address and understand is an interesting and relevant issue that concerns all human beings.

Reviewed by

S. Thianlalmuan Ngaihte
UGC-Postdoctoral Fellow
Department of Political Science
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong