

BOOK REVIEWS

Chandran Kakuthas, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom*, Oxford University Press. 2003. Pp. 304. ISBN 978-0-19-925754-6. Price: £ 60.

Modern liberal societies are grappling with the problem of managing the diversities. The biggest challenge that the contemporary liberal and free societies faces today is the challenge of coping up with wide diversities among people, groups and associations. Differences are prominently visible in the modern societies, more than similarities. Chandran Kakuthas in his latest book, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* brings out this point. He writes, “The problem addressed by contemporary political philosophy is, fundamentally, the problem of coping with diversity in a world in which particularity or difference or separateness is being reasserted. The question, put slightly differently, is: how can diverse beings live together, freely, and peacefully?” The book under review attempts to find a solution to this problem.

Kakuthas’ proposition is that individuals have different ends; there is no single or common goal that all must share; and that these ends necessarily comes into conflict with one another. The traditional liberal answer for addressing the problem is ‘to regulate rather than to eradicate the conflicts’. However, this universalistic prescription to address the issue is untenable in contemporary societies.

While accepting the premise that liberalism acknowledges and encourages the difference among individuals, groups and organisations, Kakuthas differs with prevailing liberal voices how to confront the problem. He states that liberal philosophers are still struggling with the problems posed for political theory by the facts of moral diversity, group loyalty, and nationalist sentiment. He disagrees with Rawlsian solution to such problems by arguing that justice is no panacea to address the crisis. He also does not approve of the idea of group rights advocated by Will Kymlicka to resolve the problem.

In the first chapter of his book, Kakuthas puts the question ‘what is the principled basis of a free society marked by cultural diversity and

group loyalties.’ He tries to answer it by building arguments throughout the book. In fact, the issue that he has raised is from his direct experience while living in alien societies. He is a Sri Lankan Tamil, born and brought up in Malaysia, studying and serving in the Australian Universities in the beginning of his career, then shifting to England, the United States and Singapore. At present he is holding the chair on political theory in the London School of Economics and Political Science. His experience in Malaysia in early life, especially denial of certain basic rights and preferential treatment, was the major driving force to ponder about the issue. Precisely, that is also the reason for which he worked seriously on multiculturalism and liberalism.

In this book he has tried to offer a general theory of the free society. According to him, a free society is an open society and, therefore, the principles which describe its nature must be principles which admit the variability of human arrangement. He delineates the fundamental principle of a free society is the freedom of association. The first corollary of it is the freedom of dissociation and second one is the mutual toleration of associations. Unless people and their associations tolerate others which differ or dissent, a free political society cannot exist. He observes that the political society is no more than one among other associations. While it is an ‘association of associations’, it should not subsume other associations by its superior authority. Freedom of association and mutual toleration are hall marks of free societies.

Kakuthas takes a radical position that is at odd with affirmative action, aboriginal rights and, preferential policies. He does not agree with any special recognition to any particular group, class or community. He proposes the model of a free society in which there may be many associations but none is ‘privileged’. Similarly, there may be many authorities, ‘all authority resting on the acquiescence of subjects under that authority’ rather than on justice. Therefore, the theory of the free society is an account of the terms by which different ways *coexist* rather than *cohere*.

He has countered Rawls’s thesis that justice is the guiding principle of a free society (justice is the first virtue of social institutions) by arguing that in a world of moral and cultural diversity, one of the subjects over which there is dispute and even conflict is the subject of justice. Justice

does not have universal consensus about its interpretations among thinkers. Another point of difference with Rawls is that the most fundamental question in political philosophy is the question of authority – where it should lie and how to confine it. According to him, the primary question of politics is not about justice or rights but about power. Naturally, Kakuthas was concerned with the issue of authority. In a free society, there will be multiplicity of authorities, each independent of the others, and sustained by the acquiescence of its subjects. The legitimacy of the authorities must come from their subjects.

At the end, he justifies the title of his book by contending that a good society is a free society. It should be an archipelago of different communities operating in a sea of mutual toleration. He puts it, “Unlike its more famous twentieth-century namesake, the gulag archipelago, the liberal archipelago is a society of societies which is neither the creation nor the object of control of any single authority, though it is a form of order in which authorities function under laws which are themselves beyond the reach of any singular power.”

His lucid explanation and convincing arguments exhorting diversities in the contemporary societies is a new way of looking at liberalism. Although Kymlicka’s plea for multiculturalism seems similar, Kakuthas’s book *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* has altogether different approach and different objectives. Even though some of his arguments are contestable, the book as a whole is an important work in the field of liberal theory.

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Suzanne Le-May Sheffield, *Women and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, Rutgers University Press, 2005. Pp, 409. Price \$29.95.

What is the book all about? The book is about women and their struggles in a male dominated institution of science. It makes a critique of the masculine tradition of understanding and practicing science, and discusses

the gateways and barriers that the women who seek to study and make career in the male dominated institutions of science. The book throws light on biological, anthropological, psychological and the sociological constraints women participation in Science. Talking about the exclusion of women from institutional sciences, the author explains, “The origins of the sexing of science as a male activity began in the seventeenth century. At this time, male philosophers attempted to bring prestige to their occupation and its institutions and to assert control and order over the natural world. In order to accomplish their aims, they believed they needed to ostracize women from the practice of science.” (p. 26)

The book starts with a biographical introduction that unwrap the heroic story of Madam Marie Curie, her triumphs, her struggles in male dominated fields like Physics and Chemistry. Her life itself was a message for the generations of woman. The book also throws light on the various contributions made by other women pioneers in different fields of science like, Maria Goeppert Mayer, Rachel Carson, Valentina Tereshkova, etc. Apart from the successful ones, the book also narrates the stories of women who never got the recognition that they deserved. The story of Lise Meitner is one of these kinds; the woman who did not get the rightful credit and died disheartened.

Apart from many such noteworthy narrations, the author also looks at the possibility of creating a science that fits into epistemological standpoint of women, as advocated by feminists like Sandra Harding who believed that “if women had the opportunity to choose and/or direct research goals, science would consider women’s needs and concerns, which would produce a science useful to humanity instead of one enables the elite to remain dominant over others. Science that is connected to women’s lived experiences of care and concern for their bodies and their love for their families can certainly be productive for both human beings and the environment.” (p. 198).

‘Women and Science: Social Impact and Interaction’, contains seven chapters including introduction and conclusion, it has pictures in the chapters, the last pages contain bibliographic essays, chronology, glossary, documents, and index, all laid out in detail making the book incredibly resourceful. The strength of the book lays in the fact that it attempts to unravel the subjects which had been bounded in our mind for quite a long time. Since, the book is multidisciplinary in genre; it could be useful for

students who are engaged in researching women's role in science from a historical perspective, and also for those interested in women studies and gender politics within the scientific community.

Books such as this help us understand why the women in our country and our region lag behind men in the field of science. Women pursuing science education is pretty low when compared to the total strength of women in language studies and humanities. Such poor representation could be because of numerous reasons including the stereotypical belief that women cannot be equal to men in terms of degree, rank, and salary in this field. This book brings out the situations and problems faced by the women in pursuing higher scientific education, so, people everywhere can see similarities, as patriarchy is universal.

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Sanjoy Hazarika (ed.) *Little Known Fighters against the Raj: Figures from Meghalaya*, Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia: New Dekhi. 2013. Pp. 92. Price Rs.150/-.

The book under review is Sanjoy Hazarika's edited volume, *Little Known Fighters against the Raj: Figures from Meghalaya*. The book is a collection of papers presented at two workshops/seminars. The first was a one day (6 December 2010) workshop/seminar at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong and the other was a similar but two day affair (7-8 March 2011) organised by Saifuddin Kitchlew Chair and the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia University in association with the Department of History of the University. The book contains six chapters including the introduction and an appendix, detailing the agenda of the seminar at Jamia Millia Islamia along with the list of participants.

During the last few decades, historiography of modern India has moved from being a discussion of the importance of a particular event/

personality to movements, groups, individuals, and events. The second dimension to this visible change in the historiography of modern India is that events which have been paid attention to historically are being looked at from fresh perspectives. This enables the historian to unearth marginalized voices and histories which are not canonized. A couple among the many examples reflecting this change in the paradigms of the study of the history of modern India includes Sabyasachi Bhattacharya edited *Rethinking 1857* (2007) and Sagar Boruah's edited volume, *Historical Studies in the Context of Globalization: Rationale for Restructuring Curriculum* (2011). This review situates Hazarika's said book within this changing paradigm of modern Indian history in general and the freedom movement in particular.

Imdad Hussain's paper, "The Hill Tribal People of the North East and India's Struggle for Freedom: Some Historiographical Issues", which was in fact his Keynote Address delivered at the seminar, presents the subject of the struggle against the British in northeast India in a broader perspective. Based extensively on primary and secondary sources, the paper gives a comprehensive account of the struggles of the freedom fighters in northeast India. He addresses the struggles aimed at constitutional redressal of the demands of the tribal people as well as the more radical armed rebellions in a large timeframe i.e. till the late 1930s. Though the case of Meghalaya is the main focus of his paper, he also cites examples from the other hill societies of northeast India and even from anti-colonial movements in Africa to substantiate his arguments. Highlighting the historiographical issues concerning the northeastern region, Imdad Hussain asserts that it is the responsibility of the historians to provide "... a more powerful perspective on colonial rule in Assam and the hill and frontier areas" and "...ensure that this finds its place in our national histories" (p.1). He makes historiographical critique of the factors that have led to the neglect of the 'widespread resistance of the hill people to the extension of British control over the territories' (p. 29). Barring the role of the church in the freedom struggle in northeast India, every other aspect related to the latter has been discussed comprehensively by Hussain. However, the subsequent papers in the volume are more particularly event-centric and lack the larger historical canvas in which Hussain's Address is sketched.

David R. Syiemlieh in his paper "Call of Freedom from the Hills: Tirot Sing and his Significance in the Freedom Struggle" discusses U.

Tirot Sing, the chief of Hima Nongkhlaw, who resisted the British imperial movement in the Khasi hills. Syiemlieh informs us that as the outcome of his resistance and subsequent surrender in January 1833, Sing was arrested and put in jail in Dacca where he died due to stomach disorder on 29th March 1834. Given the popular myths surrounding the death of U Tirot Singh, Syiemlieh's comprehensive and objective researches, helps to establish the historical reality about the last days of U Tirot Sing (p. 41).

S.N. Lamare's paper entitled "The Little War – The Jaintias and the British" discusses the struggle of the Jaintias against the British. He describes the subject matter comprehensively, tracing the history of the struggle from the origins to various subsequent developments (p.43). He is also able to clearly show the moves of the British to declare the pre-colonial socio-cultural and political formations among the Jaintias as illegitimate, thus inviting the Jaintia resistance. The contribution and sacrifices of U Kiang Nangbah and others working with him to the cause of the Jaintias are elaborately and objectively presented by him.

Patricia Mukhim in her paper "Freedom Fighters of Meghalaya: The Politics of Appropriation" discusses the contemporary politics of the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo societies by highlighting the monopolizing of the events/anniversaries of the life of the local freedom fighters by certain organizations. She rightly points it out that "Unfortunately these warriors have become a sort of political instrument and a cause for exclusive ethnic pride. Instead of becoming national icons like Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose, the communities to which these warriors belong and the pressure groups of each community have appropriated them" (p.69). At places, the paper appears to be journalistic in nature and lacks the style and formulation that go into the writing of a rigorous academic paper. Barring this minor lacuna, the treatment of the subject of appropriation of anti-colonial leaders through an analysis of the contemporary developments is the most important strength of the paper.

Last but not the least is the concluding paper of the volume by Abhijit Choudhury entitled "What Do We Owe Them?: Three Non-Tribal Fighters against the Raj from Meghalaya". Chaudhary is able to reconstruct the works and feelings of the three freedom fighters namely Dharanidhar Mahanta, Manoranjan Nandi and Nar Bahadur Gurung in the anti-colonial resistance movement and in the politics of post-Independence

nation state (p. 88). The first hand information collected by Chaudhary is able to provide a new perspective to the reconstruction of history in northeast India.

However, the book suffers from lack of uniformity in referencing style of the chapters and the full information of the references. Although there are not many typographical mistakes, more care should have been taken in case of references as page 15. Had this volume also included a few other articles by scholars working in northeast India on say, the constitutional methods adopted by the leaders of the freedom struggle, the role of the church during the resistance movement and after, the role and contribution of native and indigenous educated elites to the freedom struggle, role of the press (regional and national), the important contributions of the freedom fighters from the Garo Hills, the participation of women in the entire process, etc., its value would have increased manifold. Barring these glitches, the publication of this book is an excellent beginning to the reconstruction of the tribal resistance movements against the British expansion in the hills of northeast India. Though it is a welcome departure from the valley centric historiography of freedom struggle, the study of some common problems such as economic blockade of the hills as the deliberate British policy to punish the hill tribes, the fortification technology of the tribes against the British aggression, the planned destruction of youth dormitories of the tribes, alliance of the tribal chiefs against the British, role of the press etc. needs to be done to be able to fully reconstruct the freedom struggle of the hill societies of northeast India. However, the editor and his colleagues deserve our congratulations and one hope to see in the near future similar contributions about the other areas of northeast India.

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