

**Anand Kumar, Manish Tiwari (Hgg.):
Quest for Participatory Democracy.
Towards Understanding the
Approach of Gandhi and Jayaprakash
Narayan**

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This is a thought-provoking and stimulating collection of essays, which provides a special focus on the developments towards democracy in a globalizing world, and raises a host of significant questions over the link between Gandhi's (1869-1948) and Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP) (1902-1979) legacies of participatory democracy. The main aims of the book are to explore the various dimensions of good governance and participatory democracy to evaluate their connection to development progression in the postcolonial societies with a specific focus on India.

Although a mere recital of contributions to this book would serve no purpose, it is important to give the reader an outline of the titles: The book consists of an introduction plus twenty six chapters, which the editors have organized into four parts: (1) "Conceptualizing Participatory Democracy" (five chapters), which deals with theoretical themes; (2) "Who Needs Participatory Democracy?" (seven chapters), which addresses some of the specific problems; (3) "Different Facets of Participatory Democracy" (eight chapters), which sheds some light on various dimensions of democratization; and (4) "Towards Participatory Democracy" (six chapters), which evaluates the movements towards democracy in countries like Nepal and Turkey as well as India.

In Part 1, by drawing on the ideas of JP, Bhattacharjee (Chapter 1) argues that notions of centralism, bureaucracy, party system and voting mechanisms as the obstacles towards a true participatory democracy. Although Rao (Chapter 2) argues that a genuine democracy should be

"for the people and by the people" (p.19), he treats JP's belief in "a total harmonization of interests" as unrealistic. Venugopal (Chapter 3) shows that despite their differences, Aurobindo and Gandhi met in their approach to regenerate the traditional "decentralized structures of power" to achieve the final goal of individual freedom (p.37). After examining different types of democracies (pp. 44, 45, 46), Trivedi (Chapter 4) decides the idea of "grassroots democracy" is the closest to that of participatory (p. 46, 47, 48). In the final essay of Part 1 (Chapter 5), Verma argues when the "leaders of the Nehruvian generation" isolated politics from "individual concerns", they also undermined "the Gandhian model of development" (p. 61).

Part 2 begins with Kumari's essay (Chapter 6) on gender balance in politics, in which she argues, any type of exclusivist system is destined to fail in securing individual freedom. Kumar (Chapter 7) takes the reader's attention to the illegal underground economic activities and flags it as the most important economic, social and political issue of India (p. 111). In Chapter 8, Patra sheds some light on another group of people who are kept at the margins of the society, the Bodos. To illustrate that people are excluded not only in relation to their ethnicity and gender, while Jha (Chapter 9) dedicates some place in his essay to the problems of the people with disabilities in India, Rathaur and Anand's essay (Chapter 10) focuses on one of the other most vulnerable social groups in the Indian society where the impacts of globalization are severe, the senior citizens. Tiwari (Chapter 11) reads development through the glasses of religion and argues that one-way to deal with the destructive impacts of globalization is promoting a Gandhian simple living through the principles *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* and adopting social responsibility in reference to Gandhi's redefinition of *dharmā* (p. 150). Last essay in Part 2 (Chapter 12) is dedicated to the

connection between democracy and new social movements (pp. 154, 156).

In Part 3, after refuting the idea that only economic factors are relevant for development, Verma (Chapter 13) argues that a "democratic" approach of development must take the relative deprivation into consideration (p. 172). In Chapter 14, Singh and Jha discuss that Gandhi's practice of nonviolence, Nehru's commitment to democracy and JP's emphasis to "partyless democracy" were the milestones in Indian history of democracy (p. 177). Sisodia (Chapter 15) presents the case of Madhya Pradesh as a model for the future of participatory democracy in India. In his essay, Anand (Chapter 16) decides that the simplicity and the ability to appeal to the sentimentality of their readers were the key features of both Gandhi's and JP's communicative successes (p. 204). Chapter 17 is dedicated to a discussion of 'digital divide' in India. Prabakaran concludes that all social problems need to be addressed simultaneously (p. 214, 215). In Chapter 18, Thakur sheds some light on 'direct action'. He praises JP, for being "the first to purport the meaning of direct action to the masses" (p. 230, 231). Through references to libertarian thinkers, Dutta (Chapter 19) relates the neoliberal school to a new 'consumer' type self, who could be defined as 'disintegrated individual'. Part 3 ends with Sahoo's article (Chapter 20) in which he argues "to overcome the limits of parliamentary democracy and neoliberal globalization, the efforts must come from the subaltern sections of the society" (p. 288).

Part 4 begins with Mathew's essay (Chapter 21), which refuses the views to read JP as an Occidentalizer, by underlining that although "community was at the center of things in JP's scheme, [...] he was not an enemy of cities" (p. 295). In the following four chapters, the book elaborates on cases of Latin America (Chapter 22), Turkey (Chapter 23), Pakistan (Chapter 24) and Nepal (Chapter 25). Part 4 ends with

Vinod's essay (Chapter 26) which focuses on the relationship between participatory democracy and good governance.

It is difficult to draw exhaustive conclusions from the above-mentioned chapters. The book does not develop the guiding threads through four main sectors of argument as it promises in the contents. Although there is a grain of truth to the titles of the book, in reality, it limits itself focusing mainly on JP and refers to Gandhi on occasion. Therefore, it requires a 'participatory' effort from the reader to make the necessary connections, making the book's immediate appeal limited to graduate students, scholars and anyone who is specifically interested in India.

Regardless of a slight flaw in its design, the book is successful at delivering its core message from different perspectives. And that is the point that the idea of governance in the Western sense was first introduced to India during the colonial rule which was based on a particular representative model not fitting well to the local conditions in the Indian context. Since a mechanism of one-person one-vote had not covered the demands of a multiracial, multilingual and multireligious society like India, Indians based their own model on an existential understanding of autonomy, which is embodied best in the concept of *swaraj*. The authors argue that even though decentralization has been so far a mixed experiment which is open to various problems, it suits the best to the needs of Indian social structure. The book stresses the point that the idea of Indian participatory democracy comes from Indian tradition but not through modernization and Westernization, and it can serve as an original model to the rest of the world.

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