

A good book is the precious life blood of master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life

JOHN MILTON • AREOPAGITICA

## Led up the garden path to betrayal

**SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE CONSTITUTION**

Edited by Ajit Bhattacharjee, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rs 300

Ask any student of political science about the nature of the preamble to the Indian Constitution and its purpose, and the likely answer will be that it contains "the ideals and aspirations of the people of India". The preamble is a sort of introduction to the Constitution which explicates its policy and legislative intent. The purpose of the book under review is to critically examine these statements and to see what purpose they have served.

This book is a collection of papers presented at a seminar on "Social Justice and Constitution" held by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Mysore, to mark the birth centenary of B.R. Ambedkar. It analyzes why, despite the splendid promises enshrined in the preamble and the directive principles, "social justice" still eludes the downtrodden.

If justice, equality, liberty and fraternity are the "essential characteristics of a democracy", then why is there a wide "gulf between promise and performance"? The book examines several factors responsible for non-implementation of the promises: lapses on part of governments, interest groups politics and the beliefs and values that shape the political actions of the elites in India.

What makes the book interesting, and controversial, is that it doubts the intentions of the framers of the Constitution. "Did the framers of the Constitution sabotage the idealistic objectives from within?" The book states, "there are elements in the document itself that obstruct or make it easier to obstruct their (the preamble and directive principles) implementation".

But why are the framers of the Constitution targeted? They, according to the book, "were not elected... many were men of property. Their cultural moorings were western; they had little time for the Gandhian stress on indigenous institutions of democracy... they debased the values of groups outside the mainstream".

The book quotes Subhas Kashyap, former secretary general of the Lok Sabha, to prove this point. "It was, however, perhaps the class character and elitist composition of the constituent assembly that was responsible for distribution of basic human rights into the enforceable fundamental rights and non-enforceable directive principles of state policy. The poor, illiterate, hungry masses had no use for most of the rights like the right to property, freedom of thought and expression, equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, and so on. In any case, they were in no position to claim any benefit from these rights. The rights they needed were those of freedom from hunger, right to living, wage, and so on. All these were relegated to non-enforceable principles".

The constituent assembly came into being in November 1946 and its members were elected indirectly by the provincial assembly. The important members of the constituent assembly were Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad, and other luminaries. The assembly adopted an "objective resolution" which later became the preamble. It also appointed several committees to deal with different aspects of the Constitution. A drafting committee of seven members headed by Ambedkar was set up on August 29, 1947 and the draft constitution published in January, 1948.

Eight months were given Indians to discuss the draft and proposed amendments; 2,473 amendments were discussed in 11 sessions of the assembly. It is surprising despite the lengthy process and the formidable members in the assembly, no effective legal instrument was introduced to achieve a welfare state. It was left to the state to implement them with nothing but a "sense of moral duty". The moralists could not foresee that "morality" would soon be a dirty word in Indian politics.

If the current thinking on the matter is taken into consideration, there seems to be an urgent need for a review of the Constitution. But certainly not the way the Bharatiya Janata Party intends to do it and for the wrong reasons.

Sk Sadar Nayeem

In the 80th anniversary year of the October Revolution (1917-98), Harold Shukman's translation of Dmitri Volkogonov's book on the Soviet leadership from 1917 is a substantial body blow to the memory of Bolshevism. True, the seven biographies (V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, K.U. Chernenko, Yuri Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev) are poor history, set in the "great man" tradition where leaders do everything. They totally lack any sense of Soviet society and political culture, except in banal terms. But the author's "histories" will have an impact for their well authenticated reference to the straightforward, sometimes crude Soviet language of power, and the detailed treatment of sensational moments in Russia's past.

Like all Volkogonov's books (on Stalin, Leon Trotsky, and Lenin), this large tome, which he completed before his death in 1995, has nothing new to say on the subject, but has a major merit. As new Russia's most eminent historian of communist politics, and a scholar privileged by the confidence of the "democratic" establishment, Volkogonov, draws heavily on central, committee, politburo and presidential archives. The consequence is that the details of Soviet history are more clear than ever before, and no serious researcher on Soviet high politics and diplomacy can ignore the accounts the author provides. Here the book rises far above comparable literature — such as Roy Medvedev's biographies of the leadership.

Volkogonov's general message is clear: Soviet leaders were all made in a mould which was formed by Lenin and Stalin: a mould of intolerance and arrogance. No element of real humanism was to be found in the Bolshevik tradition except in Khrushchev. Brezhnev was a self-satisfied unimaginative apparatchik who became a senile cipher; Chernenko was an ambitious cipher who dragged himself to the presidency because he wanted to get there. Andropov had perception and intelligence but set too much store by the party and could not change anything; Gorbachev was a weak and indecisive leader who was doomed by the Leninism which he never abandoned. All leaders were creatures of a misconceived Bolshevik experiment founded on a class perception of Russian history and the

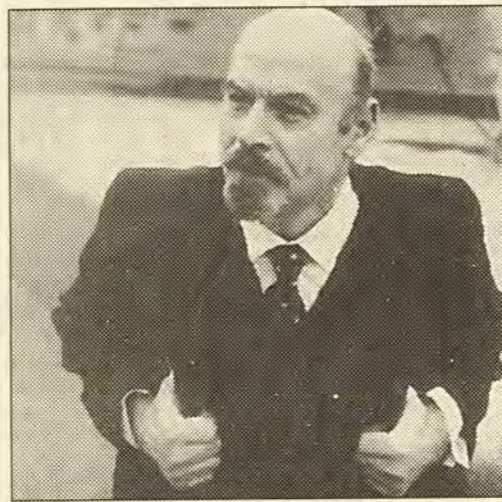
## Demystifying the Bolshevik leadership Fall from grace

**THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE**  
By Dmitri Volkogonov, HarperCollins, £ 24.99

Russian revolution.

Lenin and Stalin were responsible for the creation of the Communist Party apparatus which was to conduct that experiment. Not one redeeming word can be said about the experiment, since it rested on brutality, incompetence, empty verbiage and a pointless militarization which ruined the territories which made up the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Most of this is drawn out through a well known narrative: Lenin's assumption of power, the "utopian" lunacies of war communism, Stalin's purges, the world revolution project and the slush fund for "fraternal" communist parties, Khrushchev's failed democratization and Gorbachev's misconceived *perestroika*.

Volkogonov is at pains to strip every semblance of elegance from the Soviet leadership. Lenin comes in for bad press. His speeches were "long and boring". His language was far from parliamentary. Volkogonov quotes the aficionado of subtle Marxist polemic: "Martov and Co. are still making a stink. Go on, stir the shit! Let them choke on their own muck, it's the best thing for them — slime and filth". Again on the agent Malinovsky, Lenin would rage: "I couldn't get to the bottom of the swine Malinovsky. He was very shady". Uncategorical about Lenin's brutality in approving persecution and execution, Volkogonov also dips into Lenin's private life without serious sympathy. He publishes his intimate correspondence with Inessa Armand, accusing him of having inflicted emotional cruelty on his wife, Krupskaya, while he "carried on"



Inelegant postures

with Inessa. Lenin's last years, when he was reduced to the state of a child, hardly find any pity from this biographer.

Volkogonov finds no need to "demystify" Stalin in the same way. Mention of the number of prisoners sent to gulags appears sufficient for the author: for example, in March 1947, according to the ministry of interior reports, 2,188, 355 prisoners were held in gulags and the government had decided to open 27 new labour camps. Other details of Stalin's realpolitik do not add much to what is known, but they indicate the character of leadership interaction, nationally and internationally. Notes of a meeting between Stalin and Zhou-en-lai in 1952, regarding Korea, includes Zhou's information that Mao Zedong said "the continuation of the war is good for us". Again,

there are a number of excerpts from conversations between Stalin and Kim-il Sung during the Korean crisis.

In contrast with this account, Volkogonov gives instances of Khrushchev's earthiness and the full appreciation of this in the party. The high point of this section is not the 20th party congress, where Volkogonov's story of the build up is unusual, but where he hardly touches on the repercussions in the apparat and the country. Rather, details of secret police chief Lavrenty Beria's arrest, trial and execution are elaborate, they show the long time Khrushchev gave to "due process" to indicate the changes from Stalin's times, when the rule was a quick execution after a summary court martial by a "troika". In a party meeting, Khrushchev was brutal and coarse in his description of Beria's shock at his arrest: "He dropped a load in his pants".

The last biographies are in this mould. There are off the cuff points on the significance of each leader, couched within standard narrative (Czechoslovakia in 1968, Helsinki in 1976, Afghanistan in 1979, and so on) along with chinks from KGB reports to show the "spy society" the country had become. There are little asides regarding Andropov's and Gorbachev's sense that this could not continue, but little to show why, except that it was intolerable. The very existence of Brezhnev and Chernenko begs the question here. And Volkogonov's negligence of the strike movements of the Seventies and the neofascist mass mobilization around chauvinism and anti-Semitism in the Sixties and Seventies are an indictment of his poor social perspective.

The real problem of the book lies here. It rarely shows the making of the leader in social terms — except, perhaps, in the excellent description of Chernenko's life as a courtier and his senile longing to be president, knowing he could do nothing with the job. The reader is also expected to believe that the Soviet life was a washout and that Soviet people were sheep; though put this way, it is unlikely that Volkogonov would have agreed with the proposition. However, by the time he wrote this book, he was so full of spleen ("enlightenment"), that he says little else through his extraordinarily illuminating anecdotes.

Hari Vasudevan

## Stepbrothers in arms

**VALOUR: A HISTORY OF THE GURKHAS**  
By E.D. Smith, Overlook, \$ 40

Be it the *Purbiya* rebels defending the Red Fort during 1857, or the *Wehrmacht* in 1943, the sight of short stocky men wielding *kurris* spread terror among defenders. This book portrays the chequered history of the Gurkhas under British tutelage.

The corpus of military literature on Gurkhas is vast. The British officers of Gurkha units in 19th century India being its first contributors. The author E.D. Smith, too was an officer in the British army's Gurkha brigade. The book under review is a synthesis of regimental history and military ethnography.

Regimental chronicles were a kind of propaganda device. They highlighted the positive achievements of the soldiery neglecting cases of insubordination, fraying, combat refusals, desertions and mutinies. Smith too overlooks such negative activities of Gurkha soldiers, though unpublished sources indicate numerous court martial cases involving them.

In late 19th century India, the first military ethnographic project was implemented by Field Marshal Lord Roberts and his successor Kitchener to help the British select military manpower from the subcontinent. Eden Vansittart, in charge of Nepal compiled the information collected by him in a handbook for the Indian army in 1896. It went through several editions. Vansittart's successors, W. Brook Northey and C.J. Morris updated it in 1927. Smith's book is probably the last in this series.

Smith is influenced by the same concepts held by Vansittart almost a century ago. Both believe that "savages uncorrupted by civilization" constitute the best warriors. So illiterate villagers from Nepal were "martial".

Why did the Gurkhas join the British Indian army and after 1947, the British army? Smith, like his predecessors, argues Gurkhas were naturally soldierlike and admired the chivalrous qualities of the British. However, recent surveys by Mary D. Chesney and Pratyush Onta reveal that poor Nepalis joined the imperialist camp merely for a bag of rice. Chesney argues that the recruitment of Gurkhas was part of a tacit arrangement whereby in return for the supply of hillmen the British agreed not to

interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal. Smith's contention that Gurkha soldiers were respected in Nepal and that this motivated others to join the British army, is contradicted by a recent analysis of Nepali literature which shows that mercenary soldiers were hated in society. Nepalis were discriminated against with regard to pay, pensions and promotions. That they were aware of this exploitation is evident from their demand for equality in the journal *Himal*.

British admiration for Gurkhas can be traced to the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16 during which they concluded that Nepalis fought well enough to be



Walking away with the honours

coopted in the Indian army. Though Nepali officers like Amar Singh Thapa and Balbahadur emerged excellent fighters, the British never thought of enlisting Nepalis as officers as they would constitute a challenge to the British officer corps.

Lionel Caplan, a British anthropologist in his article, "Bravest of the Brave: Representation of the Gurkha in British Military writings" in *Modern Asian Studies* asserts that the British officers portray Gurkhas as reflecting the character of the British public school boy — simple mind and well developed body. Gurkhas were visualized as "kids" who would never

grow up to challenge the white man's supremacy. This holds true for Smith's work as well.

Though at times Smith's book degenerates into a bland narrative, he throws light on the formation of Gurkha regimental traditions. The combat value of Nepalis in hill warfare was however first discovered by Ranjit Singh and not by the British as Smith claims. The British merely carried forward the Sikh tradition.

Smith seems unaware that the term Gurkha is an anachronism invented by the *raj*. Nepal was a complex mosaic of tribes. Initially the British enlisted the Kumaonis and Garhwals. In the 1880s, Magars and Gurungs from central Nepal were recruited and Garhwals separated into another regiment. Limbus and Rais from eastern Nepal were recruited when the demand for

soldiers increased in the 1890s All the tribes were included under the generic title "Gurkhas" and Hinduism used to establish cohesion among these disparate tribes.

The *raj* is *passé*. Yet Smith's endeavour has propaganda value. Western society is unwilling to accept the losses in the attritional warfare along the Eurasian rim. But the British army under the auspices of the United Nations has the duty of maintaining "peace" against insurgency. For such human intensive counter-insurgency warfare, poor Nepali hillmen are the best possible option.

Kaushik Roy

## Man powered development

**DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND IMPOVERISHMENT RISKS: RESETTLING PEOPLE IN INDIA**  
Edited by Hari Mohan Mathur and David Marsden, Oxford, Rs 450

Many attempts have been made to kickstart development in India with the help of aid programmes, but relatively little has been achieved. These development programmes, formulated without conducting proper cost-benefit analyses have resulted in millions of "oustees". Acquiring land for development projects is not a new phenomenon and resettlement is usually limited to giving cash in exchange. The displaced are then left to go ahead with their own rehabilitation plans. These people live at the mercy of nature and disease. Their appalling living conditions, housing, health, and nutrition are an insult to the notion of equity.

Interest in the fate of these ousted people is increasing and the editors of the book under review have done an excellent job of compiling a research document on the complex issues of resettlement and rehabilitation. The book presents ideas of academicians, activists working with non-governmental organizations and researchers from the World Bank who participated in a workshop held in 1996.

Divided into four parts, the book deals with past experiences and current trends of resettlement and social security in India. The second and third parts deal with impoverishment caused by irrigation and thermal power projects, respectively. Three case studies are presented on each theme. Part four is about resettlement policies and contains articles that suggest various initiatives for empowerment to resolve the initial problems of forced relocation. The book integrates a wide range of issues, weaving one aspect into another in a holistic way.

Cernea's model of risk analysis which focuses on mitigating risks and alternative livelihood strategies is used by contributors for their evaluation of programmes. The analyses of two irrigation projects in Orissa — the Rengali dam by Ota and the one on river Indravati by Garg are based on this model. Garg presents the success story of a family oriented rehabilitation action plan based on individual

income generation schemes. In a study of the Talcher coal fields, Pandey shows how people were rendered poorer during the project, with women being the worst affected. Evaluating displacement at the National Thermal Power Station, Dinesh Agarwal makes the important point that resettlement and compensation packages often do not reach the poor but are appropriated by people who have access to power.

L.K. Mahapatra makes the significant point that good intentions and sound policies are not enough to sustain development programmes. The most important aspect is the way they are implemented. Though the contributors make various suggestions, almost all the articles centre around one possible solution: the necessity for people's participation in development programmes. Only when people have the power to influence the decisions of the management from the very initial stage will development activities have any longterm chance of success.

In spite of being well edited, the book overlooks two issues. First, the environmental aspect has not been much talked of. Second, the political dimension. Sustainable development is a political fudge, a convenient and fashionable phrase which seeks to bridge the gap between anthropocentric and biocentric approaches to politics. However, these are well known facts and the editors might consider appending them to future editions of this compact book.

In short, planners in the country need to combine ethics with a moral philosophy and concern for the environment.

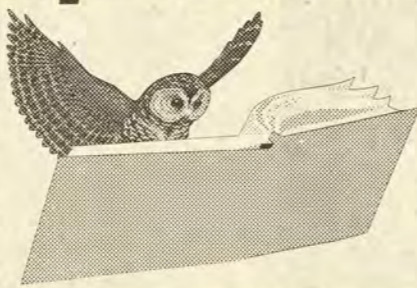
Bhaskar Chakrabarti

## Capitalizing on basic instincts

Down market American paperback publishing is a walk down the wild side.

Sexuality in all its permutations is laid bare here in all its explicit details. It is not just the scale and openness of sexual practice that is new but the amazing diversity of subjects to which sex is yoked. Like food and death, sex is capable of combining many categories. And some of these "quickies" spin off into television soap operas and commercials like two women sitting in a Hyundai speculating whether men with big cars are compensating for small penises.

In such a scenario will the Kenneth Starr reports (many "unabridged, explicit" versions have already been published) really sell? The answer depends on three questions. First, the number of copies actually sold, not just printed. Second, the time taken to sell the quantities printed/reprinted. Third, the profit of the publisher after accounting for advances, cost of production and promotion, royalties to the



BOOKWISE

celebrity who writes a foreword and spices the text with notes.

The answer is "no", despite the hype generated to sell the book to a gullible public. The number of copies sold and the number printed are two very different things. Economics compel the publisher to print more copies than the market can absorb to keep costs of production and the price within limits. The publisher creates hype about a book by announcing the num-

ber of copies printed in trade journals. But this is no indication of the actual number of copies sold.

Topical books like the Starr report have a short life span and the publisher has to resort to hype and slick marketing techniques to move his stock fast. Given the shortage of shelf space in bookshops, many books go back to the publisher after the first flush of interest is over. No publisher can afford to keep his titles for an indefinite period in the warehouse. Every book has a specified life span after which it is written off the account books and sold at a loss, or pulped.

Public interest is fickle and interest in sex even more so, hence profit and loss accounts for books like the Starr report should not be kept beyond six weeks. If copies are not sold within six weeks, the book is declared "dead" and remaindered. What complicates matters for the publisher is that

Monica Lewinsky has reportedly asked \$ 10 million for a "tell all" to be appended to "revised" editions of the report.

It is doubtful how much fresh material there will be in it, but for the publisher, this cost would be added to the cost of production. The two costs will be added and the sum divided by the number of copies printed to determine the unit cost of production. This figure would then be multiplied by a factor of



Goodies for a Starr struck world

six or seven to fix the price. However the publisher might handle his pricing (some publishers distribute the costs over three or four editions), there is no way he would be able to fix a low enough price the public will not grudge paying.

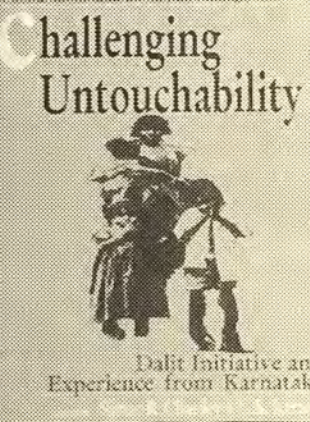
At the end of the day, a publisher is not really interested in the number of copies sold. What he is interested in is the gross margin of profit. Does it adequately cover his overheads, how much above the bank borrowing rate it is, does it provide for dividends and further expansion? This is the only criteria that matters to assess success or failure in publishing. If the Starr reports, unexpurgated or otherwise, do not meet them, it would be a failure. Of course, if the reports along with more input from Lewinsky were to be made into a TV serial, it would be profitable. But that's another matter.

Ravi Vyas

## PAPERBACK PICKINGS

### Touch of caste

■ **CHALLENGING UNTOUCHABILITY: DALIT INITIATIVE AND EXPERIENCE FROM KARNATAKA** (Sage, Rs 245) edited by Simon R. Charsley and G.K. Karanth is a collection of essays by various hands on different aspects of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. At the heart of this project lies the paradox of continuing Dalit deprivation in spite of the remarkable political gains they have made in recent years. The volume focuses on a series of contrasting communities in Karnataka and the successes and failures of their various initiatives. The case studies featured in this book will be invaluable for those who seek familiarity with the grassroots reality of Dalits in this country.



### THE MIDDLE OF LIFE

■ **THE MIDDLE OF LIFE** (HarperCollins, Rs 145) by Jaideep Prabhu is the story of the resonantly named Jawahar Shastri, lapsed Catholic and oppressed by the designs of the large family he lives in. The action oscillates between Bangalore and Mangalore, with Jawahar trying to wriggle out of a plot to get him married. He also meets the exuberant and tomboyish Ayesha Ferris, in whose company he passes from the gaucherie of youth to a certain degree of maturity. Though this is the author's first novel, he seems to have an instinctive feel for dialogue and description.

### TOLSTOY AND GANDHI: MEN OF PEACE

■ **TOLSTOY AND GANDHI: MEN OF PEACE** (HarperCollins, Rs 195) by Martin Green is the shorter version of the third part of a trilogy titled *The Lust for Power*, whose monumental size, by the admission of the author himself, tended to put off readers



somewhat. The author's preferred term for this abridged version is a "thematic biography", that is, one in which certain events are merely mentioned while others are treated extensively. Green tries to describe how both Leo Tolstoy and M.K. Gandhi arrived at a philosophy of renunciation and how their paths crossed in the process.

### TEMPLES OF INDIA: CIRCLES OF STONE

■ **TEMPLES OF INDIA: CIRCLES OF STONE** (Eshwar, Rs 250) by Kaumudi Marathe is a unique book in at least one respect: it features illustrations of temples on waxed, transparent paper which look more like architect's plans than anything else. One assumes that they are done by the author, who is an architect himself. In any case, the prints alone are worth the price of admission, especially the "View of Kashi on the Ganga". The potted biographies of the temples are written in a lucid and unpretentious style.

### THAKUR CHANDAN SINGH

■ **THAKUR CHANDAN SINGH** (Sahitya Akademi, Rs 25) by Mahendra P. Lama is a short biography of the pioneering Gorkha journalist and litterateur. Apart being a writer, he was a dedicated freedom fighter who repudiated British colonialism as well as the Rana regime in Nepal. He also founded the Indian Gorkha League.