

according to her, until the late 1990s and the conscription that came to be in the last months. She notes too, at several moments in the narrative, that the LTTE basically marshalled a tired and overstretched society to constitute a national community in the Vanni, in addition to the original inhabitants of the region.

What one misses in her analysis, is a feminist understanding of militarism, conscription and war: while this is foreclosed by the historical context in which she found herself and made her own, she surely could not have been unaware of such critiques. They were voiced widely in the civilian press, and in the mid-and late-1990s, spokespersons of the Freedom Birds had joined issue with their critics on precisely this subject. Besides, she must have been witness to the work undertaken by women's groups committed to peace and negotiation, especially in eastern Sri Lanka, which she had occasion to visit, several times.

In the last section of the book, Tamizhini dwells briefly on the importance of recognising and valuing ethnic and other differences, and on the importance of the co-existence of cultures and people. She also pulls herself out of a long past of combat and action and commits herself to love and marriage. Tragically she did not live to take the full measure of a different life, and succumbed to cancer, even as she had strove to complete her account of the times.

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Kalpana Kannabiran, *Law, Justice and Human Rights in India: Short Reflections* (Orient BlackSwan, 2021), 387 pp., ₹1,500, ISBN 9789354421105 (Hardcover).

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It is such a pleasure to read writings on human rights and justice through a perspective that is truly interdisciplinary and does not adopt a black-letter law approach. Kalpana Kannabiran's book—*Law, Justice and Human Rights in India: Short Reflections*—is one such work (referred to in this review as *Short Reflections*). LE Modesitt Jr. cautions us against mistaking

the law for justice; he says justice is ideal, and the law is a tool. Given the limitations and imperfections of the tool, and its potential for misuse by power-holders to subvert justice (the law of sedition is a case in point), it is commendable that the author blends historical, sociological, political and legal perspectives to engage with contemporary issues pertaining to a range of human rights. Political analyst Anand Teltumbde's foreword highlights the author's exploration and exposition of human rights issues through a combined application of sociology and law.

As the subtitle of the book suggests, the work consists of 67 short essays containing reflections arranged in two parts—Part A: Understanding Discrimination and Part B: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and the Law. Needless to say, the two parts are interrelated and inter-woven through the nature and character of the state, which the author relentlessly critiques in essay after essay. Due to the paucity of space, this book review cannot engage critically with all 67 essays. I will therefore discuss some essays that resonate with me, and which I think will be of interest to the readership of this journal.

In Part A, the work contains essays on a range of marginalized communities and is organized under sub-heads, such as The Adivasi Experience, Blocked by Caste, Disability Rights, Minority Rights, Queer Rights and Women's Rights. In 'Lessons from Badaun and Beyond', the author focuses on the brutal sexual assault and murder of two girl children in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh and connects it to the everyday experiences of humiliation and brutality faced by Dalit-Bahujan women and girls due to their disempowerment and vulnerability, and law's negation of those experiences. The author's pertinent observation that 'democracy lies trapped in the clutches of the two-headed state—the hibernating constitutional order and the live and throbbing rogue state...' captures not only the Badaun context (2014) but also the brutal homicidal gang rape of Manisha Valmiki in Hathras (2020). If anything, the rogue state that the author refers to has only become more brazen in its 'rogue-ness' over the intervening 6 years!

The essays on Adivasi rights, where the author speaks of constitutional claims of the Adivasi citizen, the guarantee of equality of opportunity, the state's absence of due diligence as well as a direct derogation of the fundamental rights by usurping tribal lands and evicting them from their homes and denying them livelihood, are symptomatic of the current happenings across various states in India. In the essay titled 'Right to Privacy as Right to Life' under the sub-topic of Disability Rights, the author draws linkages between the right to life, personal liberty and

privacy in the context of the arrest and continued incarceration of Delhi University professor G. N. Saibaba. In the 'Queer Rights' section, the author vehemently argues for repealing the Andhra Pradesh (Telangana Area) Eunuchs Act. In 'We Shall Not Be Silenced, nor Shall We Ever Forget', she speaks of the Hindu majoritarian political regime, its targeting of Muslims and the impunity it enjoys for its deprivation of fundamental rights. Though written in the context of political excess against anti-CAA protesters in Uttar Pradesh, it is also relevant in the context of numerous incidents of lynching of Muslims on the ruse of cow protection, and the 'hijab ban' against Muslim women students in Karnataka, 2022. The discussion on discrimination against marginalized communities in Part A of the book reminds me of the author's earlier work—*Tools of Justice: Non-Discrimination and the Indian Constitution* (2012) where she explored the scope of intersectional justice.

In Part B of the Short Reflections, the essays address contemporary human rights issues and are classified under Civil Liberties, Free Speech, Profession and Civil rights, Judges are Equal Citizens, 'Freedom to Be' in Universities, Human Rights Cultures and Future of Citizenship. What struck me as a reader and reviewer was the contemporary nature of some of the topics of essays, though they have been written and published over a span of two decades. For instance, the essay titled 'I Don't See What is Happening Within Universities as Separate from What is Happening in the Political Agenda'—published as an interview of the author by Rebecca Bowers in 2017—speaks of the relationship between violence within university spaces and negation of free speech, to government policy on higher education. The essay 'The University is not a Feudal Village' speaks of suspensions, dismissals, rustications and punitive measures against teachers and students during the Emergency and its reverberations with suspensions of faculty members in universities now, when they support students' movements or simply exercise their right to freedom of expression and to dissent. The author's observation that 'this is an age of post-truth and mythology' in the essay titled 'A Year After Rohith Vemula's Death' resonates with the recent establishment of a Cow Centre at Hansraj College (Delhi) and the commencement of a Department of Astrology, at Banaras Hindu University. As the author observes, post-truth politics works through a system of rewards and punishments. We know for a fact that the fear of punitive action forces many students and faculty members to observe self-censorship, while the system of rewards deeply polarises the community. This set of essays analyses the higher educational spaces as sites of contestation where the exercise of basic human rights is perceived as a threat against the administration.

The essays are much more than only opinion pieces, as they blend research, analysis and shape the perspective of the reader by joining the dots between the issue at hand and the political developments in a seemingly different geographical area. For instance, in the essay titled ‘Girl Punk, Interrupted’, the author discusses the imprisonment and conviction of three members of Pussy Riot—a Russian feminist punk band that critiqued the power of Vladimir Putin in 2012. She draws linkages between the Pussy Riot phenomenon and feminist mobilizing in India—of how women and feminist politics have been an essential part of the struggle against oppressive systems in India too. She emphatically states that one lesson that feminism teaches us is never to lose the sense of ourselves as citizens. The active participation of women in the Arab Spring revolutions which shocked authoritarian regimes, to the more local Shaheen Bagh protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR) have validated the author’s observations.

In both parts, in essence, the author illustrates the scope for justice in multiple sites that are riddled with contestations, tensions and dilemmas. One may wonder who will benefit from reading two-to-three-page reflections on burning socio-political and legal issues in the country. Well, in this world that prefers short, quick reads, where online articles come with an indication of whether the reading will take 5 min or 15 min, just about everyone! The book speaks spectacularly to social and political scientists, campaigners of human rights, the legal fraternity, students, researchers and academics engaged with socio-political issues. Informed and insightful essays, such as those in this collection, are useful reference points and act as prompts for further engagement with a wide array of issues. But this work will be of special relevance to graduate and post-graduate students, as the pieces inform, analyse, draw an engagement of the reader to the topic at hand and build perspectives all at once. The essays work well as stand-alone pieces and also speak to each other within the sub-topics they are organized under. Additionally, the essays have immense potential in providing a foundational framework, within which the readers can delve deeper into other works to complement the essay.

Amartya Sen, in his path-breaking work ‘The Idea of Justice’, opined that what moves us is not the realization that the world is unjust, but that such injustices can and ought to be addressed and eliminated. The *Short Reflections* emanate from a similar innate desire to eliminate injustices and to bring to a logical conclusion the incomplete and/or misplaced projects of justice. In a world where rampant and brazen violations of

human rights cause considerable anger, frustration, despair and gloom among many, *Short Reflections* does not leave the reader with pessimism and dystopia; instead, it renews and recharges the resolve to dream of hope in and commitment to justice, and charts a path towards realizing those dreams. In short, it is an immensely significant work in the contemporary context, as it provides rich food for thought and action in small wraps.

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Manjima Bhattacharjya, *Intimate City*. Zubaan Publishers, 2021, 240 pages, ₹420 (Ebook), ISBN: 9789390514366

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In her latest publication, feminist researcher, activist and sociologist Manjima Bhattacharjya locates questions of sexual commerce mediated by the internet in Mumbai, the 'intimate city'. *Intimate City* is a significant contribution to the relatively nascent domain of digital feminist geography and research on online sex work. What begins as an exploration of the geographies of online sex work culminates in a piercing account of not only the intricacies of escort work but also as a commentary on globalization-catalyzed loneliness and the need for affective outlets and intimacy, in a manner evocative of Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (Simmel, 1971).

Tracing the sexscapes of Mumbai, Bhattacharjya situates her exploratory study beyond the labour/violence binary, which is invoked more often than not in discussions of sexual commerce. While Mumbai's Kamathipura and dance bars have been the subject of many scholarly endeavours, critical research on escort services, massage parlours, the role of the middle class as consumers and providers and on forms of sexual consumption facilitated by mobile phones and the internet is conspicuously absent. It is this gap, formulated as the central question: 'how has the internet reconfigured intimacies in the digital age?', that *Intimate City* seeks to fill. Addressing the methodological challenges