

Review: 'What Do We Know of Cricket Who Only Cricket Know?'

Reviewed Work(s): Violence and Democracy in India by Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy

Review by: Kalpana Kannabiran

Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, No. 22 (May 31 - Jun. 6, 2008), pp. 23-24

Published by: Economic and Political Weekly

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40277516>

Accessed: 21-08-2017 16:48 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Economic and Political Weekly is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly*

'What Do We Know of Cricket Who Only Cricket Know?'

KALPANA KANNABIRAN

This volume explores through a series of essays, "the constitutive relationship between the 'normal' and the 'exceptional' practices and processes of political life, and (locates that) inquiry (in) the causes and consequences of extreme, visible violence within the everyday, banal, often invisible configurations of politics and power in contemporary India" (Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy, 'Beyond Exceptionalism: Violence and Democracy in India', p 4).

Hindutva Vision

Basu and Roy argue that Narendra Modi uses the metaphor of politics as cricket, to position his governance of Gujarat within the larger rule-bound universe of democratic politics – the one day match epitomising the relationship between the existing rules of the game and apparent departures from them.¹

Drawing on the work of Agamben and Baxi, they call into question the "conceptualisation of mass violence as a scripted politics of exception that occurs only in recognisably deviant places where democracy is absent", mapping instead the points of convergence between holocaustian politics and the norm of democratic politics (p 7). Even if the latter does not directly produce the Hindutva vision, it does not directly prevent such an envisioning either (p 12).

I have argued elsewhere that looking at the range of violence against women and the theoretical treatment of such violence as an aberration from the norm in "egalitarian societies" skirts the important fact of violence against women being constitutive of social relations in patriarchal societies and have examined the problem in terms of what I call "the violence of normal times".² Raka Ray's examination of the normal slap (actual or metaphorical) which "reinforces or reasserts inequality" ('A Slap from the

Violence and Democracy in India edited by Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy; *Seagull Books, Kolkata, 2007; pp 266, Rs 160.*

Hindu Nation', p 88), in the context of the everyday relationship between Hindus and Muslims, between the dominant castes and dalits, between men and women, between nations on the Indian subcontinent, and in the context of holocaustian politics opens out for us the praxiological fields of the violence of normal times – the complex interconnections between the workings of democracy and its underbelly, collective violence.

Press Coverage

A survey of press coverage on border violence along the entire Indian border for a five-year period of officially friendly relations (1998-2002) demonstrated that the Partition border was a dangerous place even half a century after its creation. Territoriality resulting from "executive cartography" while creating borders, destroys bodies – by dehumanising some ("infiltrators, foreigners, ultras, terrorists, smugglers, anti-social elements...borderlanders") and killing others – "dead bodies at the border come to stand for a greater good: they symbolise security" (Willem van Schendel, 'The Wagah Syndrome: Territorial Roots of Contemporary Violence in South Asia', p 66). Schendel observes in his essay on the violence that results from the territorialisation of religious and ethnic identities on the subcontinent (Burma, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) that "(m)uch of what is understood as communal violence today can be analysed in terms of aggressive territoriality...predicated on frail sovereignty" (p 67).

Paula Chakravarty and Srinivas Lankala in their article 'Media, Terror and Islam: The Shifting Media Landscape and Culture Talk in India' explore the strategic

role of the media in the post 9/11 phase which also saw a frenzied, often inaccurate reportage on terrorism in India in the electronic and print media, that complemented the denial of rights to fair trial to persons accused in the Parliament attack case (pp 173-97).

Women and Violence

Drawing on Tanika Sarkar's work on the construction of gender and national identity under colonialism and her more recent writing on Gujarat 2002, Martha Nussbaum in her article 'Rape and Murder in Gujarat: Violence against Muslim Women in the Struggle for Hindu Supremacy' examines the relationship between the violent subjugation of women's bodies within families, the injury to the self in daily encounters with the racial hierarchy of the outer world, and the acutely contested control of women's bodies through reform during colonialism that witnessed the persisting emergence of the female body as nation – control of one assumed (fallaciously even) to be control of the other. "[I]f the female body symbolises the nation, then, in the struggle of two emerging nations, the possession and impregnation of women is a potent weapon in consolidating power" (p 104). But, testimonies of the violence in Gujarat in 2002 spoke of the widespread use of torture and mutilation – as distinct from abduction and impregnation that typified the violence against women during the Partition in 1947. Nussbaum looks at the role of the everyday emotion of "disgust" that shields human being "from too much daily contact with aspects of their own humanity that are difficult to live with" – corpses, oozy decaying smelly things, faeces – in drawing boundaries, closing boundaries to exclude the other. Jews in European societies, dalits in Indian society, Muslims now, are ascribed disgust properties that exemplify animality and provoke rage by their mere existence thus subordinating them (violently even, but certainly physically) and insulating the dominant group from fears of its own mortality (pp 108-09). It is this complex discursive field of disgust, Nussbaum argues, that helps us understand political violence, "seeing more clearly how the organisers of hate played on pervasive

human anxieties, to which their specific constructs of the male and female body gave a new shape and urgency" (p 117).

Communal Conflicts

Looking at the Araya-Muslim conflict in Kerala, Devika and Usha Zacharias' attempt to map the ways in which the violence occurring in a small coastal village in south India post 9/11 translates simultaneously into multiple sites – local, regional, national and global. More importantly, the essay juxtaposes intra-community exclusions and hostilities (that functioned to oppress the Arayas socially and economically within the Malayalee caste order) with inter-community exclusions and hostilities that involve substantial economically powerful minorities in Kerala.

In a situation of large-scale forced displacement of Muslim families consequent on inter-community violence, the involvement of the state in rehabilitation and resettlement of Muslim families locks in with the Hindutva rhetoric at the national level and post 9/11 rhetoric of Islamic terrorism at the global level. This scheme constructs the Hindus (here represented by the Arayas who were traditionally excluded from the 'savarna' fold) as oppressed and marginalised and the Muslims (several of whom have connections with the Gulf nations through migrant work) as collaborators in the grand Islamic project who will aid the capture of this western coastline through this village. Araya women have played a key role, serving the interests of Hindutva, no doubt. Yet, importantly, this was a role that was fashioned through a complex historical process of community making within the larger Hindu fold.

Violence in War Zone

The routinisation of violence in a war zone disrupts everyday life at every level – displacement, loss of livelihoods, food shortages, the decimation of livestock, the desertion of homes and overcrowding in camps, the total suspension of developmental programmes, "routine shelling" and repression – severely

affecting social and economic functioning and bringing damaging psychological consequences to the affected communities. How do religious identities get constructed and asserted in this situation, especially when both are religious and ethnic minorities? Using the murder of three Buddhist monks in Rangdum in 2000 as her point of departure, Ravina Aggarwal in her 'Once, in Rangdum: Formations of Violence and Peace in Ladakh' traces the foundations of communal conflict and its relations to international border conflict in Kargil district, which has 80 per cent Muslim and 18 per cent Buddhist population, expanding on Allen Feldman's argument that "political violence is no longer fully anchored in ideological codes and conditions external to the situation of enactment and transaction. Political enactment becomes sedimented with its own local histories that are mapped out on the template of the body" (pp 148-72). An important part of this enactment is the process of reconciliation, unification and peace that is difficult because it is entrenched in the everyday and routinised life that also fashions repression and violence.

Looking at state responses to communal violence over the years, especially at state inaction, Zoya Hasan in 'Mass Violence and the Wheels of Indian (In)justice' raises the urgent concern about state complicity in majoritarian violence in India (pp 198-222). In a different context, in Bangladesh, Dina Siddiqui argues that "majoritarian imaginations tend to exhibit a fundamental "misrecognition" of the historical and structural factors that render minority communities...susceptible to state and non-state violence".

This volume is a useful addition to the growing corpus of work on violence in south Asia.

Email: kalpana.kannabiran@gmail.com

NOTES

- 1 C L R James, *Beyond a Boundary*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, Preface. Cf Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy, 'Beyond Exceptionalism: Violence and Democracy in India', note 41, p 35.
- 2 Kalpana Kannabiran (ed), *The Violence of Normal Times: Essays on Women's Lived Realities*, Women Unlimited in association with Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2005.

MANOHAR

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CRISIS OF STATE AND NATION South Asian States Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation

John P. Neelsen,
Dipak Malik (eds)
81-7304-731-6, 2007, 432p.
Rs. 995

NEGOTIATING FOR INDIA Resolving Problems through Diplomacy

Jagat S. Mehta
81-7304-672-7, 2007, 296p.
Rs. 750

RESCUING THE FUTURE Bequeathed Misperceptions in International Relations

Jagat S. Mehta
81-7304-752-9, 2008, 487p.
Rs. 1250

CHINA-PAKISTAN STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Indian Perspectives

Swaran Singh (ed)
81-7304-761-8, 2007, 405p.
Rs. 895

INTERVENTION IN SRI LANKA The IPKF Experience Retold

Maj. Gen. Harkirat Singh (Retd.)
81-7304-705-7, 2007, 188p.
Rs. 545

EASTWARD BOUND India's New Positioning in Asia

Isabelle Saint-Mezard
81-7304-721-9, 2006, 499p.
Rs. 1150

INDIAN DIASPORA IN WEST ASIA

A Reader
Prakash C. Jain (ed)
81-7304-727-8, 2007, 340p.
Rs. 850

for our complete catalogue please write to us at:

MANOHAR PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS
4753/23, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-2
Phones: 2328 4848, 2328 9100, 2327 5162
Fax: (011) 2326 5162 email: sales@manoharbooks.com
Website: www.manoharbooks.com