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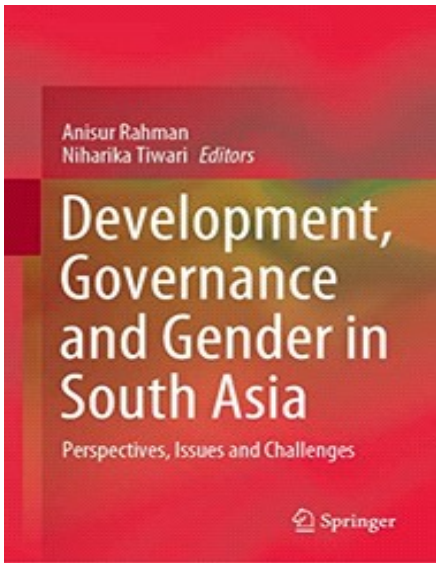
BOOK REVIEW



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By
Ghulam Mustafa

"*Development, Governance and Gender in South Asia – Perspectives issues and challenges*" is a book comprising 19 articles by various scholars, edited by Prof. Anisur Rehman, Director, UGC –Human Resource Development Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi and Niharika Tiwari, Associate Prof. Deptt. of Political Science, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Govt. P.G. College, Saidabad, Uttar Pradesh. The book is published by Springer Nature, Singapore Pte. Ltd.

The contributors to the edited volume are experts in the subjects they cover and bring their perspectives on a whole range of issues having their bearing on development and governance in South Asia, ranging from debt deficit and economic growth, human development, skill for employability, corporate governance, nuclear weapons and regional cooperation to Urdu and Arabic and Nepali literature, media and gender.

The book offers a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach to understanding contemporary issues & trends of governance, human and socio-economic development, and regional cooperation in south Asia. The book is broadly divided into four sections: 1. Social and Economic Development, 2. Governance and

*Ghulam Mustafa was formerly OSD, Parliamentry Affairs, Government of Bihar.

Human Rights, 3. Media and literature and 4. Gender and Development, with each section covering multiple chapters.

This volume weaves together debates related to the governance, human rights, human development, human security, regional co-operation, media and literature and gender in South Asia. The scholars use deconstructive and post-modernist approaches to analyse concepts of development and their impact on various issues. The socio-economic exclusion of people on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religion has also been dealt with.

South Asia is among the most promising regions of the world. The region's geographical location makes its geopolitically relevant and its natural resource reserves are crucial to the growth trends in the global economy. However, the region is characterized by mass poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and corruption, and requires immediate attention to meet those challenges. Border disputes, resource sharing, poor intra-regional trade and mutual distrust are the primary impediments in realizing the region's politico-economic integration and developmental potential potential. Equally important is to formulate viable strategies to utilize regional resources sustainably and equitably for enhancing growth and development.

There is an effort by the contributors to the volume to identify factors and patterns responsible for sluggish performance in governance and human development indicators. They question the very premise of developmental narratives in South Asia and seek to capture the role of national stakeholders, namely the state, civil society, social movements, media and their respective roles in the formation as well as de-construction of power structures in this region, trajectories of economic growth and socio-political changes have been discussed in detail.

In the post-cold war era characterized by rise of neoliberalism, the region has been at the centre of regional as well as global dynamics. The book deals with ethnic conflict in the region. The ethnicization of politics and politicization of ethnic differences is one of the common phenomena in South Asia. This ethnic problems, which have their roots in colonial policies were inherited by the post-colonial South Asian states as well.

Of late, there is a realization that there are certain socio-economic and political issues like governance, human trafficking, environmental challenges, and terrorism that are

transnational in nature and cannot be resolved single-handedly by one state. This realization led to the formation of South Asian Association for regional co-operation (SAARC) in 1985, and later SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

Demographically, South Asia is most populated region of the world. Though South Asia faces many socio-economic challenges owing to its huge population it has advantage of demographic dividend. Demographic dividend can be converted into demographic opportunities if good health, quality education, decent employment and many other capability enhancing supports are provided to the people.

Due to population pressure, poor level of governance and lopsided development, this region has been listed at the top of the extremely poor economic region's list. Per capita income of South Asia is lower than other regions of the world. However, despite several socio-economic and political constraints and limitations, South Asia has multiple global effects and therefore, it remains a centre of academic as well as political attractions despite being marred by turbulences time and again.

In a more optimistic vein, the authors aver, South Asia provides a big and diversified market that attract big economic giants. Apart from this, it provides relatively cheap labour to the gulf countries and other regions. South Asia is rich in natural resources. Moreover, strategically, India is considered very crucial in the region due to its location in Indian Ocean, as it occupies a central position.

The first part of the book also discusses status of human development and challenges in South Asia by analyzing the conditions of health, education and living standards of the people of this region. . The chapters the market dynamics and the state policies. While discussing about debt, deficit and economic growth in South Asia a comparison of South Asia with East Asia in general and China and japan in particular has been made. Migration and inflow of remittances has emerged as an exclusive characteristic of South Asian economic system. Therefore, South Asian migration to the gulf region has been examined as the best strategy for reducing poverty and inequality in the region.

The second part of this book discusses the relationship between governance and human rights. This section stress on the need for better yardsticks to gauge the impact of

governance in South Asia. Further, the plight of religious minorities is analyzed under the broader framework of human rights and governance. The need for greater measures towards democracy, good governance and human rights in South Asian countries have been extensively dealt with by the contributors.

The impact of perceived security threats that motivated India and Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons has been analyzed along with the suggestion of ways and means of enhancing the nuclear stability in the region.

Governance and human rights are complementary to each other. However, it has been widely observed that while following the process of governance, the human rights of the marginalized sections are violated by the state agencies in South Asia.. Human rights violations both by the state and non-state actors remain a concern in South Asia.

The human development approach to development was put forwarded by the economist Mahbubul Haque and it was further elaborated by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in his human capability approach. This approach uses three basic dimensions: longevity, knowledge and decent living standard. Human development approach to development provides a parameter to evaluate the programmes and policies of the government beyond the economic growth –oriented paradigm.

The third part of this book emphasizes on the importance of media, literature and their changing dynamics in South Asian region. This part unfolds the way media and literature narratives are created and marketed in South Asia. It also deals with the power dynamics and socio-political narratives that work from behind the functioning of the media houses. Media houses are regulated and influenced by influential sections. In South Asia media and literature both have played crucial role in strengthening as well as weakening efforts made for regional co-operation. Media and literature can be a medium for conflict management or they can instigate the conflicts. In South Asia media and literature has defined the issues such as conflicts , war, gender, minority and nationalism.

The fourth part deals with gender. This section captures the changing narratives about South Asian women in the fiction literature of South Asia's, women writers. It is a comparative study where major works by Simon de Beauvoir, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have been

dealt with. Male migration and its impact on women in Bangladesh is given special attention. This part also covers debate about political representation of women in South Asia especially in the context of India.

Due to rampant corruption, structural violence and discrimination, the progress in socio-economic status of women and overall human development indicators remains slow in South Asia. The trajectory of development has been gender-biased and skewed in this region. Despite being a fast growing region in terms of Gross Domestic Product, deep rooted inequalities and discriminations affect human development in this region.

In sum, the book argues that in order to make growth more inclusive and participatory, the governments should adopt a humanitarian approach. This book is a must read for scholars, academics and practitioners looking for a better future for the region. ■

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the footnotes. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, (Ms Word 2003 format) also. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

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