Book Review


The above volume provides a holistic understanding of the inclusive development of the marginalised communities through the broad-basing process in India. It focuses on whether their marginalisation in the pre-Independence period has given way to broad-basing in the post-independence period. The book, containing 12 chapters, critically analyses these issues through historical parlance, case studies, and empirical evidence with due analytical rigour by most of the contributors. Alongside, it looks at interregional disparities and policies and practices relating to the conservation of the forest ecosystem.

The introductory chapter by the Editor examines how India has fared in bringing the marginalised into the mainstream through the broad-basing process. The idea of broad-basing process as enunciated by the author refers to a wider exercise that includes processes like social mobility, trickle down, empowerment, integration, and democratisation of polity that will, over the years, lead to progressive mainstreaming of marginalised groups in terms of their economic well-being and effective participation in polity and society leading to inclusivity in the Indian society. Investigating the key regions where the broad-basing process is functioning, the author finds that the rising income and wealth inequality, faulty and tardy implementation of policies, and poor allocation of welfare resources have retarded the broad-basing process. Therefore, the mainstreaming of marginalised communities, according to the author, would be possible only if India plays the role of an effective welfare state. For this purpose, an array of policy measures including progressive taxation, redesigned welfare measures, affordable quality healthcare, and food and nutritional security are needed to speed up the broad-basing process in the country.

In Chapter two, M.V. Nadkarni focuses on the changing socio-economic and political status of the Dalits and the strategies employed to promote social integration. He finds that the Dalits lag behind the general population on account of low-income occupations, lack of alternative employment opportunities, limited healthcare and education access, inadequate implementation of the reservation policy, and other challenges faced by the government and private social welfare bodies. Hence, the author suggests that there is an urgent need to widen the access of the benefits provided by the state to reach the lower crust of the Dalit community and explore potential non-governmental options such as making reservations in private sector for rapid redressal of social inequalities.
In chapter three, Manohar Yadav discusses how the Dalit movement has evolved historically in general and in Karnataka in particular. It traces the origin of the Dalit movement against social repression as well as the literary and societal efforts to end discrimination. The movement gained momentum with the rise of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who campaigned against social discrimination towards the Dalits, and was later revitalised under the Karnataka Dalit consciousness whereby many land reform and other development programmes were launched for the emancipation of Dalits. However, the success of the movement has been limited despite continuous efforts of the government such as providing reservation in educational institutions and in public sectors. Therefore, it examines the reasons for their limited social and political bargaining power and how it fares against the economic scaling of other communities across India.

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju explores the other backward communities (OBC) of India and their gradual integration into mainstream society in chapter four. Though the socio-economic and political status of the OBCs improved after independence, there are still wide-ranging disparities within the communities which prevent the benefits of economic growth from trickling down to the most underprivileged. A number of factors have contributed to the slow mainstreaming which includes globalisation-induced neglect of the agrarian sector, dwindling efficacy of affirmative action programmes, and growing assertion of the better-off on the most backward within them and on women against patriarchy. This has led to intense competition between the upper crust and the most backward of these communities. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the reach of benefits provided by the government, especially for the most backward classes, by focusing on the revitalisation of the agricultural sector including rural development and provision of quality elementary education.

In chapter 5, Khalil Shaha and S. Yogeshwari focus on capturing the change in the socio-economic and political status of Muslims to understand the process of mainstreaming among these groups. The findings reveal that their status is not much higher than that of SCs and STs. This is particularly true in the case of education; in spite of having sufficient public schools in the country, Muslims have the lowest enrolment ratios and highest dropout rates. Besides, inter-group and inter-regional inequalities, higher presence in informal economy, underrepresentation in higher education, and gender biases are other obstacles in their progress. The authors, however, note that southern states show a lesser degree of literacy gap, and that of their level of living. Therefore, the authors call for a renewed focus on major issues faced by the poor, especially women, to promote participation in education and employment with skill development and through appropriate affirmative policies.

In chapter 6, Lavanya Suresh extensively analyses the status of women in society. In spite of several initiatives like reservations in government and private sectors and better access to education and other facilities, women have been restricted because of the patriarchal nature of the Indian society. The one of the major reasons for the marginalization of women, according to the author, is the social constraints that limit
their ability to make their own choices in terms of education, careers, and sexual orientations. Though numerous initiatives and interventions by the government, civil society, and other groups have resulted in significant outcomes in recent years towards mainstreaming of women, there are still many problems that require governmental and societal measures to promote their active engagement at all levels in society.

In chapter seven, Vinay Kumar analyses the trajectory of industrial workers to understand how the broad-basing process has affected them. The general conclusion is that while industrial workers have contributed significantly to industrial development of the country, they have never been in a dominant position in the economy. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the public sector played a crucial role in the process of industrial development which helped improve the socio-economic status of the workers. However, during the globalisation era, a vibrant private sector overtook the public sector, leading to a rise in low quality informal employment. While both the public and the private sectors have extended few social security protections to informal workers, a lack of solidarity among them has further reduced their bargaining power. It has weakened their movement and reduced their status in the economy and society.

In chapter eight, Malini L. Tantri and Shruthi Mohan Menon discuss as to how economic growth impacts on the marginalised communities through the lens of food security, poverty, and employment. The authors note that though the overall poverty level, both at rural and urban level has shown a decline in recent years its decline in the rural areas has been slow. Backward states have continued to show high level of poverty ratio. High incidence of poverty and nutritional deficiency among poor-landed and landless- especially among the SC and ST and among women across social groups has been observed. Besides, increasing economic inequality within and among states and across social groups is found especially in the post reform period. Employment rates have shown a decline. The growth of employment is taking place mostly in the non-farm sector but much of this is of low quality. Gender bias in employment and declining work participation rates among the female workers has also been observed. Several other problems like economic vulnerability, lack of social security, ineffective welfare schemes, labour shedding, diminishing village economy, and lack of education and skill among the youth restrict broad basing among the marginalized groups. The authors have suggested the need to redesign proper policies and schemes to improve and increase their efficacy.

In chapter nine, R.S. Deshpande discusses the broad-basing process in the context of digital technology, given the rural-urban economic divide, low literacy rate, and low levels of income, especially in rural areas, and analyses the determinants of the spread of this technology. He notes that in spite of the above factors, the adoption of digital technology which are user-friendly in certain financial and other activities including in the agricultural sector, has been significant, thanks to the efforts of the state and the private sectors. Its use has further accelerated after demonetisation. By
studying a number of probable indicators that influence the use of digital technology, the author observes that poverty, income, literacy level, and rural backwardness adversely affect its adoption. Despite this he has observed that it has reached the poor and illiterate in rural areas to some extent. But in reality the vulnerability of poor and people residing in remote rural areas using the digital technology has increased recently.

In chapter ten, Kala S. Sridhar explores how urbanisation has affected the rural masses, particularly the Dalits, SC/ST, women, and the urban poor, into the mainstream society. The focus is on exploring whether urbanisation and diversification lead to better access to opportunities for low-income individuals. The author notes that urbanisation has contributed to the diversification of the national economy, helped boost human development, improved the overall infrastructure, and significantly reduced the slum population in the country. All in all, urbanisation has contributed positively to the broad-basing process. However, its spatial distribution is uneven given the declining rate of growth of urbanisation of late, the rapid growth of big cities both in terms of number and population and the rural influx in urban centres, the broad-basing process in small towns has been affected adversely.

In chapter eleven, Sunil Nautiyal focuses on the conservation policies and their implementation. The author notes that the various laws and institutional structures built to protect the country’s rich biodiversity often conflict with the livelihoods of the forest dwellers. He further notes that the efforts to achieve the twin objectives of conservation of forest ecosystem and providing benefits under the Forest Rights Act 2006 to the marginalised forest dependent communities are negligible. The author concludes that due to a lack of integrated approach there has been no coherent policy to resettle the forest dwellers. Hence, it is necessary to redesign the policies to conserve biodiversity and improve livelihoods.

In the concluding chapter, M.V. Nadkarni and Subhashree Banerjee argue that numerous policies have been adopted to bring the marginalised into the mainstream but the efforts are not adequate. The broad-basing process itself is constrained by implementation factors and inadequate allocation of resources because of which the outcome is slow to accrue. Without ensuring equality of opportunity and equitable distribution of wealth, the welfare of the marginalised cannot be ensured. Hence, India will have to effectively play the role of a welfare state to protect and promote economic and social well-being, especially of the marginalised communities by mobilising more resources such as by taxing the rich. Public provision of quality education and universal and affordable health care is the need of the hour. The editor reminds that the broad-basing process is inherent in Indian pluralism and tolerant tradition of culture. We have to stand and be guided by the egalitarian principle of the Constitution of India to speed up the broad-basing process to the marginalised communities.

Of late the inequality in income, wealth, human capital and access to digital technology has increased in India and it has been precipitated due to pandemic
situation. Given this the contents of the volume are timely. This book is an important and welcome contribution to the literature that will provide guidance to academic, policy makers and other stakeholders interested in improving inclusivity in the Indian society.

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