

New Ideas And Rich Content

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*ON DEMOCRACY AND PROGRESS

by Ranjit Sau

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Professor Ranjit Sau, a well-known teacher of economics and a prolific writer on various problems of the Indian economy, has recently been applying his ever-inquisitive mind to analyses of issues that are of common concern. The *book under review is a collection of articles that are the products of this search. Here one does not find the economist, but an analyst with a profoundly philanthropic bent of mind, whose interests go far beyond the realm of economics.

The articles collected in this volume, which examines a wide range of issues cannot easily be reviewed within the space of a short essay, and hence one cannot avoid picking up the seemingly more important ones. In the very first article of the collection, Professor Sau has offered a brief account of the movement of Indian civilization. His emphasis on the synthesis achieved by the Aryans as well as the analogy with the Arabs is, however, not new. D D Kosambi first formulated this in his classic 'An Introduction to the Study of Indian History'. But Professor Sau has not copied Kosambi mechanically; he has reinforced Kosambi's view with facts and reasoning. Yet some more facts could have been added in discussing the early historical phase of India's past. For example, recent historical research, that has its beginning in Kosambi, has successfully proved that the period was not as 'golden' as it has been thought to be. Professor Sau's expectation of a new synthesis betrays his optimistic bent of mind. Here one might add forthrightly that the foremost condition of this synthesis is the overthrow of the bondage of globalization that plagues not only the Indian economy, but the Indian society also in many ways. Of course, there is a hint to it in the article. The author's demolition of the concept of nationhood formulated by Savarkar is successful and his sequence of reasoning cogent enough. One important and extremely valuable contribution is the article on Einstein's social philosophy. Even laymen all over the world know that Albert Einstein, the father of relativity physics, is the greatest theoretical physicist of modern times. But very few know of his ideas on socialism and still fewer have tried to understand his social philosophy. Einstein's essay *Why Socialism* is well known but not his ideas on the relation between philosophy and science. The author's rejection of Manu as well as his attempt to relate Darwin's famous theory of evolution of the human species with Einstein's social philosophy is profoundly interesting and instructive and should interest the reader to know more on the subject.

One finds another interesting and insightful piece dealing with the currently developing end of capitalism and the rise of fundamentalist ideas. That the US state is currently engaged in pampering Christian fundamentalist ideas is well known. Professor Sau has suggested an interesting and largely convincing hypothesis—he has provided some hard empirical underpinnings linking it with the operation of global capitalism. It is worthwhile to quote him at some length in

order to put his hypothesis before the reader, "The centre of world capitalism meets the challenge of dwindling population at home, in the first instance, by shifting the labour-prone industries to the periphery of world capitalism. The centre also resorts to helping breed more labour supply in the periphery to serve the centre's requirement. To that end it tramples upon women's right to end the freedom of choice -the option of abortion. It stops government allocation to projects that relate to family planning.

At the centre, capitalism whips up religious frenzy in support of 'multiplication', quoting the Bible where Adam and Eve are exhorted to 'Be fruitful and multiply.' At the periphery, it flashes particular pages of the Koran and the Manusamhita where women are tied to the mill of reproduction. The author's analysis should dispel the illusion of those who love to see in the rapid globalization of today's world a kind of cultural advancement. It is in general helpful in understanding today's imperialism, and clarifies a point, namely that one cannot effectively fight obscurantism without keeping in mind the evils of the concrete manifestations of imperialist economic domination of the periphery. The article entitled *Manu's Curse* embodies the author's explicitly anti-Brahminical standpoint. He has described the religious character of the Indus valley civilization and commented "On the Indus, stagnation was long and steady, lulled by the curse of a religion presided by a jealous mother-goddess. Four millennia later, in India, it would be the curse of Manu to inaugurate a similar episode." The article begins with a resolution accepted by a body affiliated to RSS, a resolution which 'calls upon the Hindu Society to take necessary measures for ensuring entry and access to every Hindu, irrespective of his caste, to their homes, temples, religious places, public wells, ponds, and other public places.' Then the author describes the historical background of the rise of *Manusamhita* and in the end, dares the Hindu politicians to make their intentions clear. "Should the RSS and the BJP be serious about the evils of the varna caste structure, let them say in public : No single part of a human body is 'purest' in any sense whatsoever". Professor Sau's views on reservation of educational, and job opportunities seem, however, to be somewhat hazy. In order to address the subject, it is perhaps necessary to ask one basic question at first : What accounts for the fact that the overwhelming majority of white-collar jobs are occupied by upper caste Hindus? And if the answer is the superior 'merit' of the upper castes, then what social factors are responsible for it? Indian upper castes have traditionally operated within the self-imposed limit of not going, beyond 'intellectual' labour, as if all merits are contained in this type of work. The attitude of the upper castes was outrageously expressed in the protest through the symbolic polishing of shoes. Even if the society declares the caste system to be immoral, that will by no means abolish this division between manual and mental labour, which, in the Indian context, is basically a product of the caste-varna system.

Another article, 'Three Concepts of Human Development' informs the reader of the Aristotelian principle and the Kantian dictum as well as the Islamic view and the synthesis within Islam. The third concept of human development, as the author formulates and rejects as absurd, is the idea of converting the whole world into Islam, 'to be ruled by one Caliph.' The author seemingly advocates

reconciliation between the Aristotle-Kant conception and the al-Gazali synthesis. It may be argued that the conception of human development is broader than these ideas, but Professor Sau's article should serve one purpose at least; it should propel the reader to try to learn more on the subject. The same can be said of his article on *Islamic Economics* in which he describes what it really is and points out fundamental self-contradiction. Referring to Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of this discipline, Professor Sau concludes, "By all indications, the economy that Islamic economics envisages is going to be capitalist in nature. If so, the political structure will have an inherent tendency to press for universal rights and liberty. But Maududi asserted that an Islamic state must discriminate against non-Muslims. In that event a sharp tension is likely to arise between the economy and the polity under Islam." One might add that if Islamic economics defies Islamic polity, then it ceases to be Islamic at all. What can be said here is that Professor Sau has trodden on a path that is not much known in India's literate circles, and is often treated with apathy. But the relevance of the issues he has discussed can by no means be gainsaid.

In short, this collection of essays, owing to the richness and variety of ideas as well as the lucidity of style, is fascinating. It should have a wide readership. □□□