

Hopefully, *The Avian Migrant* will stimulate future research in linking migration and breeding. There is much to be gained by looking at migration as part of the entire annual life cycle rather than a separate, though fascinating, behavior.

#### References

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### SOCIAL SCIENCE

## A Too-Soft Critique of India's Growth

Andrew Robinson

In 1927, American journalist Katherine Mayo published *Mother India* (1), a notorious polemic against India and Indians that gave satisfaction to British colonialists and American racists while naturally infuriating most Indians. Mahatma Gandhi famously commented that the book was “cleverly and powerfully written” but seemed like “the report of a drain inspector” who concludes with some triumph: “the drains are India.”

Although *Mother India* is largely forgotten (except by older Indians), its ghost seems to inhibit *An Uncertain Glory*, an indictment of the Indian state by economists Jean Drèze (Allahabad University) and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (Harvard University). After three decades of trawling the data compiled by central and state governments, Indian nongovernmental organizations, and international bodies, these longtime collaborators (2) know—possibly better than any other commentators—how Indian governments since the 1980s have failed the vast majority of Indians, especially in health care, education, poverty reduction, and the justice system. They bluntly acknowledge in the preface, “The history of world devel-

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opment offers few other examples, if any, of an economy growing so fast for so long with such limited results in terms of reducing human deprivations.” As they are at pains to demonstrate, the benefits of economic growth have been more widely shared even in India’s neighbor Bangladesh, let alone in rapidly growing China.

Here are a few of their many shocking facts: According to the 2011 Indian census, fully 50 percent of households lack toilets. Among the 132 countries for which comparable data are available, air pollution in India ranks highest. Due to teacher indifference and absenteeism among teachers and students, the teaching time in north Indian rural government schools is about 50 days per year. Although the celebrated Nalanda University was established six centuries before Europe’s oldest universities, no Indian university is among the world’s top 200. In 2009–10, 30% of the Indian population (350 million people) were living below the official (very low) poverty line. Meanwhile, 30% of the members of Parliament in 2009 had criminal charges, including murder, pending against them.

The authors, Indian citizens, belong to the relatively small group that has benefited from India’s impressive economic growth of the past two decades. Seemingly in order not to challenge this wealthy group’s interests or offend its sensitivities, the book as a whole shies away from trenchant criticism. Instead, it pulls most of its punches and too often takes refuge in academic equivocation and statistical manipulation, thereby forfeiting much of its undoubted potential influence.

For example, the chapter “Accountability and Corruption” avoids mentioning any corrupt politician, government official, businessman, or institution by name—despite the legion of well-established cases (a handful of which have ended in jail). Not even the

**Coverage critique.** Anusha Rizvi’s black comedy *Peepili Live* satirizes media and political responses to farmer suicides.

Bofors arms scandal of the late 1980s that undermined and sank the Congress government led by Rajiv Gandhi—a scandal as resonant for India as Watergate is for the United States—rates a mention. Nor does the anticorruption campaigner Anna Hazare, who transfixed the Indian government

and media through much of 2011–12 with his Gandhi-style public fasts (whether effectively or not remains to be determined). And it is surely peculiar to discuss “Poverty and Social Support” without mentioning India’s well-publicized farmer suicides. Between 1995 and 2012, over a quarter-million Indian farmers (according to conservative official figures) committed suicide in despair at their indebtedness created by the drive toward corporate farming: “the largest wave of suicides in history” (3), notes P. Sainath, an award-winning journalist admired by Sen. Also absent in an interesting chapter on caste and its continuing dominance, “The Grip of Inequality,” is the controversial Mayawati, former chief minister of the key northern state of Uttar Pradesh, who in the 1990s transformed Indian electoral politics as a leader of the low-caste Dalits (former Untouchables).

As for the contradictions of Indian science and technology, they too are neglected. In particular, many excellent Indian scientists openly acknowledge that they can successfully conduct original research in Europe and the United States but not in their home country, largely because of political interference and hierarchical attitudes. Of the four Nobel prizes awarded to Indian-born scientists, only one—that given to physicist C. V. Raman, in colonial times—was for research done in India. Sen himself felt obliged to leave 1950s India and work in western universities in order to achieve success and recognition. This hoary Indian intellectual phenomenon, ignored in *An Uncertain Glory*, is among the most debilitating problems that bedevil the subcontinent’s social and cultural—rather than merely economic—development that Drèze and Sen earnestly desire.

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