

## BOOK REVIEW

**Darooka, Preeti. (Ed). 2016. *Road to Rights: Women, Social Security and Protection in India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. [ISBN:978-93-515-0914-1 (HB)], pp 228. Price INR 750**

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Social Security is a nation's responsibility towards maintenance of the general well being of its people. It is understood to be an investment towards building a healthy and productive human resource. In the traditional Indian context, all security, social or otherwise came from the family system. The joint family system catered to the collective needs of the family and had the resources to fall back upon. With demographic changes as an outcome of urbanization, migration and the rich-poor divide, social security as the primary responsibility of the State has assumed great importance and is expected to guarantee the basic existential needs within families exposed to socio-economic vulnerabilities. The bread earners' ability to provide for their family is related to contingencies that deprive families of even basic needs like adequate nutrition, housing, sanitation, education and health care. Women, children and the aged face more serious vulnerabilities in the face of illness, death, disability, unemployment and conflicts. Further, social security would also include extending the reach of productive resources to the deprived classes, of which one half are women. Left glaringly unattended are the depravities and discrimination specific to women as the reproductive units of the society. Thus pregnancy, child-care and widowhood are contingencies faced by women in addition to poverty induced risks and uncertainties. So when we speak of demographic dividends from a population that promises the largest supply of labour force in the coming years, social security should make a shift from need-based basics to rights based essentials.

Edited by Preeti Darooka, the book under review, *Road to Rights: Women, Social Security and Protection in India*, gives a comprehensive analysis of the many dimensions of social security in India. It comprises three sections titled 'Conceptual Framework of Social Security', 'Missing Dimension', and 'Unpacking Social Security'. In his introduction, Dr. N. C. Saxena highlights the problems of the social sector in India. According to Dr. Saxena, since growth oriented

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productive activities do not benefit persons with disabilities, poor older persons and pregnant and lactating mothers, it is through social pensions that they can be saved from extreme distress and poverty. Although many welfare programmes have been converted to entitlements through legislations like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005, and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013; investment in the health and education sectors has not reached the desired level in comparison to other middle-income countries. The reasons for this, as identified by Dr. Saxena are insufficient funds, a low tax base at 16-17% of GDP, weaknesses in MGNREGA, decline in wages at constant prices, 'alarming' hunger levels coupled with weaknesses in the Public Distribution System (PDS), beneficiary-recipient gaps for supplementary nutrition (SN) under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and also certain gender issues related to workforce participation rates and ownership of land.

The first section of the book, 'Conceptual Framework of Social Security', gives us an understanding of social protection, its dimensions, and implications on sections of the society. Harsh Mander's chapter, *A society which cares: A framework of universal social protection* (pp. 21-31), attributes failure in extending universal and adequate social protection to the rejection of Chomsky's idea of caring for each other as a mutual responsibility. He speaks of the three different ways of understanding social protection; the first being the risk related discourse, the second the basic-needs discourse and the third the human rights discourse. He also discusses the domains of legal and moral claims of different rights in the Constitution of India; whereby civil and political rights as fundamental rights are legally enforceable, while social, economic and cultural rights are 'subsumed' under the Directive Principles thus remaining moral claims which are not legally enforceable. He however recognizes the uniqueness of the interpretation of the Right to Life to include the *positive* right to life, a life with dignity, in the Indian context. This endorsement by the Supreme Court of India has made possible legislations like MGNREGA, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, and the National Food Security Act, 2013. Finally, engendering social protection would make equal dignity of all persons possible ruling out all kinds of discrimination.

As an extension of Mander's argument, Sejal Dand in her paper *Unpacking social protection from a women's rights lens* (pp. 32-39), argues that this distinction of rights under the civil-political and socio-

economic domains is an 'artificial dichotomy' when viewed from the 'lens of a woman', as her 'civil and political rights combine seamlessly with the violation of her economic and political rights' (p. 32). For social protection to be a universal right, it should work towards excluding no one and this can be done by recognizing 'multiple vulnerabilities.' There are socially vulnerable groups like homeless women, the child migrant labourer, the sex worker, and others who get excluded by default. Other exclusions are due to conditionalities in the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NBMS), 2001 and Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), 2010. Dr. Timo Voipio's chapter, *Human right to social protection and post 2015 development agenda: Human rights, inclusive development and reduction of inequalities through income guarantees and care for all* (pp. 40-57), takes its cues from the report of the UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Dr. Voipio makes four points; that rights based social protection as guaranteed by MGNREGA is an example of the Social Protection Floor Initiative aimed at by the UN; that unless laws, policies and programmes are aimed at reducing inequalities, global commitments towards poverty reduction would be ineffective; that the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda failed in its economic and social policies to provide 'inclusion of all', as they did not in 'explicit language' include men and women with disabilities and handicaps; and finally, that the value of care work performed mainly by women needed to be recognised.

The second section of the book is a discourse on the 'Missing Dimension', focussing on invisibility of women's work in the context of largely organized sector coverage of social security. Indira Hirway, in her paper *Social protection for women workers, with special reference to unpaid domestic workers* (pp. 61-70), highlights changes in the content and approach to social security in recent times. These changes are pertaining to inclusion, needs based social security, and the human rights approach to social security. This may seem like a repetition of the highlights of Harsh Mander's paper but Hirway goes on to extend the application of these dimensions to the lives of unpaid domestic workers whose work she says has already been recognized as economic work by the UN System of National Accounts, 2008. Suggesting various measures such as pension and retirement benefits, social security, making work visible, reducing unpaid work, transferring it to the mainstream economy, and sharing of unpaid work within households, she suggests this can be made possible by integrating unpaid work into macroeconomic policies.

Asha Kapoor Mehta in her paper *Women's invisibility as workers* (pp. 71- 89) goes a step further in pointing out 'serious inaccuracies' such as under-reporting or non-reporting and deviations between various National Sample Survey (NSS) estimates in their reports recording work-related data. Having presented an extensive analysis of such deviations and discrepancies, she suggests that for NSS, in addition to assigning activity codes to activities counted as work and those that are not, the next logical step would be to include the results of 'probing questions' to activity codes related to domestic duties. This would help to make the contribution of women as workers truly visible. Nalini Nayak makes an important point right at the beginning of her paper, *Livelihood security critical for women's social security* (pp. 90-98), by stating the "the term 'social security' means different things for different people" (p. 90). In light of Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, social security in India has primarily come to mean welfare measures guaranteeing food, health and shelter. With growth figures taking centre stage, she says that various development projects have created 'development refugees.' The development initiatives leave large sections marginalised and it is to these people the social welfare measures cater. This calls for an understanding of subsistence defined as the 'subsistence of communities through access to natural resources'. Because protection of natural resources, ongoing livelihoods and the environment are intrinsic to local production systems, Nayak calls for a rearticulation of growth and development to include social security.

The third and the last section of the book, 'Unpacking Social Security', gives an insight into the various social security programmes and their deliverables in terms of securing the really insecure lives. Anjor Bhaskar, in *Social pensions: The real Aadhar for the niradhar; A detailed evaluation of successes and challenges before the system of social pensions in Maharashtra* (pp. 101-129), provides a regional context to the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) that caters to the needs of the most vulnerable sections in society. Through his direct involvement with Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), a Union of waste pickers in Pune, and the Public Evaluation of Entitlement Programmes (PEEP) survey conducted by IIT Delhi in the districts of Nandurbar and Osmanabad, the author has been able to highlight massive differences in the eligibility criteria for benefits under NSAP and the state level programme Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana (SGNY). The SGNY requires an increase in level of awareness, reduction of documentary requirements, simplification of application procedures, regularization of pension payments and improvement of

banking services. He aligns these findings with those of studies in other states, including that of TISS and Pension Parishad (2015), which suggests the need for exclusion criteria.

The social and economic plight of sex workers is discussed by Shubha Chako, Gauri Vijaykumar and Subadra Panchanadeswaran in their paper, *Our secure beliefs and their insecure lives: Sex workers organize for change* (pp 130- 146). Considering sex work as unexceptional and part of the informal sector, a strong worker identity through engagement in the political economy becomes necessary. The profile of a sex worker makes her a social and a legal outsider. The formation of the first sex workers union, 'Karnataka Sex Workers Union', and their observation of May Day, presents an optimistic picture that may show the way forward. Biraj Patnaik's focus is an analysis of the progress India has made in the past two decades, vis-à-vis the nutritional and hunger levels of Indians. In his paper, *Food and nutrition security in India: The challenges ahead* (pp 147-167), Patnaik has given an insight into the dichotomy which he calls 'hunger amidst plenty.' In 2001 the Government of India had a surplus food grain stock of 60 million tonnes but there was simultaneous reporting of hunger-related deaths from across the country. Post-NFSA (2013) there has been a series of retrograde steps that have led to the exclusion of the vulnerable sections of society, and the objectives of the life-cycle approach have not been met.

Maternity entitlements, a 'conceptually and programmatically' bringing together of the economic and the social, are discussed by Yamini Atmavilas in *Maternity entitlements: An overview* (pp. 168-193). The entitlements should meet the two-fold objective of preserving the health of the mother and the newborn and providing job security. He identifies three key 'contextual realities' that make entitlements deprivation ridden. Informality in women's labour, levels of morbidity and mortality, and relationship between poverty and expenditure on health lead to a prioritization of deprivations that need to be addressed. Subhalakshmi Nandi, in her paper *Strengthening NREGA from a gender perspective: Learning from the field* (pp. 194- 207), analyses the potentialities in NREGA from a gender perspective. She brings out the pro-women provisions in MNREGA like crèche facilities, work at 5 kilometres radius from home, and equal pay which has led to one-third of its workers being women. The fact that women are the most marginalised emerges from their having access to employment from MNREGA that is inherently linked with caste based and class based discriminations. Certain women oriented projects like Dalit Women Livelihoods

Accountability Initiative (DWLAI) in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have attempted to close the gap that existed between legislative guarantees and implementation. Certain other projects have also helped in increasing employment and the incomes of women, providing greater access to and control over financial resources, and helping women challenge gender stereotypes.

Finally, Rashmi Singh presents a comprehensive platform of delivery in her essay, *Women and social security: Convergence model of delivery* (pp. 208- 224). It is very interesting to note that the presence of a multitude of schemes fails in delivery because of conflicting outcomes and ill-conceived objectives. Singh suggests a convergence mode of delivery starting from planning to implementation. Due to the many class and caste related vulnerabilities of women, ensuring that interventions are multi-pronged, as recognized by the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, can be brought to fruition by addressing women's life cycle needs. Mission convergence can be achieved by recognizing the gap between policy, programme design, and delivery as done by the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW). As such, a bottom-up approach with centralized planning, having women as the 'prime movers', is required.

Preeti Darooka's edited book is a source of analytical information related to the identification of vulnerabilities related to women, the deficiencies in policy formulation, the difficulties in their implementation and the remedies that address the socio-cultural, economic and political peculiarities of the Indian demography. The three sections create a flow in the same order, as the first develops the conceptual framework of social security, the second identifies vulnerabilities and the need to bring out the missing dimensions in order to provide social security to women, and the third deconstructs the problem by unpacking social security. The book provides an answer to the problems of implementation in its final essay, by presenting a model that comprehensively brings together all the identified gaps in the 'convergence model' it presents. The outstanding feature of the book is the flow of chapters that links one to the next. Since the book brings together literature in the same field from different authors, there are occasions where inputs seem to be overlapping and there may be some repetition of ideas. Nevertheless this book will definitely be very helpful to students, researchers and academicians who are looking for a comprehensive approach towards all the initiatives that form the social security policy framework in India.