

terms of contemporizing the epic, this essay has a certain immediacy that is only too apparent in our troubled times.

The context-specificity or situational ethics/justice in the *Mahabharata* is explored at length by Prabal Kumar Sen. He highlights several dilemmas within the text, and draws attention to the category of *apaddharma* as well as to the strategy of *tarka* or argument. Many of these issues are exemplified through the figure of Krsna. Sen draws on the commentarial tradition in his analysis, allowing us to move beyond a presentist preoccupation with these narratives.

Inevitably, we have contributions that focus centrally on Yudhisthira, the sometimes shadowy central figure of the epic. Enakshi Mitra attempts to understand Yudhisthira through a Wittgensteinian framework. One felt that the framework often overwhelmed the discussion, but this may be a matter of perspective. Gangeya Mukherji's more accessible intervention raises issues of violence. These are exemplified by violence in the sacrificial context, in terms of violent livelihoods, capital punishment, and expectedly, the consequences of warfare. He charts the dialogues in which Yudhisthira participates, and argues that this figure of the reluctant king allows us the space to engage with these complex issues, even as (and perhaps because) it denies us any neat closure.

The contributions by the editors, which frame the volume, both provide points of entry and an open ending to the rich discussions. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay uses the game of dice (and Yudhisthira) to take the reader through a whole range of registers of human existence, from the cosmic to the everyday, engaging with issues of determinism, chaos and order. This is achieved through reading the episode in terms of a rich discussion on dicing, kingship and the world at large.

Arindam Chakrabarti, on the other hand, chooses a far less spectacular, almost incidental episode that is part of the epic tradition, the dialogue between king Janaka and Sulabha. He argues that Sulabha, a proto-Buddhist renunciate woman, is the figure who lays down norms for conversations that can be enriching, and mutually beneficial, as opposed to Janaka, who represents both masculine and kingly pride. Sulabha successfully challenges his pretensions, and exposes the hollowness of his claims. Chakrabarti suggests that this dialogue can provide us with insights into ways and means of engaging in "just" conversations. While this felicitous reading is certainly persuasive, Sulabha, like Draupadi, rests her claims, at least partially, on her status as a *ksatriya* woman, and thus, in a sense, Janaka's equal. Is there then, a dimension of caste that is particularly resilient and resistant to contemporizing?

At another level, given that most of the authors engage with the Critical Edition, it may have been useful to have some sense of the extent to which this text is known beyond the scholarly universe. If its circulation is restricted to the academia, and if departments of philosophy and ancient history have a relatively limited space even within the academic world, what is the impact of the text? Also, given that the Critical Edition took shape within the worlds of colonialism/nationalism, how do we understand it in the rapidly changing post-colonial world that we inhabit?

Also, and returning once more to the lay audience/reader, it would have been worth investigating how the televised version of the epic has been received and used as a resource. There are, besides, new and not so new tellings in circulation, ranging, for instance from Divakaruni Banerji's *Palace of Illusions* to the printed versions of the *Bharath* of the Bhils, each of which appeals to distinct audiences. How do we engage with these to set up contemporary conversations?

In the Foreword to the volume, Peter Ronald deSouza expresses the hope that the endeavour will serve to contemporize and democratize the epic, and make it available as a resource to think through our present worlds. As is evident, many of the essays redeem this expectation, and one will look forward to the sequels.

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Shakti Kak and Biswamoy Pati eds., *Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, pp. vii+340, Rs. 995/-, ISBN: 978-93-80607-30-6.

This edited volume on the issue of child labor—a stark, consistent and increasingly visible social reality throughout the country—brings together a set of fifteen essays. Laboring children, as the editors point out in the preface, are a matter of shared concern especially since the gross measurable wealth of nation-states in the South Asian region is otherwise increasing. India has indeed moved on/through the trajectory of being an ex-colony to a welfare nation-state, and is now part of an increasingly globalized economic network. The problem, as they argue, is one of political economy. Following the Marxist framework, laboring child-community shores up a particularly sensitive example of surplus labor—hence the title. The linking of slavery and children though, we might remind ourselves, is as old as Aristotle where the economy of the polis was oriented towards a different

understanding of "natural" teleology, i.e. how the society would/should broadly function, become productive and nurture values.

The essays are comprehensively organized under four different sections, around the themes/ rubrics of history, statistics/data analysis, specific case studies and "strategies and policies" of tackling this cognizable social problem. The first section comprises of three articles. Suneeta Chopra's overview of the history of child labor discusses specific Indian cases. She frames them theoretically within the Marxian paradigm of labor exploitation in a capitalist system of production, and suggests that the case of child labor be read as a sly persistence of primitive accumulation following the model. Satadru Sen's discussion of children in the Andaman Islands under British rule presents a similar framework, but the slavery-model here has the added element of the white man's burden of civilization. Combining archival work and theoretical inputs in a compelling essay, Sen draws on the Foucauldian notion of power and takes after a rich tradition of historico-anthropological scholarship by the likes of Cohn, Anne McClintock and Stoler. A detailed discussion of various disciplinary apparatuses and institutions—such as orphanages, reformatory schools, hospitals, social service sector as well as more intimate spaces of daily domestic service—posits the native children as subjects of moral-biological development within the larger Victorian discourse of instilling "character" in the savage population. The colonial encounter comes across as a profitable investment for the colonizer(s) both in terms of the flow of wealth and human capital. The upshot is a double bind of the capitalist economy of empire and the moral knowledge-economy of civilization. The third essay in this section by Shashank Sinha discusses the plight of adivasi population of the Chotonagpur region during late colonial and early postcolonial period. The author shows how earlier formal economies of mills, mining and plantation gave way to informal economies such as the carpet weaving industry—making little difference to the socio-economic status of workers, especially women and children. Sinha uses available Gazetteer records as well as local songs to give a comprehensive idea about the demographic location of this traditionally marginalized populace. General exploitation in this case is accentuated by ethnic and gender factors and is further worsened for children of daily wage-workers separated from his/her family.

The second section starts with an article of critical assessment of the data assessment methods and databases currently in place for counting child labour in India. The authors draw our attention to the current state of confusion regarding the definition of child "labor" (as

opposed to "work"), varying cultural perceptions around the category, and an increasing number of informal occupations (proto-industries, so to speak, with huge circulation and market) where they are employed. The next article by Shakti Kak brings a large amount of data on board, collected from various state agencies to argue that the central paradox (indicated in the introduction to this book, mentioned above) about a continuing mismatch between the economic standards set by the "developing" Indian state and norms/criteria of overall human development. The next essay by Vijay Kumar pushes the point further, charting a detailed map of children's economic activities in census data. He brings a wealth of data, organized along different axes/taxonomies that would help further research. Also, the difference between child-worker and child-labor is stretched (or folded back) by explaining it in terms of productive activity in various stages from agriculture to (informal) industrial economy. The question of children as subjects, or should one say subjects-in-waiting, of a democratic state would hinge on one's perception (not to speak of a stark present which is for everyone to see) of the direction the neo-liberal Indian state is moving in.

The next section, comprising of three essays, presents two case studies by Bhupinder Zutshi (on children working in carpet-making industry), Nira Rao (on children employed in sex and medical tourism) and a more general overview by P.S.Vivek. The general emphasis is on exploitation of these *little workers* (to reformulate Philippe Aries' observation on childhood as a modern phenomenon) often resulting in irreparable health hazards.

The last section on policy intervention is the longest of the book, putting together five essays by a total of seven authors—some of them being development consultants and policymakers themselves or associated with international philanthropic platforms for child care and support. The first author, Neera Burra, is already known for her previous work in this area. She uses available Census data and some ethnographic research to argue for universal school education as a crucial deterrent to child labor. She cites work currently being done in Andhra Pradesh through partnership with NGOs and recommends these as possible models. The second article reiterates a very similar line, setting up a progressive binary between labor and education, and rues, following UN norms, the lack of proper infrastructure and administrative will. It is interesting to note how such an approach completely writes off the child as an individual and treats it as a given category, following a standardized norm of human development guided by UNCRC norms. Child labor is particularly problematic because of its wide visibility and

arguably also because it signifies the difference between the unfinished project of a democratic state, currently an aspirant player in the global market economy, and the still compelling vision of a welfare nation—or should one say a not-yet nation-state. Children in general appear as the most priceless, therefore valued, or even *exemplary* signifiers of the latter.

The third essay focuses on laboring children facing the additional crisis of distress-based seasonal migration. The author advocates that this population be taken up as a special focus group through more cross-responsible governance within the state bureaucracy, accompanied by the non-state actors/sector. She prescribes several models, such as seasonal hostels, school at worksites and summer “bridge” courses, as well as better pedagogical standards in average village schools—that would result in a “progressive” decline of child labor. Perhaps one could rethink the idea of schooling as *the* preferable solution in this case, like child rights movement activists did during the seventies and eighties in England. Prominent ethnographic work done within the discipline of “sociology of work” that shows how working-class children ultimately get working-class jobs might also provide an alternative insight in this case.

The fourth article in this section is a study of the National Child Labour Project launched during the 1990s. The authors are critical of the project, or rather, like other authors in this section, of the *extent* of state initiative and not its *kind*. They recommend the interlinking of other welfare projects with this scheme. The last article by V. Saravanan looks at the state of child labor in Tamil Nadu and the state government’s initiatives to combat the problem by providing school education and related infrastructure—certainly a success story when one thinks of other parts of the country. The author presents a wealth of data from Child Labour Surveys carried out in recent years to make, or demonstrate, an argument similar to the previous authors’ in this section. The prevalent understanding of children as economic agents seems to be based on a particular understanding of *human capital*—that can perhaps be generally traced back to Adam Smith (social investment/return/profit), later taken up by developmental economists of the Chicago School (Schultz and Baker).

Education in general, and compulsory elementary education programs inspired and guided by UN norms—the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, being the chief human rights document and legally enforceable covenant—is often understood as a universal panacea, followed by states as such and has been repeatedly criticized for its lack of cultural relativism. Prescriptions following such a view holds for its little citizens [as *opposite* to good, capable and rightful little adults,

although perhaps in a similar trajectory] the promise of an affective future. Schooling would take care of, even obliterate or rewrite, the mired particular histories of laboring children following this understanding. The laboring child exists at the intersection of the productive economy of the historical nation-state and the moral economy of the deliberative, liberal democracy—a better state[of things to come? Achievable targets of normative citizenship? Desirable future?]. The laboring child in general—as a compelling incarnation of marginalized, disadvantaged, or at-risk social lives in need of care and moral responsibility—is the social-imaginary palimpsest where bad life-history is to be rewritten along the norms of a liberal-universal standard of governance.

On the whole, this comprehensive book is a welcome addition to the volume of already existing scholarship in this area but restricts itself to Indian examples with occasional references to the South Asian region at large—while the title might suggest otherwise.

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Sushil Kumar, *Liberal Humanism and the Non-Western Other: The Right and the Good in World Affairs*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2014, pp. xv + 340, Rs. 695/-, ISBN: 978-93-82396-05-5.

Professor Sushil Kumar’s book under review rethinks the concept of “remaking society” vis-à-vis western political theory and non-western traditional thought that suffered many a set-back under colonial impact. It is an in-depth analysis of non-western postcolonial societies (with its main focus on the Indian situation) that have faced the challenges of decolonization, modernization and national self-determination. The starting point is essentially politico-sociological, not in a descriptive sense, but in a dynamic vivification of the ground realities based on intense research and extensive evaluation of existing political situations, particularly in the postcolonial scenario. The author, who taught International Politics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University for many years, is well equipped to comment on the ideological base of political theory—both western and non-western, and look at the dynamics of social change and the basics of reorganizing the traditional social structures of non-western countries for developmental necessity. The present book was written during his Fellowship at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. The author has covered a wide canvas, discussed political theories from different angles and then used his expertise to write about the defining