

Though India has achieved rapid economic growth in the recent times, the authors commented that its maternal mortality is one of the highest in the world. They found that lack of management capacity in the healthcare system has led to poor quality and slow progress in these essential services. The study further mentioned that the cases of maternal deaths are basically reflection of the existing economic, social, and cultural factors. The article on cancer educates the readers on the dynamics in dealing with the disease, emotional inter-play within the family, extent of isolation among cancer patients as well as the significance of professional intervention in holistic care of the patient.

The chapter on right to equality for the Indian women traces its origin and evolution right from the ages of Plato and Aristotle to the time when the laws were incorporated in the Indian Constitution. One of the researchers has concluded that the Indian cinema failed in upholding the rights of the oppressed on one hand and portraying the women as objects of obscenity and commercial work on the other hand. In the chapter on students' radicalism, the writer finds that the left wing radicalism is on the rise among the university students in West Bengal mainly due to dissatisfaction with pathetic state of affairs in the society, polity and the educational institutions.

Overall, this book highlights the burning socio-economic issues of the Indian society along with required strategies to tackle them. As such, the book is quite useful for the policy makers, academicians, researchers, NGOs, human rights activists, rural development professionals and the civil society at large.

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***Decentralised Democracy in India: Gandhi's Vision and Reality*** by **M. V. Nadkarni, N. Sivanna and Lavanya Suresh**, 2018, published by Routledge, London, pp: 420, Price : ₹ 1295

The ideal democratic system for Mahatma Gandhi was *Gram Swaraj* (self-rule by villages). Only in *Gram Swaraj*, people would have full opportunity to make their voice heard by their representatives. Based on this theme, the book explores the philosophical and ideological background of Mahatma Gandhi's vision of decentralised democracy. The book provides an in-depth analysis of different issues relating to decentralisation, historical evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions and a critical assessment of the institutions both in rural and urban areas from a Gandhian perspective. The book comprises 11 chapters focusing on the decentralised democracy in terms of Gandhi's philosophy and the present situation of politics and governance at the local level both in the rural and urban areas.

The book starts with an elaboration of Gandhi's political philosophy and his alternative vision towards democratising the society and the economy. The introductory chapter provides a vantage point of comparison of the actual reality and what can be taken as an ideal. The first three chapters subsequently delineate Gandhi's holistic vision of rural development which included agriculture, horticulture, village industries, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, transport, education, sanitation, culture and sports. The chapters provide the overall framework of decentralised political democracy. The chapters four and five deal with the historical evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India covering the pre-Independence and post-Independence periods. It also depicts the existence of local self-government in India at the grassroots level since ancient times.

The book brings out an assessment of the present scenario of the PRIs in terms of Gandhi's perspectives in the sixth and seventh chapters. The assessment is based on people's participation in decision-making and planning, the extent of devolution of funds, functions and functionaries and regularity of elections. The chapters illustrate a critical review of the functioning of the present Panchayati Raj system and the impact of traditional elites in villages. The eighth chapter provides an insight about the historical evolution of PRIs in State of Karnataka. It also discusses the contemporary scenario of PRIs in Karnataka in terms of being ranked the second best State in the country for devolution of powers, funds and functionaries.

An assessment based on the field insights by examining the functioning of Gram Sabhas, Gram Panchayats and other local organisations in the State of Karnataka has been enunciated in the ninth chapter. The chapter also makes an attempt to understand power relations, nature of decision-making, factional politics and interference of State-level political leadership in the context of Karnataka. The tenth chapter focuses on the urban local bodies and their performance. It lays down the provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act and funds,

functions and functionaries in the context of urban local government. The concluding chapter emphasises the need for certain constitutional reforms in order to bring decentralised democracy closer to Gandhi's philosophical vision in India. The true meaning and scope of deepening democracy consistent with Gandhian perspective has been subtly identified in the concluding chapter.

The book provides a comprehensive understanding of decentralised governance in India. It highlights certain policy recommendations for improving decentralised governance through financial autonomy and self-rule. The suggestions made in the book to bring reform by strengthening the voice of the people at the local level provides a concrete proposal for effective democratic decentralisation in India. The insights on Gandhian perspective of politics blended with field scenario of PRIs in the State of Karnataka, makes the book a valuable reading in the area of decentralised governance. The book provides immense opportunity to researchers, academia, students and policy makers to benefit from the in-depth comprehension on Gandhi's vision of politics and decentralised democracy in India.

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