

# THE BOOK REVIEW

VOLUME XLII NUMBER 5 MAY 2018

Rs 100



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**ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER**

Geeta Parameswaran  
gita.parameswaran@gmail.com

**WEBSITE MANAGER**

Prasanta Nayak  
prasanta.nayak@gmail.com  
thebookreview@defindia.org

**COMPUTER INPUTS, DESIGN  
AND LAYOUT**

Marianus Kerketta  
kerketta.marianus5@gmail.com

**Please Address All Mail To:**

The Book Review Literary Trust  
239, Vasant Enclave  
New Delhi 110 057

**Telephone:**

91-11-41034635  
9650302832 / 9811702695

**Website:**

www.thebookreviewindia.org

**email:**

chandrachari44@gmail.com  
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*The Book Review* is a non-political, ideologically non-partisan journal which tries to reflect all shades of intellectual opinions and ideas. The views of the reviewers and authors writing for the journal are their own. All reviews and articles published in *The Book Review* are exclusive to the journal and may not be reprinted without the prior permission of the editors.

tive capacities has blurred the distinction between production and reproduction. Bagchi states that reproductive technologies have heralded 'a new language of genetic mothering' (p. 92) that furthers patriarchal control over women's reproductive rights. Thus, while poor women enter as surrogates for the rich wealthy couple, women from the privileged class bear the brunt of sex selective abortions. Patriarchy and eugenics, therefore, find themselves bound together in the age of Assisted Reproductive Technologies.

The book ends with an apt conclusion that re-asserts that the common thread which ties all the chapters together is the obvious marginalization of the poor toiling mothers

whose experiences are overlooked while a mythical self-sacrificing mother with privileged caste and class connotation is reified. A significant oversight of the book remains the disability and sexuality-blind approach that it adopts. Nevertheless, the book's contribution is significant in the light of the fact that within the limited confines of a brief book, it is able to throw light on the major positions that can emerge from feminist studies on motherhood.

Both the books make important interventions into what can be called one of the primary debates in feminism: motherhood. The two books speak to each other and provide a road map on the divergent perspec-

tives that have developed around the institution and practice of motherhood. Significantly, the books address several similar concerns such as the representation of the nation as a mother, the tradition of mother goddess worship and the reduction of the maternal body to a commodity under Assisted Reproductive Technology. With these two seminal books on motherhood being available, it can be hoped that interesting multidisciplinary research on motherhood in India will now be pursued with renewed enthusiasm.

**Poonam Kakoti Borah** teaches Women's Studies at Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam.

## Urgency Of Inclusive Education

Varun Nallur and Alex M Thomas

**DYNAMICS OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM: SOCIAL DIVERSITY, INEQUALITY AND SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA**

Edited by Manoj Kumar Tiwary, Sanjay Kumar, and Arvind Kumar Mishra  
Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2017, pp. xiii + 327, ₹945.00

With 1.1 million schools, 143 million students and 4.9 million teachers, the government school system in India is one of the largest and most complex public systems across the world. The past three decades have seen an exponential rise in the number of schools and enrolment due to various government initiatives. However, issues such as caste, class, gender and religious inequalities still persist in our country and they have a strong correlation with student attendance, retention, and dropouts. These issues will remain unabated unless the beliefs and attitudes of the different stakeholders gravitate towards the ideals of diversity and inclusivity as envisaged by our Constitution. Most contemporary policy discourses focus on school choice, teacher accountability, assessments, and ICT in education. What is missing and urgently needed is the creation of a learning environment in schools and classrooms that enables inclusivity, and not one where inequalities are reproduced.

The book begins with the works by RV Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Madhumita Bandyopadhyay both of which provide critical insights into our contemporary idea of inclusion. Ayyar provides a historical account of the evolution of inclusion from the Kothari Commission to the Right to Education Act. Subsequently, he expresses the need for an educational framework which effectively utilizes comparative data on learning achievements and the national norms on minimum learning outcomes. He rightly notes that a

singular focus on measurement of learning outcomes by themselves serve no purpose unless linked with pedagogy, training, and student outcomes. He also proposes a policy framework that empowers the States to follow their own strategy to achieve inclusion which is rooted in national norms. Bandyopadhyay visualizes inclusion as a process and not an event. Through extensive secondary data, she demonstrates that there has been an increase in the dropouts by marginalized students and the existence of disparities in school enrolment across Dalit and Muslim dominated regions and other regions. She notes that the vicious cycle of poor education and social inequality is perpetuated when the marginalized students are systematically excluded because of curricular and pedagogic limitations. She proposes that this vicious cycle be broken with the increased availability of neighbourhood schools with motivated and well qualified teachers.

The contributions by Dhir Jhingran, Manoj Kumar Tiwary, and Sanjay Kumar deal with social diversity and its impact on learning performance. Jhingran makes a strong case for reading and comprehension at the elementary level as they are foundational for learning. He rightly highlights the systemic issues that generate poor learning outcomes: ambitious and overloaded textbooks, inadequate teacher preparation, multi-grade situation, inappropriate assessment practices, the absence of early childhood education, and most critically, the medium of instruction in school being dif-

ferent from the home language. To facilitate inclusive pedagogy, Jhingran calls for a transformation in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers by challenging stereotypes through continuing professional development. On the basis of primary data collected from rural Bihar, Tiwary and Kumar demonstrate that while the enrolment has increased, the learning achievements of socio-economically marginalized students have declined. They find innovative initiatives such as the Comprehensive and Continuous Teaching and Evaluation to be ineffective because of the lack of institutional support. For the teachers lacking the requisite skills, the authors propose a pragmatic approach whereby the curriculum adapts to the skills of the teachers and not the other way around.

Both Caroline Dyer and Shushmita Chatterji Dutt discuss the educational exclusion faced by the children of mobile pastoralists and street children. Dyer notes that the mobile pastoralists have always been excluded from formal educational opportunities. She forcefully makes the point that the neighbourhood shouldn't be seen as a static concept because almost everywhere, the scales of redistribution, recognition, and representation favour the settled. One solution, according to her, is to strengthen the Open and Distance Learning which responds to the educational needs of the mobile pastoralists' children. Dutt outlines the educational challenges faced by street and working children, and the initiatives undertaken by Children's Development Khazana (CDK), a non-governmental organization. CDK helps these children by imparting financial literacy along with 'life skills education'. The author is right in noting that one of the strengths of CDK is its ability to provide education in the children's own environment which falls outside the scope of formal education. However, she also acknowledges one drawback of this approach: it encourages

children to work.

Nita Kumar and Peggy Mohan in their respective work discuss some of the challenges in the teaching of English. Kumar provides us with an ethnographic account of classroom situations in two schools in Varanasi. She rightly points out that operationalizing the idea of inclusive education remains a challenge. She also includes a roadmap to progressively teach English from pre-nursery to class V by stressing the importance of phonetics, classroom layout, and role play. Mohan articulates the problems faced by the children from economically weaker sections (EWS) under the RTE. We concur with her when she characterizes the EWS scheme as a 'political compromise' which legitimizes private English-medium schooling. She argues that the EWS children are excluded from the classroom because they are taught in English. Instead, she proposes bilingual education, whereby their understanding of basic concepts is ensured in their primary years and in class VI, they are introduced to English.

The contributions by both Vikas Gupta and Smriti Singh address the effect of teachers' stereotypes on pedagogy. Gupta argues

that our current educational practices reproduce stereotypes deeply embedded in Hindu upper caste mentalities and center on the urban middle class male child. He argues for a curriculum which meaningfully incorporates the cultural experiences of the marginalized students. He also rightly stresses the need and importance of pluralism—the recognition and tolerance of different worldviews, ideologies, identities, and the resultant distinctions. In conclusion, Gupta notes that all schools must be a priori capable of meeting individualized needs of all students. Singh undertakes a literature review of critical pedagogy and subsequently presents her findings from a sample survey of six full-time employed teachers working in two elementary schools in Delhi. She concludes with the important point that teacher training must include the learning of conceptual tools which help teachers politicize and problematize their material and ideological conditions of life and work.

The concluding chapter by Arvind Kumar Mishra situates the need for inclusive education within the larger context of democratic values. He points out that 76 per

cent of the out-of-school children in India belong to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other religious minorities. Inclusive education happens only within an empowering social and school structure. Mishra is right in emphasizing that the idea and practices of inclusive education are effective only when it is historically contextualized. The contextualization necessarily alters the dominant stereotypes about culture and identity which underpin mainstream education and its practice.

This book makes a much needed contribution to an area often ignored by mainstream academics and educators. The contributors of this timely book draw upon their expertise in policy formulation, classroom practices, and field research to demonstrate practices that make the classroom more inclusive. Hence, we feel that this book will be immensely valuable for teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

**Varun Nallur** works with the field institutes team of the Azim Premji Foundation.

**Alex M Thomas** teaches undergraduate students at Azim Premji University.

## Life With Oliver

Anindita Bhadra

### ANIMAL MADNESS: INSIDE THEIR MINDS

By Laurel Braitman

Simon & Schuster, 2015, pp. 400, \$11.41

‘Despite our efforts to help him, Oliver’s anxiety at being left alone only increased in the years he lived with us. His storm phobia reduced him to a shaking, inconsolable mess, and it took him hours, sometimes days to recover’. A concerned relative or friend could have said this about a person suffering from an anxiety disorder or extreme depression. But Oliver was a Bernese Mountain Dog. In the opening chapter of her book, *Animal Madness*, Lauren Braitman takes her readers through her life with Oliver, and you feel the stress, the tension, the heartache of having a mentally ill member in the family who needs constant care, attention and love. Her book is engaging and very personal, and is a very well researched text on mental illness in animals. She discusses how Oliver changed her perception of emotions in animals and uses numerous examples of various animals, from dogs to gorillas to elephants to parrots, to drive home her point—animals can suffer from anxiety, depression, homesickness, broken hearts and OCD, just like humans.

Lauren and her husband Jude tried their

best to help Oliver, suffering numerous destroyed cushions and furniture, messed up rooms in the apartment, the anxiety and stress of re-arranging their lives to take care of Oliver, heavy bills for vets and animal behaviourists, fractured social lives and the pain of seeing their beloved pet in distress. Eventually Oliver died, leaving their marriage in a crumble. Lauren moved on in her obsessive search for understanding animals and trying to fathom the depths of their emotions. She travelled across continents to meet people and speak to them about their experiences with animals. She spent hours digging up past ghosts in libraries and made connections with handlers, breeders and vets who resonated her ideas. Lauren brings to life characters like John Daniel, the gorilla, who was almost human in his behaviour; Monarch, the depressed grizzly bear at the Golden Gate Park; Rara, the elephant who preferred humans over elephants, having been raised in captivity; Sunita, the tiger who suffers from stress-related tic disorder. She echoes the feelings of many pet owners who blame themselves for the sufferings of their pets.

Oliver remained a raw wound deep within her, and she spent three years, travelling across the globe to search for disturbed animals and people who care for them. She writes, ‘I met elephants and parrots, cats and whales, horses and seals. Every time I reached for their hides, feathers, fur, or skin I was reaching for him’. Her book is sure to reso-

nate with animal lovers, and opens up a lot of questions regarding how we treat our animal friends. Not all pets are distressed due to their owners, but some are. Do we really have a right to snatch babies away from their mothers or individuals from their packs and herds to ‘give them a home’ by allowing them to share our beds and couches and gardens? Do we really make our pets happy by having them in the first place?

‘We can stop eating mentally ill pigs, chickens, and cows.... stop trimming our coats with the fur of compulsive mink, foxes, sable, and chinchillas...’ Killing animals for food or using them for drug testing or for filming ads and movies, making them perform for our pleasure or keeping them in captivity are obvious ways in which we have been torturing animals for centuries. Today, with awareness about animal rights and welfare, the situation is perhaps less morbid than in the past. Yet, we have a long way to go in showing empathy towards animals. Lauren throws open a challenge to all humanity, to ‘accept Darwin’s belief that humans are just another kind of animal, different only by degree’.

**Anindita Bhadra** is Assistant Professor and Chairperson, Indian National Young Academy of Science (INYAS), Behaviour and Ecology Lab, Department of Biological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata, West Bengal.