

# THE INDIAN SOCIAL SPHERE

## INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Edited by

Sakarama Somayaji, Ganesha Somayaji  
and Joanna P. Coelho



# The Indian Social Sphere

This book explores social formation of India through the lens of religion, state, ethnicity, and governance. It provides a nuanced understanding of the structural as well as the processual aspects of the Indian social sphere. The volume studies diverse themes, such as the impact of religiosity on religious consciousness, the primacy of tribal identity in colonial India, political inclusion of marginalised communities, and the emerging subaltern activism, among others.

An important contribution, this book will be of interest to scholars and researchers of sociology, political sociology, South Asian studies, affirmative action, and political science.

**Sakarama Somayaji**, Shree Keshetra Hosakatte Trust (Agency for Social Development of Underprivileged), Mundadi, Karnataka, India.

**Ganesh Somayaji**, Professor of Sociology, Goa University, India.

**Joanna P. Coelho**, Sociology Programme, Goa University, India.



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To Professor T. K. Oommen



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# Contributors

**Shalini Jain** is an international development sector professional.

**Antony Palackal**, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, India.

**Ashish Saxena**, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Allahabad, India.

**D. V. Kumar**, Professor of Sociology, North Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya, India.

**Dan A. Chekki**, Professor Emeritus, University of Winnipeg, Canada.

**Jasmine Y. Damle**, Associate Professor, Centre for Development Studies, TISS, Mumbai, India.

**Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt**, Adjunct Associate Professor, Aalborg University, Denmark; Senior Research Associate, Global Policy Institute, London; NIAS Associate, Senior Expert, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen University.

**K. Vidyasagar Reddy**, Professor, Department of Political Science, Mizoram (Central) University, Aizwal, India.

**M. Gopinath Reddy**, Professor and Head, Division for Sustainable Development Studies (DSDS), Centre for Economic and Social Studies.

**Manish Thapa**, Visiting Professor, Department of Conflict Peace & and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Muzaffar Assadi**, Professor of Political Science, University of Mysore, Karnataka, India.

**Nagendra Rao**, Professor of History, Goa University, India.

**Poornima Jain**, Head and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, DEI (Deemed to be University), Agra, India.

**R. Siva Prasad**, Honorary Professor, e-Learning Centre (formerly Professor of Anthropology), University of Hyderabad, India.

**Shalini Jain**, international development sector professional.

**Vijayalaxmi Saxena**, Assistant Professor in Sociology at C.M.P. Degree College, India.



# Preface

This book is the result of our efforts to bring out a volume in honour of the now-octogenarian Professor T. K. Oommen, Professor Emeritus of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. When, roughly an year ago, we invited scholars who are familiar with Professor Oommen's intellectual career and works to help us by contributing their chapters for a volume, we thought the volume will be one. However, after receiving an overwhelming response we decided on two volumes. Given the diversity of issues addressed by the contributors, we arranged them into two different volumes, albeit both dealing with Indian social formation, the empirical reality which Oommen steadfastly and passionately worked on throughout his career. We would like to assure readers that the volumes can be read independently of each other.

The volume in your hand is about the Indian social sphere with reference to institutions and social transformations. The chapters arranged in two parts give a nuanced understanding of the structural as well as the processual aspects of the Indian social sphere. We thank the anonymous referees for suggesting reorganising the themes of the volume. We are indebted to Routledge, Tylor and Francis Group for considering our manuscript for publication. Thank you, Professor Oommen, for blessing us with consent to go ahead with our efforts. When we expressed our desire to include a bibliography of articles and books published by him so far, Professor Oommen graciously helped us in compiling it. However, we are solely responsible for any inadvertent omissions in this compilation.

Our thanks are due to all the contributors who have been waiting with patience during the delay in bringing out this volume.

Sakarama Somayaji  
Ganesha Somayaji  
Joanna P. Coelho

# Introduction

A social sphere is an area of activity where the actors make and remake their history. During her long historical past of human habitation spanning roughly 5,000 years, the Indian sub-continent has evolved into a plural social sphere presently inhabited by people practicing multiple religions, speaking diverse languages, and following different familial and marital practices. Without attempting to dwell on the not yet resolved historical debates of who constitute the autochthons of India, on the basis of the multiple racial features the Indians exhibit and the presence of almost all world religions and diverse socio-cultural practices we can safely affirm that the Indian social sphere is ancient and is the product of arrival of diverse groups from across the globe in the past. Constant interactions among these groups are adding diversity and dynamism to the Indian social sphere.

Social spheres are always in the making, and is the case with the Indian social sphere. Divided into two parts, the first part of the book contains chapters that broadly deal with areas such as religion, state, ethnicity, and governance and the second part consists of six chapters that deal with aspects of transformation.

Religion in India has experienced protest, dissent, and reformation for a long time. The emergence of the Lingayat movement in Karnataka is contentious. In Chapter 1 Dan A. Chekki examines the communication of religious knowledge among Lingayats. Considering communication between generations as vital for the survival and continuity of societies and cultures, the task of sociology is to discover how different communities engage in the transmission of culture by using various forms of communication. This chapter aims to provide a sociological exposition of the traditional and modern methods of communicating religious knowledge within the Lingayat community. It shows how oral, print, and electronic communication media of religious knowledge coexist today. In her comparative study in Chapter 2 of Jains and *Radhasoamis*, Shalini Jain presents a comparison of the impact of religiosity on religious consciousness among the Jains and *Radhasoamis* of Agra, India. Whereas Jainism is one of the census-listed religions of India, the Radhasoamis constitute a sectarian group of Hinduism. Through quantitative analysis the chapter analyses the growing popularity of a sectarian religious group in a multi-religious city.

## 2 Introduction

While exploring the colonial encounter of the Tribes in Chapter 3 Muzafer Azadi addresses the issues relating to conflict in India's tribal areas. Tribal history of colonial India is replete with struggles, revolts, and deep crisis. Colonialism constructed tribal groups through its various surveys, enumerations, official writings, missionary writings, travelogues, or ethnographic studies, but they ended up creating spaces for ambiguities as well as a deep crisis. Many a time colonialism constructed them as "animist", "wild tribe", "forest tribe", "criminal tribe" or even "Hindu tribe or Muslim Tribe". Colonialism identified the tribal religion, initially as part of Hindu religion and animism, but later identified distinct "tribal religion". In between tribal groups underwent the process of converting to different religions, including Christianity and Islam. In the case of Christianity, missionaries took on the task of converting, however in the case of conversion to Islam, Sufism and military force took on this role. They also underwent a Hinduisation, Kshatriyization, or Rajaputization process. Incidentally, the Hinduisation process was both natural and co-opted. This is apparent in the way tribal groups adopted the caste system, the Gotra system, Hindu gods, and the Hindu way of life. Despite all this, tribal identity remained the dominant feature rather than their religious identities. Even different revolts that the tribal groups waged are better known as tribal revolts rather than religion-based revolts. In one or two cases religion did play a significant role in the revolts, however, here too tribal identity remained the major narrative.

In Chapter 4 Nagendra Rao discusses the issue of state formation in Western India with reference to Goa. He identifies two phases of state formation, based on the study of land utilisation and the territorial identity of Goa as a coastal region. The first phase pertains to the 5th century to the 10th century when there was limited land use and limited trade, even though Goa was ideally located on the western coast of India, which from ancient times had maintained a relationship with west Asian trade centres. During this period, Goa was ruled by dynasties such as the Bhojas, Konkan Mauryas, and Shilaharas who ruled the southern Konkan region. During this period, we find some religious processes such as the land grants to the Brahmanas. This phase was also the early period of state formation in Goa. However, it was in the second phase, which spanned from the 10th to the 14th century CE, that one can note the emergence of the state due to the utilisation of Goa's location on the coast, thereby leading to the transition from pre-state to state-society even though complete transformation to the state was not achieved during this period. The Kadambas introduced measures to enhance agricultural production, by giving land grants to the Brahmanas, constructing temples, developing the ports, and achieving greater economic development. During this phase, Goa transitioned from coastal to maritime polity. The use of origin myths, land grants to the Brahmanas and construction of temples, assumption of royal titles, and association with larger kingdoms legitimised the Kadamba state in Goa. The emergence of Goa as a mature state encouraged the larger kingdoms such as the Delhi Sultanate, the Bahamanis, and the Vijayanagara to conquer this region.

The remaining chapters in part one deal with the state and governance in contemporary India. In Chapter 5 D. V. Kumar addresses the issue of Mizo ethnicity in Begaluru city. The continued salience of ethnic consciousness even in an urban setting evokes keen interest among scholars. The question of why despite being located in an apparently urban context, ethnic identity continues to be dominant has not been adequately theorised and this chapter seeks to engage with this question. The excessive dependence on the primordialist or instrumentalist approach to explain the salience of ethnicity has increasingly been questioned. Neither approach alone enables us to have a proper grasp of the issue of ethnic identity. This chapter makes use of the oppositional approach which seeks to combine both these approaches and explain the salience of ethnic identity in a more satisfactory way. The field work was conducted among the Mizos living in Bengaluru.

Saxena and Saxena's Chapter 6 is about the issues associated with peacebuilding in the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state of the Indian union which has been troubled by insurgency and conflict for several decades since independence. The chapter suggests effective governance which implies accountability, transparency, participation, openness, and the rule of law between state, bureaucracy and the masses as necessary for the much needed peacebuilding and societal transformation.

In Chapter 7 Shalini Jain, after describing the historical background of civil society in India, delineates the three-way nexus between the state, corporate, and civil society in India. The chapter argues that civil society organisations in India based on the principles of think right, manage right, and govern right are a force to be reckoned with. They have played and will continue to play an undeniably pivotal role in the country's growth and development. Civil society forms the backbone for an informal healthcare and welfare system in the country. The chapter records the role of civil society in coming to grips with the covid-19 pandemic in India.

Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt and Manish Thapa in Chapter 8 offer a critical perspective of the internal and external dimensions of security and conflicts in Nepal which is strategically located and has been courted by India and China for decades. Both countries have been competing with each other to be Nepal's ally and have even intervened directly and indirectly in domestic politics in Nepal. Future relations between the two Asian giants will be a major factor in determining strategic trends in the nearby Himalayas. Asymmetries in power relations are illustrated by the impact of what may be termed the intertwined rivalry, confrontation, competition, and loose cooperation between India and China. The introduction to Chapter 8 concentrates on the issues related to "the great game" in the Himalayas. It sets out the strategic issues in relation to Nepal and attempts to relate the rivalry between India and China in a developmentalist and cross-border perspective where migration, low-intensity conflicts, and smuggling complicate the situation. The main strategic interests of India and China are based on past misunderstandings and reluctance to find a sustainable solution. The second part of the chapter discusses the security



#### 4 Introduction

situation in Nepal and how it acts as a “buffer state” in relation to the ongoing geo-strategic rivalry. The third section analyses the post-conflict situation in Nepal. The conclusion gives some tentative clues as to whether the new rapprochement may lead to peaceful solutions to the stalemate relating to India-Nepal-China relationship.

Part two begins with R. Siva Prasad’s analysis in Chapter 9 of positive discrimination policy with reference to Telangana State. After examining the structural and processual aspects of stratification in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states of India, Siva Prasad stresses the need to focus on the socio-economic conditions of the communities and to make their voices heard in the decision-making bodies.

In Chapter 10 M. Gopinath Reddy and Bishnuprasad Mohapatra present the struggle of the socially and economically marginalised to be included in local self-governance. They examine the role of Panchati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in promoting inclusion and how marginalised groups have been able to access various inclusive policies and programmes of the PRIs. Further, they examine how the elected representatives of PRIs from marginalised communities have become instrumental in promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups. Using a multi-method research design, it presents the case of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana using empirical results based on data collected from 30 villages. It argues that the PRIs have used various strategies to promote inclusion of the marginalised communities in the villages. Reservation of seats in the Panchayats’ governing bodies have helped the marginalised communities to contest elections and have enhanced their participation in the PRIs. The Gram Sabhas have played a key role in promoting participation of marginalised communities in the PRIs and further mainstreaming the era of inclusion. However, these strategies have not been systematic and effective so the findings offer a few alternative perspectives to strengthen the inclusion of the marginalised communities in the PRIs including adequate fiscal and human resources. The Gram Panchayats should effectively deal with the issues by addressing the economic vulnerability of the marginalised people.

In the context of the plight of the Adivasis and the socio-political milieu of the state, Anthony Palackal in Chapter 11 seeks to delineate the “*adivasinness*” of the political articulation and mobilisation of *adivasis* in Kerala in the recent land struggles and explore the forces that contributed to the emerging politics of indigenism. These struggles centred on the *adivasis* rights for land, and in fact lie outside the two predominant political fronts in the state – the left and the right. The chapter argues that *adivasi* land struggles, as new social movements in the state, are likely to shift the structure of the power context, building up subaltern activism, charged with a qualitatively different political practice and content than that of the mainstream politics in Kerala. This subaltern activism is likely to emerge as an alternative to the left- and right-wing politics of the state that would redefine their agenda.

In Chapter 12 K. Vidyasagar Reddy deals with North East India (NEI). He highlights the socio-economic routes of ethnic conflict. In contrast to the

prevalent socio-economic transformations that occur in mainstream India, North East India presents an atypical socio-ethnic setting, which has barely been explored. The NEI retains a distinct regional geopolitical character due to its locality, diverse physio-demographic conditions and has enormous ethnic-communitarian diversity among other things. Any study of NEI's identity, culture, and transformation process assumes significance as its ethno-regional setting is grappled with. Although there are many studies on the subject of ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, and political instability in the region, hardly any of these focus on the evolving challenges that stem from its ethnic plurality or the diverse socio-cultural setting. Hence, this is an attempt to study the ethno-political issues. The multidimensional character of socio-economic transformation and development has not yet been studied from an academic perspective. The chapter attempts to probe the main issues and is concerned with the impact on the transformation process of NEI. The chapter's multiple implications on the local and national dimensions of transformation are worth noting, at a time when the process of globalisation is proceeding at all levels in the region and elsewhere in the country. Thus, there is an earnest rationale to study the ethno-political challenges of transformation in the context of NEI.

In Chapter 13, the last chapter of the volume, Jasmine Damle throws light on the implementation of special economic zones in Mumbai by examining the notion of urban poverty. The chapter explores the unintended consequences of setting up of a Special Economic Zone in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

This book is dedicated to T. K. Oommen, Professor Emeritus of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi whose sociological career studying and publishing on issues that centre around processual aspects of the Indian social sphere has been a ground breaker. From selecting the area of his own doctoral research to guiding his research students, Oommen has shown an interest in plural issues and myriad conceptualisations of the Indian social sphere. In order to introduce beginners in Indian sociology to the sociological contributions of Oommen, a list of Oommen's publications can be found in Appendix 1. We hope that this book will be of interest to students of the Indian social sphere.

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