



Human Rights in India: Historical, Social, and Political Perspectives, C. J. Nirmal, Oxford University Press, 2002, 0195661710, 9780195661712, 372 pages. The essays in this volume tackle the complex issue of human rights from many different perspectives, and cover such diverse issues as the rights of tribal peoples, prisoners and refugees, the constitutional context of human rights, human rights in education, feminist perspectives, the role of the media, organisational bases of human rights and the NHRC..

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Civil liberties in India: being papers submitted to the Indian ..., Parts 1-2 being papers submitted to the Indian Civil Liberties Conference held in Madras on 16th and 17th July 1949, , , Political Science, . .

Human Rights Year, Book 2007 , Parekh P.H., Jan 1, 2007, Human rights, 178 pages. .

Tribune Des Droits Humains, Volume 2 , , 1993, Political Science, . .

The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights , Joanne R. Bauer, Daniel A. Bell, Feb 13, 1999, Law, 394 pages. The "Asian values" argument within the international human rights debate holds that not all Asian states should be expected to protect human rights to the same degree. This ....

Human rights the constitution and statutory institutions of India, Raja Mutthirulandi, 1998, Political Science, 326 pages. .

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Historical dictionary of human rights and humanitarian organizations , Robert F. Gorman, Edward S. Mihalkanin, 1997, , 296 pages. The authors begin their study by giving the chronology of important events in the history of human rights, followed by brief synopses of each organization, list treaties ....

Human rights in India hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Ninety-fourth Congress, second session ..., United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. Subcommittee on International Organizations, 1976, History, 233 pages. .

The essays in this volume tackle the complex issue of human rights from many different perspectives, and cover such diverse issues as the rights of tribal peoples, prisoners and refugees, the constitutional context of human rights, human rights in education, feminist perspectives, the role of the media, organisational bases of human rights and the NHRC.

Book Description: Oxford University Press. Book Condition: New. pp. xxxvi + 333 The essays in this volume evaluate the direction of human rights theory and practice in India from an interdisciplinary perspective. They explore diverse issues such as the rights of tribal people, prisoners and refugees, the constitutional context of human rights, human rights education, feminist perspectives, and the role of the media. The functioning of different human rights organizations in the country including the National Human Rights Commission is also scrutinized. This volume provides a broader understanding of the ideological foundations of human rights laws and the practical di. Bookseller Inventory # 7725193

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This much-needed anthology looks at the issue of human rights in India at the turn of the century as well as the new millennium. Altogether in contains thirteen essays dealing with different aspects of human rights in India. Some of the important topics touched upon include the debate between first generation rights and second (or third) generation human rights, need for local understanding of human rights, the rationale for setting up the National Human Rights Commissions (NHRC) in 1993 and many others. The following words from editor Nirmal lay out the focus of this book: "The contents of this book emphasize a historical framework, the social context and the political situation in which the issues of human rights [in India] are handled" (p. xxviii). However, since I find this collection to be a mixed bag with essays widely varying in their methodologies, organizational focus and above all their comparative success in developing a sustained thesis, it is best to review the individual essays separately before turning to an overall evaluation of the collection.

In the first essay, "Awakening of Human Rights," M. Sundara Raj traces the historical evolution of the concept of human rights through the ages and attempts to situate the Indian case in this broader frame. An interesting point that he notes is that in ancient times, both in India and in other places of the world, the concept of human rights was largely determined by humanitarian laws that regulated war-time conduct (p. 2). Sundara Raj also traces the history of events through which the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into existence. However, in spite of its

well-researched documentation of the rise of the human rights movement in the West, this essay fails to address the issues of human rights in medieval India or colonial India. It therefore fails to situate the Indian case appropriately in the larger frame. The author also makes the claim that the concept of basic human rights needs to be understood "locally" (p. 20). However, the rationale behind such a need and also how such a need can be met remain unaddressed.

In the second essay, "Victims of Human Rights Violations: Native and Indigenous Populations," Rajagopal Ryali documents how the basic human rights of tribal people and indigenous people have been violated throughout the world in the name of "progress" (p. 25), "civilization" (p. 25) and "education" (p. 30). Explaining education's role in violating tribal rights, Ryali writes, "Indifference to tribal cultural heritage is one way of depriving a person of human rights" (p. 30). This argument needed to be made more carefully. If "indifference" means "leaving alone" then how would that violate one's human rights?

The third essay, "Fundamental Rights: The Constitutional Context of Human Rights," by Leela Simon and C. J Nirmal discusses the human rights guaranteed in the Constitution of India through its admission of "fundamental rights." In this clear and well-organized piece, they point out that since the Indian Constitution was written after the U. N. Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the makers of the Indian Constitution inserted Part III that discusses the "fundamental rights" that every citizen of India has and defined these rights as "inviolable in the sense that no law, ordinance, custom, usage or administrative order can abridge or take away" (p. 43) these rights. Interestingly these fundamental rights have close a similarity with those in the U. N. Declaration of Human Rights, namely, the right to equality, the right to freedom, the right against exploitation, the right to freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights and the important right to constitutional remedies. One would have liked to know, however, why the founders of the Indian Constitution chose the appellation of "fundamental rights" and not "human rights."

In the next essay, "Human Rights Initiatives," Nageswar Rao discusses the interesting distinction between two kinds of human rights, namely, civil and political rights and social and economic rights. Nageswar Rao rightly notes that the first kind takes primacy over the other and traces the history of this imposed artificial distinction in the history of the U. N., the Indian constitutional and governmental practices. This is in spite of the fact that the International Human Rights Conference in Teheran in 1968 declared all human rights to be "indivisible." He also argues convincingly that though this distinction seems to be offered for a "trickle down" effect, this artificial distinction ends up with a "trickle up effect" thereby defeating any rationale for the primacy of one set of rights over the other.

Despite its title, "Human Rights Awareness in Education," A. Chandrasekaran's essay focuses for the most part on the relation between the right to development and the basic right to education (p. 72) and only cursorily on human rights education. Referring to the various suggestions made by the National Policy on Education (1986), he tries to make the case that India has come a long way from the time when untouchable Ekalavya had to sacrifice his thumb as "guru dakshina" [an offering made to the teacher at the completion of training or studies] (p. 78). He argues that the right to basic education is central since only through such education does one become aware of one's basic human rights. However, he fails to make a clear case for how basic education increases one's human rights awareness. Especially in view of Ryali's argument that all kinds of colonial education are detrimental to the human rights of the colonized, this seems to represent a real problem (see for example his argument at p. 30).

Indhrani Sridharan in her "Practicing Human Rights: A Feminist Perspective" draws attention to the fact that the gender equality guaranteed by the Indian Constitution does not reflect the real picture of Indian society where most women still face an uphill battle both at home and at work. However, her lengthy discussion is lacking in focus and also seems to present

contradictory data. Thus while arguing for the prevalence of female feticide in India she notes that the female population in India has decreased "from 964 per 1000 males in 1911 to 930 per 1000 males in 1971" (p. 121). However, while arguing that female literacy rate is disproportionately low,

she notes that the population ratio in 1981 is "935 females to 1000 males" (p. 105). So, from the data she presents it seems that after 1971 there has been an increase in female population that needs to be taken into account in her argument for the prevalence of female feticide. Moreover, she needs to present an independent argument as to why the rate of female feticide went up after 1911. Sridharan rightly argues that change cannot come just by making amendments to the Constitution but only by changing people's attitude towards women and their value (p. 121). However, like a few other authors in this collection she fails to give any direction in which such a change can be realized.

N. V. Anandraman's "Situating Human Rights in the Media" takes a while to find its focus. The point of this piece is to study the role of the media (more specifically Tamil language and English language news and entertainment media in Tamil Nadu) in raising general awareness about the blatant human rights violations by corrupt members of the government, the judiciary and the police system (p. 135). However, this essay fails to address the issue of the media's ability and commitment to find the truth especially under the prevalence of what Anandraman calls "self-censorship" (p. 129). He seems to argue that freedom of expression in and of itself, when supported by some form of Information Act, will lead to truth (p. 128); however, this connection needs to be shown more clearly.

In "Religious Freedom and Human Rights" C. Joseph Barnabas argues that all religions, in their true spirit, are champions of human rights since they all acknowledge basic human dignity and equality. However, he notes that in practice religions more often incite violence than harmony (p. 146). What is required, according to Barnabas is a general "conviction" in people's minds. He further argues that such a conviction can only come about by proper religious education and by a disengagement of religion from politics. Once again he fails to give a clear direction that would realize this general "conviction".

Continuing with the emerging theme of this collection, namely, the disparity between the constitutional guarantee of human rights and its implementation in practice, C. J. Nirmal in his "Human Rights of Prisoners" documents the sad plight of Indian prisoners. He also notes that wide-spread corruption at various levels, governmental, judiciary and above all in prison personnel, makes the various measures of prison reform suggested by different prison commissions (for example, the Mulla Report of 1980-83) into mere "paper Promise(s)" (p. 166). He captures the complex nature of the problem when he writes, "Even display of a charter of prisoners' rights in all prisons in all the major national and regional languages will have little impact as quite a few prisoners are illiterate" (p. 169). Once again the solution seems to lie in raising general consciousness about the basic human rights of prisoners. However, Nirmal's suggested avenue of making access to information about human rights available to every prisoner does not seem to go a long way towards actualizing that solution since any access to information, when coupled with illiteracy, will fail to deliver any real awareness about rights.

V. Vijayakumar's "Refugees and Human Rights: International and National Experiences" primarily focuses (more than two-thirds of his essay) on the evolution of the Human Rights Convention of 1951 and the UN protocol of 1967 starting with the appointment of Mr. Nansen as the first High Commissioner in 1917. However, insufficient attention is paid to the National case. He notes that though "India is not a party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol" (p. 184), India "has earned a place" (p. 185) in the highest policy-making body of the UNHCR. However, he should have explained first, the reasons for India's refraining from joining the Convention and the Protocol and second, the reasons for India's inclusion in the highest policy-making body.

In his "Organizational Basis for Human Rights," K. S. Krishnaswamy discusses the international and national histories of various governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the U. N., that work to clarify and protect human rights. In this regard he notes that, though these organizations often "lack law-enforcing sanctions", they have "increasingly resort[ed] to fact-finding" (p. 189) that is quite powerful in raising general awareness and consciousness about human rights and their violations.

V. Vijayakumar in his timely "The Working of the National Human Rights Commission: A

Perspective" discusses the inception of NHRC in 1993 and its activities and success since then. He documents the interesting debate as to whether India really needed any Commission like NHRC or whether Indian Courts were enough to ensure and protect human rights. Noting that the uniqueness of this commission lies in how it functions, namely, by integrating different systems, Vijayakumar presents a series of arguments in favor of this commission. One of the main arguments is the greater flexibility of this forum since, unlike the courts, it does not have to go through often time-consuming and expensive procedures. Vijayakumar also argues that the main value of NHRC lies in its ability to work as a "watchdog". However, to be a real watchdog, what would seem necessary is that it be independent from the government. Yet, as Vijayakumar notes, not only are the members of the commission appointed by the Central government, the commission also relies on the central government for its annual budget. It seems that the success of NHRC on a large scale would depend on its ability to function as an APOLITICAL body.

I would like to conclude this review by discussing a problem that bothered me most about this book. Though the editor in his introduction notes that this book is for teachers, researcher and activists, it is not clear whether this book is for a purely Indian audience or for non-Indian and Western audiences as well. If it is the latter, then it seems to me that some very important and relevant details are missing. Thus, while discussing African female genital mutilation, Sridharan writes, "Some Borahs of India are equally guilty of that practice" (p. 97). However, this comment needs to be developed and documented with far more care. Similarly Barnabas notes that the Government and the Christian community treat DALIT Christians differently from other Christians. However, he does not clarify who these DALIT Christians are nor how they differ from the Schedule Caste and Schedule tribe Christians. Once again,

while discussing the issue of Uniform Civil Code, Sridharan mentions only in passing the Shah Bano case (p. 108). However, if a Western reader is to understand the complexity of this issue, she needs to know much more about this case. Finally, from Vijayakumar's essay on NHRC it appears that civil- political rights have been taken as the primary human rights by the commission. This seems to be in conflict with the general Indian line noted in quite a few earlier essays that human rights are "indivisible," and further no rationale has been provided for NHRC's implicit choice. These are only a few examples of cases where a serious reader would need more definitive information than is provided by this collection.

Protection of fundamental human rights has always been accorded a prominent place in the Indian constitution. However, most laws aimed at securing human rights have been hamstrung by tardy implementation. General apathy towards human rights violation has also contributed, in large measure, to their persistent occurrence. The essays in this volume evaluate the direction of human rights theory and practice in India from an interdisciplinary perspective. Human Rights in India explores diverse issues such as the rights of the tribal peoples, prisoners and refugees, the constitutional context of human rights, human rights education, feminist perspectives, and the role of the media. The functioning of different human rights organizations in the country, and the National Human Rights Commission has also been put under scrutiny. C.J. Nirmal concludes the volume by outlining an agenda for future human rights policies in India. This volume provides a broader understanding of the ideological foundations of human rights and the practical difficulties in their effective implementation. It will be useful for legal academics, activists, NGOs and the interested lay reader.

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The book Human Rights in India: Historical, Social, and Political Perspectives (Law in India) by C J Nirmal (author) is published or distributed by Oxford University Press, USA [0195645979, 9780195645972]. This particular edition was published on or around 2000-08-10 date. Human Rights in India: Historical, Social, and Political Perspectives (Law in India) has Hardcover binding and this format has 372 number of pages of content for use. The printed edition number of this book is 1.

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