

BOOK REVIEW

Susana B.D. Devalle. DISCOURSES OF ETHNICITY, CULTURE AND PROTEST IN JHARKHAND. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992. 279pp.

by: *Artemio D. Palongpalong*

The book under review is an excellent piece of scholarship that uses the multi-disciplinary approach in analyzing the issues of ethnicity, nationalism, subordination of the tribes to the culture and designs of the majority (Indians), and development in general in a post-colonial Third World society.

The author has correctly selected Jharkhand, a region in the state of Bihar, India. In this region lives a good number of ethnic groups, including Scheduled Tribes (98 percent of Scheduled Castes are Pan or Sawasi, Ghasi and Bauri of Bihar and 2 of 10 million registered as Scheduled Castes). Of particular interest to social scientists are the issues of nationalism and ethnicity/tribes, class denomination and culture of protest.

Benedict Anderson's idea of an "imagined community" has been appropriately cited. In a social situation where such factors as colonial encroachments, administration and lingering neocolonial impact, social formation, geopolitical position, etc. are very much at work, there seems to be no appropriate description of nation-state except that which Anderson has proposed.

But linking together what may be considered the scattered, non-interconnected communities into one palpable whole who has to reckon with two constructs: ethnicity and class conflicts. The volume has presented several insights into the first, which includes the questionable conduct of the elites in the region, who behave much like the previous colonial overlords. [These insights may have their precedent in Dr. Jose Rizal's "The slaves of today will be the master of tomorrow".] The book describes the power elites as looking at the tribals as uneducated, uncultured, and uncivilized. As to the second construct, i.e., class conflicts, the views and aspirations of the masses are not lost to the author, which is appropriate in any discourse on nationalism. In vivid terms, scholars of the West are very much concerned with the gap between the economic/political elites and the masses. The status of the common men must be improved and pushed upwards, before an "imagined community" can have a semblance of reality.

What is equally interesting to social science scholars as well as those specializing in area studies is what Devalle calls "the culture of oppression," studies side by side with its opposite, "culture of protest." The long history of social unrest in Jharkhand is part of the people's collective consciousness. It is undeniably part of its people's will to survive and flourish as a society, not just to exist. Ranged against that historical reality is the series of oppressive acts of the majority, the culture of oppression and terror.

The battle between the elites, the majority culture and the ethnic minorities may be compared to the struggle between what some scholars in a different clime call "center-periphery" conflicts. This issue, along with those of nationalism and its components or sub-issues, is extremely relevant to the construction of a democracy, the true role of the people.

Minus the unavoidable verbiage, and sometimes inadequately explained phraseologies and jargons that seem unavoidable in the use of the various disciplines, the volume is of high value to scholars and area studies experts as well as students who deal with Asian post-colonial nation-states.