

The gendered nature of subalternity is also discussed in few essays. Nandini C. Bora brings forth the subaltern identity of women in the Elizabethan England through her reading of *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. Her arguments regarding the tactics used by Shakespeare's women characters to fight against patriarchy hold true even today- acquisition of material wealth, language and apparel. Anuradha Chaudhuri's essay attempts a reading of the Malay novels of Joseph Conrad to reveal the spirit of resistance displayed by the women subalterns. Several instances of subversion and resistance are brought out in the essay. Chaudhuri unravels how the women in Conrad's select novels use resistance, subversion and self-expression to fight suppression, domination and exploitation, thereby leading to a version of reciprocity.

There are also a few essays that seem to be slightly exaggerated in its understanding of subalternity. Niranjana Jena claims to look at the subaltern consciousness in ancient Sanskrit literature, but fails to look at the varna-caste system critically; produces accounts from Sanskrit literature on the 'lower status' of Shudras; fails to account for the subaltern identities of the Dalit-Bahujans, the Athi-shudras. One may consider Jena's endeavour as a limited one that does not suffice the understanding of the subaltern concerns within the literary works that were considered. Paramba Shree Yogamaya's essay on *Dasa* confuses the caste and class categories and fails to critically analyse the evolution of the terms like *Dasa* and *Dasis*, but ventures ahead to provide a gist of the arguments from Vedic to Stotra literatures. Asima Ranjan Parhi attempts to attribute a situational subaltern identity to certain characters like Karna and Duryodhana in Mahabharata. Parhi claims that the situational subalterns are reminiscent of the new subaltern. One may find the arguments problematic as there are more marginalised identities, like that of Eklavya, in the epic. Jaydeep Chakraborty's essay appears to be a limited reading of the Bhakti movement, songs and poetry, in its claim that the Bhakti movement was an effort to resist the conversion of the subalterns in Hindu society into Islam. The example about the conversion of Yavan Haridas into Brahma Haridas seems slightly fictionalised as well. Amlanjyoti Sengupta's essay discussing the minority status of certain languages in the larger context of a trilingual education policy in India talks of the ways in which even dominant languages of some states acquire a situational subaltern nature in other states. But, Sengupta seems to overlook the fact that subalternity may not be attributed merely on the use of language, without considering the social and cultural capital of the users.

The book, indeed, reminds us of the need to discuss and contest the nature of subaltern identity in South Asia, but also makes us aware of the extent to which this category can be stretched to accommodate the otherwise dominant identities. The informed reader will, hence, make her choice of essays from this book.

REJU GEORGE MATHEW
National Institute of Technology Calicut, India

THE IDEA OF SOCIALISM: TOWARDS A RENEWAL. By Axel Honneth. Translated by Joseph Ganahl, Polity Press UK, Cambridge: 2017. 145 pp.

Thinking about socialism in the contemporary time, one can only doubt if it is even possible to think the way Neo-liberalism has captured the polity, economy and society. Particularly, the post 1990s, after the collapse of Soviet Union, the global capitalism of market economy has become instinct of human mind from a metropolitan city to a local village. The public sector has declined almost to a minimal level. In other words, nothing has remained which is not controlled by private sector. In this context, the critical school philosopher Axel Honneth's effort is to bring our attention in his recent book *The Idea of Socialism: Towards a Renewal*, to rethink about socialism with a new pragmatic approach. Honneth has been arguing in his other path breaking work on recognition, in which love, right, and solidarity, are inevitable political and ethical values share with the idea of justice. In this short compelling book, he draws the ideas from socialist utopian tradition of enlightenment, particularly drawing idea from Hegel, Marx, and Dewey. This is not a political project as he stated, the book re-emphasises the socialist imagination within a democratic framework and revitalise the importance of socialism to emphasise the idea of social freedom.

The book has five chapters including a short introduction. In the first and second chapter, the author locates the original idea of socialism. To Honneth "the original idea of socialism is rooted in the notion that in the future it will be possible to organise entire societies on the model of communities of solidarity" (pp. 24-25). This idea unifies the idea of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which is a departure from the earlier socialists. Honneth traces the French Revolution and industrial revolution to discuss about the earlier thinkers of socialism such as Robert Owen, Saint Simonists and Fourierists, later he joined Proudhon, Marx, and Dewey. Honneth critiques the earlier modern socialists who confined themselves to the economic sphere only and often dismissed the idea of social and political rights. He further shows the limitation of Marx and Marxism, which do not consider the idea of social freedom as an important feature of socialism. Honneth presents Marx's ideas of class struggle led by the oppressed proletariat, which shape the power of all society. He further writes, "Marx assumes that the motor of social development consists of natures, thereby unlocking its unexploited potential and gradually compelling the organisation of society" (p. 45).

In addition to this, Honneth critiques historical determinism to show the limitation of Marxism. To quote, "by Marx's arrival at the latest – that the market could only be replaced by a planned economy, which left no room for institutional mediation or a reassessment of priorities. For decades to come, this self-imposed theoretical handicap, cause by assuming a fixed course of historical progress, deprived socialism of the chance to explore and experiment with different strategies for realising the social freedom of the economic sphere" (p. 47). By the end of Second World War, democracy, economy, and technology drastically changed. Very particularly, it happened after the collapse of Soviet Union – the fall of Berlin Wall. Simultaneously, there has been a drastic decline of socialist economy. The win of Neo-liberal economy dominates the state, economy, and society in a bigger way, which the traditional school of socialism could not answer to the questions roused after 1990s.

Honneth reinterprets in chapter three and four the idea of socialism in a democratic framework. In the modern idea of socialism, more importance will be given to the social than the individual. Honneth attempts to create an image of society and history that would do service to socialism; therefore, everything is related to everything. "A renewed version of socialism would have to leave it up to experimentation whether the market, civil society or the democratic constitutional state represents the most appropriate steering

principle when it comes to realising the social freedom in the economic sphere" (p. 58-59). Honneth formulates his idea of social freedom from Hegel and Dewey. To him, John Dewey's idea of associational life or behaviour constitutes a basic feature of all things. Moreover, he brought the idea of social freedom and communication between members of society, which is against the social exclusion, and hierarchy, in a process that will bring the social interaction among the people. This will lead to experimental exploration of appropriate solutions to the problematic situations. Honneth introduced the realisation of freedom, "as result from the gradual overcoming of barriers to free communication among the members of the society who aim to rationally explore and lay down rules for their shared existence" (p. 62). Honneth's interpretation of Dewey's democracy resembles his idea of socialism. To quote, "on the one hand Dewey claims that all of human history is marked by the gradual expansion of communication and social interaction, and, on the other hand the notion that early socialist believed they could apply to the economic sphere" (p. 64).

According to Honneth, all these possible in democratic form of life. Here democracy does not mean only equal participation in political life, but individual can participate freely and equally to mediate between individual and society. It also allows the experienced-based knowledge to establish in various spheres of life. Honneth's idea of socialism is more Hegelian than Marxist to achieve social freedom. He strongly reiterates the importance of Dewey's pragmatism in the present context by admitting that economics is completely controlled by 'global society', but he implicitly says that moral, legal, and intimate relationship are important for family, friends and across the culture. It seems clear that Honneth's idea of socialism tries to understand the social relationship among the groups and individuals, which makes society egalitarian rather than focusing on the economics aspects only. It seems too idealistic a position, however, it appeals to the global social question.

Honneth's new idea of Socialism is closer to egalitarian liberalism and pragmatism, which is not either lofty utopian dream of revolution in a static sense. Interestingly, Honneth firmly believes in the idea of experimentalism as an approach, which is not dogmatic like traditional Marxism, rather it is to be found in Dewey's pragmatic experimentalism and Habermas' communicative ethics. Honneth offers an open dialogue to happen based on the given condition and without compromising basic tenants of socialism, or, either it encourages post-modernism or traditional approach. Furthermore, Honneth conceptualises the democratic way of life to be found in Dewey's idea of democracy.

It is interesting to see the development in the Indian context. Thinkers like Dr B. R. Ambedkar had proposed a similar approach to the project of democratic socialism though Ambedkar's idea is far radical than Honneth's idea of socialism. Ambedkar's idea of *State and Minorities* strongly endorse democracy as essential framework of a state-regulated economy, in which industries shall be part of the state, there shall be distribution of land and resources, and individual rights shall be protected by the state, any kind of discrimination are prohibited by the constitution, to Ambedkar democracy can only create an alternate viable option to live a respectful and good life both materially and socially. Interestingly, Ambedkar was a student of John Dewey, while pursuing his Masters in Columbia University, and Dewey's idea of democracy had impacted Ambedkar's political ideals. Moreover, Ambedkar's reclamation of liberty, equality, and fraternity treated as radical political philosophy inherited in his political manoeuvre. It is this revolutionary idea brings Ambedkar and Honneth closer to the idea of democratic socialism that offer

a new interpretation to construe the social freedom, social solidarity and equality both in terms of economic, social and political rights in a democratic framework. I have found that Honneth is an idealist, though he is not dogmatic, his re-emphasis on the idea of pragmatism is undeniable in the present context to renew the idea of socialism.

JADUMANI MAHANAND
O P Jindal Global University, India

BELIEVING WOMEN IN ISLAM: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION. By Asma Barlas and David Raeburn Finn. Texas: University of Texas Press, 2019. 120 p.

In this book, Asma Barlas lays bare open the wounds that were inflicted in the name of religion on the women of Muslim society. She very meticulously tries to hit upon, unread and re-read the patriarchal readings of the Qura'n, serving us on our platter the egalitarian concept of Islam in a very simple yet profound and efficacious words. The incorrigible questions – Does Islam promote and validate patriarchy? Does Islam objectify women to be merely acting as marionettes at the gesture of the eyesight of men? Does Qura'n identify men in the semblance of God? Is it the biology of the woman that reduces her to be as futile as the heap of emotions with no brains and nothing more? Is the exploitation and subjugation of women justified owing to the myth ascribed to Eve's sole sin, wherein she was vandalized as the one instigating Adam and being responsible for her and Adam's fall from paradise? All these, and many more questions that had haunted women of Islam and people of other religions in manifold ways since antiquity, have been deftly woven and answered by deconstructing the arguments of previous scholars in quite a pertinent and appealing manner.

The Qura'n's reading which till now had been interpreted as promulgating and justifying the sexual exploitation, patriarchy, women discrimination and gender inequality, is taken up as a believer's reading by Barlas. She dissects and re-reads these traditional understandings and teachings through Islam's egalitarian and anti-patriarchal lens. Through her balanced and intricately layered arguments she precipitates and brings forth the truth that Qura'n and Islam have nowhere been unjust to women and never restrict the growth and liberation of women. This is achieved by picking up apposite verses from Qura'n and offering quotations from various unswerving sources that offer an eye-opening understanding and conclusion as to what the reality is and how it had been maneuvered by those in power! She picks up her yarn of arguments from the grass root level and neatly arranges them by posing simple questions both from believers and traditional thinkers and proves that Qura'n clearly confirms and establishes equality between men and women. In doing so she takes us back to the seventh century and offers us the accounts and understandings of the age of Prophet Mohammad, alluding to the lifestyle of Prophet himself and his reverence and treatment of women. There are many arguments that are articulated by Barlas related to God and his indivisibility: first one is about God's self-revelation in Islam, "God does not discriminate: humanity includes all humanity that is and will be" (p. 4); second argument is about semblance of Men with God, *The Tawhid*, where God's sovereignty is indivisible and cannot be shared by anyone;