

ARTICULATIONS

An ethnography of drought

From as far back as the devastating famine of 1791 to the present day, the author traces the changes in the perception and response to drought by drawing upon unconventional sources and multiple discourses

attention. Therefore, her attempt, which comes out in a lucid presentation of ten chapters, is to represent Indian culture through its own categories and idioms. From as far back as the devastating Skull famine in 1791, the author traces the changes in the perception and response to drought to the present by drawing upon unconventional sources and multiple discourses. In dealing

sionals? The development agenda of the state has resulted in the introduction and assimilation of new lexicon of development and new categories of discourse into social and cultural interactions. For example, terms like backward, drought-prone and poverty-stricken are far removed from the earlier conception of people about their land and lives. From the conceptualisation of farming and

of the economic dimension of local agriculture from its established cultural priorities, she reminds, are observable in the cases of suicide by agriculturists in north Karnataka belt. But often the result of such competing orientations is the pluralisation of social life-worlds, indicating the ability of societies to retain elements of existing cultures and absorb and articulate multiple cultural forms. The author has innovatively used the term hybrid as a metaphor to denote the changes in a societies experience of time, space and substance and it lends itself to provide an anthropological summary of the life and culture of an agrarian community. In an after thought, any reader feels tempted to extend the term to express the paradoxes of Indian modernity.

to grips with inequality. Probably, with the post-modern mood of the book (though devoid of its inherent scepticism, anarchy and allegory) Dr. Vasavi could not have incorporated this agenda too.

There are two aspects of this book that I imagine will interest readers for palpably different reasons. One, anthropological knowledge is socially constituted, historically situated and informed by multiple perspectives. Dr. Vasavi follows all the rules of the craft of ethnography and her work stands out from the extensive corpus of author-saturated works. It enables one to go beyond a nostalgic representation of an agrarian order and an inward looking regional ethnography. This makes it an essential reading for those who teach and practice anthropology. Second, it shakes off the number fetish many of us have in the development field and invokes an irresistible urge for peoples' perspective. Therefore, those who are not familiar with ethnographies, and seem to be less convinced about anthropological insights, can begin with this.

However, one wonders what has really changed for the poor during the drought? As the author rightly describes, from the benevolence of the landlords of the earlier system they are now at the mercy of the government administration. Well, after more than a century of its effort to appropriate the social world, social science is yet to come

HARBINGERS OF RAIN:

Land and Life in South India

By A R Vasavi

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with the core themes, she has adeptly used oral histories and, the argument dissolves well into the cerebrum enriching our vocabulary as well as sensibilities. Her analysis extends to the manner in which the concept of relief has changed and reflects peoples' subtle acceptance or resistance to the imposition of cultural and social meanings through state dispensation. She also offers a strong cultural critique of the dominant development paradigm, where in communities are treated as mere recipients of development by extending our understanding on how local communities change the meanings and terms of discourse. Is it not the missing element in the development discourse and practice in India, led by the policy makers and development profes-

living as *hulige* (bestowed abundance), there has been a perceptible shift towards *utpati* (production) and system based agriculture, signifying the entry of market forces into the economic and social arena of rural society. This has re-ordered the human-land relationships. It has displaced the local knowledge skills and there is a nascent submission to the bureaucratic administration. In the domain of agriculture, the farmer has to choose between drawing on their own knowledge and agricultural practices that relate to their established social order and identities or they must strive to be progressive modern farmers, inducing productivity by utilising external inputs. The social implications of these dual processes, that is, the separation



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