

AN UNCERTAIN GLORY - INDIA AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

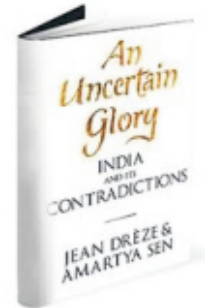
JEAN DREZE AND AMARTYA SEN

“An Uncertain Glory,” a new book by the economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen that aims to bring the poor to the center of public discussion about the country’s future. The lack of health care, tolerably good schools and other basic facilities important for human well-being and elementary freedoms, keeps a majority of Indians shackled to their deprived lives in a way quite rarely seen in other self-respecting countries that are trying to move ahead in the world.

In this book the Authors Jena Dreze and Amartyasen discussed about how to make effective use of the understanding interdependent factors on which the progress of living standards and wellbeing and ultimately economic growth depend. An overarching theme of this book is the necessity for the lived needs rights and demands of People to command greater attention in public discussion and policy making and a democratic politics.

The book is divided into ten chapters, with very interesting examples. Chapters explains above integration of growth and development, India in comparative perspectives, Accountability and corruption, Education, Health, poverty and social support, grip of inequality, Democracy, inequality and public reasoning, the need for impatience.

“An Uncertain Glory” as the title suggests is about glory that is uncertain, given the dichotomy of the situation. On one hand, the country progresses (seemingly so) and on the other, the inequalities only seem to grow without stopping. The economists look at the flaws that widen this gap.



According to author the recent achievements of modern India is to develop. India is not inconsiderable and has been widely recognized across the globe over the last decade and more. Yet, in last decade India was the second fastest grow thing large economy in the world glory of today’s India is deeply uncertain.

In this book the main focus is to know, to what extent have India’s old problems been eradicated? What remains to be done? And are there new problems that India has to address? As the New York Times put it in a recent, editorial, “India is the world’s largest supplier of generic medicines in the pharmaceutical field, the policies potentially affect Billions of people around the world”. This statement clearly states that India has established itself as an innovative Centre of some significant departures in the world economy not just in the application of information technology and related activities but also in supplying of reliable modern medicines.



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This book also through light about how along with economic progress there has also been significant social change E.g., Life expectancy, Infant mortality and female literacy. But the authors felt that it is extremely important to point to the fact that societal reach of economic progress in India has been remarkably limited.

In this book the author's also discussed about the dismal state of the power sector which is the only one part of the failure in India to address the need for good physical infrastructure. Similar deficiencies can be seen in the water supply, drainage, garbage disposal, public transport and a number of other fields.

The discussion also made about corruption. But the author's says that it would be silly to attribute the defect to democracy as many non-democracy countries suffer from massive corruption. And they also suggested that the Media can contribute hugely to this important challenge, by helping to highlight the genuine complaints of the people rather than largely neglecting the violations of rules and norms, as used to be the case until quite recently. These comparisons are rhetorical tools; the authors use them to show that India's problems can't be attributed to culture or democracy or a lack of tax revenue.

"An Uncertain Glory" directs so much of its criticism toward the "celebratory media," the proliferation of satellite channels and newspapers dominated by breathless gossip about cricketers, billionaires and bollywood stars and point-scoring among the political elite.

At the heart of Sen and Dreze's *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* is the argument that economic growth is meaningless without redistribution of its benefits to the underprivileged. Instead, in their eyes, there is a strong case for public expenditure on

education, healthcare and employment leading to better capabilities and opportunities. This, they claim, will accelerate economic growth. The writers argue that private intervention, as it is driven by profit, cannot prove effective in areas like education and health because a single-minded focus on profit can be at variance with the interests of the public. Especially the interests of those who do not have the power to even ask for their rights, let alone sway policy. The result: India is performing terribly on most social indicators.

I strongly agree with the author's about the first five year plan initiated in 1951- Even though sympathetic to the need for university education which it strongly supported argued against regular schooling at the elementary level, favoring instead a so-called basic education system, built on the hugely romantic and rather eccentric idea that children should learn through self-financing handicraft. It went on to say that the tendency to open primary schools should not be encouraged and, as far as possible, resources should be concentrated on basic education and the improvement and remodeling of existing primary schools on basic lines. This did not, however, prevent the second five year plan (initiated in 1956) from reasserting that 'the whole of elementary education has to be reoriented on basic lines'. Over time, the government has to yield to public's demand for a proper schooling system, but the conceptual confusion over what schools should do added a further regressive force to the under-allocation of public money to make the country literate and numerate.

The role of basic elocution in the process of develop and social peoples is very wide and

1. In a powerful diagnosis, Rabindranath Tagore said in my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education.

2. The role of basic education in the process of development and social progress is very wide and critically important. First, the capability to read and write and count has powerful effects on our quality of life: the freedoms we have to understand the world, to lead an informed life, to communicate with others, and to be generally in touch with what is going on.
3. Second, our economic opportunities greatly employment prospects depend greatly on our educational achievements and cultivated skills.
4. Third, illiteracy muffles the political voice of people and thus contributes directly to their insecurity.
5. Fourth, basic education can play a major role in tackling health problems in general and public health in particular. It is easy to see the importance of specialized health education.
6. Fifth, educational development has often been the prime mover in bringing about changes in public perceptions of the range and reach of what can be called human rights.
7. Sixth, education can also make a difference to the understanding and use of legal rights—the already legislated rights that people may already have, but which they are, sometimes, not able to utilize.
8. Seventh, there is now extensive evidence that the schooling of young women can substantially enhance the voice and power of women in family decisions.
9. Eighth, even though education is no magic bullet against class barriers, it can make a big contribution to reducing inequalities related to the divisions of class and caste.
10. Last but not least, learning and studying can be immensely enjoyable and creatively engaging activities, if they are well arranged and well supported, and the process of schooling itself can add greatly to the quality of life of young people, quite apart from the long-run benefits they receive from it.

They are many problems to be addressed at different education levels in India—starting from preschool education to the higher levels of higher education. In this book Authors concentrate mostly on the neglected state of schools and schooling in India. I agree that the problems of Indian universities including Academic arrangements and facilities recruitments and emoluments can be critically assessed and should be.

An Uncertain Glory: India And Its Contradictions explicates the progress of the nation as it overcame the economic lag to earning a growth rate that soon made it the second fastest growing economy in the world. For Dreze and Sen the focus however lies elsewhere and it is in determining the essential needs of the people and bridging the gap of opportunities that they believe there is a chance for India to cash in its true realization of freedom. They discuss the deep inequalities that are entrenched in the Indian system and how the resulting failure to develop human capabilities is stunting its growth.

They believe that the quality of life in India is the major concern and therefore the needs and social deprivations of the majority of the people who are among the lower rungs are of priority basis and need to be addressed. The authors lay out a premise for a stronger democratic ethic that concentrates on these neglected corners of Indian policy in this enlightening treatise.

When India became independent in 1947 after two centuries of colonial rule, it immediately

adopted a firmly democratic political system, with multiple parties, freedom of speech, and extensive political rights. The famines of the British era disappeared, and steady economic growth replaced the economic stagnation of the Raj. The growth of the Indian economy quickened further over the last three decades and became the second fastest among large economies. Despite a recent dip, it is still one of the highest in the world.

In *An Uncertain Glory*, two of India's leading economists argue that the country's main problems lie in the lack of attention paid to the essential needs of the people, especially of the poor, and often of women. There have been major failures both to foster participatory growth and to make good use of the public resources generated by economic growth to enhance people's living conditions. There is also a continued inadequacy of social services. In the long run, even the feasibility of high economic growth is threatened by the underdevelopment of social and physical infrastructure and the neglect of human capabilities, in contrast with the Asian approach of simultaneous pursuit of economic growth and human development, as pioneered by Japan, South Korea, and China.

After three decades of trawling the data compiled by central and state governments, Indian nongovernmental organizations, and international bodies, these longtime collaborators know--possibly better than any other commentators--how Indian governments since the 1980s have failed the vast majority of Indians, especially in health care, education, poverty reduction, and the justice system. Sen and Dreze are right to draw attention to the limits of India's success and how much remains to be done.

This paradox of poverty and plenty poses one of the great intellectual and moral challenges of the day. We can ask for no better guides to it than a philosopher and an activist, both

distinguished economists, and both with unparalleled knowledge of India's glories and its shames.

The authors acknowledge the rapid economic growth inked in the last 20 years when India has started to appear 'young' again — a Picasso flourish — in stark contrast to the so called 'Hindu rate of growth' in the first three decades post-Independence.

India has been climbing up the ladder of per capita income while slipping down the slope of social indicators. Human development in general and school education in particular are first and foremost allies of the poor, rather than only of the rich and affluent,” the authors note.

According to the authors, India's failure stems from the fact that it is chasing 'growth' rather than 'participatory growth'. This 'participatory growth' involves doing precious little to ensure basic amenities for its citizens, particularly in the rural recesses, or to root out the 'persistent ineptitude and unaccountability', leave alone try to bridge the growing chasm between the privileged and those not, even among the states.

Part of the blame falls on the media. Rather than engage with the “diagnosis of significant injustices and inefficiencies”, media celebrates only the rich and powerful, perhaps because it is an advertisement-driven business, the authors allege. But change is possible: through provision of education and self-confidence; legislative and institutional change; better use of modern technology; decentralization of power and decision making; changes in social norms, habit of thought and work culture; improving public sector accountability and transparency. Also, while market phobia has subsided greatly in India in recent years, it is important not to be gripped now by the market mania of wanting to marketise everything that can be handed over to the market, the authors conclude.

Besides, hasn't rapid economic growth been more a factor of private enterprise than public, often achieved despite the government rather than because of it?

I don't agree with the authors about the status economic planning failed move completely in terms of social infrastructure and tertiary industry than it did in the fields of primary and secondary productions. The relation between growth and development their differences as well as their complementarity are central to the theme of this book.

I certainly agree that caste has indeed been a major barrier to social progress in India, and not just in the form of a center productive obsession of labor, but more importantly, as Dr. Ambedkar argue with great clarity, as a pernicious division of human beings into iron-curtained compartments. According to me the reason for low allocations to publication case is not reliance of poor people on private doctors and little medical training of such doctors.

In this book, authors have focused the attention towards environment. They discussed how ecology and environment leads to development and ultimately the progress of human freedoms and capability to lead the kind of lives that people have reason to value.

The institutional changes have been discussed and there are three different issues which are central to the presentence of corruption in public services .

1. What kind of institutional change could be considered and pursued? At least three different issues are central to the prevalence of corruption in public services. First, corruption flourishes in informational darkness: by nature, it is a secretive affair.
2. Second, corruption survives in a social environment of tolerance of misdeeds no

matter how 'moral' people tend to see such misdeeds.

3. Third corruption can be curtailed through a realistic threat of prosecution and sanction.

Change is possible: - Option or suggestions of the authors:-

1. In fact, in some respects they have already started to be revised, and there are several reasons to be hopeful. First, people becoming more vocal and demanding, partly due to rising levels of education.
2. Second, legislative and institutional changes can make a big difference. The most dramatic demonstration of this in the recent past is the Right to Information Act, mentioned earlier. India's Right to Information Act is one of the strongest in the world, and it has led to fairly radical changes, not only in terms of access to transparency in public life and curbing abuses of state power.
3. Third, there is enormous scope for better use of modern technology in preventing corruption as well as dereliction of duty. Computerization is one obvious example.
4. Fourth, the decentralization of power and decision-making is still at a very early stage.
5. Fifth all these development, and other forms of democratic engagement with accountability issues (including media exposes and public debates) could lead to significant changes in social norms, habits of thought and work culture.
6. Last but not least, the politics of public sector accountability are changing. Until recently, there was no organized constituency for the restoration of accountability in the public sector.

At the end of the book, the reader is forced to think of growth and the country. Of how much change is possible and how it will affect the entire nation. All in all, “An Uncertain Glory” touches on uncomfortable issues and also provides feasible solutions for most of them.

About the Authors.

Jean Dreze is an Indian development economist of Belgian origin. His works include The Political Economy Of Hunger, Hunger And Public Action, The Economics Of Famine, Public Report On Basic Education In India, and India: Development and Participation. Jean Dreze was born in 1959 in Belgium. He has a degree in Mathematical Economics from the University of Essex and a Ph.d from the Indian Statistical

Institute. He became an Indian citizen in 2002 and is the conceptualizer of NREGA. He is currently an honorary Professor at the Delhi School of Economics and also a Professor at Allahabad University.

Amartya Sen is an Indian Nobel laureate economist and philosopher. His other books include The Argumentative Indian, The Idea of Justice, Development as Freedom, and Peace and Democratic Society. Sen was born in 1933 in Santiniketan in Bengal. He holds two B.A. degrees, an M.A. degree, and a Ph.d. He received the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998. He is currently the Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard. His books have been translated to over 30 languages.