

BOOK REVIEW

CHURNING THE EARTH: THE MAKING OF GLOBAL INDIA

—ARMIN ROSENCRAZ*

BOOK: *Churning the Earth: The making of Global India* **AUTHOR:**
Aseem Shrivastava & Ashish Kothari **YEAR:** 2012 **FORMAT:** Hardcover
EDITION: First **PUBLISHER:** Penguin Books India **PRICE:** Rs. 699

Churning the Earth is a frank and thorough exploration of the impact of globalization on India. Shrivastava has a doctorate in environmental economics and Kothari is a well-known environmental activist and founder of Kalpavriksh, an environmental action initiative. The material in the book is at least three years old. While many of the authors' observations are remarkably current, lawyers and law students are likely to find the book wanting in a number of respects. It contains little information or analysis about the involvement of Indian courts with environmental issues, including the Supreme Court's recent demand that the executive create a national regulator for environmental clearances in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India*¹. It was written before the National Green Tribunal was established, and before Jairam Ramesh's failed attempt to create a National Environmental Protection Authority. Most notably, it lacks any analysis of the role of politics and political leadership in shaping India's environment.

The book is good at describing the multiple crises confronting the bottom half of India's population, including food insecurity, water and fuel shortages and loss of livelihood. India's natural resources, including water, air, soil and forest are being steadily depleted, with no apparent concern over how future generations will cope with these seemingly irremediable losses. Marine fisheries are likewise being depleted, as they are the world over, and the increase in shrimp aquaculture can hardly compensate for the loss of fisheries and the protein they provide.

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¹ (2014) 4 SCC 61.

The book is also good at highlighting the Ministry of Environment and Forest's pro-development bias; its eagerness to grant environmental and forest clearances; its meager share of the Union budget; and its dilution of the environmental impact assessment and coastal management zone processes (see pages 148-151). The authors competently discuss the environmental damage caused by unregulated tourism and direct foreign investment in poor communities, notably the POSCO and Vedanta projects in Orissa. They also give good information on intellectual property rights; genetically modified seeds, crops and food; the privatizing of the intellectual commons; the recent resistance of the higher judiciary to Public Interest Litigations; and the purposes of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

However, in a book of this kind, one would have liked to learn more about the crucial debates fuelling many of the vagaries of the Indian state such as the bias of the Supreme Court towards large infrastructure projects; the loss of India's wildlife population; the low priority given at both the Union and State level to environmental regulation, compliance and enforcement; the prevalence of polluting industries; the undermining of the Forest Rights Act, 2006; the issue of global climate change and India's vulnerability to it; and the recent openness to renewable energy.

In summary, *Churning the Earth* is well written and tells the story of India's belated entry into the global economy. But it was written at least three years ago and much has changed—especially the haphazard involvement of the judiciary in environmental management, and the unexpected concern of the Modi government for maintaining India's water quality and quantity. The authors call for “RED”—Radical Ecological Democracy. But that prospect seems as distant today as when the book was written. Those interested in *Churning's* vision would find their time well spent by reading the book's final two chapters (293-331).