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Utsa Patnaik

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Utsa Patnaik : The Republic of Hunger: And Other Essays before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Republic of Hunger: And Other Essays:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An exceptionally good book on developmentBy William PodmoreThis is a truly important book. Utsa Patnaik is Professor of Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This is a collection of her essays and lectures from between 1997 and 2005. India faces a huge crisis due to

`austerity' (poverty) policies and free trade. She observes, "The policies made mandatory for every developing country under SAP [Structural Adjustment Program] - opening up the country to unrestricted trade, removal of subsidies to producers and promotion of agro-exports - lead to a decline in the basic food staples output per head of population. This happens because, with the diversion of food growing land and resources to export crops, the food grains growth rate falls below the population growth rate." As agriculture was opened up to global demand between 1991 and 2001, 8 million hectares of India's food grains growing land was diverted to export crops, and yield did not rise to compensate, leading to a sharp fall in annual output per head. India's annual absorption of food grains per head fell from 177 kg to 151 kg, a level last seen during the early years of the Second World War, which included the years of the Bengal famine. By 2001, about 70 per cent of the rural population got less than 2,400 calories a day, that is, they were in poverty. More than 50 per cent got less than 2,100 calories. 40 per cent of the urban population got below 2,100 calories a day. India has not yet reached the nadir of average food grains absorption seen in Sub-Saharan Africa under free trade, where from 158 kg per head in 1980 it fell to below 136 kg by the mid-1990s, and the masses are always on the verge of famine. During the worst drought for two decades, between June 2002 and November 2003, the government exported more than 17 million tonnes of grain. Independent India had never before seen such huge exports, only made possible by empty stomachs at home. In her key lecture, *The Republic of Hunger*, Patnaik refutes Amartya Sen's absurd figure of 30 million deaths in China after the Great Leap Forward. The `missing millions' in China's population between 1958 and 1961 have wrongly been identified with `famine deaths'. She points out that China's birth rate fell steeply in 1958, mainly due to labour mobilisation for collective work. Included in the `missing millions' are not only the people who actually died, but also all those who were never born at all and who `should' have been born, if the birth rate had not fallen. This is not commonsense, nor logical, for to die in a famine one must be born in the first place. China's peak `famine' death rate was 25.4 per thousand in 1960, much the same as India's `normal' death rate, 24.6. She notes that the counter-revolution in Russia in the 1990s brought a famine which caused four million excess deaths, which have been ignored, since only the restoration of capitalism could be blamed for these deaths. In a brilliant lecture, *The Costs of Free Trade*, she points out the obvious flaw in David Ricardo's idealist theory of free trade, "the tropical or sub-tropical regions with which Britain, Netherlands, France, etc., initiated forced trade using military power were bio-diverse and could, and did, produce a much larger range of goods than the North European countries could, including tropical crops which could never be produced under field conditions in the temperate regions." So, "The premise of the theory is not true, namely that both countries can produce both goods, hence the conclusion does not hold, that specialization and trade is necessarily mutually beneficial." Patnaik points out that in a slump deflationary policy aimed at cutting budget deficits worsens the slump, bringing deindustrialisation, unemployment and poverty. India needs instead to restore lost purchasing power through a universal employment guarantee, a universal public distribution system, and increased rural development spending. The people need to organise themselves into associations for producing and distributing their goods.

Showing how current policies are causing unprecedented rural distress and widespread hunger, this exploration delves into four developing regions: India, the Philippines, Mexico, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis considers both the state of economics as a discipline and the economic policies that ruin the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the third world. In these four regions, imperialism presents itself through deflationary, neoliberal "economic reforms," a thrust towards free trade, and the spread of subservient agriculture. The 12 essays presented offer an alternative look to this dire situation.