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Annie McCarthy, *Children and NGOs in India: Development as Storytelling and Performance*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2021. x+182 pages, ₹11,782. ISBN: 9780367561758 (Hardback).

In the last two decades, there is a burgeoning interest in understanding children's lives and childhoods(s) worldwide as well as in India. In India, conceptual and empirical work in this area, though not formalised or unified under a particular discipline such as childhood studies, education, sociology, anthropology, psychology or development studies, have critiqued western normative framing of childhood and formulated meaningful and just ways of engaging with children's lives and childhoods in the global south (see for example, Balagopalan, 2014; Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2016; Kumar, 2016; Nieuwenhuys, 2009; Raman, 2000; Saraswathi et al., 2017; Vasanta, 2004).

A less explored thematic area within this broader field is the nature of engagement of NGOs with children on the margins in India. Having become legitimate developmental partners of the state, NGOs now occupy a significant role in the lives of children, particularly those belonging to marginalised communities. In the global context of neo-liberalisation and the resulting proliferation of the development market, NGO engagement with marginalised children as objects and subjects of development has been pointed out as contradictory by various scholars (see Kamat, 2004; Manzo, 2008; Romani, 2016; Sinervo & Cheney, 2019). The book *Children and NGOs in India: Development as Storytelling and Performance* by Annie McCarthy is a meaningful contribution to this literature in the Indian context. The book not only problematises NGO engagement as development agencies with children on the margins but also presents ethnographic evidence of how children

themselves engage with developmental imaginaries of NGOs in the city of Delhi. The book primarily focusses on how children as subjects of development and their stories and performances in NGO sites 'navigate, perform and contest' the contours of childhood and development through complex and affective pathways. Methodologically, the book provides useful insights about the messiness and fuzziness of the process of research. For instance, the author discusses at one point how the process of research elicited a range of emotions in them fluctuating between 'light hearted sense of endless possibility and a bone crushing sensation of being completely lost' (p. 4). Similarly, the author's ethical concerns with respect to reciprocity and politics of representing voices make their research and the book a reflective methodological resource for scholars from varying fields of childhood, education and development.

The study primarily revolves around children's experiences and performances in what the author calls as the 'media NGO'—an organisation that works with slum children to produce performance and narrative based outputs on a variety of development issues such as child marriage and handwashing—and its four partner NGOs. The author engages with these performances and narratives of children in their own right and not merely as manifested evidence of development work in the margins. Through understanding children's interpretative engagement with the NGO discourse around 'extra-curricular' education and performance, the author opens a new arena of inquiry in the field of development work with children on the margins.

Apart from the introductory chapter where the author lays down the main arguments and structure, the book is divided into three sections engaging with 'character', 'problem' and 'solution' (p. 12) respectively. Part 1 contains two chapters that introduce the readers to the NGOs, participants and conceptual contours of childhood and development that the study has engaged with. In Chapter 1, the author problematises dominant narratives in development work such as the slum being a prototypical locale of underdevelopment, informality and illegality. The author inverts the pathologizing narrative by foregrounding the multiplicity of slums, intergenerational aspirations and struggles, and the diverse moral, affective and aesthetic engagements of 'target communities' with imaginaries of development. In such framing, NGOs are not noble development actors who reform lives at the margins, but are 'opportunistic, short-lived sproutings' (p. 31) and one among the many vantage points through which slum dwellers engage with development. This becomes further evident in children's narratives about communities that present multiple identities, cultures, ruptures and conflicts. Chapter 2 discusses

childhood as a category and an experience and ways in which it gets constructed through the membership in NGOs. Beginning with a review of colonial conceptions of the Indian child, the author explores how post-colonial Indian state engaged with children and childhoods, particularly those on the margins through statistical interpretations which in turn are ordered and surveyed through contingencies of gender, class, caste, region and religion. Though the media NGO's definitions of childhood through the categories of age and age-appropriate membership set conditions of inclusion and exclusion, children themselves had multiple meanings that challenged linear temporality and objectivity of these categories. These contradictions are further manifested in the conflicts between staging of childhood in the NGO campaign to prevent child marriage and children's own solutions such as running away and hiding or committing suicide to avoid child marriage. Though these are distanced from the ideal, productive and message-laden solutions that the NGO expected, children's imaginations highlight the fluidity and multiplicity of childhoods as experienced by them.

Part 2 of the book contains three chapters that engage in detail with children's performances at NGO sites and how notions of violence, victimhood and agency are navigated by children and developmental agencies in these sites. Chapter 3 explores the pedagogies of NGO campaigns about gender violence and how children experience violence in their own lives. The author reiterates that children's gendered experiences of violence as both agents and victims do not directly match NGO expectations around how experiences and markers of violence—episodic and structural—ought to be performed in sites of development. Furthermore, it is shown that children produce third-person accounts in the description of their experiences of violence and this indicates their careful navigation of politics and exposure in sites of development. Structural exclusions such as state apathy and schools acting as spaces of violence further complicates children's experiences of violence. Chapter 4 is a light-hearted visual essay that depicts children's participation in NGO organised self-defence classes through which the author explores gendered constructs of 'big girl' and 'good girl'. Despite the powerful impact of the idea of self-defence, the author problematises the real application of these techniques in children's everyday lives. Chapter 5 further explores children's construction of solutions towards gendered violence. The NGO itself constructs children's identities in gendered ways and through differential imaginations of 'girl power' and 'masculinity'. Children's narratives expose the inadequacies of such NGO engagements by highlighting structural contexts of violence and complex manifestations of girl power in children's everyday lives. These

also negate simplified developmental discourses that projects girls and women as either vulnerable objects or entrepreneurial subjects of development. Shifting moralities and affectivities in children's narratives of violence and homogenous constructions of subaltern masculinity by NGOs are identified in the chapter as potential sites for future exploration.

Part 3 of the book explores the performative nature of children's participation and contains two chapters. Chapter 6 discusses the promotion campaign on handwashing by the NGO and reflects upon the process that results in production of a film. By exploring the biopolitics involved in the promotion of soap and thereby hygiene for marginalised populations, the author problematises structural failures and lack of infrastructural facilities that impede hygienic living environment for slum communities in the city. Though children's engagement subverts NGO imaginations about the poor in many ways, in the overall process they co-opt standardised development messages and the performative space of 'getting the story right' as envisaged by the NGO and thereby underplay structural conditions of their lives. Despite children's instrumental and affective reciprocities that encourage such engagement, achievement of actual learning and sustainability are not serious concerns that bother NGOs as drivers of development. Chapter 7 delves into the annual cycle of NGO galas and the development calendar of city and ways in which they reflect affective and temporal nature of extra-curricular activities that is central to NGO work. Fun is understood as momentary and in the present tense as opposed to development as future. Children experience such momentary fun through enjoyment of food, array of celebrations and awards and recognition (along with its materiality such as trophies and certificate) that NGOs facilitate. Though it is ideals of merit, competition, hard work, commitment and neoliberal skill formation such as public speaking that shape the children's participation in extra-curricular activities, children themselves enjoyed the process. As far as the long-term aspirations were concerned, children were more prudent than their parents and NGO workers in having desires and dreams about what the future might entail.

In the concluding chapter, the author reiterates that the media NGO has ceased to exist and become a 'fickle entity' like the researcher themselves (p. 172). Summarising the discussions made in the previous chapters, the author highlights the impermanence of development agencies in children's lives and the need to understand children's experiences as manifested in micro-narratives of development, in this case, through performances-stories, plays or drawings-for they reflect children's own projects of development.

In short, this book is a useful resource for researchers and practitioners in the fields of education, development and childhood, and it provides insights into children's active negotiations with taken for granted projects of development. The agency of children is neither overlooked nor romanticised but is understood as 'contingent, unstable, relational and momentary' (Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2016). Two shortcomings concern me as an educationist, one, while the book highlights in multiple places that NGO projects of development do not adequately engage with structural contexts of margins in the city, there is limited engagement in the book with how margins are actively constructed in the city through dominant socio-cultural, political and economic factors, and how development work is situated in this landscape. Two, one would have liked to have seen in the book more discussion around the dynamics between schooling and the politics of development work and children's negotiations within and between these sites. While the author briefly alludes to the critique of schooling as a standardised solution to problems such as child marriage and as a site of violence, these relationships could have been further explored in children's narratives. Nevertheless, the book is an asset to scholars and practitioners interested in understanding children's lives and childhoods in the Indian context, particularly in the light of engagement of non-state actors in development work towards marginalised childhoods.

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N. Mythili, *Women in School Leadership*. SAGE Publications, 2019, 260 pages, ₹850.00. ISBN: 9789353283780 (Hardback).

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There exists a substantive literature and theorisation on women in leadership (Chin et al., 2007). Across the literature from different parts of the globe, a male bias in top positions of leadership is a universal phenomenon (Ridgeway, 2001). Researchers caution that the bias must not be attributed to biological differences, nor only to socialisation practices and sex roles. The patriarchy in organisational contexts and structures need to be critically questioned as well, along with a broader understanding of historical, contextual and/or environmental parameters of leadership by women (De la Rey, 2005). A multiplicity of contexts, cultures and social norms have shaped the discourse on leadership and theorisation has drawn from multiple disciplines and approaches (Storberg-Walker & Madsen, 2017). Rather than centering exclusively on women's representation in positions of leadership, N. Mythili's book, *Women in School Leadership* focuses on the biographies of women school leaders, their contexts and social locations.