

Book Reviews

India's Development Experience.—By Tarlok Singh. MacMillan 1974. pp. 458.

Perhaps no person is better qualified to present an insight into India's development experience than the author of this book who was most intimately connected with the preparation of the first four five year plans. The scope of the book is broad and comprehensive as it presents a lucid and objective account of the main goals, constraints, successes and failures of planning in India during the period, 1950-1971. The book also attempts to draw lessons for the future planner in India. The evaluation of different plans is mostly in economic terms. However, this economic evaluation is supplemented with a useful account of the social, political and administrative aspects of the development process in India.

The book is divided into four parts; the first provides an overview of the economy, the second is a discussion of the production base in different sectors, the third an analysis of the economic pre-requisites and the fourth is a summing up of the conditions for growth and development and of the policy and administrative imperatives for the future plans in India. The first and the last part in the book are mainly descriptive. The discussion in the second and the third part is analytical and is supported by both theory and data.

Part one provides the basic information on the economic and social record of the Indian planning up to 1971. It discusses both the trends in the national product and the output of different sectors and the distribution of gains from development between different regions and classes of people. The progress of and the issues in, the building up of human and natural resources and the basic economic and social infrastructure are highlighted at some length. Aggregative growth, crippling poverty and the creation of a network of basic infrastructure emerge as three salient features of the economic and social record of Indian planning.

Part two presents a detailed analysis of the development programmes in agriculture, industry and transport sectors in the different plans. Social benefit-cost analyses on sound lines are basic requirements for the judicious use of the public resources. Numerous instances of the narrow conception of the costs and benefits of the alternative investment choices in different sectors are pointed out. The discussion on the relative emphasis on the technological

and institutional factors in the process of agricultural development at different times is very illuminating. It is argued that both aspects need to be combined in any future development programme. The shifting emphasis between the private and public sector in industry, trade and transport fields had resulted in less than optimal use of public resources. A case for an integrated approach in a total programme of action for each sector is made.

Development financing, capacity to export and behaviour of prices are discussed in the third part of the book. The necessity of, and difficulties in, domestic resource mobilization, self-reliance and price stability are brought out clearly.

The last part of the book titled as a "summing up" is much more than a summary of the previous arguments. In it, the author brings together his critique of the Indian planning process and presents in detail the social, political and administrative imperatives of a future long-term plan for India. Weak management, defective administrative arrangements, all pervasive corruption—familiar features in any 'soft state'—are identified as major obstacles for meaningful development in India. A vigorous case for a frontal attack on those ills is the major lesson that the book offers to the future planner.

Reading the book, one feels the tremendous commitment of the author to the planning objectives set by India in different plans. His disillusionment in coming to grips with the basic planning issues is also obvious. A passionate defence of some failings of the planners does not in any way mar the technical or literary quality of the book which the author has termed "as a personal commitment and a small act of duty". It is a duty truly well done. The readability of the subject matter, the flowing simple style and the excellent printing deserve credit. The reviewer could find only one printing error (page 251, second para, 6th line) in the entire manuscript.

Gunnar Myrdal, in his foreword to the book, has noted some limitations *i.e.*, Tarlok Singh's acceptance of concepts and data used in official documents, his failure to deal adequately with the economics of corruption, education, health, population, administration and land reforms and his almost total neglect of the critical variables of interest rate and exchange control on the ground that these were not the core elements of the Indian plans. The data limitation is not uncommon in the developing countries and, Tarlok Singh has repeatedly, bemoaned the poor quality of data in his book. The other limitations are more telling; however. An adequate understanding of the variables operating in sectors other than the production base of the economy is crucial as these are most in need of change and least amenable to planning.

The overall conclusion reached by Tarlok Singh that "it is within India's grasp to eliminate swiftly the worst forms of poverty and, over a period of years, to create a cohesive social order and a classless society based on the values of equality, welfare and mutual cooperation", is a reassuring proposition for any wellwisher of the Indian people.

Finally, as an effort in taking stock of past performance and presenting a basis for a fresh start in planning for India's economic and social development, the invaluable contribution of this book cannot be denied. Professor Myrdal has aptly recommended it in the following words. "I dare say that

every economist interested in planning in under developed countries will have the strongest reasons to study carefully this book, before venturing further'. No better recommendation can possibly be given.

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