‘A Journey Through Memories’
Jayadeva Uyangoda

How People Connect To The Past
S.D. Muni

A Dual Biography
Wajahat Habibullah

A Peep Into Two Music Families
Partho Datta

‘Kultur,’ Community And ‘Zivilization’: Politics In The Grand Mode
Asma Rasheed

Formation And Decline Of Third Theatre
Sudhanva Deshpande

The Uneasy Life Of A Magnificent Singer
Ashwini Deshpande

Unravelling A Complex Moral Universe
A.N.D. Haksar

Lincoln’s Parental Grief
Vasundhara Srnate Drennan

A Highlights Package
Prashant Kidambi
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence And The Burden Of Memory: Remembrance And Erasure In Sinhala Consciousness</td>
<td>Sasanka Perera</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warzone Tourism In Sri Lanka: Tales From Darker Places In Paradise</td>
<td>Sasanka Perera</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rhetoric Of Hindu India: Language And Urban Nationalism</td>
<td>Manisha Basu</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegel’s India: A Reinterpretation, With Texts</td>
<td>Aakash Singh, Rathore, Rimina Mohapatra</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A People’s History Of India, Volume 7: Society And Culture</td>
<td>Bhairabi Prasad Sahu</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendant Lords: Bairam Khan And Abdur Rahim-Courtiers &amp; Poets In Mughal India</td>
<td>T.C.A. Raghavan</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contestations And Accommodations: Mewat And Meos In Mughal India</td>
<td>Suraj Bhan Bhardwaj</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanticism’s Child: An Intellectual History Of James Todd’s Influence On Indian History And Historiography</td>
<td>Lloyd I. &amp; Susanne Hoeber Rudolph</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty And The Quest For Life: Spiritual And Material Striving</td>
<td>Bhirupati Singh</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Of Anger: A History Of The Present</td>
<td>Pankaj Mishra</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Crime Pays: Money And Muscle In Indian Politics</td>
<td>Milan Vaishnav</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crisis Of 1974: Railway Strike And The Rank And File</td>
<td>Ranabir Samaddar</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces And Insurgents In Modern Asia</td>
<td>Kaushik Roy, Sourish Saha</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Legacy: Dagaras And Dhrupad</td>
<td>Humra Quraishi, Bhimsen Joshi</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha Bhole: A Musical Biography by Raju Bharatan</td>
<td>Bhimsen Joshi, My Father By Raghavendra Bhimsen Joshi</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Near, Yet So Far: Badal Sircar’s Third Theatre</td>
<td>Manojendra Kundu</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttra: The Book Of Answers translated from the original Sanskrit</td>
<td>Arshia Satter</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ending Of Arrogance: Ksemendra’s Darpa Dalana</td>
<td>A.N.D. Haksar</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln In The Bardo</td>
<td>George Saunders</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beloved Witch Returns</td>
<td>Ipsita Roy Chakraverti</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monk On A Hill</td>
<td>Guru T. Ladakhi</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcontinental Drift: Four Decades Adrift In India And Beyond</td>
<td>Murray Laurence</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Mumbai To Durban: India’s Greatest Tests</td>
<td>S. Giridhar, V.J. Raghunath</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali Cooking: Seasons And Festivals</td>
<td>Chitrita Banerjee</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Architects And Modernism In India</td>
<td>Madhavi Desai</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Book Review* is a non-political, ideologically non-partisan journal which tries to reflect all shades of intellectual opinions and ideas. The views of the reviewers and authors writing for the journal are their own. All reviews and articles published in *The Book Review* are exclusive to the journal and may not be reprinted without the prior permission of the editors.

Published by Chandra Chari for The Book Review Literary Trust, 239 Vasant Enclave, New Delhi 110057. Printed at National Printers, B-56, Naraana Industrial Area Phase-II, New Delhi 110028.
Of Bahubalis Of Indian Politics

Sarthak Bagchi

WHEN CRIME PAYS: MONEY AND MUSCLE IN INDIAN POLITICS
By Milan Vaishnav
Harper Collins Publishers India, 2017, pp. 410, ₹1833.00

At a time when Bahubali of a cinematic kind has become the buzz word in India, there is another timely intervention on the topic of Bahubali, but of a political kind. Milan Vaishnav's new book titled *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics*, claims to be the first comprehensive study of the nexus between crime and democracy in India. The book explores the importance, capabilities and interestingly enough the winnability of goondas, musclemen, criminals or as they are also sometimes called, Bahubalis, in Indian politics. The puzzle of rampant success and gradual entrenchment of politicians with criminal backgrounds in Indian politics has been a frequently discussed one in both academic and layperson discussions.

How and why do politicians with criminal backgrounds become relevant in the world’s largest democracy? Why do criminals enter politics in India? Why do parties choose to nominate candidates with criminal backgrounds? And why do voters support candidates with serious criminal charges against them? These are some of the most pertinent questions shaping up the debates on the quality of democracy in India. Vaishnav’s book throws light on these questions and through his rigorous analysis using both qualitative and quantitative methods, provides some definite answers. Let us begin by examining some numbers to understand the extent of the entrenchment of crime and politics in India.

In the 2014 general elections to the Indian Parliament, 21 percent of the total Members of Parliament elected to the Parliament had serious criminal charges against them. In the 2004 general elections, this figure was around 12 percent. This includes politicians who face serious criminal charges ranging from kidnapping to abduction to threatening, intimidation to even murder. The phenomenon is seemingly more prevalent in the politics of the Hindi heartland in the northern parts of India, however, new data provides more insightful indications in a different direction. The recently concluded Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, a north Indian state of largely rural population has around 401 or 13 percent candidates out of...
a total of over 3000, who have serious crimi-
nal charges against them. Whereas in the Mu-
nicipal elections of Mumbai, one of India’s
largest metros, 9 percent of the 1641 can-
didates have serious criminal charges against
their names. The phenomenon of criminal
politicians can therefore be seen as one which
transgresses the rural-urban divide.

So why is it that an increasingly large
number of politicians with criminal back-
grounds are continuously contesting elec-
tions and a good number among them win-
ing elections too? Vaishnav brings this down
to two important developments in Indian
politics over the years. First is the increasing
importance of money in elections. On the
basis of his research, Milan points out that,
‘Political parties prefer self-financing candi-
dates who do not represent a drain on the
finite party coffers but instead contribute
“rents” to the party.’ While many of these
candidates might have a criminal record,
their vast resources, which enable them to
meet the rising electoral expenditure, make them
electorally competitive as well.

The second development Vaishnav points to is the wide perception among vot-
ers to see politicians with criminal back-
grounds as people who can “get things done”.
This is not only from the service delivery
point of view, which is a mandatory duty for
legislative representatives across the world.
In India’s ‘patronage democracy’ (Chandra
2004) a mediated access to the state is a com-
mon feature and many times these represen-
tatives are expected to facilitate informal
mediation to access the resources of the state
on behalf of their voters. Politicians who have
strong criminal backgrounds are perceived
by the voters to be more effective in such
forms of informal mediation. This line of ar-
gument is similar to the one made by
Berenschot (2011) in his ethnographic ex-
plorations of muscle politics and goondism
in a Gujarati neighbourhood. The key argu-
ment is that criminalization of politics is not
necessarily a moral decay or a form of subju-
gation under fear but rather is a byproduct of
inaccessibility of the poorer citizens to
various layers of the state. Criminal politi-
cians in this case are able to project them-
severs as more effective than non-criminals
in helping citizens reach out to the state or
in other words, ‘get things done’. In his re-
search spanning over three parliamentary
elections from 2004 to 2014, Vaishnav found
that politicians with a criminal background
have an 18 percent chance of winning their
next election, while candidates with a clean
background have only 6 percent chance of a
re-election. Vaishnav’s argument is indeed
an important change in perspective of look-
ing at state-society interactions where rise of
criminal politicians is seen as more due to
illiteracy among voters and the politicians’
ability to intimidate voters (Aidt, Golden
and Tiwari 2011). According to him, ‘vot-
ers aren’t ignorant or uninformed; they are
simply looking for candidates who can best
fill a perceived vaccum of representation.
Viewed in this light, the electoral success of
politicians associated with illegal activity
might in fact be compatible with democratic
accountability, albeit of a partial nature.’

The book is divided into three parts. In
the first part the author addresses the puzzle
of criminality in Indian politics and attempts
to contextualize the problem in the larger
debate on corruption in India. The second
part of the book emerges as the most enjoy-
able read, as the author undertakes the elabo-
rate process of dismantling the complex pro-
ess of explaining criminality in politics.
From defining the criminal enterprise in politics,
to explaining the functioning of money
power and muscle power in elections to even
explain the demand for criminality in poli-
tics, the author shows how in a given con-
text people can actually accept criminality
as an advantageous characteristic rather than
an impediment in democracy. The third and
last section illustrates the idea of an election
as a marketplace where criminality in poli-
tics is shown as an attribute of certain con-
tingent factors. In this part Vaishnav also
briefly engages with the evidence from other
developing democracies like Columbia, Ni-
geria, Jamaica and Pakistan, where the phe-
nomenon of a nexus between crime and poli-
tics is very prevalent. With this brief
worldview the author tries to give an exter-
nal validity to his arguments proposed in the
book. What makes this read fascinating is
that Vaishnav manages to capture the read-
ers’ attention throughout the book by keep-
ing the writing style lucid and free of jargon
to a large extent. Yet, at the same time, the
narrative does not for once appear to be non
serious, because of the richness of the ac-
counts that Vaishnav has managed to weave
into his narrative. His in-depth field inter-
views reproduced in the text in a very lively
manner makes the book a very engaging read.
The specific cases of Anant Singh and Pappu
Yadav among others help in establishing the
specific contexts in which politicians with a
criminal background are able to emerge as
successful popular politicians over the course
of ‘Doing Good by Doing Bad’ as Vaishnav
calls it.

Apart from engaging with the ever in-
creasing importance of crorepatis and crimi-
nals in politics, the book also raises perti-
nent questions about the external factors
which aid this rise like weak rule of law, le-
gal loopholes, nature of party finances, eth-
nic attachments, indirect elections, to name
a few. The book triangulates data from the
thousands of affidavits submitted by the can-
didates prior to every election over the time
period from 2004-14, survey data of the vot-
ers from different states as well as field inter-
views with bureaucrats, civil society mem-
bers, politicians, police officers among oth-
ers. The arguments extended in the book have
therefore benefited from such multilayered
analysis. However, while a proven criminal
background certainly seems to give an edge
to politicians in a highly competitive elec-
tion, they also have to resort to certain emo-
tional and personal appeals as well. I wit-
tnessed two such instances over the course of
my fieldwork in Bihar. Bihar happens to be
one of the significant states in India, which
Vaishnav also studied rigorously for its ram-
pant crime and politics nexus. In the capital
city of Patna, an erstwhile dreaded criminal
politician, Pappu Yadav, warmed up to two
young boys in a very humble stance and
greeted them asking, ‘aadesh kariye, kya sewa
karoon? (Please order, how may I help/serve
you?). These two boys were from his con-
stituency of Madhepura, which Yadav rep-
resents in the parliament. They had come to
offer their services for his election campaign
ahead of the State assembly elections. Sur-
prised at the warmth and affection shown to
them by a strongman politician, the boys
decided to take a selfie with their ‘leader’
and also joined his election campaign team.
This small gesture had touched a chord with
the boys and gave them a sense of close prox-
imity to the leader, even if on a momentary
basis.

In another instance, from Mokama, in
Bihar, the incumbent MLA, who is known as
‘chote sarkar’ (young lord), and who suc-
cessfully contested the assembly election
from the confines of a prison, making his
wife canvas for votes with a picture of him in
handcuffs. Even young kids in the constitu-
ency were seen running on a freshly con-
structed cement road in a village, and ac-
crediting the road and the incremental sikas
(development) to their leader, ‘chote sarkar’.
These instances indicate the various ways in
which politicians with criminal backgrounds
try to find legitimacy in electoral politics.
This points to the new facets through which
the quality and functioning of democracy in
India needs to be understood.

While the cinematic Bahubali is now
more in the news, because of its conclusion,
Vaishnav refrains from writing any conclu-
sion for his account of the political Bahubalis.
In fact, Vaishnav’s parting thoughts on ma-
Indian State had been lurching from one crisis to another since the late 1960s. The victory in the Bangladesh war had temporarily put the lid over the deep faultlines which had crept into the state structure. The cleavages which had appeared in society had a revolutionary potential to it. All it needed was a conjecture for mounting a revolutionary challenge to the state and the ruling elite controlling it. The railway strike of 1974 was potentially the moment for such a conjecture to arise. The ruling elite realized that it was no longer possible to rule in the old style which had provided for a parliamentary democracy based on one party domination, huge public sector and bureaucracy. Now it was no longer possible to rule in that style. The alternative was either privatization of resources or to invent a more authoritarian style of rule where class conflict and the explosive disquiet of the toiling masses would be clamped down with a heavy hand. The elite chose the latter option. And yet as Samaddar shows this moment would pass by and the strike would end in a colossal defeat.

The reasons for such a catastrophic defeat were manifold, as Samaddar argues. For one, the leadership leading the strike which counted among them George Fernandes declined to read the pregnant possibilities of the situation. They failed to realize that the impending strike was really the culmination of a long unfolding structural crisis in the state. The situation called for a paradigm changing general strike which would operate beyond the legalities imposed by the bourgeoisie state and bring it to a standstill by employing planned violence, sabotage, arson and other subversive measures. A revolutionary crisis would emerge which had the tendency of changing the nature of the Indian state. Samaddar seems to believe that the situation contained the seeds for a truly revolutionary change in the state polity.

Samaddar though rue the fact that the leadership failed to grab the bull by the horns. For the leadership including Fernandes, the strike was just a tactical weapon to be deployed for a limited length of time to cajole the leadership towards the negotiating table. The leadership hoped to gain some limited gains at the negotiating table following which they would proclaim victory. Samaddar argues that this was natural on the part of the union to an extent as they had for long become bureaucratic organizations which functioned as agencies to curb workers’ militancy and served to water down such workers’ demand which possessed the potential to disrupt the status quo.

Yet the strike was lent an insurrectionary nature by the actions of the rank and file workers. Despite the difficulties posed by the presence of multiple types of skilled workers and their multiple unions the workers achieved admirable levels of unity. Some categories of workers showed extra felicity such as the loco-drivers and firemen, they functioned as the vanguard who led the way. Lines were uprooted, signal systems were disrupted, stations and trains were occasionally set ablaze, loyal workers were beaten up and humiliated, all the tell tale signs of an insurgent situation having the capacity to challenge the hegemony of the ruling class and mount a serious challenge to the existing state structure seemed to be there. All these were interspersed with more parliamentary modes of protests like picketing, sit-ins, processions, rally etc. The families of railway workers often lent a helping hand in picketing and other more benign modes of protest.

The leadership tried in vain to limit the rank and file to the more tame modes of protest. The workers seemed to be in no mood to listen. For a time the country seemed to be moving towards paralysis. The economy seemed to be grinding to a halt. Railway towns particularly seemed to be a fuse away from unmanageable explosive situations. The situation was such that massive state repression was inevitably around the corner. And as Samaddar so vividly portrays, it did come. Railway workers were dismissed, arrested, tortured, at times even family members were arrested and railway colonies soon became a site for state terror with the state committing rampant atrocities. By the 20th of May, the strike was officially over with the most of

References