

Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, *India's Coal Story: From Damodar To Zambezi*, New Delhi, SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2017, pp. 264, ISBN: 978-93-864-4600-8 (PB), Rs. 450.

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The book is a comprehensive history of India's coal which will attract not only the historians, but also the economists, political commentators and other academicians. The work will cater the needs of layman about their interest on coal mining industry in India. The author has tried to delve into the root of the coal industry in India. The chapterization of the book has been aptly done. The nine well categorised chapters have been rationally divided. In a nutshell the emergence of the coal industry has been traced along with vivid description of the events that unfolded the journey, bringing to the attention of the readers the facts and events as well as the stories behind such facts and events.

Coal is often referred to as Black Diamond. There are so many issues related to the coal sector- energy issues, environmental issues, labour issues, social issues, economic issues, trade union issues and the issues around coal mafia. All these have been rightly addressed in the monograph. Coal is the main source of energy in India. While it could undoubtedly have economic and environmental dimensions anywhere in the world, in India it has overarching political concerns due to the rent seeking that goes with a virtual state monopoly on mining of coal. The storage of coal and its utilization has also been taken into account in details.

In the opening chapter 'Ole King Coal' the author says Indian's coal reserves have always proved to be too hot to handle for its governments. India is the fourth largest coal reserves in the world. It should have a driving force for its economy boots for its concern. It has instead been its first-class curse, in truest sense of the term. Bhattacharjee moves very skilfully and carefully through the coal story- right from how it entered the Indian economic life and became so important to its history to the importance of Damodar river banks in this trade and the role of Sir Dorabji Tata. The narrative is fully loaded with information as well as interesting facts which throw light on the socio- economic importance of coal.

Through the nine chapters of this book Bhattacharjee has tried to unveil the untold story of Indian coal. From that point of view the author Subhomoy Bhattacharjee has heavily emphasized on facts in his book. Coal was the cornerstone of industrial revolution. The book also tells us about the linkages between the development of the Indian coal industry and the opium trade established by the British with China and other Asian nations. Thus, India's relation with South East Asian market is also established here.

But India's Coal Story cannot be considered as a purely creative work. It is only the outcome of a meticulous research conducted through a series of interviews and extensive field tours across the country. It is through such narration that Bhattacharjee traces the course that Indian coal ran from its pre-nationalisation days to Nationalisation and then to the epoch of auctions and the CAG

report. This book however lacks certain proper documentation and archival research.

The book covers a vast period on coal mining from colonial era to the late 1960s. The author also focused on the large-scale illegal theft in the mining and sale of coal. Coal occupies a central role in energy discussion and energy policy as it meets the bulk of India's energy requirement. But unfortunately, coal as an industry is not considered important enough for researchers. It has in the recent past captured the national narrative only because of the scams and the chocking of coal mines that followed. This work moreover covers all the pros and cons of the coal scam from the allocation to the court cases and cancellations. This book is also praiseworthy in the respect of taking coal energy policy as a subject of research and making it interesting especially with historical references. Dwarkanath Tagore the grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore was a leading coal entrepreneur of his time and he had strong ability to build a monopoly chain supply in coal. Bhattacharjee aptly uses two rivers Damodar and Zambezi to build a fluid and beautiful narrative. The only drawback of the book is the myth that the book continues to perpetuate that the public sector is inefficient. Profit is not only the sign of efficiency nor is the private sector non corrupt. Even in coal the balance between private and public sectors has to be maintained even if both these fields have their own flaws. Books like India's Coal Story help not only in presenting the challenges, but in framing the narrative for the future. The book however has almost all the facts required for a person who wants to quench his thirst on coal industry in India.