

ANTONIO GRAMSCI, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. & tr. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Indian reprint of original English ed., London, 1971, now reprinted in India by Orient BlackSwan Private Ltd., Hyderabad, 2021, Paperback, 483 pp., ₹695.

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It is not conventional to review an established translation of a well-known work, by a major Marxist thinker, published in England 50 years ago. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was a leader of the Communist Party of Italy, who, with great physical infirmities, suffered imprisonment under Mussolini from 1926 onwards practically to his death in 1937. During this period of imprisonment—in conditions no better than those suffered by Indians these days when jailed upon accusations of ‘sedition’—Gramsci yet managed to put on paper his thoughts on a large number of issues ranging from history to philosophy. These notes were miraculously saved and published after the Second World War, when Mussolini was gone. The depth of Gramsci’s thought made his prison notes a striking document, reaching scholarly audiences even outside the ranks of students of Marxist thought. For instance, his remarkable insight in his essay ‘Modern Prince’, that in the modern epoch the counterpart of the prince in a polity is the political party (see p. 147 of the volume reviewed), is a brilliant contribution to political thought. Or take his answer to the question why there was no social movement in Italy corresponding to the French Revolution. It leads him to weigh all major elements of Italy’s modern history (ibid., pp. 118 ff). India is not overlooked: there is a very serious (and sympathetic) appraisal of Gandhi’s ‘passive resistance’ employed against the British (pp. 229–30; see also p. 107). It is interesting to note, in view of the considerable range of writing of the ‘subaltern’ school of historians in India during the last 40 years, that Gramsci too uses the term ‘subaltern classes’ (p. 52 & ff.), but not in the same sense: he means subordinated classes contesting with the ruling class, *not* just non-*elite* groups, ascribed all kinds of qualities by our subaltern scholars.

Students of history and related social sciences should welcome the reprint of this immensely insightful volume from a brilliant thinker whose main ideas still remain relevant.

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