

electoral coalitions at the national level, arguing that, despite their inability to remain a viable political alternative, they still managed surprising policy achievements. James Manor's interesting essay challenges popular images of former and current prime ministers Narasimha Rao and Monmohan Singh as neoliberals, arguing that they were driven by events, not ideas and that the Congress Party, again contrary to popular perception, has reformed itself significantly in recent years. In the final essay, Achin Vanaik compellingly argues that changes in India's foreign policy are the result of a profound neoliberal shift amongst governing elites that transcends party difference, ending the Nehruvian dream of non-alignment and Asian unity.

While one volume cannot be expected to cover everything, particularly when its scope is already so large, there is a surprising lack of attention to the upsurge of lower-caste politics in the 1990s that Corbridge and Harriss's earlier work, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (2000 Cambridge: Polity Press) persuasively argued was the driving force of both economic liberalization and Hindu nationalism. Chatterjee's theoretical intervention, and, in fact, many of the contributions, would benefit from deeper reflection of the ways in which liberalization was what Corbridge and Harriss provocatively termed an "elite revolt" reacting to the democratic ascendancy of lower castes. There is also little dialogue between contributions. For instance, Polanyi's seminal concept of a "double movement" presented in the introduction (and Harriss's essay) could also have been profitably reflected on by many of the authors. But this provides readers with the opportunity to make their own analytical connections between a rich selection of essays that will prove to be an important resource for understanding the rapidly changing political economy of contemporary India.

Union College, Schenectady, USA

JEFFREY WITSOE

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Edited by Paul R. Brass. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2010. xvi, 464 pp. (Tables.) US\$200.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-415-43429-4.

What's not to like in a handbook of South Asian politics edited by someone as respected as Paul Brass and containing contributions from a further 28 of the best-informed scholars of their time?

The price, for one thing, is not to like. US \$200. Albeit for 464 pages and more than 300,000 words. But who are the likely purchasers of this book? Probably a hundred libraries worldwide? Two hundred if the publishers get lucky.

And that's what's also not to like: the sense that this book is a cog in a business plan that contributes usefully to the bottom line of a corporation but less so to the dissemination of knowledge. You persuade a group of fine

scholars to volunteer their efforts (inquiries suggest that no one got a fee); the publisher gives the contributions a basic edit, typesets the material, puts a cover round it and moves on to the next item on the assembly line. The result is an unwieldy, unfriendly volume, set in forbidding two-column tombstones. And as a “handbook of South Asian politics,” it harbours another disappointment: it does not have a single map. (Good maps need to be drawn. That takes time, skill, editorial interest—and costs money).

The essays in this collection would have worked well on a website where they could have been readily consulted, suitably illustrated and easily updated. That, of course, would have required a suitable website and the editorial efficiency that the publishers contributed to the project. There is no doubt about the Routledge ability to keep the product coming off the line. Routledge is the *Modern-Times* factory of publishing, with scholars playing the role of Charles Chaplin.

This sort of collection cries out to find a place with a university e-press where it could be easily available, readily updated and financed on a print-on-demand basis or a fee-for-download of individual chapters. A compendium like this one would have attracted attention to such an e-press and provided a widely available global tool.

The table of contents reads like the starting line-up of an All-South-Asia team of scholars. Stephen Cohen on the militaries of the South Asian countries; Sumanta Banerjee on radical political movements; the Rudolphs on federalism; Paula Newberg on the judicial system in Pakistan; Javed Burki on Pakistan’s political economy; a remarkably helpful 10-page account of the Sri Lankan civil war by Jayadeva Uyangoda; Stuart Corbridge on “development”; and John Harriss on political structures and change in India. All these and 19 more.

Not surprisingly, some pieces are more rewarding, and clearly took more effort, than others. Jan Bremen’s “Political Economy of Agrarian Change in India” is an absorbing account of his own journey through 40 years of research and engagement with Gujarat. It’s one of the most readable pieces in the book, though it does not necessarily perform for a “handbook” what one might expect, either from the title of the book or the title of the essay.

Since elections and politics are crucial to a number of the essays, should a “handbook” not have a consolidated table (or two or three) in which recent elections in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal are brought together so that users get a sense of things like frequency, turnout, number of seats contested and other basic information? For example, buried deep in a chapter on Bangladesh is the striking titbit that the 2008 Bangladesh elections, which were judged to be admirably free and fair, drew a turnout of 87 percent of the eligible voters (112)? This fragment of information is an indication that some good things have happened in Bangladesh in the twenty-first century. Indian elections do well to draw 60 percent of voters to the polling booths. For a “handbook,” it would have made sense to have

this sort of data compiled in quick-to-assimilate form, where readers could take in such notable contrasts.

There are other moments of tantalizing idiosyncrasy. A contributor on Sri Lanka, for example, refers to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as “a fascistic-terrorist outfit,” and the editor adds an asterisk to tell readers that he “does not agree with this designation for the Tamil Tigers” (338, 345). The editor doesn’t say how he would characterize the LTTE, though he no doubt has a thought-out position that many readers would be keen to learn.

The four essays on the judiciaries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are especially welcome in that justice and the courts are often alluded to but seldom treated in detail, particularly in ways that examine their everyday functioning. Shylashri Shankar’s essay on the Indian judiciary tempers anyone’s tendency to be excessively enthusiastic about the virtues of India’s hyperactive Supreme Court. “Judicial intrusion,” she writes, “may be well motivated,” but excessive workload, a lack of power to enforce rulings and the “stop-gap nature” of many of the court’s “solutions” may “overwhelm the judiciary” (174).

This collection cried out for a digital format. It should be sitting on a website where diplomats, students, businesspeople and travellers could find it and get at it—by all means, for a fee—whenever they felt the need and whenever Google led them to it. As it is, these essays will languish on the shelves of well-endowed libraries when they should be helping the world better understand a fast-changing South Asia.

National University of Singapore, Singapore

ROBIN JEFFREY

DECENTRALIZATION, LOCAL GOVERNANCE, AND SOCIAL WELLBEING IN INDIA: Do Local Governments Matter? *Routledge Advances in South Asian Studies, 23.* By Rani D. Mullen. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. xvi, 235 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$140.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-415-67065-4.

Decentralization, in recent years, has been advocated as an efficient means to deepen democracy and improve societal well-being at the local level. Some authors have argued that decentralization will effectively address the inefficiency of the Central Government in enhancing social well-being by enabling better local targeting and delivery of social services. Others have countered it by saying that decentralization might lead to widening disparities between localities, owing to a lack of local capacities, which might lead to local elite capture of public resources resulting in an inability to implement welfare programs. With differing arguments on decentralization and with countries restructuring administration and political power based on those claims, there is undoubtedly a need to undertake systematic research to investigate whether