

The work challenges us to consider the problems inherent in reading historical experiences as constants through the lens of twenty-first-century understandings. It is a well-written, well-researched book, and one that I am sure will set the standard for understanding the history of outcast/e groups and burakumin for years to come. The work here would most readily be used in advanced undergraduate or graduate-level courses on Japan, but would, I imagine, find a welcoming audience in historiography classes as well.

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**UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY: A Great Transformation?** *Edited by Sanjay Ruparelia, Sanjay Reddy, John Harriss, and Stuart Corbridge.* London and New York: Routledge, 2011. xv, 272 pp. (Tables, graphs.) US\$150.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-415-59810-1.

This volume, the outcome of a workshop at Columbia University, is centered on a question of crucial importance for understanding India's political economy since the 1990s: What are the relationships between the three key developments of this period, the process of neoliberal reform (known in India as "liberalization"), the rise of Hindu nationalism and the powerful emergence of lower-caste democratic mobilizations? The concise introduction by Stuart Corbridge, John Harriss, Sanjay Ruparelia and Sanjay Reddy begins by ambitiously stating that "only a synthetic account—one that seeks to explain the casual relationships between these central transformations through a coordinated intellectual conversation—can help to capture the dynamics of India's new political economy in their totality" (1). They ask whether these three transformations together constitute what Karl Polanyi termed a "Great Transformation" (*The Great Transformation: The Political And Economic Origins of Our Times*, Beacon Press, 1948).

The first essay by Partha Chatterjee is an important theorization of the relationship between his well-known conceptualization of a "political society" of mass politics in opposition to a liberal, elite-inhabited "civil society" and economic liberalization. While, as the introduction points out, this conceptualization has been criticized and it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw empirical boundaries between these spheres in practice, this remains an important theoretical intervention since it makes a compelling case that much of India's political life cannot be understood by mainstream democratic theory that neglects the realities of political society. Here, Chatterjee argues that "civil society" is linked with corporate capital and processes of accumulation by dispossession, while political society is connected to the informal economy and negotiating access to resources provided by the state to blunt the dislocating impact of this dispossession.

This chapter is followed by analyses of how liberalization is playing out in

specific arenas. Nandini Gooptu insightfully examines how neoliberal reforms are attempting to transform Indian cities into centers of entrepreneurship and investment, resulting in polarization between a middle class revolting against the democratic mobilizations of the poor by attempting to exercise hegemony over urban spaces and the mass of people working in the informal sector who cannot be banished because of their political clout and indispensability within the urban economy. Rob Jenkins' excellent study of Special Economic Zones examines this project to create unbridled spaces of corporate capital free from the constraints of India's tumultuous democracy, but which are ultimately unable to free themselves from political pressures and growing popular protest (demonstrating the inability of "civil society" to separate itself from "political society"). Stuart Corbridge, in opposition to the view that federalism has promoted liberalization by generating competition among states for investment, shows the ways in which this logic has failed in eastern India. Not only have governments in places like Bihar (from 1990 to 2005) marginalized development-oriented governance as a political issue in favour of a politics of lower-caste empowerment, but the reform period has seen the deterioration of state institutions and the spread of a Maoist movement. Arjan Jaydev, Sripad Motiram and Vamsi Vakulabharanam offer a quantitative study of wealth disparities in India (as opposed to the more usual income disparities), documenting the rise of a new middle class that, while comprising 10 percent of the population, commands 50 percent of the nation's wealth, while Vakulabharanam and Motiram document the regional variation of agrarian distress and the creation of "hunger amidst plenty" in much of the Indian countryside.

How has liberalization impacted forms of political action and participation? John Harriss's contribution is a broad examination of social policy in post-reform India, showing the hollowness of government rhetoric to be pursuing "growth with compassion and justice" but also the recent emergence of rights-based social movements that hold promise, even if they are limited by their middle-class activist base. Niraja Gopal Jayal's perceptive examination of citizenship regimes documents the transition from the Nehruvian ideal of citizenship (although it should be pointed out that for most Indians this was always only an ideal) to very new forms of citizenship according to the three transformations highlighted in the introduction. And Patrick Heller optimistically argues that democratic decentralization is slowly producing "a potentially very significant expansion of the political opportunity structure" (162).

The remaining essays focus on developments within the realm of party politics. Radhika Desai, in the only contribution focusing on Hindu nationalism, argues that Hindu nationalism and the project of economic liberalization were intertwined much earlier than is generally assumed, as early as the post-green revolution period. Sanjay Ruparelia focuses on "Third Force" coalitions that have periodically emerged to contest the two major

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.

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**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?

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