

James Manor, *The Writings of James Manor: Politics and State–Society Relations in India*. With a Foreword by Niraja Gopal Jayal. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan. 2016. 366 pages. ₹795.

This work is a compilation of lucidly presented analyses of many dimensions of the Indian polity and its democracy. It deals with political events from independence to the present, and is definitely a major contribution for political scientists and informed readers who wish to get an insight into the vicissitudes of Indian politics. The book is a collection of writings of a formidable scholar who offers a diachronic analysis of varied aspects of the Indian polity but leaves out other themes that he has examined over the years, as the author notes in the Introduction. The book studies the Indian polity, considered in two phases: independence to 1989 and post-1989.

The thread which links all the sections of the book is the survival of democracy in India through varied means in changing times. This survival has been made possible by the interplay among different actors who performed their roles differently in different time periods. They include political parties, political leaders, political activists, formal institutions (the Parliament, its committees, the courts, the Presidency), informal institutions (such as the media, non-governmental organizations) and the ordinary people (and their identities in terms of caste, ethnicity, language, religion, region, gender, sex). Hence, the book analyses democratic processes through changing state–society relations. Through the analysis of these processes, the author also shows the ‘contrast’ or the ‘extraordinariness’ of India as compared to other countries.

The study of integration of the politics from ‘above’ in terms of political parties, political leaders, prime ministers, chief ministers and politics from ‘below’, that is, perspectives from various caste, ethnic and other identities by the author is well done. The assessment of the roots of Indian democracy, growing through the tangles of political awakening, decay and institutional regeneration up to the present times (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), is another noteworthy contribution of this book as is the analysis of changing nature of the ‘politics of bargaining and accommodation’ adopted by the political parties in relation to various social forces to gain legitimacy and also between political parties (national and state level) in the coalition era. Other themes include the issue of governability, specifically considering chief ministers (Chapter 12) and different kinds of identity politics (Chapter 8).

There is room for disagreement with some Manor’s analysis. The first deals with the ethnicity issue. The author explains that the management of ‘ethnic’ conflicts has been possible due to a certain kind of political culture which exists in India, that is, a fluid sense of identity. Its implication being that no conflict can accumulate to the extent of completely damaging the democratic fabric. The ‘management’ of ethnicity by different leaders primarily through accommodation and manipulation forms the crux of Chapter 8. However, if we look at the present scenario of sustained resistance, then arguments like fluidity of identities which prevent building of tensions along a particular line can be questioned. In fact,

not only has consciousness in terms of various identities like caste and religion strengthened, but also simultaneously, the right to assertion along these lines has sharpened.

Further, the development paradigm which was once employed by the Narasimha Rao government to save Congress and 'de dramatize politics' (Chapter 6) stand contested. The present times need new government management and accommodation techniques to deal with the unrest rising with development that has not been able to cater to all the sections of the society, one of them being land struggle movements. It is a pity that we don't have Manor's analysis of those.

Nevertheless, this book provides a comprehensive understanding of the Indian polity, a journey with a nuanced understanding of the different stations of Indian democracy, with a final chapter that brings together the major themes of the preceding chapters.

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