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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

C. K. Johri. *India: Perspectives on Politics, Economy and Labour 1918–2007: Vol. 1: The Age of Gandhi, 1918–1957.* Dehli: Aakar Books, 2011. 506 S. ISBN 978-93-5002152-1.

C. K. Johri. *India: Perspectives on Politics, Economy and Labour 1918–2007: Vol. 2: The Age of the Constitution, 1958–2007.* Dehli: Aakar Books, 2012. 743 S. , , ISBN 978-93-5002202-3.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (April, 2013)

This two-volume series, authored by an economist, deals with the economic and political history of twentieth and early twenty-first century India. On the economic side, the focus is mainly on industrial and financial sectors, though mention is sometimes made of agricultural sector as well. On the political side, the attention is on elite politics and organized movements: the author deals in detail with British imperial policies, the achievements of the Indian National Congress, some aspects of organized working class politics, and select overviews of communitarian movements rooted in assertions of religious and 'caste' identity. Behind this empirical focus there is a broader conviction which informs the division of the work into two volumes. The governing hypothesis is that the two principal positive forces in twentieth century Indian history have been, firstly, the self-sacrificing achievements of Gandhi and other elite national leaders of his age, and secondly, the Indian Constitution.

In the first volume, the main story is thus provided by the activities of the Indian National Congress, and especially the politics of Mahatma Gandhi. As the author argues, while justifying this periodization, "The period, January 1918 to partition and the independence of India is called 'The Age of Gandhi'. Gandhi was the most dynamic political factor in this period" (vol. 1, p. 37). Many scholars would not agree with this approach. As historians of the Subaltern Studies Collective and others have argued for quite some time now, 'subaltern' populations, including peasants, artisans, and industrial labourers, often had very different ideas of politics than those sponsored by Gandhi and the elite Congress leadership. Johri's choice of Gandhi as the most dynamic political factor is therefore a conscious historiographic choice.

Behind this choice lie two ideas. Firstly, Johri privileges the notion that Gandhi and Gandhian politics (more generally, the Congress in the inter-war years) sought to promote national development through the reconciliation of the economic and political interests of different classes and communities. Obviously, there lies a basic faith in the Indian nation-state as a motor of economic reform and development. Economic development is predicated on the idea of the unity of the nation. In the author's words, "The study rests on the affirmation that over-arching nationalism is a political reality and forms the principal bastion of India's unity" (vol. 1, p. 18). When the author describes religious and 'caste' based movements, he tends to see these as negative and regressive forces in history. A similar approach is taken up in analyzing organized working class politics. The

author suggests that the working classes themselves do not have an autonomous consciousness as such. Driven by the desperation of poverty, they rely on elite leaders, who have historically emerged from nationalist or Communist backgrounds. Working class politics therefore becomes the politics of nationalist and Communist leaders organizing the workers. The author has more sympathy for nationalist leaders than for the Communists who are sometimes accused of pursuing a divisive policy of alienating the workers from the national mainstream.

The author's choice of delineating the nation-state and nationalist elites as the champions of development is related to an ambiguous attitude to British rule. On the one hand, Johri describes in detail the economic ramifications of colonial exploitation of the Indian masses. On the other hand, but not in an unrelated manner, he also sees British rule as an engine of Indian development. As he frames this argument, "The yearning for freedom, which leading elements in the relatively small middle class in major cities acquired, was based only partially on the discovery of the glory and defeats of India in the past but, more positively, on the acceptance of British liberal values. Modern India was created under British auspices and it continues. The Indian nation state was reborn as an independent country as a successor state with all the elements of continuity that defined the British administrative system, which were taken over intact by the nationalists now in governance (vol. 1. pp. 17-18).

This perspective also informs the second volume. Here the author conceives of the Indian Constitution as the mainstay of progressive political and economic values, and indeed of national stability. Democratic politics in late twentieth and early twenty-first century India has resulted in the emergence of a number of strong regionally-based and community-oriented parties in India. The author regards this as a negative development. "The new style of coalition governments has lowered the importance of ideology [...]" (vol. 2, p. 624) "The Constitution should promote healthy and democratic practices as well as decency in public life and responsible conduct among politicians. It may be difficult to legislate morality, more so in contemporary India, where corrupt practices and crime-infested politics have acquired legitimacy as a way of life and are accepted as an ongoing process [...] This is no doubt extremely perilous for the future of democratic India." (vol. 2, p. 626)

With respect to Indian economic and political developments since the 1990s, the author is ambivalent. On the one hand, he wants the Indian economy to be globally competitive, and to foster the development of market-oriented attitudes. On the other hand, he shows poignant concern for the darker aspects of economic liberalization. He discusses especially the heavy tolls on the environment. He also evinces deep sympathy for the poor who are further impoverished by neo-liberal regimes. As he notes, "The hopeful signs are that among the landless workers and poverty-stricken families the collective response is no longer one of sullen acceptance or stolid submissiveness, but of struggle and violence. Tribals have demanded control over forests, and landless workers, minimum wages, and if denied, they may look for alternative methods of militant, violent struggle" (vol. 2, p. 680).

In line with this perspective, he shows support for India's local self-government institutions, especially in rural areas. He suggests that "A most remarkable development, favourable to democracy as well as a tolerant though hybrid secular state is the transfer of power to the lower, third tier of power, at the panchayats. These are elected power-wielding village councils in which women's participation is constitutionally assured [...] It may at the minimum provide an active forum for political contests between the powerful elements in village societies and the weak or less powerful ones." (vol. 2, p. 660)

The two-volume work is empirically dense, and operates from a specific historiographic position which I have tried to outline above. It rests on the assumption that India's many economic, social and political problems can be solved by adopting economic and political categories of nationality and development which are rooted in modern Euro-American history. Such an approach does not adequately take into account the economic, social, and political categories through which most non-Western-educated non-middle class Indians view their own social achievements and problems. For them, the Congress or the Constitution might not substantially reflect their own lived practices of morality or expectations from the social and political order. Clues to understanding these views would be found in a variety of sources, and perhaps most importantly in the lived politics of 'subaltern' populations. After all, Gandhian nationalism was successful precisely in connecting to these non-metropolitan forms of insurgent politics and categories of thought. Arguably, the modern Indian structure of coalition politics, rooted in the aspirations of local regions and communities, which the author regards as a negative factor, might itself offer one of the more vibrant ways of democratizing politics in South Asia.

Historians have for quite some time now emphasized commemorating these popular visions of economic, cultural, and political expectation. But their researches have yet to make a substantial dent on how middle class public sphere debates are carried on in India, and indeed on the kind of policies which Western-educated Indian elites often frame in order to bring about 'national' development. A basic rethinking of categories, and especially of categories of economic policy, is needed in India today, which would seriously take into consideration subaltern beliefs and politics which lie outside the narrowly Euro-American notions of economic and political development. Without such a fundamental rethinking, many of the impasses in modern Indian politics, especially relating to asymmetries in distribution of economic, cultural, and political power, will not be resolved, but rather only exacerbated. The author's intention in this work to deepen Indian democracy by engineering more economic growth and social equity is a noble one. The empirical span of his research is to be commended. However, his work would have gained a greater depth of meaning if he had 'transculturally' hybridized his categories of economic thought, and shown a more positive appreciation of popular politics.

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Citation: Milinda Banerjee. Review of Johri, C. K. *India: Perspectives on Politics, Economy and Labour 1918–2007: Vol. 1: The Age of Gandhi, 1918–1957.* ; Johri, C. K. *India: Perspectives on Politics, Economy and Labour 1918–2007: Vol. 2: The Age of the Constitution, 1958–2007.* H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.

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