In the second decade of the twenty-first century, India appears to be at the opposite end of the positive evaluation of the foundation years provided by Gyanesh Kudaisya. Taking the years between 1947 and 1962 as the constitutive phase of the Indian republic, Kudaisya offers an insightful, informative, and lucid analysis of the country under the stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first premier of the republic. Kudaisya does not aim to provide a linear narrative of the formative years of the republic, and neither does he engage in a discussion of the political philosophies of early rulers. He explains the issues that were seminal to the life of the republic and the process of nation formation: the legacy of the partition; the linguistic reorganization of states; the enactment of a democratic constitution; and the coming into existence of electoral democracy premised upon universal franchise, a definition of citizenship, and planned economic development.

The central but understated aim of the book is to explain how "the nebulous idea of being an Indian"—mediated by the political-institutional language of secular civic nationalism—transformed the "the deep-seated hold of pre-existing identities" based on religion, language, and region (p. ix). His verdict is that in the Nehru years the institutional foundation of the republic provided a stable basis for the rise of a nation encompassing diverse social, economic, and political constituencies. Kudaisya, no doubt, alerts the reader about the limitations of Indian secularism by highlighting pogroms against Muslims, the changing demography of Delhi, and the decline of Urdu as a language due to open hostility toward Hindustani among champions of Hindi. While he rightly asserts that land reforms, such as Zamindari and Jagirdari abolition, provided benefits to the richer segment of peasantry and occupancy tenants, Kudaisya ignores the critical impact of land reforms in former princely states, except for Kashmir. In Hyderabad (Telangana) the surrender of private estates by the ruling house had a deep effect on the agrarian regime of the state. In a balanced judgment of the limitations of the Nehru regime, Kudaisya also points out that the planned economy did not lead toward radical land reforms that would empower actual "tillers of the soil." He lucidly summarizes how the landholding lobbies within (but also outside of) the Congress defeated efforts aimed at the effective imposition of land ceilings. Yet a deep appreciation for the Nehru regime and its ability to forge a nation characterize the underlying tenor of the book.

What is surprising is that Kudaisya does not acknowledge that such issues as the definition of citizenship or the reorganization of states along linguistic lines were far from being settled during the Nehru years. There did not evolve a stable democratic consensus over these issues in the Nehru era. These issues remained contested, caused anxiety, and were rife with implications for social and ethnic polarization. No doubt, the deepening of federal democracy took place with the linguistic reorganization, but India still remained a centralized state and the reorganization of state boundaries were undertaken with substantial reluctance and under pressure from popular movements.

Kudaisya’s positive assessment of the planned economy stands in contrast to the fact that India’s industrialization ran out of steam by the end of the second five-year plan (1961-62). Kudaisya does not mention
that agricultural production failed to sustain industrial development or that the Nehruvian state due to its insufficient capacity failed to sustain the industrialization drive. Indian industrialists’ massive campaign, in the years after independence, against a strong developmental state and the marginalization of labor as a stakeholder in the economic reconstruction under Nehru’s premiership, as Vivek Chibber has argued in *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India* (2003), put a brake on any inclusive industrialization process. This critical factor is ignored by Kudaisya. Similarly, the food crisis continued to plague different states during the Nehru years, something Kudaisya acknowledges only in a passing reference. In West Bengal under B. C. Roy’s leadership, the state achieved partial industrialization, but lack of effective land reforms and the failure of attempts to grow more food precipitated a food crisis. This led to the first food protest movement. The positive endorsement of the Nehruvian reconstruction of the Indian republic places Kudaisya’s work in the company of earlier seminal works by Ramachandra Guha (*India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* [2017]) and Sunil Khilnani (*The Idea of India* [2003]). Yet scholars endorsing the Nehru years (1947-64) privilege a statist perspective and believe that a “nation-state” could play an autonomous role, remaining above the hold of dominant social classes and majoritarian impulses. Yet the nation-state could hardly display independent initiative that disregarded the desires of the dominant social classes. There is no doubt that Kudaisya offers a lucid, informative, and thoughtful analysis of the Nehru years, but one suspects that he also tends to romanticize the hopeful days of the early republic. His book will nonetheless be a staple reading on the Nehru years of the Indian republic for lay readers.

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