

Kaveh Yazdani. *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence: Mysore and Gujarat (17th to 19th C.)*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2017. xxxii + 669 pp. \$246.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-33079-5.

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Kaveh Yazdani, in *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence*, provides the readers with a case study of Mysore and Gujarat to explain why precolonial India could not experience an economic take-off similar to the one that happened in western Europe. Yazdani is primarily concerned with “the great divergence” (p. 5) debate, but instead of asking the usual questions like “why did the West industrialize before the rest” or “why did the rest lag behind the West,” he decides to frame the concept of modernity as a heuristic category and use it in three ways.[1] First, Yazdani divides modernity into three phases: early modernity, which lasted from 1000 AD to 1500 AD; middle modernity, from 1500 AD to 1800 AD; and late modernity. Yazdani in *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence* is primarily concerned with the transition from middle modernity to late modernity, which coincides with India transitioning between the Mughal and the British Empires. Secondly, by using modernity as a heuristic Yazdani is able to have a lateral look at divergence and deconstruct it into its constituent elements. In the process of this deconstruction Yazdani realizes that several concepts like capitalism, industrial capital, industrialization, commercialization, and industrial revolution might be related, but their role and footprint in different societies over time may vary greatly. For example, he shows how fre-

quently industrial capitalism and industrial revolution are conflated by historians of South Asia without realizing that the former is not necessarily a precondition for the latter. Finally, by adopting “modernity” as a heuristic category Yazdani managed to free himself from being obsessed with per capita income in answering crucial questions linked with divergence. Yazdani here is influenced by the works of Peer Vries, who shows that during the period under consideration in this book the wealth and development gap between the richest and the poorest societies in the world was in the magnitude of five is to one, which is not very high. So, Yazdani restricts discussion of works that primarily focus on the income levels of people during the seventeenth to the nineteenth century to parts of the book that deal with living standards.

In *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence*, Yazdani is greatly influenced by the Marxist school of thought, the French *Annales* school, world systems theory, and postcolonial studies. As a result of such influences, Yazdani tries to determine India’s modes of production and spread of liberal ideas during the precolonial period while at the same time adopting the *longue durée* narrative style. But Yazdani also realizes the complexity of the subject matter he is dealing with when his research reveals multiple modes of production

and several cores and peripheries within India from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. So he creates a synthesis in his narrative by introducing the concept of *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigkeit* (p. 31), or the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous, which can be explained as follows. Yazdani's two case studies of Mysore and Gujarat were amongst the most advanced regions in India during the precolonial period. He also recognizes that the period from 1770 to 1830 was a *sattelzeit* (p. 35) or saddle period that brought the entire world and more importantly the core areas of Afro-Eurasia to "late modernity." But the complete transition of the world to late modernity could only be completed after the Second World War. Therefore the transition from middle modernity to late modernity was neither uniform nor smooth, and several societies, like those in India, continued to deal with problems inherited from middle modernity. In other words, different middle modern societies were transitioning to late modernity with varying acceleration rates.

One of the primary goals of the author in *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence* is to show the endogenous strength and potential of the "rest" (p. 59) to modernize and to grow, which is also supposed to inversely work as an argument for the influence of the "rest" (p. 55) in the industrialization of the West. Yazdani mentions how eleventh-century Song China was more industrialized and capitalized than seventeenth-century England. Even from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century core regions of Asia were more advanced than Europe in four key areas. First, China had the most advanced career progression system in the world, which was organized around a battery of examinations. Second, the cosmopolitan nature of the Mughal Empire, based on tolerance of diversity in religion and culture, also had no parallel in the world. Third, the city-dwellers of Northeast, West, and South Asia had higher sense and concern about hygiene than the urban inhabitants of Europe. Last, China and India were mass-producing items like porcelain

and textiles even before the industrial revolution. Now, Yazdani characterizes middle modernity, which started in the early sixteenth century, as a period when history truly started becoming global due to increased interactions fueled by better transportation and communication networks. So he concludes that several key advancements made by Europe during this period like the Renaissance, the discovery of America, printing, the Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, industrial capitalism, and the formation of the nation-state and national identities were direct results of the European exploitation of the "other" (p. 55).

Another unique contribution by Yazdani to the divergence debate is his formulation of the Indian catch-up story. Yazdani considers middle modernity to be characterized by European dynamism, something that was missing during early modernity. Yazdani also recognizes that during middle modernity western Europe was closer to entering late modernity than any part of Asia. For Yazdani, Europe's leading role in driving modernity ahead also meant the creation of a decreasingly polycentric world. But Yazdani also cautions us that the decline of the Mughal Empire should not be equated with a decline of South Asia. Yazdani's research provides the readers with several pieces of evidence that show that although some initial advancements were made by the Europeans during middle modernity, Indians soon managed to catch up to them. For example, Indian militaries were clearly inferior to the European ones in the beginning of the eighteenth century, but by the second half of the eighteenth century Indian military forces like those of Mysore were just as good as any European fighting force. Also, Mysore became a stable and centralized military-fiscal state like several European nation-states, and the peasants of Mysore also enjoyed stable property rights. Gujarat also engaged in rapid catch-up with Europe. Gujarati shipbuilding industry became as advanced as European shipbuilding industries soon after the initial contact

with the Europeans. Gujarat saw very rapid urbanization, which was supported by agricultural productivity that was at least as high as Europe's. Gujarat's textile industry engaged in manufacturing on a mass scale not only for the sake of domestic consumption but also for exports. Moreover, the Gujarati commercial class, consisting of merchants, traders, and bankers, had sufficient opportunities for social mobility and enjoyed significant political powers. But then why could India not industrialize and diverge before the West? Kaveh Yazdani provides two answers to this question. One is aimed at the core regions of South Asia like Gujarat and the other addresses the deficiencies of India in general.

Yazdani indicates quite strongly that advanced areas of India like Gujarat did not industrialize before western Europe because they fell into the high-level equilibrium trap. Gujarat had sufficient access to fuel in the form of wood, geoclimatic situations were favorable, it enjoyed global leadership in manufacturing goods like textiles, and its premodern institutions were spurring continuous growth. As a result, there was no great incentive to pay the opportunity cost to industrialize. On the other hand, high labor and production costs, lack of sufficient fuel in the form of wood, and inability to compete with India in manufacturing led Europe to the path of mechanization and industrialization. With regard to India in general, Yazdani points out several endogenous obstacles to divergence, such as bad institutions, lack of liberalism, and geographical constraints, but none of these barriers were insurmountable. According to Yazdani, India's lack of divergence is a result of a combination of both endogenous and exogenous factors. By bringing the nineteenth century also under the ambit of *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence* Yazdani is able to ask why India could not diverge even in the nineteenth century, when mechanization of production was introduced as early as the 1820s. So, how did India's divergence, which should have

been delayed by just a few decades, get delayed by over a century?

Yazdani accepts Tirthankar Roy's argument that although British colonization was characterized by a lack of political freedom, this does not mean that there was an absence of economic freedom as well. But unlike Roy, Yazdani is not ready to characterize the drain of wealth from India to England as payment for the services rendered by the British to India for two reasons. First, there was a sufficient number of skilled Indians to provide the same "services" (p. 573), but they were systematically made noncompetitive by colonial policymakers through unfair tariffs and custom duties. Second, major European countries like France and Germany could industrialize only by developing the skills of their countrymen through state-led education programs, but India's literacy rate showed real improvement only after the end of British colonial rule. Yazdani also heavily criticizes British rule for perverting India's economic growth and for obstructing India's march toward late modernity. According to Yazdani, the judicial and the legislative systems that were set up during colonial rule were discriminatory. As a result, people belonging to lower castes and women were systematically discriminated against, which led to a reversal of modernity and to the "traditionalization" (p. 574) of some parts of India. Yazdani also shows that not only were property rights regarding land not protected against predatory behavior, but income from agriculture was no longer reliable since around thirty million people died from famines in India between 1876 and 1902. So, exogenous factors like British colonization had a major negative impact on India's potential for economic development and her march toward late modernity.

Kaveh Yazdani's *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence* is well written, impeccably researched, well argued, and structured to almost geometrical perfection. This book is recommended for anyone interested in the divergence debate

or in early modern India. My only criticism of this book ironically emerges from one of its strong points. When Barry Eichengreen reviewed Roman Studer's book *The Great Divergence Reconsidered*, he remarked that statistical works can only hint at the answers to a larger question and so we are currently in need of research that can make historical sense of the economic data out there.[2] Yazdani sets out to do exactly that, but since he has to rely on the data sets created by people like Stephen Broadberry, Bishnupriya Gupta, and Roman Studer, he is also forced to characterize works of people like Kenneth Pomeranz and Prasannan Parthasarathi as revisionist. This does not seem consistent with the conclusions that Yazdani himself arrived at.

Notes

[1]. For example, Eric Lionel Jones, *Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

[2]. Barry Eichengreen, review of *The Great Divergence Reconsidered: Europe, India and the Rise to Global Economic Power* by Roman Studer, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 48, no. 4 (2018): 554-56.

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