

K. Sivaramakrishnan and Arun Agrawal, eds..

Regional Modernities: The Cultural Politics of Development in India .

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The key concepts that provide the organizing frame for this collection of essays are: (1) “regional modernities” (or, multiple modernities) and (2) narratives (stories, discourses, histories, case studies). The book is worth reading. It is sometimes difficult to fathom why the chapters are divided into Part I: Traveling Discourses, Part II: Development Situations, and Part III: Transgressing Boundaries. Good reasons could be mustered for rearranging the chapters, perhaps putting Part III first. But the organizational structure does not matter all that much since most of the chapters attempt to integrate theory and empirical, case study examples. Perhaps leaving a few of the more theoretical articles until the end is justified by the belief that it is only then that we will fully grasp what the methodological discussion about boundaries is all about. The chapters are unified by the idea that while modernity may be a global experience in some ways, the networks and communities affected by social change are quite variegated. That is, the authors are united in the belief that postmodernist critiques of modernization are misplaced when we are thinking of the developing world. (Whether such critiques are relevant to the “North” is another question, one not dealt with here.)

The editors have attempted to rescue the idea of economic development from Post-modern critiques of cultural modernity and the Enlightenment project. But they do not wish to attempt to counter French Post-Structuralism with further dialectical reflections. Instead, they wish to provide accounts of what is happening in terms of development practice. (There is, however, little mention of Marxist *praxis*.) Their 61 page introductory chapter is tightly argued and persuasive, although one could quibble about details. Hence, since the book has complex theoretical and methodological goals it is an interesting read. Rather than accept a “positivist” scientism (as in some works on the economics of development or the sociology of rational choice and networks) the authors defend an “area studies” (i.e. regional) perspective and try to tell the story of modernity in South Asia through that perspective. The idea of “region” here refers to the Indian Sub-continent as a whole; but it is mainly discussed as it is manifested in several parts (e.g. Kangra, Damodar Valley, Kumaon Hills, Delhi and New Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan).

The misery that is still the daily fate of billions of people in the “South” should not be glossed over and development is seen as a way to fulfill the promise of modernity. Human knowledge can be used to improve the quality of life of those who have been left behind. By exploring the multi-faceted relationship between modernity (as an idea) and development (as a practice) the various authors contribute to our knowledge. They link the unfinished tasks of development to the unfinished project of modernity. In doing so, in Part III several authors attempt to overcome dichotomies that tend to cloud regional issues. For example, they reject the polarization of global versus local. Angelique Haugerud “rethinks” the issue of boundaries and David Mosse discusses binaries. Sonja Brodt discusses the “local/global divide” in terms of tree management in Madhya Pradesh. There is a decided emphasis on forestry issues, in part perhaps because the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies was involved, along with Yale Political Science and Anthropology

departments. But a wide range of universities and topics is represented. Sivaramakrishnan is at Washington, Seattle, and Agrawal is at McGill, Montreal, Quebec. But Subir Sinha is at SOAS in London, Paul Robbins is at Ohio State, Angelique Haugerud is at Rutgers and Ajantha Subramanian is at Harvard. The academic network is broad and deep, although the methodological focus means that no psychologists or economists are represented. Anthropology and women's studies tend to dominate. (The only "non-academic" is Amitava Kumar and his essay in Chapter 15, "Modernity in a Suitcase," seems a bit out of place, although stimulating in its own way.)

The idea that globalization tends to reinforce "localities" is not new, of course, but there are few detailed studies of India which draw such striking portraits of struggles in everyday, local contexts. While not suitable for undergraduate courses, this reader could be a useful resource in graduate work on international rural development and integrated development. I would have liked to have seen some attention paid to rural sociological issues but David Kligensmith's historical Chapter 5 on the Damodar Valley Corporation and large dams as ideological "temples of the new age" fills the gap to some extent since it draws interesting parallels with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) of the 1930s. Like other authors, Kligensmith argues that universalistic models like TVA can only be appropriated partially.

This work has many subtle analyses of the nuances of development efforts in India, but does not fully develop the idea of a South Asian "region" and would have benefited from a chapter that provides an overview of similarities and differences among India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Nepal. Also, there might be a bit more critical distance from ideologies and utopias of opposition to development. To what extent does government policy and administrative structure affect the likelihood of the success of specific development efforts, both urban and rural? Libraries should acquire this volume since it is likely to be widely cited by both supporters and critics of the central ideas and the detailed case studies. But only a limited number of individuals are likely to want to purchase this book or read all of the chapters. This book is part of a series that Oxford University Press is publishing, but other volumes edited by Rakesh Mohan, Anne Krueger, and Anindya Sen tend to take a different methodological position. One could usefully compare this volume to the one by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen in the same Oxford series.

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In 2000, Prof. Bakker reviewed Hira Singh, *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants, and Paramount Power* for *CJS Online*.

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