

In This Issue

This issue features a symposium that profiles the changing face of Indian democracy, specifically its emerging definition as a democracy from below. All four essays document and analyze the recent political changes that have occurred in class and caste politics in the Indian subcontinent.

ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY opens the symposium by discussing the dramatic political developments of the last decade and a half that have led to the decline of Congress party dominance and the rise of new political forces. He emphasizes three new trends in particular: the growth of Hindu nationalism, the emergence of regionalism, and the rise of a number of lower-caste parties and organizations representing Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Lower-caste concerns, the author argues, increasingly shape Indian politics today, and their unfolding in contemporary North India can be advantageously compared with developments that occurred earlier in South India.

KANCHAN CHANDRA tracks the rising fortunes of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in North India from its inception in the early 1980s to its successes in the 1990s by charting its growing support among the Scheduled Castes. Critical to this development was the constituency that the BSP gained among middle-class members of the Scheduled Castes who had previously sided with the Congress Party. Her ethnographic study of BSP mobilization in Hoshiarpur district in Punjab and elsewhere explores and explains that party's electoral successes (and shortcomings) in terms of its selective appeal to groups within the OBC category.

STUART CORBRIDGE continues the focus on ethnic politics and the changing political scene in India by looking at Scheduled Tribes who are concentrated in the southern part of the North Indian state of Bihar. Based on fieldwork and statistical data, the author finds that the Scheduled Tribes have considerably improved their economic and political standing by reaping the benefits of affirmative action and democratic politics. In fact, growing political awareness among tribal communities has led to the establishment of a tribal-based political party whose objective is to establish a new Indian state of Jharkand where the tribal population would comprise a majority.

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT shifts attention away from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to highlight the Hindu OBCs who constitute over 40 percent of India's total population. Across North India—with one exception—he finds that the OBCs have enhanced their representation in state and national legislative assemblies at the expense of upper castes. However, the OBCs are, by no means, a unified group. Although they have acted as a cohesive political unit in some contexts, divisions exist between upper and lower OBCs that generate different kinds of plebeian politics in North India.

Indian democracy, as the symposium papers insist, is changing; it is becoming more inclusive and participatory. "India is," as Varshney concludes, "still far from becoming a democracy from below, but democratic power is increasingly moving downward. Democracy is no longer a gift from above."

KENNETH R. ROBINSON examines Korean maritime diplomacy over a two-hundred-year period to underscore the shortcomings of a sinocentric model of international relations. By focusing on early Chosŏn Korea's transactions with the rulers of Japan and Ryukyu in a number of areas, including protocol, the repatriation of Koreans, the granting of Buddhist *sutras*, and the complex negotiations resulting from "imposter embassies and missions," the author shows that Chosŏn Korea's system of maritime diplomacy cannot be viewed as centered around the Ming tribute system but one that is best understood as aimed at constructing "a Korean world order, one based upon interaction."