

Parteichef Sitaram Kesri unter mehr oder weniger satzungsgemäßen Bedingungen zum Opfer. Dennoch hatte Sonia Gandhi nicht gleich die Wirkung eines Midas: Die Congress-Partei verlor weiter an Boden. Ihre ausländische Herkunft wurde zum Politikum, die sogar dazu führte, dass prominente Congress-Politiker wie Sharad Pawar („the strongman of Maharashtra“) die Partei verließen und die National Congress Party (NCP) gründeten, nur um hinterher wieder auf Landes- und später auf Bundesebene mit der Congress-Partei zu koalieren.

Schon früh legte sich Sonia Gandhi allerdings auf Dr. Manmohan Singh als vertrauenswürdigen politischen Partner fest - sehr zu Verwunderung altgedienter Parteisoldaten. Die Wahlen von 2004 spülten die Congress-Partei dann für alle, auch für diese selbst, überraschend an die Macht. Als politische Meisterleistung wurde weithin Sonia Gandhis Verzicht auf die Premierministerschaft angesehen (Kapitel 8). Dieser Schachzug nahm der Opposition und auch innerparteilicher Kritik hinsichtlich ihrer italienischen Herkunft jeglichen Wind aus den Segeln („After British Raj, we don't want Rome Raj“). Es gab noch weitere Gelegenheiten, bei denen Sonia Gandhi deutlich machen konnte, dass sie nicht an Profit und Macht interessiert ist. Diese Haltung nötigte allen Respekt ab und bewies ihr politisches Gespür (Kapitel 11).

Das Buch bringt den Leser auf den Stand des Sommers 2008. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt war nicht alles zum Besten bestellt um die Congress-Partei. Mit dem Rücken zur Wand überstand die Congress-Partei und ihre Koalition die Krise um den Abschluss des Nuklearvertrags mit den Vereinigten Staaten. Mit einer dem Premierminister Dr. Manmohan Singh („the good doctor“) nie zugetrauten Chuzpe bemühte sich Sonia Gandhi hinter den Kulissen um andere parlamentarische Unterstützung anstelle der zum Bruch bereiten Kommunistischen Partei (CPI). Bei der Vertrauensfrage stand dann überraschend die aus dem Hut gezauberte

Samajwadi Party als Befürworter des Nukleardeals zur Verfügung.

Wahrscheinlich hätte die Beschreibung der Wahl 2009 in diesem Buch weitere Elogien auf Sonia Gandhi gebracht. Dennoch ist Kidwai nicht ganz unkritisch in der Beurteilung Sonia Gandhis. Denn die innerparteiliche Demokratie ist nicht gerade ein Gebiet, auf dem Sonia Gandhi glänzen konnte. Vielmehr zeigen alle Indikatoren, dass das Feld für Ihren Sohn Rahul Gandhi bereitet werden soll. Dieser soll einmal Dr. Manmohan Singh als Premierminister beerben.

Die Biographie Sonia Gandhis gibt einen guten Überblick über ihr Leben, ihre Freundschaften in Indien und die politischen Entwicklungen. Etwas unglücklich im Aufbau sind die thematisch nachgestellten Kapitel 14 und 15, die Sonia Gandhis Rolle in der Congress-Partei und bei den innenpolitischen Verhandlungen um den Nuklearvertrag beleuchten. Dies geschieht teilweise auch schon in den vorangegangenen Kapiteln 5 bis 10.

Alles in allem aber ist die konzise Biographie Sonia Gandhis durchaus als kurzweilige Lektüre zum empfehlen. Sie gibt einen guten Einblick in das Leben von Sonia Gandhi, und mehr will dieses Buch auch nicht leisten.

Jona Aravind Dohrmann

**Trudy Jacobsen: Lost Goddesses. The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History**

Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008, 327 S., GBP 17,99

Trudy Jacobsen's book on gender relations in Cambodian history starts out with the hypothesis that female power was denied to Cambodian women by male chauvinism. Jacobsen's analysis of female power highlights an antagonism between everyday practices of female power in Cambodian history and the hegemonic view of a "tradi-

tional Cambodia” which displays the “powerless woman” as the norm. According to Jacobsen, this image was actively misconstructed in a period of great social and political upheaval to restore a Cambodian identity.

In her introductory chapter, Trudy Jacobsen cautions against an uncritical transfer of “Western” concepts of power to non-Western contexts. Jacobsen stresses the importance of considering not only institutional, economic and political factors but also complex social networks, class differences and religious beliefs for studying the power of women in Cambodian history. Jacobsen especially asserts the continuous relevance of cosmological and supernatural forces in Cambodian notions of power. For example, ancestral spirits and mythical figures are continuously described as female in Cambodian tales and scriptures. However, *Lost Goddesses* somewhat lacks a clear conceptualisation of what power might look like in a Cambodian context. Jacobsen’s concept of power is inspired by post-structuralism and feminist studies. Some theoretical tensions become apparent: even though she draws on Foucault’s understanding of power, Jacobsen nevertheless points out the critical importance of individual publications like the *Chpab Srei*, the Cambodian ‘Code of Conduct for Women’. That way she tries to call (male) actors into account for denying power to women. The author argues that the effects of female subordination are still prevalent in Cambodian gender relations.

Jacobsen assumes that the image of historical gender relations in Cambodian history is incomplete due to a lack of female voices. *Lost Goddesses* endeavours to fill this gap and bring these female voices back into the political discourse by engendering Cambodian history. The methodological implication is to re-read historical sources and literature. Jacobsen starts her narrative in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. and traces instances of the exercise of female power chronologically into the new millennium. The author analyzes female

wielding of power on different fields: Her narrative includes women at the royal court, elite women and their economic and social status, but also the life of women in peasant families. Jacobsen particularly stresses the importance of female participation in religious and magical practices as well as the ubiquity of female deities and spirits in Cambodian cosmology.

Following the historical framework developed by Chandler, Jacobsen starts her analysis of female power in pre-Angkorean times. Due to scarce sources of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century, Jacobsen explores the roles of goddesses, queens and elite women as well as “ordinary women” from epigraphs and travelogues in pre-Angkorean Cambodia. The author stresses the central role of women in myths of creation as well as the high religious and economic status of elite women at the royal court in pre-classical Cambodia. Chapter 3 traces the power of women after the relocation of the Court to Angkor during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Cambodian princesses were regarded as mythical “manifestations of the land”. They were thus the human embodiment of supreme political authority. Overall, women enjoyed more or less equal social and economic rights and a relaxed attitude in society towards female sexuality. Chapters 4 to 6 explore the development from the so-called middle period of Cambodian history from the relocation of the capital from Angkor to Phnom Penh to the sack of the capital by the Thai in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While this period witnessed the rise of *Theravada* Buddhism as the dominant religion in Cambodia, life of women did not seem to have changed much: Elite women continued to exercise political and economic influence, whereas women outside the palace were still treated equally to men. Chapters 5 and 6 examine specifically key texts produced in times of social and political instability from 1772 to the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1864. Court chronicles reveal attempts to delegitimize the reign of Queen Ang Mei as a period of decay. Especially the queen and other

powerful elite women were blamed for the Vietnamese encroachment upon Cambodian territory. Didactic literature on the "correct" behaviour for women and legal reforms started to inferiorize women in this period. According to Jacobsen, the image of the powerless woman was constructed as part of an idealized "traditional Cambodia" which was associated to the texts produced in this time. This (mis)reading was reinforced by the French who enshrined Cambodian "traditional" practices in their Orientalist scholarship. Overall, the status of women started to decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After gaining independence, Cambodian leaders sought to construct a national identity based on what was perceived as the "traditional" and glorious past. Therefore, people turned to the conservative literature compiled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for guidance which constrained the access to power for women. Male attitudes persisted during subsequent regimes despite claims of revolutionary, socialist or democratic equality. Until today, women in Cambodia continue to have restricted access to education, socio-economic resources and political influence compared to men.

Trudy Jacobsen's book is based on her doctoral dissertation conducted at the University of Queensland. The author incorporated primary sources like epigraphic inscriptions, court chronicles, Khmer newspaper and magazine articles, popular literature, biographical and autobiographical records and archival material. Jacobsen furthermore conducted ethnographic field research in Cambodia. Benefitting from her knowledge of Khmer, Old Khmer and Sanskrit the author re-read original sources from a gender perspective. The result is a comprehensive history of the role of women in Cambodian politics and society. Theoretically, Trudy Jacobsen's book can be situated at an interesting intersection between post-structuralist gender studies and Cambodian history. Bringing in a feminist perspective on the politics of gender relations in Cambodian history, *Lost Goddesses* closes a gap in social science research on this issue. What

puzzled me was that Jacobsen seems to distinguish between "true" Cambodian traditions which can and need to be revealed and "false" constructs of tradition which had been asserted in the past to legitimize the denial of female power. However, the "traditional" view of what is considered as "appropriate behaviour" for women in Cambodian society is highly contested. In a context of ongoing struggles for female empowerment, *Lost Goddesses* is of high political relevance. What makes Jacobsen's book an interesting and important scholarly contribution is its emphasis on the intimate connections between narratives on gender, culture and national identity which are still prevalent in contemporary Cambodia.

Stephan Engelkamp

**Marco Bunte, Andreas Ufen (eds.):  
Democratization in Post-Suharto  
Indonesia**

Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series. London, New York: Routledge, 2009, xix+323 S., GBP 75.00

This volume is a collection of articles written by 12 young scholars, focussing on various aspects of the political development in Indonesia after the resignation of Suharto in 1998. They are based on field work in Indonesia in the crucial period after Suharto's successors had started to change the hitherto rather strict authoritarian regime by allowing free and fair elections, by tolerating a critical press, by starting their fight against wide-spread corruption and by issuing laws, leading to a gradual decentralisation. Thus, there are issues enough to be thoroughly examined!

But what is democratization, and what does it mean in the Indonesian context after 1998? This question is addressed in an introductory chapter (The New Order and its Legacy) by the two editors, both of them senior research fellows at the Institute of Asian Affairs in the German Institute of Global Affairs,