

One of the many strengths of this work lies in Pierre Gottschlich's ability to blend his highly diverse and numerous source materials into a carefully structured and well-integrated whole. He manages to draw a comprehensive picture of the Indian diasporic community in the United States and their political aspirations, involvements and influence. Thus, his is not only an interesting counterpart to the large number of studies of particular linguistic or religious groups within the Indian American community or particular areas of Indian settlement in the US, but also an excellent starting point for those beginning their research on the Indian American community from the perspective of political science.

*Jacqueline Hoffmann*

ANDREA FLESCHENBERG / CLAUDIA DERICHS (eds.), *Women and Politics in Asia. A Springboard for Democracy*. Singapur: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012. 173 pages, US\$ 35.60. ISBN 978-981-4311-7-1 (Co-published with Lit Verlag, Münster / Berlin. € 24.90. ISBN 978-3-643-90099-9)

This book is a welcome contribution to an important emerging field of study. Gender-focused perspectives are all too rare in the field of transition studies in Asia. This volume offers six highly interesting case studies that raise an array of essential questions. The contributions are divided into three parts. Part I deals with political participation, Part II focuses on varieties of women's movements and their approaches to questions of religion, and Part III deals with gender mainstreaming and public policies.

The introduction summarizes the wide array of questions. Part I looks at women's political participation and representation, raising questions about political actors and institutions, quotas and campaigns. In his chapter on a women's candidacy initiative during Malaysia's general elections in 2008, Julian C.H. Lee takes a specific case to exemplify major structural obstacles for women in the Malaysian voting system. More importantly, his example of the 'Aunty Bedah' campaign presents an alternative form of activism and its short-term as well as possible long-term effects. Vasundhara Mohan Rallapalli's chapter on political participation by Muslim women in India shows the complexity of multiple discrimination against Muslim women as members of several disadvantaged groups, ranging from economic hardship to increasingly orthodox and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic traditions.

Part II of the book focuses on women's movements and the challenges of religion. In her comparative chapter on women's rights and morality in Indonesia and Malaysia, Christine Holike shows how neo-conservative tendencies are connected with Islamization processes that aim to regulate sexual morality and behaviour. Especially for Malaysia, she illustrates how certain interpretations of

Islam are employed and utilized in authoritarian structures. In Kristina Grossmann's chapter on the case of Aceh, it becomes clear that religious authorities and Western organizations each advocate their own values. The chapter highlights the local tensions between different interpretative approaches to Islam. Indu Agnihotri's chapter on identity politics and women's rights in India offers an account of different strategies that the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) pursues to strengthen the rights of women in different (religious) communities. She highlights the strong role of tradition and points out that communal political institutions function as parallel judicial structures, thus challenging the state.

In Part III of the book, attention is turned to public policy and gender mainstreaming. Drawing on fieldwork in community fisheries in three different regions in Cambodia, Sophanha Chap shows in detail how the unequal division between labour and recreational time and education perpetuates patriarchal gender roles. Like Kristina Grossmann, Sophanha Chap attests a slow, but steady increase in women's participation in political organizations. Most of the actors who are analysed in greater detail campaign for increased women's participation within the framework of human rights and liberal democratic statehood.

Several of the authors of this volume mention the active participation of women in religious organizations with conservative or orthodox agendas. However, it is regrettable that they do not delve deeper into the proactive involvement and visibility of women in Islamist organizations, such as for instance the Indonesian Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which boasts an impressive number of active and very visible women in different functions. In other words, the chapters that deal with questions of religion focus largely on the struggle between patriarchal conservative religious views on the one hand and secular defenders of women's rights on the other.

Most of the authors write from a clearly liberal stance, sometimes informed by an activist background. The detailed case studies are a refreshing read and demonstrate how literal approaches to traditions and religious scripts are strongly intertwined with economic obstacles, patriarchal labour division and questions regarding education. The chapters illustrate that simplistic explanations for the low level of women's participation in political organizations are insufficient. The case studies present the enormous range of factors and reasons and different attempts to deal with them. The similarities between such apparently different cases as visibility in party politics among Muslim women in India and the involvement in community fisheries among Cambodian women are striking. In most cases, unequal access to education, unjust labour structures and (interrelated) issues of poverty reinforce interpretations of cultural and religious traditions that are disadvantageous for women. The volume's introduction connects and brings together the various contributions and develops stimulating and urgent questions. It can only be hoped that they will be pursued further as this important field evolves.

*Saskia Schäfer*