

dicates the need for further investigations to deepen the understanding of institutional dynamics.

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HERMANN KULKE/DIETMAR ROTHERMUND. *A History of India*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. (Revised and updated edition). 411 pp., £ 12.99 Pb. ISBN 0-415-04799-4

As James Mill finished his great work on Indian history in 1813 he noted the difficulties that had confronted him as he had struggled to make a coherent account from the confusing mass of materials that he had collected. His conclusion, shared by many writers since who have attempted to write a general history of India, was that the author has only two options: "Either he must resolve to observe minutely a part; or he must resolve to make a cursory review of the whole. Life is insufficient for more." Kulke and Rothermund have, however, found a third possibility for writing this excellent history of India. Both have, in Mill's terms, observed parts of Indian history minutely: Kulke as an Indologist has written detailed monographs on the temple cities of Orissa and Tamilnadu, and Rothermund as a modern historian has written on agrarian relations during British rule in India and on the freedom movement. Combining their diverse specialties, they have concentrated, not on attempting to provide a coherent chronological narrative, but on something much more valuable, an analysis of the structural patterns of the historical experiences of the Indian subcontinent. These patterns are examined in terms of a variety of topics: the rise of empires; the structure of Hindu kingdoms; the significance of the way Turkish invaders, who were Muslim in religion and Persian in culture, became *Indian* rulers in regions that remained predominantly Hindu in religion and culture; the imperial structure of British power; and the nationalist movement. This makes for a book that is quite different from previous one-volume histories of the subcontinent, and one that will be welcomed by students and teachers, as well as that mythical entity, the general reader, who seek to interpret a mass of seemingly unrelated, and sometimes contradictory, materials.

Kulke and Rothermund begin their analysis by relating historical developments to the environment, suggesting a tension between the dryer, western Gangetic plains and the wetter eastern region, with their diffe-

rent styles of agricultural and political societies. The western area saw the development of the Brahmanic cult rooted in the Vedic literature associated with the people who called themselves Aryans, who apparently were migrants from the northwest, and whose priestly class, the Brahmins, were closely allied with royal authority of kings. In the eastern region, the authors argue, there was a more egalitarian tribal organization, with less dominance by kings and priests, with the three important movements that took place there after 600 B.C. having profound consequences for later history. One was the emergence around 600 B.C. of two religious movements, Buddhism and Jainism, that were antagonistic to the sacerdotal, hierarchical claims of the Brahmans. Another was urbanization, which the authors suggest, may be related in some way to cities of the Indus civilization a thousand years earlier. The third development in the eastern Gangetic plain was the rise of empires, the first of which, that founded by the Maurya dynasty, they see based on a productive agrarian society made possible by the fertile soil. They give due attention to the great artistic achievements of the Gupta empire, but they stress that its political structure, with a central imperial core surrounded by tributary princes, served as a blueprint for all medieval Indian kingdoms.

A noteworthy feature of the book is the careful examination of the much neglected period, which the authors call "the early medieval period," stretching from about 500 to 1200 A.D., when, they say, the lack of any overarching political unit made possible the growth of the inter-related regional cultures which are the bedrock of later Indian history. There were throughout this period, they argue, four major regional concentrations of powers in eastern, western, northern, and southern India, with each of these regions usually having a premier power, but none able to dominate any of the other three for any length of time. Southern history differs markedly from that of the other three regions because the long control by a single dynasty, the Cholas, was not matched elsewhere. In their survey of the western and northern regions, the authors give prominence to the role of the rulers in those regions in preventing the expansion of the Arab kingdoms established in the Sind in the eighth century.

In addition to the emergence of regional kingdoms, Kulke and Rothermund note three other factors characteristic of this early medieval period that were of formative significance for Indian history: the transformation of Brahmanism into what we now refer to as Hinduism; the evolution of regional languages; and, as a result of all the other factors,



the development of regional cultures. This is perhaps the most original and stimulating section of the book, and therefore the one that other specialists may read with closest and most critical attention. For the non-specialist, it provides an illuminating examination of the intertwining of religion and politics.

With the Turkish conquests in North India in the thirteenth century, the relative isolation of India during the early medieval period ended, and the authors emphasize that, apart from the inevitable destruction caused by military campaigns, Indian society and culture was affected at many levels by the intrusion of a new and alien culture, but perhaps most significantly by the breaking down of regional boundaries in the attempt to create an all-India empire. This attempt, even though it was only spasmodically successful until the achievements of the Mughal dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, projected "an Indian empire which in a way became the precursor of the present highly centralised national state" (p. 181).

In a very lucid survey of the period of British rule, the authors make a startling but not unreasonable statement: "At the height of British imperial power it did not really matter who was sent to India as viceroy" (p. 256). This judgement is based on their reading of how the British won India and how they maintained their power. That conquest was carried out by a commercial company, careful cost-accounting in both war and peace was important; so was the fact, learned from their Indian predecessors, that government was paid for by plunder and land revenue; and that bureaucratic organization, not individual leadership, was the key to control in a modern state. Control of that new state was the end sought by the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement that began in the nineteenth century, and the authors have provided a succinct analysis of this contentious period. Their chapter on the period since 1947 is also very well done.

An up-to-date bibliography, a detailed chronology, and very useful maps that complement the text, combine with the scholarly credentials of the authors to make this a very valuable addition to general works on India.

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