

The reviews in Internationales Asienforum try to give a brief evaluation of recent German publications.

JÜRGEN RÜLAND: Politik und Verwaltung in indischen Städten. Einflußmuster und politische Kultur indischer Municipal Corporations. (Studien zur Kommunalpolitik und Community Power Forschung (KCPF), Bd. 2.)  
Frankfurt/Main: Haag und Herchen, 1978, 174 pages, DM 19, 80

To an even greater extent than, for example, the Dutch in Indonesia, the British colonialists have influenced post-colonial developments in India by means of an extensive and complex administrative and infrastructural network. However, particularly in India itself, the events of the most recent past have given rise to considerable doubts as to whether it is realistic to apply western models to India. This, the most populous democracy in the world, has, it is true, managed to put an end to a dictatorship but, as regards the struggle against deep-rooted structural weaknesses, this success probably even means a setback. What holds true for the federal state as a whole applies equally to the large towns: the Urban Local Self-Government, a western relict with a one hundred-year-old tradition in India, is simply not able to cope with the enormous trends towards urbanisation, especially since it is so susceptible to corruption. It is between these two poles - western theory on the one hand and oriental tradition and the reality of a developing country on the other - that Rüländ has written his study.

It is an exceedingly specialized work. Rüländ restricts himself by and large to the framework indicated by the title. Thus, apart from a few references, the subject under discussion is not incorporated into the general situation of India and its cities. For example, structural features of the urbanisation process are not discussed nor are socio-economic factors; no reference is made to the degree of centralisation in the towns and the primacy rate. Equally lacking are a historical perspective and comparisons with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial conditions. One cannot expect a standard-work, of course, the subject matter being as is defined by the title, but anyone dealing with an individual aspect of Indian towns should place his discussion in the context as a whole.

Apart from the above reservations Rüländ's book gives a very accurate discussion of power structures in India up to the middle of 1975 (the proclamation of the state of emergency) and, in particular, of the literature already published on this subject.

After an all too brief introduction, the author gives a broad outline of the conditions of Indian Urban Local Self-Government and the political institutions of the Municipal Corporations. He deals at length with the informal power structures and the influence of political organizations, interest groups and voluntary organizations on local politics: the two last-named sub-topics occupy a key position in the present study, being at the same time indicative of the state of current, western-oriented Community-Power-Discussion. Here local conditions, including their abuses, are dealt with in particular detail. A discussion of the influence of organized radicalism on local politics and, with India as an example, of Community-Power-Research in developing countries, follows. A detailed bibliography of literature available on the subject is also included.

The author can claim to have made an important contribution not only to the Community-Power-Discussion, but also to the problem of western influence on countries formerly under colonial power. In this respect his remarks on corruption and the infiltration at a local level of administrative concepts (of western origin) are significative of the situation in many developing countries: the situation in Iran or Indochina for example - i. e. the end of the unlimited influence of western ideologies on eastern cultures. One of the author's merits: as regards the literature he analyzes, he remains largely descriptive and free of western presumptions.

A reflective summary is lacking, which means that the author's personal point-of-view towards his subject does not become apparent. Missing too, unfortunately, is an English summary.

To sum up: despite the author's very commendable efforts to analyze the material at his disposal, the question arises as to the significance of such an undertaking, e. g. for concrete application really or in other developing countries with comparable situations. Rüländ's study is a good academic performance.

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