

MICHAEL MANN, *South Asia's Modern History. Thematic Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 2015. 426 pages, 2 tables, 6 figures, 27 maps, £32.99. ISBN 978-0-415-62866-2 (pb)

Michael Mann's modern history of South Asia joins the rather long list of existing introductory overviews to the history of the subcontinent. However, it still manages to furnish a novel way of presenting South Asia historically to both a broad as well as an academically trained readership. This monograph is not merely a translation of the German edition published in 2005 (*Geschichte Indiens. Vom 18. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn: Schöningh), but rather an updated and improved history which includes up-to-date scholarship. Parts of the chapters have been reorganized thematically in order to enhance readability and avoid repetition. The English version benefits substantially from these changes.

The book's most innovative feature is its thematic – rather than chronological – arrangement of the text. One third of the overview (Chapters 1–3) traces the familiar pattern of South Asian state formation from the 17th to late 20th centuries, covering the important influences of colonialism, patriotism and nationalism, but also giving important insights into local and regional variations beyond a supposed colonial European hegemony (pp. 28–51, with a mere 5 pages for “British India (1757–1856)”). The narrative nevertheless stresses the importance of global entanglements as well. Furthermore, Michael Mann proposes new temporal divisions that encourage the reader to view alleged watersheds like 1947 in a new light (p. 89) and generally problematize the periodizations which replicate those in the “master narratives” of South Asian history.

More importantly, however, two thirds of the book addresses various themes that depict cutting-edge research into South Asian history in general, while at the same time reflecting the author's research interests. In addition to the chapters on state formation and empire building in South Asia, and patriotism and nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the thematic perspectives picked for the overview are as follows: agriculture and agro-economy; silviculture and scientific forestry; migration, circulation and diaspora; urbanization and industrialization; and knowledge, science, technology and power. This approach showcases a broad spectrum of topics from social, environmental, intellectual and labour history as well as from urban and Indian Ocean studies. By incorporating these diverse perspectives on various aspects of South Asian history into one introductory history, Michael Mann manages to distance himself from the criticized “previous master narratives” (p. 15) that centre around the history of those in power and instead “pave[s] the way for a social history of the subcontinent that is free from the nation-state as a point of reference” (p. 18). Congruously, the book highlights trans-regional and trans-local historical aspects.

Naturally, the book cannot include each and every theme that is relevant in research on South Asian history today – a fact that the author himself acknowledges (pp. 18–19). Conspicuously absent is a gendered perspective on South Asian history, which today is of relevance especially among Indian scholars. Even

though the author introduces the subaltern school and broaches the issue of subaltern resistance, the topic deserves more attention, especially considering the author's aim at overcoming outmoded ways of writing history (for a subaltern introduction into the colonial period of South Asian history compare: Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and the Raj. South Asia since 1600*. London: Routledge, 2007).

Another noteworthy feature of Michael Mann's History is the claim to cover the whole of South Asia and not "simply" write the history of India. The author manages to do so by generally disregarding a nationalist framework as the major entrance point to history and also by including not only histories of colonial and post-colonial India, but also of the states of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Especially with respect to Pakistan he succeeds in doing the often neglected country historiographical justice. Rejecting the notion of Pakistan as a "purely artificial construct" in keeping with his conviction that "each nation-state is a historical-political construct" (p. 110) Michael Mann introduces the conflict-ridden history of Pakistan as one of multiple identities, thus going beyond the otherwise dominant focus on an alleged national Muslim identity. Hence, the book refreshingly puts actors, not states, at the centre of historical events.

The book includes maps and illustrations, a helpful index and an exhaustive bibliography. Unfortunately, the new English edition no longer includes the useful glossary of South Asian terms regularly used by the author. What makes this book especially attractive to students and sets the work apart from other overviews is the extensive discussion of ongoing scholarly debates and "concentrated literary review and analysis" (p. x). Michael Mann identifies and describes different historiographical schools, singles out some of the major paradigm shifts in writings on South Asian history (like the one initiated by Christopher A. Bayly in the 1980s), and convincingly problematizes the questionable relationship between history-writing and (contemporary) national ideologies. This nuanced and refreshing overview of the history of South Asia as a whole can be recommended to students and scholars alike.

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ANITA GHAI, *Rethinking Disability in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2015. 392 pages, £95.00. ISBN 978-1-138-02029-0

In her recently published monograph, Anita Ghai, Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, rethinks disability in India in eight chapters. *Rethinking Disability in India* combines a reflection on the author's personal experience of growing up as a disabled person in India with the broader socio-cultural context. A previous book, *(Dis)Embodied Form* (2003), relates