

## Reviews

JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA, DARINI RAJASINGHAM-SENANAYAKE, ASHIS NANDY, EDMUND TERENCE GOMEZ, *Ethnic Futures. The State and Identity Politics in Asia*. New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 1999. 209 pages. RS 350.00 (Hb), ISBN 0-7619-9359-2; RS 195.00 (Pb), ISBN 0-7619-9360-6

This volume is dedicated to Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, Director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, who was assassinated in 1999. It contains five chapters. In a lengthy introduction Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake put forward their thesis that ethnicity can no longer be analyzed in national contexts, nor are ethnic identities self-evident categories. Ethnicity is (mostly) invented. In India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Nepal, the four countries in this volume, the "ethnicization" of the state occurred in different periods of the colonial and post-colonial history. Minorities and majorities were thus created by government policies and their differences cemented by redistributive practices. The anthropological construction of caste, globalization, and, lately, the Asian values debate, rather helped to mask South and Southeast Asia's history of cultural co-existence and hybridity. This general thesis is substantiated by Pfaff-Czarnecka's chapter on the ethnicization of politics in Nepal. Competition for resources enforced ethnicity which has become a world-wide organizational principle of legitimate political struggle. The example is, indeed, of special interest, as ethnic tensions are rising but still low in comparison to other Asian countries. This is true in comparison with Sri Lanka in particular, a case discussed in the third chapter by Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, who calls this unfortunate country "South Asia's most dramatic failure at modern nation-building". The author goes to great length to show the growing construction of ethnicity during the colonial period which eventually climaxed in the bi-polar ethnic identity politics of current Sri Lanka. Though the basic facts and academic debates referred to in this chapter are reasonably well known to South Asian specialists, the author manages to deconstruct an image which has captured the minds of politicians and political commentators on both sides of the Sinhala-Tamil divide. In his chapter on India between Secular State and Ecumenical Traditions Nandy provides statistics on ethnic violence which show both the increase of victims as well as the unequal geographical distribution of acts of violence. In so doing he deviates from the main thrust of the previous chapters as the use of communal labels in statistics helps to re-ify communal groups as separate and closed entities.

The last chapter by Terence Gomez which deals with ethnicity in Malaysia is somewhat disappointing. He provides a rather general overview of Malaysian ethnic politics with a certain emphasis on economic issues, without really taking a political or theoretical stand. This becomes blatantly apparent in his summary in which he

asserts that economic progress would not have been possible without Chinese and Indian immigrants, but also that Malay history should not be negated nor over-emphasized. Recent political tensions and events have, indeed, shown that other forces are at work, cutting across ethnic boundaries or creating new ones beyond the previous ethnic Malay/Chinese/Indian pattern.

In all, this book is a valuable addition to the literature on ethnicity in Asia.

*Hans-Dieter Evers*

ROSS MALICK, *Development, Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia*. London: Sage Publications, 1998. 378 pages, £ 35.00. ISBN 0-7619-9227-8

For the last twenty years or so Western industrial nations have made the principle of "good governance" a precondition for "development aid" to Third World countries. Central to the doctrine of good governance are the issues of poverty reduction, addressing the problem of ethnic conflict and social exclusion, and the protection of human rights. Ross Mallick, partly drawing on his own experience as a development consultant as well as on government statistics and academic research findings, puts these issues at the centre of his analysis.

In the opening chapter on "Culture and Development" Mallick discusses the "eurocentric roots" of the idea of "universal human rights" and its coupling with development, concluding that there is "no necessary correlation between development and human rights" and that "both can be promoted for the benefits they provide in their own terms" (p. 17). He makes it clear that "development" needs to be framed in terms of poverty reduction and that human rights need to be extended to minority groups and the politically disempowered. In the next chapter on "Regional Cooperation" Mallick points out the geopolitical strategic and economic interests of Western states and the attempts by South Asian countries to achieve "relative autonomy from foreign powers" by regional cooperation. In chapter 3 Mallick tackles the issues of rural poverty and of untouchability in India. Here and in other chapters he criticises blindness to "unpleasant controversial realities" (p. 47) on the part of academics, in the West as well as in South Asia, who refrain from necessary criticism of specific policies such as the West Bengal Communists' land reform and redistribution measures. He argues against the view that the Left Front achieved social change and significant benefits for the rural poor – a point that is convincingly made in the comparatively tightly argued chapter on "Decentralization and Rural Development". Here Mallick draws on his own and other widely available data on landownership and land redistribution in West Bengal in comparison to a number of Indian states. Mallick provides evidence for the "communist government's failure to shift political power to the lower classes" and the persistent "dominance of the middle and upper classes" (p. 103). However, not all of Mallick's propositions are coherently and convincingly argued. For example, it is not quite clear how his contention that the failure of the Communists in West Bengal is due to the "constitutional restraints of operating in a democracy" (p. 103) is supposed to be related to his earlier