

THE WRITINGS OF PAMELA PRICE: STATES, POLITICS AND CULTURES IN MODERN SOUTH INDIA, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., 2013, pp 331

The book is a collection of ten essays which look at different political domains and linguistic areas of South India from colonial to post-colonial period. It captures the cultural legacies, concepts and symbols of yesteryears which are still a part of modern political structures of the

state and the political system. These essays will give its reader a better understanding on the emerging social movements and the history behind it. Price examines both change and continuity, the concept described by Sudipta Kaviraj (2005) as “historical continuity and change” and the sequence of events which have an effect on the path of change. At the same time these essays also talk of “discontinuity in political culture from the colonial period, the radical changes in political culture which have an effect on political choice and quality of democracy” as held by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (2009). The author outlines the evolution of power and influence under imperial rule and later under electoral regimes, giving evidence of individual agency in cultural construction.

In general the essays reflect on the nationalist movement which brought in the spirit of equality, dignity and emancipation. It elucidates the prevalent regional differences, political culture and the role of culture and its effect on power relations which are seemingly the product of post-colonial political experiences. The essays also analyze the distinct cultural profiles arising due to belief system, development in vernacular literatures and economic changes. Several essays in the collection are on the politics of honour and respect commanded by public figures, the establishment of political authority and the multifaceted nature of domination. The role of honour politics are complex and the possibility of colonial or post-colonial antecedents cannot be ruled out. It certainly points at the post-independence India with broad and shifting political culture which perhaps is an outcome of colonial and pre-colonial period institutions and codes.

The first three essays are on themes from the 19th century. The first is on the political impact of the imperial legal system on the Zamindari system that was prevalent in Madras constituency. The extraction of revenue by the Raja Zamindars with their local ideas of legitimate authoritative behaviour led to their own economic downfall. Landed domains with independent rule was part of the Zamindari system and the desire for local legitimacy still held firm. The British revenue demand of improving gentry led to the danger of undermining local legitimacy.

The second essay is on the changing dynamics of ethnic conflict, emergence of a public opinion and formation of voluntary associations in the port town of coastal Andhra. This essay examines the development

of the public and public life in India both in terms of indigenous conceptions of power, status and authority and the political relations among Indians.

The third essay is on household dynamics and mistress-slave relationship. Since Zamindari women lived in seclusion they are made dependent on servants. They shared an emotional bond with each other and invariably the *dasi's* knowledge of *rani's* body was a source of *dasi's* power and control over her mistress. Although the mistress was superior to her servants they remained vulnerable to their subordinates who could testify against them under the implementation of imperial law and conflict processing in imperial courts of law.

The other essays are on post-Independence. They are on Indian political behaviour, political decisions which are influenced by cultural structures and ideological concerns. There are two studies on the ideology of the Dravidian movement. The article argues that the major ideological themes of the nationalist Cultural Revolution which represent change in Tamil political culture were anchored in pre-revolutionary political concerns supported by institutions and symbolic systems with pre-colonial antecedents. It deals with honour, valour and the populist appeal in Tamil nationalism. The concept of lordship, the institutions of worship and kinship played an important role in reproducing values of personalized authority.

The next two essays examine the relationship between values, ideas and institutions and the group in political society. The issue of respect, maintaining self-respect and being treated with self-respect by others in particular by other politicians has been a major preoccupation in Karnataka politics, the ideological elements which shape political rivalries and provide rationalizations for political action. The ninth essay explores political meaning in the changing economic and political scenario. It highlights that with democratization, the political and social relationship of conventional dependency and domination has almost disintegrated. The last essay is on the election laws and voter's autonomy.

These essays illustrate the multivalent nature of symbols and concept of power in South India from post-colonial period and the cultural sources of domination which are both subtle and comprehensive. It also exemplifies the political culture of domination intertwined with the spirit of independence and moral renewal.

The essays in the book give a fresh approach on Indian culture, politics and nature of state. It is a great insight for readers who want to understand the modern political culture, social movements and the emerging political trend in South India. The author makes it an interesting read by using quotations, reporting notes from interviews. The author being an outsider has been a keen observer and analyst and has dealt in great detail on issues which often as an insider one tends to overlook.

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