

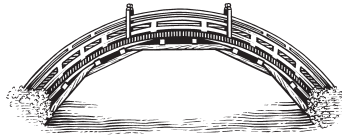
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Sumit Ganguly & Rahul Mukherji

India Since 1980

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C. Raja Mohan

Teresita C. Schaffer

Harsh V. Pant

Jason A. Kirk

Aseema Sinha

Sumit Ganguly & Rahul Mukherji

India's Foreign Policy Transformation

C. Raja Mohan

Assessing India's evolution since 1980 is a compelling idea that has been executed with much competence by Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji in *India Since 1980*. The volume is part of a broader series of studies on a number of countries since 1980, but any study of India since 1980 offers special rewards. Many features of contemporary India find their origins in that decade. The first considerations of economic reform, the rumbling of the two great tectonic plates of caste and religion, outreach to the United States and China, the perception of India as a regional power, and India's launch of nuclear weapon and missile programs can all be traced back to the 1980s.

In the three decades since then, India's views of itself and the world, as well as the world's image of India, have undergone profound changes. The core concepts that defined India's political and economic development before this period—economic self-reliance, socialism, secularism, nonalignment, and third worldism—would be recast or come under great stress in the years that followed. Ganguly and Mukherji divide the story of India since 1980 into four different domains: the changing nature of its engagement with the world, the restructuring of India's economy, the new patterns of domestic political mobilization, and the challenges to the idea of secularism amid the rise of Hindu nationalism. In a volume of fewer than 200 pages, Ganguly and Mukherji deftly guide us through the labyrinth of India's dramatic transformation.

On the revolutionary changes in India's foreign policy, Ganguly and Mukherji rightly avoid the temptation to offer a comprehensive account. Their focus instead is on India's relations with two major powers (the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia), India's principal adversaries (Pakistan and China), and New Delhi's successful engagement with Southeast Asia as part of its mid-1990s initiative on "Looking East." The chapter on foreign policy also briefly touches on the nuclear question that consumed so much diplomatic and military energy during the last three decades.

Ganguly and Mukherjee delineate with ease the main lines of New Delhi's diplomatic activity in the three decades that followed 1980:

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The Cold War's end made it exceedingly difficult for India to continue with its policies of non-alignment and Third World solidarity. Yet structure alone cannot fully explain the changes that came about. Unless key individuals at critical junctures had chosen to undertake different pathways and seize opportune moments, India would have faced the distinct possibility of marginalization in the emergent global order (p. 55).

This assessment whets our appetite for more intensive analyses of the sources of change in India's foreign policy. Besides the Cold War's end, one other structural factor that compelled changes in India's foreign policy comes readily to mind: the collapse of India's economic model of state-led socialism at around the same time as the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The change in India's economic development strategy is fully detailed in another chapter of the book. In retrospect, India's decision to embark on economic liberalization and globalization had a far bigger impact on India's foreign policy than the end of the Cold War.

Whereas India's total merchandise trade in 1980 was \$22 billion, it reached nearly \$780 billion in 2011. Well before the mid-2010s, it will cross the consequential \$1 trillion mark. Merchandise trade now accounts for more than 40% of the nation's GDP, which is a stunning transformation for a country that had consigned itself to the world's economic backwaters until 1991. India's growing economic muscle and the prospects for rapid growth are at the heart of the current international perception of India's rise as a potential great power.

On the foreign policy front, economic change has given India leverage to build more solid relations with the West, especially the United States, and to improve its international standing in the nuclear order. The reform process has also allowed India to reintegrate itself into the economic and political structures of East Asia.

Economic change has also begun to demonstrate the potential for structural change in India's relations with its two main adversaries—China and Pakistan. China is India's largest trading partner in goods—their bilateral commerce rose from less than \$1 billion in the late 1990s to \$74 billion in 2011. Although the growing trade between the two countries has not resulted in a resolution of their long-standing boundary dispute, it has generated a very different template for the conduct of India's relations with China. Even Pakistan has begun to recognize the importance of the "China model" and has ended five decades of reluctance to trade with India.

Amid India's deepening economic interdependence with the rest of the world, New Delhi's appreciation of the developing world has begun to change as well. From a past view of third-world nations as part of an anti-Western trade

union, New Delhi now sees them as markets for its products, sources of raw material, potential recipients of India's expanding foreign aid, and partners in the promotion of India's increasingly global interests.

Ganguly and Mukherji also open the door for a deeper investigation of the nature of agency in the making of Indian foreign policy. Scholars of Indian foreign policy would want to study the changing nature of India's domestic polity—strong regional parties and weak coalition governments at the center—and its impact on the making of India's foreign policy. If India's foreign policy has undergone a dramatic change since the 1980s, is there a new national consensus on the principles of its external orientation? If there is one, how has it been organized?

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's decisions to conduct nuclear tests in May 1998, declare India as a nuclear weapon state, and proclaim the United States a "natural ally" have been widely seen as a reflection of the Hindu nationalism of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a decisive rejection of the Nehruvian legacy. This left-leaning liberal critique, however, leaves us with two difficult propositions that need to be examined in greater detail. If Vajpayee's foreign policy was an assertion of Hindu nationalism, how does one explain his persistent overtures to Pakistan despite deep domestic skepticism? Equally challenging is the problem of substantive continuity in the foreign policies of Vajpayee and his successor from the left-of-center Congress Party.

There is thus a real paradox that those following Ganguly and Mukherji in the study of India's transformation since the 1980s must grapple with. While India is poised to become one of the world's largest economies and a major power, many traditional tendencies in India's worldview seem to be re-emerging. There is a renewed fascination with nonalignment and a more vigorous emphasis on strategic autonomy.¹ Even as it deepens military cooperation with the United States, India remains an enthusiastic participant in the BRICS Forum and a vocal champion of a multipolar world. Despite the extraordinary transformation of India's foreign policy since the 1980s, some ideas seem eternal.

¹ See Sunil Khilnani et al., "Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century," Centre for Policy Research, Working Paper, January 2012 ≈ http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf.

India Since 1980

Teresita C. Schaffer

With *India Since 1980*, Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji have written a compact, readable account of how India has changed in the past 30 years. The choice to write about the period since 1980 was not theirs—this book is part of a series on “The World Since 1980.” The terms of reference make for a somewhat awkward period in which to analyze contemporary India; I would probably have started my “transformation” story ten years later, using the preceding periods as the “before” part of a before-and-after story.

The authors build their analysis around four transformations of the Indian scene: political, marked by unprecedented mobilization of hitherto marginalized social groups; economic, with the move from state-centered to more market-oriented policies; foreign policy, as India’s global role expanded and its most important international relationships shifted toward the United States while Russia’s role diminished; and political ethos, as the founders’ secularism was challenged by a more assertive Hindu nationalism.

Three of these four transformations form the core of most briefings about contemporary India. On the political side, Ganguly and Mukherji devote much of their analytical effort to the emergence of the *dalits* (former “untouchables”) and backward castes, and to me this is the strongest part of the book. Taken together with the “plebiscitary politics” of Indira Gandhi, the greater prominence of hitherto marginalized groups has led to a decline of the political institution-building that parties used to do. Today, local and state offices are increasingly in the gift of national rather than state leaders, with a corresponding decline in the role of parties in developing politicians skilled at running democratic institutions. Ganguly and Mukherji see in this phenomenon a breakdown of political institutions. What does not come through as clearly as it might, however, is that “plebiscitary politics” were in part designed to provide a direct link for Congress to the vote banks of dalit voters, and that these voters’ conclusion that they were being taken for granted fed into the rise of new parties that appealed directly to the lower castes.

The authors pass relatively lightly, however, over another important aspect of India’s political transformation—the slow but steady decline in the heft of the parties with national aspirations, Congress and the Bharatiya Janata

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Party (BJP), and the increase in the importance of single-state parties. These are not unrelated phenomena. A number of the single-state party magnates got their start by leading backward castes in their states in a revolt against the upper-caste-dominated establishment. But the geographic dimension has a tremendous impact on the functioning of India's political institutions. This extends even to foreign policy, as we have seen in the critical and often disruptive intervention in India's policy toward some of its neighbors by chief ministers in adjacent states, notably West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Moreover, because single-state party leaders have thus far found it necessary to stay within their home states and tend their own political bases, they have not fully entered the competition for leadership in New Delhi.

India's economic transformation has been widely discussed and indeed is one of the drivers behind the transformation of India's social dynamics and foreign policy. Ganguly and Mukherji stress the transformation in economic policymaking and make the important but often overlooked point that precursors of the liberalization policy were visible during the 1980s. They note the increasing importance of the private sector, especially since the high-growth industries are mainly private. I would argue that the political system has not yet digested the implications of this change.

I would also place greater weight than they have on the rapid growth India has achieved through this liberalization. The taste of economic success has changed attitudes toward economic policy, both within the government and in the wider, policy-aware public. In particular, economic growth has led to a shift in foreign policy priorities, with trade, investment, and energy security emerging as central foreign policy and strategic goals.

The authors are correctly critical of India's weak performance in social development, notably education and especially health. As they point out, this will be the test of the next couple of decades, both for India's human development and for its future economic growth. This book does not reproduce the many studies that have been published in recent years about the number of high school and university graduates that India will need to sustain its growth rates. Fixing primary education, in other words, will be necessary but not sufficient.

The third of the oft-noted transformations is in India's foreign policy. Ganguly and Mukherji treat this as principally a function of the end of the Cold War. That momentous development has indeed been critical to the emergence of a new, more pragmatic Indian foreign policy, with Russia playing a much smaller role and the United States a larger one.

However, the authors largely pass over the impact of India's economic transformation on foreign policy. The "ballast" they speak of in India's relations

with the United States is largely the result of dramatically increased private economic ties, which are likely to continue more or less regardless of what the governments do. India's larger profile in international institutions similarly reflects the country's greater economic weight in the world. The authors also underplay, in my judgment, the elements of continuity in India's outlook on the world, especially the broad commitment to strategic autonomy, which makes any Indian government reluctant to get too close to the United States and leads to a very cautious approach to multilateral engagement.

Ganguly and Mukherji's final transformation, the diminishing salience of secularism in India's political ethos, is not part of the commonly heard transformation narrative. The founders of the Indian republic saw India as quintessentially diverse, and embraced that diversity as part of India's immutable character (especially in contrast to Pakistan's Islamic identity). The authors describe, with evident concern, how a self-consciously Hindu challenge to this ethos of diversity has arisen from many quarters, not limited to the Hindu nationalist political party. They in effect argue that this contest has yet to be decided. I agree, and I suspect that if it is ever decided, it will be the result of the social and economic transformations described above. As people whose parents were largely excluded from the modern economy find jobs in India's growth industries, and as more leaders emerge from groups that were previously purely followers in the political system, the country will need to find a new way of balancing diversity and group loyalty. It would take a better crystal ball than mine to determine how that will look.

A short (under 200 pages) book summarizing the most important trends in contemporary India is certainly valuable. But perhaps because my professional engagement with India goes back before 1980, I found this book insightful and frustrating by turns. A short book inevitably cannot cover everything, but I disagree with some of the authors' choices about what to leave out. I am not sure the result will actually work for the "sophisticated non-expert" audience that Cambridge's "The World Since 1980" series is aiming at; at multiple points in the book, there are references that would be obscure to anyone but an India hand. But the book's strengths, especially the discussion of social movements, make a very complex subject accessible to those not steeped in the lore of caste politics, and this alone makes the book worthwhile.

A Changing India's Search for Leadership

Harsh V. Pant

In more ways than one, India stands at a crossroads today in its sixth decade since independence. Politically, democracy in India is thriving as new alliances emerge virtually every election cycle and governments, at both the regional and national levels, are thrown out at regular intervals by a populace that demands better governance from the ruling elites. Economically, the country continues to perform well, despite the inefficiencies of the government, primarily due to the dynamism of its private sector. And increasingly India is not shy to assert itself on the global stage as a power that can shape and possibly transform the emerging global balance of power.

But beyond the hype of a “new” India, there is another story. Despite all the claims that India is a rising power, the country is passing through a serious crisis. The government in New Delhi is facing a credibility test as the nation has been besieged by a plethora of corruption scandals in recent months. From the Commonwealth Games to telecommunications, there have been scandals galore, and the government has found it difficult to operate amid demands by the opposition and the civil society for greater accountability. The Indian government is paralyzed to the point of looking like a lame duck, given that there is no political will to make tough decisions and follow them through. Dark clouds are gathering on the economic horizon, with many questioning the ability of the Indian government to initiate the much-needed second generation of economic reforms.

India has always been a land of myriad contradictions, but these contradictions have been accentuated over the last three fateful decades. In *India Since 1980*, Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji, two of the most prolific and perceptive observers of contemporary India, tell this fascinating story of the momentous changes underway in the country by using the conceptual frame of what they term the “four revolutions”: the deepening of Indian democracy, secularism, economic reforms, and changing Indian foreign policy. These are huge themes to cover in a single volume, and the authors should be commended for presenting a succinct and rigorous analysis in an eminently readable form.

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Given my research interest in Indian foreign policy, this discussion will largely focus on those parts of the book that delve into changing Indian foreign policy priorities in recent decades. The authors rightly highlight the crucial role that structural changes and key individuals at critical junctures have played in allowing New Delhi to make some significant changes in its foreign policy priorities. The impact of the end of the Cold War has been evident in almost all spheres of Indian foreign policy, with the authors focusing particularly on India's outreach to Israel, the transformation of U.S.-India relations, India's emergence as an overt nuclear power in 1998, the ushering in of a cautious change in Sino-Indian relations, the maintenance of an important defense relationship with Russia, and the extension of relations with Southeast Asia.

A broad overview of these changes succeeds in bringing out the choices that India has been making over the last three decades. It is in the last section of the chapter on foreign policy that the authors present some of their most important and interesting insights. They exhort Indian elites "to begin a discussion of the principles that might undergird Indian foreign policy" (p. 55). I have also commented along similar lines in my own work. It is not that there are no debates in India on the foreign policy choices facing the nation, but rather that these debates are happening in an intellectual vacuum with the result that micro issues dominate the foreign policy discourse in the absence of an overarching framework. A major power's foreign policy cannot be effective in the absence of a guiding framework of underlying principles that is a function of both the nation's geopolitical requirements and its values. In India, that big debate is still awaited, though a few recent attempts to articulate broad intellectual principles to guide foreign policy priorities suggest that the idea of nonalignment continues to enjoy wide support among members of the Indian intelligentsia. Ganguly and Mukherji want Indian elites to devise a new set of guiding principles for foreign policy, and I agree. But it is more likely that in the absence of new thinking, nonalignment will continue to be India's default position. And even if it might only be rhetoric, this reliance on nonalignment will have some significant costs attached to it. This will be particularly true as the competitive dynamic between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific becomes more acute.

India is trying to figure out its position in the contemporary international system, and because the system itself is in a state of flux, the complexities facing India are enormous. The loosening of the structural constraints imposed by the Cold War has given India greater flexibility in carving out its foreign policy. The changes in the structure of the international system have enabled India to pursue a "multivector" foreign and security policy, allowing the country to

strengthen its ties with all major global-power centers, including the United States, the European Union, China, Russia, and Japan. But the search for India's rightful place in the global balance of power continues because India cannot continue for long with its multidimensional foreign policy without incurring significant costs. Ganguly and Mukherji discuss India's evolving ties with the United States and China and provide a helpful overview. But it would have been interesting, and perhaps more fruitful, to locate Indian foreign policy more substantively within the changing regional balance of power in Asia, where China's growing prowess is challenging U.S. predominance and India is trying to work with the United States to manage this fast-changing structural reality. The really interesting issue here is how India will combine its rhetoric of nonalignment with the structural imperative of close ties with the United States. So far there seems to have been no long-term strategic assessment of this in New Delhi.

This inability to think strategically remains Indian foreign policy's major vulnerability, and India's lack of capacity in dealing with its growing commitments is increasingly coming into sharp relief. The authors rightly highlight the small size of the Indian foreign service and the lack of specialized functional and area expertise. Yet there is a larger problem with the overall institutionalization of Indian foreign and security policy decision-making. It is often assumed that India has the necessary institutional wherewithal to translate its growing economic and military capabilities into global influence, even though the Indian state continues to suffer from weak administrative capacity in most areas of policymaking. The authors rightly underscore the decay that has seeped into the nation's institutions in areas where the demands of political mobilization seem to have exceeded existing capacity. In the realm of foreign and security policy, however, there was hardly any credible institutional capability to begin with. The personalization of foreign policy has always been a unique attribute of Indian policymaking, but the costs of this approach are rising by the day as the capacity of existing political leadership is failing to keep pace with growing demands on Indian foreign policy. This personalization of foreign policy and its consequences underscore a larger theme that pervades the book but is not sufficiently highlighted. There is a leadership deficit in India at the political level. The mystique of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is eroding but it has not been replaced by an alternative national leadership. There are regional leaders who are doing well, but their appeal remains geographically limited. The opposition parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have failed to present an alternative leadership that is able to mobilize public opinion at a national level. None of the parties have leaders who seem capable of rising to

the nation's many crucial challenges with the sense of urgency and the creative vision that is called for.

Political disarray is a symptom of something insubstantial and weightless in the current state of the Indian polity. Politics in India has ceased to be a contest of ideas and has become entirely a cast of characters that take center stage from time to time, entertain us with their antics, and then disappear into oblivion. There is no vision from either of the two main parties as to where India should be heading in these crucial early years of the 21st century. There is nobody who can act larger than the moment, nobody being propelled by anything deeper than the last news cycle. This generation of Indian political leaders is confronting a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Yet so far they have failed to project any real authority and thereby give the world a reason to believe that India is being governed in any sense of the term.

At crucial moments in its history, a nation needs leadership that can inspire, rally the nation to some higher ideal, and infuse people with confidence. Regrettably, there is no such leadership in sight in India. Is it any wonder then that India continues to look to Bollywood and its cricket pitches in search of heroes? All four revolutions that Ganguly and Mukherji explore in this book—democracy, secularism, economic reforms, and changing foreign policy—face challenges as institutions decay and the political leadership remains bereft of a sense of purpose. It is a tribute to the scholarship of the authors that they are able to celebrate India's achievements over the last three decades, while at the same time highlighting the challenges the nation faces in the coming decades with a clarity and verve that are rare in academic writing.

Reading India's Transformation, From the Outside In

Jason A. Kirk

Sumit Ganguly may be the most prolific political scientist working on India today. In just the past five years, his name has appeared on no fewer than a dozen books covering topics in India's foreign policy, international relations, and security. In *India Since 1980* Ganguly teams up with Rahul Mukherji, a leading scholar in his own right who specializes in India's political economy, to produce a concise but comprehensive introduction to the world's largest democracy.

The book offer readers a rigorous account of India as a rising power. Its equally wide-ranging yet compact discussion of internal state-and-society dynamics is especially impressive, and perhaps because I was relatively less familiar with their perspectives in these areas, I found these discussions to be the book's most engaging. However, the chapters on each of the "four revolutions" underway since 1980—in foreign policy, economic development, democratic mobilization, and secularism—are all skillfully executed. Below, I will briefly comment on the authors' treatment of each.

But first, the book's periodization deserves particular consideration. As a publisher's note explains, this book is part of the Cambridge University Press series "The World Since 1980," which includes titles on other important countries and regions. In any case, 1980 works well as a meaningful (if approximate) marker for several crucial turning points in India's politics and international relations. As a teacher at a liberal arts institution, I tried both to read this book as my students might read it and to think about what distinguishes this volume from other generalist works that might be used in an advanced undergraduate course. I can almost envision using *India Since 1980* as a stand-alone text, which is nothing short of remarkable given its mere 200 pages. And although I might supplement it with other material on the earlier decades or on specific topics, this does not mean that the book's historical demarcation is a shortcoming. On the contrary, as post-independence India arrives at the ripe young age of 65, it makes perfect sense to approach its political history in roughly two halves.

The first period—a backstory that the authors recount judiciously when necessary—begins with independence in 1947 and runs to the late 1970s or early 1980s. This period encompasses the Nehruvian era of state-building, central planning for economic development, and pursuit of a nonaligned foreign policy.

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Crucially, it also subsumes the initial dominance and later deterioration of the Congress Party, and culminates with the Janata Party coalition leading India's first non-Congress central government from 1977 to 1980, the period after the national trauma of the 1975–77 Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. For all its turbulence, this period is relatively straightforward—even romantic—political history: there are the formidable, if highly contrasting, father-daughter figures of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, the story arc of the Congress Party, and the international backdrop of the Cold War.

But in the post-1980 period, a coherent narrative breaks down: India's story becomes “a million mutinies now,” as V.S. Naipaul called his acclaimed 1990 travelogue. Here history-as-biography gives way to more intricate analyses of structural changes. The challenge is that these changes “have not moved in tandem but have overlapped with one another,” as Ganguly and Mukherji observe (p. 1). The contemporary era requires a framework for understanding the causal relationships linking the Indian state to global market forces, subaltern social change, and the evolving regional and international milieus.

A book as concise as *India Since 1980* cannot definitively capture all of these interconnections, but it does render each of the four revolutions comprehensible on their own terms. And in doing so, the book invites a new generation of scholars to pose their own questions about the complex relationships among foreign policy, economic transformation, political mobilization, and secularism. Ultimately, Ganguly and Mukherji conclude, “India has attempted a bold experiment in democracy and development” (p. 167)—no less so after 1980 than during the Nehruvian era. But while democracy and political mobilization “have empowered hitherto marginalized communities,” they also, “in turn, have created significant challenges for governance” (p. 169). Market-friendly policies and “a decidedly pragmatic orientation” (p. 169) in foreign policy have raised India's global profile, but they have not put an end to deprivation or the dangers stemming from continuing tensions with Pakistan and China.

The chapter “The Transformation of India's Foreign Policy” begins with the briefest of summaries describing the pre-1980 period, opening with the assertion that “from the vantage point of the Cold War's end, India's pursuit of a foreign policy based upon nonalignment now appears quaint at best and hypocritical at worst” (p. 18). This is a reasonable statement through 20/20 hindsight, but as both authors know, there were significant structural and ideological reasons for nonalignment, which they can only briefly enumerate in the chapter. This is one of the few instances in which the book's post-1980 focus is a conspicuous constraint; the reader will have to look elsewhere for a

fuller exposition of Nehruvian foreign-policy thought or to understand why, even today, notions of nonalignment continue to resonate in some quarters among India's political and intellectual classes. But to their credit, the authors have provided particularly helpful footnotes in this chapter, pointing to classic works covering the pre-1980 period on topics including India's relations with the superpowers, Sino-Indian amity to enmity, the conflict with Pakistan, and the nuclear issue. The curious reader is well prepared to dig deeper.

Moreover, the upshot of historical brevity is a focused analysis of more contemporary concerns. The foreign policy chapter really gets rolling with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979, which presented "a structural dilemma for India's leaders," given that nonalignment had by then given way to formal Indo-Soviet friendship and cooperation (since 1971) and because General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan was suddenly transformed "from being a virtual pariah state to one of vital strategic significance to the United States" (p. 22). The Soviet invasion "also came at a particularly inopportune moment for India's domestic politics," after the Janata Party coalition had splintered but before a rehabilitated Indira Gandhi returned to office (p. 22). This juxtaposition of external crisis and internal disarray is a very effective way to lead off the chapter's analysis of Indian foreign policymaking during an era of complicated domestic politics. It renders India's predicament at the end of the Cold War as less of a bolt from the blue than it has appeared in some other accounts. Finally, this portrayal sets up implicit comparison and contrast with the period after September 11, when India again faced the predicament of a U.S. alliance with Pakistan and yet still managed to pursue a breakthrough "strategic partnership" with the United States.

The chapter "India's Economic Transformation" also benefits from the post-1980 periodization. Aligning their account with recent reinterpretations by leading scholars, the authors show how initial attempts at industrial deregulation from the mid-1970s were "consolidated in the 1980s," and how this important decade "laid the ideational and political foundations for the tectonic policy shifts of 1991" (p. 61) that followed a severe balance-of-payments crisis. Significantly, "the 1980s also witnessed the birth of comparative advantage in India's information technology sector" (p. 77), which of course draws global interest today. But the authors do not avoid the less successful reform stories in physical infrastructure and rural development. And while they endorse the view that "the proportion of people living below the poverty line in India has declined more sharply" after 1991 (p. 102), they also acknowledge "a growing gap in the rates of growth between the country's richest and poorest states" and the increasing concentration of India's (and

the world's) poor “in large, populous heartland states, such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh” (p. 103).

The chapters “Political Mobilization in India” and “Indian Secularism Since 1980” direct attention to the Mandal-Mandir dualism of the subordinate caste revolution and the Hindu nationalist movement (alongside distinct trends in centrifugal regionalism and the evolution of Indian federalism, which deserve fuller discussion than the space here permits). On the first, the reader is introduced to colorful lower-caste leaders Laloo Prasad Yadav and Kumari Mayawati, who for years dominated the political scenes in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, respectively. Such politicians have made masterful use of “symbolic appeals against discrimination in order to gain personal popularity rather than promote a genuine development agenda” (p. 170), an unintended ramification of the mobilization that followed the 1980 Mandal Commission Report, which called for caste-based affirmative action in public sector employment. Here again is a reason to see 1980 as an important turning point.

But the authors' most acerbic criticism is reserved for “ideologues within the Bharatiya Janata Party and its associated organizations” in the Hindu nationalist movement (p. 141). The BJP was established in 1980 as the successor to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and as the political arm of the Sangh Parivar family of organizations that also includes the groups Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Ganguly and Mukherji acknowledge the moderating constraints that the coalition government placed on the BJP during its 1998–2004 period of leadership at the center. But they offer an unsparing appraisal of the brutal sectarian conflict that episodically accompanied the party's ascent and wielding of state power—from the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in service of the Ram Mandir (temple) cause, to its direct offspring in the carnage at Godhra, Gujarat, a decade later. There, a train carrying Hindu activists was set ablaze as it passed through a predominantly Muslim district. This tragedy ignited systemic pogroms directed at Muslims across the state. Today, another decade has passed and Narendra Modi still leads a BJP government in Gujarat. Although the authors acknowledge the Hindutva movement's internecine disarray after India's 2004 elections, they argue that it would be unwise to dismiss the movement as a spent political force.

Indian secularism, Ganguly and Mukherji maintain,

is not dead—yet. But its health is poor, and it may be facing a slow demise. The stakes are huge. If secularism breaks down decisively in India, this will spell the rise of “illiberal democracy” in that country and raise grave questions about the sustainability of liberal democracy across the entire postcolonial world (p. 147–48).

Seen in this context, then, for all of the challenges that coalitions may pose to the crafting of coherent foreign policy and economic management, it may be a silver lining if, as Ganguly and Mukherji predict, “coalition governments are likely to be a fixture in India for some time to come” (p. 8).

A Story of Four Revolutions: Mechanisms of Change in India

Aseema Sinha

Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji’s *India Since 1980* presents a bold and ambitious argument about change across and within India. Its unique contribution lies in its description of four distinct revolutions: social-political, economic, foreign policy, and religious. While many recent books have noted changes in India’s economy and foreign policy, *India Since 1980* will be known for its juxtaposition of four different themes in one short, pithy volume. Even if one may disagree with the authors’ choice of the four dimensions of change, the book’s dominant message is that India is changing across a whole range of policies and arenas.

India Since 1980 represents an emerging, although not fully accepted, consensus of the need to privilege change over continuity in our understanding of India. The conventional understanding of India is of strong historical legacies and path dependence. Most tend to see India through the lens of continuing chaos, disorder, and persistent violence and conflict. This is usually attributed to the nexus of old vested interests that are locked in. In contrast, this book gently urges us to shift the frames and thematic lenses through which we view India. *India Since 1980* tells a story of a country experiencing multiple and simultaneous transformations. The book is also notable for its optimistic tone, with its focus on the making of India into a more “representative polity” (p. 2) as well as on positive trends such as the resilience of independent regulatory institutions (p. 9). The authors observe: “The rise of violent religious intolerance, the failure of national governments to curb it, and the growth of political corruption are all dangerous and corrosive trends. Yet focusing on them alone

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would provide a sadly incomplete account of Indian democracy” (p. 9). Conflict and violence is an ongoing reality in India but so is change and the persistent demand for development.

According to the authors, this change in India has been long in the making but is no less significant as a result. I agree. Even if India, unlike many countries of the post-Communist region, did not experience a massive change in one instant, it is reaching a tipping point, when all the slow and incremental changes over the past decades are cumulating and coming together. In this respect, the book is not alone, as many scholars on India have grappled with this issue.¹ These books together paint a picture of India that is at odds with our preexisting conceptions and ideas about the prospect of change in India.

While there are some problems with the authors’ specific claims, given the book’s ambitious frame, the arguments would be best served by taking the research agenda suggested by the book’s foreword. The important analytical question is: Do the changes described by the authors demand a new research agenda for the study of Indian politics and political economy? I would argue for such a new framework and new research questions to understand the combination of the four revolutions.

First, however, I have a few specific problems with some interpretations in the book. The Indian story of change needs to be placed in comparative perspective. The revolutions in India are different from changes in post-Communist countries and in Latin America, and are even more striking for that reason. Comparatively, the changes in India represent a “change within institutions” rather than “a change of institutions.”² Change in India has been rapid but has also occurred within the institutional framework inherited from the past. India did not undergo a democratic transition or the kind of “big bang” economic shock that required not only policy reform but also the creation of new markets and private actors. This comparative perspective implies that the puzzle of how change happens deserves serious analysis and that we

¹ For example, see Sanjay Ruparelia, Sanjay Reddy, John Harriss, and Stuart Corbridge, eds., *Understanding India’s New Political Economy: A Great Transformation?* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Indian Politics and Society Since Independence: Events, Processes and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Akhil Gupta and K. Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *The State in India after Liberalization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Atul Kohli, *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). The volume *Understanding India’s New Political Economy* deserves special mention because it is one of the few books to pose the question about multiple transformations in terms of “liberal economic reforms, the ascendance of Hindu cultural nationalism, and the empowerment of historically subordinate classes through popular democratic mobilization” in a parallel way. The volume’s editors call this India’s “Great Transformation.”

² Kenneth Shepsle, “Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1, no. 2 (1989): 131–49.

should attend to the institutional fabric and global levers of change that may have created the conditions for many revolutions. As the authors themselves document in the four chapters, change has crept in slowly and sometimes without design or intention.

The book could also have focused attention on the ideational and conceptual frames in Indian politics that are melting into air.³ What is striking about change in India is that it is not only a change of interests, coalitions, and policies but also a reconceptualization of key ideational notions and frames. Notions of socialism, nationalism, antipathy to the profit motive, and India's status as a developing country, as well as ideas about development, are being modified and debunked. To be sure, the chapter on foreign policy mentions the decline of nonalignment as an ideational frame, but more systematic attention to other shifting "master frames" of India would have been an important contribution of the book. India offers a fascinating laboratory to the cultural historian, especially in the current era. Many postmodern scholars need to re-learn the skills of a historian to document the fascinating changes evident in the Indian discursive landscape and leave behind the fashionable theorizations that instead preoccupy them.

It is important to distinguish between two different kinds of consequences for democracy of the political mobilization that the authors describe. India has witnessed not only the silent revolution—the rise of lower-caste and regional identities—but also the rise of the Hindutva movement, marked by the ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This rise of religious nationalism represents a shift toward a form of majoritarianism that may run counter to the trend toward greater representation. So, India is undergoing two different social revolutions, and they run into different directions in terms of their effects. One effect is a positive one for representativeness and inclusiveness, and the other effect, while increasing elite competition, may have negative consequences for the quality of Indian democracy.

Ganguly and Mukherji, however, raise larger issues of the timing, causal mechanisms, and sources of the changes they describe so well. Thus, the book calls for an analytical argument about causal drivers and levers of change. Perhaps that was not possible in a short book, but this argument deserves some discussion.

What are the causes and sources of the changes described in *India Since 1980*? I argue that there are three distinct sources of the four revolutions taken together. The first arises from below: from changes in the economic structure,

³ Karl Marx famously wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, "All that is solid melts into air."

class composition, and class and collective action. The rise of regional states in terms of both political changes and economic developments created political and social mobilization at different levels of the polity.⁴ These bottom-up changes include the rise of agrarian capitalists, the diversification of industrialization across regions and sectors, the rise of rich peasant classes, the emergence and consolidation of service and technocratic capital, and the deepening of the Indian middle classes. They also include the spread of literacy and with it expectations across India's hinterland. According to the 2011 census, 74% of the Indian population is now literate. The movement at the base of Indian society out of traditional poverty but yet into new kinds of poverty is fueling the changes described in the revolutions related to political and social mobilization as well as the demand for economic reforms.⁵ New winners and new losers have been created in India's political economy. Interestingly, the losers are demanding greater participation in the new economy, creating a revolution of rising expectations.⁶

There is also an external and top-down lever of change that originates at the national and international levels. India's slow but irreversible entry into the global marketplace, changing geopolitical and geoeconomic realities, and new global regimes have created new sources of transformation within India's politics and economy.⁷ *India Since 1980* acknowledges the role of changing geopolitical realities on India's foreign policy priorities and agendas.⁸ I would emphasize that even though this mechanism of change is the most obvious in an understanding of India's foreign policy, its effect on economic reforms, and also on the support for economic reforms across India's classes and groups, warrants more attention. Here, I am calling for a new analytical framework that incorporates international factors in our understanding of all—foreign, economic, and security policy—changes. Some domestic political changes also have deeper global roots. All parties within India are expressing different cleavages, shaped by global connections and India's position in the world. Insofar as rapid economic growth has begun to change India's foreign and

⁴ Aseema Sinha, *The Regional Roots of Developmental Politics in India: A Divided Leviathan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁵ Anirudh Krishna, "Escaping Poverty and Becoming Poor: Who Gains, and Who Loses, and Why?" *World Development* 32, no. 1 (2004): 121–36.

⁶ Aseema Sinha, "India: A Revolution of Rising Expectations" (unpublished manuscript).

⁷ I elaborate this argument in the forthcoming book *When David Meets Goliath: How Global Markets and Rules Are Shaping India's Rise to Power*.

⁸ Besides the book's authors, other scholars that focus on international dimensions include T.V. Paul and E. Sridharan. These scholars do a good job of focusing on security dimensions. However, scholars of democratization or the economy have not yet thought about how the international variables are beginning to affect domestic variables and vice versa.

security policy calculations, there is an important reverse effect of domestic changes on international positions. This reciprocal interaction of domestic and international aspects in a changing India needs a new analytical framework where the role of global factors, both as causes and as consequence, is analyzed explicitly. Scholars of India need to engage with and examine the intersection of international variables and domestic dimensions.

The third mechanism of change underlying the four revolutions is diffusion processes across different levels and themes. Diffusion can be seen in terms of the interaction among political, economic, and social mobilizations, which in turn is having an impact on India's foreign policy positions. A horizontal competition across Indian states and different regional elites and the tendency of the BJP to become more subaltern⁹ represent the intersection of at least three revolutions. Social groups and many actors are beginning to copy, and learn from, each other. The social revolution is beginning to affect the economic and foreign policy revolutions. Economic development has become the basis for India's foreign-policy standing, and therefore we need to assess the intersection of these overlapping revolutions. Even if the four revolutions originated at different times and are due to different causal mechanisms, they are beginning to feed into each other. Such linkages and diffusion processes are creating a feedback loop across the revolutions and deserve further scrutiny and research.

In sum, *India Since 1980* is quite interesting and pathbreaking for its reframing of India's past and future trajectories. India is not merely emerging as an economic powerhouse, but its history reveals multiple changes across four distinct dimensions. The shape of domestic politics and society is very different than before. Scholars would do well to pay attention to these changes despite continuities within India. In order to do so, however, it is important to develop a new framework that attends to microprocesses of change as well as to how the world shapes and is shaped by a changing India.

⁹ Tariq Thachil, "Embedded Mobilization: Nonstate Service Provision as Electoral Strategy in India," *World Politics* 63, no. 3 (2011): 434–69.

India Emerging?

Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji

We deeply appreciate the thoughtful and informed assessments of our book, *India Since 1980*. In a spirit of intellectual engagement, we seek to respond to some of the salient aspects of the commentaries on our work. To that end, we will expand on some of the issues that the various respondents have highlighted, question some of their claims, and address the possible avenues of further research that they have outlined.

At the outset we agree with C. Raja Mohan's pertinent comment that "many traditional tendencies in India's worldview seem to be re-emerging." He correctly underscores the recent discussions that seek to resurrect the concept of nonalignment and the renewed emphasis on strategic autonomy. His assessment is certainly on the mark when he suggests that this attempt to resuscitate what is a moribund doctrine is clearly paradoxical at a time when India may be poised to assume a far greater standing in global affairs, a position that New Delhi has long sought.

That said, we feel compelled to quibble with at least two of Mohan's key assertions. First, we believe that India's economic transformation in the early 1990s cannot be separated from the Cold War's end. In the absence of the Soviet collapse, along with its model of state-led development, India's policymakers would have found it much harder to finally bid adieu to the state-led, autarchic model of economic development that had neither generated significant economic growth nor substantially reduced poverty. The two issues may be analytically separated, but as a practical matter, they took place in tandem. Second, contrary to Mohan's claim, we do not agree that India's decision to test nuclear weapons was "an assertion of Hindu nationalism." As one of the two authors, Sumit Ganguly, has argued in his other scholarship, a combination of long-term threats from the People's Republic of China (PRC), the emergence of Pakistan as a strategic surrogate for the PRC in South Asia in the late 1980s, and inexorable U.S. pressures on

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India to accede to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), among other matters, led to the Indian nuclear weapons tests of 1998.¹

Like Mohan, Teresita Schaffer emphasizes the significance of India's economic policies in the transformation of its foreign policy. We have, for the most part, little quarrel with Schaffer's assessment of our work, with the exception of her parting comment that, "at multiple points in the book, there are references that would be obscure to anyone but an India hand." We genuinely believe that we made every effort to avoid obscure references and have sought to make the book understandable to the curious but nonspecialist reader. In the absence of a specific example of such recondite references, we are at a loss to address this criticism.

We are grateful to Harsh Pant for his favorable discussion of the foreign policy section of our book. One issue that he focuses on deserves further comment. We agree that the "inability to think strategically remains India's foreign policy's major vulnerability." However, we also believe that this lack of careful strategic analysis cannot be separated from the many infirmities and shortcomings of India's institutional capacity. As early as 1981, in a rather vigorous (if somewhat overstated) critique of India's foreign policy choices under Indira Gandhi, Shashi Tharoor, who is currently a Congress member of Parliament, trenchantly argued that India had paid dearly for an under-institutionalized foreign policy. His critique, which was especially relevant to the period that he had examined, continues to dog India's foreign and security policymaking apparatus. The size of India's foreign policy bureaucracy remains woefully inadequate, the training imparted to the entrants into the Indian Foreign Service remains antiquated, and knowledge of specialized subjects and regions continues to be extremely limited. Given these striking institutional drawbacks, it is indeed remarkable that India was actually able to make significant adjustments in its foreign and security policies at the Cold War's end. However, without addressing these critical lacunae it remains unclear if the country can negotiate a pathway to the great-power status that New Delhi so ardently seeks.

As with Pant's review, we find Jason Kirk's analysis of our work to be heartening. He does, however, raise a compelling question about the book's post-1980 focus, especially when it deals with the issue of the transformation of India's foreign policy. He fairly notes that we had to adhere to a predetermined date, 1980, to conform to the expectations of the book series. This date did

¹ Sumit Ganguly, "India's Pathway to Pokhran II: The Prospects and Sources of New Delhi's Nuclear Weapons Program," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 148–77.

present us with a dilemma when dealing with the question of the transformation of India's foreign policy. As most specialists would argue, the fundamental transformation of India's foreign policy, the persistent tug of nonalignment notwithstanding, came about in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the Cold War's end. Consequently, the revolution in India's foreign policy clearly did not emerge in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, as we emphasize in the relevant chapter, there is little or no question that the Soviet invasion constituted a dramatic exogenous shock to the region that forced India's policymakers to slowly reconsider their abject dependence on the Soviets for their security. Indeed, after overcoming an initial frustration with the Reagan administration's uncritical reliance on Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's military regime in Pakistan to prosecute a war in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, India responded favorably to some delicate overtures from the United States. In turn, Indian foreign policy started ever so imperceptibly to walk away from its vicious, reflexive anti-Americanism and the accompanying vacuous rhetoric of third world solidarity. Old habits, embedded in a process of path dependence, however, died hard. Consequently, it was not until the end of the 1980s and the conclusion of the Cold War that the country's foreign policy elite was forced to mostly unshackle their "mind-forged manacles"—to borrow a phrase from William Blake—and tentatively forge a new set of precepts to guide India's foreign policy choices.

Finally, we thank Aseema Sinha for underlining an innovative research agenda that can be usefully teased out from our work. First and foremost, we reiterate that India's economic transition offers valuable insights for the literature on transitions, which has a strong selection bias in favor of numerous accounts of authoritarian pathways. Authoritarian regimes, euphemistically called "hard states," disciplined powerful social actors such as industrialists, organized labor, and farmers. In these states, acquiring land for industrialization was easy. Laws limiting job security were executed in the name of enhancing productivity. Shifting gears from providing incentives favoring import-substituting industrialists to supporting exporters occurred rapidly and with great ease.

We find India's economic transformation to be in sharp contrast to many Asian transitions. Industrial deregulation in the 1980s favored the Indian business class but that did not engender globalization. Whereas China's trade-to-GDP ratio rose between 1980 and 1990 (22% to 29%), the same figure remained constant for India (16%). Labor laws could not be rewritten in India. Even today, after nearly two decades of reform, it seems impossible to charge farmers for electricity in many Indian states. Exclusive industrial enclaves

dubbed “special economic zones” had spurred growth in China. In India, on the other hand, similar enclaves were successfully resisted in states such as West Bengal, Maharashtra, Goa, and Punjab. In many critical areas of infrastructure, India also continues to lag behind. For example, Singapore and China have excellent ports, whereas India’s economic integration into the global economic order has occurred without a single world-class port.

It is easy, therefore, to conclude that India’s economy cannot be transformed. We argue otherwise. We find that economic ideas are important harbingers of change. When the dominant thinking supported import substitution, India could not be driven to promote exports, despite a serious balance-of-payments crisis in 1966. In 1991, by contrast, when the weight of technocratic ideas had moved considerably in the direction of export promotion and deregulation, India decided to jettison the old order. The 1980s were necessary for building a larger technocratic consensus, but the financial crisis of 1991 constituted the tipping point.

A tipping point model of economic change depends more on endogenous processes that undermine a system than exogenous shocks. Such an argument would suggest, for example, that a bridge collapsed not because of the last vehicle that crossed it but because of the manner in which its structure had been undermined over a long period of time.² These arguments are very different from a “punctuated equilibrium” model that relies on the role of external shocks. Likewise, India did not face its only severe financial crisis in 1991. Yet, this crisis had the greatest impact on policy change.³ Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and then finance minister Manmohan Singh led a technocratic team that desired change because they believed that the strategy of import-substituting industrialization had failed to deliver expected results. They thereby utilized this crisis to engender significant policy changes.

The concept of a tipping point is a relatively underexplored idea in political economy, but it is an important dynamic for change in India and many other countries that are fraught with powerful oppositional forces. India’s telecommunications sector, for example, was transformed not in 1991 but after a substantial effort on the part of the prime minister’s office to prod the private sector. The New Telecom Policy of 1999 reflected a consensus within the prime minister’s office and the Ministry of Finance that a financial crisis

² Rahul Mukherji, “Ideas, Interest and the Tipping Point: Economic Change in India,” *Review of International Political Economy* (forthcoming 2012).

³ Stephen D. Krasner, “Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics,” *Comparative Politics* 16, no. 2 (1984): 223–46.

in the telecommunications sector needed resolution. In their view, this could only be accomplished through a revitalized private sector.

We also agree with Sinha's suggestion about the role of bottom-up change. Indeed this is one of the central premises of our chapter on political mobilization. Though India's political system has remained unchanged since independence (barring a brief flirtation with authoritarian rule in the late 1970s), there is little question that Indian institutions have become more representative of the demographic features of the polity over time. To that end, we document how backward caste parties have increasingly come to the fore since the late 1960s. We also spell out the links between dramatic political mobilization and the growth of welfare programs in the chapter on economic transformation.

Finally, there is little question that developments at the global level have had significant impact on India's domestic political and economic arrangements. Nevertheless, the Indian state has, contrary to much polemical commentary, managed to jealously guard its autonomy. For example, India's response to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the balance-of-payments crisis in 1991 was nothing short of a sophisticated undertaking. Complex negotiations between India and the IMF produced one of the IMF's most successful structural adjustment programs in the developing world. At other times, India has worked closely with the United States in the group of 20 (G-20) but not in the World Trade Organization or in climate change negotiations. Finally, we agree with Sinha that further research on the diffusion of global processes in countries that strive for policy autonomy is likely to generate rewarding scholarly insights.

Where will the four trends that we have identified take India as it negotiates a new century? Some of the trends are structural, but these structures are hardly immanent. Social structures are the products of human agency. Consequently, key choices on the part of the Indian political leadership can shape the evolution of these structures. For example, the social revolution that is underway has both positive and retrograde features. While it has made Indian democracy more representative, it has also generated a brand of populist politics and helped reinforce primordial group identities. Continued pandering to populism has already exacted a toll on the Indian exchequer. Unless this propensity is curbed, the prospects of continued economic growth could well be blighted as hard budget constraints are routinely flouted. In turn, long-term poverty alleviation could also suffer as a consequence.

Populism has also had adverse effects on India's foreign policy. Parochial electoral concerns in particular states have acted as barriers to the pursuit of national interests and goals. Furthermore, faced with a turbulent global order,

some within India's attentive public have evinced a disturbing proclivity to fall back on the hoary slogans of yesteryear, notably nonalignment. Fortunately, others have expressed suitable doubts about the wisdom of any attempt to resurrect an atavistic ideological corpus. In sum, at this historical juncture India remains in flux. Since the future is hardly foreordained, the key debates underway about the scope of secularism, the pace of social change, the direction of economic policy, and the conduct of foreign relations will determine the country's global standing. ◆