Rob Jenkins *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. ix + 250 pp.

This is a very interesting book about the politics of the economic reform process in India in the 1990s. Based on years of detailed fieldwork in four Indian States (Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka and West Bengal) Jenkins develops an original interpretation of the political mechanisms that have made the reform process possible. Jenkins describes these mechanisms under three different headings (and this is the bulk of the book), namely incentives, institutions and skills. With regard to incentives, he argues that the political elite is willing to take risks (i.e. introduce reforms), because they are confident that the reforms will not fundamentally alter the political arena or their privileged position. Most Indian politicians know the rules of the game well and expect that even amidst or after reforms they will be able to continue to collect illegal income or build and strengthen their networks of patronage. Furthermore, according to Jenkins, the political elite is fully aware of the flexibility and malleability of interest groups, and it trusts that these interest groups will find new ways for coalition building when forced to do so. 'Politics as usual' will thus not end, and the reforms may even provide new opportunities for earning illegal incomes, strengthening support bases, etc.

Under the second heading, institutions, Jenkins describes the formal (mainly federal) and informal (mainly party networks) institutions. The way these institutions work helps the political elite to implement the reforms with surprising efficiency. The effect of the federal system is that opposition to reforms is less likely to emerge. Based on detailed accounts, Jenkins describes the various mechanisms that make States compete with each other, rather than unify to oppose the reforms. The political parties are described by Jenkins mainly in terms of the networks of relationships that they help to sustain. An important characteristic of Indian political parties is their porousness: the boundaries between party- and non-party networks are fuzzy and enterprising individuals/politicians may control various networks of influence. They can make use of these when negotiating policies and accommodating interests, but also for the purpose of intelligence-gathering. The porousness lengthens the time horizons of the politicians, something that is very important for the sustainability of the reforms, according to Jenkins.

Jenkins' third heading, skills, refers to the tactics used by politicians and party elites, which enable them to introduce the reforms by stealth, i.e. like a stealth bomber without being noticed by the political radar screen. Based on several examples, Jenkins concludes that the reformers have tried and often succeeded to cloak change in the disguise of continuity. By claiming one thing but doing another, reforms could be introduced without much opposition.

One of the interesting aspects of Jenkins' interpretations is his description of 'real democracy'. In contrast to the idealist image of democracy underlying much of the 'good governance' agenda, Jenkins shows that the capacity of the Indian state to introduce reform policies that appear to be sustainable is due to the underhanded and often untransparent tactics that are made possible by the political democratic institutions. The Indian state is capable, but often not transparent, while these two adjectives are often supposed to go together according to the 'good governance' ideologues. At the same time, Jenkins also criticizes the cynical view that the Indian democracy is fully captured by powerful interest groups which can prevent any reform that would affect their interests negatively.

One of the limitations of Jenkins' account is that it does not address and explain the substance of the reforms. He aims to explain why the reform process could proceed in India, and he analysed the political mechanisms that made the reform possible. The same mechanisms could, however, probably also facilitate a reform process of a different nature. In this respect, there is no substance in Jenkins' political analysis. There is no discussion about what is at stake in the reforms: changes in the dominant class coalition, increasing importance of international financial capital, shifts in the power and interests of the main interest groups, or whatever one may think is important. Jenkins approach may therefore be characterized as political science without political economy.

Having said that, I must also add that I do not know of any other study that contains so many detailed and insightful descriptions of the policy *process* in India. I can strongly recommend the book to anybody who is interested in the politics of reforms generally (his approach is original, and could inspire political scientists working on other regions of the world as well) or in the real day-to-day functioning of India's democratic institutions.

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