
*The Politics of Cultural Mobilization in India* investigates the relationship between politics and culture in India, and examines how the rise of Hindu nationalism, the politics of Temple, and other forms of cultural mobilization relate to the institutions of Indian politics. The book also explores the contextual connections between the “multiple denationalizing forces associated with globalization” and the contemporary cultural mobilization and political fragmentation in India. The contributors of this edited volume are scholars of religious studies, political science, anthropology, and history, and work primarily in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. The book is divided into three parts, with three essays in each partition.

The first part of the book, aptly titled *Ways of Looking*, looks at politics and political cultures through political performativity, cultural determinants, and ethnographic detail. Thomas Hansen’s *Politics as Permanent Performance* explains how political movements and parties create public moods and sentiments, construct images and spectacles, play with rumors and myth, and (mis) construe words and behaviors. Hansen uses an example of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra to explain how this organization, devoid of a coherent ideology, promotes itself using an ethno-historical imagery and xenophobic discourse of regional pride. The Shiv Sena is performance only, having resorted to corruption, violent street level agitation, incessant production of one-liners and rumors, and the glorification of youth, masculinity, and the ordinary. That the Shiv Sena participates in the grandiose celebration of festivals is developed further in Raminder Kaur’s *Fire in the Belly* arguing, that in contrast to the Nehruvian logics of modernity that had undermined the cultural card, the contemporary politicized celebrations of religio-cultural festivals, such as the Sena’s co-option of the Ganapati festival, have redrawn the map of social inclusivity to lend politics unwavering momentum and clearly demonize those that are excluded. However, neither Hansen nor Kaur explain persuasively how the celebrations of festivals actually and numerically increase the Sena’s clout. In other words, has the Shiv Sena really strengthened itself by celebrating festivals with increasing grandeur? In the third essay, Glyn Williams uses an ethnographic approach in *Rethinking West Bengal’s Political Stability* to explain
how the CPI (M) in West Bengal may look powerful given its remarkable longevity and the State’s macro-political stability. But in looking deeper, Williams successfully argues that there has been no great leap forward towards either popular socialism or revolutionary class consciousness, even if rural lower classes are undoubtedly more vocal than a generation ago. The weakness of political opponents, the fear of violence, and the provocation on Hindu-Muslim tension must be juxtaposed with the CPI (M)’s relatively effective pro-poor action and participatory politics, as well as careful maintenance of vote banks, to explain the relative stability of the State’s political machinery.

The second part of the book, *The Mechanics of Cultural Mobilization*, explains how strategic interests, the rebuilding of separationist caste and religious identities, and the employment of heroic myths serve as useful instruments to facilitate cultural mobilization. Gwilym Beckerlegge’s *The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s Tradition of Selfless Service* states that the RSS added layers of Hindu religious symbolism to its foundational identity as a “militant, communal organization with a humanitarian impulse and commitment to social welfare activism.” The larger purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that strategic considerations, such as a unified national tradition and the growth of affiliates, played a greater part in determining the course taken by the RSS than any “ideological commitment to notions of selfless service to humanity on the part of its leaders.” Edward Simpson’s *Hinduza as a Rural Planning Paradigm in Post-Earthquake Gujarat* uniquely examines the continued marginalization of Harijans and Muslims in the post-earthquake reconstruction in Gujarat. For example, the reconstructed Keshav Nagar is a village for caste Hindus primarily, while the newly constructed Indraprastha, given its uniform-style and low quality housing, has appealed to the others and, concomitantly, encouraged the formation of gated communities for the Patels elsewhere. From Gujarat we travel to Assam, where Jayeeta Sharma’s *Heroes of Our Times* explains how the myth of the gallant warrior Lachit has been invoked to bring together the frustrations and alienation of Assamese youth under the banner of unthinking, sectarian patriotism.

The final part of the book, *The State(s) and Cultural Mobilization*, shows how the nation is becoming both de-centered and re-centered based on varied definitions of territory and democratic success, as well as by the formation of more exclusive identities. Christophe Jaffrelot’s *From Indian Territory to Hindu Bhoomi* shows how the Nehruvian conception of terri-