
BOOK REVIEWS

Dilip Dutta

**Development under Dualism and Digital Divide in
Twenty-first Century India**

Springer, Singapore, 2018, 232pp., \$199, paperback.

Reviewed by Tom Barnes

This interesting book attempts to develop and apply theories of uneven economic development to the social problem of unequal access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in contemporary India. The author argues that the 'digital dividends of the rapidly spreading digital technologies in the Indian society as a whole are far from satisfactory' (p. 200) and underpinned by the 'tyranny of structural dualism' (p. 203).

The book appears in a 'Dynamics of Asian Development' series edited by the well-known scholar of Indian political economy, Anthony P. D'Costa. It has six chapters in total: an introduction on economic dualism, two chapters on India's post-independence economic development, a chapter on social sector development programs and on digital inequality, before concluding the book with a chapter which combines the author's empirical and theoretical concerns.

One of the most striking feature of the book is its level of empirical and descriptive detail. Aside from any other features, scholars and students interested in studies of economic development in South Asia could 'mine' the book for its extensive presentation of data. For example, there are a phenomenal 54 statistical tables in the book.

The level of descriptive detail means the book is not an easy read. Also, although the title of the book refers to India's 'digital divide', only one chapter (Chapter 5) focuses on this. Nor will Dutta's account of dualistic development suit every development scholar or political economist, with

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its contrast between a 'traditional' (or 'pre-capitalist') sector and a 'modern' (or 'capitalist') sector. Such language resembles the approach of very early - some would say outdated - theories which treated the informal sector as a 'waiting room' for people who could be brought into the formal industrial sector if only the appropriate growth-oriented economic policies were pursued by an ideal government (Geertz 1963; Hart 1973).

Criticisms aside, Dutta offers an interesting account of India's failure to embark upon the type of state-led, industry-based development envisaged by policymakers in the 1950s and 60s. He presents economic dualism as akin to 'compressed capitalism' (D'Costa 2014) - which is another way of saying 'uneven and combined development' - and argues that Indian society is in a state of 'disarticulation'. His understanding of development draws eclectically from class-based theories, especially those of Pranab Bardhan, and New Institutional Economics.

Two chapters on economic development history are very useful. Chapter 2 on the period 1947-1980 charts the first few Five Year Plans, the crises of foreign exchange and food production in the 1960s, the Green Revolution in agrarian technology as well as handy information on uneven development performances based on State-level data. Chapter 3 on the period from 1980-2017 joins a cast of critical international scholarship which places the origins of India's high growth economy in the carefully-managed, gradualist changes of the early-to-mid 1980s rather than the 'neoliberal' radicalism of the early 1990s.

Among a range of policy initiatives, I found the brief sections on the recently-enacted Goods and Services Tax (GST) (pp. 108-112) and Narendra Modi's radical 'demonetisation' policy (pp. 107-108) - that is, the sudden abolition of ₹500 and ₹1000 cash notes in late 2016 - timely and welcome. In both cases, more information and analysis would be useful; particularly in relation to Dutta's intriguing but unelaborated claim that demonetization is likely to generate 'a reduction in the degree of dualism' (p. 108).

In Chapter 5, the author lays a claim for the usefulness of actor-network theory and national innovation systems analysis to explore India's digital divide. This chapter offers some highlights, including a historical summary of the IT industry in India - one which compares favourably with other critical overviews (Saraswati 2012; D'Costa 2014) - and analysis of uneven IT-based development between Indian states. Dutta offers a further

descriptive account of recent developments in the platform economy like Babajob, UrbanClap, etc - India's versions of Airtasker and the like.

In short, this book represents a welcome attempt to locate the inequalities of social access to new technology within India's chaotic economic history. The overall detail on government-level data and the chapters on India's post-independence economic development are especially recommended to students interested in the political economy of South Asia.

References

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Saraswati, J. (2012) *Dot.compradors: Power and Policy in the Development of the Indian Software Industry*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Matt Withers

Sri Lanka's Remittance Economy: A Multiscalar Analysis of Migration-Underdevelopment

Routledge, London and New York, 2019, 178pp., \$230, hardback.

Reviewed by Christine Brickenstein

Matt Withers's first book, *Sri Lanka's Remittance Economy: A Multiscalar Analysis of Migration-Underdevelopment*, constitutes a thoroughly researched analysis of Sri Lanka's remittance dependent economy. Withers, a temporary labour migration expert with a background in Political Economy, competently utilises a mix of qualitative research and historical structural analysis to explore how remittance dependency ultimately reinforces underdevelopment and creates long-term unsustainable outcomes.