

Caste, Class and Capital: The Social and Political Origins of Economic Policy in India. By Kanta Murali. (Cambridge: University Press, 2017, 297 pp., £75, ISBN 978-1-107-15450-6).

India is one of the fastest-growing emerging economies in the world, with its anticipated growth expected to surpass that of one of its peers, China, in the following years, something made possible by the government's reform policies aimed at attracting private investment. However, despite this positive economic outlook, a great part of the Indian population remains overwhelmingly poor. How can these two realities coexist? In *Caste, Class, and Capital*, Kanta Murali aims to answer this question by analysing the political and social conditions that may lead to growth-oriented policies in democracies made up of largely poor electorates. Murali argues that since the economic reforms in 1991, Indian states have been in open competition with each other to procure private capital investment in order to generate growth, with each of them applying their own economic policies to achieve this goal despite being subject to similar legal, electoral and fiscal rules. Through the study of these variations in policy, the author manages to offer a novel approach to the politics of growth in India by examining the social origin of economic policies.

Murali presents two main claims as the basis of her argument: first, that policies vary according to the social base of voters (termed electoral coalitions by the author) that supports governments and that certain socioeconomic configurations, even those unrepresentative of the whole electorate (especially the more wealthy and business-friendly electoral coalitions) are more conducive to foster growth-oriented policies. Secondly, that such narrow coalitions can emerge within a poor electorate when symbolic or non-economic factors, that is, identity, ethnicity or nationalism, and in the case of India, caste rules electoral politics, favouring the fragmentation of the vote of the poor, thus preventing the formation of lower-class coalitions and, on the contrary leading to exclusionary politics. To contextualise her analysis, Murali provides an in-depth look at four case studies

that showcase this sort of political behaviour, evaluating the electoral coalitions and resulting policies in four states: Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Furthermore, the author also expands the scope of her argument by then applying it to a sample of 14 Indian states between 1992 and 2010.

The approach Murali takes to the relation between growth and economic policies in India is uncommon in the sense that it does not connect class directly with policy outcomes as one may expect, but rather places social identity, and particularly caste, as a starting point from which electoral support according to certain class configurations emerges and then leads to the application of economic policies based on that support. An in-depth study about the reasons why identity politics continue to play a determining role in India would have been an interesting addition to this approach, but understandably Murali chooses to focus on policy variation, as addressing such a broad and much-discussed question would ultimately distract from the main topic.

Even though India's identity politics is based on caste, religion and nationalism, and its patterns of growth are unique enough, comparisons with policies applied in other emerging countries in similar conditions could offer greater insights into the factors that favour growth-oriented politics. Murali does offer comparisons with other countries, especially Asian countries and former colonies, and examines the existing literature on developing economies. However, establishing a correlation with other members of the BRICS group, especially with China (whose economic status is similar to that of India) would have provided a more exhaustive comparison, given that nowadays India resembles the BRICS economies more than those previously mentioned, despite them possibly having similar origins.

These minor observations do not take from the fact that Murali's analysis is thorough, well-researched and very detailed. Although the extensive data presented can be overwhelming for some, the text still proves to be a worthy contribution to the existing literature on the politics of economic growth and policy making. Both



experts in political science and/or economics and the general reader will find in the author's clear and objective analysis a resource to study India's political economy. It remains to be seen if Murali's analysis will still hold true if India continues to climb the ranks among the devel-

oping countries to become a world economic power in its own right.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2018.76.21>

