

be giving overt general support for the policies and economic achievements of incumbent regimes. It is my impression that in most Southeast Asian countries, especially among intellectuals and the middle classes, there is a greater discontent with the style and processes of rule than is revealed by election results or by overt political activities. Because semi-authoritarian regimes prohibit independent polling of public opinion, these dimensions of politics remain unexplored. Of course, without reliable data on domestic public opinion, confirmation of trends either for or against democracy cannot be proven. Yet, it would be possible to give more attention to domestic critics when they have been vocal and to political exiles living abroad who provide some indication of the levels of domestic discontent over issues related to democratic reforms.

Although the central question posed by the authors was never answered conclusively, this study does make a valuable contribution to an understanding of the region. The accounts of the social problems and politics of each country are carefully constructed cameos that present a balanced and informed overview of each country. In each case study the readers are introduced to enough history to understand the complexity of the contending social forces within each country. The calculations of incumbent leaders and the ideological foundations for each regime are placed against a backdrop of history, social problems, and economic development issues that confront each of the governments in the area. The scholarship of the work is sound and the thrust of the interpretations and analysis are both valid and significant. Considering the complexity and diversity of the region, the background accounts and analysis of social and political issues is of high quality and remarkably uniform across all the case studies. Because each major country is covered in from twelve to twenty pages, the accounts are necessarily brief. The accounts,

however, are focused on significant public policy issues, they are informed and current (to 1995), and most importantly, they are comprehensible and make a "very good read" for both the well-informed area specialist and the general reading public.

This is a book that deserves a wide readership in the West as well as Southeast Asia. The Western public can learn about the complexity and dynamism of Southeast Asia. The volume could also be appropriately used as a text for college courses. Southeast Asian readers will benefit from seeing their region through the eyes of and with the analytical tools of informed foreign scholars. Ultimately, the book could stimulate discussion and debate about political and democratic reforms and provide some focus for "the winds of change" that are sweeping over the region.

Gordon P. Means
Department of Political Science
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario
Canada L8S 4M4

Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India.
By Ashutosh Varshney. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995.

Using a political economy framework, Ashutosh Varshney, a political scientist at Harvard University, attempts to assess the impact of development and democracy on the power of the rural sector in India. In the West, he notes, the process of industrialization preceded the rise of democracy and tended to weaken the power of the rural sector in the early stages of development. As development progressed, however, the combined impact of industrialization and democracy expanded the power of the rural sector. This sequence, he argues, has not been repeated in India, where the introduction of democracy occurred prior to indus-

trialization. As a result, the peasantry became empowered almost from the start. Despite its early empowerment, however, the twin forces of poverty and cross-cutting cleavages in the Indian countryside have tended to act as major constraints on the extension of rural power.

Varshney's basic thesis is outlined in his brief introduction. The thesis is then developed in seven clear, concise, and well-documented chapters. These chapters review the agrarian policies of the Nehru years from 1947 to 1964, which focused on institutional reorganization and the reasons behind the shift in this policy to one based on price incentives and technological investment in the mid 1960s, which led to the green revolution. The book then goes on to trace the rise of agrarian power and peasant mobilization, the gains and losses of the rural sector, and an analysis of why economic outcomes have tended to lag behind political power.

The last chapter sums up Varshney's overall findings. Unlike elsewhere in the Third World, he concludes, the rural sector in India has acquired substantial political power as a direct result of the introduction of democracy. Democracy enabled the rural sector to mobilize and gradually extend its power from district and state levels to the national level. In the process, the Indian peasantry was able to overcome the problem of collective action by a combination of the political strategies adopted by its leaders and the opportunities provided by a democratic political system. Peasant leaders were highly successful in overcoming the free rider problem by uniting the countryside behind nonparty movements designed to press for higher prices on commercial crops and food crops in green revolution areas. The democratic character of the state reinforced this effort by enabling peasant mobilization to take place with minimal state repression.

Despite their enhanced role in the political system, Varshney argues, the Indian

peasantry faces a series of constraints on the further development of their power. First, rural power in India is concentrated at the legislative level but is severely limited at the executive level of Indian government. Second, rural power is self-limiting because of the existence of cross cutting cleavages that constantly threaten its solidarity. Finally, the power of the rural sector is constrained by the underlying reality of India's low level of economic development. In the West, the power of the rural sector was a result of the small size of the agrarian sector, the small percentage of food costs in individual budgets and the relatively low cost of subsidizing the agrarian sector. In a low income country like India, however, where 60 to 70 percent of the population produce 35 to 40 percent of national income, the costs of subsidies are enormous, and high prices threaten the very survival of the urban sector and the rural poor. Unlike the developed West, therefore, democracy and development in India clash directly with each other.

Given this dilemma, Varshney sees three possible futures for India. First, India may face a stagnation or decline in rural pressure as caste, ethnicity, and religion overwhelm economic interests, as was the case of the Sikhs in the Punjab. A second scenario would involve an increase in rural pressures, which would result in an urban backlash similar to that which has accompanied the extension of the policy of reservations to larger and larger sectors of India's disadvantaged. A third alternative would require India to replace the path of higher prices, larger subsidies, and loan waivers by a policy of technology and infrastructure improvement that would lower agricultural costs rather than increase prices. This last scenario, he insists, offers the best hope for India.

Varshney's thesis has been attacked by Marxists for failing to understand that farmers in India are unable to cohere around economic issues not because of noneco-

conomic identities, as the author insists, but because rural mobilization must include the support of poor peasants and landless agricultural labor whose class position is antagonistic. It is the existence of these class divisions that compel peasant leaders to stress non-economic identities and urban-rural conflict in their effort to mobilize the rural sector. Varshney, however, insists that he has not ignored the class issue. While he admits that poor peasants and agricultural labor are a problem, they are not an insurmountable problem and do not detract from his basis argument. The plight of the landless does not undermine his argument any more than does the existence of a large

unorganized urban poor destroy the argument that there exists an urban bias in developing countries.

The author has produced a truly exceptional book. His clear style, comparative focus, and methodologically sophisticated approach make this book a major contribution to the field of political economy, comparative politics, and Indian studies. Varshney has established himself as one of the leading young scholars in the field.

*Stanley A. Kochanek
Department of Political Science
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802*