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The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India by Thomas Blom Hansen; Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India by Ashutosh Varshney

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## Recent Books

stability and muddling through, however, Jiang will find it difficult to advance China through political manipulation alone.

*The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India.*

BY THOMAS BLOM HANSEN.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 328 pp. \$49.50.

*Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India.* BY ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 229 pp. \$21.95 (paper).

Is Hindu nationalism about to subvert India's remarkable democracy? Why can't India do a better job of reforming its economy? In tackling these questions, Hansen goes back to the two antidemocratic constraints that have flawed India's secular democracy since independence. First is the exaggerated attachment to a technocratic administrative culture, which has caused Indians far more trouble in the transition to a market economy than the Chinese ever faced. Second is the government pledge to respect all religious communities and the affirmative-action demands of the lower castes. The system worked in the early years because state and local bosses wielded enough authority to accommodate diversity. But after Indira Gandhi split the Congress Party in 1969, the central government had to address India's diversity directly—which opened the door to religion-based politics and the "saffron wave" of Hindu nationalism. Although Hansen advances a subtle and sophisticated argument, he also muddles his presentation with dense postmodern rhetoric.

Varshney takes a different tack and asks why the Indian countryside has enjoyed

such enduring political power, given that cities usually dominate politics in developing nations. He argues that the institutionalization of electoral politics occurred before industrialization, which allowed peasants to learn the power of the ballot from the start. Soon thereafter, bureaucrats and politicians became enmeshed in agricultural policy. Like Hansen, Varshney sees the Congress Party split as seminal in switching the roles of the central and state authorities and in granting further advantages to the rural sector. Yet he also sees the growth of rural power as limited because religious and caste cleavages continue to divide the countryside and inhibit collective action. As a result, he is less concerned over the threat of Hindu nationalism. Time will tell whether identity politics or economic interests will determine the next phase of India's development.

*Giants of Japan: The Lives of Japan's Greatest Men and Women.* BY MARK WESTON. New York: Kodansha America, 1999, 352 pp. \$30.00.

Everyone knows that consensus and conformity rule in Japan, right? Wrong, says Weston, who uses the biographies of outstanding Japanese to better understand Japanese economics, history, cultural traditions, and politics. Starting with the founders of Japan's great corporations—Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Honda, and Sony—Weston devotes more discussion to business life in Japan than to individual personalities. His treatment of historical figures provides a vivid picture of Japanese feudal society, and his recounting of the great shoguns serves as an excellent introduction to Japanese history. His unique approach allows him to fill the