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Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India by Ashutosh Varshney

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member needs, diversify, integrate vertically and horizontally, and contribute to social overhead investment" (p. 47).

While Shah's model and the broad survey upon which it is based are productive contributions to a field which often focuses either on individual cooperatives or on relatively homogeneous microregions, the endeavor is not without its faults. Behind the facade of objective analytical categories, for instance, lies a vast array of normative assumptions which Shah cannot suppress: the leadership of unsuccessful cooperatives is almost always referred to as "dishonest," "uncouth," "wayward," or "lethargic," while the leadership of successful cooperatives is "virtuous," "honest," "driven," and "conscientious." Moreover, Shah's model is useful primarily as a descriptive and not as a prescriptive device. It can describe the deleterious effects of the "members' propensity to cheat the co-operative" (in spite of a well-designed operating system) as happened in Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh (p. 161), but it cannot predict which cooperatives will have problems with cheating based solely on their design, nor can it explain why cheating is rampant in some areas but not in others. Finally, the focus on success leads to a certain blindness with regard to oppressive social conditions. In describing the vigor of the cooperatives in Surat, Shah praises the stability brought by the pervasive dominance of the Patidar community in local socioeconomic dynamics, as if to suggest that the most fertile ground for a successful cooperative is a region in which one dominant community can thwart all attempts at economic competition or social protest (p. 195).

Nevertheless, in spite of its limitations, Shah's book does provide a number of intriguing insights and observations which may help to push the debate on cooperatives into hitherto uncharted territory.

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*Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India.*  
Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. By ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. xi, 214 pp. \$54.95 (cloth).

At a time when Deve Gowda, a self-described agriculturist, has become prime minister of India, any book that focuses on the political importance of the rural sector is a welcome addition to the literature. Ashutosh Varshney employs rational choice methodology to explain why rural India has become increasingly powerful in the country's political system. He also utilizes the same type of analysis to demonstrate the limited appeal of economic issues in the current political context.

Varshney explains why it took until the late 1970s for agricultural concerns to become a major political issue in a country that is overwhelmingly rural. Paradoxically, the agricultural sector became politicized at a time of increasing industrialization. Around two-thirds of Indians who produce about a third of the national income live in rural areas. Given their numbers, farmers have always been an important group in India's electoral calculus and all political parties have been responsive to their demands. However, it was not until the 1996 parliamentary elections that, for the first time, agriculturalists constituted a majority (51.8 percent) of those elected to the Lok Sabha.

Varshney discusses the reasons for the neglect of agriculture and the delayed influence of the rural sector in India. The dominant political culture in colonial times

was city-based. Congress leaders in the nationalist movement were primarily urban lawyers. Under the British, agricultural output did not keep pace with population growth. It continued to be a subsidiary concern of politicians in independent India. The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, favored investment in heavy industry, not agriculture. A Marxist, he resisted price incentives and the profit motive as means to maximize production. Nehru preferred an institutional solution that emphasized cooperatives, and land reforms implemented by local *panchayats* to restructure village life. Rural interest groups demonstrated the capacity to defeat the implementation of agricultural policy—not formulate it. As agriculture was constitutionally a state subject, Nehru's approach was resisted by the upper class politicians who dominated politics outside Delhi.

It was C. Subramaniam, Food Minister in the brief Shastri government from 1964 to 1966, who changed course and invested in the agricultural sector. Supported by the United States government, American foundations, and institutions like the World Bank, he pursued a strategy that emphasized higher agricultural prices and the adoption of modern technology such as a combination of high yield seeds and fertilizers. Since the green revolution of the early 1970s, Indian agriculture has been "a victim of its own success" (p. 167). Larger farms increased the number of landless laborers. Higher prices generated greater yields, but created surpluses in the midst of shortages, as the poor cannot afford to buy food. For Varshney, "a food subsidy is a consumer subsidy in situations of shortage but a producer subsidy in the context of surpluses" (p. 169). The goal of the Indian government has been to increase agricultural production, while keeping food prices in check. While politicians emphasized increased production, economic bureaucrats typified by the finance ministry, tempered the impact of food prices on budget subsidies, inflation, and the poor.

Land reforms pitted tenants against landlords and did not involve rural society as a whole. It was Charan Singh who began the mobilization of the rural kulaks in the late 1970s. The discourse of Indian politics took on an urban versus rural character and led to policies that did not please either sector of society. While farmers claim they have not been given an adequate return, urban consumers complain about high prices. They resent the preferred position of farmers in the Indian polity. Although the agricultural sector accounts for 35 percent of national income, it generates less than 11 percent of tax revenues. Farmers are exempt from income taxes and pay less than 1 percent of the country's total tax bill. They also benefit from reduced rates on water and pay virtually nothing for electricity. After charging Rajiv Gandhi's "yuppie government" with ignoring the rural sector, the short-lived Janata Dal administration in 1990 forgave all federally guaranteed agricultural loans of less than Rs. 10,000. Increased government intervention protected the farmers against a fall in producer prices, but they remain unsatisfied. They continually demand more from the Indian state than it is prepared to give, a situation that has contributed to alarming budgetary deficits at the union and state levels.

Although they represent nearly 70 percent of all voters, agriculturists are hardly a cohesive force. They are subject to cross-cutting religious, caste, ethnic, and linguistic appeals. Since the implementation of reservations under the Mandal Report in 1990 (unmentioned by Varshney) and the subsequent Ayodhya agitation, agricultural issues have been pushed to the background. Even though regional parties dominated by farmers came to power in Delhi in 1996, they were outpolled by entities that emphasized cultural issues. This book explains why agricultural issues made India's political agenda so late and faded so fast, before issues of infrastructure could

be addressed. Unfortunately Varshney's study focuses mainly on demands for price supports. It does not mention until page 202, the reality that a majority of India's villages have no clean drinking water, paved roads, or electricity. Except for confusingly referring to the Janata Dal government of V. P. Singh as the "Janata government" (a coalition that was in power from 1977–79), the book is clearly written. It is worth reading.

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## SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Gamelan Stories: Tantrism, Islam, and Aesthetics in Central Java.* By JUDITH BECKER. Tempe: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993. 222 pp. \$24.95.

This essential work from Judith Becker breaks important new ground in the quest by English-speaking scholars to understand the deeper levels of Central Javanese meaning regarding music and musical exegesis. She approaches her work on gamelan and court dance by examining texts and interviews of a number of older (and since deceased) Central Javanese scholar/musicians. "While these stories focus on the events of music and dance, those activities also become metaphors for the strongly felt, extra mundane connections between human and cosmos, between the individual and a greater, more enduring, more powerful realm with which he or she is both linked and separated" (p. 1). Becker carefully outlines her claim with strong supporting evidence, building a history of medieval Javanese thought that lays the groundwork for the ways in which Javanese musicians interpret their art today. She also notes some of the ways in which Western scholars have misunderstood Javanese musicians and the literature about Javanese music and dance, and how they have inaccurately analyzed certain characteristics of modern practice.

One of the most important aspects of this book is that it clearly links modern Javanese performance practice to Tantric and Sufist practices widespread in Java's medieval past. Although Tantrism is rarely discussed by modern Javanese performing artists for political and religious reasons, the evidence of it is abundant in tune titles and song texts, in historical Javanese texts, and in the history and choreography of the *bedbaya* court dance. Furthermore, Becker illustrates the close ties between Sufist and Tantric practices of the past, and offers several interpretations for the recession of Tantrism from overt practice and discussion into the nonverbal realm of the performing arts. In her clear and concise citations and analyses, Becker argues convincingly that a pervasive layer of Tantrism underlies the development of modern Javanese gamelan performance practice. If this work reaches a broad audience of Indonesianists and ethnomusicologists, as it should, medieval Javanese performing arts culture may never be taught or discussed the same way again.

*Gamelan Stories* is organized into four chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The introduction examines the problem of deciphering layers of meaning and links Javanese interpretation of meaning with the medieval Javanese practice of