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**Jivanta Schöttli. Vision and strategy in Indian politics: Jawaharlal Nehru's policy choices and the designing of political institutions. Oxford and New York: Routledge. 2012.**

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**Jivanta Schöttli. *Vision and strategy in Indian politics: Jawaharlal Nehru's policy choices and the designing of political institutions.* Oxford and New York: Routledge. 2012.**

In this new volume in the series "Routledge Advances in South Asian Studies," Jivanta Schöttli explores three key developments in newly independent India: the founding of the Planning Commission (1950), the Panchasheela Agreement with China (1954), and the Hindu Code bills, seen as a step towards a Uniform Civil Code (1955-56). All three developments are key to understanding the nature of Indian modernity and its transformation from a colonial to a postcolonial democracy, and for Schöttli, all three developments owe their origins to Jawaharlal Nehru's political worldview, which Schöttli studies in terms of both Nehru's vision and his strategy. "New Institutionalism" and "Historical Institutionalism" are the two main political frameworks through which she conducts her examination, but for Schöttli, understanding the worldview of Nehru "the individual" is critical to understanding Nehru "the political actor." Thus, while she explicitly argues against the separation of the man from his times, such a separation is at times implemented in her analysis as a methodological tool in order to understand the nature of Nehru's political action. Schöttli's primary sources for excavating this worldview are Nehru's speeches and writings, from which she quotes copiously but judiciously. The book is thus at once a biography and a study of the process of Indian modernization in the Nehruvian period.

Schöttli explains her choice of theoretical structures by presenting the argument that both the New Institutionalism and Historical Institutionalism schools of thought allow room for an exploration of the processes by which an institution comes into being; both frameworks also assert that the existence of an institution is, itself, not a guarantee of its validity. Schöttli points out that in the case of India, traditional models of modernity, which tend to be teleological, seem to falter because of the integration of the processes of modernity within an entrenched indigenous tradition that is often extremely hierarchical and feudal and informed by considerations of class, caste, and religion, which modern institutions do not succeed in displacing. As Schöttli argues, Nehru, as the middle ground between the conservative right and the radical left, and propped up by Mahatma Gandhi, was constrained by his political opponents and supporters as well as by the specific organizational policies of his political party, the Indian National Congress (INC), and this, as much as his worldview, shaped the nature of his actions. The three institutions he developed, therefore, were not solely driven by his unique vision, as is often promoted in Nehruviana, but were instead developed within the constraints of his political situation. Schöttli argues that Nehru's evolving worldview in the context of Indian modernization is itself a product of the historical circumstances that Nehru the political actor was trying to negotiate.

To distinguish Nehru on the basis of his worldview vis-a-vis the other dominant leaders of the time risks falling into the trap of psychological individualism, and detracts from a historical methodology. Vision and strategy are not mutually exclusive categories, as Schöttli successfully shows, but are, rather, meshed together in political choice. As such, Schöttli presents what she calls the "structure of opportunities," meaning that the constraints that shaped Nehru were also the very reason for his success and that he was ultimately able to alter such conditions in his favor. Nehru's decisions were affected by the actions of his contemporaries (Subhas Chandra Bose before independence and Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad after), and Nehru strategically highlighted or compromised on specific issues in order to gain ascendancy within the party and promote his own vision of progress.

Schöttli's approach is particularly useful in understanding Nehru's position on the first of the three institutions she examines: the Planning Commission. As Schöttli shows, the Planning Commission serves to demonstrate both how Nehru consolidated power and

translated his specific vision into policy. The origins of the commission lie in the Congress National Planning Committee (NPC), established under Subhas Chandra Bose, with Nehru as chairman. The NPC, which saw in industrialization the solution to India's economic problems, was nonetheless opposed by Gandhi and Gandhians, and Nehru never openly opposed Gandhi even though he was in favor of the solution. Thus, while Bose, whose conflict with Gandhi led to the former's disenchantment and eventual departure from the Congress party, did not feel compelled to publically defer to Gandhi's opinion, Nehru depended on Gandhi's support within the INC in order to rise to power within the party and was, therefore, more diplomatic in his support of the commission. Due in no small part to this sort of diplomacy, Nehru ascended to party leadership upon the country's independence and, after the death of Gandhi, was able to bring the party more tightly under his control and, eventually, promote his socialist vision through the Planning Commission.

Schöttli's second case study involves an examination of Nehru's second institution: India's Panchasheela Agreement (also known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) with China and the debate over the status of Tibet. The agreement stipulated mutual non-aggression and respect for territorial sovereignty. Schöttli claims that getting involved in the Tibet debate was both an opportunity for India to assert itself as regional power in relation to China and to establish relations with China immediately after India's independence. Schöttli argues that unlike his difference of opinion with Gandhi regarding the creation of the Planning Commission, Nehru did not have any particular opponents when it came to foreign policy decisions, and he was, therefore, directly responsible for the nature of the Panchasheela Agreement. The preamble to the agreement, which emphasized "peaceful coexistence," was to Nehru an extension of India's non-aligned position and its wider aspirations regarding its role in world affairs. The agreement itself, however, which also sought to establish trade ties, was tipped in China's favor and is, ultimately, an example of Nehru's political short-sightedness, says Schöttli. It is important to note in this context that while none of Nehru's plans produced long lasting positive results, the Panchasheela Agreement with China soured much more rapidly than many others. In opposition to the more right wing Patel, Nehru rose to power within the party by aligning himself to a certain extent with Gandhian principles. After previous less successful attempts at international diplomacy in the years after India's independence, the Panchasheela Agreement became a mark of Nehru's success as a diplomat, if only in the immediate context.

Finally, the Hindu Code bills demonstrate yet another aspect of Nehru's aspirations of nation building. India, founded as a secular nation, was nonetheless predominantly Hindu. The premise of a secular state necessitated religious reform not merely to ensure secularism but also to ensure uniformity for Hindus. The approach itself was controversial; it was not a Uniform Civil Code but was aimed at reforming a specific religion and was intended to subsequently serve to unify the entire country. While four bills were passed between 1955 and 56, as Schöttli shows, Nehru's personal involvement in the passing of these bills was quite limited; he merely saw these as a step towards modernization and did not invest any personal interest in resolving the nature of the conflict with individual groups over religious rights and, hence, expedited the process without careful consideration. It was, Schöttli argues, a triumph of "strategy over vision," driven by short-term goals rather than long-term planning.

The Nehru that emerges from Schöttli's book is a complex figure. Nehru the political actor is shown to be politically capable in gaining and retaining power and decisive enough to see his personal vision realized. Yet the same figure is also shown to be at times personally limited and driven by the need for power and, like any other political figure, influenced by political exigencies and often short-sighted when it came to understanding the nature of political events and necessities. His three institutions, while serving some limited purpose, ultimately failed to lead to the prosperous India he envisioned. In the final chapter, when

Schöttli considers the “shelf life of Nehru’s institutions,” we see the eventual uselessness and failure of all three institutions that Nehru built. This appraisal by Schöttli also leads her to put forward the proposition that where personal vision without personal expertise motivates the establishment of an institution (namely the Panchasheela Agreement), institutions are likely to be driven by “risk-taking” and remain largely untenable; where formed out of political exigency and instrumentalized by the author (such as the Hindu Code bills), likely to remain contentious; and where built on consensus and personal expertise, rather than individual vision, more likely to be adapted, as necessary (such as the Planning Commission). According to Schöttli, while the Planning Commission serves no real purpose in India’s liberalized economy at present, it can nonetheless be made to adapt to a changing circumstance. The Panchasheela no longer survives, and the mess created by the Hindu Code bills continue to present problems not only because of the bills’ ambiguity but also due to the interstices between Muslim personal law and the Uniform Civil Code that often flare up in communal unrest.

Jivanta Schöttli’s contribution in this volume is less in terms of detail, for the material itself that she uses has been utilized in Nehruviana before but rather lies in her methodology, to which she brings her careful interpretation of the shifts in Nehru’s vocabulary across time and in response to the shifting needs of a newly independent nation. The book is a timely volume at a time when founding figures in a space such as India have been deified to the point where even mild criticism leads to extreme governmental backlash; her work also restores to one of these figures his rightful, if unelevated, place in history.

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