

Perna Singh: *How Solidarity Works for Welfare: Subnationalism and Social Development in India*

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Under the aegis of the 'worlds of welfare tradition', historical inquiries into social policy in late industrialising countries have usually neglected the fundamentally *national* accumulation of social policies [Kaufmann 2013: 25]. This is a particularly problematic gap in countries of the Global South, where ethno-national heterogeneity rather than homogeneity is the norm (p. 16). Following a fashionable scholarly trend [Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Beland and Petersen (eds) 2014], Perna Singh picks up the gauntlet and delves into the huge developmental and institutional disparities present in the under-researched case of India. The book's primary objective is analysing and explaining 'variation in education and health outcomes both across and within Indian states over time' (p. 22). Above and beyond ethnic fractionalisation data, Singh offers a comparative historical analysis of five Indian states (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar), nicely interwoven with a quantitative analysis, aiming to uncover '(causal) mechanisms through which subnationalism influences welfare' (p. 5).

Chapters 1 and 2 outline the theoretical framework and methodological approach. Fundamentally, Singh analyses pathways through which developments in social policy creation went intimately hand in hand with those of nation-building [Leisering 2003]. For such an endeavour, comparative historical analysis represents the optimal methodology. Singh looks first and foremost at parliamentary debates to 'establish a clear chronology in which the emergence of a cohesive or fragmented subnational identity precedes improvements or deteriorations of social indicators' (p. 19). The focus on parliamentary

debates is undoubtedly a strong point of the book, as it makes it possible to accurately observe the political conflict behind social policies. Furthermore, longitudinal analysis is methodologically apt as it enables uncovering causal mechanisms rather than mere influences during 'moments of extremity' (pp. 21–22). For Singh, education and health policy gain prominence on the political agenda only *after and as a consequence of* the emergence of subnational solidarity (pp. 41–42).

Drawing on sociological theories of identity (p.33), Singh makes the strong claim that *subnationalism is the basis for, rather than the outcome of, social policies*. The book, however, should not be conflated with the literature on how ethnic fractionalisation hampers social policy development. Singh impresses with analytical clarity in her review of this particular body of scholarship, which, even in its most recent and nuanced iterations, usually misses constructivist ideas of identity (pp. 51–53). The author is rightly sensitive to the idea that social policy and (national) culture intersect in multiple ways [Beland and Lecours 2008], as she shows that linguistic fractionalisation has an inconsistent effect, while religious fractionalisation can actually *galvanise* social development (p. 230). Quite clearly, the book aims beyond mainstream studies of national identity, as it defines subnationalism at a crossroads between cultural and political dimensions—a belief in a shared past and common culture, desiring 'the creation of and control over, a political-administrative unit within a sovereign country that corresponds to a territory they believe belonged to their forbears' (p. 27). For social policy the effect is rather clear: re-categorisation into a superordinate group facilitates the partial renouncing of individual utility-maximisation in favour of collective welfare (p. 33). The book draws heavily on the tradition of nationalism as a political movement, where self-determination of any sort (be it national or sub-na-

tional) is what sets apart sub-nationalism from ethnic identities (p. 28). For Singh, subnationalism might be sustained by purposive elite stances, but ultimately 'stands strongest when it is undergirded by an institutional foundation' (p. 30).

Otherwise analytically clear and methodologically operationalisable, this approach does seem, however, to reify the problematic groupist ontology in the study of nationalism. As Brubaker [1996] shows, nationhood is not uncontested, but is rather at the crossroads of multiple competing discourses, only some of which deal with desires for independence and/or autonomy. Focusing on *nationalising (sub)nationalism* as a dynamic political claim made on behalf a putative nation, rather than a 'real' one, would have allowed analytical space to tackle some lingering questions regarding feedback effects and the strength of causality. Both seem to be fundamental issues with historical studies of social policy (similar criticism raised most notably to Inglot [2008]). Particularly with a political process like (sub)nation-building, which cannot be easily assumed to be 'complete', feedback effects seem inevitable. For instance, welfare benefits themselves create specific socio-economic and cultural homogeneities out of which new nationalisms arise, sometimes completely opposed to the original projects [see, e.g., Beland and Lecours 2008]. While subnationalism might temporally precede *certain* social policy developments, it seems rather difficult to argue, particularly over the long run, that subnationalism appears and develops fully independently from social policy developments, as Singh claims (pp. 41–42).

Chapter 3 tracks the origins and relative strengths of subnationalist movements and parties in the selected states. Singh's historical narrative maps the origins, sources, manifestations, and spread of subnationalism in the selected provinces, offering a balanced account of the political strength of the individual movements/par-

ties. It is precisely from this vantage point—in-depth historical knowledge of the specific Indian politics, that Singh notes the limits of conventional political economy models of social policy development (pp. 46–50). The socio-historical account is rich in detail and analytically clear, resembling in spirit Hroch's classical model of nation-building [1968]. Among the mechanisms that explain the differences in nature and strength of the different movements, key factors, independent of pre-(sub)nationalism social development, were: access to English-language education and changes in the socio-economic status of the groups associated with state-wide developmental processes (p. 108–110). Singh tracks the way in which rival elites carved their own political space. In Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Rajasthan subnational symbolism was an attractive strategy, whereas in Uttar Pradesh differentiation had to be done more exclusively via religion (p. 65).

Chapters 4 and 5 present in detail the success stories of Tamil Nadu and Kerala as compared to the under-developed Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. Particularly in the case of Kerala, usually hailed as a hallmark of success for decentralisation policies, Singh argues that subnationalism was in fact the key explanatory factor (p. 137). The activity of a subnationalist party galvanised popular involvement: 'politically aware Malayali citizens bound by ties of solidarity have tended to act collectively on a range of issues, including the functioning of schools and health centers' (p. 44). Rather similarly, Tamil Nadu perfectly exhibits the concrete power of subnationalism for political mobilisation. Despite elite commitment and increased social spending in 1900–1940, the spread of social developments was modest, without touching the most at risk rural areas (p. 116). By contrast, the internationalisation of Tamil subnationalism in the 1950s–1960s, with its grounding in the concepts of social justice and collective welfare, led to improve-

ments in school rates and nutrition (p. 118). Although Singh herself admits that some of the data is correlational (p. 127), the overall argument that strong subnationalism galvanises particular aspects of social policy development is undeniable.

The under-developed cases display a less unitary picture. In Rajasthan it was not the absence of subnationalism as such, but rather changes in its strength that generated variations in the progressiveness of social policy (p. 171). Timing also mattered greatly as Rajasthan entered the post-colonial period with a distinct economic disadvantage compared to Uttar Pradesh (p. 175). The generational change of the 1990s coupled with a renewed subnationalism that covered more than political elites eventually managed a limited catching up in the utilisation and efficacy of social services (p. 180). In Uttar Pradesh closer identification with the federal-level 'national sphere' stymied the emergence of subnational solidarity (p. 153), which de facto meant that competing claims by Muslims and Hindus evolved as mutually exclusive (p. 150). Moreover, in addition to this narrow targeting advocated by rival political groups, the Uttar Pradesh government itself was marked by resilient inertia, which pre-empted significant social development (p. 167). In the case of Bihar, which admittedly comes rather out of the blue at this stage of the book, the immediate aftermath of the Indian Independence witnessed the total dissipation of even the most basic intra-elite, subnational solidarity (p. 185). This led to Bihar becoming the 'armpit of India' (pp. 183–187), with only minor developmental improvements occurring with the re-emergence of subnationalism in the mid-2000s (p. 189).

Chapter 6 attempts to measure how far the argument travels within the Indian subcontinent. In the murky waters of measuring (sub)nationalism, Singh opts for a very flexible 'family resemblance structure'. Four indicators (language, sub-

nationalist consciousness, subnational mobilisation, absence of a separatist movement, subnationalist parties): none is necessary by itself, but all four are sufficient for solidarity (p. 206). The data mobilised are impressive, going as far back as 1966. Singh offers a comparative longitudinal analysis which shows that from 1971 states with stronger subnationalism also display higher social development indicators (p. 209). Furthermore, regression analysis shows that controlling for typical political economy variables— economic development, strength of leftists parties, party system (p. 225)—subnationalism has a statistically significant effect on social development (p. 209). Concretely, 'holding all levels of economic development constant, subnationalism is found to have a positive effect on literacy rates and a negative impact on infant mortality rates' (p. 216).

On the whole, Prerna Singh's book impresses through analytical clarity and an in-depth historical narrative. More than a token interdisciplinary approach, the book clearly offers an innovative approach to the nationalism-welfare nexus, by analysing the co-constitutive relationship of agency, structure, and process, in a highly complex environment such as India. Granted, the causal argument could be infused with some more flexibility, particularly towards acknowledging rather than outright rejecting reverse causation. Nevertheless, the book's dialogue with the ethnic-fractionalisation-damaging-social-policy literature sends out the strong message that there is far more to welfare states than an underlying social-democratic thinking [Kaufmann 2013: 76].

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Patrick Baert: *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*
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Patrick Baert's tenth publication on the problems of social theory and the philosophy of the social sciences is devoted to the social role of intellectuals and their public actions, especially in 20th-century France. Baert explores the impact and social influence of the group of French intellectuals—Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir et al.—associated with the development of existentialism. The book's subtitle, *The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*, reveals the particular angle of its approach. The period Baert focuses on runs from the late 1930s to the late 1960s. Sartre's work is closely followed from the mid-1940s (after the liberation of France from the Nazi occupation) to the 1950s, when his eminence and influence reached their peak. Sartre's life preceding that time, and what followed in the 1960s,

are left in the shade. This account does not seek to present a comprehensive biographical sketch, but rather to analyse his life during a period crucial to the broader emergence of existentialism as a new philosophical direction, coinciding with the zenith of Sartre's intellectual career.

The life of J.-P. Sartre (1905–1980) was richly interesting and peppered with fascinating events; his philosophy, art work, and public activities gave rise to many original and inspiring ideas, but also to a number of paradoxical phenomena, oddities, and incidents. It is no wonder, then, that Sartre has been the subject of large bibliographies, including works by Annie Cohen-Solal, André Guigot, Sophie Astier-Vezon, and others. What does Baert's book bring that is different, new, or innovative? First, it is a text written by a sociologist, and this manifests itself both in the questions which the author asks, and in the way in which he answers them. If literary criticism or historiography frequently means writing about the great figures of culture, in sociology this is not the case. Although the issue of individual actors as the creators of social reality is accorded an important place in 'social constructivism', it is quite normal that attention is focused mostly only on 'small' anonymous actors and their quotidian activities, observed at the micro-social level. The question of individuals with influence on the societal level, a commonplace of historical sciences, is mostly ignored. While history, so to speak, has a tendency to see social processes as the work of great historical figures, sociology tends to see these processes as a manifestation of the supra-individual social units, structures, forces, and functions of societal systems.

Baert's study is an important exception to this tendency in sociology in that it focuses attention on the significance of the individual. It recalls the idea of Norbert Elias, which involved the twin metaphors of coin and stamp. Each person in society resembles a coin that is shaped by a stamp,