



Annual report of the King's India Institute 2020

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Introduction from the Director of King's India Institute

Dr Louise Tillin



It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up significant and unexpected challenges in 2020. At King's College London, we moved a substantial proportion of our teaching online at short notice, as well as suspending active in-person research and travel. With Brexit also on the horizon, this is a period of exceptional fluidity and flux for the university sector as a whole.

The King's Global Institutes, including the India Institute, welcomed a large cohort of new students in September 2020 including the second cohort of students on the MSc Global Affairs.

This vibrant student body, in addition to our cohort of India Institute PhD students (including a growing number on our joint PhD programme with the National University of Singapore), bring new energy into the India Institute. We are pleased to profile the achievements of some of our first graduating cohort of MSc Global Affairs students, who wrote dissertations on India, in this report.

The India Institute has also anchored a rapid response grant on the social and economic ramifications of COVID-19 at the state level in India, called Decentralisation and COVID-19 in India (DecovIndia). This was funded by the Faculty of Social Science and Public Policy and the King's India Institute.

DecovIndia, builds on the conviction that the long-term outcomes of the coronavirus in India will be regionally uneven and will depend on the capabilities and responses of its state governments.

Based on some exhilarating teamwork, our team of researchers based across India and at King's worked collaboratively over the summer to harness innovative sources of big data to chart the evolving and uneven impact of, and policy response to, COVID-19 across states.

The DecovIndia.com website, launched on 2 November, makes this data publicly available.

The India Institute will also be leading new research on other emerging policy challenges for India and the UK. We are excited to have won a large grant from the Economic and Social Research Council and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, on the future of UK-India trade.

This grant is led by Dr Sunil Mitra Kumar, Lecturer in Economics at King's India Institute, and Dr Kamini Gupta, Lecturer in International Business & Comparative Management at King's Business School, and is in partnership with FICCI, IIM-Bangalore and the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for European Union Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. It will explore two main themes: access to credit for SME exporters in India, and the role of diaspora networks in facilitating trade.

A number of our staff published landmark new books this year and are working on major research projects which are profiled in this report.

We have also used the previous year to consolidate our staffing. We are delighted to have welcomed a new Lecturer in India and Global Affairs, Dr Srilata Sircar, and to welcome Professor Harsh Pant back to a formal role with the Institute, as Professor of International Relations.

We hope that you will enjoy the contents of this annual report which demonstrate the range of the India Institute's activities in the year 2020, its vibrant research culture, and our existing and new international partnerships.

Staff update

Dr Srilata Sircar, Lecturer in India and Global Affairs



In August 2020, we were delighted to welcome Dr Srilata Sircar as our new Lecturer in India and Global Affairs. Dr Sircar is the module leader for the Introduction to Global Affairs and Contemporary India modules.

Trained as an urban geographer, Dr Sircar received her doctoral degree from Lund University, Sweden in 2017. With a prior background in History and Development Studies, her research interests include the urban political ecology of South Asia, the politics of caste in infrastructure-building, and the political economy of subaltern urbanization.

Dr Sircar's work has been published in academic journals *Geoforum* and *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, as well as on popular platforms such as *The Hindu*. She is a contributing writer for *Feminism in India* and is also interested in documentary film-making and podcast production.

Dr Sircar's research lies at the intersection of urban studies, agrarian studies, and postcolonial theory. Her current research focuses on the knowledge politics and caste dimensions of urban infrastructure building in South Asia.

With a focus on smaller urban centres, she adopts both archival and ethnographic methods to expose and dismantle the ways in which dominant knowledge regimes shape urban planning and development. She assumes an intersectional-feminist and postcolonial analytical stance.



Staff update

Harsh Pant, Professor of International Relations

Following his sabbatical, Professor Harsh Pant formally returned to the India Institute in December 2020 as Professor of International Relations on a part-time basis, alongside his role as Director, Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Programme of the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.



Professor Pant is based in New Delhi, and supervises six PhD students at the India Institute who work on a range of subjects related to India's Foreign and Security Policy.

His most recent books include: *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* (Cambridge.

University Press, 2019), *India's Nuclear Policy* (Oxford Oxford India Short Introductions Series, 2018), *The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy* and *Handbook of Indian Defence Policy* (Routledge, 2017).



MH Suryanarayana, Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) Chair in Indian Studies and Visiting Professor

Professor M H Suryanarayana held the ICCR Chair in Indian Studies, based at the King's India Institute.



Professor Suryanarayana is an economist with expertise in food security, growth and poverty reduction. His recent research has focused on the measurement of inclusive growth. He spent the spring semester at the India Institute, until campus closed due to COVID-19.

He has been a member of faculty at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai since 1988. He has taught courses on statistics, econometrics, development economics, food policy analysis, human development and Indian

economy at IGIDR and other postgraduate centres.

While based at the India Institute, he gave a research seminar on Inclusion vs Marginalisation: Concept, Measures and Illustrations which offered a conceptual framework to measure the distributional dimensions of economic growth.

He also worked on a contribution to the Routledge International Handbook of Poverty in the Global South.

Update from the interim Avantha Chair 2019–21

Professor Christophe Jaffrelot

The Avantha Chair is a prestigious position responsible for advancing the India Institute's goal to become the leading international centre for the study of contemporary India.

Following the departure of our first Chair, Professor Sunil Khilnani, Professor Christophe Jaffrelot was invited to hold the position of Avantha Chair for two years.

I am Professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at the India Institute and the Research Lead for the King's Global Institutes. I also teach South Asian politics and history at Sciences Po, Paris and am an Overseas Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I was Director of Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) at Sciences Po between 2000 and 2008.

I am on the editorial board of several journals and am the senior editor of a Hurst book series, *Comparative Politics and International Studies*. I am also a regular commentator on Indian and Pakistani politics in France, UK, US and India, where I write a fortnightly column in *The Indian Express*.

As the interim Avantha Chair, I have published several journal articles on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and co-edited a special issue of *Contemporary South Asia* on this event.

I have also trained Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomats, taught a module on 'Religion and Politics in India and Pakistan' and supervised a dozen PhD students.

I am presently co-leading four collective research projects on:

- **Muslims in India** - with Princeton University and Columbia University. This project looks at growing intensity in existing trends such as Muslim marginalisation in India, restricted civil liberties and demographic restructuring.



- **Shared sacred sites in South Asia** - with Agence National de la Recherche Scientifique and EHESS. This project looks at South Asia's long record of intermingling between religious communities and asks what the sharing of these sites can tell us about the fabric of plural societies in times of rising religious and ethnic nationalisms.
- **The Social Profile of Indian National and Provincial Elected Representatives** - with Professor Gilles Verniers, Ashoka University. This project looks at the sociological profile of contestants to Indian Elections.
- **Federalism in Pakistan** - with Lahore University of Management Science. This project looks at how region-based political groups in Pakistan have mobilised themselves for political power.

Last but not least, the first book in my series with Hurst, *Comparative Politics and International Studies* was published this year. I have also finalised *India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975–1977* a book written with a former student of mine, Pratinav Anil. This will be published by Hurst in December 2020.

I am honoured to be the 2019–21 Avantha Chair and hope to play a major role in shaping the Institute's education and research agenda in the future.

Events: India Institute seminars

The Crisis in Kashmir: History, Politics and the Law

November 2019

Speaker: Ananya Vajpeyi, Centre for the Studies of Developing Society, New Delhi

On 5 August 2019, the Indian government announced the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India, that had maintained the autonomy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and defined its relationship to the Indian Union since Independence. All of a sudden the state was bifurcated and demoted to a Union Territory, triggering a Constitutional emergency, a security lockdown and an international diplomatic stalemate. This talk looked at historical, political and legal dimensions of the most recent crisis in Kashmir, which has already seen 30 years of conflict



The Cunning of Politics: Democracy, Duplicity, and the Art of Elections

November 2019

Speaker: Michael Collins, University of Göttingen

In popular imagination, elections are centered on the act and outcome of suffrage. Votes are tallied and trends analysed as pundits distill election results into plausible narratives. But, such accounts convey only a partial view of an election campaign, which is equally a contest of skill, finesse, charisma, and outright skulduggery. This talk cast new light on the complex sociality and campaign strategies constitutive of democratic politics in modern India.



Emotions and modernity in colonial India

January 2020

Speaker: Margrit Pernau, University of Heidelberg

This talk investigated the experiences, interpretations and practices of emotions in India between 1857 and the First World War, based on a large archive of sources in Urdu, many explored for the first time. These sources range from philosophical and theological treatises on questions of morality to advice literature, from journals to newspapers, from children's literature to nostalgic descriptions of the courtly culture, from sermons to psychological essays.



Inclusion versus marginalisation: Concept, measures and illustrations

January 2020

Speaker: MH Suryanarayana, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai

This concept of 'inclusive growth', has received wide currency ever since the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started advocating it as a development goal. Contemporary development policy literature is replete with references to terms like 'inclusion', 'exclusion', 'mainstreaming' and 'marginalisation' without a well-defined concept or measure for each of them. Of course, these terms pertain to the different distributional dimensions of the development process. This talk, based on a paper of the same name, proposes a conceptual framework to define these dimensions in an integrated framework with reference to the Indian experience.



A subaltern history of liberalism: The making of Dalit political thought in late-colonial north India

February 2020

Speaker: Ramnarayan Rawat, University of Delaware

This talk covered the ongoing discussion on the histories of liberal political thought in modern India by highlighting the initiatives taken by Dalit groups in northern India. Drawing from tracts, plays and speeches published by the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha between 1922 and 1940, and entirely in verse genres, this talk examined Dalit poet-activists singular engagement with liberal ideas. Through a discussion of themes, such as equality and liberty, representative government, human dignity, freedom and law, Ramnarayan illustrated Dalit poet-activist's efforts to create a new public sphere.



Democracy's multiple genealogies: Translating the political in southern India

February 2020

Speaker: Lisa Mitchell, University of Pennsylvania

This talk contextualises contemporary understandings of the meaning and practice of democracy in India by examining one strand of influences, the contributions of the writers and translators associated with the Vijnānacandrikā Granthamāla (1907–1934). Lisa examined a selection of their translations of globally-circulating political ideas into the Telugu language (then the most widely spoken South Indian language) as part of a larger effort to situate the unique history and practices of democracy in India.



Events: Virtual webinar series

Lines in the Hills: Indo-Chinese Rivalry in the Himalayas July 2020 Panel discussion



Following a clash at the Himalayan border in June, the most violent confrontation between India and China in decades, the King's India Institute and Lau China Institute hosted a webinar to discuss the changing nature of Indo-Chinese relations and to evaluate whether growing tensions between the two Asian powers might amount to further instability in the region.

Bringing together Dr Louise Tillin and Professor Harsh Pant from the India Institute, Professor Kerry Brown from the Lau China Institute, and Dr Nicola Leveringhaus and Dr Walter Ladwig from War Studies, the webinar assessed the strategic significance of the current escalation. You can hear this discussion at <https://youtu.be/7uXFf16cz-Y>



Shaheen Bagh Protests and Street-Festivals in DLF City, Gurgaon: Urban Politics and the Making of a New 'Ordinary' Citizen in India October 2020 Speaker: Sanjay Srivastava, University College London

This talk explored the re-making of ideas of the 'ordinary citizen' in India in the context of a new social and political environment and changing relationships between the state and private capital. The discussion suggested that contemporary narratives of 'ordinariness' in India require an engagement with the term beyond its deployment in critical social science literature where it is posited as a politics of speaking truth to power. The appropriation of ordinariness by the privileged in the Indian context is part of a new politics of class, caste, majoritarianism and changing relationships between the state and private capital.



Sino-Pakistani relations: politics, military and regional dynamics October 2020 Speaker: Dr Filippo Boni, The Open University

Sino-Pakistani relations have been at heart of Asia's geopolitics in recent years. Since the announcement of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the 'flagship project' of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the relationship between Islamabad and Beijing has morphed into a multi-dimensional partnership, including the infrastructural and economic components. While a qualitative shift in the bilateral ties has occurred, the military component has retained a key role over the years. This talk unpacked the political and military dynamics behind Sino-Pakistani Relations in the past 20 years, looking at the wider trends in the relationship, as well as at the evolution and implementation of CPEC. Five years since it was officially launched, CPEC has now entered into its second phase, and this talk discussed current developments as well as the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.



Confronting Caste Discussions November- December 2020 Seminar and podcast series

Recent events in South Asia and across the globe have, once again, brought questions of caste to the forefront of public discourse. *Confronting Caste* is a series of online panel events hosted by the India Institute, to address these questions. The series expands the scope of academic engagement with caste as a system of social power, with an aim to dissect and dismantle its modes of operation within coloniality-modernity. You can listen to podcasts of each of these events by clicking on the links below:

[Caste, sensory politics and labour](#)
[Caste, pollution and conservation](#)
[Chennai, waters, coastlines and caste](#)



Projects and dissemination

Decentralisation and COVID-19 in India (DecovIndia)

DecovIndia, a project led by Dr Louise Tillin and King's colleagues Dr Sunil Mitra Kumar, Lecturer in Economics; Professor Amrita Dhillon, Department of Political Economy and Dr Muralikrishnan R Kartha, King's Health Economics, along with a team of researchers in India, tracks the policy response of India's state governments to COVID-19.

DecovIndia aims to understand how the decentralised policy response to COVID-19 will shape the outcome of the pandemic in India in three domains: health, economy and social security.

In some respects, India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been heavily centralised. The central government invoked the 2005 Disaster Management Act, to implement one of the strictest nationwide lockdowns in the world in the early stages of the pandemic. Yet, in a federal system in which state governments have responsibility for public health and play a crucial role in implementing social sector policies, India's emergence from the pandemic will depend crucially on the actions and capabilities of its states.

As India's states have distinctive political economies, divergent histories of social policy development and differing rates of economic growth, the COVID-19 response on the ground will depend on the role of state governments.

The DecovIndia website (decovindia.com) presents preliminary analysis of the following, based on publicly available data:

- Health infrastructural capacity and the approaches taken by states to manage public health during the pandemic.
- The policies announced and implemented by states to protect social security in the face of risks to income and employment.
- The resilience of the food supply chain across states during the pandemic (including the functioning of agricultural markets, and the distribution of subsidised food) especially for India's vast informal sector workforce including migrant workers.
- The impact of the lockdown and its easing on business and industry across states, including via analysis of new firm registration; the supply of credit and electricity usage.

DecovIndia was funded by grants from the Faculty of Social Science and Public Policy and the King's India Institute. Our project partner in India is the Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University.



Projects and dissemination

Politics in the vernacular in India

It is extraordinary that, given the significance of India as the world's largest democracy and a rising power, we know so little about the conceptual foundations of its political life.

Much has been written about political ideas and institutions imported from Europe, yet no focused, consecutive effort has gone into understanding the ideas that guide most ordinary Indian citizens' engagement in their political lives.

A new five year project, led by Dr Anastasia Piliavsky, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Politics, began in spring 2020. It will be a pioneering exploration of India's demotic political ideas and an ethnographic and historical scrutiny of the vernacular languages of its political life.

Bringing together a team of anthropologists, historians, linguists and scholars of politics, and taking inspiration from the Begriffsgeschichte inquiry into German political concepts, this project will:

- Lay the empirical and analytical groundwork for a vernacular lexicography of India's political life.
- Develop an online, open-access Concept Laboratory of Indian Political Languages.
- Explore, with scholars of European political ideas, the implications of this work for global political theory.

Drawing on Dr Piliavsky's established work on demotic categories and values in Indian politics, the project will break major new ground in the study of Indian politics.

The ultimate aim is to make analytical advances towards a truly global political theory, grounded not in the analytical lingua franca of Western political theory, but in the realities of political life around the globe.

This project was made possible through a European Commission starter grant and is a global collaboration. The chief institutional collaborators are the University of Witwatersrand; University of Pennsylvania; Georgetown University in Qatar and the University of Cambridge.

Members of the extended research team are also based at the University of Siena; SOAS University of London; O.P. Jindal Global University; University of Delaware; University of Louisiana at Lafayette; University of St Andrews; Royal University of Bhutan; Georgetown University; University of Minnesota; Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta; University of Göttingen, and the Madras Institute of Development Studies. This creates a wide global network of scholarly collaboration and exchange.

As the project started a month before the COVID-19 pandemic, only three of its members (including Dr Piliavsky) have so far managed to conduct field research in India. Since then, the team have been deep in translations and transcriptions of gathered material, and in readings that will prepare for the analytical work.

The team is also working on the architecture of the Concept Laboratory, and looking forward to their first meetings next year.



Projects and dissemination

Executive education: Foreign and Commonwealth Office's South Asia Diplomatic Academy

King's delivers training courses for Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) staff and those across the UK Government working on South Asia or in the region. The programme is taught by academic staff at the King's India Institute and the Department of War Studies, with contributions from external experts and practitioners.

This is the flagship programme of the FCO's South Asia and Afghanistan Directorate (SAAD) and is led by Dr Rudra Chaudhuri at King's. The South Asia Diplomatic Academy has trained over 550 UK diplomats since 2012. This includes the present Political Director of the FCO, the former Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Foreign Secretary, British Deputy High Commissioners to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the present High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

The training courses range in length from one to five days, delivered both in London and South Asian capitals. Containing a mixture of plenaries and focused group discussions, the curriculum examines the key social, economic, political and strategic issues relevant to diplomats and policy staff working in or around South Asia and Afghanistan.

Topics covered include the modern history of states in the region and their interrelations, domestic politics and culture, the role of extra-regional powers, business and economic opportunities, and key policy issues affecting the region.

In 2020, King's ran three week-long courses and a series of one day courses. Since spring 2020, these courses have been adapted for online delivery.



Our students

We provide our students with the opportunity to study the history, politics, economics, society and foreign relations of contemporary India in global context.

This multi-disciplinary perspective produces individuals who can deliver impact, think differently and create meaningful change. Here you can read about the work of two of these students:

Dr Saawani Rajee (PhD Contemporary India 2020)

Dr Rajee completed her PhD thesis in the summer of 2020. She began a new position at King's as Lecturer in Defence Studies Education, at the start of the 2020–21 academic year.



Saawani's dissertation was on 'Decisions in Crises: A History of Civil-Military Relations in India, 1947–1971'

This thesis is a deep historical study of civil-military relations in India from 1947–1971, conducted through the analytical lens of crisis decision-making.

Civil-military relations is an understudied and overlooked field of research in India. It seeks to fill the glaring empirical gap within civil-military scholarship in India by being the first such full historical study of civil-military relations in independent India based on extensive archival research drawn from multiple governmental archives and private papers in the UK, US and India.

The thesis also challenges traditional theories of civil-military interaction which focus on the ideas of civilian control and civilian control mechanisms. Instead, it departs from this traditional viewpoint and argues for a change in the way we think about civilian control in post-colonial states, especially in states with weaker institutional systems.

Neelanjana Paul (MSc Global Affairs, 2019–20)

Neelanjana completed her master's in 2020 and is now working as a Political Analyst for *ex capsa*, a political blog that provides a platform for innovative authors to voice their opinion about the most urgent topics taking place in the world.



Neelanjana's dissertation was on 'Minimum Deterrence, Maximum Responsibility: Examining the Nuances of India's Nuclear Identity through Rationalist-Constructivist Debate'

In 2003, India's nuclear doctrine declared Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD) as a key aspect of its nuclear posturing. However, its recent nuclear triad development triggered a debate whether such force expansion challenges the very idea of CMD.

Attempting to explore this apparent ambivalence, this dissertation highlights how India strives to maintain recognition as a 'responsible' nuclear power alongside its force advancement.

Scrutinising the realist-constructivist debate, it argues that an upgrading of nuclear force doesn't nullify India's adherence to CMD and concludes that in India's case, CMD is a dynamic entity, whose conceptualisation must entail both: the perception of threats it constructs and the posture it requires to deter its nuclear-armed adversaries.

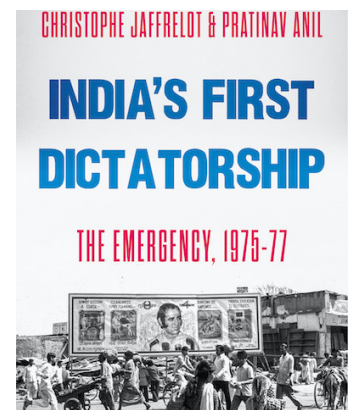


Publications

India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975-77, Christophe Jaffrelot and Anil Pratinav (Hurst, 2020)

India's First Dictatorship focuses on Mrs Gandhi and her son, Sanjay, who was largely responsible for the mass sterilisation programmes and deportation of urban slum-dwellers. However, it equally exposes the facilitation of authoritarian rule by congressmen, communists, trade unions, businessmen and the urban middle class, as well as the complacency of the judiciary and media. While opposition leaders eventually closed ranks in jail, many of them tried to collaborate with the new regime. Those who resisted the Emergency, in the media or on the streets, were few in number.

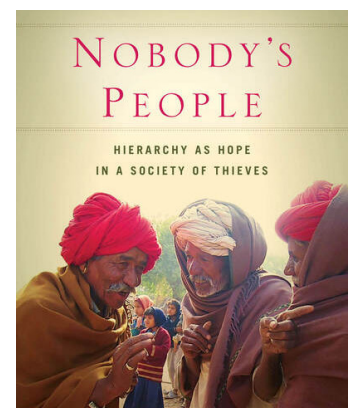
This episode was an acid test for India's political culture. While a tiny minority of citizens fought for democracy during the Emergency, in large numbers the people bowed to the strong woman in power, even worshipped her. Equally importantly, Hindu nationalists were endowed with a new legitimacy. Yet, the Emergency was neither a parenthesis, nor so much a turning point but a concentrate of a style of rule that is very much alive today. This important book sheds light on one of the darkest moments in India's recent history, drawing upon a trove of new sources.



Nobody's People: Hierarchy as Hope in a Society of Thieves, Anastasia Piliavsky (Stanford University Press, 2020)

What if we could imagine hierarchy not as a social ill, but as a source of social hope? Taking us into a 'caste of thieves' in northern India, *Nobody's People* depicts hierarchy as a normative idiom through which people imagine better lives and pursue social ambitions. Failing to find a place inside hierarchic relations, the book's heroes are 'nobody's people', perceived as worthless, disposable and so open to being murdered with no regret or remorse.

Following their journey between death and hope, we learn to perceive vertical, non-equal relations as a social good, not only in rural Rajasthan, but also in much of the world, including settings stridently committed to equality. Challenging egalo-normative commitments, Dr Anastasia Piliavsky asks scholars across the disciplines to recognise hierarchy as a major intellectual resource.



The Politics of Poverty Reduction in India: The UPA Government, 2004 to 2014, James Chiriyankandath, Diego Maoirano, James Manor and Louise Tillin (Orient Blackswan, 2020)

In 2004 the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance coalition unexpectedly came to power in India, promising to govern in the interests of the 'aam aadmi'. Over the next decade, it introduced several rights-based laws and welfare programmes targeting mass poverty. However, how fully did the UPA deliver on its promise to meet the needs of the poor?

In *The Politics of Poverty Reduction*, four internationally-reputed specialists in Indian politics and public policy answer this by offering a critical review of the five most important initiatives: the National Food Security Act, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Integrated Child Development Services, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, and the Forest Rights Act.

The first systematic review of the politics and policy-making behind the UPA's anti-poverty programmes, this book unearths the constellation of interests that shaped their legislation, and the key roles played by central, state and local governments, senior politicians, bureaucrats, civil activists, courts and the private sector in influencing the UPA's agenda. This book contributes to our understanding of official Indian thinking on poverty in the twenty-first century, and how India's partly rights-based welfare regime assumed its present form. Explaining the persistent gap between intent and outcomes of social policy in India, this first substantial assessment of the UPA in power will be invaluable for students and scholars of economics and development studies, public policy, governance and sociology.

