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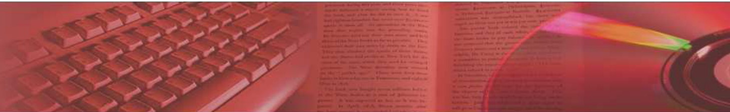

Niraja Gopal Jayal. *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. viii + 366 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-06684-7.

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Published on H-Asia (February, 2015)
Commissioned by Sumit Guha

Menon on Jayal

Citizenship is a proleptic gesture. One is always in the process of becoming a citizen, even as it is assumed that for most this is a status inherited at birth. The entailments of citizenship are at the very basic level, one of identity and maximally one of guaranteed status and rights. This triad, inflected as it is by national histories, the will of states, and the political participation of people, works less with a notion of guarantee than of negotiation. The discontents that Neeraja Jayal speaks of in her immaculately rigorous exposition of Indian citizenship arise precisely from this tension. In the transition from colony to nation, the people of India were presumed to have made a parallel move from being subjects to citizens. However, the travails of Partition, the uncertain reach of the nascent state despite its developmentalist goals, and the political maneuverings of parties meant that the rhetoric of citizenship ran up against the rocks of pragmatism and prejudice. One of the fundamental issues that this book explores is the fact that the Partition haunts all discussions of nationhood and belonging in India: is merely being born on the soil of India sufficient for full-fledged citizenship? Is a refugee one deserving of the full palette of opportunities that citizenship offers?-What of the migrants to Pakistan who return; are they renegades who came to their senses too late? It is in addressing these shades that the book is at its best, particularly in its assertion that the idea of *jus sanguinis* (rights from descent) is trumping *jus soli* (rights by residence) increasingly, reflecting the fraught history of religion and political identity on the subcontinent.

Assertions of universal citizenship have always to reckon with histories of exclusion and discrimination. The very fact of some being more unequal than the others raises the issue of redress. If religion has been one recalcitrant fact in Indian politics, even more so has been the issue of caste. Attempts to wish it away as a manifestation of economic backwardness or deprivation have foundered on the intransigent reiteration of ascriptive hierarchy in private as much as public spheres. The question of backwardness has been vexed by multiple issues: which are the groups; how is deprivation and lack of access to be graded; are policies of affirmative action to exist in perpetuity? There have been, as the author righly points out, multiple shifts in the career of backwardness as an idea and the "passage[s] from backwardness to citizenship" is an ongoing project (p. 229). The other vexed issue has been the distinction between minority status and backwardness: is being a scheduled caste to be privileged over a poor Muslim, or a dalit Christian? Seemingly backwardness can be ameliorated by development. However, development has happened at the cost of the lives and livelihoods of tribal groups: development has become an excuse for large-scale displacement. And in the end we are left with B. R. Ambedkar's ironic observation in the Constituent Assembly that "backward community is a community which is backward *in the opinion of of the Government*" (quoted, p. 245). The resolutions of backwardness have become the preserve of government and governmentality, and citizenship has become deeply implicated in claims of deprivation and state resolutions.

Citizenship should mean access to livelihood, protection of the law, and education as well as access to social and economic rights. Jayal points out that in the immediate post-independence period the responsibility of the state went along with the idea of the mendicant citizen who would be the recipient of largesse. Paradoxically, in neoliberal times, when state withdrawal from the provision of social insurances should be at its apogee, the Indian state has take on the role of providing employment, work, and food to the poor as presumed rights. In a striking phrase, Jayal calls this, "from charity disguised as welfare to welfare disguised as rights" (p. 174). The need for social provisions in the period of neoliberal as-

cendancy has created a peculiar situation in the matter of public services. As Jayal points out, "the classes that have political voice do not have any stake in their improvement, while the classes that are entirely dependent on these services lack the voice to effect such change" (pp. 194-195). Underlying the idea of providing welfare to a putative class of citizens is the bitter fact that entitlement, if any, to social welfare arises only if a person belongs to an officially defined category of disadvantage.

In our present age, with the proliferation of displaced people and migrancy in search of employment, national citizenship is one among many identities that individuals may claim. Many on the margins live their lives as "peripheral citizens," and a document stands between them and access to basic rights and dignity. Citizenship, as Jayal points out, is an aspirational category and we have to reckon with the fact of "thin" citizenship as the fact of being for those invested in the idea of the nation-state, but without the social capital to enforce their claims.

This is a hard-headed and lucidly argued book that gives short shrift to many of the misty-eyed assumptions of belonging and citizenship. Full citizenship is like caviar: expensive, hard to get, and accessible only to those with privilege.

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Citation: Dilip Menon. Review of Jayal, Niraja Gopal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History.* H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. February, 2015.
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