

Religion, Caste, and Politics in India (Columbia/Hurst)

Christophe Jaffrelot



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Following independence, the Nehruvian approach to socialism in India rested on three pillars: secularism and democracy in the political domain, state intervention in the economy, and diplomatic non-alignment mitigated by pro-Soviet leanings after the 1960s. These features defined a distinct "Indian model," if not the country's political identity.

From this starting point, Christophe Jaffrelot traces the transformation of India throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly the 1980s and 90s. The world's largest democracy has sustained itself by embracing not only the vernacular politicians of linguistic states, but also Dalits and "Other Backward Classes," or OBCs. The simultaneous—and related—rise of Hindu nationalism has put minorities—and secularism—on the defensive. In many ways the rule of law has been placed on trial as well. The liberalization of the economy has resulted in growth, yet not necessarily development, and India has acquired a new global status, becoming an emerging power intent on political and economic partnerships with Asia and the West. The traditional Nehruvian system is giving way to a less cohesive though more active India, a country that has become what it is against all odds. Jaffrelot maps this tumultuous journey, exploring the role of religion, caste, and politics in determining the fabric of a modern democratic state.

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