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Routledge handbook of South Asian economics

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influence of a now powerful Church – and provided higher education for the most able through the University of Ceylon. Health reforms, like most features of welfarism sought to benefit more than the poor. For example, those aimed at controlling malaria not only produced a fall in morbidity generally, but also became a significant feature in improving the social well-being of the population as a whole. By the end of this late period, Sri Lanka had a welfare system second to none in South Asia, and as good as anywhere in the developed world.

The period from 1948 to the present can itself be divided into the period up to the 1970s and from then to the present. The former saw the consolidation of the Sri Lankan welfare state reaching its apotheosis with a UN report which congratulated it on reaching ‘rates of school enrolment, literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy far ahead of other low income countries and better than many middle income ones’ (127). The emerging movements of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism changed everything. Professor Jayasuriya calls it the transformation of the Sri Lankan polity from welfare to warfare with an intransigent ethnic conflict, enmeshed in two cultures and two societies.

The period since the 1970s is full of stark reminders of the destructive nature of ethnic conflict. This, of a country whose recent history involves a break from its colonial past, a 25-year civil war, and a legacy that leaves Sri Lanka as the most militarised country in South Asia. The book as a whole offers a hopeful account of the value of Sri Lankan social development and social policy, but the growth of the current military establishment does not augur well for the future. Although Professor Jayasuriya does not say so, there are difficult times ahead. He sees the future as less certain; it all depends, he argues, on whether the military establishment remains in the ascendency and whether the earlier social democratic state, which nurtured the welfare system can be restored. This is a thoughtful well-written account, by a distinguished scholar in his field.

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The classic dilemma for books on South Asia is whether to present country-studies or to take a thematic approach. This handbook takes a thematic approach, with six parts titled ‘Economic growth’, ‘Human development issues’, ‘Monetary and fiscal policy issues’, ‘Sectoral issues’, ‘International trade and financial flows’, and ‘Environmental issues’. Each part comprises two to four chapters.

The handbook includes some excellent chapters. Part V ‘International trade and financial flows’ offers four very good chapters: namely Pursell’s ‘Trade policies in South Asia’, Kumar’s ‘Foreign capital flows and development … ’, Bhattacharji’s ‘Trade, growth and poverty in South Asia’ and ‘The impact of South Asia on global institutions … ’ by Thangavelu and Pattnayak. From reading these chapters, the reader may clearly understand that despite the role of institutions like the World Trade Organisation, and South Asia Association Regional Cooperation, the increasing number of free trade agreements, and the presence of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement, South Asia has its own dynamic.
This dynamic emanates from special relations between India, the main driver in the region, and the smaller states as well as the growing influence of China in South Asia. As regards trade, the prevalence of anti-tariff and anti-dumping cases makes it difficult to move from regionalism to real integration.

The thematic approach adopted here is interesting, as the analytical work and the synthesis are done for the reader. The book is very dense, with copious referencing and the presentation of quantitative data contributing to the feeling that this is more of an academic work than a book for a lay readership.

In some ways, the handbook is not as strong as it could have been. The challenge in the field is to locate up-to-date data, and the sources used in many chapters are from 2008 publications if not 2005–06. For instance, Chapter 6, ‘The importance of education and literacy skills’ uses sources mainly dated from 2001 to 2006. In addition, it would have been useful to have the various countries profiled at some point in the text. Without understanding the distinctiveness of the various elements of the group, it is difficult to grasp fully the regional picture.

The thematic approach is effective, but it does come at the cost of a detailed treatment of smaller states; a notable exception being the chapter ‘Trade Policies in South Asia’ by Pursell where each South Asia country is presented separately. Out of 20 chapters, no less than eight only discuss India. Although India is surely the key driver of the region, it is already very well served in relation to the other states. An opportunity to rectify this imbalance is missed in this volume. The treatment of environmental issues in Part VI might have been more extensive, especially when the editor highlights (11) that the region has been suffering increasingly devastating natural disasters in recent years. The chapter by Gaiha, Hill and Thapa, ‘Natural disasters in South Asia’, should have been placed in this section as it shows, with numbers and facts, the extent of the natural disaster issues and how they affect South Asian countries. Environmental issues, especially the management of water as a resource and a threat, are key issues in this region with a real economic impact.

This volume competes with a similar book, Handbook on the South Asian economies, edited by Anis Chowdhury and Wahiduddin Mahmud (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2008). The latter volume takes a country by country approach, and many might prefer this approach. The Routledge volume is nevertheless a useful, thematically organised complement to the country by country approach. A later edition might consider expanding coverage of the smaller economies of South Asia.

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Historian Neeti Nair’s Changing homelands, a fine addition to the new generation of Partition scholarship, adeptly navigates sensitive historical terrain to shed new light on the complicated story of Punjab’s Hindus, and the relation of Punjab to the larger Indian national movement. This is a study of the Hindu minority in Punjab, an understudied constituency in Partition literature, and the politics of communalism and nationalism as they