The book recognizes the ‘importance of the caste system’ (p. 206) but does not offer useful generalizations on how caste struggle and class struggle interact. In answer to the question why insurgency has grown recently, which it has, we are told that ‘tribals represent a relentless fight against the neoliberal development model that corporate magnates champion’ (p. 207). On the face of it this is an attractive idea because insurgency has grown during the last two decades that saw India move from a socialistic to a liberal economic policy regime. But why should resistance to corporate power be greatest in tribal areas where corporate penetration is the weakest, and be absent in areas like western coastal India where corporate magnates lead structural change? In the book’s own account, liberalism does not necessarily hurt tribal groups; in Tripura, the prospect of exporting rubber has empowered tribal landholders. Fundamentally, the book is undecided as to whether the insurgency is the result of new forms of exploitation unleashed by the market-led developmental model or a failure of the old state-led socialistic developmental model. Neither market failure nor state failure is explored with adequate statistical data.

In the end, we have here a book that leaves almost all the important questions about communism in India unanswered. And yet any future attempt to address some of these questions will need to consult the detailed narrative it contains.

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Itty Abraham’s represents a departure from the hackneyed approach towards foreign policy, it is an absolute must-read not just for academics, but for anyone with an interest in Indian foreign policy, history and politics. As the author makes clear in the preface, while his thrust is on Indian foreign policy, he has not relied excessively on conventional approaches adopted towards the study of foreign policy; in fact, he has sought to question them. ‘This is not a conventional study of Indian foreign policy. This study does not try to establish realist, idealist or constructivist frames with which to understand international relations and the state … Nevertheless this book is centrally concerned with questions basic to the study of foreign policy, while at the same time questioning the conventional parameters of the field’ (p. 14).

Some of the significant departures from the traditional approach to foreign policy are: first, the author has not looked at foreign policy only post-1947, but delved deep into the key features and rationale behind British strategic thought in the late nineteenth century. This had the clear imprint of the then Viceroy in India, Lord Curzon, and was dubbed as ‘Curzonian foreign policy’. One major benefit of this time-frame is that it gives Abraham an opportunity to make a serious comparison between colonial and post-colonial foreign policy. Abraham argues that ‘imperial thinking is central to understanding the form and practice of postcolonial Indian strategic planning and action’ (p. 114). One of the key characteristics of Curzonian foreign policy, according to Abraham, was that ‘Curzon’s geopolitics was the most formal and explicit vision of a land defined territory of India that saw its primary points of strategic vulnerability lying beyond its northern mountainous frontiers’ (p. 114). In a later chapter on geopolitics, Abraham also discusses some important debates within various strands of Indian politics. He focuses on the differing world-views of Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru. For example, the author brings to the fore an important point, which is that Patel’s views of China were largely influenced by his anti-
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communist leanings while one of the major criticisms of Nehruvian foreign policy was the Prime Minister’s idealism and absolute neglect of ‘geopolitics’ (p. 119).

Second, the author both challenges traditional scholarship on states, and the notion of space, borders and territory as static, and makes the interesting point that this legitimates states’ views of their space as static rather than dynamic; ‘space is an outcome not a prior foundation’ (p. 5). Abraham also points to recent scholarship which has strongly argued that borders are ‘fluid, shifting’ while ‘state border games seek to transform this fluidity and mobility into a fixed and unchanging form, namely the permanent international border between countries’ (p. 35). Last, the author highlights that for the north-east of the country not much changed after independence since it was perceived as a mere frontier and looked at with suspicion, laws like the 1958 Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which grants the armed forces special powers in ‘disturbed areas’, only serve to emphasize this point.

In his chapter on diaspora, Abraham traces Indian immigration from the 1830s. He also draws attention to the impact of migration on the freedom of movement. One of the significant points made in this chapter is on the changing approach towards the affluent sections of the diaspora settled in western countries since the 1990s, especially under the BJP (Indian People’s Party) government. Abraham refers to the findings of the LM Singhvi report (2000) which was set up with the intention of tapping the economic clout of the Indian diaspora. The increasing attention given to the diaspora is attributed to the rise in their economic status, and the reorientation of economic policies. Interestingly, current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, has sought to reach out to overseas Indians in the US, Canada and Australia; during his visits to these countries he has addressed large gatherings of expats. Conversely, Abraham also highlights that India tends to neglect poorer sections of the diaspora, ‘even as the global Indian nation is now imagined in terms familiar from the beginning of the twentieth century, namely a deterritorialized and dispersed community, class and caste distinctions constitute the new territorial boundaries that are applied to divide the Indian nation from itself’ (p. 106). It remains to be seen whether the current government can address this shortcoming of India’s approach towards its diaspora.

In the concluding chapter, Abraham discusses India’s disputes with neighbouring countries—Pakistan, China—and makes a comparison with China and observes that China has made concessions to neighbours in boundary disputes where it faces a threat to its territorial integrity from ethnic minority movements (p. 147). This is to avoid a situation where ethnic minorities could find refuge across international borders or that neighbouring countries will try to cash in on China’s ethnic problems to destabilize it. Abraham then discusses the India–Pakistan relationship and the need for a change in mindsets and perceptions of national security.

As well as adopting a refreshingly new approach to foreign policy, the author has highlighted issues of contemporary relevance while exhibiting a nuanced understanding of South Asia’s history and politics. However, some relevant points related to territory, diaspora and geopolitics were overlooked by the book, including the role diasporas play in reconciliation not just between India and Pakistan, but in South Asia as a whole and the increasing connectivity between India’s border provinces and neighbouring countries. While Abraham does discuss some, such as the transport links between the two Kashmirs, he ignores the equally important cases of the two Punjabs; Rajasthan and Sindh; West Bengal and Bangladesh; and doesn’t discuss whether these networks will help revive cultural identities and affiliations obliterated by the rise of nationalism.

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