

Pereira, Alex. Book Review – Rahul A. Sirohi's From Developmentalism to Neoliberalism: A Comparative Analysis of Brazil and India.

Rahul A. Sirohi. *From Developmentalism to Neoliberalism: A Comparative Analysis of Brazil and India*. Palgrave Macmillan: Springer Nature Singapore, 236 pp. ISBN 978-981-13-6027-5

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Over the last two decades, since the acronym BRICS emerged in economics, there has been a growing academic interest to compare the development path of those emerging economies. Rahul Sirohi's book compares specifically the historical economic experiences of Brazil and India, covering the central role of the developmental states between the 1950s-1980s, during the period of import substitution industrialisation, and the post-1980s when both countries embraced neoliberal reforms. Sirohi's findings show that more than a simplistic understanding of neoliberalism as the freedom of the market over the project of a minimum state; the governments of these two countries have played a significant role in providing interventions to address distributional conflict of national income between the elites and the rest of the population. His research shows that despite some economic growth, neoliberalism has also worsened income distribution, the socioeconomic conditions of a large part of the population and even generated de-industrialisation in those countries.

Scholars such as Joseph Stiglitz, Alfredo Saad-Filho, Atul Kohli among many others have questioned whether economic growth and neoliberalism can provide solutions for poverty alleviation and the issue of the increase of inequalities. After exploring the impact of neoliberal reforms in the contrasting developmental trajectories of Brazil and India, Sirohi builds his argument showing the incompatibility of social welfare programs to the neoliberal agenda. He provides a well-balanced debate comparing different theories to criticise the impact of models that take into account exclusively economic growth, productivity and capital accumulation as a measure of development. Instead, his approach is more aligned to Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen's argument, based on human development (p.22). According to his findings, the Indian impressive economic growth and relative macroeconomic stability of the last three decades have been exclusionary with little contribution to improve the quality of the lives of the masses of the population. Sirohi argues that a slower and more gradual process of liberalisation has helped Indian elites to adapt themselves to globalising pressures, while the emergence of right-wing religious nationalism under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has contributed to bring potential divergent elites' interests together, preventing also collective actions emerge from below (p.113).

In contrast, during the same period, Brazil experienced a more bitter experience, passing through a military regime and several cycles of economic austerity and political crisis. These crises have contributed to labour and other social movements to organise their claims to influence the decision-making process. Then, when in power, the Worker's Party

(PT) was able to introduce a pro-poor agenda promoting more inclusive growth, helping to lift the social and economic condition of a large part of the poor population. Sirohi's findings reinforce the idea that it is through the comparative analysis of the distinct trajectories of these countries that some aspects become evident and the lessons learned from both political and economic contexts can give the contribution to social sciences.

Although the book presents its criticism on the neoliberal agenda, Sirohi also provides severe and constructive critics on the position of the left, showing, for instance, that the failure of the PT after unprecedented four consecutive mandates in power in Brazil is the result of the challenges to implementing a welfare system and its inability in radically tackling the structural foundations of the neoliberalism, such as financial interests, external economic dependence and neoliberal monetary policy (p.219). In his view, the Party was unable to manage neoliberal interests and social needs while getting involved into corruption scandals and political opportunism, distancing itself from lower classes and social movements - which formed the basis of its electoral support. Then, the impeachment of the President in 2016 marked the end of a remarkable era of the left rule.

'From Developmentalism to Neoliberalism' fits perfectly to courses of international development and studies of comparative politics. It is highly recommended to scholars searching for different models of development delinked purely from economic growth and balancing different lines of thoughts and authors' perspectives. For those interested specifically in the comparisons between Brazil and India, in addition to an extensive literature, the book also provides a detailed research of political events in both countries and high quality of the critical analysis.

Sirohi concludes that social welfare conflicts to the neoliberal agenda. In this book, he sets a critical perspective on the impact of neoliberalism as a source of increasing inequalities and exploitation of disadvantaged classes. He supports the importance of workers as the central protagonists of development today (p.224). Therefore, even for the opponents of this perspective, the book will be a challenging intellectual source helping to establish constructive debates. Finally, it is essential to highlight that after this book was launched, Brazil also entered a new era with the huge staggering victory of the far-right President Jair Bolsonaro. Therefore, the history and the similarities between Brazil and India do not end in this book. With the rise of populist right-wing leaders with religious, nationalist and centralising discourses posing a potential risk of deterioration of democratic institutions and potential impact on economic development, Sirohi's book provides a rich historical knowledge background to understand these current on-going political processes.