



Patronage as Politics in South Asia

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Western policymakers, political activists and academics alike see patronage as the chief enemy of open, democratic societies. Patronage, for them, is a corrupting force, a hallmark of failed and failing states, and the obverse of everything that good, modern governance ought to be. South Asia poses a frontal challenge for this consensus. Here the world's most populous, pluralist and animated democracy is also a hotbed of corruption with persistently startling levels of inequality. Patronage as Politics in South Asia confronts this paradox with calm erudition: sixteen essays by anthropologists, historians and political scientists show, from a wide range of cultural and historical angles, that in South Asia patronage is no feudal residue or retrograde political pressure, but a political form vital in its own right. This volume suggests that patronage is no foe to South Asia's burgeoning democratic cultures, but may in fact be their main driving force.

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