

Why Democracy Deepens

“Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic,” warned Bhimrao Ambedkar, the principal architect of the country’s constitution, a year into independence. The social order – the soil on which India’s new democratic edifice was then being erected – was marked by social hierarchies and economic vulnerabilities. Decades of socio-economic changes since then would transform this old order, albeit unevenly across Indian states, to decisively shape the development of democracy in the country. *Why Democracy Deepens* relates how these socio-economic changes have deepened democracy in India beyond its topsoil. Drawing on his research in villages and states, Anoop Sadanandan explains how socio-economic changes have heightened the need for local voter information and promoted grassroots democracy in some Indian states. By exploring the pivotal political developments in the world’s largest democracy, the book puts forward a theory of local democratization.

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Why Democracy Deepens
*Political Information and Decentralization
in India*

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Author's Note

This book investigates why people in some Indian states have to travel long distances to urban bureaucratic centers to avail basic government services – such as tapped water or a road in their village – that their compatriots elsewhere get from their elected village councils; why unelected bureaucrats in distant towns are the most recognizable face of government in some parts of India when others have functioning elected councils in every village; why democratic governance remains remote to some Indians even as it reaches out to others.

“Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic,” warned Bhimrao Ambedkar, chairman of the committee that drafted the country’s constitution, a year into independence. The social order, the soil on which India’s new democratic edifice was then being erected, was marked by age-old ethnic and gender prejudices and economic marginalization. Keenly aware of this reality, Ambedkar judged the villages that upheld this social order to be the ruination of India. Fortunately for India, decades of socio-economic changes since then have chipped away at this traditional order to socially and economically emancipate even those who had so little. In the process, many were freed from their vulnerable existence to give real meaning to the political ideal of one person, one vote. But, this transformation has been uneven across India, strapping some with greater vulnerabilities even as it bestowed greater freedoms on others. This book is about how these uneven socio-economic changes deepen democracy in India beyond its topsoil into its villages, its very substrata.

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