
Book Review-II

Reviewed by

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Choudhuri, Srabanti, & Guha Thakurta Banerjee, Barnana. (Eds.). (2024). *Drifts from the Dens of Democracy*. Kolkata: NSOU Series in Studies on Marginality, Volume-I, School of Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University.

Introduction

Drifts from the Dens of Democracy is an ambitious and timely edited volume that interrogates the promises, paradoxes, and lived realities of democracy in contemporary India. Emerging as the inaugural volume of the NSOU Series in Studies on Marginality, the book sets out to examine democracy not as a static constitutional arrangement, but as a dynamic, contested, and socially embedded process. Bringing together a wide range of scholarly contributions, the volume foregrounds marginality as a central analytic lens through which democratic institutions, cultural narratives, and policy regimes can be critically re-evaluated.

The editors conceptualize democracy as an evolving ideal that frequently “drifts” away from its foundational spaces—its “dens”—of inclusion, participation, and justice. This metaphor is effectively deployed throughout the volume to expose the fractures between democratic ideals and social realities, particularly in relation to marginalized communities, displaced populations, gendered exclusions, and cultural erasures.

Structure and Thematic Scope

The book is systematically organized into five thematic sections, each addressing a critical dimension of Indian democracy. Beginning with philosophical and historical foundations, the early chapters revisit Gandhian ethics, nationalist imaginaries, and constitutional aspirations, establishing the normative “dens” against which democratic drifts are later assessed.

Subsequent sections engage with representation, rights, and marginalization, offering incisive analyses of caste, gender, ethnicity, and political exclusion. Particularly compelling are the chapters that explore displacement—both urban and rural—as a structural consequence of development-driven governance, revealing how democratic legitimacy is compromised when livelihoods, identities, and voices are systematically displaced.

The volume also devotes sustained attention to cultural narratives, literature, and identity, demonstrating how stories, texts, and collective memories function as sites where democratic inclusion is either reinforced or denied. The final section on social security, environmental movements, and policy responses examines the state’s role in addressing marginality, highlighting both innovative interventions and persistent policy failures.

Scholarly Contributions and Strengths

One of the book’s major strengths lies in its interdisciplinary breadth. Drawing from sociology, political science, history, gender studies, cultural studies, and philosophy, the volume offers a panoramic yet layered understanding of democracy’s contradictions. The contributors collectively succeed in moving beyond celebratory or procedural accounts of democracy to foreground its everyday negotiations and exclusions.

The emphasis on marginal voices—Dalits, women, indigenous communities, displaced populations, and ethnic minorities—adds ethical and empirical depth to the analysis. Several chapters effectively bridge theory and lived experience, making the volume relevant not only for scholars but also for policymakers, activists, and students of democratic governance.

Equally significant is the book’s conceptual coherence. Despite being an edited collection, the metaphor of “drifts” provides a unifying analytical thread, enabling diverse case studies to

speak to a shared concern: the fragility of democratic promises in the face of entrenched power structures and cultural hierarchies.

Critical Reflections and Limitations

While *Drifts from the Dens of Democracy* is intellectually rich and thematically expansive, a few limitations merit consideration.

First, theoretical engagement could have been more dialogic across chapters. Although individual contributions are strong, there is limited cross-referencing among authors, which at times results in conceptual overlap, particularly in discussions of marginalization and representation. A more integrative concluding chapter synthesizing these insights could have strengthened the book's cumulative theoretical impact.

Second, while the volume offers deep insights into Indian democracy, comparative perspectives remain largely absent. Occasional references to global democratic crises appear, but a more sustained comparative engagement with other post-colonial or Global South democracies could have enhanced the analytical reach of the book.

Finally, the book privileges qualitative and interpretive approaches, which is a strength in itself, but the inclusion of selective quantitative or policy-impact data might have complemented the narratives, especially in chapters dealing with social security schemes and governance outcomes.

These limitations, however, do not detract substantially from the volume's scholarly value; rather, they point to potential directions for future volumes in the series.

Conclusion

Drifts from the Dens of Democracy is a significant scholarly contribution that deepens our understanding of democracy by centering marginality, cultural contestation, and social justice. By refusing to treat democracy as a finished project, the volume compels readers to confront its ongoing failures and fragile possibilities. Its publication as the first volume of the NSOU

Series in Studies on Marginality is both symbolically and intellectually apt, setting a high benchmark for future work in this domain.

For scholars of democracy, marginality, and social theory, this book offers a rigorous and reflective resource. More importantly, it reminds us that democracy survives not merely through institutions, but through continuous critique, ethical vigilance, and the amplification of voices from its margins.
