

Laudation

For the Political Theory Book Prize 2024

The Jury has this year chosen to award the prize to Tejas Parasher of the University of California, Los Angeles, for his book *Radical Democracy in Modern Indian Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

The jury had the following to say:

The jury recommends Dr Tejas Parasher as the winner of the Political Theory prize for his book *Radical Democracy in Modern Indian Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). This book offers a rich exploration of Indian radical democrats from the early to mid-20th century. Challenging the anticolonial movement's focus on state centralism and parliamentarism, this dissenting group promoted a more pluralist, participatory model of democracy, which—unlike the state-centric model—was inspired by Indian political history and experience.

The book presents incredibly detailed and rigorous research, both in its empirical engagement with archives and in its theorisation of anti-colonial popular sovereignty. Written in a highly engaging and accessible style, it offers a new reading of the history of anti-colonial thought, bringing into the canon the works of forgotten thinkers such as Brajendra Nath Seal, Beni Prasad and K.T. Shah, all of whom produced profound and rich rejections of parliamentary democracy. It is therefore incumbent upon mainstream political theory and philosophy to engage with the work of these important thinkers.

As the first book-length systematic examination of this group of thinkers, the book decentres the nation-state as the telos of national independence movements and highlights the preference for a federation of national units articulated by many anti-colonial figures themselves - both in and outside India. Throughout, Tejas describes a striking continuity of imaginaries of popular government, first under British rule and later during and after the transition to independence. The book thus makes an invaluable contribution not only to our understanding of twentieth-century Indian political thought and revisionist imperial histories of decolonisation, but also to existing defences of radical democracy that have so far failed to engage with these fascinating rejections of representative democracy.

Finally, the book offers important insights for political theorists more generally. By excavating what is aptly described as the 'defeated tradition of popular sovereignty', it helps us to push the boundaries of our own political imaginary. The book is exemplary in taking seriously the claims of anti-colonial theorists and activists on their own terms, and in using their insights to read dominant traditions against the grain.

Ladislav Cabada

On behalf of the Political Theory Prize Jury
European Consortium for Political Research

