

Review of Piliavsky, A. ed., 2014. *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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I'm slightly torn about this volume edited by Piliavsky on patronage in South Asia. On the one hand, it is an important topic that deserves considerably more attention than it receives and most of the contributions do indeed offer invaluable analyses of the significance and pervasiveness of patronage across South Asia. On the other hand, Piliavsky lays out the principle argumentation of the book in ways that do not reflect the sophistication of the *anthropology* of patronage. She is critical of work that simplistically equates patronage to corruption and undermining democracy. Most of the contributions would also appear to suggest this is a naive reading of patronage. While this is indeed the case in many political science circles and Roniger, cited repeatedly, has been a principle culprit in analysing reciprocal asymmetry (clientelism), as damaging democratic institutions.

Anthropologists who have been paying attention to patronage since the heyday of patronage studies in the 1960s and 1970s, on the other hand, have not necessarily been so assertive in their political leanings. My own book (Lyon, S.M., 2004. *An anthropological analysis of local politics and patronage in a Pakistani village*, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.), which included the word patronage in the title no less (pp. 4-5), was certainly not attempting to evaluate the political pros and cons of patronage, but rather understand one of the dominant forms of political relationship in Pakistan with a view to understanding how it is maintained and reproduced. In other words I, like other anthropologists looking at such relationships, did not try to assign a prescriptive value to patronage, but instead understood the principle of *lena-dena* (give-take) relationships as broadly constitutive of asymmetrical relationships as well as the less common symmetrical ones. It is also worth mentioning, that while there were good reasons for patronage to lose some of its prominence after the 1970s, 'overwhelmingly dull' writing was not among them (p. 5). Some of most accessible and engaging ethnographies came out of those detailed analyses of the political practices of so called patronage networks (cf. Bailey, F.G., 1969. *Stratagems And Spoils: A Social Anthropology Of Politics*, Boulder, Co: Westview Press.; Barth, F., 1959. *Political leadership among Swat Pathans*, London: Athlone Press.; Boissevain, J., 1974. *Friends of Friends*, Oxford: Blackwell, though one could expand the list of well written, engaging patronage studies in anthropology rather easily).

Many of the contributions are excellent, despite my disappointment at the persistence of what appears to be a misleading account of the anthropology of patronage in the introduction. The book is divided into three sections each with between four and seven chapters: the Idea of Patronage; Democracy as Patronage; and a section entitled Prospects and Disappointments. One of the great strengths of this collection is the breadth of coverage across regions and faiths, though as is perhaps justifiable given the demographics of South Asia, patronage in India among Hindus dominates. It is nevertheless gratifying to see that Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tibet and Gulf migrants each have at least one chapter focussing on different aspects of patronage in contrasting contexts. One of the things that comes through persistently across most of the chapters is the dynamism of patronage. Most of the contributors are at pains to represent patronage as a form of political interaction that is, in itself, neither at odds with nor beneficial to democracy. This is not consistently the case, however, and the negative aspects of the personal and partial asymmetrical reciprocity are clearly included, for example in Martin's interesting condemnation of Pakistani patronage (seemingly in ways rightly criticised by Piliavsky in her introduction).

I believe the fundamental direction of this collection is undoubtedly correct. Patronage is not one

thing and it must be understood with reference to specific historical and ethnographic contexts. Nor can it be understood as isolated dyadic transactions, but instead must be seen as part of a broader social and cultural network of intersecting relationships and values. Finally, that it is far from unique to South Asia and to deny the significance of patronage politics in so called successful states is naive at best. Although my own view is admittedly biased, having worked on Punjabi patronage since the late 1990s, what the contributors have produced is a work of tremendous significance and any criticisms I may have of the way the collection is theoretically introduced are far outweighed by the value and originality of the individual contributions.