

EXPLORING THE POLITICAL IN SOUTH ASIA

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Retro-modern India

FORGING THE LOW-CASTE SELF



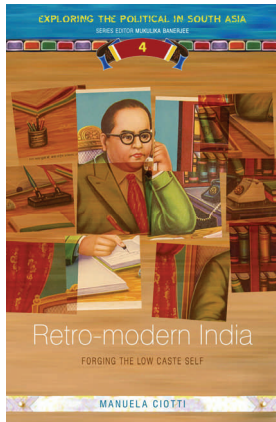
MANUELA CIOTTI

Retro-modern India

Forging the Low-caste Self

Manuela Ciotti

Series: **Exploring the Political in South Asia**
Series Editor: **Mukulika Banerjee**



'After a thorough discussion of various critiques of modernity, the author provides a sustained account of what she means by retro-modernity. Manuela Ciotti effectively sets the stage for following the trajectories of individuals and families in Manupur village and accounts for the ways in which Dalits realised that paths out of indignity lay in new occupations and their striving for escape from hereditary polluting work. Without overstating the case, or over-theorising, the author is able to show Dalit agency and its political pragmatism in searching for human dignity, inspired by the egalitarian ideals enshrined in the Indian constitution.'

K. Sivaramakrishnan, Professor of Anthropology, Yale University

Firmly situated within the analytics of the political economy of a north Indian province, this book explores self-fashioning in pursuit of the modern amongst low-caste Chamars. Challenging existing accounts of national modernity in the non-West, the book argues that subaltern classes shape their own ideas about modernity by taking and rejecting from models of other classes within the same national context. While displacing the West—in its colonial and non-colonial manifestations—as the immanent comparative focus, the book puts forward a unique framework for the analysis of subaltern modernity. This builds on the entanglements between two main trajectories, both of which are viewed as the outcome of the generative impetus of modernisation in India: the first consists of the Chamar appropriation of socio-cultural distinctions forged by 19th-century Indian middle classes in their encounter with colonial modernity; the second features the Chamar subversion of high-caste ideals and practices as a result of low-caste politics initiated during the 20th century. The author contends that these conflicting trends give rise to a temporal antinomy within the Chamar politics of self-making, caught up between compulsions of a past modern and of a contemporary one. The eclectic outcome is termed as 'retro-modernity'. While the book signals a politics of becoming whose dynamics had previously been overlooked by scholars, it simultaneously opens up novel avenues for the understanding of non-elite modern life-forms in postcolonial settings.

The book will interest scholars of anthropology, South Asian studies, development studies, gender studies, political science and postcolonial studies.

Manuela Ciotti is Research Associate at the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh.

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