

Preface

For a general reader, understanding Russia can be a daunting task. The essence of Russia is lost somewhere in the dichotomous narratives that emerge from the West and Russia. Western writings evaluate the Russian political system and social structure from a liberal framework, while the Russian counter-narrative harps on the unflinching virtues of Eurasian exceptionalism. Most works on Russia invariably fall into one of the binaries. General readers who are not familiar with such analytical frameworks find themselves at a loss in making sense of Russia. Russia as a consequence remains a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma—as Winston Churchill famously called it.

The aim of this book is to provide a general overview of the structures, institutions and processes that evolved after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. We examine Russia from a perspective which is neither Western nor Eurasian. We try to explain why Russia not only survived, despite several predictions otherwise, but also re-emerged as a significant player in the international system. Russia is a politically stable state capable of handling threats from inside or outside. It remains at the core of politics in Eurasia. Its economy has witnessed periods of both crisis

and growth. Russia is a resource-rich country with a highly educated and skilled human capital which helps it recover fast.

Russia managed to achieve political and social stability in a relatively short time, but in the process, it disregarded the autonomy of political and social institutions. Independence of institutions is essential for their legitimacy and to keep the executive under control. The powers of the executive in Russia far exceed the powers of the legislature. The presidency is at the core of political system in Russia. The constitution of 1993 subordinated the legislature to the president. The president can indirectly influence the judiciary through his appointing powers. The vertical division of power between the Centre and the federal units is tilted heavily in favour of the Centre. The state controls the media and civil society. In short, there are several inadequacies in the Russian political system and we highlight them in detail.

Our core contention is that Russia is a state in transition. Given its rich history of defiant culture and contemporary politics, Russia is unlikely to embrace the Western models of democracy. The attempts of the West to promote democracy through regime change are counterproductive. Democracy does have universal appeal but it cannot be superimposed in countries with inadequate institutions and contrary political culture. Such experiments have failed miserably in Eurasia. Demonising Russia in the name of democracy and human rights serves no purpose other than impairing its relationship with the West. Russia needs to be analysed and understood rather than demonised.

This book is an outcome of more than a decade of academic exchanges between the authors: first as supervisor and student and later as colleagues in the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. A systematic work on this work began with the idea of updating *The Making of New Russia* by Anuradha M. Chenoy but soon we realised that with the new developments in Russian politics and society, it would be easier to write a new book than update an earlier one. In some chapters, this book extends the arguments of that book without replicating the narrative. Some continuity of thought and language are discernible in those chapters.

We are grateful to a number of scholars and researchers who helped us in this project. We would like to acknowledge academic exchanges that we had with Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy. Whenever we were in doubt about certain concepts and their applicability to the case of Russia, we consulted him for clarification. He was always available for lengthy discussions and guidance. Our colleagues at the Centre, Professors Ajay Kumar Patnaik, Tahir Asghar, Sanjay Pandey, Archana Upadhyay, Phool Badan, Preeti Das, Raj Yadav, K.B. Usha, Nalin Mohapatra, Vishvanath Thakur and Amitabh Singh have always been very kind in sharing their ideas and resources with us. Abel Polese while visiting India read one of the chapters and made useful suggestions on how to improve that. Professor Pushpesh Pant has always been encouraging and a great support to us.

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