“A People’s Constitution”

**ABSTRACT:** What difference did the enactment of the the Indian constitution make on everyday lives of its citizens? It has long been contended that the Indian Constitution of 1950, a document in English created by elite consensus, has had little influence on India’s greater population. Drawing upon the previously unexplored records of the Supreme Court of India, *A People’s Constitution* upends this narrative and shows how the Constitution actually transformed the daily lives of citizens in profound and lasting ways. This remarkable legal process was led by individuals on the margins of society, and the book looks at how drinkers, smugglers, petty vendors, butchers, and prostitutes—all despised minorities—shaped the constitutional culture.

The Constitution came alive in the popular imagination so much that ordinary people attributed meaning to its existence, took recourse to it, and argued with it. Focusing on the use of constitutional remedies by citizens against new state regulations seeking to reshape the society and economy, the paper illustrates how laws and policies were frequently undone or renegotiated from below using the state’s own procedures.

Exploring how the Indian Constitution of 1950 enfranchised the largest population in the world, *A People’s Constitution* considers the ways that ordinary citizens produced, through litigation, alternative ethical models of citizenship.