

This book makes us aware of the distinctive features of Madhya Pradesh, a state whose politics has remained relatively unexplored when compared with other regional states of India, for the following reasons. First, unlike most other states which since their formations in post-colonial India have become a "self-contained political community" within a territorial boundary, MP (like Haryana, another 'new' state) continues to lack in terms of having a strong regional political identity and existence. The lack may be traced to its genesis in the form of a "sprawling incoherent unit" or worse a "left-over state" in the sense that whatever was left over after the creation of neighbouring states was apparently dubbed as Madhya Pradesh by the State Reorganisation Commission in November 1956. This explains why the state has had a strong tradition of "outsider politicians" who originally belong to the neighbouring Hindi belt. Second, with most of the Hindi-speaking states experiencing a silent revolution in recent times with political power shifting from the dominant upper (twice-born) landowning castes to the middle/intermediate peasant castes mainly through the electoral route, MP – like Rajasthan – remains an exception. Legitimacy of traditional social authority remains largely intact in the state. A "loyalty bound political culture" compels the parties to seek feudal support in a state that came into being essentially comprising the territories of 15 former princely states. Third, politicisation and mobilisation by state-level ethnic parties along the territorially confined social cleavages does not appear to have succeeded so far in the state to an extent it has in other states in the post-Mandal era. As a result, the two polity-wide parties i.e. Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party, notwithstanding a recognisable preference amongst certain social groups for one of them in the short term, continue to have a fairly spread electoral base, both in social and regional terms. Benefiting from endemic region-based factionalism afflicting the Congress, the BJP (earlier Jan Sangh) emerged as a credible alternative to the Congress much before it could acquire the same status at the national level.

All the above distinctive factors come to play as Sudha Pai takes up an analytical study of the policy initiatives undertaken by the Digvijay Singh-led Congress government in the momentous decade of 1990s. The initiatives basically had a dual aim: to enable/empower the Dalits and Adivasis who constitute almost one fourth of the state's population and also to reap electoral benefit by retaining the traditional support base of the Congress in a period of electoral volatility so as to counter the growing influence of the Bahujan Samaj Party. The significance of the initiatives lay in the fact that they were undertaken by an upper-caste dominated Congress regime without facing a significant assertion of the subalterns. While the neighbouring states like Bihar and UP, swept by the Mandal wave witnessed the incumbent "social justice" parties (Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal) taking recourse to a pattern of socio-political

The unravelling of best laid plans

Developmental State and the Dalit Question in Madhya Pradesh: Congress Response

By Sudha Pai

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mobilisation of lower castes using state power to empower them with the help of "symbolic policies" based on recognition of "difference", "presence" and "identity", the Digvijay Singh administration made similar efforts but through substantive policy measures. The two development programmes that receive critical attention in the volume were primarily chalked out in

like distribution of the government owned *charnoi* (common grazing) land among the landless Dalits and Adivasis. It also made efforts to restore the tribal land, remove the encroachments and ensure the *actual* possession of the land to landless Dalits and Adivasis. Another novel effort was the introduction of public-private partnerships, evident in the form of the active involvement

The programmes aimed at the redistribution of scarce resources like land and capital respectively among the Dalits and Adivasis of the state received priority by the Congress regime. However, they met with only limited success. The party has suffered successive electoral defeats in the last decade. Sudha Pai attributes it to the absence of any social change at the grassroots level. Strong-arm tactics were deployed by the upper as well as middle peasant castes who resisted the land distribution programme as it not only threatened to divest them from the encroached *charnoi* land and the common property resources but also threatened the top-down power structure in villages

Bhopal Document, a roadmap created by the Dalit intelligentsia following a state-sponsored conference and implemented by hand-picked civil servants, mainly Dalits, at the helm of the district government. Civil society groups continued to be involved in the process of consultation and monitoring of the programmes which were administered directly by the office of the chief minister effectively bypassing the upper/middle caste Congress legislators and ministers who naturally felt spurned and also threatened by the prospect of losing their core community support base.

The Land Distribution and Supplier Diversity programmes aiming at the redistribution of scarce resources like land and capital respectively among the Dalits and Adivasis of the state received priority by the Congress regime. Innovativeness was visible in the manner the land distribution programme was implemented. Instead of insisting on pushing for the failed land reforms legislations, the regime took certain measures

of Ekta Parishad, a NGO. The Supplier Diversity Programme, more in the mould of affirmative policy measure than archaic policy of protective discrimination (read caste-based reservation), committed the regime to have 30 per cent of government supplies especially to its welfare department and associated departments and institutions only from Dalit and Adivasi producers, suppliers, distributors or institutions in which the Dalits had at least 50 per cent ownership. Another scheme having similar market flavour was named Rani Durgawati Scheme (RDS) which enabled the unemployed educated Dalits and Adivasis to avail "margin money" from the government to make them eligible for obtaining credit from the banks to start their enterprise. These budding first generation entrepreneurs could also be allotted land for setting up units or paid 33 per cent of the cost of land under the scheme by the state government.

Despite the political will/courage

shown by a skilful, powerful leader, having a powerful landowning community support, going all out to use the administrative machinery at his command, the programmes met with only limited success, which was also reflected in the inability of the Congress to reap any electoral benefit from these programmes. The party suffered successive electoral defeats in the last decade. The intensive field study-based assessment report by Sudha Pai attributes it to the absence of any social change at the grassroots level. Strong-arm tactics were deployed by the upper as well as middle peasant castes who resisted the land distribution programme with all the power and influence at their command as it not only threatened to divest them from the encroached *charnoi* land and the common property resources but also threatened the top-down power structure in villages. The symbolic presence of the Dalits in the party leadership role, ensured by Digvijay Singh, was not enough to counter the apathy of the upper caste leaders from his own party. The BJP on the other hand tried to cash in by taking advantage of the OBCs' resentment against the programmes which excluded them from its purview. As for the Supplier Diversity programme or RDS, they catered to the microscopic segment ("creamy layer") of the targeted Dalit and Adivasi communities in the urban areas. They were ones who were already beneficiaries of the affirmative policies. So there was always an inherent limitation in the intent and scope of the whole scheme. The adoption of scheme illustrated how the new middle classes even if of plebeian origin matter much more than their actual number in terms of public policy choices as India undergoes the process of economic transition.

While going through Pai's comprehensive appraisal of the different programmes initiated by Digvijay Singh, one cannot but help observe that seldom have politicians arrived at a set of policies/programmes that have helped some groups and displeased no one, thus creating a win-win situation. The Education Guarantee Scheme adopted by Digvijay Singh as the chief minister was such a policy. The policy provided schools and teachers with rudimentary training to thousands of villages that had never had either. One can also add the Watershed Management and Health Mission programmes in the same vein. These programmes, which surprisingly find scant mention in the volume, were initiated at the very beginning of the regime. These were welcomed by the beneficiaries and also by sitting Congress MLAs who were prompt in taking undeserved credit for them in the successful electoral campaign for the 1998 assembly elections. However, the policies that targeted the entrenched identity-based interests without the necessary social change taking place within the society were bound to have limited success and met with stiff resistance not only from the affected classes but also their representatives who feared an electoral backlash, as happened in the case of land distribution programme.

The pivotal role played by Digvijay Singh in the whole developmental

process comes through the study. It draws our attention to the under-explored arena of growing power and influence of local leadership in shaping of the political and economic agenda at the state level (Narendra Modi, Nitish Kumar, Naveen Patnaik, and the late YSR are examples). The leadership style, the idioms, symbols as well as community support deployed/marshalled by Digvijay Singh should have received much more nuanced treatment. In fact Madhya Pradesh has always had a string of influential leaders. If in the past, the Congress had leaders like DP Mishra, Ravi Shankar Shukla, Govind Narain Singh, Awdhesh Pratap Singh and PC Sethi and Jan Sangh (now BJP) had Vijaya Raje Scindia, Kailash Chandra Joshi and Virendra K Saklecha, the '80s saw the emergence of a new breed of leaders like Arjun Singh, Sunderlal Patwa, Madhavrao Scindia, Kamal Nath, Ajit Jogi, VC Shukla in the Congress and Kushabhau Thakre, Uma Bharati in the BJP. The other parties like Bahujan Samaj Party have had to depend on 'imported' leaders like Arvind Netam, which partially explains their failure to make a significant mark in the state's politics. The presence of so many powerful leaders within the two parties has ensured that the politics in the state has always been deeply factionalised with a plethora of claimants for chiefministership at any given time — another factor that did not help Digvijay Singh in his efforts, which besides helping the marginal groups and the party also aimed at the consolidation of his own leadership.

In a general mode, the present study substantiates an argument that recurs in some or other form in other researches, undertaken to gauge the effectiveness of different party regimes in implementing affirmative policy measures (Kohli 1987; Frankel and Rao 1990; Varshney 1995; Desai 2007 among others). In the states where the entrenched power and influence of the locally dominant castes/classes have not been sufficiently challenged by the newly mobilised Dalits and Adivasis (artisan OBCs are still missing) neither in the form of movement politics (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) nor in electoral terms (UP, Bihar), and also where the party in office as well as in government lacks in terms of ideological commitment and political will (West Bengal, Kerala under Left rule), it is difficult to make a success of a policy effort that aims at ameliorating discrimination or destitution of the socially and economically marginal ones. What has also not helped is the proclivity of the political class while embarking on these policies to look forward to mobilise the poor not as an economic class but as members of "communities of birth". Digvijay Singh, an "unusual leader" as he seemed then, was no exception on this count.

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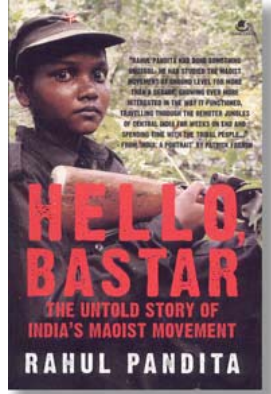
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The 'balanced review' is probably as much of a myth as the 'neutral book'. Introducing 'Forum' which celebrates the capacity of the written word to crystallise opposing points of view on controversial subjects, to provoke dissent and to radically re-imagine otherness.



AJAI SAHNI

There is an acute dearth of authoritative literature on India's contemporary Maoist movement. Most recent publications are in the category of quickies which haul the hapless reader over a sketchy reconstruction of the history of the Naxalite movement, based largely on tertiary sources, and a partisan and subjective narrative regarding aspects of the present Maoist revival.

Rahul Pandita's *Hello, Bastar* offers an immediate promise of something different. First, in its intended focus on Bastar, today the Maoist heartland; and second, in the fact that, as the front cover endorsement by Patrick French tells us, Pandita "had done something unusual—he had studied the Maoist movement at ground level for more than a decade, growing ever more interested in the way it functioned, travelling through the remoter jungles of Central India for weeks on end and spending time with the tribal people."

Obviously, then, expectations from *Hello, Bastar* would be exceptionally high. Here, the reader hopes for a detailed and firsthand account of the "heart of darkness", a region that has been little documented or understood, and a record of the gradual consolidation of the Maoists in this tribal heartland, and its troubled core, Abujhmad, where the rebels have established their "central guerrilla zone".

Pandita has certainly written a book that would provide some hours of edifying reading for those unfamiliar with the Naxalite movement. His experience of "more than a decade" of studying the movement, his sojourns among tribals and Maoists, and his exceptional achievements as a journalist covering the conflict — including a rare face-to-face interview with the elusive 'secretary general' of the Party, Muppala Lakshmana Rao aka Ganapathi — are, however, poorly reflected in *Hello, Bastar*.

Indeed, *Hello, Bastar* is something

The heart of darkness

Hello, Bastar: The Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement

By Rahul Pandita

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of a deception—just another quickie, but posturing as an authentic narrative from the field. The title itself is clearly intended to mislead.

Just two sketchy chapters bring any significant focus on the Bastar region: "Hello, Bastar" and "From Andhra to Abujhmad". But even this is disingenuous. Apart from a slight peppering of anecdote, these are also derivative narratives from earlier histories and from widely available Maoist documents. At no time is Pandita able to convey a sense of the dark isolation of this region, its grim neglect, and the texture of the lives of its people. There are, of course, a handful of atrocity stories pulled out of news reports and occasionally from personal narratives. But swapping atrocity stories is not a productive pastime if you want to understand conflict—the other side invariably has large archives documenting Maoist excesses. Pandita does pretend to an 'objective' posture here; after describing several Police atrocities in graphic detail, he notes that "The Maoists, of course, kill their enemy with equal ruthlessness" (p 133). But he is quick to narrate, without comment, but with implicit approval, an account by a "senior Maoist leader", who cites "a story popular during the Chinese revolution" to conclude, "When a tribal guerrilla kills the 'class enemy'... it gives him immense satisfaction. His pent-up

anger caused by suffering humiliation and exploitation, generation after generation, make him act like this." (p 134)

Crucially, Pandita fails to interrogate the nature of the Adivasis' relations with the Maoists. By all accounts, the Maoists have unsettled traditional relations within tribal communities, just as other 'outsiders' have, and have done this, in at least some measure, through coercion and intimidation. Many of the changes they have enforced — however well-intentioned or otherwise — have provoked resentment within these stagnant communities, but we learn little of this. Instead, Pandita leaves us with the sentimental, and at least faintly ludicrous and certainly contemptuous, image of the Adivasi as a mongrel that runs to the Maoists on being "kicked" by the State (p 123). That at least some Adivasis are running to the State on being "kicked" by the Maoists is a matter that does not hold Pandita's attention. Indeed, Pandita is rightly and harshly critical of the State's failures and excesses throughout the book; he demonstrates no comparable appraisal of Maoist transgressions.

Pandita informs us, with obvious moral outrage, "Unfortunately, the Maoists have been used by political parties to further their own interest" (p 84). Clearly, the cynical, compromised and corrupt Indian

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