

have devoted some space to defending his choice to meet the obvious comment that ultimately India would need to find home grown solutions. The reforms to be carried out in tandem are necessary to bring about efficiency but although important constitute the proximate layer of an otherwise more complex environment in which the civil services function. Issues of inclusiveness in governance; mass mobilization; working with NGOs and Public-Private Partnerships; insistence on social audits and greater participation of civil society need to be brought into the mainstream of the reform agenda, especially in the context of the constitutionally mandated democratic decentralization. Reforms need also to be carried out within the oversight and regulatory bodies like the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Central Vigilance Commission and the Central Bureau of Investigation so that the ideas on Risk Management are properly understood and implemented.

On the core issues of separation of policy from implementation a more critical approach could have been taken. Would it be correct to altogether divest Ministry Secretaries from responsibility for the efficient management of departments, when there is a general consternation that people at the top are getting away with almost anything? Autonomy is good but limits must be set. Even well respected organizations like the Space Commission have slipped up as witnessed by the S-Band spectrum imbroglio.

Having set out the reform agenda the author should also have attempted a road map for implementation, more so when he has firsthand knowledge of the attitudinal lethargy of the civil servants to change. This would have also justified the title which calls for 'building' a world class civil service. Since he has relied heavily on the U.K. model it would be pertinent to recall what its most ardent proponent had to offer. In her memoirs *The Downing Street Years*, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher remarked that the only desire the civil service had was for 'no change' and that the idea that 'the civil service could be insulated from a reforming zeal was a pipe dream'. The strategy she adopted was to encourage individuals to bring about reform rather than changing attitudes en bloc, and to do it in stages. In fact the Executive Agency system in the UK advocated by the author was brought about much later in the 'Next Steps' programme. India obviously needs to come up with its own suggestions but one thing is clear and S.K. Das makes no bones about it, that if change is going to be forced on us why not start now?

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## Where is the Party?

K.K. Kailash

DEVELOPMENTAL STATE AND THE DALIT QUESTION IN MADHYA PRADESH: CONGRESS RESPONSE

By Sudha Pai

Routledge, New Delhi, 2010. pp. XV+537, Rs. 995.00

In this ambitious and empirically rich study Sudha Pai attempts to make sense of the Congress Government policies in Madhya Pradesh (MP) towards dalits and tribals between 1993 and 2003. It draws insights from three fields of scholarship that Pai has distinguished herself in comparative politics, state politics and party politics in India, to advance the argument that the policy programme was a strategic attempt by the Congress party to respond to the rising dalit assertion taking place in northern India and to meet the challenge posed by two competitors, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It concludes that elite driven state sponsored efforts to transform an unequal society from above are unlikely to reach fruition in the absence of a strong political movement from below by the deprived communities themselves.

Pai's immensely detailed study is in four parts, has ten chapters, besides an introduction, conclusion and also a postscript. The first part with three chapters sets the background. It focuses on the Congress party in MP, its early history as well as its attempts to broad base itself over the years. This part also has an elaborate discussion on the 'new dalit agenda' and the Bhopal document. Part two and three form the core of the book, with three chapters each and focus on two programmes initiated by the Congress government, the land distribution programme and supplier diversity programme. These two parts are based on extensive field-work, analysis of government reports, dialogues and interviews with members of the bureaucracy, political leadership and civil society personnel. The final part examines the implications of these two programmes in the light of the Congress defeat in the assembly election.

Contrary to the widely held view, Pai argues that besides *bijli*, *sadak* and *pani*, there was something more that was responsible for the Congress loss in 2003. The developmental programme of the Congress intended to shore up its own support base, attempted to change the existing way resources were being used. Besides economic implications, the changed pattern of resource usage had social and political consequences. The OBCs were the main encroachers of the *charnoi* or common grazing land that the government was attempting to redistribute among the underprivileged. It is therefore not surprising that they opposed the land distribution programme as it not only reduced their access to land but also to cheap

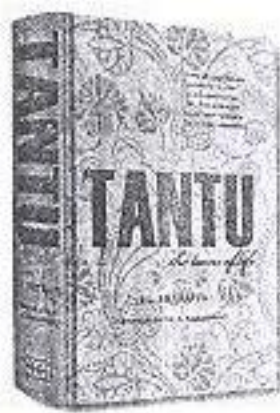
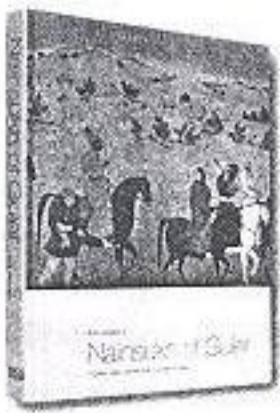
labour that the dalits and the tribals were hitherto providing. In the supplier diversity programme, the banias were similarly threatened by the rise of a new entrepreneurial class from among the dalits.

Pai shows that the Congress loss in 2003 despite these redistributive efforts was a result of a combination of factors. Using post-poll survey data to back her analysis, she argues that on the one hand, the BJP successfully tapped the resentment and addressed the concerns of the discontented sections. On the other hand, the shoddy implementation of the programme also alienated the intended beneficiaries. In other words the Congress was squeezed from all sides.

While a more activist deprived community may have helped, the failings of MP as a developmental state cannot be ignored. If we go by the textbook understanding of a developmental state, Madhya Pradesh violated at least two of its core features, the need to have a cohesive elite and an autonomous bureaucracy with unity of purpose. The study showed that the Congress was not one on the issue. The bureaucracy too was divided; a selected segment close to the Chief Minister pushed the programmes, while for others it was a routine exercise. At the local level the bureaucracy often worked to undermine the programme. But what, in the final analysis explains the failure?

In developmental studies often ignoring the role that leadership plays, the focus is on designing institutions and structures (Leftwich, 2010). By focussing on Digvijay Singh, Pai brings the spotlight on agency and its role in the developmental experience. Despite being sympathetic to Singh, Pai's account shows that he failed to provide an effective leadership to implement intentions and sustain arrangements to achieve the desired transformation with respect to the dalit question. Contrast this with Bhairon Singh Shekhawat's successful sales-tax reform exercise in Rajasthan (Jenkins, 1999). Despite an entrenched coalition of vested interests Shekhawat was able to work through them to bring about change. Clearly the role of political leadership in the face of odds and constraints is decisive.

While one may quibble with particular aspects of the methodology, Pai spells out a detailed defence of the specificities of the study like selection of districts, villages, choice of cases, their characteristics and more importantly the limitations of the selection itself. A more vigorous defence of why the land distribution and supplier diversity programme



"To trace the life and career of a painter (of the past in India is), as the author says, 'somewhat akin to following the course of an earthen lamp on swift waters.'"

However, knowing this and going against the prevailing (perhaps even comfortable) state of anonymity that is almost a defining condition of the arts in India, this book concerns itself with simply one painter: Nainsukh.

The glow that comes from his work is remarkably bright and warm. Nainsukh attached himself for the greater part of his career to an equally little-known place of Jasora, Bahari Singh. From that obscure corner of the hills, through the coming together of a discriminating patron – a true connoisseur – and a painter of genius, emerged a body of work that is compelling: startling in its freshness and heart-warming in its humanity.

Nainsukh of Gulet is perhaps the first ever book to appear on a traditional painter of the past in India.

It is a path-breaking work: illuminating in its scholarship and written in a flowing, almost poetic style. Justly, it has received world-wide notice, and has attained the status of a classic.

In this epic novel, Bhyrappa examines the very fibre of contemporary Indian life – social, political and psychological – basically in terms of post-independence, post-Gandhian scene. Police brutality, goondism at the village level, the phoney, five-star hotel culture, the theft of air, obnoxious smuggling, them out of the country, betraying a great heritage for monetary benefit by mercenaries – thus the novel progresses relentlessly.

The range of characters, entirely credible, is incredible and astonishingly comprehensive – the true Gandhian idealist, who, inspite of all odds holds on to his ideals; an honest and uncompromising journalist-editor, who, in spite of personal tragedy remains steadfast to his professional ethics, demonstrating that he cannot be bought, no matter what the price; the "liberated" career woman who sleeps around in order to gain favours in business; the academic politician with a carefully cultivated charm seducing glibble and impressionable young women etc.

All in all, it is simply a fascinating novel about modern India – surviving, as it does, the state of the country from Mahatma Gandhi to Indira Gandhi ending with the emergence of the "Emergency".

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were selected would have helped. Nevertheless, this 'methodological self-consciousness', to use Schmitter's phrase is not only refreshing but is essential for future studies (Schmitter 2009). Pai's approach would definitely help others who want to build on this work and explore some of the hypotheses that the book throws up. It would also be interesting to revisit some of the 'beneficiaries' of the programmes some time down the line and examine the changes that have taken place.

Another interesting aspect is the comparative flavour that runs through the book. Pai contextualizes and contrasts the Congress programme in Madhya Pradesh with that of identity based politics in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, comparing it with the strategy of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). There is also a comparison of the political culture of different regions of the state. At another level, she not only compares MP with other states but also with the state's own past experiences. While the land-distribution policies in Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal present a sharp contrast to the MP strategy, we are told that there is a similarity in approach between the Arjun Singh and Digvijay Singh Congress regimes. In terms of leadership, Pai contrasts Chandrababu Naidu and S.M. Krishna who undertook extensive economic reforms with Digvijay Singh who focussed on 'reforms from below'. These comparative references are useful to the building of a discipline of comparative study of state politics in India.

However much Digvijay Singh believed he was different from Naidu, there are similarities between them. Policy-making in both states was almost completely controlled by the Chief Ministers. Despite their different objectives, they also managed key programmes similarly. The *Jannabhoomi* programme in Andhra and the Rajiv Gandhi mission programmes in MP were attempts to move beyond the traditional policy implementation mechanisms. In this situation their respective parties were reduced to mere bystanders.

A question that is likely to be therefore asked is if this was a 'Congress Response', where is the party? There is probably more about the *Ekta Parishad*, a civil society organization, its materials as well as discussion with its members than the Congress itself. There is also more about Digvijay Singh than his party. While the implication of the policy package on the Congress has come out well, Pai wants us to take it that the policy programme towards the underprivileged was the Congress response to the dalit question. Given that the whole case rests on this assertion, a more systematic exposition of this point would have strengthened the case.

The study does not tell us much about the Congress party in contemporary Madhya Pradesh, except about factionalism. Here again, details are scarce as to how it specifically affected the internal politics of policy making

within the state Congress. Attention to party discussion, documents, organizational dynamics as well as interaction with more party personnel would have been useful. As of now, it is not clear whether the dalit agenda was a conscious party strategy or an idiosyncratic policy line pushed by Digvijay Singh to increase his standing within the Congress. Interviews with rival Congress leaders especially faction heads may have thrown more light.

The hunch that it was primarily a Digvijay scheme cannot be brushed aside easily if the issue is examined more closely. The plan of action had no space for the party, preferring civil society groups and the bureaucracy instead. By partnering the *Ekta Parishad*, the party's role as a central actor in policy making was removed. In the task force set up for implementation at the state as well as district level, the party component as such was not represented. Similarly, during his first term Singh had relied on 'structures outside the state' like the mission approach, which were clearly structured to reduce 'political influence'. If the aim of the exercise was to strengthen and broaden the party base, then it is imperative that the party be involved. Relying on civil society groups and the bureaucracy ignoring the party is an unlikely formula for success.

A more diligent proof-reading and copy-editing of chapter two and three would have made for more easy reading besides enhancing production quality. The bibliography should have also passed through more careful eyes. Etcetera in its abbreviated form etc. has probably been used much more than in an average text. While it is definitely a very useful word, it cannot always be assumed that the reader will understand what all is being implied by the etcetera. A more careful reading of the text may have helped eliminated repetitiveness and also aided in reducing the size of the volume itself.

Despite being a sympathetic account, Sudha Pai undoubtedly succeeds in highlighting the limitations of a top-down approach to social transformation. Even if the Congress could not draw much political capital from the developmental agenda, Digvijay Singh's efforts are unlikely to be forgotten and could stand him in good stead in the future. The study is definitely a welcome contribution to the study of state politics, leadership as well as policy and development studies.

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