

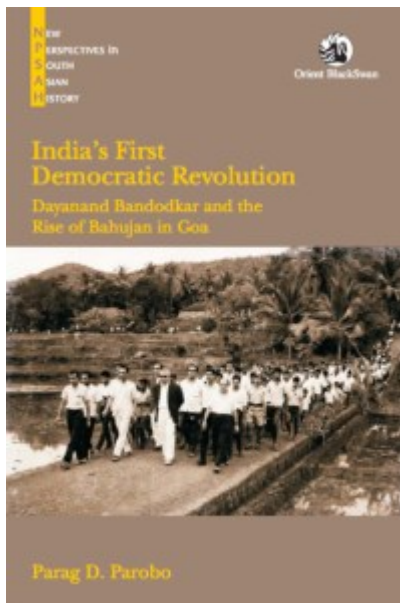


In his essay titled 'A Warning to Untouchables', Dr. B.R. Ambedkar appeals to the depressed classes to strive for two goals. The first one being the pursuit of education and spread of knowledge, for he believed that the power of the dominant castes rested upon the lies consistently propagated among the uneducated masses. Challenging the dominance of the privileged classes requires countering these lies which could only happen with education. Secondly, he asserts that the depressed classes must strive for power. Ambedkar says that "[w]hat makes one interest dominant over another is power [and] that being so, power is needed to destroy power".

The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh from the mid 1990s is considered a success story of Ambedkar's aforementioned appeals. But Parag Parobo's recently published book, *India's First Democratic Revolution* (2015), could help us imagine Goa's first Chief Minister, Dayanand Bandodkar, as a bahujan leader whose politics resonated with Ambedkar's political scheme mentioned above, much before Kanshi Ram and Mayawati.

In the first three state elections (1963, 1967, and 1972), the Indian National Congress (INC) suffered most humiliating defeats in Goa while Bandodkar and his Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party single-handedly emerged as the most powerful political force. The reason for this, as cited by Parobo, was the INC's dependence on reproducing feudal and caste hierarchies within the INC's organizational structure. During the first Goa assembly elections in 1963, the INC gave candidature mostly to upper caste landlords and "freedom fighters", leaving no space for the representation of subordinated castes. Bandodkar, on the other hand, placed an emphasis on giving tickets to the individuals belonging to the bahujan samaj, two significant examples being Kashinath Shetgaonkar, a loin-cloth-wearing farmer and Vijay Kamulkar, a tea-stall-owner, both from Pernem. Shetgaonkar and Kamulkar won their respective seats while defeating feudal doyens Raghunathrao Deshprabhu and Vaikunthrao Dempo. Deshprabhu and Dempo's loss reflects the grit of the masses to reject the INC's attempt to reproduce upper caste dominance within electoral democracy.

Bandodkar's caste background not only informed his political strategy but also his vision. Parobo astutely elaborates on this aspect by analyzing Bandodkar's educational policies for Goa vis-a-vis Jawaharlal Nehru's educational policies for India. Nehru is uncritically considered as the architect of Modern India by a large majority of the Indian population. Nehru's narrative of development was launched through investments in heavy industries and mega-projects and dams, which Nehru referred to as the 'temples of Modern India'. However, as Parobo points out, Nehru's development rhetoric emphasized higher education by downplaying the value of basic education in the country. At a time when a vast portion of the country's population did not have access to basic education, Nehru made precious resources available to higher education in the process starving primary and secondary schools of funds.



Parobo articulates it precisely when he writes that “at a time when investments in higher education were a priority being driven by [the] Nehruvian vision of India, Goa’s story was being scripted very differently”. Within one month of taking charge of the government, Bandodkar announced the setting up of 200 primary schools for the academic year 1964-65. The major thrust of his educational policy was to eradicate inequality by universalizing primary education and to make education accessible to everyone in Goan society by setting up educational institutions in villages, especially for those who belonged to lower ranks in the caste hierarchy. Under Bandodkar’s tenure, the number of primary schools increased

from 274 to 492 in 1964-65 and further increased to 900 in 1967. According to Parobo, Bandodkar did not merely limit himself to opening up schools but also created conditions that would make Bahujan access to education possible. For example, Bandodkar’s land reforms liberated the low caste mundkars from feudal compulsions and responsibilities, thus easing their way towards acquiring education. The results of these concentrated efforts were seen in the census of 1971, wherein in the New Conquests, a region which had received relatively less attention in terms of education before 1961, the literacy rate increased from 18 to 51 percent.

Bandodkar seized political power which, according to Ambedkar, was the master key for the lower caste emancipation. Through his political strategies and reforms, Bandodkar was able

to achieve two things. Firstly, Bandodkar disrupted the elite Goan establishment, both Hindu and Catholic, which was reaping benefits available to them through their support of the Portuguese colonial state. Secondly, he strategically rejected the INC's hierarchical politics as well as the Nehruvian vision of development that catered to safeguarding the interests of the elites. Instead, he scripted a development narrative that prioritized the liberation of the lower caste communities. Thus, even though Bandodkar may not have engaged directly with Ambedkar's political thought, he was able to demonstrate the potential of Ambedkar's vision of subaltern emancipation. He did this by seizing political power and exposing the limits of the Nehruvian model of governance. This goes to show that a critical questioning of Nehruvian idea of 'modern' nation and coupling an inclusive version of Bandodkar's strategy with Ambedkar's political thoughts could help us to imagine possibilities of emancipating the subaltern in contemporary times.

(First published in *The Goan Everyday*, dt: 27 October, 2015)



Share this...



Facebook



Whatsapp



Print



Email



Twitter



Reddit