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Working Paper

NATIONALIZING A PRINCELY STATE DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN TRIBAL BASTAR (1947-1980)



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Introduction

Intense constitutional deliberations surrounded the future of predominantly tribal areas in British India during the last three decades of colonial rule. On the one hand, the most vocal anthropologically minded administrators argued that the introduction of modern electoral democracy would be inimical to the interests of tribal people. On the other, the nationalists held almost unanimously that the only way tribes could be uplifted from their backwardness was by giving them guaranteed representation in the legislative bodies. With Indian independence, the debate was resolved in favour of the nationalists, and electoral democracy made its inroads into tribal areas such as Bastar. In this paper, I shall analyze the dynamics through which the predominantly tribal region of Bastar came to be incorporated into the body-politic of the new nation.

In order to introduce the complexities of the issues involved, let me begin with a newspaper story about the first elected Member of Parliament from Bastar constituency, Muchhaki Kosa. This tale is important for it points to the several paradoxes of the newly emergent Indian democracy:

A very strange story was published last week from the Indian Parliament at Delhi. Some of the former ruling princes in India still exercise great influence; from constituents in their territories they secured last winter the election of their nominees. But few maharajas can have so biddable a member of Parliament as His Highness of Bastar. This Maharajah arranged for the election of a man named Kosa, a tribesman from a secluded forest area, who could not read or write had never ridden in a train or a motor-car, who did not know the use of money, and who spoke only in a dialect known to no other member of the Delhi Parliament. To this legislator the Maharajah attached a secretary who was to relieve him of all his worries. At first all went as the Maharajah had planned. The Secretary accompanied Mr. Kosa to parliamentary sessions and instructed him on what documents to put his thumbprints. But the secretary pressed his advantages too far. It occurred to him that as he did all the parliamentary work, he ought by rights to have the parliamentary salary; he therefore intercepted Mr. Kosa's stipend, and the poor member of Parliament was reduced to near starvation. In this condition he was found weeping one day at his desk in the Parliament Hall, and at last by means of an interpreter he was able to tell his story. His colleagues gave him courage, and he rebelled against the secretary. It was the story of Faust and Mephistopheles. Mr. Kosa's salary was paid into his own hands; and his face "was full of indescribable joy." But now the problem is what will happen to him if he ever returns home to his constituency and faces his Maharajah. Mr. Mahtab, until lately a Minister of the Central Government, summed up the story. "A picture of

the circumstances,” he said, “in which Indian democracy is making headway came before my eyes and I sighed.”¹

I have found only one other detailed reference to this first parliamentarian of Bastar.² Barring these two items, he only appears in the various lists of local bodies in Bastar as a public representative who was characteristically silent. Besides, Kosa the parliamentarian, this story introduces the main cast of our narrative, Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo the ex-ruler of Bastar State and his nemesis, the Congress Party dominated state-structure. The events leading to and after Pravir’s tragic death will follow as well as my interpretation of them.

At the cusp of Indian independence, most tribal regions of the subcontinent had witnessed little electoral or associational politics. Especially in the erstwhile Princely States, the established tradition of ruling authority was that of the king and the court elite. In due course of time, such traditional power structures were superseded by democratic institutions, even though the king dominated the scene for as long as he was alive. In many cases, the ruling family made a successful transition as elected representatives of the people.

Scholars who have attempted to analyse the post-independence developments are well aware of the major challenges. Most provincial level files have either not been transferred to the archives or remain classified. If somehow one manages to get permission to work on the little that exists, the haul is usually poor for files have been indiscriminately destroyed for lack of storage space. In such circumstances, a historian has to give up the usual dependence on official archival repositories. Instead, institutional records, letters, memoirs, newspaper reports, statistical records and oral narratives become the primary source material which can legitimately plug the loopholes for historical reconstruction as well as provide a nuanced understanding of macro-level processes. Such a method is most required to reconstruct developments in the predominantly tribal areas where the official narrative often acquires the character of an infinite loop which parrot old colonial stereotypes. If successfully accomplished, besides the advantage of escaping the official bias, it can create new pathways to understand the wider nation-making processes at work in a newly independent India.

¹ A news item titled ‘A Strange Story’, *The Manchester Guardian*(1901-1959), September 1952, p.6.

² A report published in *The Times of India*, almost a year later describes him as a ‘Scheduled Caste M.P. from Bastar’ who was ‘the only illiterate Member of parliament and he wanted to resign due to ill-health. The Government of India feels that he should be encouraged to take keen interest in matters relating to aboriginal uplift. Mr. Muchhaki Kosa secured the largest number of votes in the general elections then any other M.P. from Madhya Pradesh. It is expected that he will attend the next session of Parliament’, *The Times of India*, 31st October 1953, p. 8.

Organising Democratic Politics in a Tribal Region: The Challenges Faced by the Congress Organization

The Central Provinces and Berar (McEldowney, 1980; Baker, 1993), like other linguistically 'composite provinces'³ established by the British Raj, was a conglomeration of Hindi and Marathi speaking areas. In 1931, it was reconstituted into nineteen districts, eleven of which were Hindi districts while the remaining eight were predominantly Marathi-speaking. In terms of Congress organization too, the province was a composite one: instead of having a single, over-arching provincial level body, it was divided into three Provincial Congress Committees (PCC). While the Hindi areas were under the *Mahakoshal* PCC, the Marathi belt was sub-divided into the Nagpur and Berar PCCs, each comprising of four districts. Despite the smaller area and population of the Marathi belt, the politics of the province lay firmly in the hands of Marathi politicians until the first quarter of the twentieth century.

This balance of power however, was set to change. As David Baker has so admirably shown, the politicians of the Hindi belt decisively managed to break the Marathi domination of politics in the Central Provinces and Berar over the span of two decades (1919-1939). N.B. Khare's ministry which survived till July 1938 was the last commanded by Marathi politicians. An intense power-struggle by Hindi politicians led by the Jabalpur based Pandit Dwarka Prasad Mishra successfully paralyzed the Khare ministry who (in temporary alliance with his then arch-rival Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla of Raipur), created conditions under which Khare had to resign. Consequently, on 29th July 1938 Ravi Shankar Shukla took over as the Premier of the Congress ministry in the Central Provinces and Berar. Though the Shukla ministry was short-lived, the episode signaled a new phase of supremacy for the Hindi belt politicians in the province (Baker, 1993).

The outbreak of the Second World War and subsequent resignation of the Congress provincial ministries resulted in the suspension of the new constitution proclaimed under the Government of India Act, 1935. The political stalemate continued until 1945, after which the constitution became operational once again. As a prelude to the imminent transfer of power to the Indian nationalists, elections to the Central Provinces and Berar Legislative Assembly were held in March-April, 1946. Riding on a nationalist wave, the Indian National Congress swept aside all other political parties, garnering 92 of the 112 seats. Once again, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla was elected the leader of the Legislative Assembly and became the Premier (also called Prime Minister) of the Central Provinces and Berar.

One of the most challenging tasks before the Shukla Ministry was to effect the integration of the 14 Princely States into the province. A parallel attempt was being made to incorporate some of these states (notably Surguja, Jashpur and Korea) into the province of

³ This term acquired political currency in the second quarter of the twentieth century when the demand for an extensive reorganization of British Indian provinces on the linguistic principle was on the rise.

Bihar. This movement was led by the charismatic Adivasi leader Jaipal Singh who was agitating for the creation of a predominantly tribal state of Jharkhand. Singh demanded a province in which predominantly tribal areas of British India were amalgamated with contiguous princely states exhibiting a similar demography. Thus, his claims extended to the territories of the Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Central Provinces & Berar.

Long before his career as a Congressman and even before he became a pleader, Shukla had been a tutor to many future rulers of the Princely States in Chhattisgarh, including Bastar. This prior connection helped him maintain a wide network of friends and associates who kept a close watch on the events in these States. As the head of the provincial state machinery, Shukla informed Sardar Patel of every move that Jaipal Singh made. Eventually the idea of Jharkhand was thwarted and the integration of these states into the Central Provinces and Berar was successfully achieved.

On 1st January 1948, through a gazette notification, the princely state of Bastar (along with 13 other Chhattisgarh States) became a part of the Central Provinces and Berar. Seventeen representatives from these states were nominated to the State Legislative Assembly through the State Government's recommendation to the Governor-General of India. From Bastar, Pandit Sunderlal Tripathi became Member of the Legislative Assembly.⁴ Another representative was Raja Naresh Chandra Singh, the ruler of Sarangarh State who became the tenth minister in the Central Provinces Cabinet.⁵

With the British departure from India in 1947, a new kind of political landscape was slowly emerging in India. The political character of the Indian National Congress which was essentially a "united front" of anti-imperialist nationalist forces underwent a sea change with the adoption of a new Constitution of India in 1950. Until the 1940s, its essential nature was not that of a quintessential political "party" engaged in electoral number game in order to capture state power. Instead, the Congress was essentially a "movement" whose chief aim was independence from the British colonial power and the establishment of a sovereign democratic nation-state in India. The introduction of election based representative democracy in 1952 throughout the length and breadth of the newly independent nation triggered a fundamental shift in the character of the Indian National Congress. Thereafter, it slowly began losing its earlier sheen and soon got transformed into a massive electoral machine which galvanized its forces around the time of the state assembly and parliamentary general elections. This deployment of political forces was not unchallenged and several political parties, both provincially and nationally were, gradually but steadily, gaining electoral ground. The establishment of Madhya Pradesh in accordance with the report of the States Reorganization Commission created new

⁴ Tripathi was a member of the influential *kanyakubja* Brahmin lobby within the Mahakoshal Congress. In a personal interview, Hiralal Shukla, a historian of Bastar told me that Tripathi was a relative of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, which explains the patronage he received from the leadership of the Provincial Congress.

⁵ *The Times of India*, 8th September 1949, p. 8. In March 1969, Raja Naresh Chandra Singh became the first tribal Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh albeit for a short period of 13 days.

dynamics. It brought together distinct units with a princely past and little tradition of associational politics.

Where the Bastar state is concerned, the earliest information on associational political activity available in the archives points to a certain K.V. Narasimha Rao, a trained lawyer, who was employed as a scribe in the State administration. Sometime in the 1940s, Rao was caught forging some State documents. He was immediately dismissed and ultimately externed from the Princely State. In February 1946, police authorities were warned that Rao had “reentered the State and intends to start a Praja Mandal there in consultation with Sarangdhar Das of the State’s Peoples’ Conference”.⁶

Whereas the Congress forces had little footprint in the region before 1946, following Independence they began spreading their organizational strength rapidly. According to a 1948 document of the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee, the 14 princely states of Chhattisgarh came under the “Orissa States and Bastar States Region” of the All-Indian States Peoples’ Conference. The Regional Council for this area was created on 1st of March 1947 at Cuttack in which ten representatives of the Chhattisgarh princely states participated.⁷ As August 1947 drew nearer, the political din in Jagdalpur, the State Headquarter town increased. However, the level of political agitation and associational political activities was low and confined to a few urban centres.

From 1949, concrete archival evidence of the activities of the local branch of the Indian National Congress in Bastar starts emerging. Among the prominent people in Bastar District Congress was its Minister Suryopal Tiwari whose monthly tour details are an important source of ascertaining the *modus operandi* of the organization in the district. The following report detailing his activities in August 1949, is a sample of the kind of record Congress workers were supposed to maintain:

1-8-49- For the purpose of organizing Tilak Jayanti on behalf of the Jagdalpur tahsil Congress, I reached here (Kachnar) two days before the celebrations were to be held. Despite heavy rainfall, the *prabhatpheri* was taken out at 5 a.m. in which the masses participated in large numbers. In the afternoon, a special assembly was convened to encourage the “vriksharopan yojna”. Headmen from 25 villages who attended the meeting

⁶ Praja Mandals were Congress bodies in Princely States which were tied to the parent organisation. However, before the mid-1940s, Congress not actively engaged in political work in Bastar. Sarangdhar Das was a known Congress activist. Hailing from Orissa, he was very active in the Praja Mandal Movement in the region. Letter No.B.3(10)45-46, From- The Office of the Orissa and Chhattisgarh States, Joint Criminal Investigation Department, dated Sambalpur the 19th February 1946; To- H.W. Alderson, Dewan Bastar State. From- A.C. Carter, Inspector General of Police; Sub: K.V. Narassimha Rao, B.A., LL.B. Activities in Bastar, F. No. C.30-9/46, Secret and Political Branch, Eastern States Agency, Government of India (GoI), 1946. Sub: Congress Activities- Bastar, National Archives of India (NAI).

⁷ Undated and Untitled Resolution regarding the Congress local body elections in the integrated Chhattisgarh States, F. No. Miscellaneous-69/1948, Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), pp. 12-14.

planted saplings of mango. I, myself planted 10 mango saplings. At 4 p.m. in the afternoon, I presided over a meeting on behalf of the Tahsil Congress in which I threw light on the need to strengthen the Congress organization, growing more food grains and social education scheme. After the end of the meeting, I negotiated a few cases of fleeing by women....In the evening I reached Kinjoli at six in the night via Amaguda after walking 8 miles. In the night, I explained 500 villagers about Tilakji. During the night, I rested at Kinjoli.

2-8-49-In the morning, at Kinjoli, in order to encourage the *vriksharopanyojna*, I directed the villagers to plant saplings of mango, neem and *karanj*. I told them about the protection of *nistari* jungles. Here, there were a lot of complaints about fleeing of women. The people do not have enough money that they would do court proceedings and neither are there any government empowered panchayats who would assist them. The *panchas* from the *darbari* times who are alcoholics and corrupt create a lot of nuisance here. If there is any trouble to the rural folk in Bastar, it is only that of fleeing of women. I mediated in a few cases of disputes involving women. Around 10 a.m. in the morning, I proceeded towards the Bastar village and after walking around 6 miles, I arrived in Bastar at around 12 noon.⁸

Suryapal further delineates the work he was doing for establishment of the Congress Seva Dal, Krishak Congress and Krishi Mazdoor Congress in the rural areas of Bastar. However, he admits that since he was not very well acquainted with the schemes, these efforts did not achieve great success. An account then follows about the preparations for the upcoming second anniversary of Independence Day which the Tahsil Congress had decided to celebrate in Jagdalpur. This included supervising the construction of a 2 mile motorable road, shaded seating arrangements for the Congress workers and audience, village cleaning operations, decoration and erecting a stage- all of which was done with the help of villagers.

Time and again, we find Suryapal launching into an aggrandized representation of himself as a self- sacrificing party cadre member. For instance, he wrote,

Every night around 100 volunteers continued coming to my house despite torrential rains and I regularly trained them in the national song. I thoroughly indoctrinated them as to how the Seva Dal activities will help in strengthening the Congress work. After looking at the organization here, a wave of enthusiasm swept through the people of Balenga, Gufti and

⁸ F. No. 83- Miscellaneous, MPCC Papers, NMML, pp. 44-45. The file and the accounts therein are entirely in Hindi. All the quoted and indented portions are my translations of the original.

Retaband and they volunteered to become soldiers of the Seva Dal. Like this, 500 soldiers were recruited in the meantime.⁹

Several interesting aspects about the Congress cadre work are discernible from Suryapal's accounts. The emphasis of the organizational work was on extensively touring the area and spreading of the Congress propaganda while doing so. The effort of a Congress worker was to be on engaging the people in constructive and nation-building activities such as the Grow More Food Campaign, social education and planting of fruit bearing or medicinal trees. A Congress worker was also supposed to help the people to solve their domestic or local quarrels and this was particularly visible in Suryapal's account of the problem of fleeing women. Another noticeable aspect of his description was the representation of people with princely loyalties as "alcoholic" and "corrupt".

Equal emphasis was given to the ritual and ceremonial aspects of "national festivals" such as Tilak Jayanti, Independence day and later Republic Day. The importance of imparting a training in citizenship seems to have been high on the local agenda of the Congress workers. Hoisting of the national flag, singing of national song and even spinning of cotton were all a part of this framework. Attempts to establish local ancillary bodies like Congress Seva Dal, Krishak Congress and Krishi Mazdoor Congress were designed to reach out to the broadest cross-section of the local population. Another significant feature of the early Congress propaganda seems to be the use of traditional means of recreation such as songs and dance programmes in order to connect the people with national festivals. Certainly, cinema shows must have been a very novel and crowd catching strategy. Proficiency in the local language (Halbi) too is stressed. In addition, Suryapal reported that his activities included campaign for prohibition, increased use of chemical fertilizers, propaganda about Gandhian values, providing encouragement to the school going children and adults, inspection of schools run by the Janapada administration. Meanwhile, Suryapal was playing his part in the organizational work of the Congress. A membership drive was going on in the district and there seems to be a lot of activity on recruiting the *prarambhik*(basic), *yogya*(qualified)and *karmath*(committed) members as well as preparing their lists.

Despite these proclamations of dutifulness and zeal, all was not with the Congress organization in Bastar district. An intense factional war was taking shape between Suryapal Tiwari on the one hand and Sunderlal Tripathi on the other. A District Working Committee member reported the following to the President of the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee, Seth Govind Das:

The desire for position has led to a lot of ill-will amongst the Congress office holders in Bastar district and this has created a lot of trouble here. Today, when we should make intense efforts to strengthen our sacred Congress organization, the Congress office holders are, instead, spending

⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

their energies in momentary opposition in order to annihilate their own co-workers. Recently, our honourable minister(of the district), Shri Suryapal Tiwari presented a no-confidence motion against our Chairman, Shri Sunderlal Tripathi. He did it surprisingly in front of just a few party cadres on a night when the programme for the next scheduled meeting (thereafter cancelled) for the next night was already declared.¹⁰

Suryapal Tiwari was desperately trying to undermine the membership status of Pandit Sunderlal Tripathi which the latter bitterly resented. Tripathi wrote to Seth Govind Das that Suryapal had openly declared that he did not consider him as the Chairman of the District Congress.¹¹ The feud acquired almost monumental proportions and even a truce effected between the warring parties in early 1955 soon broke down. So much so that on 22nd October 1955, Tripathi wrote to the Provincial Minister of the Congress, Lakshmishankar Govindsankar Bhatt that “it has been years and the Congress organization in the Bastar Division is long dead”.¹²

Electoral Politics in Bastar and Madhya Pradesh (1952-1967): Towards a Reassessment of Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo, A Controversial Political Figure

Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo’s willingness to let Bastar accede to the state of Madhya Pradesh was a rare instance of the cohesion of his views with those of the Congress in Bastar. Their relationship spanning nearly two decades, was by and large oppositional, and it culminated in the Maharaja’s untimely death in March 1966.

In her book, Nandini Sundar has given a fine account of the life and career of the last Maharaja of Bastar (Sundar, 2007, pp.191-233). Combining extensive archival material with rich ethnographic work amongst the tribal ‘member(s)’ and ‘membrin(s)’, she has woven an authoritative account, gripping in narrative and insightful in analysis. Building upon her narrative, I shall try to take it further by disturbing the narrative constructed by the Indian State which sought to represent Pravir as a ‘rebellious’ ex-ruler, unable to reconcile himself to the loss of his powers. It is only by juxtaposing the state’s portrayal with those produced by the non-state actors that the degree of misrepresentation that was indulged in by the Indian state and the Congress Party can be ascertained.

In February 1948, Pandit R.S. Shukla, the Premier of Central Provinces & Berar wrote to Sardar Patel suggesting the advisability of taking over Pravir’s estate as well as the privy-

¹⁰ Letter from Badri Vishal Trivedi, Member, District Working Committee, Bastar, To- Seth Govind Das, President, Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee dated 23-12-1949, F. No. 83-Miscellaneous, MPCC Papers, NMML, pp. 157-158.

¹¹ Letter dated 15-5-1950, From- Sunderlal Tripathi, To- Seth Govind Das in Ibid.,

¹² Letter No. R.M. 83 dated Jagdalpur 22nd October 1955; from- Sunderlal Tripathi; To- L.G. Bhatt, F. No. A-41/1955, MPCC Papers, NMML, p.11.

purse under the Court of Wards management in order to control his expenditure. Shukla wrote that such a step would induce the young Maharaja to,

marry and settle down in life, and at the same time, disillusion him of the fantastic ideas he has about the sovereignty over the State. This sovereignty is no doubt acknowledged in the Constituent Assembly by Dr. Ambedkar. I do not mind the verbal acknowledgement. But the young Maharaja has to be kept within bounds. I will not take immediate action in the matter. Only, I shall let him know what action is proposed in case he does not behave properly. He has taken to drinking and is bound to come to grief soon if not checked now.¹³

Coming in less than two months of the Bastar State's formal merger in the Indian Union, the letter clearly indicates the deep mistrust that existed regarding the young Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo in the minds of the new Congress rulers of the country. Already, the controversy of Bastar State's negotiations about leasing the famed Bailadilla iron-ore deposits to Hyderabad State had ensured that the relationship between the Pravir and the top nationalist leaders had begun on the wrong foot.

In the run-up to the 1952 elections, and after the merger of 14 princely state territories in the old Central Provinces & Berar, the First Delimitation Commission provided for 232 seats in the new Legislative Assembly of the enlarged state. A significant aspect of these elections was that 13 members of royal families of the integrated states stood for elections. Three members of the royalty contested for Lok Sabha seats while 10 contested for Vidhan Sabha seats. Out of the latter, 5 got Congress tickets, 2 fought from Ram Rajya Parishad, 1 from Jan Sangha platform and the other two fought the elections as independents. Out of the 5 Congress candidates from royal background, 3 contested from general seats while 2 fought from reserve seats.¹⁴

Where the Bastar elections are concerned, we have to be mindful of an important factor. Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo was influential in most of the seats but not all. Particularly, towards the north Bastar region, in the erstwhile princely state of Kanker, the sphere of influence was that of the local ruling family. Kanker was the very first state which had signed the Instrument of Accession with the Indian Union and while this family often worked in close alliance with the Provincial Congress Committee, this relationship too, had its ups and downs. However, the Kanker ruler took care to avoid straining the relationship to the extent that Pravir had done. Hence, the Legislative Assembly constituencies of Kanker and Bhanupratappur in the subsequent analysis should be counted as ancillary to our framework and not constituting the sphere of influence of Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo.

¹³ Confidential letter from R.S. Shukla to Sardar Patel, dated November 21, 1948 in F. No. 554-P/48, 'P' Branch, Ministry of States, GoI, 1948, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ *The Times of India*, 24th December 1951, p. 8.

In this section, I will attempt at analysis of the three electoral results in Bastar districts fought in the lifetime of Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo and the one immediately after his death. It will also mark out the macro-trends in the politics of Madhya Pradesh and try to situate Bastar in this larger political arithmetic.

An analysis of the electoral results from various general elections reveals fascinating trends in Bastar politics. The following are two analytically important tables which provide a synoptic view of the winning candidates and the polling percentages across all the state assembly elections in the Bastar district until 1998:-

Table (A) : Party Affiliations of the Winning Candidates from all the Constituencies of Bastar District (1952-1998)

Constituency	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	1977	1980	1985	1990	1993	1998
Kanker	Ind.(D)	INC(D)	Ind.	INC*	INC	J.P.	Ind.	INC	BJP	INC	BJP
Bhanupratappur	Included in Kanker	Included in Kanker	Ind.	PSP*	INC	J.P.	INC(I)	INC	Ind.	BJP	INC
Keskal	Ind.	INC	Ind.	J.S.	INC	J.P.	INC(I)	INC	BJP	BJP	INC
Kondagaon	-	-	-	Ind.*	INC	INC	INC(I)	INC	BJP	INC	INC
Jagdarpur	Ind.(D)	INC(D)	Ind.(SC)	J.S.	BJS	J.P.(G)	INC(I)	INC	BJP	INC	INC
Keshlur	-	-	-	-	-	J.P.	BJP	INC	BJP	INC	INC
Bhanpuri	-	Included in Jagdarpur	Ind.	-	-	J.P.*	BJP	BJP	BJP	INC	INC
Bakawand	-	-	-	Ind.*	INC	-	-				
Chitrakote	Ind.	INC	Ind.	S.S.P.	INC	J.P.	BJP	INC	BJP	BJP	INC
Dantewada	Ind.	INC	Ind.	Ind.*	INC	J.P.*	CPI	INC	CPI	CPI	INC
Konta	-	INC	Ind.	INC*	BJS	J.P.	Ind.	INC	CPI	CPI	INC
Bijapur	INC	INC	INC	Ind.*	INC	J.P.*	INC(I)	INC	INC	BJP	INC
Narayanpur	INC	INC	Ind.	Ind.	INC	J.P.	J(J.P.)	INC	BJP	BJP	INC
Sukma	Ind.	-	-	-	-	-	-				

Key: INC- Indian National Congress; INC(I)- Indian National Congress (Indira); Ind.- Independent; PSP- Praja Socialist Party; J.P.- Janata Party; J.S.- Jana Sangh; BJS- Bharatiya Jana Sangh; S.S.P.- Samyukta Socialist Party; BJP- BharatiyaJanata Party; CPI- Communist Party of India; J(J.P.)- Janata (J.P.) D-Double Member Constituency; G-General Constituency; SC-Scheduled Caste Constituency. Unless mentioned otherwise all the constituencies were clubbed under Scheduled Tribes. The symbol (-) denotes that the constituency by this name did not exist in the said election year. The symbol (*) stands for winning candidates who defected to other political parties after their victory.

**Collated from Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha General Elections, 1957-80, Results- Statistical Data (Part I & II), Chief Electoral Officer, M.P., Government Central Press, Bhopal, 1980, Records from the Vidhan Sabha Library, Bhopal and various files of D.P. Mishra Papers, NMML.

Table (B) : Voting Percentages in Different Constituencies in Bastar District during various elections for the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha(1952-1998)

Constituency	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	1977	1980	1985	1990	1993	1998
Kanker	63(D)	52(D)	53.94	43.13	41.17	34.23	39.16	37.77	47.20	47.26	50.91
Bhanupratappur	Included in Kanker	Included in Kanker	45.56	42.05	47.30	37.50	39.85	43.72	46.65	48.89	52.05
Keskal	Un	58	64.20	64.36	48.44	29.77	30.06	30.90	35.21	42.70	46.89
Kondagaon	-	-	-	58.49	58.26	45.34	41.56	32.02	40.87	38.72	47.73
Jagdulpur	59(D)	44(D)	43.16(SC)	48.36	45.63	48.30(G)	33.64	37.89	37.25	46.64	49.46
Keshlur	-	-	-	-	-	30.46	25.31	25.55	33.65	36.05	38.66
Bhanpuri	-	Included in Jagdulpur	54.97	-	-	38.95	39.03	36.16	44.81	43.52	47.87
Bakawand	-	-	-	52.54	51.66	-	-				
Chitrakote	Un	47	50.04	50.75	42.55	23.88	22.92	24.03	28.92	29.87	32.05
Dantewada	Un	47	55.93	55.63	48.71	27.99	27.66	28.59	36.51	32.82	38.95
Konta	-	41	42.31	43.08	42.79	27.03	26.35	19.67	24.81	27.68	39.08
Bijapur	Un	42	Un	38.94	43.07	37.06	32.01	34.39	27.27	30.15	35.55
Narayanpur	Un	65	61.19	54.01	52.78	37.56	37.69	45.27	44.01	49.70	53.42
Sukma	Un	-	-	-	-	-	-				

Key: Un- Uncontested; D-Double Member Constituency; G-General Constituency; SC-Scheduled Caste Constituency. Unless mentioned otherwise all the constituencies were clubbed under Scheduled Tribes. The symbol (-) denotes that the constituency by this name did not exist in the said election year. The polling percentage given in this table indicates the total votes casted and not the valid votes.

*Collated from Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha General Elections, 1957-80, Results- Statistical Data (Part I & II), Chief Electoral Officer, M.P., Government Central Press, Bhopal, 1980 and various files of D.P. Mishra Papers, NMML.

In the first general elections of 1952, riding on a nationalist wave, the Congress under the leadership of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, the incumbent Premier won a massive mandate. Out of the 225 candidates that contested on the Congress ticket, an impressive 194 were returned to the Vidhan Sabha (Sud, 1953). The biggest opposition party in the first Vidhan Sabha was the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party(KMPP) which had a tally of 8 members. Among other opposition parties, Jan Sangha bagged 8 seats, Ram Rajya Parishad and Shetkari Kamgar Paksha won 3 and 2 seats respectively. There were 23 independent legislators in the House as well. All the members of the royalty won their respective seats.¹⁵

One of the Congress royal winners was Raja Naresh Chandra Singh who came from a Gond royal family in Sarangarh and won a seat in the double member constituency of Sarangarh. Subsequently, he served as the Minister for Tribal Welfare in the Government of Madhya Pradesh and was set to play a major role in Bastar and state politics.

¹⁵ These results are inclusive of the 8 Marathi speaking districts which were still a part of the new Madhya Pradesh. The Congress won 118 out of the 140 seats that it chose to contest in the Mahakoshal region.

Commenting on the stupendous electoral success of the royal family members in Madhya Pradesh, Mahesh Saran, an AICC observer reported,

Be it noted that all ex-rulers who were given Congress ticket were elected and all those ex-rulers who opposed Congress candidates were also elected. The people felt that if Raja with Congress ticket is good then Raja without the Congress ticket is also good. I understand that the Rajas were selected because there were greater chances of their success. By the resignation of Shri Dwarkaprasad Mishra the position of the congress was shaking these states (sic) and in order to get majority in the Assembly Rajas were selected as candidates but I consider it wrong poheif(sic).¹⁶

The Bastar election results of 1952 stuck out like a sore thumb in an otherwise magnificent election result for the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee. In the entire district of Bastar, there were two double-member constituencies and six single member constituencies, all of the latter being reserved for the members of schedules tribes. Out of these ten seats, six single member seats went uncontested, of which, the Congress could only win 2 seats. In the Bijapur seat, its candidate Hira Shah was the only candidate whose papers were found valid while in the Narainpur constituency, the Congress candidate Rameshwar Arjun won only due to the rejection of the papers of his opposition candidate from the Ram Rajya Parishad.¹⁷ In the four contested seats, the Indian National Congress was wiped out. It received a major drubbing at the hands of the local rulers of Kanker and Bastar who exercised their influence and canvassed extensively. While the Kanker ruler Bhanupratap Singh was himself a candidate, Pravir put up a number of candidates in his stead. For its time, the contested seats returning double members witnessed a reasonably high voting (see Table B). The result was a one-way contest in which the Congress candidates lost by a heavy margin.¹⁸

In the contest to the Scheduled Tribe seat in the House of the People (Lok Sabha), the Raja's candidate was Muchaki Kosa who stood as an independent candidate. Again, a notable 55.6% of the electorate casted their votes and Kosa emerged victorious by bagging 1,77,588 valid votes out of the 2,13,845 ballots polled. A significant fact about Muchaki Kosa's return was that as a winning candidate, he polled the highest number of votes amongst all the Members of Parliament from the entire state of Madhya Pradesh. Surti Kistaya of the Congress was a distant second and bagged a mere 36, 257 votes. Following this poll debacle, the Congress cadre in Bastar was severely demoralized. Additionally, the organization was reeling under a serious financial crisis as it had little

¹⁶ Short Note by Mahesh Saran dated Jabalpur 28th June 1953, F. No. A-42, MPCC Papers, NMML, p. 2., emphasis mine.

¹⁷ *The Times of India*, 19th November 1951, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Handbook of the General Elections in Madhya Pradesh: Election Results from 1952 to 1967*, Chief Electoral Officer, Madhya Pradesh, p. 46; Subject F. No. 10, D.P. Mishra Papers (IIIrd and IVth Instalment), p. 68.

money to fund organizational work. Even Suryapal Tiwari complained of this inadequacy and wrote to his provincial superiors that,

I pray that you very well know what is the financial situation of the Bastar Congress. There is hopelessness everywhere. All the workers and cadres are downcast. None of them are exhibiting any special drive. How much could one do anyway? To work against the raja amongst the Adivasis is similar to banging your own head against a stone. To become a Congressman is like becoming an enemy of Adivasi and rural masses. It is not a child's play to work among them. You know that my economic condition is not such that I can tour and work. As long as I could do so, I wandered across several villages to spread Congress propaganda. But now I do not want to remain a political worker perpetually in debt (*UDHAARI Karyakarta*). It is not possible to work without money in an area like Bastar. I do not want to betray my leaders. Do not depend on me that I will tour and work for you. This vast area from which the Congress has lost its foot-hold, needs a large amount of money and salaried working cadre for sustained activity. It would be better if you could stay here for a few days and establish the system. Now, merely the verbal promise of funds and expenses and correspondence will not be enough to get the work done.¹⁹

In a similar letter, written shortly afterwards, Suryapal once again spoke of the financial situation within the organization. The post-card reads, in his characteristic inimitable style:

Congress does not possess even one pice even to buy poison. There is no donor in sight as well who could contribute some economic support. As far as I am concerned, one does what one can in a limited area. Let this be certain that in recent times, no elections can happen in Bastar. No worker is ready to come forward enthusiastically. All around there is only darkness.²⁰

Early in 1953, the president of the Indian Republic, Dr. Rajendra Prasad made an official visit to Bastar. A function to welcome him was held, but the Maharaja of Bastar was conspicuously absent from it. The President was reportedly irked at the misdemeanor on the part of the young ex-Ruler.

Already provoked by their electoral defeat at his hands in 1952, this inappropriate behavior on the part of Pravar was used by the Madhya Pradesh Government as an opportunity to strike back. The state government now put up the case that during the short period of five years (1948-53), the Bastar Maharaja had lost vast sums of money from his estate. His mismanagement had, in fact, indebted the estate to some creditors as well. The Central Government concurred with the state government's view that the condition of the

¹⁹ Letter from Suryapal Tiwari; To- The Prime Minister, Mahakoshal Provincial Congress, Jabalpur dated 21-9-1952, F. No. K-8/1952, MPCC Papers, NMML, pp. 2-2A.

²⁰ Post card, Suryapal Tiwari to Chairman, Mahakoshal Provincial Congress, Jabalpur dated 3-11-1952, Ibid.

Maharaja was precarious and was satisfied about the absolute incapacity of Pravir to “manage his estate on account of his mental infirmity”.²¹

Through the Ministry of State’s notification No. 85-P-B, dated 20th May 1953, the estate of the Maharaja of Bastar was taken over by the Court of Wards. This point marks the true beginning of Pravir’s troubles with the new dispensation. In official accounts, henceforth, Pravir’s ‘activities against Government’ are stated to have become more vigorous and vicious. By 1956, according to a senior bureaucrat in the Madhya Pradesh administration, such activities had “taken such a shape as actually to constitute a threat to the peace of the district”.²² The state government was actively looking for ways to extern the Maharaja from the district. However, such a drastic action could not be undertaken under existing law.

Meanwhile, as the evidence suggests all was not well with the Congress Party. Soon after the notification of the government order placing the estate of Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo under the Court of Wards, the All India Congress Committee deputed Mahesh Saran as its Special Representative to prepare a report on the 14 ex-Princely States of Chhattisgarh. Their territories were reordered into the four districts of Surguja, Raigarh, Bastar and Drug in the new state of Madhya Pradesh.²³

Saran’s report is quite revelatory on the nature of the Congress organization, the character of its main leaders, the nature of influence the Raja welded, as well as the forms of political organisation in these districts. He pointed to the fact that Congress organization rarely existed on the ground and where it did, enrolment was scanty. Poverty was so acute that many members did not wear khadi and even party flags were absent from the offices. Public meetings in tahsils and villages were few and far between.

Saran suggested several steps to remedy this sorry state of affairs. Characterising the Chhattisgarh States as a “very backward area”, Saran argued that it needed greater attention to “infuse the true Congress spirit”. Hence, the Congress leaders must tour regularly at least once every three months and “whenever they go to place, they must, first of all, send for the Congress workers and talf(sic) to them so that they may feel encouraged”. Ministerial visits were important as well where some time should be earmarked for meeting the Congress workers and hearing their difficulties. Saran wrote that it was “absolutely necessary” to depute an organizer from the PCC for a minimum period of six months “in order to infuse life amongst the Congress workers and in order to re-organize the Congress”. This organizer “must be provided with a jeep and should not return the Headquarters till he had finished the work”. Lastly, Saran pointed out that the

²¹ F. No. 5/48/59-Poll. III, Political III Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, 1959, p. 2.

²² Letter No. D 1068- Poll. III/56 No. 231/10.Con. dated 8th March, 1956, Nagpur; From- B.S. Kunte, I.A.S., Secretary to Government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP), Political and Military Department; To- The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, F. No. 18/3/56-Poll. III Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, 1956. pp. 10-12.

²³ Short Note by Mahesh Saran dated Jabalpur 28th June 1953, F. No. A-42, MPCC Papers, NMML.

PCC or the AICC must find out schemes to collect funds. He concluded with the dire warning that “unless the organizational work is taken up after the rains, the Congress workers here and there will vanish in thin air”.²⁴

The local Congress organization in Bastar shared in these deficiencies that marked other local Congress bodies in the Chhattisgarh States. Additionally, it was steeped in factional rivalries between Suryapal Tiwari and Sunderlal Tripathi. Attempts to bridge the rift between these two were made but were never fully resolved. This pathetic state of affairs must have necessitated the alliance with Pravir during the 1957 general elections.

Meanwhile, the new and enlarged state of Madhya Pradesh came into existence on 1st November 1956. Comprising old Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal, it brought together most of the Hindi speaking territories of Central India. Spread over 171,217 square miles, it was now the largest state of the Indian Union. An important aspect of this new province was that barring the Mahakoshal region, the other three constituents were Princely States Unions formed of 275 big and small erstwhile States which had acceded with the Indian Union. Many considered that the state was born in error. Wayne Wilcox, for instance, wrote,

No state in India has fewer bonds underlying its unity, and it can with truth be argued that the parts of Madhya Pradesh are greater than their sum. The dominant characteristic of local politics is that no coherent state political community with well-worn practices and an intrinsic “spirit of the house” has yet emerged. (Wilcox, 1968, 128)

The delimitation of new assembly and parliamentary constituencies was finalized in end October 1956, prior to the notification announcing the new state. The new Legislative Assembly was to have 288 members, of whom, 151 legislators were to be from the Mahakoshal region. The second largest constituent was Madhya Bharat which had 89 assembly constituencies. Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal were to return 39 and 9 members respectively. In proportion with the population of the new Madhya Pradesh, 43 seats were reserved for the scheduled castes and 54 for the scheduled tribes. The break-up of the 97 reserved seats was:- Mahakoshal- 58(SC-20, ST-38), Madhya Bharat- 36(SC-15, ST-11), Vindhya Pradesh- 10 (SC-6, ST-4) and Bhopal- 3(SC-2, ST-1).²⁵

Pandit Shukla’s death two months after the announcement of the new state, robbed the Congress organization of an astute and experienced leader who could keep the motley flock together. Prior to the merger of the four constituent units, the Congress had been in power in all of them. The ruling elite within these units had enjoyed power for 6-8 years and in fact, most Congress leaders from Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal had opposed the proposal for the creation of an enlarged Madhya Pradesh. Only the Mahakoshal Congressmen supported the merger as they were set to gain political power

²⁴ Ibid. , p. 10.

²⁵ *The Times of India*, October 25, 1956, p. 9.

over far wider territories owing to the numerical superiority of their constituent unit in the new state. Consequently, the decision of the State Reorganization Commission of combining all these disparate (and disgruntled) sets of Congress politicians in a single state, generated an intense schism and power-struggle which had long term implications.

To quell the simmering political discontent in Madhya Pradesh, the High Command of the Indian National Congress brought in the then Union Defence Minister Dr. Kailash Nath Katju as the State Chief Minister. Another important decision taken soon after the 1957 elections was that the Provincial Congress Committees of Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal were merged with Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee and reconstituted as the Madhya Pradesh Provincial Congress Committee.²⁶

In Bastar, the internal dissension within the Congress Party organization had forced the state leaders to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo. Pravir too, after a period of intensive propaganda, must have thought his chances of reacquiring his estate would be better inside the Congress organization. A possible reason why the state leaders brought him into the Congress fold could have been the new electoral arithmetic needed to form the government. Hence, in 1956 he joined the Bastar District Congress Committee as its head. With Pravir on its side, the Congress swept all the seats in Bastar in the 1957 Vidhan Sabha elections. Pravir himself contested and won from Jagdalpur Double member constituency polling 31,932 votes. The closest contest was in the Dantewara constituency (electorate- 45,830 adults) where the Congress candidate Shiv Ram defeated an independent Boda Dara by a margin of 5,281 votes. In the Lok Sabha elections too, the defeated Congress candidate of 1952 elections, Surti Kistayya stood again in 1957. He polled a massive 1,40,961 votes out of 1,82,645 votes casted and sailed to a comfortable victory over his independent contender Boda Dara who secured 41,684 votes.²⁷

At the state level as well, the Congress steam-rolled a majority winning 232 of the 288 seats on contest. The other parties stood as follows:- Praja Socialist Party- 12, Socialists- 5, Communists- 2, Hindu Mahasabha- 7, Jan Sangha- 10, Ram Rajya Parishad-5, Independents- 15. Most big Congress leaders won their elections. Overall, the Congress Party won 134 (151) seats in Mahakoshal, 65 (89) in Madhya Bharat, 25 (39) in Vindhya Pradesh and 8 (9) in Bhopal region. However, in Mahakoshal, this success did not reflect the strength of the party organization. Instead, in a repeat of 1952 elections, Congress' electoral victory was based on the "inclusion of nine big ex-landlords and five former rulers, who, though not truly Congressmen, hitched their fortunes to the Congress star".²⁸ The alliance between Pravir and the Congress did not last long. By the end of October 1955, much ahead of their uneasy alliance, Pravir and his associates had decided on the

²⁶ *The Times of India*, 20th April 1957, p. 9.

²⁷ *Handbook of the General Elections in Madhya Pradesh: Election Results from 1952 to 1967*, Chief Electoral Officer, Madhya Pradesh, p. 8; Subject F. No. 10, D.P. Mishra Papers (IIIrd and IVth Instalment), NMML, p. 11.

²⁸ *The Times of India*, April 5 1957, p. 6.

formation of 'Adivasi Seva Sangh'. This, according to the state government marked the beginning of the "pseudo-political activities of the Maharaja".

A 1956 letter by a top M.P. bureaucrat wrote to the Union Home Ministry that through his recently formed political party, Pravir and associates sought "to create disaffection in the minds of the aboriginals against the present administration and to restore the Maharaja to the Gaddi by resorting to violence, if necessary". The letter acknowledged that though Pravir was "careful enough to refrain from making any speeches", he supported the activities of this body by attending its public meetings and was financing the movement.²⁹ The stereotypes used in its subsequent rhetoric suggest that the post-colonial Indian state viewed the tribal population in ways that were striking similar to its colonial predecessor. Arguing for preventive detention of the Bastar Maharaja, the state government representative wrote,

The population of Bastar predominantly consists of Adiwasis all of whom were formerly the subjects of the present Maharaja. He is regarded by them as the representative of the Goddess Danteshwari Mai, whom they worship. The Adiwasis are a very simple and ignorant people, who believe anything coming from the Maharaja's lips or the lips of his agents and associates. Though generally peaceful, these simple children of nature, once the feeling of disaffection towards the State is created in the minds, can be easily indicted to do acts of violence on a mass scale. If the activities of the Maharaja and his associates are not checked immediately, a situation similar to the one which existed during the 1910 rebellion in Bastar might develop. In this connection it may be recalled that in the year 1910 when the former Bastar State framed certain forest regulations one of the members of the Raj-Family and his associates who were working against the administration, made a grievance out of these and incited the aboriginals to rebel. There were assaults on Government servants, burning and looting of state property and assaults on non-adiwasis. These events are still fresh in the minds of the local people. Action, is therefore, being taken by this Government against the principal associate of the Maharaja, Bhira Manji by Preventive Detention Act and some others are being warned.³⁰

Attached to this letter was an eight page note on the "Activities of the Maharaja of Bastar" which set out various reasons for doubting the character and intentions of Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo. The first sub-heading was "Immoral Activities" which outlined 13 instances of the sexually promiscuous conduct of the Bastar Maharaja. It was alleged that Pravir had "fallen into bad company", was engaged in "immoral acts" and "pending lavishly on low

²⁹ Letter No. D 1068- Poll. III/56 No. 231/10.Con. dated 8th March, 1956, Nagpur; From- B.S. Kunte, I.A.S., Secretary to GoMP, Political and Military Department; To- The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, F. No. 18/3/56, Poll. III Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, 1956.

³⁰ Ibid.

class women”. It was also reported that the “Maharaja was psychopathic in many ways and one of his fixations is the desire for women who are much older than him”.

The second allegation was that since 1951 Pravir had indulged in “Tantric” activities. He had apparently come under the influence of a certain Pandit Parmeshwar Trivedi from Lucknow who had convinced him that “as a result of unholy sacrifices and pujas he could become omnipotent... It was reported once that he made a “Hone” to get the destruction of Chief Minister Pt. R.S. Shukla and the D.C. Bastar Shri Noronha”.³¹

The State Government further indicted Pravir on the count of “Anti-Government Activities”. It alleged that ever since Pravir’s estate was taken under the Court of Wards, he had “been trying to make his personal grievances the grievances also of the Bastar people”.³² For instance, when the rains failed in 1955, the “agents” of Pravir held a meeting at Jagdalpur and linked the phenomenon to the “wrath of Gods to the non-performance of the religious ceremonies by the Maharaja as a result of his estate being under Court of Wards and that he should be restored to the Gaddi with a mass movement of the aboriginals”.³³

Further, the state government complained that in 1955, the associates of the Maharaja incited the aboriginals to “insist that the Maharaja must sit on the *rath*³⁴ or else they would not pull it”. In both the aforementioned instances, Pravir did not “denounce the action of these people and thereby created difficulties for the administration”. The note mentioned that a meeting of about 1500 aboriginals was held on 24th August, 1955 at the royal palace in Jagdalpur in the presence of the Maharaja. In the said meeting, Bhira Majhi, an “aboriginal leader”, stated that the ryots of the Bastar district were in great distress ever since the Court of Wards came into being and that they wanted that the estate should be released from the Court of Wards before Dasehra or else “they (tribals) would offer Satyagraha”. In the same note, it is alleged that Bhira Manjhi and other associates of Pravir were “preaching the idea of a rule of Adiwasis by Adiwasis and for the Adiwasis which means a sort of parallel Government”.³⁵

According to the Madhya Pradesh Government, this sort of open propaganda was combined with a secretive campaign with accompanying violence. For instance, on the night of 24th August 1955, the manager of the Court of Wards was “murderously assaulted” and investigations suggested that Pravir was “secretly encouraging the persons involved in the affair”.³⁶

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ A Chariot. Bastar Dussehra has been famous for being centred around Danteshwari Mai, who is the chief patron deity of the region. During the period of Dussehra festivities, the King temporarily abdicated his throne and assumed the role of Chief Priest of Goddess Danteshwari. A wooden chariot is erected which is pulled by hundreds of tribal men.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

In contrast to this narrative laid out by the state we can contrast the charter put forward by Pravir's Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Seva Sangh. The charter was issued by fifteen adivasis led by Shivnath Singh Bhandari and Samaru Ram Muria, and it laid down the following demands:

1. We demand that the shops selling alcohol, opium, marijuana and bhang be closed down and restrictions be imposed on toddy and sulphur.
2. The management of the temples be tightened!
 - (a) *Akhandjyots*³⁷ of ghee be soon started in the temples of Danteshwari Mai.
 - (b) All the *Dev* temples be repaired.
 - (c) The arrangements for *pooja*³⁸ and *bhog*³⁹ be restored as it was prevalent in the times of Raja Bhairam Deo.⁴⁰

NOTE:- If the Government is unable to do all this then a Committee should be formed which must be entrusted with these responsibilities. The *muafi*⁴¹ villages of the Raja or the income realized from those villages should be handed over to the said committee.

3. Dams should be erected on the sites in our district which are suitable for this purpose. Canals should be channeled out from suitable sites. The Government should make arrangements for free use of tractors for breaking the fields.
4. In between every ten villages, the government must establish a rural industrial centre in which we and our children should get free education. Household commercial enterprises should be opened where training in the new methods must be imparted in carpentry, smithy, basket-weaving, *chatai*⁴² making, cotton-spinning, weeding of cotton field, weaving of cloth, oil-pressing and making of *Kosa*⁴³, so that we may be uplifted.
5. In our district, between every 5 villages, a hospital must be opened which should be manned by either a doctor or a *Vaid*.⁴⁴
6. Co-operative banks must be opened in every tahsil and zamindari of our district.
7. In every five villages, the government must open a *dhankothi*⁴⁵ so that we are protected from the exploitation wrecked by the *gadiyawalas*.⁴⁶

³⁷ Perennial flames which are never extinguished.

³⁸ Worship.

³⁹ Offerings of flowers, sweets and fruits.

⁴⁰ He died in the year 1891 and was Pravir's great grandfather.

⁴¹ Certain villages in the princely state were made rent-free and their land-revenue went to religious denominations.

⁴² This is a kind of spreadable sheet made by weaving together locally available grasses.

⁴³ Kosa is a kind of silkworm which is harvested to produce silk which is then woven in a handloom.

⁴⁴ An Ayurvedic medical practitioner.

⁴⁵ Possibly a rice procurement store. In Bombay Presidency, this was called grain-golas.

8. Metalled roads must be made to every village from the existing metalled roads throughout our district.
9. A primary school must be established for every five villages in our area.
10. Our children should be provided with higher education free of cost. They should also be given scholarships for higher education.
11. In our fields and on the rows therein, we must be given the right to cut the trees which are tilted or overgrown as they are potentially harmful for our crops. Also, the trees which are productive for us, their entire produce (leaves, fruits) should be considered as our right so that we can sell it to whomsoever we may want to.
12. The *Viran* villages⁴⁷ must be re-established, their rent for three years must be forsaken and the peasants should get *taccavi*.⁴⁸
 - (a) No *taccavi* is being given to us. Its chief beneficiaries are the big *Gadiyawalas*. This practice must be stopped and instead we should be the ones receiving the *taccavi* so that we may make our fields and *merh*.⁴⁹
 - (b) *Taccavi* should be given for wells, tanks, oxen, buffaloes, seed and manure.
13. The property of Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo which has been under the Court of Wards must be released. We, the *Adivasi*, *Kisan* and *Mazdoor* do not say that his *raj*⁵⁰ must be restored to him. We are aware that the Maharaja Sahib has '*merge*'⁵¹ his state. Hence, it is not at all a question of returning his state to him, nor do we desire that his *gaddi*⁵² be given to him. All we desire is that his personal property which has been under Court of Wards be released. Because we consider the Maharaja of Bastar as the *pujari* of *Mai Ji* whom we have been believing in generation after generation. His personal property should be returned to him. We request this to the Government of Madhya Pradesh.
14. The practice of *Bhent*, *Begar*, *Bhatta* (free rice, pulses, milk and chicken to government employees) must be stopped. The labour that is taken from us, its remuneration must be given to us at the rate of 2 days for women and 1 day for men must be paid to us...⁵³

When compared with the state government's representation of the "activities of the Bastar Maharaja", the charter reveals astounding contrasts. The State Government's note acknowledged that a charter of 14 demands were formulated and published at the first District Conference of the Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Seva Sangh on 1st of January 1956. However, it made an absolutely absurd misrepresentation to the Central Government that

⁴⁶ Gadiya is possibly a local term for a *sahukar* who loans the needed capital at the time of sowing and procures the harvest of peasants at throw-away prices.

⁴⁷ Deserted villages.

⁴⁸ Agricultural loans given at the time of sowing of crop.

⁴⁹ Rows and columns in an agricultural field.

⁵⁰ Ruling Powers, Sovereign rights.

⁵¹ The word is written in Devanagari script within quotation marks in this document.

⁵² Royal Throne on which the Sovereign ruler sits.

⁵³ Ganpat Lal Sav '*Bilaspuri, Bastar ka Khooni Itihaas*, Shakti Prakashan Mandir, 1983, pp. 38-40.

they fell into the three categories of “(a) Repairs and Maintenance of temples, (b) Removal of Court of Wards, (c) Miscellaneous demands like stopping of Begar, Construction of roads, hospitals etc.” This amounted to picking the second and the last two demands and swallowing almost everything else in the middle under the rubric of “miscellaneous demands”. The note further reveals seething prejudice against the Maharaja,

The climax of the propaganda reached when a meeting was held at Kondagaon on 15th Feb, 1956 which was attended by about 5,000 aboriginals. The Maharaja brought Bhira Manjhi in other associates in his own car but took care not to attend the meeting. Bhira Manjhi spoke at the meeting. In his speech, he tried to incite feelings of hatred and disaffection in the minds of aboriginals against the Hindus and non-adiwasis. He appealed to the people not to pay taxes and to regard the forests as their own property and to cut timber without permission. He asked them to take forcible possession of land, to agitate for the removal of Court of Wards and for the restoration of the Maharaja to the Gaddi and not to cooperate with Government servants. He also incited the people to resort to violence against Government servants, with a view to eliminating all non-aboriginals from the Government machinery. He advised them not to give evidence whenever any offence was committed against the outsiders. In short, he has been preaching establishment of a Government of the Adiwasis by the Adiwasis and for the Adiwasis by resorting to violent means.⁵⁴

Further evidence is available which refutes many of the charges leveled by the Madhya Pradesh state government. In his address to the first district conference of the Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sevasangh, Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo made a speech in which he said that a lot of negative propaganda against him was being generated by individuals with vested interests, who “until yesterday... were my servants and now were unable to realize their political ambitions because of me”. In a denouncement of the negative propaganda that he wanted to reinstall himself as the ruler, Pravir said in 1955,

Meanwhile, a false campaign was going on that I wanted my State back, wish to sit on my throne again and that is why I am inciting the Adivasi-Kisan and Mazdoor. I have given up my state way back in 1948 itself. Something which I happily forsook, why will I demand it back? This mythical campaign is being propelled to downgrade my status in the eyes of the people and mislead them. I have never said that I wanted my *gaddi* or my State back. However, I do say that my property should be released from the Court of Wards. Why am I being denied the rights accruing to me as an independent citizen, which are available to everyone else...I have

⁵⁴ Note entitled ‘Activities of the Maharaja of Bastar’ in Letter No. D 1068- Poll. III/56 No. 231/10.Con. dated 8th March, 1956, Nagpur; From- B.S. Kunte, I.A.S., Secretary to GoMP, Political and Military Department; To- The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, F. No. 18/3/56, Poll. III Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, 1956, pp.13-20.

never betrayed with our nation. I love my motherland as much as you love yours. I am ready to sacrifice everything that a patriotic person is capable of doing. I have as much faith in the national flag and law as you people. I have always desired that I continue to serve my motherland and that my country progresses towards prosperity and leaders such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru may live for thousands of years.⁵⁵

In 1960 again, Pravir gave public statement to the national press that he had never advocated the formation of a separate State of Bastar on the lines of Naga State. At this juncture, however, he pleaded that Bastar be placed directly under Central control to ensure fair and better conditions for the Adivasi population in the district.⁵⁶

In 1962, around the third general elections, the uneasy alliance of the Provincial Congress Committee was in disarray. By the end of 1950s, the Congress politicians were roughly divided between the 'Ministerialist' group under the Chief Minister Dr. K.N. Katju and the 'anti-Ministerialist' faction headed by Mulchand Deshlehra, the new chief of the Provincial Congress Committee. It must be remembered that the size of the Congress ministries in the 1950s and early 1960s was quite small and very few members (12-15) of Vidhan Sabha became ministers or deputy ministers. This further intensified the struggle for power within the provincial Congress organization. A few contemporary reports in the newspaper media suggest that the thorny question in Madhya Pradesh was determining who was to contest on the party ticket in the 288 electoral constituencies, leading to a scramble for nominations amongst the Congressmen.

To their credit, the various opposition parties were gaining in strength in different parts of Madhya Pradesh. In the municipal elections held after the 1957 general elections, there was visible decline of Congress support in larger cities like Indore, Jabalpur, Bhopal and Bilaspur. The Jan Sangh dislodged the Congress from nine municipalities and the Praja Socialist Party in six. Also, by the time of the third general elections, the opposition parties had had some time to integrate their activities in the different constituent parts of the new state of Madhya Pradesh. Between 1959 and 1960, the Jan Sangh increased its membership from 15,000 to 50,000 while the P.S.P. trebled it to 30,000.⁵⁷

The consolidation of opposition parties bore fruit in the 1962 elections. The Congress won only 142 seats out of the 288 it contested, thus falling short of the absolute majority mark. The incumbent Chief Minister Dr. Katju himself lost from the Jaora constituency. An enquiry into the electoral debacle found that the anti-ministerial faction of Moolchand Deshlehra had sabotaged Congress prospects by fielding several dummy candidates against the official nominees. While the Jan Sangh (41 seats) and P.S.P. (33 seats) were the principal beneficiaries, the opposition also included the Socialists (14 seats), Ram

⁵⁵ Ganpat Lal Sav 'Bilaspuri, *Bastar ka Khooni Itihaas*, Shakti Prakashan Mandir, 1983, pp. 41-42. Hindi Text (Translation mine).

⁵⁶ *The Times of India*, 9th December 1960.

⁵⁷ *The Times of India*, 2nd February 1962, p. 6.

Rajya Parishad (10 seats), Swatantra (2 seats), Hindu Maha Sabha (6 seats), C.P.I. (1 seat) and a large number of independents (39 seats).⁵⁸ However, despite missing the majority mark, the Governor of the State invited the Congress to form the government. It was at this juncture that 'defection' and 'horse trading' started becoming a feature of Madhya Pradesh politics which were to assume serious proportions following the fourth general elections in 1967.

Much as the rest of the state, the woes of the Congress continued in the election results to the Bastar constituencies. The alliance with Maharaja of Bastar Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo had failed miserably. In fact, disgruntled at the inability to get any of his demands fulfilled, Pravir resigned from the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in 1959. Thereafter, a long season of political drama unfolded during the course of which, Pravir was externed from the district, fought a criminal case, de-recognized as the ex-Ruler of Bastar and substituted by his brother Vijay Chandra Bhanjdeo. The climax, however, came when the police fired on a couple of thousand protestors in Lohandiguda who were demanding Pravir's return to the district; several people were killed. As his struggle with the state and district administration intensified, the battle-lines were clearly drawn. The 1962 Bastar elections were fought in this volatile and charged political atmosphere. The Congress seems to have alienated the Kanker ruler as well, who fought the elections as an independent candidate.

Prior to the 1962 elections, the system of double member constituencies was done away with and all the constituencies became single member ones. The results in the Bastar district were on expected lines. The Congress was decimated and lost 9 out of the 10 seats in the district. Its only victory was in Bijapur where its nominee Hira Shah had an uncontested success. The only other consolation for Congress was the defeat of Pravir himself from the Kanker assembly constituency where he was placed fifth in the tally. The ex-Ruler of Kanker, Bhanu Pratap Deo was the winner from this seat. However, Pravir's nominees won from all other seats quite comfortably, the lowest margin being 2,229 votes in the Konta constituency.

In the parliamentary election result, the incumbent M.P. Surti Kistaiya of the Congress lost heavily, was placed third on the tally and could only gather a little over 24,0000 votes. An independent supported by Pravir, Lakhmu Bhawani won the contest defeating his nearest independent rival Bodha Dada by over 26,000 votes.

On March 25 1966, Pravir died in a police shoot-out inside his palace compounds. In the aftermath of this horrendous political assassination, the fourth general election in 1967 became a keenly fought contest. It was the first one in Bastar which was fought without Pravir actively featuring in the picture. However, in this very first post-Pravir electoral showdown, his widow Rani Vedavati came to acquire a significant role. In the 1967 electoral results, the ire of the electorate was felt severely and all but one Congress

⁵⁸ Subject F. No. 12, D.P. Mishra Papers (IIIrd and IVth Instalment), NMML, p. 46.

candidates lost their respective contest. The Congress could only win the Konta seat while the SSP and PSP bagged one seat each. Five independent candidates supported by Maharani Vedavati won.

A notable feature about this election was the victory of two candidates of Jana Sangh (Keskal and Jagdalpur). This result provided the party with a foothold in the region and marked the beginning of the emergence of right wing forces on the electoral scene in Bastar district. In a little more than a decade, the character of electoral politics in Bastar was to acquire the complexion of a two party system, much like the rest of Madhya Pradesh. As Table (A) shows conclusively, barring a few victories for the Communist Party of India from south Bastar constituencies, from 1980 till today, the Bastar seats go either to the Congress or to the BJP, the political successor of Jana Sangh.

For the first four general elections, three broad points are clearly visible from the electoral data. Firstly, Pravir and his associates occupied a hegemonic position as far as final results were concerned. Barring the 1957 elections when Pravir was himself part of the Congress bandwagon, his candidates won comprehensive victories often defeating the Congress candidates by a reasonably large margin. The Bijapur seat was the only exception to this rule where Congress had a strong presence in the form Hira Shah who won the 1952 and 1962 elections uncontested. In this case also, the Congress lost the seat in 1967 when the anger against Pravir's death swept away its electoral prospects in all but two of the Bastar constituencies (Kanker and Konta).

Secondly, it can be convincingly said that before each general and assembly elections, the levels of political activity on both sides (Pravir versus Congress) witnessed a dramatic increase. Very often, the run-up to the elections was also the period of precipitation of political drama and crisis. In this context, it is noteworthy that the first attempt to extern Pravir happened a few months before the 1957 elections. Finally, the warring parties arrived at a consensus as a result of which Pravir joined hands with the Congress and helped in its electoral sweep. Similarly, his externment to Narsinghgarh jail and the consequent firing in Lohandiguda (1961) occurred in the year before the third elections were to be held in 1962. Last but not the least, the climax of the story was the police shootout inside Jagdalpur Palace which claimed Pravir's life. This happened on 25th March 1966, yet again, a year before the 1967 elections. The trend was quite clear.

Finally, the voting percentage in the first four elections was remarkably high for its time, especially considering that almost all the constituencies were reserved for scheduled tribes. Very few of the other scheduled tribe constituencies in Madhya Pradesh witnessed such high percentage of voting across all the four general elections in the 1950s and 1960s. Credit for this no doubt goes to Pravir and his associates who despite all the logistical hurdles ensured that a large number of electorates turned up to the polling booths.

For all his eccentricities, the fact remains that Maharaja Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo did raise the demands and aspirations of the Bastar tribals. In the official records, his views have been consistently and thoroughly misrepresented. A befitting tribute to this highly controversial figure was given by Stephen Fuchs in following terms:

It cannot be denied, however, that the agitation of Pravir Chandra, however wayward and erratic it might have been in his methods, was in many respects highly beneficial to the tribals of Bastar. Pointing out constantly and highly embarrassingly, often sneeringly, to the state officials how much injustice was committed daily and how often the tribals were cheated of their rights and just demands, Pravir Chandra forced the Government officials to abolish certain long established and deeply entrenched abuses and to be more vigilant over the true nature of their tribal subjects. It is a documented fact (1) that during the years of his agitation relatively few illegal transfers of tribal land to non-tribals occurred in Bastar,(2) that much Government land was distributed among landless tribals, and (3) that their exploitation by landlords and money-lenders, officials and policemen was more efficiently checked. On the other hand, Pravir Chandra also strengthened the authority of the tribal leaders, restored their self-respect and courage, made them aware of their rights and privileges laid down and solemnly guaranteed in the Constitution of India. No wonder that the tribals of Bastar were grateful to this savior and defender of their rights, ignored and pardoned his obvious flaws of character and mad pranks, and were willing to fight and even die for him. His death was a severe blow for them and their cause, it dashed all their hopes for the future and deprived them of the only leader they had. (Fuchs, 1992, 112-113)

In fact, as Table (B) indicates, the percentage of polling witnessed a sharp decline after the 1967 elections. This trend continued throughout the seventies, especially in the southern part of the district. Perhaps, it is an indication that after the death of the Bastar Maharaja, the political vacuum could not be filled by anyone. In this sense, the 1970s success story of Baba Bihari Das⁵⁹ in getting his supported candidates elected to the Vidhan Sabha seems far less spectacular than what just the results suggest (Sundar, 2007).

These cumulative processes gave rise to regional political forces each of which tried to increase its share of elected seats in the state legislature so that they could control government formation. As long as the single party dominance of the Congress remained, these fissiparous tendencies could be held in check. However, with the depletion of Congress strength in 1960s led to a crisis-ridden period of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal Ministry (1967-69) which gave way to Congress regaining power. However, the interregnum witnessed a 13 day stint by the first tribal Chief Minister in Central India

⁵⁹ Baba Bihari Das was a phoenix-like figure who many tribals believed was their slain ex-ruler Pravir. At the height of his popularity, Bihari Das's support influenced several electoral results. For this reason, he was frantically wooed by political parties including the Congress.

(Raja Naresh Chandra Singh) in March 1969. This history needs to be mapped out in much greater detail.

Conclusion

I have tried to argue that it is essential to study the effect of elections based on universal adult franchise on the political fabric of the newly independent Indian nation. Though the Congress had participated in the 1937 elections and won power in several British Indian Provinces, the ministries were short-lived. Also, the electorate for the 1937 elections was hardly 5 percent of the adult population of the British Indian Provinces. There were no elections in the princely state areas as the federal scheme enunciated by the Government of India Act 1935 had failed to make the Princely States agree to a voluntary merger of their territories. However, the break-neck speed with which Sardar Patel and V.P. Menon effected the integration of about 565 odd princely states into the Union of India completely altered the picture. In anticipation of the imminent British exit, local Congress organizations sprang up suddenly during 1946-47 in large parts of princely territories in Central India. These “branches” of the Indian National Congress had little experience of associational politics through which a large committed cadre of workers and politicians was created in the British Indian provinces during colonial rule. As a result, factional fights within these new local Congress units greatly subverted the political potential of the Congress. Eventually, after a period of transition during 1970s, the single party system in Madhya Pradesh paved the way for the emergence of two-party system in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The ex-princely state of Bastar was caught in the political and administrative quagmire of integration. It became a small and tucked away part of a grand province hopelessly embroiled in regionalism and factional politics. As long as Pravir was alive, the tribal aspirations had a spokesperson and a benevolent figure to keep their hopes alive. However, his death in 1966, created a political vacuum that was filled by opportunistic politicians from both the Congress and the right wing forces. The rise of a charlatan figure in the form of Baba Bihari Das and his early success in influencing electoral outcomes was a predecessor to the tragedy which was to follow at the end of the twentieth century with the rise of naxalite insurgency.

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