

Fordelen med denne avhandlingen er at den har et klart og tydelig handlingsbegrep. Ulempen er at den opererer med et sprogbegrep og et identitetsbegrep som jeg ser som problematisk. Men, man kan ikke få alt. Den analysetilgangen som mest effektivt har lagt til grunn et sprogbegrep som det jeg har skissert her for å studere identiteter, nemlig diskursanalyse, har så langt frembragt mye interessant om *forutsetninger* for handling, men lite om handlingene selv. Denne avhandlingen lykkes derimot i å anvende et identitetsperspektiv på spesifikke handlinger. Kanskje det er verd prisen. Vår felles oppgave bør imidlertid så vidt jeg kan forstå være å utvikle analyseopplegg som *både* legger til grunn at sprog og identitet er konstitutive fenomener, og har noe å si om spesifikke handlinger og spesifikke sosiale sekvenser.

Iver B. Neumann

Noter

1. Teksten bygger på mitt innlegg som fakultetsopponent, Stockholms Universitet, 6. juni 2003.
2. Hvorfor gå over bekken etter vann: som eksempel nevner jeg i fleng meg selv.
3. I Norge husker man at Sverige ikke anerkjente Norges London-regjering før etter slaget ved Stalingrad; i Sverige husker man det ikke. I det ene tilfellet er det minnet som er konstituerende for nasjonal identitet, i det andre er det glemsel.
4. Ordvalget er her litt uheldig, for han betoner ellers gjennomgående at en fortelling alltid vil være i forandring.
5. Oppsiktsvekkende langt i svensk og skandinavisk målestokk; det å sette godt innarbeidede normer til side med loven i ryggen er ikke akkurat noe ukjent politisk fenomen generelt sett.
6. Det skal dog nevnes at Westberg gjør et poeng av at det var Rudolf Kjellén, og ikke sosialdemokratiet, som først brukte begrepet folkhem.

Referanser

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MAGDALENA INKINEN: *Mobilizing the Lower Castes: The Rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in India* Uppsala: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen 2003.

Magdalena Inkinen successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation in Uppsala on May 22, 2003. This study was conducted at the Department of Government, Uppsala University, under the supervision of Professors Anders Westholm and Hans Blomkvist, and I had the pleasure of being the external examiner at her defense. Apart from it being a wonderful education for me in terms of the cultural experience – I had never before attended any Swedish, or even any Scandinavian, doctoral dissertation defense – it was also a delight for me intellectually. Some truly remarkable academic work with important practical consequences is being conducted at Uppsala University on India and many other developing countries. I met and spoke with graduate students working on social, economic and political issues in diverse countries, including Bangladesh, Chile, China, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia, and I never failed to be impressed with their cutting-edge knowledge of issues and theories highlighted within the contemporary international development debate. I did, of course, find many things to quibble about – I am a full-time academic after all! – and it would be wrong for me to pretend that these quibbles are minor or unimportant. But the fact that these young scholars' work gives rise to thoughtful and

sometimes passionate arguments is something to be celebrated rather than decried.

Magdalena Inkinen's doctoral dissertation is no exception in this regard. Inkinen considers that a basis of party politics in India has changed fundamentally over the last 50 years. Soon after national independence (in 1947) and the advent of democratic rule (in 1950), the parties that came to power in India, including the long-ruling Congress Party, were dominated mostly by upper caste (and upper class) elites. More recently, however, lower-caste parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, the BSP, have come to power at the level of state governments in India. The BSP draws its members and leaders predominantly from among *Dalits*, India's former untouchables, also known as Scheduled Castes, and at the time Inkinen conducted her field research, it was the party in power in the most populous Indian State, Uttar Pradesh.

This change in the nature of Indian politics is important to explain: How and why has a party of Dalits risen to power? Why has this change occurred principally in one Indian state and not in others? And what patterns of voting behavior have made this change possible in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Inkinen addresses herself to two basic questions: Which voters have aligned themselves with the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, and what has motivated these voters to do so? More precisely, she asks:

- (1) Is the rise of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s explained by the fact that Scheduled Castes – Dalits – have voted for this party in larger numbers, or have voters from other caste groups also voted for this party in numbers large enough to make a difference to its electoral prospects? Is it a Dalit party, by and large, or does it also have any considerable appeal among members of other caste groups?
- (2) Why have these voters shifted to the BSP in increasing numbers? Here, she consults different theories of voting behavior, and she formulates four alternative sets of possible motivations:
 - because they agree with the ideology or the political program of the BSP (“political opinions” or issue-based voting);

- because they believe that this party will benefit the groups with which they identify (“group interests”);

- because they follow the dominant voting norm within their groups (“group norms” or group loyalty);

- or because they expect to get patronage benefits if the BSP comes to power (“patronage”).

These four alternative explanations are tested with the help of a very comprehensive and multi-level data set that Inkinen has constructed, and for which she deserves considerable credit.

Inkinen does well to start by examining alternative explanations available in the literature that seek to account for the rise of the BSP in UP. Four alternative explanations are addressed by her in the main. Politely yet firmly, she informs us that each of these explanations is either incorrect or incomplete (or both).

First, there is the hypothesis that caste and class have merged to some extent, and different parties represent the class interests of different population groups, thus the rise of the BSP can be explained in terms of its appeal to the common class interests of the lower classes in UP. This is a hypothesis, Inkinen claims; it is not yet a complete explanation because it has not been tested empirically so far; and she examines it later alongside her own preferred explanation.

Second, she dispenses with the explanation that parties rather than voters are the fundamental change agents in this case. Proponents of this explanation would have it that parties and political entrepreneurs have created issues and exploited divisions – including, most notably, affirmative action, or as it is better known in India, reservations (of spaces for lower castes within government jobs and educational institutions) – and these divisive politics have tended to herd individuals to vote along the cleavages of caste. Inkinen dismisses this explanation as incomplete – voters are not so easily “manipulated” by parties, she claims, and in any case, she asks, why did the Dalits become divided from Other Backward Castes in Uttar Pradesh, even when both these groups shared a similar reservations benefit?

Third, Inkinen considers explanations based on the secular improvement in the socio-economic conditions of Dalits, but she concludes that this explanation is also not sufficient by itself for explaining the rise of a Dalit party in Uttar Pradesh. The socio-economic position of Dalits rose higher also in other Indian states, her data show, but neither the BSP nor any other Dalit party came to power in these states. Thus, rising socio-economic status among Dalits does not by itself provide any complete explanation.

Finally, she rejects the explanation that patronage is the single important factor explaining the rise of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh. Patronage, she claims, can help explain why parties once in power tend to remain in power. But it does not explain why a party that was not in power – and that was not therefore able to dispense any considerable patronage benefits – was nevertheless able to expand its support base and come to power for the first time.

None of the received explanations for the rise of the BSP to power in Uttar Pradesh withstands her scrutiny, and it is necessary for Inkinen to construct her own explanation. She does so by constructing a formidable database of evidence gathered from both primary and secondary sources. A remarkable strength of this dissertation comes from the large numbers of different data sources that Inkinen has consulted, that have permitted her to undertake focused comparisons of many different levels and types. She starts – in Chapter 3 – by making comparisons across time. She focuses for this part of the analysis on trends observed in different *election years* in Uttar Pradesh. But she undertakes comparisons not just over time but also over space. And – most commendably – she considers different spatial units of diverse size. In Chapter 4, she provides a comparison across different *states* of India. In Chapter 5, she undertakes comparison over different *regions* within the state of Uttar Pradesh. For this purpose she looks first at different administrative *districts*, and then separately, she analyzes trends in 10 particular electoral *constituencies*. In Chapter 7, she performs similar comparisons across a selected set of *towns and villages* in UP. And in Chapter 6, she compares voting behavior over a random

sample of SC *individuals* residing in these selected towns and villages.

She has visited these localities herself, constructing her own original data set for this part of the dissertation. But she has also consulted other datasets, put together at different times by different researchers and institutes, and she has looked carefully at data made available by official sources, including by the Indian Election Commission and the Census of India. Taking these multiple different approaches and levels of analysis is a very significant strength of Inkinen's dissertation, for it allows her to "triangulate" her conclusions from diverse unrelated directions. But it also introduces some additional factors complicating what might otherwise have been a slim and parsimonious explanation.

Inkinen's preferred explanation to her two can be stated briefly as follows. In terms of the two questions she sets herself to answer, Inkinen concludes:

- (1) To the first question, i.e., whether it was Dalits alone or also other castes who voted for the BSP in increasing numbers, she concludes that the BSP gained in Uttar Pradesh because Dalits – and not so much other voters – began to support it in very large numbers. The party is, therefore, a party of Dalits; it does not have any significantly broad-based appeal in Uttar Pradesh. Over time in this state, just as overall support for the BSP has increased, differences in voting patterns have grown between Dalits and other caste groups.
- (2) In terms of her second question – why did Dalits commence voting for the BSP in these steadily increasing numbers? – Inkinen considers the four alternative sets of motivations reviewed above, and she concludes that among these four motivations, patronage and group norms are not supported by her data. Survey data show that BSP voters do not consider these elements to be the primary reasons why they are attracted toward this party. Issue-based voting is also not supported: the party does not provide any coherent issue-based program that voters can judge for themselves, and in any case, a majority of those surveyed were not aware of any such

issues. The fourth motivation – *group interests* – is much better supported by these data; and two factors help Inkinen explain why group interests have become so influential among Dalit voters.

First, education has grown considerably among Dalits over the last few years, and their socioeconomic position has also improved overall. They are not, therefore, as helpless as they used to be 50 years ago, and they are no longer dependent on others for articulating their political interests. However, even as the economic positions of Dalits have improved in these past decades, the economic positions of non-Dalits have improved even faster, resulting in a widening gap between non-Dalits and Dalits, and therefore increasing resentment among Dalits themselves. It is this combination of *absolute improvement together with relative worsening* of socioeconomic status that provides, in Inkinen's reasoned view, the cause for group interests to be formed and to work themselves out in altered voting behaviors and the resultant electoral results.

This is an interesting and provocative explanation. And it has potentially interesting implications for the study of minority groups in different parts of the world, not least because it challenges some early views about the effects of modernization on voting behavior.

Early modernization theorists expected that as urbanization, democratic voting, and mass media became more prominent within developing countries, people's affiliation with their ascriptive groups, such as tribe or caste, would tend to weaken. More cross-cutting social and political alliances would play more important parts, these theorists predicted, and older cleavages based on religion or ethnicity would tend to fade away. These predictions (hopes?) were expressed quite stridently, particularly in the 1950s and sixties as independence from colonial rule was gained and democratic republics established in country after country in Asia and Africa. But such views are rarely heard more recently. Events of the recent past have tended, by and large, to provide relatively little support for modernization theorists' perspectives. Instead of fading away, as they had hoped, cleavages based on ascriptive

differences have tended to widen in many developing countries, though not all, and ethnic strife has taken a heavy toll of life and property in many of these countries. Rwanda and Burundi are perhaps the most horrific examples, followed closely by Congo, and caste- or religion-based rioting is reported frequently as well from otherwise peaceful countries, such as India. Violence is not the only expression, however, of ascriptive differences that have tended to abide. Even where democratic elections are carried out peacefully, voters have been divided very often along lines dictated by abiding ethnic or religious differences.

These differences were expected to weaken or disappear altogether as countries and voters became more modern, but either these countries have not become "modern" enough, or else modernity does not have the effects it was predicted to have by modernization theorists of the fifties and sixties. In some countries and at some times, ascriptive differences have indeed become less pronounced, but in other situations these cleavages have persisted or even become deeper. Existing theory is not very helpful for distinguishing between these different outcomes – why do ethnic differences deepen in one situation while becoming weaker in another situation?

Inkinen's explanation in terms of absolute improvement together with relative worsening is therefore a helpful first step toward building a more general theory. Absolute improvements in socioeconomic status are not enough by themselves, *contra* modernization theory. Rather, they must be seen in context of people's relative positions vis-à-vis the relevant comparison groups. Hutus revolt and kill Tutsis not because they are doing poorly by themselves but because Tutsis are doing comparatively better. Dalits come together in Dalit-first parties not because they have slid back economically in any absolute sense but because they have slid back relative to others. Their absolute progress enhances their capacity for political action, much as modernization theory had predicted, but their relative decline provides the spark for ethnicity-based political action.

This is an interesting hypothesis, capable of robust empirical testing in diverse milieu, and I hope someone else among Inkinen's colleagues at Uppsala will take up the challenge of examining its validity elsewhere in the developing world or in the new democracies of Eastern and Central Europe.

I did not state all of these impressions as clearly when I spoke before at Inkinen's dissertation defense – I was told by my Swedish colleagues that it was a venue more for criticism than for praise – and so I focused at that time on laying treacherous traps (which she mostly evaded) and asking quibbly questions (which she most politely answered). Some of these quibbles bear importantly, however, on how her theory might be extended and made more general. Let me end by sounding once again these cautionary notes.

Just as it cannot be assumed that groups based on ascription will simply go away as modernization occurs, it also cannot be assumed that they will remain or grow stronger. In any particular setting, it needs to be demonstrated – and not assumed – why caste, or ethnicity, or religion, or some other ascriptive category is valid and relevant for political analysis. Inkinen follows the example of many other analysts of Indian politics, for instance, in selecting caste as the relevant category for analyzing political outcomes. But is caste equally relevant for political analysis everywhere in India? Observers have commented upon the quite rapid changes in Indian economy and Indian society, especially in recent years, and there are parts of India that are probably better connected with the global rather than the local economy. Is caste equally relevant for political analysis in all of these parts? Is it less

relevant in some parts? Where and why is caste (or some other ethnic category) more fruitful for political analysis? It is important to examine these questions in order to build better theoretical explanations; as we saw earlier, theory is relatively poorly developed in this regard. But it is also important for practical and humanitarian purposes to have, as the Americans say, a better handle on caste and on ethnicity. By knowing better how and why some ascriptive grouping becomes important (and possibly turns violent), we can better handle and prevent the suffering it might cause. Ethnicity-based social and political movements are not always undesirable or violent. Quite often, they represent the only voice, the only forum for self-expression available to some particularly deprived and marginalized groups in a society. The aspirations of these groups and their leaders must be seen then against the backdrop of a larger societal failure: Providing equal opportunities for self-development, equal protection of the laws, and equal benefits from social welfare programs, not just in theory but also in everyday practice, is a particular need for disempowered groups. States, societies and political leadership are all implicated when social movements emphasize ethnic differences and divide people among themselves. It remains for theorists to explain better why these events happen in some contexts more than others and how they can be prevented or made peaceful in the climates where they arise.

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