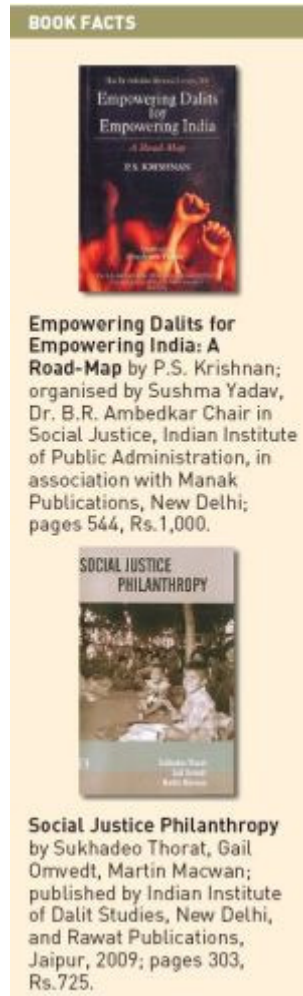


Untold story

V. VENKATESAN

Two books bring to light the little-known story of how the state and civil society reach out to Dalits.



THE Central government has taken certain epoch-making initiatives to emancipate Dalits in recent decades. One is the renaming of the Union Ministry of Welfare as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. What is there in a name, one would ask. But the minor yet significant change in the name of the Ministry has not only been able to convey the government's determination to uplift the marginalised sections of society, but also accorded to the Ministry's functions the kind of focus it required. The second is the conferring of constitutional status to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The third initiative is the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, first to reserve posts in Central government services for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and, after a decade and a half, to reserve seats in Central educational institutions for them.

Each of these initiatives would not have been possible but for the sustained efforts of one civil servant, P.S. Krishnan. *Empowering Dalits for Empowering India* is the story of Krishnan's behind-the-scenes contributions to the state's efforts to uplift Dalits. It also serves as a useful documentation of the various stages in the government's initiatives in this regard.

Normally, the contribution of individual civil servants to the government's progressive decisions is never highlighted in the interest of preserving the neutrality of the civil service. As a result, the credit for taking positive decisions always goes to the political leaders who occupy positions of power at the relevant time. Thus, it is inconceivable not to associate the implementation of the Mandal report with the then Prime Minister V.P. Singh's historic decision in August 1990 to reserve posts for the OBCs in Central services. But history must also record the contribution of other players who made such a decision possible by giving it the requisite thrust and focus. This book is one such effort to present the facts relating to a civil servant's efforts to uplift Dalits in contemporary India.

Krishnan joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1956. As a young officer in Andhra Pradesh in 1957-59, he pioneered the practice of officially camping in Scheduled Caste *bastis*, tribal villages and hamlets of the Backward Classes, thereby infusing confidence and self-esteem among them. This book is an extremely inadequate account of Krishnan's early career as a civil servant, and whatever one learns is obtained from the introductory remarks by Sushma Yadav.

Krishnan is credited with formulating the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes in 1978, as a means of enhancing, in physical as well as financial terms, the flow of developmental benefits to the S.Cs. This has since become part of the developmental philosophy and mechanism both at the Centre and in the States. This has been buttressed by the instrumentality of the Special Central Assistance to the States' Special Component Plans for S.Cs, conceived by him in 1978 and got cleared by his efforts in 1980.

He also contributed to the birth of the scheme of Central Assistance for State Scheduled Castes Finance Development Corporations in 1978-79, resulting in the establishment /strengthening of such corporations in every State to provide loans on affordable terms to S.Cs for their mini-projects of economic development. It remains to be told how this transformed the lives of S.C. and S.T. farmers-cum-agricultural wage labourers over the years.



P.S. Krishnan, former Secretary, Ministry of Welfare. He was instrumental in the formulation of the government's strategy and comprehensive measures against atrocities on S.Cs and S.Ts in 1980.

Krishnan was also instrumental in the formulation and implementation of the Government of India's strategy and comprehensive measures against atrocities on S.Cs and S.Ts in 1980. As the Special Commissioner for S.Cs and S.Ts and as Secretary, Ministry of Welfare, he conceptualised and operationalised integrated special legislation against atrocities, in the form of the S.Cs and S.Ts (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Krishnan processed the proposal for the appointment of the Mandal Commission on January 1, 1979, and facilitated the functioning of the commission from 1979 to 1980, as Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs. In 1990, as Secretary, Ministry of Welfare, he ensured proper processing of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission and placed them in the right perspective before the Union Cabinet. When the implementation of the recommendation was challenged in the Supreme Court, Krishnan prepared the affidavits personally to ensure that the Supreme Court had a correct picture before deciding the writ petitions before it. His efforts finally led to the judicial upholding of reservation for OBCs.

Krishnan continued to be associated with administrative issues with regard to the OBCs since then – be it the adoption of the creamy layer formula in 1993 as a member of the Experts Committee or his presence as Member Secretary of the National Commission for Backward Classes from 1993 to 2000. No wonder, he again came to the rescue of the Central government when it was faced with a fresh legal challenge to its decision to extend OBC reservation to Central educational institutions in 2005. Thanks to his valuable legal assistance, the government succeeded in convincing the Supreme Court about the legality of the reservation for OBCs in higher education in the Ashoka Kumar Thakur (Mandal II) case in 2008.

A comprehensive account of Krishnan's contribution still remains to be written, as the purpose of this book is only to publish with all the annexures, the full text of the First Ambedkar Memorial lecture instituted by the Indian Institute of Public Administration and delivered by Krishnan on April 21, 2006. The lecture has useful data regarding the institution and the disposal of civil rights cases against the perpetrators of atrocities

against Dalits. The 15 appendices, carrying key documents from 1996 to 2006, will be of immense assistance to anyone interested in the study of Dalits' struggle for justice.

The second book, *Social Justice Philanthropy*, examines the role of funding organisations in addressing the problems of social exclusion and marginalisation. The authors believe that the efforts undertaken by the formal Dalit or tribal funding agencies to reverse the effects of historical deprivation, exclusion and discrimination of the S.C./S.Ts are not contributing to their objective as these social groups suffer from a weak resource position, and also because of their lack of social capital. The authors collected data from 829 funding agencies, and selected 10 of them which are engaged in some type of social justice philanthropy (SJP). These include CRY, ActionAid India (AAI), Social Development Council of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), four individual corporate sector organisations of Mumbai, Maharashtra, and a few individual family-based organisations from Gujarat. The authors found that corporate sector funding agencies did not recognise caste-based exclusion as a factor in the perpetuation of poverty and deprivation of certain social groups. Therefore, the issue of redistribution (to improve access to resources), improving participation, or discrimination does not figure prominently in the project list of the corporate SJP agencies.

On the contrary, agencies such as AAI and CRY view deprivation and poverty to be embedded in structural factors and the lack of access to resources. They address and support projects which attempt to improve the access of the poor to resources and, thereby, strengthen the capacity of community participation. Thus they support projects on land distribution, minimum wages, and strengthening of participation in local institutions. Since they recognise caste discrimination as a factor in the denial of basic human rights and deprivation, they support projects related to discrimination and exclusion.

On the basis of the sample results, the authors conclude that the funding agencies, particularly the corporate sector and family-based trusts, which draw funds from Indian civil society for their pro-poor activities, tend to ignore the issues of poverty and deprivation caused by caste and other forms of social exclusion. The authors deplore the fact that the social diversity in the staffing pattern, although shown to have been useful for promoting SJP, has not been really practiced by most of the funding agencies.
