

Book Reviews

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Anil Kumar Vaddiraju, *Politics, Governance and Philosophy*. Eliva Press, 2022, 158 pp. \$54.50, ISBN: 9789994980338 (Paperback).

The rise of majoritarian governance across the world is a cause of concern. One of the reasons for this would be the withering of values in general and politics in particular. However, this is only a consequence of the deep-rooted crisis of political philosophy. Anil Kumar in his new book has made an effort to explore some of these aspects. The chapters are accommodated in two sections: (a) Political Philosophy, in which the works of Hannah Arendt, Paul Freire and Antonio Gramsci, interpretive theory and others were discussed, and (b) Politics and Governance. This review focuses on political philosophy in general, with a particular emphasis on the Marxian concept of the state and its need for the change. This is done with a view of further strengthening the theoretical underpinnings of the Marxian state. Such a contemporary change improves upon the extent of pragmatism of the political theory, thereby deepening the social legitimacy of the state in a given society.

Political Philosophy beyond Marxian State

The argument of the need for the study of exclusion through the interdisciplinary approach is well taken. However, construing social as without state and its institutions needs more clarity and reasoning. Baltimore argues that the state is a product of society, which means that the state is part and parcel of the entity called society. The term ‘social exclusion’ does involve the aspects of cultural, economic, political and ecological dimensions. It would have been better to argue the aspects of strengthening the methodologies and tools to study the complex phenomenon called social exclusion. The high-handedness of the economic tools to study the income inequality blurs the scope for studying other types of inequalities in the larger domain of ‘social’. This needs further clarity in terms of interdisciplinary methods and methodologies in place of a monopoly of singular discipline to enquire various inequalities in the society.

This connects with the concept of power more to political power, which is discussed in terms of Marxist, liberal and postmodern theory. However, very little justification is provided for taking Marxist theory of state as a point of reference in place of Hegel’s theory of state wherein the state is perceived as

an ethical order rather than looking at the power dimension. The point of identifying the specific locus of power in order to claim the rights of an individual is well explored; however, the same is not very much forthcoming especially in decentralised power regimes.

The project of modernity and democracy in India is a work in progress. Both modernity and democracy are still evolving by complementing each other sometimes and conflicting with one another many a time. The pendulum of complementing and conflicting elements in fact gives room for modernity and democracy in a diverse society like India. Industrially advanced states, such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh with median industrial advancements and Kerala with a low industrial advancement, provide a nuanced understanding of the status of modernity and democracy.

The interplay between the economy and politics is interesting yet challenging in terms of the institutional actors and their dynamics. The argument of the imposition of political democracy on a thin economic base in the Marxian traditional state needs some kind of reforms in the wake of the welfare state concept inherited in the Constitution. The economic base criterion is indeed necessary yet insufficient to explore the development of the state in India. This could be one of the reasons why Ambedkar emphasised on having social democracy along with political democracy. Looking beyond Marxian conception of the state is the need of the hour to analyse the state of modernity and democracy in India. The reductionism to the Marxian conception of the state reduces the analytical scope of modernity as a political project and democracy as an outcome of governance. The dialectics of modernity and democracy, Anil Kumar argues, needs an interdisciplinary—more so a multidisciplinary—perspective rather than an economic understanding alone. Such an interdisciplinary approach enhances the scope of enquiry of the modern state as an analytical category. The economic rigidity around the state needs to go beyond the calculations from its theoretical nature to the actual functioning of the state in a society like India wherein economic inequality is an inherent and structural feature.

Anil Kumar deserves appreciation for the efforts made to put forth these crucial aspects of political and governance issues within the larger framework of political philosophies. Overall, the first section on political philosophy raises more questions than it answers to the contemporary political problems of the world in general and India in particular. The application of Western political philosophy to the Indian social and political scenario indeed has some inherent limitations as the context for developing those political philosophies is different from the realities of India. Having said this, a more careful scrutiny is necessary to formulate and apply these political philosophies to the Indian social and political context. This contextualisation is critical to ensuring the validity and applicability of political philosophies of Arendt, Gramsci and Freire and the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation both externally and internally.

The second part of the book deals with the various facets of politics and governance with greater emphasis on urban governance, female labour problems in agriculture, ecological proletarianisation, decentralised planning and governance, state development in India and the modernity project. All these issues

have been brought out neatly at the conceptual level; what is missing is the larger substance and their critical analysis. Barring Chapters 6, 7 and 9, the other chapters are more of theoretical in nature and less in empirical data. Otherwise, the book is a welcome addition to the governance literature in terms of understanding the Western political philosophies under the Indian social and political conditions. The book's underlying attempt to answer some of the problems posed by the crisis of political values in general and the Indian state, in particular, is valuable.

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**Sabine Kuhlmann, Benoît Paul Dumas and Moritz Heuberger (Eds.),
*The Capacity of Local Governments in Europe: Autonomy, Responsibilities
and Reforms*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2022, xi + 121 pp. EUR 39.99, ISBN:
9783031079610 (Hardback). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07962-7>**

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The contesting and contrasting outcomes in decentralised governance across developed and developing countries have in recent years catapulted into prominence issues of their competence to push the critical multidimensional development agenda vested in them. Consequently, the subject of local governments' capacity has preoccupied the attention of policymakers, academics and civil society activists, and like never before, this has become more pronounced at a time when the subject of development – as captured and prioritised under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals – has become a dominant and binding development blueprint.

The centrality of local governments to development under this framework has been escalated considering its proximity advantage to the local setting – a fundamental, yet rare characteristic which, in the views of policymakers and academics, could be leveraged for better governance outcomes capitalising on their powers to ensure equity in the provision of public goods and services. It is instructive to clarify at this juncture that local states' realisation of these obligations does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is anchored on their capacity, a complementary description loosely replicated here to represent competencies.