At Home with DEMOCRACY

A Theory of Indian Politics

D.L. Sheth

Edited with an Introduction by Peter Ronald deSouza

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Author
D.L. Sheth
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
New Delhi, India

Editor
Peter Ronald deSouza
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
New Delhi, India

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For Surabhi, friend and companion

Preface

About a year ago when I thought of putting my published articles between covers and making a book, I consulted my friend and colleague Peter about a small dilemma I faced: should I present my work chronologically, as it developed, or thematically, through an analytical perspective. I showed him the list of articles I wanted to include and gave him the text of some of them. Peter was fairly well acquainted with my overall work for we had several occasions to discuss, and even dispute, the issues explored in what has now acquired the shape of a book. This often took place during our daily drive to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and back—what Peter called the 'seminar on wheels'. Looking at what I had given him, he responded 'Neither, for I see your work principally as theoretical. The way you problematize democracy as a phenomenon integral to India's social, cultural and even historical frame and the way you see its working, in a complex civilizational society like India, would require theoretical literature in democracy to recognize and re-work how the major institutional architecture of checks and balances in India evolved through popular protests and movements and not deductively from theory.' In fact the Indian experience of group identities and rights, which I discuss, has expanded the idea of democratic theory. In India the concern of political freedom is stretched into impossible areas because of the romance of democracy among ordinary people, and thereby blunting the elite features with which it began. The result of my conversations with Peter was to junk my 'collected work' project and produce a selection focused on issues concerning the theory of Indian democracy. After some 'seminar on wheels'

Peter agreed to compile and edit those articles which could be included within this overall logic and to write an Introduction. The net gain for me, and for the reader, is the Introduction which covers and raises distinctive theoretical issues of Indian democracy.

I would also like to particularly acknowledge my deep debt to the CSDS which helped me conceive, investigate, and write several of these articles through the collegial process of the regular lunch *adda*—unique to the CSDS—where every member was eager to introduce ideas and projects that they were considering and to seriously contest viewpoints and approaches they disagreed with. Everything was open—even wild—but never personally motivated. It really began with Rajni Kothari's *Politics in India*. The lunch *addas* particularly helped me to recognize the two languages of social thinking on India: English and the *bhashas*. When written in English an essay in political sociology would sound scholarly and even social scientific. The same thing when rendered in Gujarati sounded, at the best, commonsensical. It appeared as if the use of English lent the essay an air of being academic and scientific. The same thing in Gujarati cannot be written without bringing the play of agencies involved, and consequences entailed, into the process of depicting that reality. My work has been an attempt to de-academize the idea of social change and to bring back the reality of agents, issues, and implications/consequences involved. The critical culture of the CSDS produced a restlessness within me which led me to see academic pursuit as essentially a dialogic process (rather than adopting a 'truth out there' approach which needed to be investigated) involving social agencies. This enabled me to reject the dichotomy between the producers and consumers of social knowledge. It is primarily experiential. This led me to conceive of *Lokayan* as a different kind of knowledge-producing process from which I have drawn many of my formulations. Such an institutional initiative as *Lokayan* was only possible because of the culture of CSDS. This is how I conceived and really experienced academic freedom at CSDS.

Also crucial to this process are my early Baroda days. It began during my work with I.P. Desai in the sociology department. He talked about social roles by converting the classroom as a social group with many roles, processes, and sanctions and in a concluding lecture told us that 'now that you have done the course, if you go and stand at a bus stop and do not see things differently from how you saw them before, then you have not learned any sociology'. The other crucial experience was the Renaissance Club led by R.C. Patel (*mota*), who was iconoclastic towards all authority. Sixty years later I have still not recovered from his response to my presentation on

Talcott Parsons's theory of social systems. Rajni Kothari systematized in my mind the idea of thinking about issues as a way of thinking India.

Having thought about India for sixty years, the conventional dichotomies—such as tradition-modernity, progressive-regressive and class-caste—dissolved into a more generic view of coexisting multiple and multidimensional realities contained in every singularity. As we look at today's India most of these old classifications collapse. In India today, increasingly, older identities/identifications are blunted. New awareness is now more and more about opportunities through expanding spaces. With increasing democratization the old politics of identities is being dimmed and blunted and now it is more a politics of aspiration, rights, freedoms and opportunities, particularly economic opportunity, presaging a new phase of democracy. The organicity of old ties is getting dissolved. This perhaps gives us a glimpse into the new phase of democracy on which India has embarked.

New Delhi, India
14 August 2017

Dhirubhai L. Sheth

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Political Theory of Indian Democracy

Peter Ronald deSouza

Concepts and Context

Compiling this collection of articles has been a challenging and rewarding exercise, both personally and professionally. What began as a simple practical task of selecting from Dhirubhai L. Sheth (DLS)'s extensive and diverse writings a representative set of papers that could be made available to students and researchers of Indian politics, an apparently straightforward objective, soon developed into a tutorial on his ideas and his political philosophy. As editor, I quickly realized that I had to engage with his arguments and interpretations of events and to reflect on his readings of personalities, processes, institutions and histories. The intellectual universe he inhabited emerged as more complex and layered than I had anticipated and, as a result, I had to make a mid-course correction. The pragmatic exercise of 'just compiling' was, it now seemed, not possible. I found myself beginning a conversation with the writings, one that spanned many issues starting with his epistemic location within the social sciences community in a developing society to his personal and his own community history, to the role of persistent knowledge asymmetries in India and even to trying to map his multifaceted political disposition. I had to walk back and forth from his understandings to mine in a continuous process of signification. The last

P.R. deSouza (✉)
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, India

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had a cubist character to it. To do justice to DLS's work required me to acknowledge the range of resources from which he drew and with which he interacted. Added to these factors was the influence of the academic institution in which he was based and to whose intellectual life he contributed, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, an institution that had developed a public identity as a community of activist-scholars and intellectual iconoclasts. Locating Dhirubhai, a project in itself, helped me to understand and appreciate his deep commitment to democracy as the maker of a new and egalitarian India.

I mention this in the first paragraph of this collection since I want to draw attention, in the very beginning, to the fact often ignored in India that the intellectual work of a creative scholar must be understood in terms of both the cultural and material world in which he is embedded and the world of ideas in which he is conducting a dialogue. In DLS's case, this is important because his is the generation that saw the dawn of Indian independence. Those were the years when young people, such as him, were introduced to the twists and turns of the freedom struggle and who picked up their ideas through household and village gossip. The doings and sayings of Gandhi, Patel, Nehru, Ambedkar and Azad, as well as a host of others who participated in the civil disobedience movements, were the topics of their growing years. Theirs was the generation of people who heard stories of the heroics and sacrifices that ordinary people made for a higher cause—the promise of Swaraj—who combined high idealism with pragmatism in campaigns such as the Dandi march, and who had to adapt to the new vocabulary of Swaraj fashioned by the Mahatma. The many elements of this vocabulary resonated with these young people since it drew on the sources of their tradition, which had been reworked for the times and given a futuristic direction. DLS was a participant in that history. As he was just a boy it was mostly the sidelines from which he drew his inspiration. From the stories that he received, both momentous and mundane, he fashioned his world view. DLS has recounted to me episodes in which he, and other village boys who were part of the Seva Dal, teased and taunted other boys from the neighbourhood who went with their big khaki pants to the shakas on the other side of the river, for being backward-looking. In this youthful jousting, a politics was being forged of the distinction between the 'backward' and the 'modern', the past and the future, which one can see underlies all his subsequent writing. Every essay in this collection carries this politics of the 'backward' and the 'modern' which has served as the basis of his political judgement. In DLS's writing, there is no tentativeness about

political judgement. The early experience of growing up in Gujarat, in the shadow of the Mahatma and in the din of the national struggle, I believe, set the ethical foundations for his subsequent intellectual life.

The post-independence period also contributed many events, involvements and responsibilities to the making of his analytical frame. Together the two phases of his life produced the key elements of his philosophy such as a deep commitment to democracy as the necessary dynamic for transforming the social structure of India, and an unwavering hostility to authoritarian practices irrespective of the quarter from which they came. He developed a dislike of the family in politics as he also did of ethno-religious organizations, not just because the latter tried to homogenize an internal diversity but also because of their spurious nationalism. DLS's work shows impatience with the dissimulation practised both by political parties and by social scientists. This is because of his unhappiness with the explanations and concepts used to elucidate the political process in India which, he believes, needs different frames. Running through his writing is a preoccupation with the denial of rights, especially of disadvantaged and subaltern groups. His work in Lokayan and Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) was based on his valorization of the act of protest against injustice. I was once witness to him challenging the immigration officers at Delhi airport who were casual in processing the passports of the large numbers of tired passengers who had arrived on long international flights. He first reprimanded them for their casualness and then demanded to submit a complaint to their officers who were sitting in a room behind the counters. His dissent soon produced an increasing decibel of protest. And the Indian State actually (seen through this impromptu ethnographic lens) soon improved its delivery of public services. We now move through immigration with greater ease. While most of us are excessively polite before an immigration officer, he was purely professional.

Decoding the many levels of his readings required me to travel to his 'native'—as we say in India—to get a sense of the roots that were the foundation of his framework, the meaning system that coloured it and the ethical resolve that underlined it. The 'native' for DLS is not just the village. It is also the region, the community and the nation. Each of these locations, I believe, adds dimensions to his framework of explanation. It is from the village that his understanding of the rules of social and cultural exchange comes, from the region that the encounter with modernity is understood, from the community that his perception of internal and external group dynamics emerges and from the nation that he discovers the relationship

between history and politics. In this framework of explanation, we find both assertion and critique, a vocabulary that is shared and yet one that is quite distinct to him.

Mapping all of this soon converted a simple exercise of sorting out his essays into a more complex exercise of understanding. As I write this now that I am in the final stage of completing the preparation of this edited collection, I am back to being practical about the task undertaken but in a different way. From the practicality of an editor-publisher, who has to think about the mechanics of publishing a good book, I have now moved to the practicality of the scholar-editor, who seeks to ensure that the collection of articles does not just represent DLS's range of insights into Indian politics, but also presents his work as belonging at the 'appropriate' conceptual level at which a theory of Indian politics is valid. The 'appropriate' level is one which is able to combine the insights of the ethnographer with the insights of the political scientist, of the political economist with that of the constitutionalist. A political theory of India must not be derivative and must not carry the burden of an orientalist framing. It must be sensitive to descriptions of the particular and the local while also being sufficiently removed from the heat and dust of everyday politics to see the societal dynamics that have been set into motion by democracy. It must be able to dialogue with both the nativist and the cosmopolitan, the activist and the intellectual. I believe DLS's work meets these criteria. That is why I worked hard to persuade him (it was a struggle) to accept the title 'A theory of Indian Politics'. The compromise we reached was to make it a subtitle.

Theory and Significance

It was important for me to insist on the words 'theory' in the title because I believe that his lifetime's work can best be described as a theory of Indian politics. It has a framework of explanation with a distinct value slope which gives it significance. For example, his statement that '*the structure of law undermines the legal rights of tribals*' is a sweeping statement and can only be understood if one explores how he sees the 'structure' of law in India, from the initial constitutional promise to its translation into a criminal and civil system, and then to the manner in which this elaborate edifice of laws—the procedure and structure—actually works. DLS, having analysed this working, concluded that tribals who are guaranteed equal citizenship, in reality, suffer a deprivation of their rights. In this succinct statement can be found a theory of the legal order and of the interests that it serves, of its partiality in

contrast to its professed impartiality and of its inability to protect the vulnerable section of tribals from the actions and policies of the State. He held that this is true even of legislation that has been specially enacted to protect the interests of the tribals. For DLS, there is a fundamental flaw in the structure of the Anglo-Saxon adversarial structure of law in India. Only because he has a theory of Indian politics is DLS able to make a clear and unambiguous statement about the nature of law with respect to groups such as tribals. It is a radical theory of the legal order. He believes that for the tribal the law is unjust.

Take another illustration. His statement on language that *'modernization became an elite discourse in post-independent India because it was, by and large, carried out in English'* gives a clear sense of one of the instruments of elite domination, language. English is a language that excludes large numbers of citizens and inferiorizes those who do not speak it. Because English is the language of the elite, it serves to establish and maintain their continuing superiority. But more than the political point being made here is an epistemic point. By conducting a discourse in English the elite demonstrate the fact that they have not completely broken free—or perhaps they never really were able to break free—of the conceptual frames of colonialism, using its categories to explain, represent and recommend. DLS's statement suggests that English is not up to the task at hand. It cannot adequately represent the political process because there are no equivalent English terms for concepts that have a currency in the bhasas such as netagiri, biradari, asmita or bahujan. Even colloquial words such as 420 or lal batti, which convey a great deal, cannot be rendered effectively in English. Native categories from the bhasas would certainly have served modernization better. When the discourse is conducted in English a great deal is lost because Indians thinking in English both miss many of the English concept's nuances and misrepresent the social reality by relying on it. In addition to exclusion, control and conceptual loss, DLS's statement is also a critique of the democratic deficit in the system since it limits participation in the modernizing project to those proficient in English. In the statement is a theory not just of language as an instrument of control, but also of an incomplete process of decolonization of the mind.

A third illustration from a different area, to strengthen my point, is the following statement in his chapter on caste: *'The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party [BSP] is not a victory of caste politics but the opposite, a repudiation of caste ideology.'* This seems to go against the prevailing wisdom but if we use the same approach that I have used so far, of going behind the statement to

discover the frame that gives it meaning, we find a clear explanation of the dynamics of the BSP which, bowing to the demands of competitive politics, makes (and can make) alliances across castes, even with the Brahmins, that a conventional theory of social stratification would consider inconceivable. Hence, while caste as a descriptor is foregrounded in the analysis, it is not the same category of social stratification where social boundaries are maintained and policed and where social norms are the basis for societal exchanges. According to DLS, in democratic politics in India, and because of it, these boundaries are transgressed. And so the discourse that talks of caste in politics fails to appreciate that the referent here, in this political discussion of caste, is not the social category of vertical stratification but a political category of horizontal division. If in the former usage we are referring to a regressive tendency in society, in the latter usage we are referring to a progressive tendency in politics. Here too we see that it is possible for the statement to be made only because of a political theory of what democracy is doing to the caste system.

There are several such pithy statements in the essays that I have selected for this collection. I cannot, and do not, wish to list them all because I hope each reader will find for himself or herself similar statements and then, through a process of self-reflection, determine why the statement chosen by him or her was deemed significant. When identified and subjected to the kind of analysis that I have just demonstrated, of unearthing the frame that stands behind the statement, thereby giving it significance, we would be able to reconstruct DLS's theory of Indian politics. If a theory is a framework of explanation, then DLS's work provides us with an innovative theory of Indian politics. This collection is rich in hypothesis from which the study of democracies, both in India and abroad, can draw.

I have chosen to speak of the 'appropriate level of abstraction' because a great deal of reflection went into the choice of the word *'of'* in the subtitle. '*For*' was the reflex word, which was also syntactically more elegant, but I soon discarded it because it seemed too patronizing. If the struggle is for a theory of Indian politics that did not carry the three burdens of (a) a colonialization of the mind, (b) a derivative discourse and (c) an imperialism of categories,[1] the word had to be *'of'*. While *'of'* is a bit ambivalent since it does not clearly specify whether it emerges from within the language of representation or whether it comes from outside or does a bit of both, it is better than *'for'*. DLS's work develops a theory 'of' Indian democracy and thereby it is set apart from many of the other studies that are unable to shake off the burden of being derivative. The theory that informs DLS's work is

sometimes stated clearly in his writing and has sometimes to be extracted from it since it frames his analysis but remains in the background. This is what makes his work so exciting and enriching since a reader is invited to reconstruct the theoretical frame from the succinct statements that abound in the work and from the specific analysis of a particular theme. The 15 chapters when added up give a comprehensive theory of Indian politics.

Since DLS's theory is both manifestly stated and discernibly outlined in his work, reconstruction can be attempted at three levels: (i) inquiring why he has selected a set of issues to write about, i.e., asking the significance question; (ii) examining how he has formulated the details of the issue, i.e., the construction of the argument question; and (iii) positioning his analysis against other frameworks of explanation on the same issue, i.e., the question of critique. DLS's framework of explanation, although lean, offers itself for deployment in a large range of instances. This is what makes it a theory at the right level of abstraction.

The sequencing of chapters and the clustering into groups have also been the product of considerable deliberation. The five sections—(i) State, Nation, Democracy; (ii) Parapolitics of Democracy; (iii) Social Power and Democracy; (iv) Representation in Liberal Democracy; and (v) Emerging Challenges of Democracy—seek to establish the distinct platform on which the argument will be developed. The first chapter on the relation of history to politics begins by challenging the thesis of 'fact' from 'interest', undermining the claim that history is objective and governed by evidence alone and not by political considerations. Here DLS makes the provocative claim that such a reading of history has been the source of much of the contemporary communal discord in India. In contrast, he endorses the Gandhian attitude of privileging cultural political consciousness over such historical consciousness. The collection ends with a chapter on global governance. From a philosophical engagement with the historical method in the first chapter, through a discussion of specific themes, the book concludes with a discussion on democratizing the global system. Although the essays were written at different times over the last four decades, they retain their value because of their conceptual insights into the political dynamics of Indian democracy which, although specific to the context, have a relevance beyond the context and address general issues of human societies. While some of the data used may be dated, it must be seen merely as illustrative of the argument being made. The argument is not dependent on these data.

Some chapters are earlier essays that have been edited and included with minor changes. Others have been substantially reworked, combining several essays to form a wide-ranging argument. This is to allow the issues developed in individual small essays, but which are part of a larger concern, e.g., reservations—which he has argued in three separate small essays as reservations in the private sector, reservations for other backward classes (OBCs) and reservations for religious groups—to be combined so that they are available to the reader as a more comprehensive argument. Each chapter is therefore chosen, either in its original or reworked form, to offer the reader a substantial argument of what democracy in doing to India and what India is doing to democracy. The essays collected here are DLS's responses to these two connected questions. Both contain seeds of a theory since only a theory of democracy will be able to (i) explain the consequences of the political processes that have been set into motion and (ii) accept its inability to explain aspects that have emerged—the inconvenient facts, ambivalences and conundrums of democracy. Because of these inconvenient facts and conundrums, the theory will have to be reworked to accommodate them. For example, DLS in his discussion of the voluntary sector writes that

> in our voluntary sector the integrity or otherwise of the form that an organization acquires is linked to the kind of leadership it has. Since the leadership is usually individual-oriented the form remains flexible, but not necessarily diffused. An [o]rganization's origins, its legal identity, the patterns of its growth and its contemporary role and functions, however, do not always exist as elements of one coherent entity. Yet even an individual centered organization acquires, over time, an institutional form which imparts a certain image and boundary to its functioning. Ironically, such evolution of institutional form is often made possible by a prolonged continuation of one individual in the leadership role. Both the strength and vulnerability of the sector thus lie in what seems to be this uniquely Indian (individual centered) form of voluntary action.

Democracy in India should therefore be seen as producing a politics which goes beyond the simple binaries of full and flawed, mature and young, developed and deficient. It requires new concepts for explanation.

What Is Democracy Doing to India

For DLS 'democracy may be said to be a model of deliberate imperfection, a model that tolerates various loose ends in the system.... Democracy recognizes ... a multiplicity of possible courses open to the system at any given

point in time. ... [It] presumes a society that allows various legitimation processes to test themselves out on the ground through critical analysis and through real-life conflict, struggles and integrative movements of ideas and actions.'[2] Having made the argument, in the first part of this introduction, on why DLS's work constitutes a political theory of Indian democracy, let me now go, in the second part, to the substantive aspects of this theory. I shall do this by identifying five interesting hypotheses from the 15 chapters in the collection and show how they offer valuable insights into 'what democracy is doing to India and what India is doing to democracy'. I have chosen five to illustrate the depth of his thinking on democracy.

The first hypothesis comes from Chap. 2, 'Historicizing India's Nationhood: History as Contemporary politics', and states that the '*historicization of an event, or an object (e.g., a monument) or an institution of a distant past becomes credible, and makes good historical sense, only when made in terms of contemporary concerns and sensibilities*'. This hypothesis goes to the centre of one of the important concerns of post-independent India: how to build the present by relying on a certain narrative of the past. While the terrain of history has always been contested in India, with the Cambridge, Nationalist, Marxist and Subaltern schools, and their variants, claiming validity for their account of the past, DLS's hypothesis takes the discussion beyond a mere acknowledgement of the different interpretations. He challenges the claim of a history based on objective evidence and argues that history's role is not dissimilar to that of politics since it too seeks to establish 'the legitimacy of ideas, institutions and representations (symbolic, ritual and as arrangements for power-sharing)'. For DLS both history and politics are involved in similar functions of settling the contentions and legitimacy claims being made in society. They therefore need to work closely together, with history shedding its pretense of being objective. While this raises the crucial questions of evidence, and of objectivity, in the reconstruction of the past, and how such a reconstruction is different from one based on myth and ideology, the issue of epistemic relativism—an issue DLS does not quite address—it points to the similar roles history and politics play in the making of the nation state. The politics of the present requires, according to him, certain reconstructions of the past so that the narrative that emerges from this reconstruction enjoys the legitimacy of the people. Nation building requires such legitimacy.

If we shift from this epistemic question of the objectivity of history to the political question of what has been the impact of what he calls 'history as contemporary politics', then two very provocative propositions emerge. For

DLS the recent self-image of the discipline of history, as dealing with objective truths, has resulted in a 'historicization that legitimized the ethno-religious principle of nationalism which, in turn, inevitably led to the partition of India'. Historicization, for DLS, is at the base of the 'permanent state of communal discord in the subcontinent'. He argues that this way of writing the history of the subcontinent legitimized the ethno-religious principle of nationalism and the subsequent division of India into two states, because it was based on an alien (Western) conception of a nation state. For DLS the Indian State is not a nation state, but a State for a country, which, because of its inherent diversity, is not a nation in the European sense of one language, one religion and one ethnicity, but a country state with intricate internal diversities. Through this hypothesis, DLS compels us to think not just about the challenges of writing the history of democratic India, but also about the political consequences of that writing which have followed us from the time of partition. We need a new historiography.

His second proposition is that in contrast to historicization Gandhi privileged a 'cultural political consciousness'. In doing so, he 'expanded and intensified political mobilization on a truly national scale thus laying the pluralistic democratic foundation for Indian secularism'. By cultural political consciousness DLS means a process of extracting and reviving and recalling the social structural unity of India, thereby acquiring a supra consciousness. It sets the basis for secularism because it grants a different social reality—e.g., caste in Tamil Nadu being different from caste in Haryana—but brings it into a conceptual framework which can encompass both. A peculiar national sentiment emerges that concedes and accepts this diversity of language and religion but has a common national consciousness. The phrase in the hypothesis stated earlier 'makes good historical sense, only when made in terms of contemporary concerns and sensibilities' allows for readings of history that are both emancipatory, since they have the potential to escape the orientalist framing, and problematic, since they permit nativist constructions. The building of a plural and inclusive society, which Gandhi argued for, requires contemporary historians of India to navigate away from these nativist eddies which seem to be producing the turbulence in our democracy today.

The second hypothesis that I wish to draw attention to is the following: *The 'development' establishment is, of course, not impervious to the threat the grass roots movements hold for its constituent group of beneficiaries, the scientific, bureaucratic, managerial, military and business elites. If it fails to coopt*

such movements on the ground with its sprawling networks of patronage and power, the 'development' establishment would devise modes of curbing them using the raw power of the state and bureaucratic subterfuges. In continuation with his epistemic challenge to the dominant discourse on nation building and state formation, DLS challenges the development paradigm, which has underlined policy making in independent India. He sees it as being exploitative of disadvantaged groups and as creating a class of beneficiaries who become the new elite that dominate the levers of the State and the public discourse. He argues that if the countries of South Asia, and others in the global South (since he is an important participant in debates on the politics of development and underdevelopment), 'want to reverse the current process of near-pulverization of their societies and cultures and also to assume a simple and dignified standard of living for their people, they have no alternative but to "de-link" from the conventional paradigm of development and the type of elitist politics associated with it'. Such alternative development needs an alternative politics which will break away from the conventional politics of the institution-centric politics of liberal democracy. He sees such politics coming from grassroots movements that also offer a normative-ideological frame in opposition to the dominant model of development. In these suggestions, we see the influence of Gandhi's ideas on development, particularly his arguments in *Hind Swaraj*.

While DLS does not present himself as a Gandhian he borrows from the concept and from his dialogue with grassroots movements—in the *Lokayan* initiative that he managed—to build both a critique of the dominant model of development, which he sees as serving the interests of the global and national elite and not of disadvantaged groups, and also a case for alternative development. He holds that the dominant model of development supports a 'programme of colonial-type exploitation of the primary producers (the vast population of tribals, artisans, small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers) by a small urban-industrial elite, and its client class of a dependent rural elite, who can persist, even thrive, in a market economy. In India he holds that the market economy, instead of making a dent in the social structure, is in fact absorbed by it.' In his thinking about alternative development, the cohort is clear: Mahatma Gandhi, E.F. Schumacher, Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, Gro Brundtland, Rajni Kothari, Elaben Bhatt, a host of colleagues at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Lokayan, and more recently those at the World Social Forum.

This critique of the development paradigm has unfortunately been consigned to history as the world has succumbed to the thinking of the

World Economic Forum. We can, in shorthand, refer to it as the Davos paradigm, which is now witnessing a backlash as countries across the globe are faced with an anti-globalization campaign by the losers of such Davos-driven globalization and which, in the absence of an alternative model of globalization argued for by the cohort just mentioned, are being driven into the politics of xenophobic nationalism. Unfortunately, the word 'development', with its subtle normative suggestion that what is being proposed is a response to backwardness, has come to dominate our policy thinking and little analysis has gone into assessing the consequences, both social and economic, that such development has produced. We need to ask ourselves whether these consequences are just unfortunate outcomes of poor implementation or are those which will inevitably flow from the conceptual frame itself. Are dead and dying rivers, unlivable cities and communal violence the necessary outcomes of our development paradigm or are they merely its unfortunate pathologies? Does the livelihood aspiration of an India of 1.3 billion people, and an ecosystem that is rich and fragile, require us to revisit the ideas of Elaben Bhatt or is what she proposes in *Anubandh* mere utopia? It is bullet trains, smart cities and gated communities that we opt for instead of reviving the village community.

The third hypothesis which is at the core of his theory of Indian politics is the argument that *'people in our country are rights-deprived in numerous ways and their rights often remain invisible and unrecognized'*. It is this deprivation of rights that serves as the basis of all DLS's judgements of the working of Indian democracy. All aspects of the polity can be measured in terms of whether they add to the enjoyment or the deprivation of rights. This deprivation, he holds, is not just a deficit that can be redressed through tinkering with policy or institutions. It is an inversion of the promise of democracy that can only be resisted by an alternative politics. The existing politics will, for him, necessarily lead to a denial of rights. In DLS's view, a gap has emerged between the formal spaces of politics and the non-formal spaces, where the excluded were located, allowing many movements to occupy the social spaces created by the decline of the conventional mainstream politics of legislatures, elections, political parties and trade unions. The result is the retreat of democratic institutions from open, competitive politics, where they continually sought to establish their claims for legitimation and their transformation, into the pure politics of power and manoeuvre.

In the discourse of Indian democracy, DLS sees an inordinate emphasis on examining the processes of institutional power. The non-institutional

forms and processes of political power, emerging from non-party democratic politics, as a phenomenon relevant for theorizing Indian democracy, he believes, are undervalued. As a result, he holds that

> the theory's focus remains primarily on the modernity of India's democratic state and only secondarily on its democratic character. . . . It is the inability of the state, its bureaucracy, and its institutional politics to process the problems of those left out, the grassroots, into their own arena that has created this overwhelming situation that the grassroots movements feel they are required to tackle. . . . Any work at the grassroots that does not define itself as political must of necessity acquire some political characteristics of a movement because people in our country are rights-deprived in numerous ways and their rights often remain invisible and unrecognized. Even good non-political work cannot begin without addressing the issue of rights in one way or the other.

There are at least three important suggestions for thinking about democracy in India, and in many countries of the global south, that DLS makes over here. The first is the retreat into looking at democracy only in terms of the institutional structure of politics. Many democracy watchers do this, an exercise which is easy but which excludes the grassroots movements, which, through their external dynamics, also represent citizen interests. This takes us to his second suggestion, which is to look at representation as an idea that must also be explored beyond the formal institutions of parties, elections and legislatures. DLS believes that non-formal political formations also meet the activity of 'representing interests' in a representative democracy. Democratic theory would need to examine whether such representation is legitimate and democratic. It is DLS's insistence that the politics of grassroots movements is also a form of representation that has added depth to our thinking about representation in democracies. *'The central thrust of these grassroots groups and movements is the politics of issues. They have not only raised issues but kept alive the old unresolved ones, issues long since given up by the political parties. These include such broad issues as human rights, women's rights, child labour, ecology and communalism.'* The third is the suggestion that a more mature understanding of democracy in India requires us to look at the relationship between the formal and the informal spaces of politics. The informal spaces, represented by the grassroots movements and non-formal political formations (also referred to as civil society) are the areas where those excluded find refuge and representation and where they get some protection. He holds that 'the combined effect of the emergent

economic and political situation, post liberalization and globalization, on the poorest among the poor is that they are neither entitled to become full wage earners in the economy nor full-fledged citizens in the polity'.

The fourth hypothesis that adds to the complexity of his theory of Indian democracy is his views on the politics of elites in India. In consonance with the classical elite theory, DLS too holds the view that *'the ruling elites in their concern to ensure stability to the regime in power tend to treat the problem of legitimation not in terms of aiding the process of transformation of the social structure—forces of which are surging at the ground level—but as a problem of tightening up the law and order situation'*. He observes that there are two groups of elites in India which are in contestation. The older pan-Indian English-educated elite who inherited the postcolonial State, maintaining its continuities, and managing it according to a Nehruvian template, are confronted by the new but ascendant elite who have paradoxically emerged through the successful work of the Nehruvian elite. This latter group has a rural and regional location and, having entered the structures of the State, are now seeking to change its vocabulary and grammar. Indian democracy is witnessing a multipoint contestation between the two groups of elites, each of which has a constituency that they must pamper, a political logic to which they must respond. Sometimes, and increasingly often, these logics place huge stresses on the state's ability to manage situations, such as in 2017 the challenge of dealing with the non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks in the former case and the writing off of large farmer's loans in the latter case. DLS notes that the sharp differences between them are marked by the language divide. I would like to read this language divide not just literally, as between English and the bhasas, but also metaphorically, as one responding to different worlds of opportunity and threat. If the Nehruvian elite found opportunity in India's becoming closely linked with the global economy, the regional elite saw this linkage as producing threats and hence causing negative consequences for the rural economy.

But I am over-reading here, carrying my own interpretations into his formulations, a morphing of arguments that sometimes happens when one embarks on such an editorial undertaking. This occasional over-reading underscores the charm of engaging with DLS's work for the insight that he offers, almost casually to an interlocutor, is so full of possibilities that on hearing it one immediately wants to run with it. I seem to have done just that. My engagement with DLS's work impels me to probe the tensions between these two sets of elites, to trace their political logics because they

speak to different constituencies, connect them to the processes of democracy both as celebration and as lament, and explore their consequences for the working of the democratic State. One wonders whether this idea of the language divide between the two groups of elites is also a divide in their democratic vocabulary.

The fifth hypothesis concerns the expanding policy of reservations as it has grown from being available to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to now being offered to OBCs. In this process of extension, Indian democracy has minutely debated and finessed aspects of the policy such as the percentage of places to be reserved for such claimants, whether the creamy layer in the respective group should be excluded, whether economic criteria should be the basis of eligibility, whether reservations should be extended to the private sector and also whether reservations should be made available for disadvantaged minority religious groups and so on. These public discussions have enriched our democratic politics.

DLS looks at how reservations have impacted the caste system as a system of social stratification, which, through its elaborate prescriptions and prohibitions, has defined relations between social groups in India, established economic occupations for different groups and determined the social geography of the village. By fundamentally transforming this system of social stratification, democracy has set into motion a bloodless revolution giving dignity, and the aspiration for equality, to a large segment of society that had hitherto been denied these recognitions. According to DLS, '[r]eservations gave a big impetus to the process of politicization of castes (as well as de-ritualization of inter caste relations). The policy itself by providing special educational and occupational opportunities to members of the numerous lower castes converted their traditional disability of low ritual status into an asset for acquiring new means for upward social mobility. ... Caste now survives as a kinship-based cultural community but operates in a different newly emergent system of social stratification. By forming themselves into larger horizontal groups, members of the different castes now increasingly compete for entry into the middle class, changing its old pre-independence character and composition'. It is through this break with the ritual system that democracy has been able to set into motion a great transformation in society towards equality and dignity. Through the political dynamics that the policy of reservations has set into motion, DLS shows that the uniqueness of democracy in India is its bloodless social revolution.

On this issue of reservation, however, he also offers an insight into the other question: what is India doing to democracy? Let me state this insight as the fifth hypothesis. For DLS *'the progressive expansion of affirmative action policies prevents the Indian state from acquiring an ethno-majoritarian character'*. Neither the literature on secularism in India nor the literature on reservations and social justice has made this connection that reservations have prevented India from the dangers of majoritarian communalism. The unintended consequence of India's nuanced affirmative action policies,[3] enacted to meet the demands for equality and social justice, is the promotion and development of a secular society. When we look across at other countries in the South Asia region which have moved increasingly towards an ethno-majoritarian character, we can appreciate the importance of this outcome. But will it, in spite of its 70-year evolution, endure? Will it be able to withstand a brand of politics that seeks deliberately to move the polity in an ethno-majoritarian direction? Will Hindutva politics be able to forge a majoritarian constituency over the fault lines of identity created by the politics of reservation?

Significance of 2014

To look at this issue I shall conclude this introduction of DLS' work by shifting from his written work to a conversation that I had with him over two continuous days a year ago as we were reflecting on the implications of the 2014 general election. It was a wide-ranging conversation, which can be seen as both a journey of ideas and a reflection on the biography of the nation. And therefore deciding what to bring into the report of the conversation and what to exclude is not easy, not because it would be repetitive of what has already been said, but because I have to diminish myself from being one part of a conversation to being just the asker of questions. While I could have ended this introduction at the end of the last paragraph, which I had originally intended to do, I felt the need, at this stage, to make available DLS's views on the significance of the 2014 election for Indian democracy.

The reflections on the 2014 elections should really begin with DLS's comment that the 'day Modi won the election with a majority, the 60 years of anti-RSS/Hindutva politics, post assassination of Gandhi, came to an end'. To understand this shift of the Hindutva world view moving from the margin of politics to its centre, DLS believes we must go back to tracing the politics of India from the period of the freedom struggle to the decades after independence. He believes the idea of India that emerged under the

leadership of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, embodied by the Congress, was in fact embraced by a larger spectrum of positions than merely the Nehruvian consensus. The only trend that was outside this spectrum, and alienated from it, was the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS from an era that precedes independence. Nehru saw this tendency of the communalism of the majority (as fascist) as being more dangerous than minority communalism, which, according to DLS, is theoretically and historically true but politically problematic.

Explaining why it was politically problematic DLS observed the distinct sociological fact that a majority of Hindus did not and do not have a political religious identity. Even though political Hinduism was the creation of the independence movement, those who wanted the leadership of the Hindus did not get it and hence for decades remained on the fringes of politics. This is because the political identity of Hindus, as a political cultural community, i.e., a nation-like community, was not sustainable and even difficult to conceive because of class, caste and structural factors. Added to this was the fact that the Hindu view of life did not accommodate this totalized view of social-cultural life. DLS regards Hinduism as particularly individualistic—in a non-Western way—perhaps even anarchic, because in it deliverance (moksha) is an individual burden even though one is a part of a community.

Gandhi's understanding of India in terms of cultural political consciousness produced an inclusiveness that defeated the RSS/Hindu Mahasabha idea of Hindu nationalism. He defeated them because he remained, according to DLS, an 'authentic' Hindu with his campaigns, e.g., against untouchability and his focus on ahimsa on terms that were more Hindu than that offered by the RSS and Mahasabha, which drew their ideas from Europe and Garibaldi. The idea they proposed of the 'one peopleness' of a nation comes from European nationalism. Between them, and because they addressed different and complementary constituencies, Gandhi, Nehru and Sardar Patel were able to keep this idea of 'one peopleness' on the fringes of politics. In contrast, they asserted a nationalism that was more inclusive and one which people could identify with.

From recognizing the success of the alliance of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel in defeating the 'one peopleness' idea of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, DLS then went on in our conversation to analyse how this inclusive idea of nationalism got undermined. DLS believes that the conceptual and political activity of the left secularists delivered the platform of Nationalism to the communalists. This happened in the following way. First, they separated Sardar Patel from Gandhi and Nehru on the issue of nationalism,

which they saw as a backward ideology or even a proto fascist ideology. Cosmopolitanism, which they advocated, meant being global and not nationalist. Further, they tried to split Nehru from Gandhi, who they regarded as an obscurantist. In doing so, they separated the project of secularism from nationalism, a fatal manoeuvre, because the national movement had regarded secularism, modernism, socialism, democracy and development as the micro-ideologies of the Nehruvian State. The Congress by using the communist left also got into their intellectual spell seeing those that supported their politics as being progressive and those who opposed their politics as being obscurantist. Whereas Congress used the left in its developmental project, it could not escape the left's politics on nationalism.

DLS valorizes the discourse on nationalism since it presents India as a subcontinental identity, which he considers as the real 'discovery of India', for the citizen of India. The last man, the measure of our democracy, suddenly saw himself as the inheritor of a much larger world called INDIA from the small world he was accustomed to. This was highly edifying for the ordinary Indian, and this was new and exciting. It was inclusive, secular and egalitarian. DLS is of the firm view that the only idea congenial for democracy is inclusive nationalism. The political idea of people discovering fraternity through a political system which is democratic and a territorial aspect which is community-defining, e.g., Indian territory which is expansive, where we have rights, pushed the State towards republican nationalism, which was in opposition to the ethno-nationalism being forwarded by the RSS/Hindu Mahasabha. Over the last several decades, this republican nationalism has taken roots.

The devaluing of this republican nationalism by the left secularists was accompanied by their devaluing of religion. DLS regards their politics as being more elitist than secular, as a result of which they culturally alienated subaltern Hindus. The nature of this alienation needs to be amplified. Secularists became a charmed circle but, unlike the Gandhian politics of swadeshi, did not become popular. Their intellectual arrogance made Hindus feel apologetic for their religious practices, which were portrayed as backward. Practising Hindus developed a minority complex. Since secularism was equated with the culture of the English-speaking elite, the practising Hindu felt excluded. Further, the secularists patronized the minorities, who were portrayed as communities of the oppressed that needed special attention, which in fact was given. In this context, the special attention was seen as appeasement. The alienation that was building up

through this double onslaught of the left liberals on subaltern Hindus resulted in a fertile ground for the Hindu nationalists.

It is by using this double strategy of aggressive ethno-nationalism and of Hindu pride that the RSS/BJP has mounted a series of micro-campaigns from ghar vapsi to Bharat Mata, to change the coordinates of our secular politics from the gains of a republican nationalism to an overtly ethno-nationalistic politics. Starting with the Vajpayee regime the Hindutva forces have systematically sought to occupy all the spaces that the Congress had occupied from the party system, where it is now the dominant party, to the many State institutions, to the knowledge and culture institutions supported by public finances, to setting the agenda of the public discourse. In this growing dominance of the BJP/RSS, and the larger-than-life persona of Modi, DLS argues that intellectuals have lost Modi, who is the buffer against hard Hindutva because they attacked his Hindutva and did not give him the recognition as Prime Minister that he has earned through the democratic process of elections. DLS is of the view that since Modi has a personal ambition of power, as Indira Gandhi had, and wants to inherit the system and its continuities, the intellectuals by criticizing his Hindutva rather than undermining his institutions have lost him and thus paved the way for hard Hindutva.

In spite of this grim prognosis of the RSS/BJP occupying all the spaces that the Congress had occupied, DLS reasserts his faith in democracy. When he says 'if they overdo Hindutva they will lose', you can see his confidence in the revolutionary power of democracy in India. He is certain that the democratic process will not allow it. Referring to the Janata experiment, which broke into factions and parties, he accepts that the BJP will not break into factions and parties depending on how much autonomy from the RSS the BJP is able to get. In DLS's reading, the RSS has no clue about democratic politics. Because India's democratic politics is a most secularizing force since one has to work with multiple interests and forces, to sustain power one needs to be secular, i.e., accommodate these multiple interests so the RSS cannot overdo the Hindutva thing. If the RSS asserts and determines the agenda of government, then, he holds, the dynamics of Indian democracy will marginalize them. One cannot garner support for maintaining power only on Hindutva. Immediately the caste factor will overtake the religious factor, which DLS acknowledges is currently dominant. A diversity of interests and cultures will assert themselves.

NOTES

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PART I

State, Nation, Democracy

CHAPTER 2

Historicizing India's Nationhood: History as Contemporary Politics

Politics and History: Interdependence

It is a truism to say that sources of historical sense generation in a society are not confined to history. Within the discipline of history itself, the recognition is growing that history's own established procedures of making sense of the past cannot remain insulated from the influences of movements of ideas and action within the wider society. This has made the discipline pliable to modes of understanding the past developed in other disciplines such as arts, aesthetics, literary theory and criticism, ethnology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics and so on. This does not mean, however, that the discipline has lost, or is in the process of losing, its sense of boundary or its self-image as a rational, cognitive pursuit of objective truths about the past. Nor has its claim to dominance, if not to universality, of the historical mode over other modes of making sense of the past become negotiable. What has changed is that the discipline of history now accords recognition to 'non-historical' modes and shows a certain readiness to sift data and to process concepts of other 'non-historical' disciplines through the historical mode. This is true more at the level of theory than at the level of the actual procedures of doing history. In the process, the procedures are often sought to be expanded, even modified, to accommodate insights and approaches of other disciplines.[1] This, in turn, has given rise to important controversies within the discipline which, in my view, have implications for changing the very orientation of the discipline itself about how to view the past.

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This new catholicity of history, however, lives very uneasily with a vast arena of modern life in which contestations are made for truths about the past for settling social, cultural and economic equations in the present. This is the arena of politics. History's ambivalence to politics arises from the fact that if historians do not participate in contemporary political discourses about the various conflicting reconstructions of the past, the established dominance of the historical mode may diminish. But if they participate, or even try to mediate in these controversies, as they often do, they cannot avoid taking sides in the ongoing battles in the society for owning history. In the process, they appear as partisans, compromising their claim to objectivity. However, the reason for this vulnerability of history to politics is rarely sought in the structure of the discipline itself. It is often attributed to manipulative politicians abusing history for their power needs.[2]

It is easier for history to open up to other fields of knowledge, as has already happened, than to politics. It is particularly difficult for history to explicitly recognize and take into account the role contemporary politics plays in shaping historical consciousness. Although history's actual relationship to politics is very old, its self-image as a discipline devoted to sifting objective truths about the past and formulating, on that basis, principles of collective human behaviour for the present, and for the future, is relatively new. Historians fear that by moving closer to politics, modern history's assiduously cultivated image and claim to objectivity and scientificity would be severely undermined. The discipline will be thrown back in the lap of politics from which it has theoretically differentiated itself in modern times. For, historically, in the pre-modern times, accounts of the past were by and large constructed by historians working directly under the political patronage of rulers or on behalf of the social and political groups to which they belonged. This mode of doing history, among other things, had made various accounts of the past—which today would be considered 'non-historical'—integral to history. In fact, the distinction between historical and non-historical modes of viewing the past was not just tenuous, but almost non-existent.[3]

It is therefore understandable that history's growth as a modern, scientific discipline, with its cognitively oriented procedures, led to self-consciously putting itself at a great distance from politics. This theoretically cultivated distance, it seems, has resulted in the very denial of this relationship imparting a degree of opaqueness, on the part of the discipline of history, to political issues. Put another way, the denial has created a sort of cognitive blindness among practitioners of the discipline to recurrent

situations where they routinely dispense historically 'authoritative' judgements on contemporary political ideological formulations and attitudinal data which are supposed not to enter the discipline's procedures in arriving at a historical truth about the past. This has made it possible for politics to enter the field of history directly, and for history to move into the political arena in ways not sanctioned by tenets of historians' discipline.

My intention in this chapter is not to search for the reasons of history's vulnerability to politics in the history of history, although this may be an interesting line for a historian to pursue. I am a political sociologist. I feel more comfortable about examining this relationship from the other end, namely from politics. In doing this, I am also interested in searching for terms of recognition and, if possible, of retrieval and redefinition of the cognitively denied relationship between history and politics. In my view, such a redefined relationship can keep the legitimacy of politics by and large confined to political arenas but at the same time open up history further to some political concepts and data in a manner that prevents politicization of the discipline itself. This process may lead to a more productive interdisciplinary debate and, hopefully, to a more constructive mode of intercultural communication in the global society.

Insofar as competing contentions exist in the society about the legitimacy of ideas, institutions and representations (symbolic, ritual or as arrangements for power-sharing), diverse claims on 'history' and to 'historical truths' will constantly be made. Contending social and political forces of the time make claims on history either to challenge the dominance of the historical mode or to refer their disputes to historians to seek historical legitimacy for the political domain. Put simply, historicization of an event, or an object (e.g., a monument) or an institution of a distant past becomes credible, and makes good historical sense, only when it is done in terms of contemporary concerns and sensibilities. Thus seen, the periodically changing historical revaluation of ideas, events and institutions, the dimming of a certain image of the past and the illumination of another, the shrinking of some strands of consciousness and the expansion of others, have to do not only with new historical data coming to light, but also with history's constant involvement in politics.

In summary, therefore, one must accept that both history and politics are involved in the ongoing process of contention and settlement of legitimacy claims (of different groups, interests, forces) in society. In modern times, such contention has produced a confrontation between the two: politics seeking to redefine *historical consciousness* in more explicit terms of

contemporary political discourse and history wanting to interpret contemporary *political consciousness* in pure historical terms. Of course, in practice, the contending forces are not so neatly divided. In fact, the confrontation creates new divisions both in politics and in the discipline of history; often the entire discourse is hijacked by politicians masquerading as historians, and politically motivated historians purveying politics as history. If, however, the relationship between history and politics is properly recognized and, if possible, codified, it may, in my view, lead to creative controversies in the respective disciplines, and in the public discourse at large. It may contribute to raising new questions and generating new data, and stimulate thinking on finding new modes of interpretation, often questioning the discipline's established procedures and methods. This is already happening to history and to other disciplines interacting with it, but its relationship to politics and the discipline of political studies remains by and large unexplored.

My intention here is twofold: first, to highlight some elements of this relationship in the Indian context. In doing this, I shall confine myself to the politics of the independence movement in India. I shall show how the historical mode of viewing the past became integral to the political consciousness of modern Indians, i.e., in their viewing India as a nation-state. This change in consciousness, from the cultural to the historical-political, had far-reaching implications for India, the world's most complex multi-ethnic society governed by the nation-state. The second objective is to see, when cast in history–politics relational terms, what kind of 'nation building' narrative emerges.

Colonial and Nationalist Historiography and Ethno-religious Nationalism

The politics of competing legitimacy claims on 'history', and to 'historical truths', surfaced during the movement for India's independence. In fact, it can be said that this politics was born with the rise of colonial, broadly Western, historiography, which had begun to challenge and replace the then prevalent modes of making sense of India's past.[4]

In the initial phase of the colonial rule, i.e., before the independence movement acquired the pronounced political character of a 'national' movement for self-rule by Indians, new constructions of the past were

made by what was then a very small English-educated class of Indian elite, exposed to colonial historical writings. But in the absence of any mobilizational political movement, these constructions were not embodied in politics. They, however, did contribute to the growth of a new cultural consciousness, loaded with political images of India as a land and people subjected to the foreign rule of the British, and earlier to the power of an alien culture of Islam. The articulation of these images of subjugation and resistance was, however, more in terms of regional-linguistic cultures than of an India representing one territorial-cultural unity. The preferred mode was mainly narrativist or fictional. It relied more on the power of images than on factual accounts of the past that they sought to recreate. The narratives wove rich cultural imageries. Many a times they came close to depicting a parade of pictorial images in writing more in the epic-puranic tradition than in the new historical mode, thereby relying on the old mode for new constructions of the past. This was so despite the fact that these new constructions were, in the first place, inspired by the historical mode introduced by colonial historians.

Most of these narratives and fictional accounts were focused on concrete historical figures, ranging from King Puru fighting back Alexander's armies to a Rana Pratap or a Shivaji resisting empire-building campaigns of the Mughals. It was thus around the historical figure of a hero that events, and ambiences, were created which permitted the depiction of a hero's great deeds, exemplary courage and sacrifices in resisting the assaults by the 'foreign' invaders or empire builders on their native land and culture. These narratives, close to the form of a saga, or what modern historiography describes as hagiographic accounts, drew more on memories of these heroes preserved in the minds of the people, either through an oral tradition of generationally transmitting memories of the past or other 'non-historical' sources such as bardic lores or accounts of genealogists. The effort was to recreate a poetic imagination about the hero's exemplary life (*jivan*) and his or her preaching (*kavan*), rather than to construct biographic accounts of the actual lives such persons lived. Irrespective of whether these constructions were of 'historical' or 'hagiographic' value, they did succeed in conveying a new image of India as a land and a people beleaguered by 'foreign' invaders and rulers, all of whom were valiantly resisted by native heroes.[5]

In short, these accounts of assaults and transgressions by who were now perceived as foreign invaders or rulers, and of the resistance offered to them by their own heroes representing concrete historical figures of the past, were depicted more in sociocultural and religious terms than in

political national-territorial terms. The 'historical consciousness' invoked in these narratives was culturally pronounced, but politically subdued. Indeed, the idea of 'peopleness' of the 'native' Indians and a sense of common cultural, often even religious, bonds having been inherited from the past were very much a part of this consciousness. But rarely, if ever, was this consciousness invested with a sense of bounded territory or an idea of a political centre, for and on which the people fought back the assaults and resisted transgressions. Of course, in quite a few of these narratives, the lack of a political centre or a sense of territory was hinted at as the prime reason for the defeat of the individual heroes.

It was sometime in the mid-nineteenth century that this cultural consciousness began to acquire political trappings, leading eventually, among other things, to the founding of a national political forum in the form of the Indian National Congress. Although started as a forum to articulate grievances and aspirations of 'native Indians' under colonial rule, in the course of time, i.e., by the turn of the century, the Indian National Congress became a political centre leading the movement for India's independence from British rule. It was during this period that the consciousness of India as a territorially constituted and historically endowed cultural unity, i.e., a nation, subjugated by alien rule entered the popular consciousness.

These new claims to historically produced cultural unity and territorial continuity made by the leadership of the independence movement were not just cultural. They were pronouncedly political. Obviously, these claims were unacceptable to the colonial rulers. Aided by British historians, the colonial authorities pointed to the lack of *historical reasoning* in the making of such claims and the doubted *historicity* of the cultural constructions of the past on which the claims still largely depended. Colonial politics, aided by modern historiography, thus posed a new challenge to the politics of the independence movement: to *historically establish* territorial and political continuity as the basis of the cultural unity of India as a nation. In the colonial view, the cultural constructions of the past privileged the dominant religious community of the Hindus, which, if seen historically, was a heterogeneous mass of population divided sharply within itself, both culturally and politically. Thus, the idea of India representing a nation *à la* European nation-states was found historically unsustainable and therefore politically illegitimate. Its grounding in the political-cultural consciousness of the 'natives' did not provide a good enough basis for India's claim to nationhood. Paradoxically, a new group of nationalist historians and historically inclined political leaders of the movement also found this to be a reasonable

argument. Like the colonial historians, they too believed that without establishing the historicity of India's cultural unity in terms of territorial and political continuity, supported by the 'historical consciousness' of its people, no country can become a nation and therefore cannot politically justify its claim to independence.

A new project and a new discourse were born: historicizing India's nationhood. Through this process politics entered the domain of history and history came to the centre stage of politics. It led to endless controversies between the colonialist and the nationalist historians about sustainability of the historical claims to India's nationhood. Both depended, by and large, on the same procedures of writing history but for different political purposes. The new project of historicizing India's past gave rise, among other things, to intense competition and conflicts in the society among various religious, cultural and linguistic communities. The competition and conflict among them became increasingly centred on claims to 'historical truths'. Their political claims of representation now needed support from history. In making these claims, the communities began to conceive of themselves as historically differentiated 'nationalities', rather than as culturally overlapping and interlocked socio-religious identities interested in preserving some of their distinctive symbols, rituals and practices. In this process, history became the arbiter not only of all contemporary claims to political legitimacy by various groups in the society, but of the entire society's future.

When Gandhi returned to India from Africa and led the independence movement, he rejected the new historical mode of constructing India's past. He refused to conduct his politics of the independence movement by joining the prevailing discourse about the past, the terms of which were set by the colonial rulers. He found it unnecessary, even undignified, for a people with a long civilizational past to justify their claims to independence on such vacuous terms.[6] Gandhi thus saw historicization of the past as a self-defeating project for Indian nationalism. He sought to revive the old cultural mode but in radically different terms, by emphasizing traditions of co-living among different communities within a political arrangement consented by them. Many political and cultural issues that were pushed into history's lap were brought back into the political arena. Rather than weakening political mobilization for the independence movement, Gandhi's abandonment of the debate over history, his privileging cultural-political consciousness over historical consciousness, expanded and

intensified political mobilization on a truly national scale, thus laying the pluralist-democratic foundation for Indian secularism.

Paradoxically, while this strategy won the political battle for India's independence, the cultural vision it represented was defeated. At the moment of independence, the historical mode emerged as triumphant. This does not mean that the attempts of the nationalist and modernist historians to historicize India's nationhood had succeeded. But it greatly facilitated the political leadership's effort to make the idea of the nation structurally integral to the emergent, postcolonial State. However, at the same time, the nation-state logic, which was implicit in the historicization project, privileged and politically legitimized claims of *various* cultural and religious entities to political autonomy and to independence when these were articulated in historical terms. In effect, historicization legitimized the ethno-religious principle of nationalism that inevitably led to the partition of India and to an almost permanent state of communal discord in the subcontinent.

It would be erroneous to think that the modern nationalist historians either envisaged or endorsed the principle of ethno-religious nationalism. They, in fact, sought to delegitimize such claims to nationalism showing, e.g., how historically the pre-British State of the Mughals had acquired a secular character in the process of the Mughals building an empire in India and how British colonial rule, in large part, had inherited the Mughal State structure. In their view, the cultural consciousness of India, as a nation which inevitably emphasized the ethnic diversity of its population, could not by itself provide a basis for India's political unity. They held that it was necessary to impart a sense of political and territorial continuity of the State to the politically unformed cultural consciousness. Crucial to this thinking was the idea that a cultural entity claiming politically to be a nation, in this case the whole of India, must have its own State.

The modernist leadership of the movement saw in this formulation great potential for the political mobilization for India's independence. First, by making the idea of India's nationhood integral to the State structure, or as representing one political centre, it could mediate and possibly superordinate the various competing ethnic claims of political representation that had surfaced in the politics of the movement. This was necessary to sustain the claim for independence on behalf of the *nation* rather than for any single linguistic or religious community. Second, the linking of nationalist consciousness to State power was conducive to the modernist leadership's aspiration to inherit power after independence with continued legitimacy of an already established

modern state. They believed this was necessary for governing the multi-ethnic society that was India, if and when the British left India. Third, and perhaps the most important consideration, they found the nation-state logic enabling for their politics of confronting and containing the emerging claims of ethno-religious nationalism and thus for laying the foundations for civic and secular nationalism in India.

Unfortunately for the modernist leadership, and for India, the nation-state logic did not work in this direction, for in the view of the British colonial rulers, historically more powerful claims to 'nationhood', and therefore to political power, had been made by the ethno-religious communities. Of course, the idea that a nation must have its own State did have its validation in Western historiography, informed particularly by the Westphalia treaties, and was eventually conceded by the British. But the modernist leadership of the independence movement argued that the Indian nation must have a basis in a secular state, and that India could find such a basis through the independence movement. This, they believed, would make it possible for the Indian nation to inherit the Indian State, which was presently under the alien rule of the British. This argument did not cut much ice with the British concept of 'historical consciousness'. In British colonial eyes, it was a wrong, wishful reading of history by the modernist Indian leadership. For, in their part of the world, i.e., Europe, the nation represented a historically evolved political entity that was by and large culturally homogeneous in terms of race, religion and language. Only such a nation (of *one* people) could shape the State for itself. This could be a secular state conferring citizenship rights to all, including the minorities. But it could take other forms as well. The British colonial authorities, therefore, did not see anything wrong with such an idea of the nation and, in fact, encouraged claims to nationhood by different ethno-religious, linguistic and other sub-territorial communities (the Princely states) in India. They eventually conceded such claims not only to nationhood but to a separate statehood for the major ethno-religious community in India, namely the territorially based Muslims (i.e., to the provinces in which Muslims were in majority). Thus, independence was won through the creation of two nation-states on the principle of ethno-religious nationalism: India and Pakistan. The British authorities left it open for other linguistic and regional-cultural identities to sort out their claims to nationality and statehood in the newly created nation-states of India and Pakistan.

This logic has since been at work, both in India and Pakistan, almost inexorably, pushing many an ethnic entity to claim nationhood and often

beyond to a demand for separate statehood. Along with this, the use of history in the politics of nationhood and statehood, as well as that of international relations between the already separate nation-states of India and Pakistan, has become intense, threatening the breakdown of the old, established intercultural communications among various communities both within India and Pakistan, and *between* them.

It was easy to sociologize or politicize the cultural consciousness of Indians (Indianness) in nationalist terms. The idea of 'India' as a continuous civilizational entity binding Indians by the sense of a common past was credibly available to such efforts. For this consciousness was not just about the past that was dead and gone. It could find validation in the everyday life of its people: through memories of the past symbolized in the present (in places and heroes they worshiped and in festivals they celebrated), in rituals and practices through which they sought sanctification of various economic, social and even political activities. Despite the different cultural representations in these rituals and practices of different communities, the meaning system of one cultural representation was seen and felt as commensurable with other representations. But attempts at *historicization* of such cultural consciousness in linear terms of political–structural and territorial continuity failed to establish the *historicity* of India's nationhood. Instead, they produced different and opposing claims on history, with various regional, ethnic and religious identities trying to find their own separate historical and cultural legacies and continuities.

With this, the basis of legitimacy for claiming representation in politics began to lie in the community claiming for itself an ethno-territorial identity (nationality). The politics of representation now got converted into establishing the political and cultural hegemony of the numerically larger ethno-religious communities. Once this happened, it became irrelevant whether these claims were, in fact, historically sustainable or not. In this battle for hegemony between communities, history was 'sourced' for establishing claims to nationhood of the two major religious communities of the Hindus and the Muslims, each claiming to represent a separate past and even a culturally incommensurable meaning system vis-à-vis the other. This is what I mean by the triumph of the 'historical' mode over both the politics and the culture of the independence movement. The partition of India was a consequence of history's political project. Its consequences for the discipline of history itself tell another story.[7]

Notes

1. One of the representative ways of this kind of historiography in the recent decades was the first six volumes of Subaltern Studies edited by Ranajit Guha. Ranajit Guha "Subaltern Studies" vols 1–6, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–89.
2. The best illustration of the misuse of history in politics has been evident in a variety of ways in which both right and left political groups have propagated certain versions of the past. Gyanendra Pandey, "Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India", New Delhi, Oxford University Press, New Edition 2012.
3. Romila Thapar, "The Past Before Us", Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2013.
4. Romila Thapar, 'Syndicated Hinduism', Chapter 9 in "The Past as Present", New Delhi, Aleph, 2014.
5. James. W. Laine, "Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India", New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
6. Raghavan. N. Iyer, "The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi", New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
7. Partition Histories have alerted us towards the use of history towards the construction of community and religious identities. Mushirul Hasan (ed) "India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization", New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

CHAPTER 3

State-Nation Building: The Making of Liberal Democracy

The story of nation building in India is about how the Indian multiethnic civilizational society was first straitjacketed into a single territorial state by the British colonialists and then how, in the course of becoming a 'national society', it became divided into three nation-states after decolonization: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But the story does not end at this point. In fact, as we shall see, nation building in India acquired an entirely new dimension after independence. While remaining rooted in India's long tradition of cultural pluralism, the postcolonial project of nation building acquired new foundations in popular sovereignty, political equality and social egalitarianism. It was through a long and tumultuous process of political debates, social conflicts and changes in the self-definitions of cultural collectivities, which occurred in the colonial period, that nation building in India found its modernist ideological core. It is therefore necessary to take a look at this crucial formative phase of nation building in India.

The discourse on nation building in India emerged in the late nineteenth century through a dialectic that developed between the process of colonial state formation and the politics of the independence movement. The British imperial rulers were not content with the might and power they had established over the vast Indian territories they had by then conquered, annexed and subjugated. They were anxiously aware that without winning the loyalty of the population, a minuscule number of them could not sustain their occupation, let alone their rule, in a country the size of a subcontinent. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, they therefore stepped up their efforts to consolidate a pan-Indian territorial state and acquire political

D.L. Sheth, *At Home with Democracy*,
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legitimacy for their rule. Such a claim to legitimacy was advanced on the ground that India was not a 'nation' but a society divided by religions, languages and ethnicities (tribes, races and castes). They argued that an entity like India, governed by social codes and customary laws—which in their view were administered arbitrarily by 'despotic' rulers—needed 'the rule of law' to be administered by the impersonal authority of the State. They saw as their onerous duty—the proverbial 'white man's burden'—to provide such a rule.

Colonial politics thus involved staking claims to legitimacy for the imperial State, as also a simultaneous de-legitimation of the traditional Indian forms of sociocultural unities and governance. It was in opposition to such claims of the British that the discourse on nation building found articulation in the movement for India's independence. Thus, the two processes of state formation and of nation building, usually conceived as complementary to each other, in theory, were historically born in India in opposition to each other, with the British affirming the territorial authority of the State and denying nationhood to India, and the nationalists asserting India's nationhood and thus questioning the legitimacy of the alien rule over their 'nation'. At the centre of these contending discourses was the politics of reconstructing India's past. This quest for a reconstituted history gave rise to a new cultural and historical consciousness in society, which eventually led to a long-drawn-out process of the making and unmaking of 'nations' in the Indian subcontinent.

In the initial phase of the British rule, new constructions of the past were made by a small group of English-educated Indian elite who had been exposed to Western historiography.[1] They portrayed India as a land and a people who had for long been subjected to foreign rule. The writings implicitly pointed to the British subjugation of India, but depicted more explicitly Muslim invasions and the resistance offered to them by the brave Rajput kings. These portrayals projected the images of subjugation and resistance more in terms of regional-linguistic cultures than by an India representing one territorial-cultural unity.

The narratives of the past were usually rendered in the fictional form, but were focused on concrete historical figures, ranging from King Puru (Paurus) fighting Alexander's armies to a Rana Pratap resisting the Mughal emperor Akbar's empire-building campaigns. They drew on memories of the heroes preserved in the minds of people, in bardic lores and the accounts of genealogists—sources that colonial historiography considered 'non-historical'.[2] Despite their contested 'historicity', these accounts succeeded in conveying an image of India as a land and a people

beleaguered by 'foreign' invaders and alien rulers, all of whom were valiantly resisted by native heroes. More specifically, they invoked a kind of 'historical consciousness' which was entirely new to Indians.[3]

The idea of a 'peopleness' of the 'native' Indians and a sense of common cultural, often even religious, bonds having been inherited from the past was very much a part of this consciousness. But rarely, if ever, was this consciousness invested with a sense of bounded territory or an idea of a political centre for and on which the people fought back and resisted the assaults and transgressions. Of course, in quite a few of these narratives, the lack of a political centre or of a sense of territory was hinted as being the prime reason for the defeat of individual heroes. It was sometime in the mid-nineteenth century that this cultural consciousness began to acquire political trappings, leading eventually, among other things, to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Although it started as a forum to articulate the grievances and aspirations of the 'native' Indians, by the 1920s the Indian National Congress had become a *political centre* leading the movement for India's independence from British rule. It was during this period that the consciousness of India as a territorially constituted and historically endowed cultural unity, i.e., a *nation*, subjugated to the alien rule of the British, entered popular consciousness.

A new claim was now made by the leaders of the independence movement, namely, that India represented *one people* living historically in a common territory. Obviously, this claim was unacceptable to the British rulers. In the colonial view, the nationalist construction of India's past was not grounded in 'history'. Seen *historically*, the colonialists argued, India was a heterogeneous mass of population divided within itself, both culturally and politically. In their view, the claim of a multireligious and multilingual society like India to nationhood was not only historically and theoretically unsustainable but politically illegitimate. It did not meet the European idea of a nation which, they believed, was that of a culturally homogeneous community, ruled historically by a single political authority. Paradoxically, a new group of nationalist historians and historically inclined political leaders of the movement also found this to be a reasonable argument. Like the colonial historians, they too believed that without establishing the historicity of India's cultural unity, in terms of territorial and political continuity, India's claim to independence remained weak.

So a newer project and a newer discourse was born, i.e., that of defining Indian nationalism by historicizing India's nationhood. This opened up a Pandora's box, leading to endless controversies between the colonial and

nationalist historians about the sustainability of historical claims to India's nationhood. It also gave rise to intense competition, even violent conflicts, among the various religious, linguistic and ethnic communities, each trying to historically establish a separate cultural and political identity. In this discourse, the argument—actually the fact—that these communities, although not ruled by a single political authority, had till then lived in a cultural system of overlapping and interlocked identities began to appear as lacking in historical reasoning. They now began to conceive of themselves as separate 'nationalities', each representing a different 'historical consciousness' from that of the other. From among these, a more pronounced political articulation of a separate ethno-religious nationality came, towards the close of the nineteenth century, from a section of Muslim leaders from both within the Congress party as well as outside it.

By the time Gandhi—after his return from South Africa in 1914—established his leadership over the Congress party in the early 1920s, the idea that different ethno-religious and ethno-cultural communities represented separate political and economic interests had begun to shape a new, ethno-political self-definition of the colonized Indians. But Gandhi refused to join this discourse, the terms of which were set by the colonial rulers. He gave top priority to changing these terms and initiating a new discourse on nation building.

It was as early as in 1924 that Gandhi pronounced himself against the colonial mode of history for reconstructing India's past. He said:

> I believe the saying that a nation is happy that has no history. It is my pet theory that our Hindu ancestors solved the question for us by ignoring history as it is understood today and by building on slight events their philosophical structure. Such is the Mahabharata. And I look upon Gibbon and Motley as inferior editions of the Mahabharata.[4]

Gandhi, in fact, saw the historicization of the past as a divisive and self-defeating project for Indian nationalism. His abandoning of the debate over history made way for articulating the idea of the Indian nation in non-European terms, i.e., as a multiethnic political unity; and of 'nationalism' as a common cultural consciousness shared by different ethnic communities, which had, for time immemorial, provided the basis for their coexistence.

While this strategy prevented ethnic fragmentation of the nationalist movement to a large extent, paradoxically, it gave impetus to the separatist politics of the Muslim League—the political party of the Muslims. The

cultural vision Gandhi represented, of India as one national entity, was defeated by the time India achieved independence.

Gandhi's politics of cultural integration, however, succeeded in two important respects: first, it substantially weakened and almost permanently marginalized the Hindu nationalist movement led by the Hindu Mahasabha, confining it to a miniscule minority of Hindus; and second, it secured the commitment of the Congress party to the idea of India as a multiethnic nation. This enabled the Congress to mobilize support not only of the vast majority of Hindus, but also of a large number of Muslims and other communities. But all this did not prevent the polarization of politics of the independence movement between the Congress party and the Muslim League on the issue of ethno-religious nationalism. With the deepening of this polarization in the following crucial decades of the 1930s and 1940s, the discourse on nationalism acquired a new, statist dimension.

By the end of the 1930s, the Muslim League, which was established in 1906 but had since functioned as a rudderless, faction-ridden organization, was galvanized under the leadership of M.A. Jinnah into an all-India Muslim party. It was able to mobilize substantial Muslim support for the idea that Muslims in India historically represented a separate 'national' identity and, hence, were entitled to an 'autonomous and sovereign' territorial state. In short, the idea of the 'State' became integral to the Muslim League's movement of ethno-religious nationalism.

The modernist Congress leadership, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, was also driven by a similar logic of the nation-state, although it vigorously opposed the politics of ethno-religious nationalism, both of the Muslim League and of the Hindu Mahasabha. Unlike Gandhi, who privileged the civilizational discourse, the modernist leadership sought to focus the discourse on nation building around the creation of a modern-secular and liberal-democratic state in India.[5] Its sights were now fixed on acquiring State power soon after independence was achieved, and also on the problems of nation building India would then face. In that event, it wanted the secular Indian State to assume the role of nation building, rather than allowing the contentious discourse on nationalism to shape the nature of the Indian State. In its view, Gandhi's cultural epistemology obscured the long-term process of forming a modern, secular state for India. And in the short term, it did not provide a good enough basis for making a claim to State power—an ultimate goal of the independence movement. The modernist Congress leaders believed that a continuing focus on the cultural discourse would enable the British to delay, if not deny, independence to India. In brief, they preferred to

articulate Gandhi's idea of multiethnic nationhood in their own non-cultural, secular terms, which conceived the 'nation' as an entity integral to the State.

Nehru and the modernist elites saw some distinct advantages in bringing the State to the centre of the discourse on nationalism. First, by making the idea of India's nationhood integral to the continuing state structure established by the British, the independent Indian State would be able to mediate and possibly superordinate conflicts among the various ethnic and regional groups, the seeds of which were already sown by the colonial rulers and which had divided the independence movement. Further, it enabled the Congress's movement to sustain the claim for independence on behalf of the entire Indian *nation* rather than of any single religious or linguistic community. Second, by linking nationalist consciousness to State power the modernist elite aspired to inherit not only power after independence, but also the continued legitimacy of an already established modern state. Third, the modernist leadership believed that Gandhi prematurely relied on the politically unformed and culturally diffused national consciousness as forming the basis for Indian nationalism. Instead, only the State-centred view of India's nationhood could effectively counter ethno-religious nationalism and thus lay a foundation of the movement for a civic and secular nationalism in independent India.[6]

Like modern nationalists everywhere, the Congress leadership argued that the idea of a 'nation' remained incomplete until it found its embodiment in a State. This idea became the source of massive political mobilization in the early 1940s, when the British and the Indian independence movement were caught in the vortex of the Second World War. The discourse on nation building, which began in opposition to the process of (colonial) state formation and which Gandhi had shaped in multiethnic cultural terms, now became focused directly on the political issue of the legitimacy of the colonial State. The new political discourse emphasized that the State should derive its legitimacy not from seeking support of any ethnic or religious community, but from the entire population of India conceived as its citizens. Since the British imperial State did not represent popular sovereignty, it had no moral or political authority to commit India in the war together with Britain. Both Gandhi and the modern-nationalist leadership now articulated the politics of nationalism in terms of the right of the Indian people to repossess the State, for only an independent India could decide about its role in the war.

As the war progressed and the possibility of achieving independence began to appear increasingly real, Gandhi put on hold his opposition to

the State-centred view of building the Indian nation. He went along, albeit in great agony and with reluctance, with the rest of the modern-nationalist leadership, hoping against hope that the ethno-religious movement for a separate Muslim nation-state could be accommodated, if not won over, by his conception of India as representing one civilizational unity. But when independence came, what prevailed was the logic of the nation-state by which only a culturally homogeneous nation could have a State of its own. In the then prevailing Indian context, it inevitably privileged and legitimized the ethno-religious principle of nationalism. The result was that, in 1947, India was partitioned on *that* principle into two territorial nation-states: India and Pakistan. The partition turned out to be violent and bloody, leaving bitter memories and unresolved issues between India and Pakistan. Guided by different constructions of the history of the independence movement and of the partition, each independent State chose its own separate path of nation building.

Unlike Pakistan, India chose not to have a religion-based or a constitutionally majoritarian ethnic State of the Hindus (a Hindu *rashtra*).[7] The leadership of independent India to whom power was transferred rejected religion as the basis of either state formation or nation building. Instead, it chose to have a liberal, secular state governed by a democratic constitution.

The Constituent Assembly, representing different identities and interests prevailing in society, framed the Constitution of India, which was adopted in January 1950. In it, India was conceived as a sovereign, democratic nation-state. The Constitution, departing from the textbook definition of a unicultural nation-state, established both the collective rights of communities to maintain cultural identities and to pursue religious freedoms *and* the individual rights of civil liberty to all citizens as fundamental rights.

The Constitution not only explicitly rejected religion, language and other ethnic criteria for creating a political majority to ensure the stability and legitimacy of the new State, it also ruled out federalism as a means of distributing power among the *ethnicity-based* territorial provinces. Instead, it mapped out large multiethnic and multilingual provincial states as constituting political-administrative units of a quasi-federal State called the Union of India. Such non-recognition of ethno-linguistic identities in governance gave rise to strong and widespread movements demanding the reorganization of provincial states into ethno-linguistic states within the Indian Union. The movements compelled the central government, despite the opposition of the ruling Congress party and particularly of Prime Minister Nehru to this demand, to reorganize provincial states on a linguistic basis in the late 1950s

and early 1960s. The ethno-linguistic movements, which threatened to undermine the integrity of the Indian nation-state, were thus effectively dealt with.[8] The Indian nation-state, in fact, emerged strong. Similarly, divisions based on caste and other ethnic identifications were sought to be redefined by the State, in new terms of political equality and social justice. On the one hand, these identities and the conflicts among them were brought within the ambit of the state's social policies; on the other, they were processed through the politics of elections and parties, thus making them integral to the normal politics of representative democracy.[9] Consequently, the politics of ethnic identities became confined mainly to the religious minorities at the national level, and to specific linguistic, religious or ethno-cultural minorities within provincial states, even if that 'minority' constituted a majority in some other state of India.

In sum, since its inception the Indian nation-state adopted a liberal-democratic character and rejected the ethno-religious/cultural idea of the 'nation'. Accordingly, the 'State' was conceived in ethno-neutral terms and the 'nation' as a territorial-political community of citizens. In effect, it legitimized the agency of the State for building the nation conceived as a political unity within which communities with diverse cultural identities could survive and even flourish. Thus, after independence, the Indian nation-state politically problematized the issue of ethnic diversity in the institutional framework of citizenship, which also recognized collective cultural rights of the minorities.

Embodied in this approach to nation building was the concept of state-nationalism evolved by the modernist Congress leadership of the independence movement. This enabled independent India's leadership to conceive of nation building as mainly a State-driven process through which it sought to bring about economic development, social transformation and cultural integration in the country as a whole. In this proactive process, the leadership saw the multiethnic character of the society as a passive cultural 'context', rather than as representing any active principle that could interrogate the idea of the nation-state. The expectation was that the universalization of citizenship rights and the induction of cultural pluralities into the democratic process of open and competitive politics would evolve new civic equations among ethnic communities and between them and the State. At the same time, it was also expected that the cultural communities would, in the process of nation building, maintain their distinctive identities, even as their individual members exercised their rights as citizens.

This concept of nation building has served India reasonably well. First, it has helped the Indian State in maintaining its integrity and the nation its inclusive, multiethnic character. It has, on the whole, helped in successfully containing centrifugal forces arising from conflicting claims to political power, made by the various regional, linguistic, religious and caste-oriented groups.[10] And, at the same time, such pressures arising from democratic politics have restrained the built-in tendency of the State to centralize power and homogenize cultures. In responding to these pressures, the Indian State has shown remarkable flexibility; e.g., by forming newer and smaller states as well as autonomous State councils in some tribal regions; by devising the policy of affirmative action for communities of ex-untouchables, the tribals and the socially and educationally backward classes; and lately by initiating the process of devolving power to the provincial states and the village *panchayats*. Thus, in practice, the State-centred project of nation building has all along been subjected to the dialectics of democratic politics and social movements. It is through this process of nation building that the democratic and secular state has been linked to the idea of India as a multiethnic nation.

Second, by not allowing itself to align with the ethno-cultural majority of the Hindus, the Indian State could establish its autonomy and neutrality in the midst of ethnic pulls and pressures arising from within the society. Seen in a comparative perspective of nation building in the postcolonial world, this has been a significant achievement. As is well known, many countries after decolonization ended up, sooner or later, aligning the State with one or the other (usually the dominant) cultural-religious identity prevailing in the society. In doing so, the State acquired either a theocratic or a majoritarian-cultural character. The latter tendency became evident, e.g., in Sri Lanka, when the State chose the dominant Sinhala language (and Buddhism) as the epitome of its national identity; and the former (i.e., theocratic) tendency asserted itself, e.g., in the Iranian State after the Islamic Revolution, when the political authority of the State was not allowed to differentiate itself from the priestly authority of the dominant religion and, in fact, was held dependent on it for its legitimacy.[11] Even worse, in some countries, the ethnically defined State sought to subjugate, even disenfranchise, the cultural minorities, often inviting in the process its own decapitation. For example, the formation of the Pakistani State on the ethno-religious basis of Islam could not prevent the growth of a movement for a separate ethno-linguistic state among the Bengali Muslim population of Pakistan.[12] This resulted in the division of Pakistan into two nation-states: Pakistan and Bangladesh. More

significantly, the Bangladeshi State could not accommodate the Hindu Bengalis and the Buddhist Chakmas in its ideology of ethno-linguistic nationalism—on which the State was founded in the first instance. Very soon, the religion of the majority, i.e., Islam, became the religion of the State and the defining feature of the Bangladeshi national identity.[13] In Pakistan, the culture of the dominant region of Punjab began to dominate the State.[14] This, among other things, gave rise to the separatist ethnic movement of the Mohajirs. This movement is made up of that section of Muslims who migrated from India to the provinces that constituted Pakistan after partition. In undivided India, the Mohajirs were in the forefront of the movement for a separate 'homeland' for Muslims in the subcontinent—a movement that gave birth to Pakistan. In short, it is counterproductive for the State in a multiethnic society to adopt, in any form, the ideology of ethno-nationalism. Far from ensuring stability, it threatens its integrity. Seen in the comparative context, it is also clear that the Indian State could not have maintained the degree of integrity and autonomy it so far had, if the first generation of its (post-Independence) leadership had wedded the State to the ideology of ethno-nationalism.

Third, the Indian model of nation building aligned the State with the ongoing processes of modernization and assigned it a primary role in the economic and technological development of the country. This extended the reach of the State far and wide in different sectors of the society. With its social and welfare policies it even succeeded in building the loyalties of its diverse populations. The new nation-state thus sought and substantially gained legitimacy on the plank of its macro-ideology of democracy, development and secularism.[15] This statist paradigm of nation building is now undergoing radical changes as it faces the newly emergent forces of globalism from above and regionalism from below. In this process of change, an entirely new set of issues—such as of 'national sovereignty' and preservation of indigenous cultures and lifestyles—have been inserted in the discourse of nation building, creating far-reaching implications for the concept of nation building itself. The State-led model of development and modernization succeeded in building for India a national economy and polity and, despite its many deficiencies while it reigned, produced a system of economic and political interdependence among the culturally and linguistically diverse regions of the country. It thus built a durable basis for the survival of the Indian nation-state—a basis which cannot easily erode, even as the State adapts itself to the new and compelling demands of global economic integration.

The model has, however, produced some negative consequences for nation building. More specifically, it has all along failed to cope with ethnic *and* ethno-religious movements for political autonomy and separate nation-statehood in the border regions of the North-East and in the Kashmir valley. People in these regions have seen mainly the coercive face of the Indian nation-state. Over time, this has produced violent ethnic conflicts and insurgencies. Unless radical modifications and innovations are made in the structure of governance for these regions, making it responsive simultaneously to both the ethnic and developmental aspirations of the people, the model's claim to success would remain suspect.

A more serious threat to this model has emerged in recent years from the movement for Hindutva. It threatens to create a rupture in the process of nation building, which has by now structurally institutionalized the linkage between the secular democratic State and the ideology of pluralist nationalism. This movement was launched in unison by various Hindu nationalist organizations in the early 1980s. Although the ideology of Hindutva was propounded by V.S. Savarkar during the independence movement, it had remained feeble till the 1990s. The politics of Hindutva is addressed to detaching the idea of 'nation' from the State, and redefining India as representing a nation of the Hindus—a Hindu *rashtra*. Their long-term objective is to make the Indian State dependent for its legitimacy on the idea of unitary nationalism symbolized in Hindu *rashtra*. Put simply, Hindutva seeks to legitimize ethno-religious majoritarianism in the name of nationalism, and reshape the Indian State in majority-ethnic terms.

In my view, this project of Hindu nationalists is unlikely to succeed, despite the electoral gains made by their political party—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). I believe this because, first, the Hindutva ideology goes against the grain of all that Hinduism and modern India are about. Second, the heterogeneity of interests and identities among Hindus will not allow their political mobilization on a sustained basis on an issue like Hindutva. In the competitive politics of representative democracy, it is difficult for these identities and interests to be patterned in any single, ideological direction. But, if for some reason, Hindutva succeeds in cultivating the long-term political support of a majority of Hindus, the Indian nation-state would acquire the character of a majority-ethnic State which would treat its minorities like other such states in the subcontinent. In that event, the distinct Indian enterprise of building a politically liberal and culturally plural modern nation-state, a historically unique enterprise, would have failed.

NOTES

1. For discussions on the Western and Indian traditions of historiography, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chapter 4 (Delhi, 1994) and Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and Its Implications* (Calcutta, 1988), pp. 27–36.
2. For an account of pre-modern modes of writing history in India, see V.S. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India* (Bombay, 1996), Chapter 1; also see F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (Delhi, 1972). For the impact of hero-centred narratives of the past on the novel, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 38–68 and Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1993), Chapter 3, especially pp. 126–30; and on representations in folk theatre, see Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: the Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Delhi, 1992).
3. See Sudipta Kaviraj, Crisis of the Nation-State in India, *Political Studies*, 42 (1984), pp. 115–29.
4. Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. l (Oxford, 1986), p. 187.
5. Jawaharlal Nehru was the most influential among the modernist leaders of India's independence movement whose writings (and politics) shaped this vision of nation building. His *Discovery of India* (New York, 1946), which he wrote during periods of his imprisonment by the British, comprehensively articulated this vision in historical-cultural terms.
6. See Chapter 5 in Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Delhi, 1986).
7. For a balanced account of the formation of the Pakistani State after independence, see Stephen P. Cohen, 'State Building in Pakistan', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds), *The State Religion and Ethnic Politics: Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (Lahore, 1987), pp. 299–332.
8. Jyotindra Das Gupta, *Language Conflict and National Development* (especially Chapter 8) (New Delhi, 1970).
9. See D.L. Sheth, 'Secularization of Caste and the Making of a New Middle Class', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34–35 (21 August 1999).
10. See Partha N. Mukherjee, 'The Indian State in Crisis? Nationalism and Nation-Building', *Sociological Bulletin*, 42(1) (March 1994).
11. See Shahrough Akhavi, 'State Formations and Consolidation in Twentieth Century Iran' and Patricia J. Higgins, 'Minority-State relations in Contemporary Iran', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds), *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics.*

12. For an account of progressive Islamization of the Pakistani State after partition, see John L. Eposito, 'Islam: Ideology and Politics in Pakistan', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Wiener (eds), *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics.*
13. Amena Mohsin, 'National Security and Minorities: The Bangladesh Case', in D.L. Sheth and Gurprit Mahajan (eds), *Minority Identities and the Nation State* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 312–32.
14. Leonard Binder, 'Islam, Ethnicity and the State in Pakistan', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds), *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics.*
15. For a critique of the ideology of the Indian State, see Ashis Nandy, 'The Ideology of the Indian State'", in Ponna Wignaraja and Akmal Hussain (eds), *The Challenge in South Asia: Development, Democracy and Regional Cooperation* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 315–25; Also see Ashis Nandy. History's Forgotten Doubles, *History and Theory*, 34 (1995).

CHAPTER 4

Crisis of Political Authority

Looking back at over half a century of India's independence, one is impressed by the resilience of its political system. At the same time, it is not easy to ignore the fact that the resilience is marked more by its capacity for survival than by its ability to create durable bases of its legitimacy in the wider society and thereby to perform effectively in solving the economic and social problems of the country. It is this debility of the political system that I wish to address in this chapter. I shall argue that the Indian political system entered a chronic state of crisis sometime in the mid-1970s, from which it has not yet recovered. I shall further show that this crisis has its roots in the inability of the system to cope with changes in the social structure. This inability, which has persisted for decades, has resulted in the massive accumulation of legitimation losses by the political authority of the Indian State. It is hoped that an analysis of the nature and sources of the crisis will enable us to identify measures for alleviating it.

Defining Political Crisis

A political crisis is much more than the many problems which continuously arise in a political system. Problems are specific and isolable. They are definable in terms of agencies and the actions required for their solution. When they are allowed to accumulate over time, however, they become compounded into a crisis. It then becomes difficult to isolate one problem from the other for the purpose of a policy or a plan of action. Political crisis

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then acquires deeper roots in the economic and social structures that engulf the *whole* political system.

In such a state of crisis, attempting to find the solution of a specific problem amounts to no less than firefighting. Alleviation of the crisis requires radical rearrangements of the relationships between the institutions, structures and values of the political system in accordance with changes in the wider society. Action to solve problems then remains no longer administrative or managerial. It requires sustained political and social interventions, often from outside the established institutional networks in the existing political system.

I believe that by this definition, the Indian political system has been in a state of crisis since the Emergency, which was imposed in 1975 and lifted in 1977. In popular memory, the Emergency years may be remembered as a bad dream or, by an optimist, as an aberration that the 'resilient' system overcame. But seen in a proper historical and systemic perspective it constituted a moment of rupture of India's institutional democracy. It pushed the system into a chronic state of crisis from which it has yet to recover. It is, however, not my intention to focus the analysis of the crisis on the single event of the Emergency. In my view, the Emergency brought to a head the growing dissonance between the macrostructures of power and the democratic aspirations of the people. Indeed, the crisis was symptomatically managed whenever it became acute. Such episodic management prevented the system's disintegration but it did not achieve any significant breakthrough that could lift up the system from the state of morbidity into which it has sunk. With every salvaging operation the political system and its institutions acquired a lease of life but not vitality. The fault lines of the system, exposed by the Emergency, thus continue to point to its vulnerability and to a possible event of its collapse in the future. It is therefore important to take a view of the system in a historical perspective, after nearly 60 years of its existence as a liberal democracy, and identify sources of the crisis it has been facing not merely in the institutional system of parties but also in the larger society.

One way of going about this task is to begin by describing the nature of the crisis and then to see how and to what extent the changes in the social and economic structures have contributed to its eruption in its present form.

Nature of the Crisis

The political crisis facing the country is, in a fundamental sense, the crisis of legitimacy of the political authority.[1] It is marked by a high degree of incongruity that has grown in the political system, between the electoral process unable to produce the mandate to rule and the governmental and interparty processes that have become subject to such pressures and interests which often undermine the very principle of democratic representation. The result is that the political authority has been unable to find adequate basis in the representational system. On the one hand, the traditional structures of social and economic dominance prevent the State from acquiring a degree of autonomy needed for its effective functioning and, on the other, *these power structures* are no longer regarded as sacrosanct by the people. Either they are seen to have lost their mediating role in processing the mandate or their mediations are seen as manipulations of the mandate undermining their democratic aspirations. Consequently, the political authority finds it increasingly difficult to retain legitimacy from the people, even though the government is formed after 'free and fair' elections. This is not to say that elections have ceased to be a potent democratic instrument for effecting significant changes in the political system or that the people have lost faith in the institution of elections. The point is that the 'supply of legitimation' to the political authority from elections has increasingly become inadequate for it to implement the mandate in the face of the structural resistance it meets from within the system, and from the outside by people who feel their aspirations are frustrated in this process.

The weakening of the legitimation process began in the late 1960s and has continued unabated since then.[2] The starting point can be traced to the 1967 elections when governmental performance became, for the first time, a live issue in Indian politics. Since then, acts of omission and commission by the government have been seen by the people as directly those of the 'party in power' rather than of an anonymous entity called Government. For example, the deterioration in the economic conditions of the country which had perceptibly begun in the mid-1960s was seen by the 1967 electorate as the consequence of the policies of the Congress party and its leadership.

The change in voter consciousness that was manifested in the 1967 elections by a widespread rejection of the Congress party at the polls created some significant consequences for the political system. The legitimation losses incurred on account of the failure to perform in the economic sector

pushed the ruling Congress party to the use of populism in the political arena.[3] This short-term strategy, to make good legitimation losses of the political authority, produced a long-term consequence for the system. Substituting populism for performance resulted in laying bare the face of the socio-economic groups which wielded power in the macrostructure, the face that had for long remained concealed behind the anonymity of the 'government' and had kept the issues of legitimation away from the wider public within the confines of the *political-bureaucratic arena*.[4] But, as soon as the issues of success and failure became alive in the wider public realm, legitimation could not be sustained through the populist idiom emanating from a charismatic leader of the party. The political authority was now directly exposed to demands and pressures arising from the bottom of the society. The legitimation strategy of populist politics had resulted in removing the 'buffer' provided by the institutional forms and procedures which insulated the political authority from direct popular pressures and demands.[5]

The legitimation problems of the political authority were, thus, simpler when the structural differentiation of the economy and the political awareness of the public were at a relatively low level. This ceased to be the case after the 1967 elections. It became increasingly difficult to keep the economy and the wider public realm structurally separate. The contest for legitimacy moved out of the political-bureaucratic arena into a wider public realm. Politics ceased to be an inter-elite competition under the system of one-party dominance. It became more competitive and spilled over in the wider society making political issues important even during non-election time and 'direct-action' movements acquired legitimacy in democratic politics. Institutional politics became unsettled in the face of growing populist politics.

The denouement of this post-1967 politics was the Emergency. The process started with the split in the Congress party, followed by the mid-term polls of 1971, which heralded a new phase in Indian politics, i.e., populist politics. Despite the massive majority obtained by Indira Gandhi's Congress party in the 1971 elections, the forces released by the 1967 election made it difficult for the ruling Congress party to retain legitimacy to rule for the term it was elected to power. The recourse to radical rhetoric by the ruling elite in the post-1971 period failed to ensure a sustained supply of legitimation to the political authority. The Emergency thus represented the ruling Congress party's desperate bid to put down the counter-validity claims of the opposition by the use of force when its own

legitimacy was seriously questioned in the public realm. Although the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the rupture it created between the political institutions and the protest movements entered the representational system, resulting in competitive politics assuming the representational form of competition among various ethnic, religious/communal and regional power groups. Consequently, the representational system, at the national level, ceased to produce a *political* majority for a party or a coalition.

In sum, the legitimacy claims of the political authority can now no longer be validated through elite politics at the apex of the system. Lately, they are not being settled through electoral politics either. The electoral outcome is that the policies of the Government often appear as an ad hoc play of executive power and the political parties opposing them as power groupings representing sectional interests, hence losing its bearing on the determination of a mandate for the Government. Consequently, claims and counter-claims to legitimacy of government functioning and policy-making are being increasingly contested through popular movements, i.e., outside the electoral and legislative framework. Unlike the politics of pressure groups which work through political parties and legislatures, the movements engage in parallel politics, often aimed at withdrawal of legitimation to the institutions of the State. It is this that is, in my view, the defining feature of the crisis. Its poignancy is indicated by the fact that no election held since the lifting of the Emergency—even when in the first three elections, one or the other political party received massive majorities—has succeeded in restoring legitimacy to the political authority. Elections are thus becoming less effective in performing their basic function, namely, to settle validity claims of the political authority.

The political parties which normally translate raw aspirations to power, of groups and communities in the society, into political issues are relying increasingly on mobilization of casteist and communal sentiments in the society. The political authority, on its part, is increasingly relying on market mechanisms rather than adopting direct policy measures to remove bottlenecks in the social structure. These, in effect, serve as instruments for advancement of interests of the urban and new rural elite, preventing any benefits of the economic and even social policies of the Government to percolate down to the poor and socially marginalized populations.

The ruling elites in their concern to ensure stability to the regime in power tend to treat the problem of legitimation not in terms of aiding the process of transformation of the social structure, forces of which are already surging at the ground level. Instead, they view it as a problem of tightening

up the law and order situation, and would periodically mount rescue operations for the economy, such as securing foreign investments and international loans. Increasingly, they have been advocating such policies for the State as can meet the aspirations of the articulate middle class, which is, by and large, comprised of the upper castes. Rather than expanding the frontiers of such a middle class to include the hitherto structurally excluded socio-economic groups, these policies make it evermore difficult for them to enter the middle class. The result is an ever-widening gap between the middle classes and the vast majorities of the poor which now divides them not only economically and socially but also culturally. They are no longer bound by a common meaning system or norms in public life. The political authority's grounds for securing new legitimacy, therefore, no longer hold good simultaneously for both the elite and the masses.

In order to understand the nature of the crisis in a deeper way, it is useful to look back and reconstruct the state of 'non-crisis' that was enjoyed by the Indian political system for a relatively long stretch of time, longer than it could have normally been permitted by the objective forces of change in a society. This exercise will also illustrate the role of a deliberative political leadership in forestalling or altogether avoiding crisis situations and thereby negating the predetermination embedded in the theory of class-polarization.

Legitimacy of the Congress System

Historically, what I call the state of non-crisis in the Indian polity can be identified as the period of the Congress system. As I have clarified at the beginning of this chapter, the absence of crisis does not mean that problems, even legitimation problems, do not exist in the system. What is meant is that whatever problems exist appear to be solvable. They lend themselves to certain prioritization, even postponement, within the overall framework of the system.

In this sense, the Congress system could successfully handle problems because for a long time it could keep the public realm structurally separated from the bureaucratic and legislative process and maintained, in the former, a low level of politicization. This gave the political authority autonomy in making administrative and legislative decisions, which could not be directly affected by the demands in the public realm. The public realm, thanks to its low level of politicization, offered a diffused loyalty to the political authority and thus ensured its legitimacy.

Of course, a divergence of interests did take place in the public realm, but the consciousness of such divergence among different groups was quite low. Under the Congress system, interests were believed to be generalizable for the purposes of nation building and State action. And, insofar as the decision-making processes within the legislative-bureaucratic arena followed the procedures and forms sanctioned by the objectified democratic norms, the administrative and legislative autonomy was conceded in 'public interest' both in the Parliament and outside it in the public realm whenever the issue of public accountability of governmental actions was raised. In this sense, the Congress system, although ridden with problems, did not face any serious crisis of political legitimacy.

It is, however, not enough to say that the Congress system owed its legitimacy only to the relatively low level of politicization in the public. The level of politicization is always associated with the level of structural differentiation within the society. Having said this, I must admit that very little analysis of the Congress system is available which directly examines this relationship for explaining the sources of its legitimacy. We do have some excellent accounts of how the Congress system worked, revealing the internal *political* dynamic of its functioning.[6] But little is known about how the system grew in the ambience of the social and economic structures and the process through which it obtained legitimation. Some scholars and ideologues of political parties have, from time to time, commented upon the sources of legitimation of the Congress system and, for the present, we will have to be content in taking account of these.

One such view held that the Congress system was a political superimposition on the feudal social and economic structure and as such provided political legitimation for the traditional (caste-based, ascriptive) social authority and feudal relations of production. This, in my view, is a questionable proposition. No political authority could have legitimized itself on this basis without responding to the empirical processes of change in the social and economic structures at the time of independence. It is by embedding itself in this process of change that the Congress system could acquire the legitimacy it did. Accordingly, the Congress system created a new socio-economic base of power by directly undermining the feudal elements in the society. It consolidated the new power base and then sought to legitimize it through the political process. This was a political response to two kinds of structural change that had already taken place in the society.

The first pertained to the weakening of the hierarchical and the strengthening of the divisional-horizontal aspect of the caste structure. It was

accompanied by a loosening of the normative hold of the karma theory. This change set into motion the process of the breakdown of the caste system as an all-India ideology of social organization. The breakdown transformed castes into regional power groups and promoted the emergence of individual achievement and performance as the new ideology of social stratification. The second kind of change was in the occupational structure. This structure was expanding because of the emergence of a wide range of occupations not bound to any caste, making horizontal occupational mobility possible on a significant scale both in the rural and urban areas.

The Congress system identified its support bases in these growing structures: the peasant proprietors (not the feudal landlords) in the rural areas and the growing tertiary sectors in the urban areas. Beyond these, agricultural labourers, ethnic minorities and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were brought within the political fold partly through the governmental policy process and partly through the political mobilization of these groups in the party structure.

The other view rejected the feudal-structure basis of the Congress. It held that the Congress system derived its legitimacy by becoming the political instrument of the emergent capitalist class. In my opinion, this is too neat a view of a very complex process. The fact is that the prime concern of the Congress system was to avoid close identification with the interests of any one class, if only because the divergence of interests had not yet made itself felt in the public realm. Congress policies, if anything, had negative consequences for the growth of the capitalist class; neither the industrial and business entrepreneurs in the urban areas nor the capitalist farmers in the rural areas derived any significant benefits. The Congress policy, on the contrary, explicitly protected a few big and established industrial and business houses by restraining the natural market process, and, through such measures as food zones and control of prices of food grains.

The ideological expression of such policies was the socialist rhetoric. Indeed, the Congress was so wary of the emerging capitalist entrepreneurs, both urban and rural, that production was not allowed to have even its natural growth. Control, rather than expansion, was considered the best policy to put off the pressures that were generated by the change. The dampening of the production process was disguised by the policies of 'import substitution'. This amounted mainly to the production of consumer durables under the monopolistic control of the big industrial houses. In the agricultural sector, the dampening of production was managed through

food imports mainly under the PL-480 contract. The Congress thus succeeded in maintaining political stability by inhibiting processes of growth of the capitalist economy and, at the same time, not promoting a full-fledged socialist economy. In brief, over the years, the Congress system perfected a bureaucratic model of development which was neither socialistic nor capitalistic. If one must describe such a model in these terms, it may be said to be capitalist by default and socialist by fraud.

The legitimation programme of the Congress system was thus clearly not based on any long-term perspective. Such a perspective would have aimed at consolidating the liberal democracy by curbing economic monopolies and promoting land reforms, and by universalizing primary education and progressive democratization of the decision-making structures of the party and the government. The Congress did not do any such thing. All it did was to successfully keep the public realm structurally delinked from the legislative-bureaucratic arena, thereby not allowing legitimation pressures to arise either at election times or through political movements.

It did so with finesse and probably for a longer period than the growing forces of differentiation within the economic and social structures would have otherwise allowed. This programme, moreover, deflected the process of polarization of the classes into an elite–mass dichotomy. It did, for a long period, maintain social and national integration as the central issue of politics, thereby preventing governmental performance from becoming a real issue. Moreover, it politically absorbed the emergent conflicts in the rural society within the factional structure of the party. In brief, the Congress system maintained its legitimacy by insulating the political system from the change in the economic and social structures which had come about and was continuing to take place.

Two points emerge from this discussion. First, the Congress system rooted its legitimation process not in the traditional authority system and the feudal structure but in the mobilization consequent to the independence movement in the political arena and the changing hierarchical and occupational structure in the socio-economic system. In so doing, it succeeded in insulating the political system from being prematurely overloaded by the growing demands in the public realm and, consequently, it was not encumbered by the issue of legitimation.

Put differently, it maintained, on the one hand, the democratic procedures and forms of decision-making in the bureaucratic-political arena, a very necessary step for establishing the legitimacy of the new political system. On the other hand, it avoided the substance of democracy being

determined and validated in the public realm. Thereby, it could, to a significant extent, prevent the changes in the social and economic structures from affecting the legitimation process in the wider public realm.

The second point pertains to the nature of the Indian political-bureaucratic elites who managed the Congress system. To identify them as a 'class' which represented the feudal or the capitalist interests is of limited explanatory value. In fact, it can be totally misleading. These elites had neither the expansionist capitalist character nor the work ethic of capitalism, nor did they show any feudal sense of power. They were a political conglomerate that had inherited a long and distinct tradition, the cultural tradition of Brahminism, whose genius lay in compartmentalization rather than expansion or subjugation.

The Indian political elites were, thus, adept at using their rule for compartmentalization of the potentially conflicting interests and exercising a parental control which curbs rather than promotes initiative. Indeed, they were averse to expansionism of any kind including that which was believed to be necessary for the system's survival. They were equally averse to direct subjugation of the elements believed to constitute a threat to the system they managed. Instead, they preferred to devise various mechanisms of overall containment and accommodation with a great tolerance for inconsistencies and contradictions. In this lay both the strength and the weakness of the Congress system.

In sum, the Congress system was a political miniaturization of the Hindu social system. The historical Hindu system, e.g., constantly diffused the counter-validity claims to its legitimation that arose from time to time (for instance, Buddhism) in the system and it avoided direct subjugation of its peripheries (say, through institutionalizing slavery); instead, it controlled the peripheries with the all-India ideology of the *varna-jati*. In its incarnation in the Congress system, the ideological rhetoric of socialism and the policy of 'mixed economy' managed by the political-bureaucratic elite (the neo-Brahmins?) served the purpose of diffusing the counter-validity claims that constantly arise within a system.

Structural Basis of the Crisis

The process of legitimation of the political authority perfected by the Congress system ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, and the Congress system met its natural death. It became increasingly difficult to insulate the political system from the changes that had already occurred in the economy

and society. We must recognize that the Congress system was essentially a stalling operation, successfully carried out so long as the changes in the social and economic structures did not spread and acquire a magnitude sufficient enough to introduce differentiations in the public realm. But the impact of these changes began to become visible in the public realm towards the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and marked the beginning of the disruption of the legitimation process in the Indian polity. In what follows, we shall quickly review these changes between the 1950s and 1970s, albeit in an illustrative manner, with a view to showing their implications for the legitimation crisis which had gripped the political system in the mid-1970s and is continuing to do so since then.

Basic changes in the demographic structure occurred between the 1950s and the 1970s.[7] Despite the high rate of growth in population, literacy went up by about 16 per cent from (18–34 per cent) during the 1951–1971 period. More importantly, the proportion of literates in the population (above 4 years of age) almost doubled in the rural areas (from 14 to 27.3 per cent) and tripled for the rural females (from 5 to 15 per cent). Overall urban literacy reached the figure of 60 per cent compared to 40 per cent in 1951 and 54 per cent in 1961. About 70 per cent of the urban males and 48 per cent of the urban females were literate by 1971. The increase in the absolute numbers of the literates in the population, not revealed by these percentages, were enormous: as against 83 million literates in 1961, the number increased to 160 million in 1971.

While, as a percentage of the total population, the urban population registered only a 2 per cent growth (from 18 per cent in 1960 to 20 per cent in 1971), in absolute numbers the increase was 80 million in 1961 to 109 million in 1971. More significant were the changes in the pattern of urban and rural settlements. The number of cities with a population of 20,000 increased from 735 in 1961 to 913 in 1971.

The population growth during 1961–1971 remained consistently higher for the bigger urban settlements: 52 per cent for the cities with a population above 100,000, 45 per cent for cities with a population between 20,000 and 50,000, and 20 per cent for towns with a population between 10,000 and 20,000. For the smaller urban settlements with a population below 10,000, the growth rate was negative, with −8.8 per cent for towns with a population of between 5000 and 10,000 and as low as −22.9 per cent for smaller towns below 5000.

Similar changes took place in the rural settlement patterns. The number of bigger villages greatly increased while the smaller ones remained static or

declined in number. Over 50 per cent of the rural population lived in villages with a population above 1000 and only one-sixth of this number lived in villages with a population below 500 in 1971. As against this, in 1951, about one-third of the rural population lived in villages with a population below 500.

Add to the above picture the changes that occurred in the composition of the Indian electorate between 1952 and 1977.[8] In sheer numbers, the electorate grew from 173 million voters at the First General Elections in 1952 to 360 million. In 1977, three-fourths of the electorate consisted of voters who either reached the voting age or were born in the post-independence period; in fact, one-fourth of them were born after 1947. Put together, this was the picture of a change that represented a radically different constellation of socio-economic and political forces. It is clear that the structural assumptions that informed the political analyses of the 1970s and continue to be held even today will have to be appropriately revised to arrive at a better understanding of the politics in crisis.

This point would become clearer if we focused our attention directly on the nature of the structural changes in the society that became visible by the mid-1970s and have since been growing and continually impinging on the political system. First, the hierarchically superordinated rural social structure of caste is being progressively polarized into a conflictual caste–class structure primarily around economic forces represented by wage-labour and capital. In 1961, e.g., 60 per cent of the rural workforce accounted for cultivators and only 19 per cent for agricultural labourers. This situation radically changed by 1971, with agricultural labourers registering an increase of 12 per cent and cultivators suffering a decline of 10 per cent. Thus, by 1971, over 82 per cent of the rural workforce belonged to the categories of cultivators and agricultural labourers of which about 52 per cent accounted for the former and 31 per cent for the latter.

The other occupational categories that are generally dependent on the feudal occupational structure—here we ignore the urban industrial occupational categories that account for negligible percentages in the rural areas—such as household industry, livestock, forestry and fishing, and other services accounted for about 16 per cent of the rural workforce in 1961; their percentage declined to 10 per cent by 1971. Thus, the occupational structure that was once characterized by the social organization of the village system has been shrinking progressively, making room for an economy based on the relationship between wage-labour and capital. Second, the traditional *jajmani*-based relations of production have, by and large,

become monetized. The supportive service sector of artisans and others which operated within the social organization of the village system, with its relationship of social obligation and dependence on the patron caste, has now been detached from the social matrix of the village.

The service sector in the rural economy is, thus, no longer agriculture-dependent but is fast growing into an independent sector of the economy with its links not with the village system but with the national economy. The occupational relationships in this sector are now more those between *employers* and employees than between patrons and clients. For example, if we look at the non-agricultural workforce in the rural areas, about 45 per cent of the workers in this sector were covered by the employer–employee relationship in 1961. The percentage increased to about 60 in 1971. Further, among them, 3 per cent were employers and 42 per cent were employees in 1961. But, by 1971, the percentage of employees rose to 55 while that of the employers remained constant. The remaining two categories of single (self-employed) workers and family workers in the non-agricultural rural workforce also registered significant changes: the percentage of single workers fell from 45 to 34 and that of the family workers from 11 to 8.

Even more significant is the fact that the proportion of wage earners has been growing at a faster rate in the rural economy. While the percentage of employers remained constant in both urban and rural areas during the 1961–1971 period, the increase in the percentage of employees in the urban areas was only 5 as against 15 in the rural areas. It should, however, be pointed out that in terms of industrial categories of workforce, the percentages of urban workers declined in the categories of mining, household industry and other services but increased in manufacturing, trade and commerce, thus indicating a significant change in the urban industrial occupational structure.

Although some of the differences described in the workforce are to an extent influenced by changes in the definition of 'workers' and the classification of occupational categories in the 1971 census, the trend towards an emerging contradiction of wage-labour and capital in both the rural and urban economies was unmistakable. The structural changes of this kind were accompanied by changes in social and political consciousness. For example, a study by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi,[9] of post-1971 political attitudes of Indian citizens, based on a representative national sample of 3800 citizens, showed that about a quarter of the sample population attributed the causes of their deteriorating living

conditions to the policies of the government and to the groups which they thought were opposed to their interests (rather than to fate or acts of God).

From the sample population having opinions on various political issues (about 70 per cent of the total sample), 26 per cent showed a strong preference for direct political action, both against the government and the socio-economic groups, which they thought were opposed to their interests. Another 27 per cent, although they rejected direct action as a proper means of influencing government policies, strongly pleaded for structural changes through legislative measures. Such a radical orientation was found to be strongly associated with poverty (measured in terms of monthly household income). The poor, regardless of the differences in caste, religion and so on, showed unmistakable radical tendencies. But the probability of them acquiring a radical orientation in terms of political and social consciousness of the structures that came in the way of improving their living conditions was found to increase greatly with literacy, urbanization and the economic development of the areas they lived in.[10]

This review of changes in the social and economic structures and the political consciousness of citizens, although very sketchy, is sufficient to suggest the fact that by the beginning of the 1970s the Congress system was faced with changes not merely in the political process, but in the principle of organization of the society as a whole. Not being able to understand the import of these changes or perhaps due to the unwillingness to accept them, the issues thrown up by the structural changes were approached by the successive regimes since 1971 as if they lent themselves to purely political manipulation or to law and order arrangements. The inability of the political leadership to make adequate political and economic responses to changes hastened the loss of legitimacy and pushed the system into a prolonged state of systemic crisis.[11]

Dimensions of the Crisis

The processes of structural change that undermined the legitimation process of the Congress system in the 1970s have, if anything, grown in both spread and magnitude; in the process, the entire political system has been overtaken by a crisis. I draw the following implications for understanding this crisis and for finding ways to deal with it.

1. The relationship between the centre and the periphery which was once viewed as between 'modern' political institutions and the

'traditional' social-cultural system is now being interactively reproduced as one between the socio-economic peripheries (educationally and occupationally 'unintegrated' socio-economic groups) and the national economy. Politics has become a pressure zone in this process of working out new equations in the socio-economic system. Contestations in macro-politics have become increasingly about redefining 'nationalism' or about the means of achieving integration of the national society. Thus viewed, the various agitations and movements of the 1980s—'sons of the Soil' movements, linguistic, caste and communal tensions, growth of politics of ethnic identities and of various kinds of 'subnationalisms', and perpetration of violence on the weaker sections—can no longer be viewed as sudden eruptions of non-secular or obscurantist sentiments in the society. They represent political conflicts arising from the new systemic compulsions of socio-economic integration and as demands for renegotiation of the terms of relationships by the socio-economic groups adversely affected and placed by the changes in the economy. The crisis, in a fundamental sense, is thus characterized by the failure of the political system to cope with the legitimation pressures generated by changes in the economy and society.

2. Since representative institutions of politics—parties, legislatures and so on—have lost the initiative to respond to this process, the issues of redefinition and renegotiation of relationships are being raised and fought outside the pale of institutional politics. The need, therefore, is to view the issues of social and national integration as a problem not merely of emotional integration of communities representing different faiths, cultures and descents but also of recognizing and reconciling interests which are often articulated in the politics of identities. The whole system is confronting basic change in the very principle of its organization, compelling groups and individuals in the society to relocate their activities and interest in the changing national economy, which in turn is seeking integration in the global economy.
3. The assumption about the Indian political system as a mosaic of pluralities needs also to be modified. While it is true that the forces of socio-economic differentiation of traditional cultural entities (i.e., of secularization) are at work at the base of the society and that the mediation role of politics is far from being exhausted to deal with these changes, the forces released by social-structural changes have real potential also of fragmenting the political system itself. For,

contrary to theoretical expectation that forces of secularization will produce a polarized class structure, it has brought about dichotomization of the preexisting pluralities themselves. In politics, they tend to articulate their economic interest often in pure identity terms. Thus, while such dichotomies as Hindu–Muslim, Sikh–Hindu, rural–urban, Sons of the Soil and the outsiders, tribal–nontribal, and Caste Hindus-Dalits constitute the dichotomy have acquired bases in the growing divergence of objective economic interests in the society, they continue to find political expression in sociocultural and ethnic terms. In effect, their interests remain unaggregable in institutional politics and unstructurable at the macro level in terms of economic classes.

4. While the sociocultural identities compete and clash with each other for their share of power, they have economically become sharply differentiated internally. Their claims to representation and power as cultural identities, divided within themselves on the economic dimension, have become difficult to contain by the existing party system. Unprocessed by institutional politics such claims often find expression in terms of intergroup conflicts and violence. This contributes to the erosion of the legitimation process for the established political authority, on the one hand, and prevents the emergence of an aggregative political process which can give rise to a nationwide movement that can successfully stake counterclaims for legitimacy, on the other. Such a continuing stalemate between the political authority and the pervasive politics of identities may, in fact, threaten the system with another crisis, namely social fragmentation and political disintegration. If such a drift towards fragmentation continues, it may push the system from the present crisis of legitimacy to a more severe crisis of integration, i.e., threatening India's existence as one nation.
5. Finally, crucial for a successful political management of changes in the society is a stable party system. It is clear that there is no institutional possibility for anything like a system of one-party dominance to reappear or for a two-party system to take place. This is because the structure and the character of the public realm have radically changed. The politics of regions and of ethnic identities have entered and are now redefining the 'national' political space. It is no longer possible to conceptualize the idea of 'nation', as was probably the case in the 1950s and 1960s, as a political category, set apart from its social and cultural constituents. The politicized populace, on the other hand, press for divergent interests attached to identities rather than their

> secular locations in the differentiated social and economic structures—claims that the already weakened political-bureaucratic authority cannot serve. In this sense, the crisis is of the representational system: the old idea of 'national representation' by a party or a personality or a social-political coalition has decomposed in terms of numerical proportionalities of ethnicities and regions.

The crucial question is this: Are there possibilities within the existing party-electoral system that may enable the political system to overcome the crisis? It seems such possibilities are becoming less available from within the institutional representative system. First, the continuing erosion of political legitimacy faced by successive regimes since 1971, albeit brought to power through election, suggests that by itself the party-electoral system cannot politically process the magnitude of structural changes that have cumulatively taken place in the Indian society. The base of institutional democracy will have to expand beyond parties and elections, and the political authority will have to seek legitimation by also responding to politics of non-party and non-electoral organizations and movements that have arisen in the wider public realm (i.e., within civil society) and largely in response to structural changes in the society.

Second, even while alliances are being formed by different political parties, the possibility of parties forming and sustaining a stable coalition government and retaining power for a full term is decreasing. This is largely because parties themselves are increasingly conceiving their 'constituencies' in terms of social-cultural identities (regional, caste-based or communal) they seek to represent rather than work for reconciling interests across such 'constituencies' which in reality overlap among them and are politically negotiable. It seems a successful working of a political coalition can become possible only after the polity has solved the primary problems of the economy so that politics is freed from pressures arising from the economy and where the economy more or less takes care of itself. In other words, coalitions can succeed and become durable only when conditions become ripe for decoupling the economic system from the political system in which contentions about economic policies remain pragmatic, rather than paradigmatic.

Third, the expectation that the programmes of administrative and economic reforms will free the political system from the performance pressure in the economy is not coming true. Instead, 'reforms' have become a contentious political issue and the unresolved problems of the economy are being directly unloaded in the competitive, mobilizational politics.

Such economic measures taken by the regime for ensuring relative autonomy of the economy seem to have come to naught. The social-structural bottlenecks that had stopped the percolation of developmental benefits in the State-managed economy to the large numbers of socially dis-privileged populations living below the poverty line are now serving as barriers to their entry into the new market economy. The political agenda required for the removal of structural impediments faced by different categories of population, of course, as is generally agreed, will have to be of democratization and decentralization of the existing political and economic structure. The question is whether the Indian State and its institutions can by themselves, gripped as they are by a crisis, conceive and implement such an agenda. When crime and corruption have ceased to be outside problems to be tackled by the State and have themselves become the bases of the State power, it is difficult to envisage, despite good intentions and legislations, how such an initiative can come from and be sustained by the institutional structure of the State. There is, however, another possibility inherent in the situation. The forces released by the structural changes in the society discussed earlier have given rise to a new kind of politics, the politics of 'non-party' and 'non-electoral' organizations and movements. If the sources of the crisis lie in the political authority's inability to cope with changes in the social structure, its alleviation may come from outside the State system, i.e., through the politics of the civil society.

Notes

1. The present analysis uses the concepts of 'legitimation problems' and 'legitimation crisis' as developed by Habermas. Habermas's analysis of the legitimation problems facing the modern state represents a significant advance over Max Weber's concept of political legitimacy, and as such provides a more fruitful frame of analysis to understand the problems of political authority in crisis. See Jurgen Habermas, 'Legitimation Problems in the Modern State', in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Heinemann, London, 1979, pp. 178–205. Footnotes 4, 5 and 6 further elaborate Habermas's concepts of 'legitimacy' and 'legitimation problems'.
2. Legitimacy means that there are good arguments for a political order's claim to be recognized as 'right and just'. In his sense, Habermas further elaborates that '*legitimacy* is a contestable validity claim; and legitimation is a *process* in which one side denies and the other asserts legitimacy'. This is how legitimation becomes a permanent problem for a political order (Habermas, *op. cit.*, pp. 178–179). We speak of the weakening of a legitimation process

when a situation arises in which the supply of legitimation to the political authority becomes increasingly scarce and it can no longer take its claim to legitimacy for granted.

3. The persistent failure to solve economic problems severely exposes the political authority's claim to legitimacy. When the ruling elites realize that the economic problems cannot be solved without endangering their own established interests, the legitimacy ploy they resort to is the politicalization of economic issues. They then take recourse to radical rhetoric in order to hide their incapability—in fact, unwillingness—to take drastic administrative and economic measures which might harm the established interests.
4. Since the domain of application of the legitimation process, as Habermas rightly holds, is the political order, the supply of legitimation to the political authority has to come from two levels of the polity: from the political bureaucratic-economic elites and from the wider public. Legitimation problems arise when the political authority's claim to legitimacy is disputed at one of the two or at both the levels. The legitimation problem assumes the proportion of a crisis when the political authority is compelled to secure legitimation from both the arenas and yet its grounds for securing legitimation do not hold good simultaneously for both the arenas: the elites and the masses.
5. This is a crucial point at which the supply of legitimation to the political authority from the elite circles ceases to be adequate to justify its claim to legitimacy. At this point, the legitimation problem often assumes the proportion of a crisis, for the simple reason that legitimation now needs to be sought *simultaneously* from among the elite circles as well as from the wider public. In so far as the political authority fails to respond to this new situation and does not change its grounds for securing new legitimations the normal legitimation process comes to naught. It is then either overtaken by the ad hoc power groups that manipulate political power rather than seeking the loyalty of the people or by the political-bureaucratic elites who attempt to make good the legitimation losses by progressively relying upon the use of the coercive mechanisms of the State which they still control. A third possibility but which has remained far from becoming real is that a popular revolutionary movement that has been latently countering the validity claims of the established political authority comes to the fore and secures legitimation, and consequently political power, for itself.
6. See Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress "system" in India'. *Asian Survey* 4 (12) December 1964; 'The Congress System on Trial' *Asian Survey* 7(2), February 1967; 'The Congress System Revisited: A Decennial Review'. *Asian Survey* 14(12). December 1974. Also see Ramashray Roy, 'Dynamics of One Party Dominance in an Indian State', *Asian Survey* 8(7), July 1968;

Gopal Krishna. 'One Party Dominance; Development and Trends', *Perspectives* 12(1), 1966.

7. The data in this section are used in rounded figures only for illustrative purposes. Except the electoral data all other statistics used in this section are drawn from a very useful recasting of data done by Ashish Bose from various sources (mainly the census handbooks). See Ashish Bose, *India's Urbanization 1901–2001 (second edition),* Tata McGraw-Hill Ltd., New Delhi, 1978.
8. The observation that the social demographic character of the Indian electorate has radically changed, having long-term implications for the political process, was first made by Bashiruddin Ahmed. See his 'The Electorate', *Seminar*, April 1977. The data on changes in the electorate are from this article.
9. The data on political attitudes presented here are from the data files of the 1971 Elections study of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. The study, financed by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, was jointly directed by Bashiruddin Ahmed and D.L. Sheth.
10. For a detailed analysis of these data, see my 'Structure of Indian Radicalism', *Economic & Political Weekly*, No. 5, 6, 7 February 1975, pp. 319–334.
11. The main point about systemic crisis is the growing dissonance between the institutional structures of governance and the social and political forces released by structural changes in the economy and society. This process began in the early 1970s, but it has since continued, and even deepened. This has been so despite electoral victories achieved by the non-Congress parties in 1977 and 1989. The systemic nature of the crisis is revealed by the fact that although significant regime changes, and more importantly changes in the nature of the party system, have occurred since 1971, these changes have not increased legitimation supply to the political authority. All successive regimes since 1971 have thus not only been subject to this crisis but have contributed to its intensification. In this sense, it is not the crisis created and lived by any one party. I have elaborated this process of intensification of the crisis form 1971 to 1991 in my 'Crisis of Representation', *Seminar,* No. 385, September 1991, pp. 14–20.

PART II

Parapolitics of Democracy

CHAPTER 5

Civil Society and Non-party Political Formations

The Emergence of the Idea of Civil Society in India

Although an established concept in political philosophy, the term civil society entered public discourse in India almost abruptly with the rise of the Anna Hazare–led anticorruption movement. Until recently, people who belonged to what is today called civil society did not see themselves as civil society. The terms used were non-governmental organizations (NGOs), voluntary associations, micro-movements, grass-roots organizations, social movements and so on. The term civil society was rarely used though the phenomenon, which is today identified as civil society, was there. The media and the Internet have particularized this term to refer to Anna Hazare's anticorruption movement.

In the 1990s, more precisely, when India began to enter the globalizing world and adopted new economic policies for its 'integration' with the world economy, the term came into circulation. The foreign funding agencies used this word frequently. They used the term Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for their partners, the Indian NGOs, who received grants, thereby enabling foreign funders to justify, even if semantically, their direct dealings with Indian NGOs. The partners too accepted the civil society tag with great alacrity. It is interesting to note in this context that a change in the political climate, and the emergence of a new political discourse, may infuse an old-established concept with new meanings. It may even reverse the meaning retrospectively by making its prominent meaning recessive. Something like this seems to have happened to the term 'civil society'.

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The term 'civil society' became popular also through the international politics of the Cold War, especially towards the end when the idea was embraced by Soviet intellectual and political dissenters. Their central argument against the Soviet regime, and the one that was then widely disseminated by the American academia to the rest of the world, including India, went like this: the Communist State has not only lost touch but has, in fact, become the enemy of the people, thanks to its intrinsic tendency to totalize power in a small coterie. As a result, the State has moved away from the people sitting imperiously above and over their heads. Only the revival of civil society can bring the State back to the people. Thus, civil society which was considered, in Marxist lore, to be a passive, anti-revolutionary and retrogressive phenomenon, integral to bourgeois democracy, was now being given a new, democratic-revolutionary content. The dissidents believed that bringing the State under the command of civil society was necessary for the emergence of a multiparty democratic system, and for the attainment of political freedoms, both of which the Soviet State denied firmly and ruthlessly. The term, now loaded with a specific meaning acquired in the Soviet political discourse of dissident-political action against the State, soon became a favourite concept for Indian social activists and academics. Some of them, without giving further thought, began to routinely use the term 'civil society' in the place of 'society', even when that usage was not at all appropriate. When Anna Hazare's movement mobilized people in significant numbers against governmental corruption, the term got quickly fixed to it, along with its meaning of political action against the State.

Another important strand in the intellectual genealogy of the concept of civil society in India can be traced to the texts of political philosophy—the writings of Marx, Hegel, Gramsci and their derivations and renderings by Indian academicians. This strand can be found in the writings of some British and North American thinkers who highlighted the civic functions of public organizations and institutions in the fields of philanthropy, welfare, education, health, and, lately, development. To this must be added the literature of 'Tocqueville studies' of American democracy which constitute an important influence in Indian debates that are of non-State, civic associations regarded as integral to a functioning democracy.[1] The phenomenon attracted the attention of Indian academicians, mainly sociologists and political scientists, as late as in the early 1980s. By and large, they locate civil society in the modern-secular sector of public life in India. Its emergence can be traced to colonial modernity.

When we go back to the precolonial period, we learn that when the colonial regime needed to link the government, especially its administrative apparatus, to the people, it promoted the creation of sets of intermediary organizations and institutions at the interface between the rulers and the ruled. The agenda was to moot the idea and support initiatives for social, economic and welfare activities in the provinces and, in the process, build a degree of political support in the Indian population for the (modern) colonial regime. This included the formation of cooperative societies, public trusts and voluntary social organizations in the area of education, health and welfare. In the area of local administration, a series of district-level organizations, such as district development boards, were also created. They were all manned by the 'notable' and 'respected' persons in the area selected by the colonial administrators. The period I am referring to is the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century India when the awareness of *colonial publics* grew thanks to the regime's policies implemented in collaboration with the English-educated as well as the traditional social elite. The creation of, and participation in, the intermediate bodies also came on the agenda of social reformers. In Gujarat, e.g., Narmadashankar Dave (Narmad), an influential social reformer and the founding father of modern Gujarati literature, wrote an interesting small essay titled 'Mandali Banawana Phayda' (Benefits of Forming Associations). This example of Narmad is to make the point that associations in various fields were promoted by social reformers even as they were adopted as a policy measure by the colonial State. The society registration act of 1860 gave a legal basis and recognition to such organizations.

The point, therefore, is that colonial modernity was crucial to understanding the relationship between the civil society and the State. One could no longer talk of civil society and not refer to the State. Although it worked relatively autonomously for the welfare and in the general interest of the people, civil society appeared as the penumbra of the State. By locating it in the sphere of the modern state, social scientists began to view civil society almost exclusively in secular terms, and therefore saw caste and religious organizations as existing outside its pale. It was thus seen as a para-political structure of public organizations *aligned* to the State. In short, civil society for them represented primarily the modern sector of India's social and political life and, derivatively, thereby an aspect of democracy.[2] Once again, we find here theories of modernity and democracy being intertwined to the point of interchangeability where the sphere of democracy co-terminates with modernity.

In today's world with the phenomenal growth of diverse *political publics*, especially in the post-war democracies, civil society has, in fact, come face-to-face with the State, in a dynamic relationship of conflict and collaboration. The churnings in civil society interrogate the long-term modernist project of creating a democratic polity consisting of deracinated citizens. Civil society politics also makes it difficult to take a simplistic, black-and-white view of State–society relationships according to which the civil society can exist only in a purely secular space, created by the State and as if there is no society beyond civil society. The fact is that the caste and religious organizations have conventionally performed secular functions for their (social) constituencies, especially in areas of education, health and general welfare. Nor did they stay aloof from some kind of political influences in the course of performing these functions. They never confined their activities to only managing ritual statuses and carrying out sacral roles by their members. It should be noted that similar kinds of functions—social as well as political (vis-à-vis the State/king)—were performed by the social and religious centres (temples) even in premodern times. All this suggests that the task of conceptualizing civil spaces and drawing boundaries around civil society is yet to be accomplished.

In India, 'civil society' evolved in three phases: (i) in the course of the freedom movement, (ii) during the Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) movement and (iii) in the post-globalization era. In its present form, the development of 'civil society' took place only in the post-Emergency phase. After the JP movement, various kinds of NGOs came into the scene in different parts of the country. With this development, it became increasingly difficult to confine the idea of civil society to the charitable organizations or to organizations like universities. As the term civil society is being popularly used in the present context, the meaning has gone beyond this initial stage, which was closer to the Western notion of the term. In its new meaning, the term civil society incorporates the phenomenon that we used to call non-party politics. If we want to understand the meaning of civil society today, we should not neglect this conceptual evolution that took place in post-Emergency India.

At this point, I would like to again emphasize the idea of 'non-party political formation', particularly because the idea does not hide the political content of the movements. This concept is necessary for unpacking the complexities of various forms of democratic practices in India. I find it strange that people in anticorruption movements call themselves

non-political although they are political in every sense of the term, except that it is not electoral and party-political that is being referred to.

In the meanwhile, in my view, a more urgent theoretical question awaits our attention: What has been the primary source of the tremendous political energy we witness in India today—democracy or modernity? It is crucial to address this question if we wish to begin disentangling democracy from modernity, theoretically and phenomenologically. This might also help us situate civil society in the midst of ongoing, para-institutional democratic politics, rather than in the supposedly exclusive and passive middle-class (elite) politics of influence and networking. Civil society politics is not a politics of cabals, nor an informal (even though non-institutional) politics of 'favour banks' where accounts are held of the favours done and received in the course of using one's official power for unofficial, pecuniary purposes. (The author Paulo Coelho uses the term 'favour banks' to ascribe a relationship of delayed payment.) I find the term quite useful for characterizing the informal elite politics where favours are internally exchanged among bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen for the benefit of each other. Such a Mutual Favours Society does not carry a civic, public identity in a real sense. It cannot be called in any sense a civil society. I would like to think of civil society as the third kind of politics, expanding and making spaces between the politics of vote banks and favour banks.[3]

Non-party Political Formations

When the term civil society descended upon the Indian political scene, a vigorous debate was on about the sector of democratic politics that operated outside the representational institutions of State, i.e., elections and political parties. The debate was initiated by the activists and public intellectuals associated with the Lokayan movement. They conceptualized and popularized the idea of non-party politics and characterized this sector of democratic politics as non-party political (formations) groups and movements. Compared to civil society, the non-party political formations were a more focused and appropriate conceptualization of the phenomenon. This idea of non-party politics, however, was not the same as that of the party-less democracy developed by Jayaprakash Narayan in the early 1960s since it did not seek the idea of replacement of parliamentary democracy by direct, participatory democracy.

The thrust of the debate raised by Lokayan was to carve out, and highlight, the aspect/arena of politics in a parliamentary democracy that

represented the phenomenal world of democratic politics. But the practitioners of institutional politics (the party politicians) were skeptical of this idea and a section of political theorists saw it as representing some archaic idea of democracy and perhaps also a threat to liberal democracy itself.[4] The non-party political formations referred to individual actors (social activists) and groups whose intentions and programmes were essentially political, but eschewed the politics of parties and elections. The debate reminded the citizens that democratic politics was not all about parties and elections. The role non-party politics performed was largely in terms of raising and communicating specific issues of people to the political establishment and of compelling it to address these issues by mobilizing popular support. These were also called grass-roots movements. Then, there were State-level support organizations of the grass-roots movements whose main terrain of activity was to engage the State in a dialectic of oppositional protest and cooperation.

These grass-roots movement worked with, and on behalf of, the people, a vast number of marginalized groups of people in the economy and society all over the country, whose needs and rights were not even perceived by political parties and, when seen, were not considered important enough to be articulated as issues of electoral politics. The kinds of problems the people faced were simply not amenable to creating vote banks. For the local, rural communities governmental corruption had become so rampant that it virtually became a life and death issue for them. A non-party political group, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), founded by Aruna Roy and her colleagues worked hand in hand with the affected people in Rajasthan and succeeded in compelling the officials to administer development works in a corruption-free manner. Eventually, MKSS developed into a national-level campaign for 'right to information' as a means to fight governmental corruption. These are the kinds of non-party political process and movements that typified Lokayan's concept of *non-party* political formation. Other examples are a network of non-party groups and movements: National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM) led by Medha Patkar, and the *Manushi* movement for economic rights of the poor, especially cycle rickshaw pullers and *rehdy patriwallas*, founded and led by Madhu Purnima Kiswar. There have been many more such micro-movements in the south, east and other parts of India. I have mentioned these examples only as illustrations. The debate on non-party political formations was sidelined as the idea of civil society became fashionable. Significantly, however, the idea

of people's grass-roots movements survives in an important section of the activist world by its Hindi name *jan-andolan*.

Expectations and Organizational Forms

In looking at the issue of expectations from the non-party political formation sector, three broad sets are discernible. One stems from the constant, even if latent, political urge among social activists to bring about a 'revolution' in the society. The expectation is that regeneration of the voluntary sector will create conditions for the birth of an ideal political party that will address itself systematically, and on a long-term basis, to creating a new politics of social transformation. The form that an organization adopts in this context is of the type that allows it to function as a 'movement'—a proto-political party. Its effectiveness is to be judged in terms of its ability to bring about changes in mainstream politics. It works on the assumption that social transformation cannot be effected without political power. This expectation is latently held by many activists of the JP movement, and manifestly by some of those Naxalite groups which function over-ground and participate in competitive politics. In fact, most organizations working with the self-image of movement groups will aspire to achieving an organizational form of a revolutionary/alternative political party in the making.

The second set of expectations arises from viewing the voluntary sector as a *fifth estate* (after media as the fourth estate). The members of this estate, NGO functionaries and so on, although not elected or accountable to specific constituencies, acquire significant clout by working as pressure groups within the system through advocacy and other means. From this perspective, the sector can be seen as providing mechanisms for effecting self-correction of ongoing social and political systems. Many contentious issues arise within this framework: the lack of accountability of organizations, the transparency or otherwise of their functioning, their funding sources and allocation of resources, the corruptibility of their functionaries, relationships of organizations with populations for whom and on whose behalf they work and so on.

The third axis along which examination of expectations from the voluntary sector is possible is to view it as a sphere of alternative development, allowing great play for social imagination and creativity of individuals. Organizations active in this sphere are engaged in socio-economic and cultural activities and are often led by and identified with a single individual. I believe Indian individualism is of a special kind and the voluntary sector is a

good space in which to see the personality-based efficacy of organizations flourish. In such cases, expectations from the organization become directly related to the image of an individual and his/her performance, as a result of which a whole host of related standards of judgement are applied. At the same time, individual-centred organizations impart a particular kind of vulnerability to the voluntary sector in India. Many such organizations are facing formidable problems of decentralized functioning, credit sharing and succession. In addition to thinking of these challenges, I believe we should see the exercise of setting up an organization or initiating a micro-movement as an act of social creativity by an individual. Such organizations are uniquely Indian and have quite a few success stories to report. They should therefore not be judged on the basis of their genesis alone.

Further, since form is directly linked to expectations and to substantive programmes an organization adopts, it is crucial to focus on how an organization evolves the form through which it is functioning. For instance, how should one judge an organization like Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)? Not many are aware that SEWA (Ahmedabad) is formally a registered trade union. Its history lies in trade unionism as much as in the Gandhian movement and a sensitivity to the condition of self-employed women. Any attempt to treat SEWA's form and identity as providing a clue to its functioning must take all these elements into account. Similarly, unlike many movement groups and organizations, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) is not registered as a 'society'. Yet it continues to function continuously at the national and State levels effectively as a full-fledged organization and movement. Forms of activity and the dynamism of functioning that have evolved over time in each of these two organizations cannot be seen as having emerged from its moment of origin or its legal identity.

In fact, in our voluntary sector, the integrity or otherwise of the form that an organization acquires is linked to the kind of leadership it has. Since the leadership is usually individual-oriented, the form remains flexible, but not necessarily diffused. An organization's origins, its legal identity, the patterns of its growth and its contemporary role and functions, however, do not always exist as elements of one coherent entity. Yet, even an individual-centred organization acquires, over time, an institutional form, which imparts a certain image and boundary to its functioning. Ironically, such an evolution of institutional form is often made possible by a prolonged continuation of one individual in the leadership role. Both the strength and vulnerability of the sector thus lie in what seems to be this uniquely Indian

(individual-centred) form of voluntary action. It is for this reason that an organization's legal identity, its stated goals and objectives, or its organizational chart often do not constitute enough information to understand its form.

Although there is a current of opinion that sees the ambiguity of the 1860 Act as a drawback that works against the standardization and development of the voluntary sector, I think it allows a great deal of scope for innovating organizational forms suited to specific tasks and goals voluntary organizations set for themselves from time to time. As organizations and movements grow and develop, a certain logic of organizational form determined by an organization's leadership, size and scope of activities may impose itself. As activities and expectations increase, a small, dynamic group of activists functioning effectively but in an ad hoc and informal manner tends to acquire the characteristics of a more settled, formal organization. It is in this process that movements often shed their movement orientation and undergo processes of routinization. Many groups within the Bodh Gaya movement, e.g., had to adopt non-movement NGO traits as they expanded and their roles evolved. At the same time, any work at the grass roots that does not define itself as political must of necessity acquire some political characteristics of a movement, because people in our country are rights-deprived in numerous ways and their rights often remain invisible and unrecognized. Even good non-political work cannot begin without addressing the issue of rights in one way or the other. It is for this reason that a routinized, apolitical NGO is often expected to perform the role of a movement group. Every entity in this sector is thus liable to frequent organizational and programmatic changes. In this process, some organizations undergo mutative changes and devise new forms to cope with new challenges. Many, however, become dormant or even die—paradoxically—in their effort to preserve the form!

The issue of organizational form isn't simply a matter of mapping the sector and its units according to organizational types. It demands serious attention, without prejudice in favour of or against specific types, as it is central to understanding the framework within which the relationship between voluntary action and social transformation is articulated in practice. For instance, constructive work, as understood in the Gandhian tradition, is significantly different from the development work which today many Gandhian organizations have adopted. Historically, Gandhian constructive work was political; it grew out of a political agenda and was undertaken as acts of resistance against the colonial State and the political culture it

represented. Development work of the last few decades has depoliticized several Gandhian organizations.

Parties and Non-party Political Formations

Political parties were not happy with the academics and activists privileging 'non-party' organizations. Even in the early 1980s, they thought that such movements and organizations undermined their political salience. Left parties, in particular the Communist parties, did not like it at all. In fact, in the mid-1980s, the leader of the Communist Party, Prakash Karat, wrote an article in his party organ arguing that the rise of non-party political organizations represented yet another strategy of the bourgeoisie to counter the revolutionary politics of the Left. Some of us, however, saw this development as one containing the seeds of a new politics of democratizing Indian democracy. It not only raised the political participation and awareness of people at large but energized the political action of groups, leading to high-intensity politics of rights in the country as a whole, a phenomenon that was later described by V.S. Naipaul as a million mutinies.[5] It was a phenomenon radically different from the established public institutions and organizations conventionally identified as 'civil society' such as the universities, colleges, philanthropic organizations, social services and welfare groups.[6] The Left-Communist parties were not unhappy with the academician confining the idea of civil society to such apolitical spaces as it did not threaten the Left monopoly of radical/revolutionary politics. Their hostility was to the public intellectuals and academics who recognized and supported (and some even led) non-hegemonic, democratic radicalization of politics.

The political parties' discomfort with non-party politics was, however, not confined to the Left parties. This was easy to understand. The non-party political groups were seen by political parties as usurpers of party-political spaces. They raised new issues in politics. They made demands on the State, which were pressed politically and processed and converted into rights, a kind of politics the parties had left behind when they ceased to be movements. A significant amount of theoretical and empirical work was done describing and analysing this phenomenon that acquired the shape of a movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan. But it developed and expanded in the 1980s and 1990sinto myriad micro-movements at the grass roots engaged in the politics of rights for marginalized and socially and economically deprived rural as well as urban populations. This spurt in grass-roots politics captured the political imagination of the Indian youth and

significant innovations were made in the politics of protest, and in devising programmes for alternative developments. Today, all kinds of political initiatives and campaigns in the arena of non-party politics are lumped into a singular idea and given the name, especially by the media, of civil society. This is what has happened with Anna Hazare's campaign against corruption. It has been virtually personified by the media, and that too with an address: civil society @Jantar Mantar! It is high time we pay serious theoretical attention to democratic politics and conceptually clearly differentiate between politics of civil society of movements and of parties.

Academics and Non-party Political Formations

The tendency of Indian academics to readily give up what they are doing if a new fashionable word comes up from the West is a known fact. There is of course no harm in adopting a new term from wherever it comes, but it must be linked to our experience so that we could correctly and more appropriately use it in our own context, the kind of thing we have perhaps done with the concept of 'secularism'. The problem arises when a clearer concept, describing appropriately the reality at hand, is abruptly dumped in favour of a catch-all term!

Indian academicians, especially sociologists and political scientists, began to make serious use of the term 'civil society' sometime towards the end of the Cold War, more specifically in the post-Emergency era: the former in their attempt to make sense of changes democratic politics had brought in the Indian society and the latter perhaps to make up for the deficit in the democratic theory caused by its excessive concern with formal, institutional democracy and neglect of substantive politics of movements. This neglect, in fact, continues to constrict the theory's view of political power to mainly the power of the modern democratic State, and its institutions. The focus on institutional power (and, of course, the concern for its legitimacy) daunts the theorist from boldly inserting the non-institutional forms and processes of political power, emerging from non-party[7] democratic politics, as a phenomenon relevant for theorizing (Indian) democracy. Consequently, the theory's focus remains primarily on the modernity of India's democratic State and only secondarily on its democratic character.

As a result, the democratic theory of India has been badly entangled with the theory of modernity. This has led to a tremendous loss of perspective involving the non-recognition of those forms of political participation that do not revolve around elections and political parties producing peculiar

dialectic in India, between democracy and modernity. Further, the theory does not easily bring in its ambit the non-(pre)modern sources of political power which are also presumed to be non-(pre)democratic. The fact, however, is that the non/premodern forms get transmuted into new contemporary forms of power which the institutions of democracy have to constantly cope with. This antecedent structure of power, even though modified and tempered by democratic politics, is represented in the power of the contemporary elites. It is the play of this elite power that constitutes a big challenge to India's democratization, even as it works as an engine for its modernization. It is a formidable challenge verging on a threat to democracy because the historically persisting elite structure of power is constitutive of the institutional power of India's liberal democracy and, ironically, the harbinger of its 'modernization'.

The basic issue is how the people (the ruled) can achieve the maximum degree of representation and a say in governance. The concept of representation in India needs a deeper theoretical-philosophical effort. Since electoral politics has been taken as the defining feature of democracy, and elections constitute the main source of its legitimacy, the elected political leaders often fail to recognize the democratic role that the other 'non-party' public leaders play and, in a different but democratically crucial sense, also *represent* the people in the nation's politics. It is the fear of such representation by non-elected leaders that perhaps explains why the party politicians and some media leaders tried to project Anna Hazare's movement as constituting a danger to India's democratic polity.

We have, thus, one kind of scholar and political commentator who still uses the term civil society, with its conventional Western trappings, and feels unhappy when the concept is being extended to incorporate protest movements. It is essentially the fear of politics itself. The fear turns into a terrifying thought, a nightmare, when protests assume the form of direct action politics. We have no inbuilt mechanisms or sufficient theoretical clarity of the kind of politics that people could resort to when the democratically (electorally) acquired political power of legislators and the constitutionally sanctioned power of the government administrators are used 'illegally' in the name of the executive that has been systemically allowed to monopolize governmental power. The situation becomes worse when such power is used for, and on behalf of, a clan or a family which rules the party that numerically dominates the government or has a power to hold it in balance (read ransom). Preventing the decline of institutions should therefore acquire utmost priority for the theorists as well as the practitioners

of democratic politics. The question is what kind of political means are available to people in such a situation. It is in this context that the idea of direct political action becomes relevant, demanding serious theoretical attention. The overall practical challenge is how to invest the reality of non-electoral power, which sometimes may take undemocratic populist forms, with democratic content. Innovating new forms and mechanisms in the practice of democratic politics, and developing a comparative theoretical understanding of its principles and functioning (in different social-cultural and historical contexts) are therefore crucial to prevent further decline of its institutions and in the long run to evolve broad-based alternative forms of representation and participation.

The Issue of Funding

Shifting from the conceptual and genealogical level to the practical level, an issue that has been uniformly controversial is the sources of funding for voluntary action. Most voluntary organizations face a resource crunch. A lack of serious work on the political economy of movements in the voluntary sector and, more particularly, the absence of mechanisms for dignified support to independent social activists represent major lacunae in the institutional structure of the sector. Our tradition of philanthropy, such that it is, needs to be explored. Foreign funding is generally mistrusted, and, by extension, organizations that accept and utilize funds from foreign sources are suspect. There are good reasons for this wariness, but it is dangerous to completely discredit this source of support in the resource-starved situation we find ourselves in. As a general rule, Indians do not donate to secular-philanthropic causes, which appear to them distant and abstract in terms of relating their act of donation to concrete individuals and groups to whom it will bring succour or to earning merit for themselves for the next birth. Even corporate funding is minimal and is often channelled to the organizations set up by the company and whose functioning is tightly controlled by it. I do not think there is anything inherently wrong in using funds from non-national sources.

Broadly speaking, there are three attitudes *vis-à-vis* foreign donors. One is opposed to such funding in principle, and looks elsewhere for resources. The second is donor-driven, with the donor determining not only the programme areas the NGO operates in but often strategies and methods as well. The third is more interactive, where the recipient attempts to educate the donor to bring their thinking around to the NGO's own

approach, and in the process seek to equalize and democratize the relationship. The latter involves a complex process of negotiation with the funding agency. While individual organizations can retain their own perspective and agenda in the face of foreign funding and any accompanying conditions, this can by and large be quite problematic across the sector as a whole. The general problems are a distortion of priorities (in the sequence and choice of tasks) and the replacement of indigenously defined problems by another (imported) paradigm. For instance, child labour is often defined in very alien terms; the discourse of development can be influenced by foreign policy concerns of countries to which the donor agencies belong and by global frameworks ill-suited to local conditions. With money comes a fairly specific discourse.

This influence can be of two kinds, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One, global or international funding brings with it a global discourse and its own set of priorities. Two, the symbolic and literal language of activism changes. Some organizations become mediators or translators for the global agendas of funding agencies acting as a bridge between them and the local NGOs. Two worlds of activism are thereby created: the local, grass-roots, mofussil world with, at one extreme, its committed (and literally barefoot) activists, and, at the other extreme, the world of global, metropolitan centres with their jet-setting activists who exercise both intellectual and monetary power over the local, the peripheral. Money isn't neutral and there is a great need to negotiate these spaces more creatively, yet carefully. A larger, institutional challenge is to redistribute wealth at the global level, to find ways to actualize the idea that global wealth is a source of generating global commons. The United Nations was to pull together 1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of each member country. It has been unsuccessful in all these years.

In conclusion, let me now attempt to pull all these concerns together. The key issue here of democratic politics is that a democratic State can't remain confined to its own organizations and institutions. It needs civil society so that political action, which can often turn lawless and violent, is brought into the frame of democratic protests and dialogues. This is why since colonial times the State has looked for, and even promoted, organized forms of protests and cooperation that it can deal with. It should therefore not have surprised us that the Planning Commission recognized non-governmental and voluntary organizations for implementing developmental schemes as well as for seeking their advice in the planning process.

Civil society, as stated earlier, is in a dialectical relationship with the State—democratic or otherwise. It does not have to necessarily always be against it. Here, we are talking about a democratic State. In the tradition of Marx, Hegel and Gramsci, civil society is a part of the bourgeois State. Even Partha Chatterjee in his critique of civil society is not stating something drastically different from this. His contribution lies in devising the concept of 'political society' and thus recognizing an aspect of democratic politics which need not be discarded in the name of civil society.[8] In a manner of thinking, he conceptually saves an aspect of liberal democracy from the ongoing Marxist theoretical onslaught on it.

One can see two important impacts of globalization on Indian civil society. The first is the emergence of the politicized and growing middle class and its entry into global civil society. With this development, liberal democracy, which was always linked to the idea of liberal or liberalized economy, has now acquired, in a manner of speaking, the character of a market democracy. The second is implicit in the first, namely, the reduced legitimacy of representative governments. Global democracy is thus conceived as democratic but not in the sense of being representative. It is so more in the sense of being consultative. The idea has certainly shifted from a representational to a consultative, expert-based governance, which is non-representative but democratic in the sense of making governance transparent and procedurally accountable. We can give the example of increasing credibility of such institutions as the Election Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and the higher judiciary in India or the global watch–type of organizations in areas of environment, civil rights and other transnational institutions. In this context, trust, rather than representation, has become more important. At the same time, this will increase the power of 'international' experts and technocrats.

The functions of the State have been changing for some time. Its area of operation is malleable, shrinking in some parts, expanding in others. The voluntary sector thus acquires new meanings as it takes over functions abandoned by the State. It, in fact, acts as an antidote to some ills created by the rapidly changing functions of both the State and market. The State and market, however, are not the only institutions exhibiting rapid change. The nature of the family, locality, community is also undergoing transformation. Communities are losing territories, retaining only some of their past functions. Within this framework of flux and change, the voluntary sector could be seen as an emerging network of new social and political institutions expected to fill different kinds of vacuums and assume roles created by

economic, social and cultural changes occurring simultaneously at, arguably, an unprecedented pace in human history. It is in this perspective that the sector will have to come up with imaginative and institutionally creative responses to expectations that have emerged for it, from deep anxieties and fears in the society experiencing all-round rapid changes.

Notes

1. See Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnana, "Civil Society: History and Possibilities", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
2. See Neera Chandhoke, "State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory", New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995; N. Jayaram (ed) "On Civil Society: Issues and Perspectives", New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005.
3. We will have to find some other name for internal intrigues and deals made in the corridors of power. Of course, this network of exchanging huge 'gifts' (for work done or expected to be done), when it becomes thicker and when it grows wider, comes into 'public' view and is seen for what it is: crony capitalism. In another context, we have seen such cliquing together of bureaucrats, big business and politicians for pecuniary and party-political benefits covered by an ideological veneer of socialism. It did not unfortunately get the name it deserved: (bureaucratic) crony socialism.
4. Kaviraj and Khilnani, op cit.
5. V.S. Naipaul. "India: A Million Mutinies Now", Minerva, 1997.
6. Putnam, Robert. "Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy", New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.
7. Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Trajectories of the Indian State: Politics and Ideas", New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012.
8. Partha Chatterjee, "The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World", New Jersey: Columbia University Press, 2006.

CHAPTER 6

Transformative Politics of Grass-Roots Movements

Politics of Development

There is indeed no dearth of normative and ideological critiques of the prevalent model of development. There are also several new models being advanced at the abstract level of ideological 'alternatives' to the prevalent model. But no coherent view has yet been developed of the numerous experiments, movements and organizational initiatives that struggle on the ground, in the already cramped intellectual and political spaces, to make 'development' a relevant concept, a direct experience in the lives of the deprived, the oppressed and the impoverished—populations who have either been untouchables of development or, when touched, are adversely affected and become its victims. It is in these initiatives at the grass roots that another approach to development is becoming manifest. However vague their conception of the alternatives, and however internally inconsistent their programmes might appear to the onlooker, they all share a common perception about the nature and sources of the misery of the 'left out' as a consequence of the prevailing model of development.

The development establishment is, of course, not impervious to the threat these grass-roots initiatives hold for its constituent groups of beneficiaries—the scientific, bureaucratic, managerial, military and business elites with their economic entitlements, social privilege and political clout, and with international backing for the same. It views struggles for livelihood and dignity being waged everyday by action-movement groups and people's own organizations on the ground as counterproductive to development

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efforts of the State as well as unfriendly to the market forces which the State has now undertaken to assist and expand. If it fails to co-opt such initiatives on the ground within its sprawling networks of patronage and power, the development establishment would devise modes of curbing them. It would use raw power of the State, and bureaucratic subterfuges, if such grass-roots initiatives acquire a form of protest against the implementation of development schemes ostensibly designed to benefit the poor but the control mechanisms of which lie with the national and, now increasingly, with the international techno-bureaucratic elites.

A more subtle process is also at work seeking to delegitimize the achievements of the grass-roots initiatives. This is done in the name of 'evaluation' studies of these new experiments and organizations mounted by established social scientists, both foreign and local. In this, the work and role of grass-roots movements is often assessed not in terms intrinsic to their existence and purpose but in essentially non-political terms and against the predetermined establishment criteria of what development is and what it is not. They are so often judged, especially when found politically effective, as movements counterproductive to growth and development and, often by implication, against 'national interest'. The strategies adopted by the development establishment, for co-opting and curbing grass-roots initiatives when found to run counter to its ideology and policies of development, should not surprise anyone.

Of greater concern to us here are the critiques of development mounted by the ideological 'alternativists'. With a few notable exceptions, many among these alternativist thinkers, either due to their preconceived ideological notions or because of their remoteness from the real world of action, have failed in their theorization in taking account of aspirations and experiments articulated in the struggles of the action-movement groups and peoples' own organizations at the grassroots. While these critiques energized the discourse on alternative development in India and supplied the grass-roots movements for over a decade with globally communicable terms of protest against the prevalent model of development, their appeal today seems to have faded for the grass-roots activists. The cut and dried analyses contained in the critiques have ceased to inspire the politics of movements, which is now increasingly addressed to redefine and reorient the development process, rather than rejecting it outright. Put differently, the politics of grass-roots movements has been lately converging on rejecting Development (with capital D) and redefining development in non-hegemonic, pluralistic terms using inductively arrived at insights and criteria evolved

by them from their struggles on several other fronts: feminism, ecology, human rights and social justice. In confronting the established model of development, their politics is about making development a bottom-upward process, directly relevant and an edifying experience for the poor as opposed to development, which has become an exclusionary device, an instrument of political, economic and cultural hegemony of metropolitan elites within the nation as well as globally. This is particularly so because the global scene of development has significantly changed in the post–cold war world of today.

With the end of the cold war the development establishment itself is giving up some old assumptions about universalizing development for all and is dismantling the coldwar structures of aid and assistance. In their place, a new global economic regime of trade and fiscal control is being set up. It works on two assumptions of dispersal of political controls over the economies of the Third World, on the one hand, and of centralization of political and military power globally in the hands of the already rich and powerful countries as the basis of their global hegemony, on the other. This new global arrangement is seen as ensuring international economic and political stability under conditions of inequality among nations. These changes at the global level have made the old critiques of development which, in a large part, centre on the role of the State in development somewhat irrelevant if not redundant. The changes have also created a political void for the movements, which, by and large, have been used to targeting their protests against the development model in anti-governmental terms—the governments which in the countries of the Global South have become instruments of the powerful global forces. What then is the politics of alternative development that the grass-roots movements in India can pursue in the post–cold war world? Some patterns of this politics are becoming visible.

First, there seems to be a return to an earlier assumption that a political action for alternative development should not be derived deductively from a received theory, not even the theory based on the global alternativist critiques of development. Instead, it should emerge from the concrete and specific struggles of the people themselves. Consequently, the emphasis is placed on such issues as decision-making not only in choosing means but in defining ends of development. The emphasis is, once again, being laid on social justice and equity as well as on citizenship rights and even rights of the unborn.

Second, the issue of development is being increasingly viewed in political terms, engaging the movements in the larger issue of democratization—not only of the polity (State), but of economic organization (work and work place) and social organizations (ranging from the national society to family). Thus, remaining sensitive to the gender, ecological, cultural and human rights aspects involved in redefining development, the concrete struggles are political in nature; they are primarily about confronting the hegemonic structures of power—locally, nationally and globally. The strategies of action have been so far in the form of protests, but they also emphasize withdrawal of legitimation to the prevalent structures of domination and resistance, to imposed homogeneity of attitudes, tastes and lifestyles—whether these are imposed by the market or through an ideology of majoritarian nationalism, or by the State acting on behalf of the national and global interest of the metropolitan elites. By readjusting their activities to the changed national and global economic context of the post–coldwar world, the grass-roots movements in India are thus articulating the idea of alternative development in terms of concrete political struggles waged against various programmes of Structural Adjustment being devised by the State. This is evident in their assessment of the new market model of development on which I shall now elaborate.

The grass-roots movements, while conceding that the economy is growing in volume, find its impact for removing poverty and unemployment to be negligible. It continues, in their view, to operate on the principle of social and cultural exclusion of groups from the ranks of the middle classes. The Indian middle class has indeed grown in magnitude incorporating over decades the erstwhile poor households of the higher social strata in its composition. But it is still a class, by and large, consisting of the upper castes of the *dwijas*. Seen in secular terms, the prevalent economic growth model has little to offer to the vast multitudes in the unorganized and informal sector. The model simply holds them to ransom for cheap and perennial labour supply as and when needed by the organized economy. Whatever benefits that were supposed to trickle to them have stopped half way. On the other hand, the model offers ever-increasing standards of living to those with some entitlements (e.g., land, education, social privileges) and by virtue of which they form a part of the small organized sector in the economy. For those outside the organized sector, it is only malnutrition, destitution and semi-starvation. Only the line is now drawn rather firmly and looks almost unerasable.

Further, the new market model of development increasingly perceives rural development as a problem of *sectoral development*, monitored through an input–output calculus where inputs are made in the rural economy for obtaining outputs for use in the urban-industrial sector. The index to measure rural development has thus become one of growing dependency (its euphemism being 'integration') of the rural production system in the urban-industrial economy which regulates the markets, monitors supplies and demands, commands the polity and thereby lays down priorities not only for the economy but for the lives of the vast dependent populations. The movement-activists find it astounding that a programme of colonial-type exploitation of the primary producers (the vast populations of tribals, artisans, small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers) by a small urban-industrial elite, and its client class of a dependent rural elite, can persist, even thrive in the market economy. In other words, it seems to them that the market economy, instead of making a dent on the social structure, is in fact being absorbed by it.

Worse still, millions among the rural population continue to be deprived of even the doubtful privilege of being 'dependents' of the organized economy. Their need to survive cannot become an effective demand in the market for they practically have no purchasing power. They are exposed to a kind of doom, a state of destitution, semi-starvation and chronic malnutrition, a long period of physical and psychological stunting, and slow death.[1] For them the problem is sheer physical survival, not 'development'.

Further, the State and the political process having lost their commanding position vis-à-vis the economy, intervention on behalf of the poor to restrain the market forces from destroying the local subsistence economies and their natural environs (which at least provided food and shelter to the poor) is becoming less effective. The State is also unable to replace such destruction with any credible system of welfare and the 'integrating' national economy has no place for the displaced and the uprooted. So, the poor swarm like destitute refugees into the cities. The vast populations, affected adversely by development, are unable to make a forceful enough demand on the mainstream democratic process either because the polity has begun to move along the fringes of the market or because it has itself acquired the character of a market. Moreover, the destitute people comprise occupationally disparate and socially fragmented populations (often found to belong to opposite camps in the local social structure), groups which simply cannot be organized like the industrial workers in trade unions.

The combined impact of this emergent economic and political situation on the poorest among the poor is that they are entitled to become neither full wage-earners in the economy nor full-fledged citizens in the polity. For them there is no transitional pathway in sight in the present economic and political framework of development. They cannot graduate from penury to any livable standard or from subjecthood to citizenship or from an endemic state of starvation, disease and destitution to basic needs satisfaction. They do not have enough of a material base to enable them to reflect on their condition and to acquire radical consciousness. Lost for them also are the securities of the traditional social order, which is already shaken at the roots. In proportional terms, their number may have decreased but by a rough estimate the 'left-outs' of development and market still constitute a staggering figure in absolute numbers of over 200 million(2016 figures). More significant is that their exclusion is social-systemic rather than purely economic in nature, a large majority of this population being constituted by tribals, *dalits* and the lower rungs of the erstwhile *shudra* communities and sections of minorities. The established economic and political institutions often aided by the analyses of social scientists have, however, docketed their problem as either of 'over population' or (when they create trouble only to face ruthless repression) of 'law and order'.

Informed by this assessment, the grass-roots movements by and large work for and with the bottom-most population, which is written off by development as well as by institutional politics. The emphasis of their programmes varies widely from raising the level of material life to raising consciousness, to demanding a rightful share in the national cake, to working for self-reliant economic, social and cultural development in the local or regional settings. But almost all grass-roots activists are, in their different ways, in search for an alternative to the present model of development in which the *bottom-most population can find a rightful place as producers in the economy and citizens in the polity.*

It is in this context that new strategies of action are being worked out by several grass-roots movements and organizations to counter both the State and the market models of development. It should, however, be noted that such new thinking and action strategies are being carried out in the context of various local milieus and in response to problems of specific population groups in which, and for whom, the grass-roots organizations are working. These initiatives have not yet acquired a durable macro-formation. But, in the meanwhile, they have been able to register a clear departure from the old Statist as well as the new market-democracy models of development.

The Alternative Idea of Development

There are at least six different conceptual and political challenges that emerge from this alternatist framing. First, the new change agents and grass-roots organizations do not view poverty purely as an economic problem, one of just enlarging the national cake through capital accumulation and growth so that benefits of such economic development will almost automatically trickle down to the bottom. Instead, they view poverty as a function of the social-structural locations of the poor which meet with barriers that separate the world of development (with all its legal, political and economic immunities and insulations) from the world of poverty (with all its vulnerabilities and exposures to exploitation and their unorganized and helpless nature). Their perception of these barriers is not primarily in terms of economic classes, and therefore their strategies of action are not purely in terms of class struggle. They believe that the new social-political formations of the poor and the deprived, being grounded in caste and ethnic structures dividing the world of the poor along different socio-cultural lines, makes pure class-based movements difficult to organize. Hence their emphasis is first on organizing the social categories, such as the backward castes, the *dalits*, the tribals, as also the women, and, only secondarily, on evolving strategies for their joint fronts. Accordingly, their initiatives and programmes work not only against economic exploitation of the poor but also against the new forms of social and cultural exploitation. This is especially evident in their work among the *dalits*, tribals and women.

Second, the grass-roots groups reject the 'inputs' view of rural development as a partial and lopsided one since a large majority of the population lacks any economic and organizational capacity to receive and use inputs such as credit, seeds, fertilizers, irrigated water and soon. These inputs are simply swallowed by the upper stratum of the rural society. Their focus of activity is more on creating various capabilities among the rural poor than in merely taking them as different packages of inputs dispensed by the development establishment. The general approach of the grass-roots groups is not to work for such administrative units as a revenue village, a block or a district. They prefer working with specific vulnerable groups within and across these units. Instead of working as middle-men of development, they prefer to work directly among the poor relying increasingly on the internal resources—economic, social, cultural and political—of the people themselves.

Third, the grass-roots organizations view rural development not as a problem of efficient implementation and management of given schemes and programmes but essentially as a *struggle* for establishing the economic and political rights of the poorest among the poor. These are necessary for their very survival. Thus they demand direct institutional intervention—of the State, the judiciary and the 'fourth estate'—to protect the rights of the poor, a precondition to ameliorating their situation. At the same time, they organize the people for struggles against the institutions of the State whenever these come in the way of peoples' own empowerment.

Fourth, they resist ongoing attempts by the bureaucratic and the technocratic elites for de-politicization of the development process. For them it is only through the politicization of the poor that development can reach the poor. The poorest among the poor, having no purchasing power, cannot create a demand for themselves in the economic market, so the demand has to be made politically effective. Political parties have, by and large, failed to achieve this for the poor. Even the need for votes gets them only transient benefits around election times, if at all. On the whole, even these go to the intermediaries. The new change agents and action groups, therefore, are devoting themselves progressively to organizing the vulnerable groups politically through struggles on specific issues. Through this process they are building for themselves a new political credibility, which they do not seek to encash electorally, but to create a long-term impact on the nature of Indian politics.

Fifth, the development administration having failed in its role of linking the policies and programmes of the government with the felt needs of the people, especially the poorest, the scope of grass-roots initiatives in this regard has immensely increased. But this role cannot be performed without giving a political content to their economic programmes. It is in this respect that the economic activities they organize and promote for extremely poor populations differ from the developmental programmes being implemented by the State under the bureaucracy.

The decline of normal politics (of parties and elections), on the one hand, has made the State less accountable in respect to its development expenditures. The growing desperation of the poor with their deteriorating living conditions, on the other hand, is pushing them towards more chaotic and violent actions in the social sphere. To overcome this counterproductive trend the change agents at the grassroots are devising new forms of political action: militant but nonviolent protests against the so-called development projects involving massive displacement of the poor, sustained sensitization

of public opinion on adverse effects (economic, cultural and ecological) of such projects, mutual learning and training of cadres through dialogue and interaction among them, and a long-term process of close identity of language and lifestyle between change agents themselves and the people. They are, in the process, redefining economic demands in terms of political and cultural rights. It is through this process that they seek to mediate between the coercion of the haves and the anarchy of the have-nots.

Sixth, since the new change agents and activist groups are not enamoured by the logic of capturing State power as a precondition for social transformation, they are more inclined to work with long-term programmes emphasizing decentralization of economic and political power. This helps them to integrate the hitherto neglected social and cultural issues in formulating their economic and political programmes. All this allows them greater flexibility and openness, experimentation and innovation in devising their programmes and picking up issues. Health, environment, education, the role of science and technology and other such issues have all become, for them, simultaneously developmental and political.

In sum, the grass-roots initiatives in India today are in the nature of both a critique and a protest against the prevailing model of development. Their long-term goal is, however, to evolve an alternative approach to development that is more holistic, transcends economism and is self-consciously political on behalf of those sections of society whom modern 'development' has rendered impoverished, destitute and starving.

The Decline of Institutional Politics

Having identified the six different conceptual and political challenges of grass-roots movements to the establishment idea of development, let me rewind a bit and locate the emergence of these movements in the decline of institutional politics and the opening of new political possibilities of representing the interests of the excluded and marginalized. A gap emerged between the formal spaces of politics and the non-formal spaces where the excluded were located, allowing many movements to occupy the social spaces created by the decline of the conventional mainstream politics of legislatures, elections, political parties and trade unions by the end of the second decade after Independence. This decline, although it began earlier, became visible during the Emergency (1975–1977) and has continued since.[2] The result is the retreat of democratic institutions from open, competitive politics where they continually sought to establish their claims

for legitimation, and their transformation into the pure politics of power and manoeuvre.[3] In the process, the political parties lost their national character, both in political and geographical terms. Their role in inducting new groups into politics, through waging struggles for their legal and political rights, was considerably reduced. Their ability to process issues arising in the economy, society and culture declined greatly.

The parties failed to convert the economic demands of the poor and the deprived into effective political demands. Instead, some parties took the easy course of ethnicizing and communalizing the economic issues for electoral gains. The result was that the political process, which in the 1950s and 1960s worked for inclusion of the middle castes into the mainstream of Indian politics, got halted in the mid-1970s, keeping out large sections of ex-untouchables, the tribal peoples, the occupationally marginalized and economically extremely poor groups from among the ritually low-ranking Hindu castes, and the other poor and landless among the minorities. Of course, they were approached for their votes but only with all kinds of electoral gimmicks—the promise of *garibi hatao* in 1971 elections being the biggest of them all. Being leaderless, their struggles were sporadic and local in character and for that reason their survival and dignity ceased to be issues in mainstream politics. The populations involved in these struggles were dispersed and fragmented on many dimensions besides that of class. For this reason they were written off by the parties, especially those of the left, as unorganizable. In sum, the parties prematurely gave up their 'movement' aspect, becoming increasingly just electoral machines operating with makeshift arrangements at the grassroots at election time. Having lost the capacity to retain the durable social and economic support they had once built, they sought to forge such support anew at every election since 1971. The elections became more like referenda, and electoral mandates lost their appeal ceasing to inform the process of government formation and policy for any party elected to power.

The trade unions, which to begin with were like labour wings of the political parties with little autonomy of their own, became virtually bargaining counters between the people of the same class supposedly representing different interests. The unions showed a complete incapacity to expand their activities in the growing informal and unorganized sector of the economy. Workers in this unorganized sector had little to offer either electorally or in membership fees. Whatever ideological incentive was still there for expanding the activities of the trade unions to incorporate the workers outside the big factories and white-collar establishments got eroded

as trade unions' incomes grew ever larger from the frequently raised membership fees and not infrequently from the wheeling and dealing of the leadership. Tired, after long years of struggle, the union leadership got used to a cushy lifestyle and to a mentally non-taxing bureaucratic mode of functioning. In all this their activities assured a sound financial base to the parties to which they belonged. So party leaders had no reason to complain.[4]

The legislatures reflected this change in the wider politics. The Parliament increasingly became a handmaiden of the executive branch, with the ruling party using the brute force of its majority to silence any debate on issues it considered inconvenient and uncomfortable for the Government or its leaders. The net result was that the executive became the most powerful branch of governance and the judiciary the final arbiter of all political disputes. The political discourse began to be increasingly informed by narrow constitutionalist positions held by the executives and often endorsed by the lawcourts rather than by issues emerging from democratic politics.[5] The Indian Constitution, which was held not only as an instrument of governance but also as an agenda for social transformation, became a document sanitized from the flesh and blood of social and political movements which enriched democratic politics.

Emergence of Grass-roots Movements

It is in this context of the decline of institutional politics that the grass-roots movements emerged on the Indian political scene. They moved into niches yielded by the retreat of institutional politics. They took up issues and constituencies abandoned by the political parties and the trade unions, and those ill-served by the bureaucracy. In the process, they reformulated the issues and expanded their constituencies in a framework of politics that was non-electoral. The organizational form that evolved was not of a political party or a pressure group. It was a participative and mobilizational form of politics which sustained struggles on issues articulated by the people themselves and worked for their empowerment. Through these struggles they expanded the meaning of constitutional politics in so far as they sought to justify their struggles in terms of the Directive Principles of State Policy—a chapter in the Constitution, provisions of which are not justiciable in courts of law.

The grass-roots movements vary a great deal amongst themselves although they share common political arenas and a broadly similar

perspective on social transformation. The differences are with respect to their political lineage, size, geographical level of operation, which may vary from a highly local to the provincial and national levels, the importance they attach to some issues over others, the populations they work for and the organizational form they adopt. There are sporadic, short-term movements, addressing a particular issue such as the liberation of bonded labour. There are also the long-term movements, with a developed organizational form, working for a specific constituency, such as farmers' movements. Then there are a series of single-issue movements active at the national, State and local levels. These include the human rights organizations, working both in urban and rural areas. The most widespread ones are those that can be described as the 'movement groups of social activists'. These are groups of committed social activists forming themselves as a nucleus and working self-consciously as 'agency' for social and political transformation. By involving and mobilizing people, on issues concerning them directly, to begin with they seek to harness the social energy so released to a long-term movement for transforming power relations in the society.

In the decade after 1975, these groups of social activists multiplied into thousands and spread into different parts of the country.[6] They are now led by young men and women, usually from the middle or lower-middle classes who have left their professional careers and founded or joined these movement groups in the rural areas and the tribal belts of the country. They take up various causes on behalf of the marginalized populations of the *dalits*, the tribal peoples, the landless and women. They work on a long-term basis in small geographical areas for the goal they describe as 'empowerment of the people'. Some socially committed professionals and social activists have organized themselves for national-level campaigns for the right to shelter and to work.

Then there are legal aid groups, the groups for better health care for the people, popular culture and people's creativity groups, and popular science movements. There are also the new trade union movements launched by small groups of social activists organizing workers in the informal sector. These include organizations for self-employed women (SEWA), the *beedi* workers (involved in hand-rolling of Indian cigarettes), workers in construction and public works and those working in the small industrial and semi-industrial units like the powerloom and handloom factories. Included in this list, which is incomplete, are only those grass-roots movements that self-consciously see themselves in the role of creating social transformation by using new means of political action.(The traditional philanthropic and

welfare organizations, the non-political developmental organizations, various front organizations of political parties and the sect like organizations of the religious movements have been excluded from the conception of grass-roots movements, although the line dividing some of these organizations and those described here as grass-roots movements are thin).

The central thrust of these grass-roots groups and movements is the *politics of issues.* They have not only raised new issues but have kept alive the old unresolved ones, issues long since given up by the political parties. These include such broad issues as human rights, women's rights, child labour, ecology and communalism (chauvinism based on caste/religious identities or sentiments). More specific issues are also raised by different movements. These include bonded labour, atrocities perpetrated by the dominant castes on the *dalits* and tribal peoples, and the rights of the populations displaced by the big development projects of the State, private companies and multinational corporations.

Long-term issues are also addressed by the movement groups at the micro-level but these have yet not acquired political salience at the national level. These issues pertain to the legal rights of the landless to minimum wages and working conditions, the access of the tribal peoples to the forest and forest products, and the poor people's rights to the village commons, such as to village grazing land, use of the so-called waste lands, tilling dried-up lakes, ponds and water reservoirs, fishing rights in common waters and so on. Social issues are also taken up involving political mobilization around such controversies as dowry deaths (murdering of the wife by the husband and/or his kin for inadequate sums of dowry received or for remarrying another woman for dowry), burning of widows, rapes and child labour. The list goes on and on.

The important fact is that almost all issues raised by the grass-roots movements are ones on which the State is committed to act positively as ordained in the Directive Principles of the State Policy in the Constitution but, being non-justiciable, they are not resolvable through recourse to the lawcourts. Direct action by the people on these issues becomes, therefore, a preferred means of political action for the movement groups. Today, there is some group or the other working on these issues even in the most remote rural and tribal areas of the country. And yet, seen in the national context, the reach of the grass-roots movements remains limited, both politically and geographically. The enormity of the problems the grass-roots movements have taken upon themselves is so great that one wonders how long they can withstand the pressures and trials of their efforts, to continue to serve as a

buffer between the state's growing coercion and the chaos in Indian society. It is the inability of the State, its bureaucracy and its institutionalized politics to process these problems into their own arena that has created this overwhelming situation that the grass-roots movements feel they are required to tackle. The activists of these movements are constantly on the move, spending most of their time and energy on firefighting, leaving them little time for reflection or for interaction with those in movements other than their own.[7]

Micro-movements and Local Politics

While they operate at the base of the Indian polity, the movements are not a part of what is conventionally understood as local politics. Until recently, i.e., while the one-party dominance of the Congress Party reigned, local politics was vertically, even if loosely, coordinated by the macro-institutional structure of politics. The panchayats (village councils whose members are periodically elected through universal adult franchise), the cooperatives and the block development committees were also operated and politically coordinated by holding diverse caste-based factions into the politically accommodative structure of the Congress party. These factional alignments characterized the party system at the local level. But local politics has substantially changed, especially since the 1971 elections. This change, often attributed to the breakdown of one-party dominance, is, in my view, rather the result of changes that have been taking place at the base of the society. And these changes have created new political space at the local level which has now been occupied by the movement groups.

Let me quickly index only a few of these changes. The relations between castes, which often are hereditary occupational groups, hitherto based on the principle of a barter-like reciprocal system of goods and services (the *jajmani* system), have been fully monetized. A much greater proportion of the rural population, over two-thirds, now lives in bigger villages, with populations of over 1000. At the same time, the bulk of the population in an average village now consists of owner-cultivators and landless labourers. The other categories such as the priestly, trading and artisan castes are either moving out of the villages into the nearby towns or are getting absorbed into the ranks of owner-cultivators or landless labourers. The Indian village, which was primarily a social system within which economic activities subsisted, is now acquiring the character primarily of an economic organization in which social relationships are getting defined in terms of relations

between employers and employees, between wage labour and capital. The so-called caste conflict is now mainly between the dominant castes of the owner-cultivators and the castes of the landless labourers, with the former having lost their traditional claim on the labour of the latter. The changes in the village social structure have changed the nature of conventional local politics. The political parties, operating on the old assumptions, have not been able to address themselves to the new issues that have sprung up in rural India. Instead, as stated earlier, these issues are being taken up by the movement groups operating from outside such institutions of local politics as the panchayats, the cooperatives and the local units of the parties.

Micro-movements and Mainstream Politics

From this description of the micro-movements, the political spaces they occupy, the issues they articulate and the organizations they have spawned, it should be clear that they represent a fairly heterogeneous but vigorous element of political action at the grassroots of Indian politics. But they function as disparate micro-movements, each zealous in guarding its identity, autonomy and territory. They resent any effort by a macro-organization, even by a non-party political formation, at the national or regional level, to coordinate their activities or to federate them into a larger political entity. They do align with some others on issues, join up for common causes, even create joint fronts. But they do all this only around specific issues and for the duration for which the struggle lasts. They refuse to become organizational parts of, or to create for themselves, any larger long-term movement. This, despite the fact that many among them share a common perspective on problems, especially in terms of their critique of the existing political and social order and the model of development. The important fact is that there seems no possibility, in the foreseeable future, of these micro-movements emerging as a larger nationwide political movement by forging coalitions, alliances and mergers among themselves. It is for this reason that the activists and intellectuals of the political parties, and some observers of the grass-roots scene in India, do not attach much political significance to the micro-movements. In their view, any movement that does not make a visible impact, either on government policies or electoral politics, has no political future. The activists of the movement, however, do not share the view of conventional revolutionary politics, in which movements are conceived and carried out with the ultimate objective of capturing State power.[8]

For them, the capture of State power is not a precondition for social transformation. There are indeed some differences within the micro-movements on whether they should completely rule out, even from a longer-term theoretical perspective, the goal of acquiring or capturing State power, however remote that possibility might appear today. But a large number of the movement groups, including those inheriting the Marxist-Leninist tradition of struggle, prefer to leave this issue dormant, if not to ignore it totally. They believe that a premature and excessive concern about capturing State power suppresses the real issues of politics and social transformation, distorts the priorities in struggles and gives rise to authoritarian tendencies within the organizations of the movements.

The groups belonging to the Gandhian, *sarvodaya* (a neo-Gandhian movement which emphasized cooperation against conflict between classes as a means of social transformation), socialist and even liberal traditions, however, clearly reject capture of State power, even as an ideal. They find the concept overly political and distracting from the long-term struggles for the decentralization of economic and political power. According to them, this can only be achieved by changing the forms of organization and building peoples' own capabilities, rather than by changing the administrative structure with the use of power from the top. Such changes, if achieved in the broader society and culture, may ultimately result in the transformation of the State itself.

Whatever the nuances of their positions on the issue of State power, in practice, the micro-movements of all types function away from mainstream politics. Theirs is the politics of issues, of winning rights and of changing the consciousness of the people. This often brings them into confrontation with the State, the bureaucracy, the law and order machinery, the local power structures and sometimes even with the political parties and established trade unions. They view such confrontations as an aspect of the larger, long-term struggle for political and social transformation, and not as a means of directly competing with the political parties for the legitimacy claims in the prevalent system. Instead, they emphasize withdrawal of legitimation, by separating themselves from the institutions of mainstream politics and devoting their energies to building the people's own organizations. In the process, they view situations of conflicts as the means of raising people's consciousness and building the awareness of the people, rather than as the means of capturing State power.

This, however, does not mean that they are opposed to the institutional framework of Indian democracy. In fact, they consider institutional

democracy as a necessary condition for their functioning, but not a sufficient condition for their long-term goal of political and social transformation.[9] For this goal to be achieved, they believe that the political battleground needs to be shifted away from mainstream politics into the society and culture. In this sense, while they do not view the functioning of institutional democracy as representing forces hostile to their agenda of social transformation, working within and for it is not high on their agenda. Their political agenda, instead, is further democratization, not only of the political institutions but of the family, the community, the workplace and the society at large.

Micro-movements and the Politics of Transformation

The self-perception of these micro-movements is, thus, not merely of being pressure groups working for the rights and benefits of specific constituencies. They view themselves as movements for political and social transformation, and their methodology consists in involving the people in redefining the basic issues concerning the relationship between society and politics. Let me illustrate this point briefly with a reference to the three major grass-roots movements: the human rights, the ecology and the feminist movements.[10]

The issue of human rights as viewed by the activists of several human rights groups is not limited to the conventional legal notion of civil liberties; it also extends to situations in which individuals and groups are denied satisfaction of their basic needs. The poorest among the poor have in their view lost out in both respects. Thanks to the model of development adopted by the State, the poor are neither entitled to become full wage-earners in the economy nor full-fledged citizens in the polity. The politics of micro-movements, therefore, lies not merely in fighting particular infringements of legal rights of citizens, but in creating and expanding new political and civic spaces for them by converting the survival and development needs of the poor and the deprived into struggles for their economic, political and cultural rights, and these not only of individuals *qua* individuals but of groups and communities surviving on the margins of the civil society. In the process, the activists link rights of access to and benefits from the development process with the issues of ethnic identity and human dignity, and view the satisfaction of material needs as a pursuit not detached from the spiritual and cultural aspects of human existence. Several movement

groups that are not single-issue organizations for human rights relate to human rights movements through such a perception of rights.

Similarly, the ecology movements do not view ecology as merely a cost factor in development, as many ecology academics do. Nor are they interested in specifying tolerable levels of ecological destruction necessary for achieving higher levels of economic development as modernizing regimes tend to do.[11] Instead, they view ecology as a basic principle of human existence, which, if reactivated, can yield higher-level principles for reorganizing the economy in human terms and refocus development in terms of well-being, in which, to use Gandhiji's well-known phrase, 'everybody shall have enough for his or her need, but not for his or her greed'.

The activists of the women's movements have lately been defining their problem not merely in terms of achieving equal benefits and access for women in the present system. They self-consciously take up such issues mainly for finding entry points to the submerged world of Indian womanhood; but their long-term goal, as they put it, is to change the working of the gender principle itself in the economy and society, such that both society and economy become more just and humane. They find the ecological worldview of the movements more aligned with the feminine principle. The fusion of the ecological and gender principles, they argue, is conducive for a more humane economic and political organization of society than that of 'development' which, in their view is founded on the principle of male domination over all aspects of human life and nature. Their project, working together with the human rights and ecology movements, is thus to change the forms of organization and consciousness in society.[12]

Even as these movements seek to acquire greater perspective and coherence, they confront situations of division and splits within their own organizations. Currently, there is active debate among these groups on five issues which has resulted in the splitting of some groups and the joining together of some others. The issues are over the appropriate attitude the grass-roots movements should adopt towards (i) the use of violence, the specific issue being violence as a justifiable means of self-defence for the people versus complete reliance on nonviolent methods of *satyagraha* as a mode of conducting struggles; (ii) acquiring/capturing State power, the specific issue being their participation (or lending support to political parties) in the electoral politics versus engaging themselves solely in the non-electoral and non-party politics; (iii) the kind of relationship the group/movements should maintain with the political parties in the conduct of their own struggles; (iv) cooperating with the State in implementing

certain development schemes that may provide immediate short-term benefits and relief for the poor; and (v) accepting foreign funds.

The Need for Macro-level Initiatives

While the grass-roots initiatives and organizations indeed represent a new qualitative edge for social and political transformations required for evolving another approach to development, there is a distinct possibility of this edge being blunted or their confidence being eroded before they are able to make their long-term impact felt at the macro-level.

Although a process of self-evaluation and introspection has been going on among these groups and movements, and sporadic attempts are being made to create wider linkages and networks around issues of common concern (especially in the field of ecology, civil liberties, atrocities against *dalits*, corruption and women's rights), their attempts fall short of evolving a sustained structure of organizational linkages, communications and joint action so that a stronger and durable macro-level projection of the alternative approach (at the levels both of theory and praxis) is made possible.

Thus viewed, the scene of grass-roots movements and organizations today, despite the promise it holds, appears full of problems. First, organizationally they are highly fragmented where every group tends to view its own problems and problems of the people, with and for whom they work, in uniquely personal, biographical and local terms. Second, they tend to couch their thinking on alternative approaches in such narrow terms that they create false ideological barriers among themselves almost in a caste-like fear of getting polluted by touch. Third, the new groups and micro-movements, in absence of a wider political cover of their own, are often vulnerable to manipulative politics from outside. It allows the established political structure—the government, the bureaucracy, the development establishment and above all the political parties—to deal with them on a bilateral basis with the result that some of them get either co-opted or split into further fragments. In so far as these groups and movements continue to live a disparate and isolated existence, they are viewed, however effective or successful some of them may be, as individual cases, and not as a force representing an alternative. Fourth, and perhaps more importantly, the catalyst organizations have yet to work out an alternative system of financial support for themselves. At present, most of them operate almost surreptitiously, trying to advance their internal agenda of social transformation while fitting their organizations and programmes externally to the

requirements of the funding agencies. This reduces their effectiveness in the long run. Those among them who reject this 'solution'—and there are quite a few such individual change agents and movement groups—do put on a valiant fight for autonomy but get eventually tired.

It is in this context that there is a need for new independent macro-initiatives that would link up with the grass-roots movements and organizations and would serve them in response to their felt needs. Some such initiatives have already been taken by concerned intellectuals, independent academic organizations and new macro-level activist organizations. The main emphasis of these (till now very few and most of which are single-issue-based—e.g., gender, ecology, human rights, etc.—organizations) macro-initiatives is not on 'federating' or centrally coordinating the grass-roots organizations but to function as macro-forums of debate and action for grass-roots organizations. Through their various programmes of dialogues, training, participative research, documentation and dissemination of relevant literature (some of them bringing out their own bulletins and newsletters, pamphlets and booklets, for use of grass-roots activists), these new macro-initiatives aim at strengthening and expanding grass-roots movements, building linkages among them and generating a horizontal process of aggregation and impact. The crucial element in their activities is creating a new knowledgebase, an epistemology of social and political action which is distinctive in so far as it aims at changing prevalent relationships between knowledge and power in the society.

Notes

1. The FAO report on Hunger (2014–15) and the UNICEF report on malnutrition (2015) bear out this grim situation in India.
2. On 25 June 1975, Internal Emergency was imposed in India by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi as a stratagem to continue in power after she was disqualified from her membership of the Indian Parliament on being found guilty of electorate malpractice by a High Court judgment delivered on 12 June. During the Emergency, which lasted for two years, the constitutional rights of citizens including some Fundamental Rights were suspended. The Emergency regime was stiffly resisted by several political parties and social activists. For an account of how the constitutional rights were undermined by the emergency regime, written during the Emergency, see Rajni Kothari, 'End of an Era', *Politics and the People*: *In Search of a Humane India*, (Ajanta Publications, Delhi) 1989, pp. 235–250.

3. For an illuminating analysis of the decline of the institutions of democratic governance in India, see Rajni Kothari, 'Decline of the Moderate State', *State against Democracy*: *In Search of Humane Governance*, (Ajanta Publications, Delhi) 1988 pp. 15–36. An incisive account of the decline of political parties can be found in Kothari's 'Decline of Parties and Rise of Grassroots Movements', *State against Democracy*, *op. cit*., pp. 33–54.
4. The decline of the Trade Union Movement is graphically illustrated by Sandip Pandey. See his 'The Datta Samant Phenomenon', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Vol. 16, Nos 16–17) April 1981, pp. 1–8.
5. For an account of the erosion of the legislative and judicial institutions in the 1970s, see Rajni Kothari 'Taking Stock of the Seventies', *Politics and the People*: *In Search of Humane India*, *op.cit*., pp. 343–353.
6. The political and historical context from which these groups emerged and their typology is provided in my 'Grass-roots Stirrings and the Future of Politics', *Alternatives*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1983.
7. The problems faced by the activists of grass-roots movements are discussed in my 'Grass-roots Initiatives in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 6, February 1984.
8. For a critical assessment of the role of grass-roots movements in the politics of social transformation, see Harsh Sethi, 'Groups in New Politics of Transformation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 7, 18 February 1984, pp. 305–316.
9. For a more comprehensive discussion on this point, see my 'Alternative Development as Political Practice' *Alternatives*, Vol. 12, No. 2, April 1987.
10. The political thinking and positioning of the movements described in this section are based on my participation in about a hundred dialogues with social activists in different parts of India in the early 1980s sponsored and organized by *Lokayan*.
11. For a critical assessment of attitudes and thinking of various ecological movements in India, see Harsh Sethi, 'Some Considerations on Ecological Struggles in India', *Asian Exchange* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49–74.
12. The leading exponent of this position is Vandana Shiva. See her Staying Alive: *Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (Kali for Women, New Delhi) 1988.

CHAPTER 7

Law and the Outcasts of Development

I am not a lawyer, yet I dare to offer some comments on the limits and possibilities of using law in restoring the rights of the poor. These rights are being undermined everyday in the name of development and, not infrequently, in the name of law. Moreover, as the cliché goes, law is too serious a business to be left entirely to lawyers; for, the issue of rights is not merely a legal one but a potent political and social issue.

I shall base my comments on Lokayan's experience of organizing the ousted and the displaced population of poor tribal peasants and small traders in Singrauli—an area bordering on two Indian states, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Singrauli, at one level, represents an archetypal situation of a much larger drama of 'development' that is being played out in India, and possibly in other parts of the third world. I would, however, confine my comments here at the other, more concrete level, of how legal rights of the tribals are undermined by a structure of law that operates at the local level and what approach is being adopted by activist groups to use legal intervention as part of the larger struggle for the empowerment of the poor. My purpose here is not to present a systematic case study of Singrauli. I seek only to offer some reflections on the issue of using law as a resource for the poor.

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Displacement: The Context for the Use of Law

Let me first introduce the problem of displacement around which the issue of using law becomes relevant. I shall do this not in the language of the 'developers' or of lawyers but in the language in which the activists perceive it and as it affects the displaced population.

In the course of 25 years, but more so during the 7 years from 1980 to 1987, the primarily tribal area of Singrauli had been subjected to a rapid and ad hoc process of industrialization and urbanization. This had resulted, among other things, in a large-scale displacement of the local tribal population as well as a massive induction of population from the outside. From the distance that the class of 'developers' has cultivated from the objects of that development, i.e., the 'subjective' lifeworld of the victims, such displacement may appear to be a small, perhaps inevitable, cost the people at the site—not the developers themselves—have to pay for a larger and long-term goal of 'development' of the nation. The cold letters in print and the statistics through which information, insights and experiences are sought to be relayed to the developers about the 'development' on the ground, the phenomenon of displacement may appear simply as the removal of a set of people from one locale to another and in the process causing them some inconvenience. That this perpetually undermines their legal rights and pushes the entire victimized population to the verge of destitution, and, worse, sounds to them like a false scare raised by crazy do-good activists who have nothing better to do. That development schemes can be drawn in such a way that they are not implemented unless they specifically provide for adequate and timely compensations and rehabilitation of the displaced population, that modifications in the blueprints can be considered keeping the 'human factor' in mind, that the people should have a voice in planning for development that is going to affect them and that they may have a thing or two to teach the planners are ideas which are not at all palatable to the 'developers'. To them, such ideas sound woolly; they gravely affect the 'cost-effectiveness' of the projects. This happens especially when the affected population is the marginalized and powerless population of the tribals.

The story is quite different when the lands and property to be acquired belong to rich peasants or business houses. The law in the books is the same: the State's right to acquire land and property in public interest, the procedures for acquiring, which are also laid down. But the mediating power structure and the degree of marginalization and alienation from power of

the affected population create different impacts of the same law: it brings bonanza to one set of population and devastation to the other.

This is where the activist programmes of empowerment of the poor through organization, movement and politics of rights become relevant. In the absence of such initiatives, the legislation on the statute remains a mute witness to the injustices perpetrated by the power structure and the administration. In the process, the development projects are at first usually confronted and opposed. But once they become a reality they are accepted as a *fait accompli*. Those affected then put forward their claims and demands, which are usually treated with indifference by the project administration. The activist groups then push the politics of rights into the forefront of the movement. It is at this stage that the recourse to law becomes important. It boosts the struggle even as it raises hopes and expectations among the affected population about getting their rightful due. Such use of law, however, turns out to be a temporary phase. It never clinches the issues involved. Depending on their degree of social commitment, lawyers may serve either process: that of empowerment or that of further disempowerment of the poor.

There is also the question of the inherent limitation of the legal system which, after a point, is difficult to bend in favour of justice, even fairness, to those affected when the population involved is peripheral to the system, as is the case with the tribals. The legal system has no place for the tribals. Given their collective pattern of ownership (of a clan or the entire tribe), the notions of territoriality and use are separated from the notions of individual ownership; given their codes of communitarian living, the tribals operate at the margins of the legal-judicial system and never as its integral part. When they come face to face with law and its administration, the tribals are literally taken unawares and left without any defence either to protect their rights or to make any use of the suddenly changed environment to their own advantage.

It all begins with the issuing of evacuation notices by the project authorities. These notices bring them nothing short of a death warrant. Their normal rights of property or of continued occupation of land are undermined by the cavalier manner in which the tribal people are treated by the administration. But more importantly, displacement results in the total destruction of their livelihood patterns, disruption of communities and a complete pulverization of their cultural life. All this is visited on them without any guarantee of finding them a place in the new order. They get uprooted from their own world and having been forced to scatter, do not

find any place in the other world created by the developers. Women are separated from their men and dragged to the city brothels, the men arc reduced to destitution and beggary and the children do odd jobs in the new establishments. Those who still survive as families are constantly on the run from one construction site to another or compelled to retreat into forests from where they came. But that no longer offers them any livelihood because it has also been 'developed' in the meantime. So they become 'poachers' und 'criminals' in their own land.

Experience of Using Law

It is in this context that the activist groups in Singrauli are located. They seek to create space by organizing the affected populations for assertion of their rights vis-à-vis the system and they also struggle to create with the tribals alternative means of self-defence and community organization. In the process, they, among other things, seek to use law, now by means of a writ petition, now by using 'public-interest litigation' and sometimes by filing individual cases for seeking remedies and redressals in the local courts. All such efforts raise expectations: some create awareness of their rights among the affected population and may even provide some protection to the activists themselves from the high-handedness of the local administration, but rarely do they succeed in actually restoring the rights of the people that have been undermined by the patently illegal ways and means the development authorities use in implementing the projects on the ground. When the tribal people and the activists take recourse to direct action, the law suddenly gets activated to operate in its full fury, smashing the organization and the movement. It then takes long for them to recover and regroup for another round of struggle. In the process, the urban radical intellectuals label them as 'anti-developmentalists' and the establishment denounces them as 'anti-national'. For the legal knowhow required for coping with such circumstances, the activists have to depend on their own wits and the bits and pieces of knowledge they acquire by learning while struggling. Lawyers, like any other class of professionals, are available only for money which the organizations cannot afford. Nor are the credentials of these lawyers for putting up an honest fight on behalf of their victimized clients very reassuring. Socially committed lawyers are extremely difficult to come by at the grass-roots level, unless they happen to be de-professionalized and declassed lawyer-activists working with the local movement organizations. I must hasten to add that some professional lawyers do indeed make their

services available gratis, but they are available only at the High Court or the Supreme Court levels. Their intervention may sometimes succeed in handling a 'writ' admitted or a public-interest litigation suit filed, but such legal intervention hardly ever brings concrete benefits for the affected population. They may bring glory to the lawyers and to the activists through publicity in the press, they may raise the consciousness of the general public about the injustices perpetrated in the backwaters of a tribal belt, but the implementation of 'directives' of the higher courts arising from such interventions, even if they come in time—which is seldom the case—is another story. It will be a chastening exercise if we were to study the outcome of human rights–related writ petitions and public-interest litigations in six decades since independence in India. They have indeed created a favourable climate of opinion with respect to human rights issues, but they have accomplished little by way of actually restoring the rights of the affected population.

What then should be the role of lawyers? The need is for the activist groups to consolidate the legal resource at the grass-roots level and to elicit support of the local lawyers at the level of the *mofussil* courts and local administration. While the superstructure of the legal system created by the Indian Constitution and the laws enacted by the legislatures can be generally described as 'progressive' in letter and spirit, it is the law operating at the grass roots that regularly undermines the rights of the citizens. It is this law with which the people and the activists have to deal on a day-to-day basis. This aspect of law operates in the form of rules, regulations and procedures laid down by the administrative authorities and the specially created development corporations. In an area like Singrauli, these institutions behave like mini States, subjecting the normal civil and municipal administration to their own ad hoc authority and punitive powers.

Besides these two faces of law, there is the larger problem of making the superstructural provisions (of the constitution and enacted laws) effective on the ground. This problem pertains to the kind of jurisprudence that has grown in India since the country acquired its own Constitution. By and large, that jurisprudence is addressed to notion of rights and freedoms that are in consonance with a market-oriented society, away from the real-life world of social injustice, collective rights of communities and individual dignity of people without assets, social privileges and entitlements. Consequently, the assaults on the dignity of such individuals and on their identity and culture are not taken cognizance of in law. If and when they become matters of rightful legal contention, the 'redressals' and 'compensations'

offered at the end of a too prolonged litigation are such that they actually add insult to the injury already caused.

The Problems in Singrauli

It is in this context that I shall now outline the concrete problems of Singrauli with a view to illustrating the possibilities and limitations of using law to resolve the problems. First, let me describe the nature and magnitude of the problem.

The travails of the people in Singrauli began in the early 1960s when over 200,000 people were forcibly displaced by the project authorities without adequate compensation. This happened as a result of construction of the Rihand dam on the Sone river. Since the dam was among what Jawaharlal Nehru described as the 'new temples' of independent India, it was considered in those days unpatriotic to organize the oustees for asserting their rights to proper compensation and rehabilitation. Except for a few Lohia socialists in the area, no voice was raised against forcible evictions carried out without any consideration of rehabilitating the displaced. (A temple it did indeed become.) For, today, the water of one of India's biggest reservoirs is exclusively used for producing electricity. Any irrigational or other use by the local population is forbidden. The problem, therefore, has become one of how to initiate a movement for 'temple entry' by the outcastes of development.

Many of the oustees moved a few kilometres away from the dam and the reservoir, and settled down on their own in the surrounding area. But in the late 1960s, huge coal deposits were discovered in the area. In the course of the decade that followed, about 11 open-pit coal mines were developed in the area; one of them is the largest of its kind in Asia. So, the Rihand oustees who, thanks to their first displacement, became 'illegal settlers' were once again pushed out along with many other original settlers of the area. The discovery of massive reserves of coal led to further 'development' *in* the area, but not *of* the area or of its people. This created the current third phase of displacement and ousting of the local population. For the thousands of people affected this has been the third or fourth round of successive displacement.

Taking advantage of the closeness of the reservoir and the coal mines, the Government of India decided to set up a series of thermal power plants that would use the coal as fuel and water of the reservoir for cooling the plants. When completed, the total installed capacity would reach 25,000–30,000

megawatts! In addition, there is a privately owned power plant of the Birlas—a big Indian business house. Many ancillary industries (chemical plants, aluminium plants, cement plants) have also come into existence. All these have resulted in the clearing of vast spaces for the thermal power plants, open coal pits, new industrial plants and for settling the incoming population of professionals and employees of these new establishments and for a network of roads and railways to facilitate the movement of coal and construction materials. Vast areas of land have also been acquired for setting up hospitals, schools, playgrounds and so on for the exclusive use of this new population. The cumulative figure for the oustees, displaced many times over, would be in excess of 600,000. In the current phase itself, some 150,000 people are directly affected by acquisition and evacuation orders but many more, because they are without any assets or entitlements, do not even figure in any statistics. I shall not deal here with the terribly adverse impact that this rapid process of development has had on the environment; a high degree of pollution—of air, water and land—has been created. My concern for the present is the undermining of rights of the local population. The eviction resulted in pushing hundreds of thousands of people into a perpetual state of penury and destitution. The projects with astronomic outlays of expenditure provide only miniscule amounts for compensation and rehabilitation of the oustees. The welfare facilities—schools, hospitals, playgrounds and so on—were set up for the incoming population, but the oustees were barred from any access to these facilities. For example, the oustees have been often denied access to the employees' hospital, even for medical emergencies.

The whole process of induction and ousting of population is managed and monitored through a complex structure of multiple authorities specially set up, with exceptional powers, for the 'speedy implementation of the projects'. It is difficult for the local population, no less for the activist groups, to connect a grievance or an act of wrongdoing to a specific authority for the purpose of its redressal. They get lost in the maze of jurisdictional wrangles before they are able to put across their case to an appropriate authority. The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), e.g., acquires land for its purpose at one rate and follows its own procedures for payment and so on, while the Coal Authority pays a different rate and follows its own time table. Technically, they conduct these operations through the revenue department, which in turn, along with other functions of the civil administration of the area, is subjected to the specially created development authority, the Singrauli Area Development Authority

(SADA).With its establishment, the normal functions of civil and municipal administration are either suspended or handed over to SADA. As a result, the elected representatives of the area have no role at any level in decision making. Thanks to the tremendous political clout and financial power of the NTPC and other authorities, the elected representatives of the area behave as their supplicants, rather than as spokesmen of the affected population.

The authorities have a complete monopoly of information. The affected population is kept completely in the dark about the time taken between the issuance of a notice and the actual acquisition of land or a house, about the mode and nature of compensation, about alternative sites to be allotted and, above all, about the channels open to seek redressal against ad hoc and unjust actions of the authorities involved. It often takes more than five years to acquire land after the notices are issued. But the interval is entirely arbitrary and always takes the oustees completely by surprise. The evacuation party suddenly descends upon them, giving less than 24 hours' notice to vacate. Non-compliance meets with force and the bulldozing of whatever stands on the land marked for acquisition. Moreover, the rate of compensation given is the one that had been fixed five or seven years earlier when the notices were first served. (And even that was not meant to be the market rate). There is no provision for providing alternative sites for the uprooted villages or for giving new land in exchange for the land taken away. Only arbitrary cash compensations are given at miserably inadequate rates—and these too come in instalments, minus the cuts made by the officials disbursing the amounts. The money soon gets used up as the oustees have no alternative means of livelihood or a site for resettlement. A very small number of oustees with political connections may get compensation quicker and some jobs for the able-bodied. Those with larger assets may also find alternative accommodation and a means of livelihood on their own. The vast majority, however, is rendered landless and homeless without any means of livelihood or any access to education for the children or medical facilities for the families.

The Emerging Approach

Obviously, in such a situation of all-round undermining of legal rights of the people, there is a great scope for using law and seeking the help of lawyers for the affected population. In fact, the activist groups in the area have already filed several suits; so have some better-off individuals by employing private lawyers. But these have, by and large, helped only the non-tribal

population in the area. The tribal households have the peculiar problem of establishing their title to the land they have now lost but were using for generations. They cannot establish entitlements by using the land records with the government. Most of their land, by definition, becomes government land or forest land in absence of 'provable' legal entitlements. Often, a third party successfully (i.e., by greasing the fight palms) manages to enter its name in the records as rightful occupant or owner of the land that was in possession of a tribal. Moreover, and this is most important, legal intervention does not help the vast majority of the displaced who did not own any land but made their living by remaining an integral part of the local socio-economic system which is now disrupted. In such a situation, the use of law can help only a few among the affected population. It is for this reason that the activists tend to give primacy to political action over legal intervention. The activist groups in Singrauli have, after a process of trial and error, come to the conclusion that political organization of the oustees must be established and strengthened *before* taking recourse to law. Premature legal intervention, in fact, may affect the struggle adversely. A few people opting for individual legal solution—the use of law usually amounts to that—fragments collective struggle.

On the other hand, almost an exclusive dependence on the political process, not using the available resource of law, may affect the movement adversely, especially when the struggle is about securing rightful claims of the oustees. For example, in another location of Lokayan activity, around the Sri Sailam dam in Andhra Pradesh, an effective organization of the oustees was developed through a political process. For some time it succeeded in effectively demonstrating the problems of the oustees and in making collective representations to the authorities. But no legal remedies were sought. The movement reached a state of stalemate characterized by a series of demonstrations followed by prolonged and tiring negotiations producing no results. Then the lawyers entered the scene. They approached some individuals and promised that they could get them much higher compensation than was asked by their organization. Through bribing the revenue officials, they got the wording in initial notices modified and the entries in the land records changed. As a result, the lawyers' clients got much higher cash compensations than were initially declared and paid. Many more members of the organization then flocked around these lawyers and left the organization high and dry. At the end, the lawyers got a net cut of 80 per cent of the compensation they got for their clients! And still the clients had some additional cash left in their pockets. A well-developed

movement got dispersed. As a result of this experience, it is feared, the process of empowerment through organization, movement and unity of the affected population, in many development projects in Andhra Pradesh, would suffer a great deal because of the Sai Sailam project. What is likely to happen is that through the use of law in a market situation, the relationship between individual lawyers and individual clients is likely to acquire greater prominence than forming an organization of their own. This will benefit a few among the oustees, but it will leave the rest totally defenseless. It now seems, in retrospect, that the activists in Sri Sailam depended almost exclusively on the political, administrative and cultural aspects of the struggle. Having consolidated the organization, they should have aligned their struggle with legal activities. In fact, they ignored the legal aspect altogether, and weakened the organization in the process.

Taking a leaf out of the Sri Sailam experience, the Singrauli oustees and the activist groups are in the process of evolving a new approach to the use of law. While maintaining the primacy of political action, law will be used by the organization for articulating the struggle. The sporadic and ad hoc use of law involving only a few individual cases is being shunned. Having realized the limitation of pure political, pressure-group activities of an organization in confronting the authorities, they are turning to a more systematic use of the legal resource. They have now floated a large-scale, membership-based, trade union–like organization which will administer the legal front of the movement. They now realized that for making effective use of the available legal resources or for creating new ones, the movement has to evolve an appropriate organizational form that can use the resource of law at the right time and in the right manner, such that it strengthens the struggle, rather than weakens it.

This new development in Singrauli, the launching of a large-scale trade union–like organization of the oustees, is still in a primary, infant stage. It is an open question how effectively the new organization will be able to use the legal resource and whether it would get the support of the lawyers. (They now hope to be able to pay for their services.) Moreover, to run a trade union–like organization for a population which is in the process of being dispersed and which does not belong to any identifiable workplace or a well-defined territorial location is a stupendous task. Even to manage a regular collection of membership fees is not an easy task. Even so, it can now use law on behalf of a collectivity and its members, rather than for finding individual solutions for some.

Obviously, then, neither legal intervention by itself nor a political action by itself can effectively tackle the problems of the oustees. The examples I have quoted show that political struggle must be combined with the use of law for optimum results. For this to happen, the movement should acquire an organizational form that prevents such use of law which results in the fragmentation of the struggle. Instead, the law must be used at proper points for strengthening the wider struggle for the empowerment of the poor.

[This article was published in 1998. What happened in Singrauli after this date needs to be added to the analysis so far. Although the analysis is, in this sense, an incomplete story of a several decade–long development struggle, its arguments of the hostile character of the development projects for tribal populations, and the use of law to disempower and even disenfranchise them, remains valid. This can be validated by studies of all the major development projects in tribal areas. The possibilities of justice available to the victims of displacement are remote in our democracy and they can only resist their displacement and the arrogance of the developers by a combination of collective struggle and legal contestation in the slim hope that the penury and destitution visited them by 'development' will be somewhat attenuated.]

PART III

Social Power and Democracy

CHAPTER 8

Secularization of Caste and the Making of a New Middle Class

The changes that have occurred in Indian society, especially after India's decolonization, have led to a de-ritualization of caste. With the erosion of rituality, a large part of the support system of caste has collapsed. Caste now survives as a kinship-based cultural community but operates in a different, newly emergent system of social stratification. By forming themselves into larger horizontal social groups, members of different castes now increasingly compete for entry into the middle class, changing its old pre-independence character and composition. This new and vastly enlarged middle class is becoming, even if slowly, politically and culturally more unified but highly diversified in terms of the social origins of its members.

Although existing for thousands of years, the caste system got its name about 500 years ago from the Portuguese when they landed on the Malabar coast and began to have 'direct experience' with Indian society.[1] Derived from *casta* in Portuguese, the term caste has since been used generically to describe the whole (*varna-jati*) system as well as specifically to refer to its various orders and the units within an order. The Portuguese 'discovery' of caste, however, went much beyond giving a name to India's *varna-jati* system. The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to provide detailed accounts of its functioning. The most perceptive, empirical account of caste was given by Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese of the sixteenth century. Barbosa identified the main features of caste: (a) as a hierarchy, with brahmans at the top and 'untouchables' at the bottom; (b) untouchability as linked to the idea of 'pollution'; (c) existence of a plurality of 'castes' separated from each other by endogamy, occupation and commensality;

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(d) application of sanctions by castes to maintain their own customs and rules; (e) relationship of caste with political organization.

Although Barbosa did not provide a 'systematic' account, the elements of caste he identified remain central to any definition of caste, even today. Moreover, Barbosa's approach to reporting about caste had some distinctive qualities. First, he described caste as he saw it functioning on the ground, i.e., he got his facts by talking to common people in their own language. Second, he did not use the religious scriptures as a source of information on caste, thereby building up a theory of social stratification from texts. There is no reference to the *varna* theory of caste in his narratives. Third, he related the idea of pollution to the practice of untouchability and not to the functioning of the whole system. Fourth, he saw caste not exclusively in ritual-status terms, but also as a plurality of 'self-governing' cultural communities. Fifth, he stuck to a matter-of-fact account of what he saw and was told about caste, and refrained from moralizing and passing value judgements on it.

The Colonial Discourse

Nothing much of significance was added or any improvement made to Barbosa's account for the next 250 years by his European successors reporting on caste. It was only after the British rule was established in India that a second 'discovery' of caste was made by the Europeans. The Western Orientalist scholars, the Christian Missionaries and the British administrators began, in their different ways, to make sense of this complex phenomenon. A new, colonial discourse on caste was born. It marked important departures from precolonial accounts of caste. It is important to note some distinctive feature of this discourse because for decades after India's independence the studies of caste continued to be guided by the terms set by the colonial discourse.

One, the new discourse centred on whether caste was a system beneficial to Indians or it worked against them. The Orientalist scholars viewed caste as serving some positive functions, whereas the Missionaries saw it as an unmitigated evil. Second, both its sympathizers and opponents saw caste in highly schematized and unidimensional terms: as an inflexible hierarchy of vertically ranked ritual statuses. The idea of pollution which Barbosa saw in the context of untouchability was now generalized for the whole system in which the idea of ritual purity and impurity of statuses was considered the central principle governing the caste system. The reality of caste was

reconstructed largely from its depiction in the religious scriptures. In the event, Barbosa's empirical view of caste was now superimposed by the scriptural (ideological) *varna* view of caste. Three, with the 'discovery' of Hindu scriptures by the Orientalist scholars, caste became a prism through which the colonial rulers began to see Indians and the whole Indian society: Caste was now seen as representing a world view of Indians and a totality of India's social and cultural life. Certain non-ritual, even non-religious, elements which always existed in the caste system and informed quite a few aspects of intercaste relations were theoretically ruled out of the system.

Four, in the course of setting up its revenue administration, a number of land and village surveys were launched by the colonial regime in different regions of India. This focused the attention of revenue administrators, many of whom were anthropologically inclined scholars, on the Indian village—which was also a revenue unit. This focus developed into a view of the village as a microcosm of the Indian society, and caste as constituting its social, economic and political organization legitimated by its religious ideology. In this village view of caste, caste was seen as an ensemble of local hierarchies, each contained within a village or a group of villages. This view contributed to the image of the village as a stable, unchanging social system. In the latter ethnographic studies of caste carried out by Indian sociologists, although the *varna* theory was discarded, caste continued to be seen as a vertical hierarchy of ritual statuses embedded in the religious and cultural context of the village.

Fifth, the administrative and anthropological concerns of the British officers led them to counter both the Orientalist and the Missionary views of caste. Their concern was utilitarian, about finding administrative and political ways to tame and change this formidable system functioning from ancient times to suit the needs of the colonial polity and economy. This concern of the colonialists prompted an ideological debate on caste. The debate achieved a degree of political sophistication which was not shown earlier either by the Orientalists in their appreciation or the Missionaries in their condemnation of the caste system. The debate introduced a new, theoretical-comparative dimension for viewing caste. Caste now began to be seen in comparison with the normative (values of equality, individualism, etc.) and social (estate, race, class, etc.) categories of the Western societies. Eventually, with the English-educated nationalist Indians joining the debate, on the terms setup by the colonial regime, caste became a bone of contention between conservatives and progressives, traditionalists and reformers. Valuation became the mode of observation.

Sixth, the method British administrators adopted in reporting about caste, unlike that of the Orientalist scholars, was 'empirical'. They did not see the caste system only in terms of the *varna* categories. They also saw castes as separate communities often divided by descent, political organization and customs. Consequently, they theorized caste in terms of its racial and tribal origins and character. In fact, multiple and elaborate systems of classification of castes were evolved by them based on a variety of ethnographic materials, officially obtained through various village and caste surveys.[2]

Seventh, crucial to the colonial discourse was the relationship between caste and the State. From the 1901 Census, the colonial State began caste-wise enumeration of the entire Indian population. The decennial censuses not only updated the population figures for enumerated castes, but gave them specific names/labels and ranks. In doing so, the census officers tended to rely on their 'reading' of the scriptures as well as local knowledge and practice. But when a name and/or a rank given to a caste was in dispute—and this happened frequently—the Census officer's 'anthropological' judgement, albeit tempered by representations received from leaders of the concerned caste, prevailed. Thus, despite the diversity of the debate, at the end of the day, the criterion of 'social precedence of one caste over the other', i.e., the scriptural principle of ritual-status hierarchy, was explicitly and *officially* recognized.

The colonial State thus acquired an agency, even a legitimate authority, to arbitrate and fix the status claims made or contested by various castes about their locations in the ritual hierarchy. At the same time, the enumeration of castes and their ethnographic descriptions compiled by the State highlighted how the social and economic advantages accrued to some castes and not to others in the traditional hierarchy. This led to demands among many castes for special *recognition* by the State for receiving educational and occupational benefits as well as for political representation. The colonial State assumed a dual role: of a super brahman who located and relocated disputed statuses of castes in the traditional hierarchy *and* of a just and modern ruler who wished to 'recognize' rights and aspirations of his weak and poor subjects. This helped the State to protect its colonial political economy from incursions of the emerging nationalist movement. Among other things, it also induced people to organize and represent their interests in politics in terms of caste identities and participate in the economy on the terms and through mechanisms set by the colonial regime.

On the whole, the colonial regime not only introduced new terms of discourse on caste, but also brought about some changes in the caste system itself. A large part of these changes, however, were unintended consequences of the colonial policies; they were related to the larger historical forces of modernization, secularization and urbanization which had begun to make some impact on the Indian society by the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. But some specific policies of the colonial regime, aimed at delegitimizing the power of the traditional social elites and creating support for its own rule, had direct consequences for the caste system. Towards the end of the colonial rule such policies, alongside the larger historical forces, had produced some profound and far-reaching changes in the caste system.[3]

The most important among the changes was the formation of a new, trans-local identity among 'lower castes', collectively as a *people* with the consciousness of being 'oppressed' by the traditional system of hierarchy. The discourse of rights, until then quite alien to the concepts governing ritual hierarchy, made its first appearance in the context of the caste system. New ideological categories like 'social justice' began to interrogate the idea of ritual purity and impurity according to which the traditional stratificatory system endowed entitlements and disprivileges to hereditary statuses. The established categories of ritual hierarchy began to be confronted with new categories like 'depressed castes' and 'oppressed classes'.[4]

Second, several castes occupying more or less similar locations in different local hierarchies began to organize themselves horizontally into regional- and national-level associations and federations, as it became increasingly necessary for them to negotiate with the State and in the process project their larger social identity and numerical strength.[5]

Third, movements of the lower castes for upward social mobility, which were not new in the history of the caste system, acquired a qualitatively new dimension as they began to attack the very ideological foundations of the ritual hierarchy of castes, in terms not internal to the system (as was the case with the Buddhist and Bhakti movements), but in the modern ideological terms of justice and equality.

Changes that occurred in the caste system during the colonial period have greatly intensified after India's decolonization. Further, with India establishing a liberal democratic State and the growth of institutions of competitive, representational democracy, the changes acquired newer dimensions and a greater transformative edge. All this has produced some fundamental structural and *systemic* changes in the traditional stratificatory system.[6]

Despite the fact that after India's independence such qualitative changes had occurred in the stratificatory system, the changes continued to be interpreted in the old, colonial ideological-evaluative frame. The terms and categories used for describing these changes—by the sociologists studying caste as well as by social reformers and political thinkers wanting India to become a caste-less society—were derived from the colonial discourse. This gave rise to two opposite views of change in the caste system, which in fact represented mirror images of each other. One view, which has long dominated studies of caste in post-Independent India, emphasizes certain structural and cultural *continuities* the Indian society has manifested in the course of modernization. In this view, changes in caste are seen in terms of functional adjustment made by the system for its own survival and maintenance. The other view, which dominated the political-ideological discourse on caste until recently, sees modernization as a linear, universal force of history, transforming the caste system into a polarized structure of economic classes. On the whole, the discourse on caste in post-Independent India remained bogged down in the dichotomous debate on 'tradition' versus 'modernity' and 'caste' versus 'class'.

Secularization of Caste

The dichotomous view of change has prevented scholars, policy makers and political activists alike from viewing the *process* by which caste has changed and a new type of stratificatory system has emerged. This *process*, which can broadly be characterized as secularization of caste, has detached caste from the ritual-status hierarchy, on the one hand, and has imparted it a character of the *power*-group functioning in the competitive democratic politics, on the other. Changes in caste could thus be observed along these two dimensions of secularization: *de-ritualization* and *politicization*. These changes have (a) pushed caste out of the traditional stratificatory system, (b) linked it to the new structure of representational power, and (c) in their cumulative impact have made it possible for individual members of different castes to acquire new economic interest and social-political identification and own class-like as well as ethnic-type identities. Thus, secularization of caste, brought about through its de-ritualization and politicization, has opened up a third course of change. For a lack of a more appropriate term, I call it *classization*. In the following sections, I shall describe these three processes of change in caste and their implications for the emergence of a new type of stratificatory system in India.

De-ritualization

Caste has been conventionally conceived as an insulated *system* of ritual-status hierarchy, embedded in the 'perennial' religious culture of India. Rituality (i.e., rootedness of caste behaviour and organization in the religious ideology and practices) thus constituted the core of the whole system of castes. It enabled caste to maintain autonomy and stability of status hierarchy in the face of changes, both economic and political, that occurred in the wider society. In this perspective, caste 'accommodated' these changes only to the extent the system could absorb them without losing its structural and cultural integrity. In responding to these changes, caste was seen to have found 'new fields of activity' and to assume new functions, but all this to retain its basic structure and ideological (religious) core. The insularity of the caste system is thus guaranteed, because it is bounded by certain ideological and structural contexts—each articulating a form of rituality. More specifically, these contexts pertain to (a) the religious ideology of purity and pollution; (b) the religiously sanctioned techno-economic and political organization of the village, especially its food production and distribution system; and (c) the customs and traditions of castes that have evolved over centuries. Caste not only survived but grew in these contexts and acquired its *systemic* character.

In what follows, I argue that the changes that have occurred in Indian society, especially after India's decolonization, have led to de-ritualization of caste—meaning delinking of caste from various forms of rituality which bound it to a fixed status, an occupation and to specific rules of commensality and endogamy. I further argue that with the erosion of rituality, a large part of the 'support system' of caste has collapsed. Uprooted from its ritually determined ideological, economic and political contexts it has ceased to be a unit of the ritual-status hierarchy. Caste now survives as a kinship-based cultural community and operates in a different, newly emergent system of social stratification.

1. Modernization of India's economy and democratization of its political institutions have released new economic and political power in the society. The hierarchically ordered strata of castes now function as horizontal groups, competing for power and control over resources in the society. Alongside this change in the organizational structure, i.e., its horizontalization, the form consciousness takes has also changed. Among members belonging to a caste it is expressed more in the

nature of *community consciousness,* rather than in hierarchical terms. Caste consciousness is now articulated as political consciousness of groups staking claims to power and to new places in the changed opportunity structure. It is a different kind of collective consciousness from that of belonging to a 'high' or 'low' ritual-status group. The rise of such a consciousness of castes has led to disruption of hierarchical relations and to increase in competition and conflict among them. Far from strengthening the caste *system*, the emergent competitive character of 'caste consciousness' has contributed to its systemic disintegration. The disintegrating system of traditional statuses is now thickly overlaid by the new power system created by elections, political parties and above all by social policies—such as of affirmative action—of the State.

2. Fundamental changes have occurred in the occupational structure of the society. A vast number of non-traditional, unbound-to-caste occupations and a new type of social relations among occupational groups have emerged. This has resulted in the breaking down of the nexus between hereditary ritual status and occupation—one of the caste system's defining features. It is no longer necessary to justify the status of one's occupation in terms of its correlation with the degree of ritual purity or impurity associated with it. The traditional, ritualistic idea of cleanliness or otherwise of the occupation one follows has become unimportant; crucial consideration is what brings a good income to the individual. A brahman dealing in leather or an ex-untouchable dealing in diamonds is no longer looked upon as a socially deviant behaviour. That the former is more a frequent occurrence than the latter has only to do with the resources at one's command and not with observance of ritual prohibitions attached to the statuses involved. More importantly, the cleanliness or otherwise of an occupation is increasingly seen in physical and biological sense than in ritual or moral terms.[7]
3. Significant structural differentiations have taken place *within* every caste. Traditionally, an individual caste bounded by rituals and customs functioned internally as a truly egalitarian community, both in terms of rights and obligations of members *vis-à-vis* each other and of lifestyles, i.e., the food they ate, the clothes they wore, the houses they lived in and so on. Differences in wealth and status (of clans) that existed among households within the same caste were expressed, often apologetically, on such occasions as weddings and funerals but

rarely in power terms *vis-à-vis* other members of the caste. Today, households within a single caste have not only been greatly differentiated in terms of their occupations, educational and income levels and lifestyles but these differences have led them to align outside the caste, with different socio-economic networks and groupings in the society—categories which cannot be identified in terms of the caste system.

4. The caste rules of commensality (i.e., restrictions about accepting cooked food from members of other castes) have become almost totally inoperative outside one's household. Even within the household, observance of such rules has become quite relaxed. In "caste dinners", e.g., friends and well-wishers of the host, belonging to both the ritually lower and higher strata than that of the host are invited and are seated, fed and served together with the members of the caste hosting the dinner. The caste panchayats, where they exist, show increasingly less concern to invoke any sanctions in such situations.
5. The castes which occupied a similar ritual status in the traditional hierarchy, but were divided among themselves into sub-castes and sub-sub-castes by rules of endogamy, are now reaching out increasingly into larger endogamous circles, in some cases their boundaries co-terminating with those of the respective *varna* in a region to which they supposedly belong. More importantly, intercaste marriages across different ritual strata, even often crossing the self-acknowledged *varna* boundaries, are no longer uncommon. Such marriage alliances are frequently made by matching education, profession and wealth of brides and grooms and/or their parents, ignoring traditional differences in ritual status among them. Significantly, such intercaste marriages are often arranged by the parents or approved by them when arranged by the prospective spouses on their own. The only 'traditional' consideration that enters into such cases is the vegetarian–meat-eating divide, which is also becoming quite fuzzy. Although statistically the incidence of such intercaste marriages may not be significant, the trend they represent is. A more important point is that the mechanisms through which castes enforced rules of endogamy have weakened in many cases.

The ideology and organization of the traditional caste system have thus become vastly eroded. Its description as a *system* of ritual-status hierarchy has lost theoretical meaning.[8] As may be expected, such erosion has taken

place to a much greater extent and degree in the urban areas and at the macro-system level of social stratification. But the local hierarchies of castes in rural areas are also being progressively subjected to the same process.[9] In the villages, too, traditional social relationships are being redefined in economic terms. This is largely because in the last three decades, particularly after the 'Green Revolution' and with the increasing role of the State and other outside agencies in the food production and distribution system in rural areas, the social organization of the village has substantively changed. From the kind of social-religious system the Indian village was, it is increasingly becoming primarily an economic organization. The priestly, trading and service castes, i.e., social groups not *directly* related to agricultural operations, are leaving villages or serving them, if and when such services are still required, from nearby towns. Members of such castes continuing to live in the villages have largely moved out of the 'village system' of economic and social interdependence of castes. They increasingly function in the emergent national market–related rural economy or the secondary and territory sectors of employment.

In this process, many a caste has structurally severed its relationship from the system of ritual obligations and rights which once governed its economic and social existence and gave it an identity in terms of its status in the ritual hierarchy. Intercaste relations in the village today operate in a more simplified form, as between castes of land holders/operators and those of the landless labourers. This relationship between them is often articulated in terms of political consciousness of two groups of castes representing different economic interests in the changed political economy of the village.

The socio-religious content of economic relationships in the village has thus largely disappeared; they have become more contractual and almost totally monetized. The traditional *jajmani* relationships, which regulated economic transactions between castes in social-ritual terms, have been replaced by relationships of employer and employee, of capital and wage labour. When the traditional social and religious aspects of economic relationships are insisted upon by any caste, such as traditional obligations of one status group to another, it often leads to intercaste conflicts and violence in the villages. In brief, the pattern of social relations sustained by the internal system of food production of a village and by conformity of status groups to their religiously assigned roles in the system and to norms defining the roles has virtually disintegrated.

In sum, while castes survive as micro-communities based on kinship sentiments and relationships, they no longer relate to each other as 'units'

of a ritual hierarchy. The caste *system*, for long conceived as a ritual-status system, has imploded. Having failed to cope with the changes that have occurred in the larger society, particularly after India's decolonization, the caste '*system*' is unable to maintain itself on the basis of its own principle of ritual hierarchy. It cannot sustain vertical linkages of interdependence and cooperation among its constituent units; nor can it enforce its own rules governing obligations and privileges of castes *vis-à-vis* each other.

In few specific contexts where ritual relationships between castes still survive, they have acquired contractual, often conflictual, forms negating the system's hierarchical aspect. Ritual roles which members of some castes (e.g., the role of a priest or a barber) still perform have been reduced to those of functionaries called upon to do a job for payment on specific occasions (weddings, deaths, etc.). Performance of such roles/functions by a few members of a caste, however, has no relevance for determining its place in the changed stratificatory system. Such roles, it seems, now survive outside the stratificatory system, as a part of Hindu religious practices. But such phenomenal changes have occurred in Hinduism itself in recent years that intercaste relations can no longer be viewed as constitutive of a ritually determined religious practice. The growth in popularity of new sects, of deities and shrines, and the growing importance of gurus and godmen and the new practice of public celebrations of Hindu religious festivals on a much wider social and geographical scale, involving participation of members of a number of castes across ritual hierarchy and regions, have all shored up popular-cultural and political aspects of Hinduism. These have considerably weakened the traditional ritual and social organizational aspects of Hinduism. In this process, intercaste relations have lost not only their systemic context, but also to a large extent their *religious reference*. Castes now negotiate their status claims in the newly emergent stratificatory system.

The simultaneous processes of detachment of castes from ritual hierarchy and the growth, albeit in varying degrees, of economic, social and cultural differentiations within every caste have resulted in castes entering into various new, larger social-political formations which have emerged in India's changing stratificatory system. As we shall see in the next section, each such formation grew in the process of politicization of castes and has acquired a new form of collective consciousness, a consciousness different from that of a ritual-status group. Yet the new consciousness is not of a 'class' as in a polarized class structure. This consciousness is based on a perception of common political interest and modern status aspirations on

the part of members of these new formations. In this process, the unitary consciousness of individual castes has become diffused into an expanded consciousness of belonging to a larger social-political formation, which cannot be described as a 'caste' or 'class'.

Politicization of Castes

For some two decades after Independence, the political discourse on caste was dominated by left-radical parties and liberal-modernist intellectuals who saw, rather simplistically, changes in the caste system in linear terms, i.e., changes as suggestive of its transformation into a system of polarized economic classes. In believing so, they ignored the fact that while caste had lost its significance as a ritual-status group it survived as a 'community', seeking alliances with other similar communities with whom it shared commonality of political interest and consciousness. Consequently, political parties of the Left, both the communists and the socialists, by and large, sought to articulate political issues and devise strategies of mobilizing electoral support in terms of economic interests, which in their view divided the social classes in India.[10] In the event, although these parties could credibly claim to represent the poorer strata and they even occupied some significant political spaces in opposition to the Congress party at the time of independence, they failed to expand their electoral support in any significant measure for decades after independence.

Put simply, competitive politics required that a political party seeking wider electoral bases must view castes as a pure category neither of 'interest' nor of 'identity'. The involvement of castes in politics fused 'interest' and 'identity' in such a manner that a number of castes could share common interests and identities in the form of larger social-political conglomerates. The process was of *politicization* of castes, which by incorporating castes in competitive politics reorganized and recast the elements of both hierarchy and separation among castes in larger social collectivities.[11] These new collectivities did not resemble the *varna* categories or anything like a polarized class structure in politics. The emergence of these socio-political entities in Indian politics defied the conventional categories of political analysis, i.e., class analysis versus caste analysis. Thus, the singular impact of competitive democratic politics on the caste system was that it delegitimized the old hierarchical relations among castes, facilitating new, horizontal power relations among them.

Congress Dominance: First Phase of Politicization

The process of politicization of castes acquired a great deal of sophistication in the politics of the Congress party, which scrupulously avoided taking any theoretical-ideological position on the issue of caste versus class. The Congress party, being politically aware of the change in the agrarian context, saw castes as socio-economic entities seeking new identities through politics in the place of the old identities derived from their traditional status in the ritual hierarchy. Thus, by relying on the caste calculus for its electoral politics and, at the same time, articulating political issues in terms of economic development and national integration, the Congress was able to evolve durable electoral bases across castes and to maintain its image as the only and truly national party. This winning combination of 'caste politics' and 'nationalist ideology' secured for the Congress Party a dominant position in Indian politics for nearly three decades after independence.[12] The Congress party rarely used such dichotomies as upper castes versus lower castes or capitalists versus working class in its political discourse. Its politics was largely addressed to linking vertically the rule of the newly emergent upper-caste and English-speaking 'national elite' to lower-caste support. And the ideology used for legitimation of this vertical social linkage in politics was neither class ideology nor caste ideology; the key concept was 'nation building'.

The Congress party projected its politics and programmes at the *national* level as representing 'national aspirations' of the Indian people. At the *regional* levels, the party consolidated its social base by endorsing the power of the numerically strong and upwardly mobile dominant, but traditionally of lower status, castes of land-owing peasants, e.g., the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Reddys in Andhra, the Patidars in Gujarat, the Jats in Uttar Pradesh and so on. In the process, it created patron–client type of relationships in electoral politics, relationships of unequal but reliable exchanges between political patrons—the upper and dominant (intermediate) castes—and the numerous 'client' castes at the bottom of the pile, popularly known as the Congress's 'votebanks'. Thus, in the initial two decades after independence, the hierarchical caste relations were processed politically through elections. This ensured for the Congress a political consensus across castes, despite the fact that it was presided over by the hegemony of a small upper-caste, English-educated elite in collaboration with the regional social elites belonging by and large to the upwardly mobile castes of landed peasants. The latter, however, were often viewed by the

former (i.e., the 'national elite', with the self-image of modernizers) as parochial traditionalists. Still the alliance held.

This collaboration between the two types of elites created a new structure of representational power in the society, around which grew a small middle class. This class constituted the upper-caste national elite living in urban areas *and* the rural social elite belonging to the dominant peasant castes as well as those upper-caste members living in rural areas. Although the ruling national elites belonged to the upper *dwija* castes, they had become detached from their traditional ritual status and functions. They had acquired new interests in the changed (planned) economy, and lifestyles which came through modern education, non-traditional occupations and a degree of Westernization which accompanied this process. The dominant castes of the regional elites still depended more on *sanskritization* than on 'Westernization' in their pursuit of upward social mobility. But they encouraged their new generations to take to modern, English-medium education and to new professions. In the process, despite their *sudra* origins, but thanks to their acquisition of new power in the changed rural economy and politics, several peasant communities succeeded in claiming social status equivalent to the middle-class *dwijas*.

Consequently, such communities as Patidars, Marathas, Reddys, Kammas and their analogues in different regions were identified with 'upper castes' and not with 'backward castes'. Acquisition of modern education and interest in the new (planned) economy enabled them, like the *dwija* upper castes, to claim for themselves a new social status and identity, i.e., of the middle class.

At the same time, the caste identities of both these sections of the 'middle class' were far from dissolved. They could comfortably own both the upper-caste status and the middle-*class* identity as both categories had become concomitant with each other. While the alliance between the upper-caste national elite and the dominant-caste regional elites remained tenuous in politics, together they continued to function as a new power group in the larger society. In the formation and functioning of this middle class as a power group of elites, the caste had indeed fused with the class and status dimension had acquired a pronounced power dimension. But insofar as this process of converting traditional status into new power was restricted only to the upper rungs in the ritual hierarchy, they sought to use that power in establishing their own caste-like hegemony over the rest of the society. It is this nexus between the upper traditional status and new power that

inhibited the transformative potentials of both modernization and democracy in India.

This conflation of the traditional status system with the new power system, however, worked quite differently for the numerous non-*dwija lower* castes. In negotiating their way into the new power system, their low traditional status, contrary to what it did for the upper and the intermediate castes, worked as a liability. The functions attached to their very low traditional statuses had lost relevance or were devalued in the modern occupational system. Moreover, since formal education was not mandated for them in the traditional status system, they were slow to take to modern education when compared with the upper castes. Nor did they have the advantage of inherited wealth as their traditional status had tied them to subsistence livelihood patterns of the *jajmani* system.

In brief, for the lower castes of small and marginal peasants, artisans, the ex-untouchables and the numerous tribal communities, their low statuses in the traditional hierarchy worked negatively for their entry into the modern sector. Whatever social capital and economic security they had in the traditional status system was wiped out through the modernization process; they no longer enjoyed the protection that they had in the traditional status system against the arbitrary use of hierarchical power by the upper castes. On top of that, they had no means or resources to enter the modern sector in any significant way, except for becoming its underclass. They remained at the bottom rung of both the hierarchies, the sacred and the secular, of caste *and* class.

This objectively created an elite mass kind of division in politics, but it still did not produce any awareness of polarization of socio-economic classes in the society. In any event, it did not create any space for class-based politics. In fact, all attempts of the left parties at political mobilization of the numerous lower castes as a *class* of proletarians did not achieve any significant results either for their electoral or revolutionary politics. Neither did their politics, focused as it was on class ideology, make much of a dent on Congress-dominated politics marked by the rhetoric of national integration and social harmony. In effect, Congress could establish the political hegemony of the upper caste–oriented middle class with the electoral consent of the lower castes! A very peculiar caste-class linkage was thus forged in which the upper castes functioned in politics with the self-identity of a *class* (ruling or 'middle') and the lower castes, despite their class-like political aspirations, with the consciousness of their separate *caste* identities.

The latter were linked to the former in a vertical system of political exchange through the Congress party, rather than horizontally with one another.

Politics of Reservations: Second Phase of Politicization

It took some three decades after independence for the lower castes of peasants, artisans, the ex-untouchables and the tribals to express their resentment about the patron–client relationship that had politically bound them to the Congress party. With a growing awareness of their numerical strength and the role it could play in achieving their share in political power, their resentment took the form of political action and movements. An awareness among the lower castes about using political means for upward social mobility and for staking claims as larger social collectivities for a share in political power had arisen during the colonial period, but it was subdued after independence, for almost three decades and a half of Congress dominance.

It was around the mid-1970s that the upper-caste hegemony over national politics began to be seriously challenged. This was largely due to the social policies of the State, particularly that of Reservations (affirmative action). Despite tardy implementation, towards the end of the 1970s, the Reservations policy that was for long inexistence in many states of the Indian union had created a small but significant section, in each of the lower-caste groups, which had acquired modern education, and had entered the bureaucracy and other non-traditional occupations. In the process, a small, but a highly vocal political leadership emerged from among the lower castes.

The process of politicization of castes, however, came to a head at the beginning of the 1980s. This was when the Second Commission for Backward Classes (the Mandal Commission) proposed to extend reservations in jobs and educational seats to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs; i.e., to castes of lower peasantry and artisans) in *all* states and union territories and at the central Government level. This proposal was stoutly opposed by sections of the upper and the intermediate castes, which by then were largely ensconced in the middle class. They saw the newly politicized lower castes forcing their way into the middle class (particularly into white-collar jobs), that too not through open competition but on 'caste-based' reservations. This created a confrontation of interests between the upper and intermediate castes on the one hand and the lower castes on the other. But it led to a resurgence of lower castes in national politics. This resurgent politics, guided by lower-caste aspirations to enter the middle

class, was pejoratively derided as the 'Mandalization of politics' by the English-educated elite. The so-called Mandalized politics, a euphemism for the politicization of lower castes, has since resulted in radically altering the social bases of politics in India.

First, the Congress party–dominated politics of social consensus, presided over by the hegemony of an upper-caste, English-educated elite, came to an end. The Congress organization could no longer function as the system of vertical management of region-caste factions. The elite at the top could not accommodate the ever-increasing claims and pressures from below, by different sections of the lower castes, for their share in power. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, large sections of the lower strata of social groups abandoned the Congress and constituted themselves into shifting alliances of their own separate political parties. The vertical arrangement of the region-caste factions that the Congress had perfected just collapsed. The national parties—the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist parties alike—had to now negotiate for political support directly with the social-political collectivities of the OBCs, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) or with the regional-caste parties constituted by them.

Second, the categories of the OBCs, SCs and the STs, expressly devised for the administrative purpose of implementing the Reservations policy, perhaps as an unintended consequence, acquired a strong social and political content and surfaced as new social formations in the macro-stratificatory system. They now operated in politics with the self-consciousness of socio-economic groups. Not content with proxy representations by the upper caste—middle class elites, they wanted political power for themselves. Politics now became a contest for representation among horizontal power groups, representing social collectivities as identified by the policy of Reservations.[13] These groups began to bargain with different existing parties or formed their own new parties. Whatever survived of the hierarchical dimension of the traditional stratificatory system in politics was thus effectively horizontalized.

Third, the 'Mandalized politics', by generating aspirations among the lower castes to attain 'middle class' status and lifestyles, prevented the process of *class* polarization. This politics created new compulsions in the social arena. The old middle class, dominated by the upper and intermediate castes, was now compelled to admit expansion beyond itself and make spaces, even if grudgingly, for different sections of the lower castes. At the same time, lower castes while forming coalitions in politics, began to compete among

themselves intensely at the social level for an entry into the growing middle class.

In sum, the State policy of affirmative action gave a big impetus to the process of politicization of castes (as well as to de-ritualization of intercaste relations). The policy itself, by providing special educational and occupational opportunities to members of the numerous lower castes, converted their traditional disability of low ritual status into an asset for acquiring new means for upward social mobility. What politicization of castes has thus done, along with the spread of urbanization and industrialization, is to have contributed to the emergence of a new type of stratificatory system in which the old middle class has not only expanded in numbers, but has begun to acquire new social and political characteristics.

Classization of Caste

'Classization' is a problematic, and admittedly inelegant, concept used for describing certain types of changes in caste. As a category derived from the conventional 'class analysis', it articulates the issue of change in linear and dichotomous terms, i.e., how (rather 'why not') is caste transforming itself into a polarized structure of economic classes? Just as the role of *status* and other 'non-class' elements (e.g., gender, ethnicity) is routinely ignored in analyses of class in the Western society, 'class analysis' in India undermines the role of 'caste' elements in class and vice versa. At the other end of the spectrum are scholars devoted to 'caste analysis'; they have little use for a concept like 'classization'. Accustomed to viewing caste as a local hierarchy and to interpreting changes *in it*, in terms of the caste system's own ideology and rules, they view class elements in caste (e.g., the role of modern education, occupational mobility, economic and political power) as elements extraneous to the caste system, which it of course incorporates and recasts them in its own image to maintain its *systemic* continuity.

Classization neither follows a linear, teleological course of change nor does it represent the caste system's own reproductive process. I, therefore, view *classization* as a twofold process: (a) *releasing* of individual members of all castes (albeit the extent of which may vary from one caste to another) from the religiously sanctioned techno-economic and social organization (i.e., occupational and status hierarchy) of the 'village system'; and (b) *linking* of their interests and identities to organizations and categories relevant to the urban-industrial system and modern politics. This process operates not only in urban areas, but also increasingly in the rural areas. The

two aspects of the process are not temporally sequential, or spatially separated. They criss-cross, and the changes become visible in the form of elements of the newly emergent, macro-system of social stratification. Thus viewed, 'classization' is a process by which castes, but more frequently their individual members, relate to categories of social stratification of a type different from that of caste.

The emergent stratificatory arrangement, however, is far from having acquired a 'systemic' form. Yet, new and different types of social and economic categories have emerged at all levels of the society by relating to which caste is not only losing its own shape and character, but is acquiring a new form and ideology. Thus, as we saw earlier, caste survives, but as a kinship-based cultural community, not as a status group of the ritual hierarchy. It has acquired new economic interest and a political identity. Its members now negotiate and own larger and multiple social and political identities. In this process, caste identity has lost its old character and centrality. The economic and political activities in which members of a caste are now engaged are of a radically different type from the ones perpetuated by the caste *system*. The ritually determined vertical relationship of *statuses*, which encouraged harmony and cooperation among castes, has got transformed into that of horizontally competing, often conflicting, *power* blocs, each constituted of a number of castes occupying different statuses across traditional local hierarchies. In the process, new socio-economic formations, some of 'ethnic type', have emerged at the macro-level of the society. They compete for control of economic, political and cultural resources in the society. The idea of upward social mobility today motivates people of all castes (not just of the 'lower' castes), collectively as well as *individually*. For, the quest today is not for registering higher *ritual* status; it is universally for wealth, political power and modern (consumerist) lifestyles. In short, caste has ceased to 'reproduce' itself, as it did in the past.

Emergence of a New Middle Class

All these changes have imparted a structural substantiality to the macro-stratificatory system of a kind it did not have in the past. In absence of a centralized polity, the system functioned superstructurally as an ideology of the *varna* hierarchy. Lacking structural substance, it served as a 'common social language' and supplied normative categories of legitimation of statuses to various local, substantive hierarchies of *jatis*.[14] But after India became a pan-Indian political entity governed by a liberal democratic

State, as we saw earlier, new social formations—each comprising a number of *jatis,* often across ritual hierarchies and religious communities—emerged at the regional and all-India levels. Deriving its nomenclature from the official classification devised by the State in the course of implementing its policy of affirmative action (Reservations), the new formations began to be identified as the forward or the 'upper castes', the backward castes (OBCs), the *dalits* or SCs and the tribals or the STs.

Unlike status groups of the caste *system*, the new social formations function as relatively loose and open-ended entities, competing with each other for political power. In this competition, members of the upper-caste formation have available to them the *resources* of their erstwhile traditional higher status and those of lower-caste formations have the advantages accruing to them from the State's policy of affirmative action. Thus, the emergent stratificatory system represents a kind of fusion between the old status system and the new power system. Put differently, the ritual hierarchy of closed status groups has transformed into a fairly open and fluid system of social stratification.

This system is in the making; it cannot be described either in caste terms or in pure class terms. However, the salience of one category in this newly emergent stratificatory system has become visible in recent years. It can be characterized as the 'new middle class': 'new' because its emergence is directly traceable to the disintegration of the caste *system*; this has made it socially much more diversified compared to the old, upper caste–oriented middle class that existed at the time of independence. Moreover, high status in the traditional hierarchy worked implicitly as a criterion for entry into the 'old' middle class, and 'sanskritized' lifestyles constituted its cultural syndrome. Both rituality and sanskritization have virtually lost their relevance in the formation of the 'new' middle class. Membership of today's middle class is associated with new lifestyles (modern consumption patterns), ownership of certain economic assets and the *self-consciousness* of belonging to the 'middle class'. As such, it is open to members of different castes—which have acquired modern education, taken to non-traditional occupations and/or command higher incomes and the political power—to enter this 'middle class'.

And yet, the 'new middle class' cannot be seen as constituting a pure *class* category—a construct which in fact is a theoretical fiction. It carries some elements of caste within it, in so far as entry of an individual in the middle class is facilitated by the collective political and economic resources of his/her caste. For example, upper-caste individuals entering the middle

class have at their disposal the resources that were attached to the status of their caste in the traditional hierarchy. Similarly, for lower-caste members, lacking in traditional status resources, their entry into the 'middle class' is facilitated by the modern legal provisions like affirmative action, to which they are entitled by virtue of their low traditional status. It seems the Indian 'middle class' will continue to carry caste elements within it, to the extent that modern status aspirations are pursued, and the possibility of their realization is seen, by individuals in terms of the castes to which they belong.

Yet, crucial to the formation of the 'new middle class' is the fact that while using collective resources of their castes, individuals from all castes entering it undergo the process of *classization*; (a) they become distant from ritual roles and functions attached to their caste, (b) acquire another, but new, identity of belonging to the 'middle class' and (c) their economic interest and lifestyle converge more with other members of the 'middle class' than with their 'non-middle class' caste compatriots.

The process of middle-class formation in India is empirically illustrated by findings of an all-India sample survey. The survey, based on a stratified random sample (probability proportionate to size) of 9614 Indian citizens (male and female) drawn from all the Indian states, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir, was conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, in June–July 1996. Based on the preliminary analysis of the survey data, I provide a broad profile of the 'new middle class'.[15]

1. The middle class which was almost exclusively constituted at the time of independence by English-educated members of the upper castes had expanded to include the upwardly mobile dominant castes of rich farmers, during the initial three decades after independence. In other words, this period saw the emergence of a small rural-based middle class.
2. The survey conceived the category of middle class in terms of *subjective* and *objective* variables. The subjective variable pertained to the respondent's own identification as 'middle class' and an explicit *rejection* of 'working class' identity for himself/herself. Using self-identity as a precondition, certain objective criteria were applied for inclusion of a respondent in the category of 'middle class'. Thus, *from among those with middle-class self-identification*, respondents possessing two of the following four characteristics were included in the category of middle class: (i) ten years or more of schooling; (ii) ownership of at least three assets out of four, i.e., motor vehicle, TV, electric

pumping-set and non-agricultural land; (iii) residence in a *pucca* house built of brick and cement; and (iv) white-collar job. Accordingly, 20 per cent of the sample population was identified as belonging to the middle class.

3. The survey analysis revealed that even today, the upper and the rich farmer castes together dominate the Indian 'middle class'. While members of the two 'upper' categories, the *dwija* upper castes and the non-*dwija* dominant castes, account for about a quarter of the sample population, they constitute nearly half of the new middle class. But this also means the representation of upper castes has reduced in today's middle class, for the old middle class was almost entirely constituted by them.
4. About half of the middle-class population came from different lower-caste social formations, i.e., the *dalits* (SCs), the tribals (STs), the backward communities of peasants and artisans (OBCs) and the religious minorities. Considering that members of all these social formations constituted 75 per cent of the sample population, their 50 per cent representation in the middle class is much lower than that of the upper and intermediate castes. But seen in the context of their inherited lower ritual status in the traditional hierarchy, this is a significant development. Even more significant is the fact that when members of the lower castes, including those belonging to castes of 'ex-untouchables', acquire modern means of social mobility, such as education, wealth and political power, their low ritual status does not come in the way of their entering the 'middle class' and, more importantly, acquiring the *consciousness* of being members of the 'middle class'.
5. The analysis of the survey data also revealed statistically highly significant differences in political attitudes and preferences, between members of the middle class and the rest of the population. More importantly, on certain crucial political variables (e.g., support to a political party) and cultural variables (e.g., belief in the *Karma* theory), the difference between the lower-caste *and* upper-caste members of the middle class was found to be much less than that between members of the 'middle class' and their caste compatriots not belonging to the 'middle class'.
6. The Indian middle class today has a significant rural component, thanks to the earlier inclusion in it of the rural-based dominant castes and now of the members of the lower castes participating in modern

economy and administration. In brief, the 'middle class' in India today is not a simple demographic category comprising of certain ritual-status groups. It is a social-cultural formation in which as individuals from different castes and communities enter, they acquire new economic and political interests, and lifestyles, in common with the other members of that 'class'. Within this 'new' middle class, caste identities of its members survive, but operating in conjunction with the new, overarching identity of 'middle class', they acquire a different political and cultural meaning.

To conclude, secularization of caste, occurring along the dimensions of de-ritualization, politicization and classization, has reduced caste to a kinship-based micro-community, with its members acquiring new structural locations and identities derived from categories of stratification premised on a different set of principles than those of the ritual hierarchy. By forming themselves into larger horizontal social groups, members of different castes now increasingly compete for entry into the 'middle class'. The result is that members of the lower castes have entered the middle class in sizeable numbers. This has begun to change the character and composition of the old, pre-independence, middle class which was constituted almost entirely of a small English-educated upper-caste elite. The new and vastly enlarged middle class constituting about one-fifth of the Indian population, is becoming, even if slowly, politically and culturally more unified but highly diversified in terms of social origins of its members.

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NOTES

1. The Portugese account of caste presented here and the following discussion on the colonial discourse draw heavily on Bernard S. Cohn "Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture", *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi 1987) pp. 139–40.
2. Ibid., pp. 141–162.

3. For a detailed discussion on changes in castes under British Rule in India and the impact the colonial policies had on the caste system, see G.S. Ghurye, "Caste During the British Rule" in his *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962) pp. 270–305. Also see Marc Galanter, "Reform, Mobility, and Politics under British Rule" in his *Competing Equalities: Law and Backward Classes in India*(Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp. 18–40.
4. Collective self-awareness among the lower caste as *a people*, oppressed socially and economically by the ritually high-ranking castes, developed and found organizational articulation through their participation in anti-Brahman movements which grew in the early decades of this century. See Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*: *The Non-Brahman Movements in Western India—1873 to 1930.* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976); see also Eugene F. Irshick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movements and Tamil Separatism 1916–1929.* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969).
5. Galanter sees this development during the colonial rule as having brought about some important changes in the caste system: 'Caste Organization brought with it two important and related changes in the nature of castes. The salient groups grew in size from endogamous *jatis* into region-wise alliances. Concomitantly, the traditional patterns of organization and leadership in the village setting were displaced by voluntary associations with officials whose delimited authority derived from elections' Galanter, (note 1 supra) p. 23.
6. For a recent argument articulating a contrary position emphasizing that the caste system has, even in the face of such changes, maintained systemic continuity, see A.M. Shah, "A Response to the Critique on Division and Hierarchy" in A.M. Shah and I.P. Desai, *Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat* (Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1988) pp. 92–133. Shah sees horizontal divisions as intrinsic to the caste system itself, representing another principle of caste organization which has always operated in juxtaposition with 'hierarchy'. The horizontal divisions in caste, in his view, are thus produced and reproduced as part of the continuous process *within* the system, a kind of change that a system undergoes for its own survival and maintenance. Whereas for his interlocutor in the debate, i.e., I.P. Desai, the horizontal divisions which existed prior to caste but were integrated in the *system* of castes by the principle of ritual hierarchy are now breaking away from that hierarchy and interacting in horizontal social and political spaces. In this sense, for Desai, horizontal divisions represent a new principle for the emerging stratificatory system, which has undermined the caste principle of ritual hierarchy, I.P. Desai, "A Critique of Division and Hierarchy", in the above cited *Division and Hierarchy*, pp.40–49.

7. For an illuminating discussion on the changed relationship between ritual status and occupation and its implications for the emergence of a new type of stratificatory system in India, see I.P. Desai, "Should 'Caste' be the Basis for Recognizing Backwardness?" *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. 19, No. 28, July 1984) pp. 1106–1116.
8. Of late, such recognition of systemic changes in caste is reflected in the mainstream sociological writings. For example, M.N. Srinivas in one of his latest writings has characterized the changes that have occurred in the caste system as *systemic* in nature: 'As long as the mode of production at the village was caste-based, denunciation of inequality from saints and reformers, or from those professing other faiths proved ineffective. It was only when, along with ideological attacks on caste, education and employment were made accessible to all, and urbanization and industrialization spread that *systemic changes* occurred in caste' (italics mine). See "Introduction" in *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, M.N. Srinivas (ed.), (New Delhi, Viking, Penguin India, 1996), p. XIV.
9. For an overview of comprehensive, systemic changes that have occurred in local hierarchies of castes in rural areas, see G.K. Karanth, "Caste in Contemporary Rural India", in M.M. Srinivas (ed.) *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (*note 7 supra*) pp. 87–109. Karanth, in his concluding remarks to the essay, observes the following: 'In the first place, it may not be appropriate any more to refer to caste in rural India as a "system". Castes exist as individual groups, but no longer integrated into a system, with the dovetailing of their interests' (p. 106).
10. The writings and politics of Ram Manohar Lohia, a renowned socialist leader, however, constituted an exception to this approach of the Left parties to political mobilization. In his view, horizontal mobilization of lower castes on issues of social justice had greater political potential for organizing the poor and deprived populations of India than the ideology of class polarization, which, in his view, lacked an empirical, social basis for mobilizational politics. See Ram Manohar Lohia, *The Caste System* (Ram Manohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad, 1964). Also see D.L. Sheth, "Ram Manohar Lohia on Caste in Indian Politics", *Lokayan Bulletin* (Vol.12, No. 4, January–February 1996) pp. 31–40; also D.L. Sheth, "Ram Manohar Lohia on Caste, Class and Gender in Indian Politics", *Lokayan Bulletin* (Vol. 13, No. 2, September–October 1996) pp. 1–15.
11. The concept of 'politicization of castes' was first used by Rajni Kothari in the early 1970s, to describe changes that had occurred in the caste system with its involvement in democratic politics. See "Chapter 1: Introduction" in his *Caste in Indian Politics,* (note 22 supra) pp. 3–25.
12. Rajni Kothari in his pioneering work on the Congress party saw this aspect of Congress's politics, i.e., expanding its social base through management of

caste-based political factions regionally and seeking consensus on issues of development and modernization nationally, as crucial to the Congress party's prolonged, political and electoral dominance. See Rajni Kothari, "The 'Congress System' in India", *Asian Survey* (Vol. 4, No. 12, December 1964) pp. 1161–1173; see also "The Congress System Revisited", in his *Politics and People: In Search of Humane India*, Vol. 1 (Ajanta Publishers, Delhi, 1989) pp. 36–58.

13. See D.L. Sheth, "Reservations Policy Revisited", Economic and Political Weekly (November 14, 1987) pp. 1957–87.
14. M.N. Srinivas, "Varna and Caste" in *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962) pp. 63–69. Also see Andre Betelle, "Varna and Jati", *Sociological Bulletin* (Vol. 45, No. 1, March 1996). pp. 15–27.
15. I would like to emphasize that presented here are preliminary findings of the survey. The author and the research team at the CSDS are in the process of refining the index of middle-class membership. In the final analysis, percentage figures for the representation of social formations into the middleclass and for the magnitude of the middleclass may slightly change (by about $\pm$1–2 per cent). I have reported here 'work in progress' and not a completed analysis of the composition of the middleclass, which will soon appear in a separate monograph. The idea is to give a broad, even if slightly tentative, picture of the emerging new middleclass.

CHAPTER 9

The Dalit Question in Four Frames

The Changing Ecology of the Caste System

One of the most perceptive and comprehensive analyses of caste in India can be found in Ambedkar's writings. He saw caste almost exclusively as a ritual-status hierarchy, and, as such, therefore rightly associated untouchability with Hindu ritual practices. Untouchability is integral to rituality inasmuch as it defines physical distances among individuals and groups in terms of purity and pollution. Such distances were indeed observed even within a family, between husband and wife, e.g., and even between a mother and her child, in the case of a menstruating woman. Some scholars mistakenly see such a practice of temporary and contextual 'untouchability' as comparable and qualitatively similar to the practice of caste Hindus treating the entire group of people as untouchables for centuries. In the case of the untouchability of an untouchable caste, it is a permanently fixed attribute that is meant to be inherited from generation to generation. This untouchability has little to do with the physical cleanliness or uncleanliness of the so-called untouchables. In their case, untouchability is treated as inherent in the bodies of untouchables. It is not the work they do which is defiling but what an untouchable does becomes defiling. Therefore, whatever object he/she touches, or on which he/she casts a shadow, is considered and treated as untouchable. In this sense, untouchability has been an extreme form of rituality (i.e., ritual practice). Traditionally, the arena of ritual practice was considered sacred and the observance of ritual purity was seen as endowing the practitioners with magical powers, making them

D.L. Sheth, *At Home with Democracy*,
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pure bodies. Rituality thus constituted its own sacred sphere and that space was monopolized, in different degrees, by the communities of dwijas who were supposed, literally, to embody purity (i.e., the brahmans, the kshatriyas and the vaishyas).

Historically, when the observance of ritual purity began to be associated with the gaining of magical powers by its practitioners (roughly, the period of epistemic predominance of the Mimallsakas and Smritikaras), the exclusion of the non-dwijas began to be institutionalized. The practice of observing ritual purity, and consequently of observing untouchability, acquired over time even a 'moral' justification and behaviour that earned merit. Those among the shudras considered the 'inassimilable' vanquished, e.g., the Chandalas of the ancient times, began to be despised and treated as the outcaste and untouchable. Since then, the numbers of 'untouchable' castes began to proliferate with the growing obsession of the dwijas with ritual purity. This resulted in attaching impurity to an increasing number of economic—productive and service—activities and occupations and their practitioners began to be treated as 'polluting' in their persons. Several groups of people and individuals were not admitted into the caste system as a punishment for intransigence as well as for deviance and transgressions considered serious and violative of the basic ritual codes of caste organization. In the creation of untouchability, the dimension of rituality was intertwined with that of power. Thus seen, Ambedkar was right to associate untouchability with the caste system.

My point is that the ritual aspect of caste which has been extremely weakened and has become almost defunct today means that the practice of untouchability which we witness has lost any ritual-moral justification. It is used as an instrument of the powerful to subjugate the powerless. The conflict and violence that occurs on the issue of untouchability is theoretically more understandable in terms of changing relations of power rather than the reinforce mentor assertion of any ritual practice associated with untouchability. The dominant castes often use 'untouchability' as a means to subjugate, even humiliate, the dalits so that they can have them as a source of cheap and perennial labour. The dalits, on the other hand, having recovered their self-respect and achieved a degree of well-being, thanks to the rights movements and policies such as reservation, resist and protest upper-caste dominance. On the whole, atrocities are committed on dalits by the upper castes, particularly by those among them who have either acutely felt the loss of traditional social power or who have been able to establish their dominance in villages, using their economic power and the political

power of numbers. Finally, as far as dalits are concerned, it can be said that some elements of rituality still survive in their relation to the savarna castes. Among the non-dalit castes, however, as I have argued earlier, ritual hierarchy has, by and large, lost its relevance.

Caste that we witness today is not the system it once was. What we have are disparate individual castes surviving, at one level, primarily as a community of interrelated kinship groups and, at another level, as politico-cultural communities competing, conflicting as well as cooperating in horizontal social spaces. In this process, it has become increasingly possible for individual members of any caste to exit or outgrow the ritual status in which they were born by acquiring modern education, professional careers, political power, wealth and other such attributes privileged by the new stratification system. The old organization of castes where individuals inherited generationally given occupations, i.e., occupations ritually attached to their castes, has almost collapsed.

Today a vast majority of members in every caste have quit ritually ordained hereditary occupations and have taken to new, modern occupations or those belonging to other castes. In fact, the occupational structure of a community can be seen/used as an index of the survival or non-survival of ritual relationships between castes or, in a certain context, of their social and economic backwardness. For example, those agricultural and artisan communities in which the occupational structure has remained insufficiently differentiated and their members in significant numbers follow traditional-hereditary economic activities (cultivation, crafts, carpentry, pottery, etc.) are also the socially and economically backward communities. It should, however, be emphasized that a traditional occupational activity in itself does not suggest the continuity of rituality/ritual relationships. For example, the occupation of a barber in the ritual hierarchy of caste is located in a jajmani context, where the barber regularly visits the houses of his patrons for giving them a haircut, and he and his wife (who is usually the mid-wife of a village) perform many other roles for their patrons. In fact, in the jajmani system, entire families of the service communities of shudras were attached to their patrons.

The barber opening a hair-cutting saloon, in contrast, marked the end of ritual relationships. Likewise, many such occupational and economic activities, e.g., that of a washerman, carpenter, blacksmith, or potter, have all changed from a barter-based, ritual jajmani type to a contractual type of relationship based on monetary exchanges.

The other important principle of caste organization relates to marriage. Although today, empirically, it is shown that only a minority of people marry outside caste, it is important to note that the very idea of caste boundaries has changed. First, the idea of marrying within caste means marrying in any caste of the same varna, e.g., the numerous castes among banias, brahmans and kshatriyas, or among OBCs and dalits. In most parts of India, these intercaste, intercommunity differences, among these categories, are being increasingly ignored and marriage alliances are being made across such castes. More importantly, many self-arranged, or parentally arranged, marriages take place between castes even across the varna boundaries, especially among the savarnas, i.e., among the communities of the erstwhile dwijas and shudras. Considerations for making such alliances, as a rule, are about matching economic status, political position, professional background of the families involved, and education and income of the prospective spouses. The only barrier that is sometimes observed in negotiating the across-varnas, intercaste marriages is the vegetarian–non-vegetarian divide.

Another ideological basis of caste, the ideology of karma, which provided justification for caste inequalities and induced acceptance of one's undignified and stigmatized existence, say as an untouchable, is no longer accepted by the victims. The demise of the caste ideology of purity and pollution is best illustrated in the assembly elections that took place in Uttar Pradesh. Political pundits unfortunately miss the point of how democratic politics has created a social revolution in India. The electoral rise to significance of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the dalit party led by Mayavati, like many events of Indian politics, is seen by many an analyst as a 'victory of caste politics'. In my view, it is in fact the opposite as it represents a complete repudiation of caste ideology with the ritually *pure* brahmans aligning with the ritually polluting dalits and, moreover, accepting a dalit woman's leadership. This case shows that democracy has made the two ends of purity and pollution, which according to the colonial theory of caste were supposed never to meet, come together in Uttar Pradesh. Ironically, this is described as caste politics. However, the organizational and ideological erosion of the caste system has not yet resulted in the individuation or independence of individuals from communities. Democratic politics in India still remains a politics of *communities.* It is true that communities have ceased to be a part of a vertical ritual hierarchy but individuals still remain, at least in villages, bound to the norms and rules of the communities to which they belong. On the whole, India still appears as a society of communities, though the

communities are multidimensional and open-ended, and Indian democracy is more a democracy of communities than of citizens. This is caste's challenge to democracy.

Central Issues Facing Dalits Today

Within this transformative process, we must take note of the fact that the real problem faced by dalits today is the growing incidence of atrocities committed on them by members of upper castes. This fact has to be explained. No one can deny that even today, as I have already pointed out, there are remnants of relations of ritual status surviving in villages of some Indian states, insofar as some upper-caste members seek to force dalits to perform traditional social and economic roles. Although such role expectations have no legal or even wider social sanction, members of upper and middle castes, wherever they are in dominant positions, use their power to subjugate and humiliate dalits who are usually a small minority in a village. Strictly speaking, this is not as much a manifestation of ritual-status relationship as of the assertion of power by a dominant caste in the village. This is the real issue facing the dalits—their vulnerability to local power exercised by the dominant castes. The growing atrocities on the dalits are, in fact, illustrative of the failure, often even deliberate neglect, of the law-and-order machinery at the local level. It is also related to the improved social and economic condition of some sections of dalits. This development of dalits is envied, resented and not tolerated particularly by those sections of the upper caste who have lost social power due to almost complete irrelevance of ritual status as a means of power.

Another issue about which some dalit leaders are concerned is the educated middle-class dalits losing identification with the problems of ordinary dalits and, in the process, not engaging with issues raised by dalit movements. This, in fact, is a real dilemma. Seen from the perspective of normal process of social change, this is an expected and even a welcome development. Like everyone else, an educated middle-class dalit has a right to exit from the pulls and pressures of the community and opt for the life of anonymity offered by modernity, i.e., exercise the option of joining the so-called 'mainstream'. This phenomenon is more like what was seen and criticized in the Marxist movements as 'bourgeois individualism' or the bourgeoisification of the working class. But considering that a very small number of dalits have achieved professional and middle-class status, such

disidentification may adversely affect the movement, which anyway has a small and socially undiversified leadership.

A further issue, which remains shrouded in the discourse of the dalit movement, is the condition of the scavenging community or the so-called sanitary workers known as 'Bhangis' or Valmikis in the villages of western and northern India, and their equivalents known by different names in other parts of the country. These are the unseen and forgotten dalits who, in some villages, live in subhuman conditions. Even the upper rungs of dalits practise the ritual distance of exclusion and even untouchability vis-à-vis them. Although the dalit movement thrives on projecting imageries of such exclusion, from which a large and articulate section of upper and middle rungs among dalits have moved out, the movement, except for a few dalit leaders and organizations, has not yet evolved significant programmes—mobilizational or welfare and uplift-oriented—for the dalit castes of the 'Bhangis' and Valmikis. On the whole, however, their existence and identity remain submerged and unarticulated in the politics of demands and protests which the dalit movements address at the national and regional levels. The most inexcusable is the practice of carrying night soil (human excreta) on heads by the officially employed sanitary workers of the scavenging castes. The origin of this practice is, of course, in the ritually polluted and polluting status assigned to them in the past. But persistence of this practice today has little to do with rituality. It has more to do with the cynical neglect and non-recognition of this section of dalits, both by the State and the movement. This non-recognition has made the untouchable also an unseeable! If recognized, the problem is simply of deploying resources and harnessing technological equipments to abolish this inhuman and also legally criminal practice adopted officially by the civic administration of several small towns and large villages. Let me explain my point as to how this practice today has little to do with ritualistic caste relations. In towns where the sanitary workers have been freed from the practice of touching and carrying night soil physically, employment as scavengers is being sought and obtained by members of the upper castes. In some parts of Uttar Pradesh, even the brahmans, along with other upper castes, have enrolled themselves as sanitary workers. Even though it is true that the upper-caste sanitary workers unofficially contract out their work to members of the dalit castes, the fact remains that the formal recruitment of members of different castes, including the upper castes, as sanitary workers frees the work of a scavenger from the odium of untouchability.

To put it differently, with the increase in educational, economic and occupational opportunities for the dalits at every level, and technological development that makes dignified labour universally possible for the sanitary workers, the issue of untouchability is likely to become totally irrelevant in public discourse and in practice. In every region of India, there have been growing divisions among dalits on socio-economic and cultural dimensions. About a hundred years of dalit movements and social policies of the Indian State after independence, accompanied by such forces as modernization and urbanization, have remarkably improved the socio-economic conditions—consistently and uniformly—of certain dalit communities. They have been able to receive the impacts of changes more effectively and positively because they had acquired receptacles to receive them in the form of education and urbanization. These upper sections, e.g., are identified with the Jatavs in Uttar Pradesh, the Mahars in Maharashtra, the Mahyavanshi, Vankaras and Chamars in Gujarat and the Malas in Andhra Pradesh. There is another section who lack the receptacles and cannot receive the impact of policies. They are lagging behind and feel that the advantages of policies are cornered by the upper sections. This issue of how to distribute scarce assets and resources among different communities of dalits will have to be politically resolved for the dalit movement to attain coherence and unity.

Finally, there is almost a complete divergence between dalit movements and dalit party politics. The movements articulate their politics in moral, righteous terms. They have a kind of disdain for electoral and party politics pursued by dalit leaders like Kanshi Ram who founded the BSP or by his disciple and successor Mayavati, who expanded the party electorally and became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, the largest State in India. The movement activists look down upon party politicians, who, in their view, have no patience for pursuing long-term programmes for the educational and economic development of dalits. Further, by making social-political alliances with upper castes, and by entering into political coalitions with non-dalit parties, the dalit party politicians, in the view of movement activists, blunt the ideological edge of the movement. The political leaders themselves see the movement activists as impractical idealists who can't recognize the tremendous role electoral and party politics can play in empowering the dalits. In my view, these two can become complementary to each other and there is a need for dialogue and interaction between the movement activists and party politicians.

Movement, Coalitions and Party Politics

This development, however, was received with great apprehension in the civil society about the harm this dalit 'hunger for power' may do to Indian democracy. More ironically, the dalit intellectuals and movement activists themselves, even though their fledging morale of the 1980s was boosted by this development in politics, had only some smug and sanctimonious advice to give to the dalit party-political leadership. The political leadership, they argued, was wasting an opportunity to serve a long-term objective of the dalit movement by adopting shortcuts to get into power and, worse, making the short-sighted use of the power it has got for narrow partisan gains. In my view, the biggest challenge facing the dalit politics—and generally the national politics—today is about bridging this gap between the movements politics of discourse (from Durban to Diversity) and the dalit party politics of power (from Kanshi Ram to Mayawati).

In my view, the contemporary dalit situation is so vastly different from what it was at the time of independence that the kind of movements and strategies which need to be deployed to cope with this changed situation cannot be derived entirely, and mechanically, from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political thinking and experience. His social and political philosophy, without doubt, is of great lasting value, but the terms of discourse and categories of political practice he developed—say, in dealing with Gandhi, the Left, the upper-caste Hindus and the religious minorities—may not help us equally well today. The dalit situation in the current context needs to be re-problematized. Let me elaborate on two specific contexts that have changed and the implications this change may have on the politics of the dalit movements. First, from the time of the independence movement (say, since the 1920s) up to the early 1950s, the dalit discourse and politics, as also that of the OBCs and the religious minorities, were all articulated with reference to the then existing, active and intervening authority of a 'third party'. Supposedly a neutral arbitrator of all intercommunity disputes, the British rulers performed this third-party role at varying times between the aggrieved communities (the OBCs, dalits, minorities) and the colonial State. The 'third party' arbitrator formally ceased to exist in 1949 when the Constitution came into force. While the secular-democratic State rooted in the Constitution has replaced the colonial State, it has not yet been able to fill the void created by the eclipse of the 'third party' for the communities that have been historically wronged and justly aggrieved, except perhaps for the OBCs among them. The contemporary politics of the dalits, as also of

the religious minorities, often seem to incarnate the neutrality and legitimacy of the missing 'third party' in some transnational authority located in some other nation state of the world, or in an ephemerally and episodically existing global civil society, or in some of its transient forums. For, the already emaciated world organization of the United Nations and its agencies, being intergovernmental in its constitution, is reluctant, if not incapable, to play any significant interventionist 'third-party' role in the affairs of a particular nation state.

All this, however, has resulted in privileging a certain kind of intellectualized dalit politics usually seeking global forums for articulation and redressal of problems facing the dalits. This politics can best be described as a pure politics of discourse, detached from and running parallel to the actual politics of power. The actual politics of power operate in the arenas of elections, parties, legislatures as well as in the micro-struggles and movements of dalits at the grassroots. One consequence of this development is the retreat of a section of dalit leadership (ironically, along with the 'being-pushed-out' upper caste) from the State sector into the para-politics of the foreign-funded national and global non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This has brought the issue of nationalism, an issue already abandoned, by the liberals and the left-radicals to the Hindutvavadis, to the fore in the politics of civil society.

This emergent politics of nationalism has produced a tangential effect on dalit politics: a growing schism between the NGO-intellectual leadership and the dalit leadership engaged in electoral and party politics—a leadership constantly in need of popular support. A dichotomy that keeps the ideological politics and popular politics apart and which was perhaps incipient in Dr. Ambedkar's political practise, which kept a large mass of dalits in the Congress party fold, has now grown into two worlds of dalit politics. These are the unidimensional and 'pure' NGO politics of discourse and the ever-compromising, 'unpure' and opportunistic politics of the party. In between these two worlds of dalit politics, the dalit movements are being pushed into either becoming NGOs or their leaders seeking patronage and security within the political party fold.

If the movements are to be recovered and revitalized, it is essential to recognize how the larger picture has changed, in which the dalits (like some other 'communities'), while comprising within themselves different religious, cultural, linguistic as well as economic groups, make a composite whole of a political-cultural (ethnic?) identity. More specifically, there has been for a want of a better term middle classization of a section (even if a

small one) of dalits and pauperization of significant numbers of people in some 'non-dalit' communities. This, and many other developments, makes it necessary for the dalit-led movements to be multi dimensional and coalitional in nature. For today, dalit interests, even identities, intersect with many other non-dalit groups more than ever before. This has made it possible for other political formations and movements to effectively claim to incorporate dalit interests and identities in their own movements. One such major claimant is the Hindutva movement projecting itself as an all-inclusive (hence exclusive to its 'other' religious minorities) political formation. This is true for the other, highly politicized religious movements as well, which claim to represent dalit interests and identities, namely, the Christian and the Buddhist movements. Given this politics of claims and counterclaims there is no escape from rethinking the current identity politics of communities and simultaneously re-investing the Indian State and the Constitution with a legitimate and ultimate authority of a neutral, autonomous and just 'third party', ensconced in the sanctity of democratic values and procedures. This 'third party' of the Indian State and constitution is the one that is not alien and is accountable to its own people. Put differently, new terms of discourse have to be invented to reconcile the apparently contradictory claims of citizenship and identities, such that the current political language of 'majoritarian dominance' and 'minoritarian blackmail' is not allowed to oppress individuals by the collectivities and communities of people by any majoritarian fiat. The need is to transcend the present (one against all) zero-sum game of identity politics and evolve a new political language of individual and social emancipation.

The second context is the radical change that has occurred in the national-political context as a consequence of over 50 years of dalit participation in democratic politics. In my view, the dalit politics of elections and parties, building on the gains of the reservations policy, has responded more effectively to the needs of the time—'the pure politics of discourse'. There are three aspects of this response. First, in about four decades after independence, reservations produced for the dalits a critical mass of educated and highly politicized elite occupying, in small but significant numbers, positions in government administration and in the professions. This contributed, at one level, to bringing to an end the Congress (one-party) dominance in politics. The critical mass of the educated, political-bureaucratic dalit elite began to stake claims directly to power rather than remaining satisfied with power-by-proxy—an art of political management that the dominant Congress system had so astutely developed and

successfully practised for many long years. The origins and growth of the BSP needs to be seen in this light (of political-social transformation brought about by the Reservations policy).

Second, despite its neglect of the study-and-struggle dimension of the dalit movement and its indifference to development issues, for which the BSP leadership of Kanshiram–Mayawati has been subjected to severe criticism by the dalit intellectuals pursuing the pure politics of discourse, the BSP in the North of India has virtually electrified the dalit masses. In recent years, the dalits of Uttar Pradesh, as a consequence of the BSP's insistence on direct participation on equal terms in competitive power politics, have experienced an unprecedented level of psycho-political and social empowerment. This, among other things, has produced a high degree of dalit unity, something which the high-intensity movement politics in many other parts of the country cannot claim to have achieved. The point is we have underestimated the revolutionary role democratic politics has played in the caste-hierarchical Indian society.

Third, the high-profile dalit politics of parties and elections have created a possibility of relieving the dalit leadership from the burden of political categories of the past, which may have become counterproductive, to evolving a new politics of social emancipation. More specifically, such categories, although they continue to serve as painful reminders from the past, are increasingly less likely to sustain the kind of confrontationist discourse the dalit movement activists tend to raise on different issues. Not finding resonance in everyday experience even the recurrent use of these categories, by the social-activists, does not succeed in preventing dalit politics from becoming more coalitional and consensual.

Let me pursue this point a bit further. The party-political leadership cannot afford to *continually* indulge in the politics of breast-beating and moral indignation aimed at invoking the collective memories of the past. For the reference points of these memories have, by and large, been obliterated by changes that have occurred over time, and are not easily validated by the experience of the present. Since the party politicians have to continually expand their support base, they are compelled to recognize the changed equations on the ground and pursue the politics of expansion through accommodation. In this politics of accommodation they also cannot in any way appear to undermine the interest and identity concerns of their own supporters (i.e., the people of their own community). It is through striking a fine balance between interests of the party's core supporters and its potential supporters that political alliances happen. It is

important to understand this process for all those interested in creating a synergy between the movements-politics and the politics of parties. An alliance becomes necessary and useful when every aligning group becomes aware of its own specific problem as different from the other group and, at the same time, it knows that it cannot solve this problem without aligning/working together with the other. More specifically, it is on the recognition of identity differences as well as of overlapping economic and social interests that a political unity among different social groups is forged. It is in this light that one should evaluate the BSP's coalitional politics in Uttar Pradesh. The party could build political alliances among some previously adversary group, because their social equations had already changed through the processes of urbanization and modernization. For example, the actual relationship of interests between the *brahmans* and *dalits* had become less conflictual on the ground than between the dalits and the dominant communities of the OBCs. This made it possible for the BSP to claim itself to be not just a party of the *bahujan* but of *sarvajan* (of the entire people). In this process, Mayawati could forge for her party a formidable electoral alliance of the dalits, the *brahmans,* sections of Muslims and the lower OBCs.

It must, therefore, be kept in mind that what appear to be tenuous and opportunistic political alliances today are rooted in some new and durable social coalitions that have emerged through changes that have been taking place in the traditional social hierarchy of castes, especially since Independence. These changes have radically reshuffled social locations of groups and, more importantly, of many of their individual members who have now relocated themselves outside their traditional groups. This has resulted in redefinition by different castes and communities of their political and economic interests, making such alliances possible that were inconceivable only few decades ago. The historical burden of the past categories, however, continues to prevent some movement-intellectuals from recognizing the contemporary political meaning of these changes, which have produced new group and individual identities and have changed orientations of individual members to their old group identities. The unwillingness to recognize this change has made a genre of dalit movements, wedded to a pure politics of discourse, unidimensional and even exclusionary. But Mayawati cannot afford to cultivate such blindness. Competitive democratic politics does not entertain the old claim of ritualistic purity; nor does it allow the contemporary forms of ideological purity to survive for too long. It breaks old barriers even as it creates the new ones. In the process, the old unities are destroyed and new unities, as well as fragmentations, are created.

The other significant political advance the dalit party politics has made, strange though it may seem, is in the area of political discourse. Perhaps compelled by the need to forge new social coalitions, the BSP leadership sought to replace the rhetoric which made *brahmanvad* (brahminism) the target of their ire and anguish, as well as of their political attacks, by that of *Manuvad*. This indeed was not an original idea invented by the BSP leadership. In fact, from the inception of dalit movement, *manusmriti* has remained a focus of attack as it represented the core of brahminic exclusivism in thought and practice. But the terms and context in which it has been rearticulated by the BSP leadership represents, in my view, a significant advance in the politics of dalit discourse. At one level, it may seem, and it was, an opportunistic usage invented to mitigate negative consequences of the earlier, aggressive, anti–upper caste rhetoric of the party: *tilak, taraju aur talvar; unko maro jute char* (a brahman, a bania and rajput deserve thrashing by shoes). But, at another level, it is a conceptual innovation made in response to the changed political equations in the society. The challenge being to expand the party's support base and at the same time preserve its ideological core, new terms of discourse had to be invented. Thus, along with projecting the BSP's image as the party of *sarvajan* (entire people), Mayawati had to show that she had not compromised with her party's core ideology. She declared that her party was not against the people of any particular caste but against all those who held and lived by the pernicious ideology of Manuvad. This shift in discourse from brahminism to Manuvad has, in my view, a potential for resolving some conceptual and political problems facing the dalit movements today.

First, the term brahminism is liable to be interpreted either as articulating traditions, practices and thinking of the people of a particular caste, i.e., the brahmins, or as an ideology designed by that caste to create and maintain its dominance over others. In either sense, this usage fudges and even deflects the wider ideological meaning of brahminism. Thus, the term brahminism not only remains confined to a narrow empirical-historical domain, it also fails to communicate its intended reference. Put differently, the term brahminism fails to illuminate different elements of the ideology that legitimated, and sustained for millennia, not just the interest of one caste of people but the entire social and economic system of inequality by birth and, as such, served as a means of justifying a systematic exclusion and discrimination of a vast majority of people by a small minority in arenas as different as economy, polity and culture. Second, by organically linking the caste of people to an ideology which is a complex construct, encompassing a long

history of ideas, practices and legal and semi-legal enforcements, its ideological meaning becomes severely attenuated. Consequently, brahminism is being seen as an instrument, *a ploy,* of serving transient interests of a social class, rather than as a wider, long-lasting system of legitimation of power in society. Such use of the term brahminism has resulted in cultivating a political blindness to other contemporary forms of 'brahminism' practised not only by the brahmins but by many non-brahmin communities. This is not to deny that brahminism served the interests of the brahmin caste, but alongside this need one must also remember that brahmins did not and could not maintain their ideological hegemony exclusively, in all contexts and at all times, but needed much wider and continuous support in the society. Whenever such support became scarce, the brahminic power receded.

In brief, if the brahminic ideology is articulated in terms of *Manuvad,* it will serve better the purpose of interpretative logic as well as the contemporary political and social need to address the peculiar Indian situations of social injustice and inequality. More specifically, Manuvad being a more pronounced ideological conception, it can be articulated in terms of an ideology of the contemporary caste system which sanctions exclusivism and different forms of social injustice. Brahminism refers to that aspect of the ideology which primarily governs the ritual relations among castes. Thus seen, not just the brahmans but any group of people today, manifesting characteristics of caste oppression and dominance—rajputs, banias, the dominant castes of agriculturists or it could even be a particular 'lower-caste' group practising brahminic ideology for upward mobility—can be characterized by a generic term, *Manuvadi*, and be politically dealt with as such. Similarly, several subgroups or individuals sharing the appellation of brahmins but fighting alongside the dalits, making the dalit cause their own, can justifiably disengage themselves from a birth-marked political disability of being 'brahminic'. All this is possible because the Manusmriti along with some other *smriti* texts (but not necessarily all the ancient scriptures) epitomizes the caste system's ideology (pathology) of discrimination, exclusion and humiliation. Moreover, treating Manuvad as an embodiment of brahminism allows people to focus their attack on the continuing, systemic pathology of caste system and, at the same time, it does not prevent them from relating to the other enriching and emancipating aspects of their classical past and civilizational heritage.

It is a pity that the dalit intellectuals did not respond to this transmutation in discourse, from Brahmanvad to Manuvad, mooted in the mundane

world of the BSP party politics formulated by Kanshiram and propagated by Mayawati. In my view, any such initiative from the intellectual-activists of dalit movements would go a long way in establishing a dialogue with the political-party leadership. These developments that have come about through the working of competitive democratic politics need to be understood by the movement activists so that wider and durable social movements, based on the newly emergent aspirations and interests of different identity groups, could emerge and grow in the civil society arena.

Caste in the Mirror of Race

The fourth frame of the dalit question in contemporary India is the demand by some to equate caste oppression with racial discrimination. This has triggered a new debate in the dalit movement. A section of dalit activists has initiated a global campaign for incorporating the issue of untouchability in India within the wider Western discourse on racism. This campaign gained visibility at the Geneva conference attended by several dalit intellectuals and activists as well as some government representatives, and was further strengthened at the World Congress against Racism and Xenophobia (WCAR) held in Durban. Among other objectives, it aims at making the United Nations accept that caste oppression should be officially treated as a form of racial discrimination and, as such, an international campaign be launched against it under the aegis of the world organization.

Notably, political parties such as the BSP and the Republican Party who claim to represent dalit interests did not join the debate and the campaign remained more or less confined to the NGOs. Particularly active were the organizations attached to the World Council of Churches. Indeed, some of the organizations leading this movement even hoped to assume political leadership of dalits, replacing those whose primary political preoccupation, in their view, has been only with electoral calculus. This new, aggressive politics of NGOs has contributed to a situation where anyone, even in slight disagreement with these organizations, is labelled a supporter of untouchability and brahminism.

As for the attitude of the government, it was, as ever, a knee-jerk reaction. The political implications of viewing the problem of caste from the perspective of race could be quite serious and should, therefore, be examined as dispassionately as possible. I would, however, like to make it clear at the very outset that I see nothing wrong in the internationalization of caste. First, caste discrimination is by no means confined to Indian society

alone. It is found in several countries of South Asia and East Asia, even though its nature and extent may vary. Even untouchability is not an exclusively Indian practice. For example, because of their long association with leatherwork in the past, the Buraku of Japan suffer a predicament comparable to that of the chamars of India. The case of the Peekchong as of Korea and Ragyappas of Tibet may also be cited in this context.

Second, if untouchability is a crime against humanity, which it indeed is, how can we assume that all of humanity is exhausted in the Indian nation state? The question of untouchability should not be seen as one of nationalism; it is about the right to be human. As such, the question must be raised in all available and appropriate for a so that a powerful politics against its ideology and practice can be built up, both nationally and globally. It is necessary to construct a universal moral discourse against all types of social and cultural practices leading to different forms of sub-humanization of the excluded 'others'. This, however, should not compel us to mix metaphors/categories in a manner that might prove counterproductive in devising a politics to counter the process of sub-humanization of specific population groups in society.

To enter into the debate about whether or not to equate caste with race would be futile, for it is easy to show theoretically, sociologically and scientifically that the Asian phenomenon of caste is in some basic respects dissimilar to the Western phenomenon of race. Race has a biological connotation whereas caste is a socio-cultural construct. It is obvious that, like any other caste conglomeration, the dalits of different regions of India cannot be seen as of *one* race. To be sure, both caste and race are hereditary. Unlike race, however, a caste formation is not determined by biological characteristics such as the colour of one's skin. It is a function of a complex socio-historical structure within which a social group is assigned a ritual status specifying a degree of purity or pollution attached to it, an occupation and a specific range, within which its members can forge matrimonial alliances. Racism, on the other hand, is a form of social and political discrimination based on biologically manifest intergroup differences. In any case, the European claims regarding the inherent superiority of one social group over the other have been thoroughly discredited. While the fact that caste is different from race cannot be disputed, several aspects of injustice on account of racial discrimination in Europe, America and Africa appear similar to those perpetrated in the name of caste in India. The earlier generation of dalit leaders even started a Dalit Panther movement, drawing inspiration from the Black Panther movement in the USA. A number of

established dalit litterateurs have fruitfully used the idiom and imagery of the anti-apartheid movement to analyse and articulate dalit awareness and aspirations.

The fact of the matter is that the issue of caste versus race is primarily political rather than academic and must be understood as such. While it is true that no national society can objectively be divided into racial groups, for the idea of racial purity has proved to be nonexistent, discrimination on the basis of a perceived notion of race is a reality. It is, therefore, irrelevant whether the notion of race is scientific or not. It is a socially, culturally and politically operative construct on the basis of which a section of the population is seen as the lesser and inferior 'other'. A racial division of 'us' and 'them' has thus become a prevalent classificatory scheme, even when the idea of race is scientifically rejected.

This scheme is informed by a culturally constructed belief that certain communities are lacking in specific bio-physiological virtues because of the colour of their skin, a particular shape of nose or a specific type of hair texture. This biocultural belief, however, is sought to be presented as a 'scientific truth'. Even after the legitimacy of such beliefs is conclusively repudiated, the structures of associated ideas and prejudices continue to affect intercommunity relations. The racial discourse is thus designed to marginalize certain groups and deprive them of normal individual and group rights. That is why, despite its scientific invalidation, racism not only survives but continues to grow. It finds its expression in the intercommunity relations within a national society as also in relations between nation states. Indeed, racism today is more prevalent in international relations than in intercommunity relations in non-Western societies. Having lost its scientific basis, race, like caste, has become a cultural and political means of marginalizing disempowered groups in society. In spite of this obvious similarity, the dalit problem is fundamentally different in its constitution from the problem of the blacks.

But what if the demand to see caste as race is accepted by the United Nations, and casteism is 'officially' viewed as a manifestation of racism? If this happens, the social and democratic movements against caste in India will have to revise their ideological and organizational objections to the caste system that have been developed and effectively used to counter it. This would be unacceptable to the leaders of the dalit movement, when they begin to confront such objections on the ground, in everyday politics. True, the 'international community' understands racial discrimination more easily than casteism. Yet, if the vocabulary of race is given

currency merely to portray caste as an understandable, palatable category to the international community, many significant achievements of the movements against caste and untouchability would be lost to the anti-caste movement in India. How will the conceptual and ideological consequences of viewing caste as race affect the dalit movement?

A possible consequence might be that the readymade conceptual categories developed by the anti-racist movement would replace those developed by the long experience of dalit struggle. Today the ideology of casteism and untouchability finds expression in the context of perceived higher/lower status of communities, not in the vocabulary of biophysical discrimination. Casteist ideology uses a moral and religious language. Categories determined by a religiously sanctioned social hierarchy fix the limits of purity and impurity within which social groups are assigned different status. The entire system helps legitimize the association of social hierarchy with ritual purity. Racism does not operate in this manner. The language of racial discrimination is about fixing stable and total alienation of communities, whereas that of caste discrimination leaves the scope for appropriating social and cultural spaces for caste communities and thus expands their communal and secular interests simultaneously.

Because of their position at the bottom of a hierarchy-based system, dalits are the most deprived among the lower castes. Even today most of them are condemned to live more or less in a subjugated condition. Yet, they are not outside the system. Rather, they may even be kept forcibly 'within' the system. On the other hand, the ideology of racism totally alienates those who are biosocially demarcated as the 'other'. The 'ruling races' can accomplish such domination through a blatant exercise of power.

Another important difference between race and caste is that the Indian caste society allows an opportunity for upward mobility to the 'lower' castes under certain conditions, although such opportunities were in practice rarely available to castes in the fifth *varna* (pancham). Significantly, however, a large number of such castes claim that historically they were the upper castes, but were pushed down in the hierarchy for practising a 'polluting' occupation for survival—as an *apad dharma*.

Today's powerful community of Nadars in Tamil Nadu, e.g., were considered untouchable in the past. The Ezhavas of Kerala, who today have a decisive voice in the politics of the State, were once 'untouchables'. Within a span of 50 years, greater occupational diversification has been witnessed in these two communities than in the agricultural and artisan caste groups, which are otherwise higher in traditional social hierarchy.

Many members of these erstwhile untouchable communities have not only broken out of traditional caste occupations but have succeeded in registering socio-economic progress through employment in the industrial and other sectors of the modern economy.

In brief, if the modes of caste and racial oppression are different, the movements against them must also adopt different strategies. To put it differently, the process of democratization and modernization affords far greater possibilities of uprooting caste oppression than of doing away with racism. Victims of caste oppression can subvert the system from within, using ideas from without. The victims of racial discrimination can only locate themselves in a position of permanent opposition, but cannot subvert the system while acting as insiders. Racism casts the 'other' away; casteism draws the 'other' nearer. The former creates an adversary; the latter, a 'willing' victim.

If caste-based discrimination can be construed as racial discrimination, will not the brahmins of Tamil Nadu, the pundits of Kashmir, the Buddhists of Ladakh and the religious and linguistic minorities in various states avail of the opportunity to portray themselves as victims of racial discrimination? Once castes other than the dalits are also considered a race, casteism would begin to be understood in a bland and generic international idiom rather than in its distinctively Indian character, which hurts dalits in a different and deeper way than racism does the blacks.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the impact this move would have on the caste structures in communities outside the Hindu fold. Every religious minority in India has its own dalits—the discriminated 'other'. Claims and reassurances to the contrary notwithstanding, the Christians, Sikhs, Muslims and even the dalits themselves have failed to break free of the scourge of caste. Even conversions have not solved the problems of the victims of caste oppression and that is why the converted dalits are rightly demanding reservation benefits. Seen in this context, it seems that those campaigning for equating caste with race are looking for an opportunity to dilute the issue of caste polarization and discrimination within their own minority communities. This would eventually pave the way for the 'racialization' of minority politics. It is therefore necessary that the impact of this discourse on the dalit movement be examined both from the immediate and from the long-term perspectives.

One immediate consequence might be that the constitutionally guaranteed provisions for reservations could come under question. The opponents of reservation would get another chance to reopen the policy

and place it at the centre of the newly revived political and constitutional debates. Even worse, the moral passion against untouchability in the wider public sphere may lose its political edge. The non-dalit radical consciousness, seeds of which were sown by the rich egalitarian traditions of anti-caste movements, may also be blunted by the new, exclusionary politics of dalit discourse epitomized in the Durban debates.

CHAPTER 10

The Great Language Debate: Politics of Metropolitan Versus Vernacular India

The use of a regional language as the language of administration in a State, and as the medium of instruction in schools, is by now an established policy. It has been followed, although not uniformly, in almost all the states of the

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The term vernacular is used in two senses: linguistic and cultural. In the former sense, vernacular refers to all non-English Indian languages as a diffused countervailing reality confronting the pre-eminence of English in India. As such, these languages comprise the constitutionally recognized Indian languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil and so on, which in common parlance are referred to as the 'regional' languages. In this context, Hindi is also referred to as a vernacular, although it is competing with English at the national level and is aspiring to become recognized as the lingua franca of India. Other Indian languages and the so-called dialects which have not yet acquired legal-constitutional recognition (such as Konkani, Dogri, Tulu, etc.) also comprise the vernacular languages.

The term vernacular when used in the larger cultural context refers to a cultural identity in politics, of people and social-political elites who are identified us such for their non-use of English in the national political discourse. The use of non-English Indian languages by the 'vernaculars' (people, elites, etc.) may be due to conscious preference or the inability to use English as their first language. In the pan-Indian discourse, the non-use of English is uniformly associated with lack of sophistication, parochialism and cultural underdevelopment. And, therefore, all articulation and activity in Indian languages is seen as devoid of a genuine national perspective and modernist content. This has given rise to a countercultural identity in politics, of people and elites not using English as the first language; they are variously described as regional, provincial, mofussil, indigenous or vernacular.

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Indian union. In 1991, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, chose to reaffirm this policy. And that precipitated a fierce attack from the powerful English-language press in India. My interest in this event is not confined to commenting on the role that the English press played in countering the implementation of an established policy in an Indian State. Using that as a vantage point, I shall focus on the wider debate that this event generated, after 44 years of independence, on the future of English language in India. More than articulating the issues involved in the policy as such, the debate brought to surface the changed relationships among social groups in politics, and the divergence of perspectives between the contending groups—the proponents and opponents of English—on language policy as a means of nation building. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to situate the language debate in the politics of social change and to show how the clue to the language issue may lie in viewing democratization, rather than the continuing political hegemony of an elite class, as the means of nation building for India.

The viciousness with which the press attacked Mulayam Singh Yadav was not surprising. The English-language press has always reserved a special treatment for such rustic interlopers in our metropolitan world such as a Raj Narain or a Tau. And for the English-language media, a Yadav, whether a Mulayam Singh or a Lallu Prasad, is a chip of the same vernacular block. What was remarkable, however, was the unity of opinion in support of the English language expressed by all shades of commentators, irrespective of their radically different ideological backgrounds. One is hard put to recall any such event in the recent past of our fractured public discourse. Even such issues as *sati*, violation of human rights, threats to our environment and to the livelihood of the poor through so-called development projects, or even something such as the Bhopal gas tragedy, failed to achieve such a unanimous opinion and common attitude in the press as was reflected on the issue of the English language. One, of course, heard the odd dissenting voice but the main thrust of the writings in the English-language press was, and has remained till today, to support the continued pre-eminence of English over all other Indian languages, especially Hindi, in modern India's life.

Admittedly, the closing of ranks by the English-language press was not a reaction to an imagined threat. Mulayam Singh Yadav did more than merely revive an old policy for implementation in the state of which he was Chief

Minister. He declared his intention to give teeth to the policy, which was only hissing till then, not biting any one. The mode of implementation he chose was radically different from the one that had been followed in his own state or, for that matter, in any other Indian state and in the process he touched some raw nerves.

Yadav was not content with making pious pronouncements about 'promoting' Hindi in a manner that did not threaten the prevalent role of English language in the education system and generally in our public life. This is how the policy had been 'implemented' in the states so far. His mode of implementation involved replacement of English, *wherever* it was used, by Hindi, both as a language of education and administration in his state and as a language and communication between his state and other states in India and with the union government. In interstate communications, he insisted on translations directly from one state language to another without the mediation of English. The implications of such a step are not far to seek.

After the creation of linguistic states, the language policy followed so far in several Indian states was not able to establish the regional language as a universal medium of education and administration in a state. This half-hearted and partial implementation of the regional language policy has allowed the market principle of demand and supply to prevail over policy which, in effect, has given rise to a dual system of schooling in every state. One school system caters to those who can afford private schooling, the so-called public schools, in which English is the medium of instruction from the first standard. Even the nursery schools belonging to this system use English as the first language. In these schools, children are discouraged to use the language they speak at home even as a peer-group language. However sound may be the pedagogical principle of using the mother tongue as the medium of teaching and learning in theory, it is contemptuously rejected by this system. As is the case in other realms of Indian society, such a principle is applied in practice only for the masses. The latter are served, if that is the word, by the other system, in which the mother tongue or a regional language is the medium of instruction. This system comprises almost all the government and the municipal schools in a state. The vast majority of parents have no alternative but to send their children to these schools.

Yadav's dispensation, had it been actually implemented, would have put an end to such a dual system of schooling, at least in the state of Uttar Pradesh. But that is not all. Beyond making specific policy announcements

about using Hindi—which also happens to be the regional language of Uttar Pradesh—as a medium of education and administration in the State, Yadav made bold to air his views on the wider issue of what role and status the English language should have in India after over four decades of independence. He went even further and referred to the self-serving interests of the class which supports the continued dominance of English in our public life and proceeded to elaborate on its lifestyles and motives. Coming as it did from a 'mofussil' elite, this was too much to take for a class which operates with the self-consciousness of being the 'Builders of Modern India'. In its support for English, or for that matter its stand on any other issue, this class of self-proclaimed nation-builders cannot admit of any motive other than that of protecting the 'national interest', both present and future. Its support for English, it is convinced, is for promoting the noble causes of development and national integration. Those who fail to share this altruistic logic lack, in its view, a 'national perspective' and are victims of such dreaded and atavistic ideologies as regionalism, traditionalism and obscurantism.

Despite his bold stand later on the issue of secularism, a cause which a large section of the English-language press loudly espouses, Mulayam Singh Yadav could not retrieve his lost ground with the press and generally with the metropolitan elite. In fact, this was one of the major factors that eventually brought his career as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to an end.

Yadav will have to fight his own political battles. But the debate on the language policy triggered off by him has brought to the surface issues that had remained dormant in the earlier debates of the 1960s. Unlike in the past, the debate now is not about educational problems involved in the teaching and learning of the English language in India. Nor does it reflect such rational concerns as those of identifying the levels and areas of professional and public life for which English may be considered necessary and useful, those in which English can be replaced by the regional language and/or by Hindi. Least of all is any concern about evaluating 30 years of experience of using the mother tongue or a regional language as the medium in schools and the language of administration. The fact is that a radical change has occurred in the basic terms of discourse on the language issue as a whole.

The discourse on the language policy today is primarily a political discourse. Unlike in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when cultural identities were linguistically defined, today the discussions on the language policy do not pose a potent threat to such identities. Since the reorganization of states on the linguistic principle, religion, rather than language, has become the epitome of the culture of the people. Shorn of rhetoric, disputes concerning the language policy are now more openly stated, to use a hackneyed phrase, in terms of 'who gets what, when, and how in politics'. In more concrete terms, the discourse on the language policy has now been linked (along with other issues such as the reservations) to the wider conflict over power in the society between two elite groups: the nationally entrenched, pan-Indian English-educated elite and the new but ascendant elites who have lately emerged on the national scene *sans* the trappings of an English education.

The former has successfully managed to continue to tighten its hold on the levers of power at the national level since independence. This controls the higher echelons of politics, bureaucracy, the armed forces, corporate business and the professions. Members of the latter group have, as a result of democratic politics, risen at the regional level and have come to exercise power in the states for the last three decades. They are now attempting to create for themselves spaces in the power structure at the national level. (They are known by various names: the regional elite, the rural elite, the 'mofussils', the vernaculars or simply and crudely the kulaks.) The differences between the two are indexed in terms of their urban–rural and caste backgrounds. While there is some overlap between the two in economic terms, the sharp differences between them in socio-cultural terms are marked by the language divide. In the lifeworld of the former, English occupies a central role; for the latter, its role is at best marginal.

The English-educated elites have so far enjoyed the privilege of determining the terms of discourse because they claim to represent a 'national perspective' on every issue; in fact, they define what is 'national'. But the regional elites have begun to operate with a newly acquired sense of confidence because of the numbers they represent. In the process, they are seeking to change not only the terms of discourse on the language issue in their favour but are generally proceeding to challenge the role the English-educated elites have been playing since independence, both as norm-setters and pace-setters of India's public life.

This dimension of intra-elite conflict which has overridden all other aspects of the language debate is not a sudden, fortuitous happening. It is a *denouement* of a longer process of change in the balance of power in society brought about, among other things, by the functioning of open and competitive politics. It will, therefore, be misleading to view the debate merely in terms of intra-elite conflict. At the root of this conflict is the process of further democratization of the Indian polity.

This process began with the granting of universal franchise by the Constitution of India, the exercise of which was vastly expanded over time. Universal franchise has brought into the political fold groups which for centuries existed on the peripheries of the Indian political order. For example, the erstwhile *shudras* constitute today the numerous peasant and intermediate castes; according to the Mandal Commission, they make up over 52 per cent of the Indian population. By deploying their numerical strength, and basing themselves on the tradition of social solidarity of groupings among them, they have not only acquired electoral salience in politics but have lately been able to enter the legislatures and other structures of political decision-making in fairly large numbers.

In the earlier phase of the 'Congress system', this process was monitored and gradualized, if not contained, through the horizontally factionalized structure of political accommodation and participation—a hallmark of the Congress system. But this structure was subordinated at the national level by the Nehruvian elite. The latter emerged victorious in the elite struggle for power which took place soon after independence, and succeeded in establishing its pre-eminence in national politics. In the process, it insulated the fragile institutional structure of democracy from being overwhelmed by the populist pressures released during the independence movement. But at the same time, it also resulted in creating a big divide between the elite and the masses which in today's terms is often characterized as the divide between India and Bharat.

Indeed, the Nehruvian elite did not rule by use of raw power. Instead, it established its political hegemony by defining the terms of national discourse for independent India which, along with other forces in its favour, helped it obtain a consent to rule. Although democracy (and modernization) was its credo, the discourse appeared, at best, patronizing and condescending to the vast majority of the neo-literate and illiterate rural masses. They neither had the aptitude nor the language to participate in this discourse. The Nehruvian elite dismissed them as a change-resisting population steeped in obscurantist traditions. The only way the masses could

establish their fitness for modernization was by subjecting themselves to self-denigration and unconditionally accepting the modernizing national elite as their saviour.

As was proved later, the problem of modernization had nothing to do with the Indian farmer's resistance to change. The alacrity with which he/she adopted the new practices of 'scientific' agriculture and took to the monetization of the rural economy firmly repudiated the elite 'theory' of the change-resisting Indian farmer. But the same person showed disdain for such abstract ideas as 'modernization', 'secularism' and 'socialism'. For him/her these were disembodied ideas with no anchorage in real life. Their embodiment in real life required that the terms of discourse be adapted to the meaning system and the lifeworld of the Indian people. Instead, they were couched in terms alien to the cognitive and experiential categories used by ordinary Indians. The problem, thus, was not so much with the ideas per se, but with the idiom and the language in which the ideas of change and modernization were packaged. Simply put, modernization became an elite discourse in post-independence India because it was, by and large, carried out in English (or at best in some kind of translations). English became the language of modernity and of moderns in India and the indigenous languages began to be viewed as the medium of traditionalist, even obscurantist, thought and lifestyles.

It took about a decade and a half after independence for the subjugated groups to establish their identity as Indian citizens and to express their resentment about the patron–client relationship between them and the Nehruvian national elite. Although this process started in the 1950s with the participation of the masses in electoral and party politics, it acquired a big momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this period that the rural–urban and caste–class differences in the society acquired a strong political content and meaning. Several peasant-based and regional parties emerged, some as split-away groups from the Congress, while some old ones acquired a new political salience. The system of one-party dominance came to an end with non-Congress parties coming into power in several states and collectively posing a serious threat to the monopoly of the Congress party's power at the centre. The threat was first posed in 1967but it actually materialized in the 1977 elections. The Congress was unable to accommodate or contain the pressures that arose from the base of the polity and thus ceased to be the *system* that it was. It remained a 'national' party, but without strong roots in regional politics. Underlying these developments of the 1960s and 1970s was the rapidly expanding

process of institutional democratization, which in its first flush brought the large masses of peasant and intermediate castes onto the centre stage of politics. In the process, the upwardly mobile groups among them acquitted not only political clout but also a material basis to their power in the rural economy. This significantly changed the balance of power in the society.[1]

While it is true that the politics of this period did not open up avenues to power for the people at the lowest rungs of the traditional social hierarchy, i.e., the *dalits* and the tribals, they at least entered the process by forging electoral alliances with the upper castes. This was the case in the 1971 elections. They are now pressing harder at the gates, in a bid to enter the political process on their own terms. By forming parties (such as the Bahujan Samaj Party), they seek to convert their numerical strength into a durable political base. Nevertheless, the participation of people as full citizens is still an unfinished process in India and its full impact is yet to be felt at the centre of the political system. But, in the meanwhile, the vernacular elite has entrenched itself firmly in power at the local and regional levels. At the close of the 1980s, the Congress party was removed once again from power at the centre with the regional elite moving closer to acquiring its hold on the levers of power at the national level. As we entered the 1990s, the Congress returned to power once again at the national level. This change, however, was least likely to reverse the process of ascendancy of the vernaculars. It was the Congress party which, to survive in power, would have to change its Nehruvian stance on such issues as language, policy reservations, federalism and farm policy. Thus viewed, the intra-elite conflict illustrated by the language debate is an outgrowth of the democratic process of politics. The language policy, as also the other economic and social policies, will have to be adapted sooner or later to this changing balance of power.

The regional language policy operating on the ground has, either by design or default, produced far-reaching consequences for India's public life, particularly for the educational system. Among other things it has made the status quo regarding English unmaintainable.[2]

One unintended but major consequence of the manner in which the language policy has been implemented is the mushroom growth of the English-medium schools at all levels of school education—pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher secondary. The question now being posed by those excluded from the 'public schools' system is why the protagonists of English do not take an honest view of this development and recommend universal use of English as the medium of instruction in all the schools

throughout the country—'public' and 'non-public', private and governmental, and at all levels from pre-primary to the university? If English is so important for development and national integration, they argue, why should access to English education remain restricted to a few? The protagonists of English find any such suggestion 'impractical', even preposterous. Perhaps the idea of universalizing English education in India hurts their pedagogic and nationalist sensibilities. In contrast, maintaining the status quo on English not only satisfies their 'noble' sensibilities but can also be justified on the liberal grounds of freedom of choice. It is a different matter that the choice is not, and cannot ever become, real for the vast majority of Indians. Anyway, the fact remains that despite the increasing spread of English-medium schools a vast majority of children in India receive, and will continue to receive, schooling in the regional language. English will never serve as a vehicle for mass education in India.

Another but, by and large, unexpected consequence of the policy of promoting the regional language for mass education is that it has produced a whole generation of educated youth with little or no exposure to English whose parents are either illiterate or at best first-generation literate. They are taught English as a subject, but indifferently and at a fairly late stage of their schooling. They show little inclination to use even the little English they may have. When they use it they do so in a halting way with a strong regional accent. This gives them away as the mofussils they are. They have little chance of getting admitted to the charmed circle of the metropolitan youth who have acquired their English through its use as a medium of education in 'public schools'. Thus, for a vast majority of educated youth, proficiency in English is unattainable and yet they face unequal competition for social mobility in the society in which English continues to be the mark of education.

Today, about 80 per cent of the students graduating from colleges and universities have studied through the medium of a regional language.[3] The 'entrance examinations' or the so-called qualifying tests and 'interviews' they have to take, either for jobs or for entrance in the professional institutions, are, however, held in English. Even if for proforma's sake when they are allowed to take such tests in Hindi or other regional languages, their chances of getting jobs and elite positions remain dim in the institutional milieu, which is English-dominated. A few gifted ones are able to make an entry but for the vast majority of educated youth English has been a barrier to their social and physical mobility. To overcome this disadvantage the non-English-educated youth make pathetic efforts by joining 'English-

speaking classes' or reading up such books as *The Rapid English-Speaking Course*. They do this almost towards the end of their educational career when it is too late for them to make good their 'deficiency'. Obviously, this cannot prepare them for competition, but it does bring them the derision usually reserved in society for the parvenus.[4]

It may be a lop-sided view, but it contains an element of truth when it is said that the continued dominance of English in India has resulted in the emotional alienation of the non-English-educated youth from the national mainstream. This divide between the metropolitan and the vernacular youth, brought about by the dual educational streams, has given a new twist to the language issue. The question now being raised is about the future of this mass of population of the non-English-educated regional youth in the rural area whose life chances are severely affected by their poor knowledge of English. Their frustrations, based on acute status anxiety, find political expression in linguistic and regional chauvinism. This often results in them joining, even founding, regionalist and separatist movements, especially in the non-Hindi regions. In the Hindi-speaking regions, they express such anxiety by vociferously opposing the domination of English, and demanding that Hindi take its place. The enterprising ones fancy entering the world of high crime or of 'politics', or organizations such as the Bajarang Dal or Shiv Sena, for joining and prospering in which knowledge of English may be a liability rather than an asset.

The continuities of lifestyles and aspirations once informed the relationship between the national political elite and the rural leadership, especially during the independence movement, linking national politics with regional politics. These continuities have been eroded in the course of the three decades from the 1960s. The neocolonial elite, having acquired greater, almost exclusive, access to English education, have been able to develop for themselves new techno-managerial skills. In the process, they have struck roots in India's growing metropolises. Their lifestyles and aspirations are now linked to, and are more in tune with, the global metropolitan world. This has created a new gap between the so-called national elite and the regional elite. The gap now is not only political but also socio-cultural in nature.

While the national elite has kept the regional elite at bay, India's regional politics has also been displacing the upper caste–oriented, English-educated elite from positions of power in the regions. This process is best illustrated by frequent waves of anti-Brahmin movements in the peninsular states of South India and in the western state of Maharashtra. Such movements

predate independence but their nature has changed significantly in the post-independence period, especially since the early 1960s. They are no longer the 'protest' movements they once were, expressing strong sentiments, through the symbolism of oppression and exploitation, against what they described as Brahminical domination in the society. The castes, which in the earlier phase were 'in the forefront of these movements, have now acquired political power in these states and are in the process of consolidating it by acquiring economic clout, control over the educational system, and over the job market in the governmental sector'. The language and symbolism they now use are of power and not of 'protest'.

The result is that significant sections of the upper-caste elites from these states, equipped with English education, have been elevated to the national level, and quite a few among them have also migrated to countries of the developed world. Those who have been left behind are unreconciled to the regionalization of politics brought about by the ascendant middle and intermediate castes and to the consequent loss of their power. In the other states, where there have been no anti-Brahmin movements, regional politics is nonetheless dominated by the caste–class and sectarian factors. In these states, the numerically strong and upwardly mobile groups of the middle and intermediate castes have, by and large, succeeded in casing out the upper-caste elite from positions of power and to some extent from white-collar jobs as well.

This ongoing process operates differently in different states. It is articulated in sectarian terms in states like Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, and in terms of 'preserving the linguistic and cultural identity' in a state like Assam. In any event, the consequences of these new post-independence regional polities are similar in all the states in that a certain class of elite is displaced from power, with significant sections from among them moving out into the growing metropolitan world. The process is likely to be intensified in several states of northern and western India with the implementation of the reservations policy for the 'Other Backward Classes'. When fully implemented, total reservations for jobs and college admissions in these states will amount to at least 50 per cent.

These developments, of the last few decades, have not only brought the regional elites into prominence but have radically changed the character and composition of the national elite. The old neocolonial upper-caste elite, with a long tradition of education in the language of the ruling elite of the time—Sanskrit or Persian in the past or English today—still constitutes its core. However, the ranks of the 'national' elite have now expanded to

include several new groups of castes, by and large of the *dwija* varna, which have acquired access to English education in the post-independence period. This has been made possible by the rapid expansion of English-medium schools which cater to these new aspirants. This development, combined with the push and pull factors described earlier, has not only contributed to the increase in the numerical strength of this expanded elite, but has changed the character and function of the elite in the society. In this sense, it is a different class of elite from the one which led the independence movement. This new formation is constituted by drawing together different elite elements in the society—the new as well as the old ones. Their commitment to the continued pre-eminence of English in India acts as a binding force for these diverse elite elements. This has not only shaped their attitude and role as the new pan-Indian elite operating in the national arena, but has also detached them from the world of regional politics and cultures. It will be a mistake to confuse this expanded new elite formation at the national level with the regional elites who operate in regional languages but still support the use of English, rather than Hindi, as a second language in their respective regions. Unlike the new national elite, their primary commitment is to the regional language and not to English. In effect, their worldview is radically different from that of the pan-Indian elite in whose life world English has a priority over their mother tongue.

Sociologically viewed, the ranks of the pan-Indian elite are drawn from several groups ousted from the regions, such as Punjabi Hindus, Kashmiri Pundits and South-Indian Brahmins. Then there are the traditional urban-oriented professional castes such as the Nagars of Gujarat, the Chitpawans and the CKPs (Chandrasenya Kayastha Prabhus) of Maharashtra and the Kayasthas of North India whose members have joined the ranks, albeit more through responding to the pull factor than being subject to the push factor. Also included among them are the old elite groups which emerged during the colonial rule: the Probasi and Bhadralog Bengalis, the Parsis, and the upper crusts of the Muslim and Christian communities with a pronounced secular and nationalist persuasion.

Being uprooted from regions, they have become a new somewhat homogeneous all-India group. Usually their nationalism is unitary and their idea of the State is that of a centralized and hegemonic political entity. They see a close connection between knowledge and power and use English as a means of exclusion, an instrument of cultural hegemony, by which they seek to defy the logic of numbers in politics and continue their hold over the levers of power at the national level.

Although they operate with the subjective sense of a *national* elite, they lack the self-consciousness, ideological coherence and the strong will to rule. Their primary concern, it seems, is to somehow retain their hold on the Indian State in the face of radical, and apparently irreversible, changes that have occurred in the balance of power in society. With their lifestyles and aspirations now being hitched to global metropolitanism, they lack a cultural basis for their political power. Theirs is a synthetically manufactured Culture (with a capital 'C'). While they may continue to give an ideological justification for their rule in terms of modernism, its validation in the wider society has become tenuous.

Although English has become central to the life world of this national elite, their bilingualism is not of the kind a Gandhi, a Tagore or a Tilak represented during the independence movement. These leaders used their bilingual facility to transcreate the terms of national discourse in the regional world and thus seek the latter's participation and involvement in nation building. It is important to remember in this context that the national leadership of the independence movement self-consciously learnt English as a foreign language; it was indeed acquired assiduously and cultivated purposively. But the national leadership lived and, by and large, operated in the milieu dominated by the regional language and culture. It made creative contributions in different fields of knowledge through the medium of a regional language. The national discourse raised by this leadership was addressed to the issues of social reform and political independence and was carried out in regional languages; in the process, it also contributed to the growth of these languages. It was not accidental, for instance, that Gandhiji's *My Experiments with Truth,* Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Tilak's *Gitarahasya* were written originally in Gujarati, Bengali and Marathi, respectively.[5] The post-independence national elites, on the other hand, have become distant from the regional languages and cultures, with English having become virtually their *first* language. Their use of the mother tongue or a regional language is, by and large, confined to the household or to the bazaar. It is a language hardly ever used by them in any serious discourse, not even when the interlocutors among them may belong to the same regional language group. The result is that the political schism which always existed between the 'national' and regional elites has now widened along socio-cultural dimensions with the caste–class and rural–urban differences between them being overlaid by the language divide: the 'national' elite, by and large, operating in English, and the regional elite in the respective regional languages.

The socio-linguistic map of India has vastly changed since the restructuring of the states on the linguistic principle during the period between the late 1950s and mid-1960s. It has created political units which became coterminous with large linguistic identities. Identification of the boundaries of a State on the basis of *one* language which was culturally predominant and also numerically preponderant in that region or province, and the recognition of that language as the official language of the State, created a strong cultural base for the political-linguistic identities in the country. In the process, however, the other smaller languages and cultures in the regions have been marginalized. The 'non-official' languages in the linguistic states do indeed survive today, but more as 'spoken languages' or 'dialects' or media of expression for 'folk cultures'. Their role in formal education and in the administration of these states has been almost erased.[6]

This has made regional languages the vehicle of mass literacy in formal education and, generally, of public communication in the State. As a result, the regional languages themselves have undergone significant transformation. The socio-cultural groups which until recently had little or no access to formal education have now acquired significant levels of education through the medium of an officially recognized regional language. They are now contributing to the evolution of regional languages, bringing with them idioms and perspectives which these languages had shunned when literature was the preserve of the old bilingual elite: in those days, the Sanskritic or English-language sources were drawn on for the 'development' of these languages. The growth of the *dalit* literature in several regional languages is one indicator of this change. Added to this is the phenomenal growth of the print media in regional languages which, among other things, has encouraged the participation of new generations of the literate population in a region in the production of signs and symbols relevant for mass politics.[7]

These developments have significantly contributed to making the regional languages more pliable as vehicles of public discourse. The formally adopted language of a State has in the process established its primacy not only over the minority languages but also over English. While English has survived, thanks to the dual education system, its role as the language of cultural hegemony and political domination in the regions is on the decline. But there is little prospect for several 'mother tongues' or even full-fledged languages within a region to survive, with the predominant language of a region having established itself as the language of formal education and administration in the State. In political terms, this is a development

unprecedented in Indian history. It has brought about political and cultural unification within what are today called linguistic states, and it is these that constitute the primary units of the Indian political system.[8] Several of these political units are larger in population and territory than many European countries.

This particular development has far-reaching implications for the future of Hindi in India. This language has been adopted as the official language in seven Indian states. Four of these states are among India's most populous ones: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The remaining three states of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi are the smaller units. Together they comprise, according to the 1991 census, 43.36 per cent of India's population. Even if we discount the non-Hindi-speaking population in these states, the fact remains that in the 1981 census about 40 per cent of the total household population in India reported Hindi as the language used in their households. As against this picture of spread of Hindi, the census figure for English appears minuscule. Only 52,000 households in the whole of India, comprising about 0.04 per cent of the total household population, reported English as the language used in households. Another 0.5 per cent population reported English as its second language.

Unfortunately, we do not have data on the third language used by people. It is, however, common knowledge that the increased proportions of interstate migrations and particularly out-migration of people from the Hindi belt to other parts of India in recent years, the now vastly expanded networks of the electronic media—the radio and the TV—relaying Hindi programmes, some of which have become quite popular outside the Hindi belt, the reach of Hindi cinema and the growing integration of the market have all contributed phenomenally to the spread of Hindi in India after independence. Its use as a third language or in the form of a bazaar patois seems to have become quite widespread. As such, Hindi has emerged as a throne language, which is understood and used today by a majority of Indians, albeit with great variations in the degree of comprehension and use. There is thus little doubt that Hindi, in its natural course, has spread to different parts of the country—though more in some and less in others. And such a spread has little to do with the work of Hindi proselytizers or with the so-called national policy on Hindi.

Indeed, English has also spread extensively in recent years, figures for which are not adequately reflected in the 1991 census. According to the census data on English, 0.55 per cent of the households use it as either the first or the second language, 0.51 per cent use it as the second language and

only 0.04 per cent as the first language. This, however, leaves out fairly large numbers of those who may be using English as the third language. For example, an English-educated Coorgi will report Coorgi as the mother tongue and Kannad as the second language, while he or she may be quite proficient in English. Similarly, a Marathi-, Gujarati- or Punjabi-speaking Indian who is proficient in English, but uses Hindi in day-to-day transactions vis-à-vis those not knowing his or her mother tongue or English, is likely to report Hindi, rather than English, as the second language. The spread of English is also indicated by the increased circulation figures for English-language newspapers and magazines in recent years, by statistics of those listening to news and commentaries in English on the electronic media, and by the number of high school and college graduates who may have learnt English as a subject for a few years of their education. There are also those who may have acquired a smattering of English through the trades they are engaged in, such as tourism and the hospitality industry. Even after taking all these factors into account, the figures for use of English in India continue to remain much smaller, even smaller than, say, Urdu, which is spoken by 5.3 per cent of the Indians.

Such a situation in which Hindi represents the force of numbers and English the historical power of a small national elite, and which is now linked with mobility aspirations of the country's growing literate population everywhere, calls for a change in the perspective and approach of the debate followed so far on the language issue. The protagonists of English need to recognize the fact that the regional languages have become a great homogenizing force for the politics and culture of the regions and now also serve as the media for mass education in the country. In light of these developments, English can no longer maintain the kind of hegemony and pre-eminence it has been enjoying in our national life. The protagonists of Hindi, on the other hand, need to change their priorities and concentrate more on its growth than its spread. The cause of Hindi will be served better if their interventionist impulses and creative energies are applied simultaneously to the development and standardization of Hindi as a language of the Hindi belt and they leave its spread in the other parts of the country to the ground-level forces which are already at work in favour of Hindi. While the protagonists of Hindi clamour for its national status, they do not seem to pay much attention to its development as the regional language of the Hindi belt covering over 43 per cent of the Indian population. For Hindi to grow as a common language of the people across all the states in the Hindi region, and also as the vehicle for serious scholarly discourse, the primary

requirement is massive expansion of formal literacy as well as of higher and professional education in the Hindi belt.

In the 1991census, only 41.71 per cent of the population in Uttar Pradesh is literate, which is about 11 percent lower than the national average of 52.11. The literacy rates for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar are 43.45, 38.81 and 38.54, respectively. In the literacy ranking for all the states and union territories ($N = 31$), Madhya Pradesh ranks 26th, and Uttar Pradesh 27th. Rajasthan and Bihar occupy the bottom-most positions at the 30th and 31st, respectively, in the rank order.[9]

One reason for this low performance of the Hindi-speaking states on the literacy front is the manner in which the Hindi used in the administration, schools and the government-sponsored electronic media is sought to be 'standardized'. There is no common policy guiding all these states about the use of basic terminology in administration or for translating concepts and terms from English or other languages into Hindi for their use in the school textbooks. At the same time, standardization is imposed artificially from the top in an ad hoc manner in each State, all relying on opaque Sanskritic terms and often disregarding those in common usage, but each producing a different terminology.[10] The situation is further confounded by the fact that 'official' Hindi is not only confined to the language used by the administration in the State, but it has also invaded the textbooks and the classroom. Being falsely perceived as a literate language, it censors the use of words and phrases—notwithstanding its already narrow vocabulary base—coming from the 'non-standard' sources of Hindi spoken in the households and communities in the Hindi belt. The result is the wide and artificial gap between the Hindi used in the school and the Hindi spoken in homes, in effect, making it difficult for the language to serve as a vehicle for mass literacy. According to the 1981census, e.g., about 48 variants of Hindi are being used in the households of the various regions in the Hindi belt. In short, if Hindi has to serve as the medium of mass education in the Hindi states, its standardization will have to be achieved through an evolutionary process rather than through administrative fiat.[11] Meanwhile, at least at the level of the primary school, the distance between the Hindi used in the school and that in homes will have to be minimized.

The pattern of growth Hindi has followed since independence is qualitatively different from its growth during the colonial period as well as from the one followed by other Indian languages. Its growth is being increasingly delinked from a specific linguistic culture with which it was once identified. While this has made it possible for Hindi to become a language used by a

much wider population, today constituting the Hindi belt, it seems to have lost its earlier cultural identity wherein it was territorially confined largely to the western and some parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh and was linguistically fused with Urdu.[12] The result is that as it is written and spoken today, Hindi is not the language of any one identifiable, territorial cultural group. It has evolved, and is evolving as a supra-language, overriding several languages across many Indian states. These are, among others, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Braj, Marwari, Haryanvi, Maithili and Urdu. The supremacy of Hindi over these languages has largely been achieved through historical and political processes. Hindi today seems to be groping for a new cultural identity, which it can no longer seek in any local culture of the region. Consequently, Hindi has come to be looked upon as the language for political issues, with potentials or mass mobilization in the entire Hindi belt. In the process, it has found basis in the mass political culture of the region but is far away from acquiring a distinctive linguistic culture of its own, which it can find only through the growth of literacy and of higher education (through the medium of Hindi) in the entire Hindi region. For its growth as a truly universal language of the entire Hindi belt, and as the second or third language in other parts of the country, Hindi will have to also develop a capacity to incorporate, and draw sustenance from, the other cognate languages in the region. Again, for this to happen effectively, the literacy frame will have to vastly expand, such that the increasing ranks of the literate coming from different regions and cultures of the Hindi belt are freely able to enrich Hindi by bringing with them usages and idioms of their various mother tongues, all of which are akin to Hindi. This is how many regional languages in India have grown since the formation of linguistic states.

With a linguistic dynamism thus acquired, Hindi may also become a pliable language for India's literate population outside the Hindi belt. But the resistance to Hindi involves not just the issue of its linguistic capability or incapability. It has also to do with the somewhat negative attitude of the Hindi-speaking population to other Indian languages. This is exhibited by the striking degree of monolingualism prevalent among the Hindi-speaking population. With regard to the proportion of bilingual Indians, as against the national average of 13.34 per cent, only 4.74 percent of the Hindi speakers are bilingual. The only other major language group in India approximating this 'record' of monolingualism are the Bengalis with 5.64 per cent among them having a second language.[13]

In sum, the socio-political context of the language issue has radically changed in the course of the last 30 years, but the terms of debate on the

issue have not yet adapted to this change. For one thing, the change has severely narrowed down the range of options available to the national elite interested in maintaining the *status quo* on English. For another, they pose a serious challenge to those interested in making Hindi the lingua franca of India, requiring them to simultaneously develop Hindi as a regional language in the six Indian states and make it acceptable to others in the non-Hindi-speaking regions as the second or third language. They cannot do this, as I shall presently show, by relying on the power of numbers that Hindi represents.

It was by relying on the democratic process that the vernacular elites in almost all the states could convert their numerical strength into political power. They now want to extend the logic of numbers to seek power at the national level. The Hindi-speaking elites among them, however, seem to believe that numbers are the essence of democracy and that they can settle the issue of national language by using numerical strength. They probably do not realize that the game of power in India is quite different at the national level. There the logic of numbers is not decisive. For validation of its power, the national elite must rely on established norms and procedures of the system in which numbers have only a subsidiary role. It is, therefore, not surprising that while the vernacular elites, adept as they are at caste calculus in elections, could produce electoral victories, they found it difficult to secure continued legitimacy for their rule. Numbers are necessary but not sufficient to make an electoral victory sustainable at the national level.

In reality, power at the national level does not reside in the majority or even in the party elected to form a government. It resides in the apparatus of the State which in India is wielded by the neocolonial, Nehruvian elite to whom the power was transferred at independence. For its legitimacy this elite only indirectly depends on numbers, which at the national level remain unaggregated on any issue. Since it is the members of this elite who usually supply terms of definition, the relationship between the merit of an issue and the weight of numbers behind it is generally kept unarticulated or obfuscated.

It is true that by making connections between considerations of merit and of numbers a democratic leadership can bring about major transformations in the society. The ruling elite in India, however, tends not to make such connections. Instead, it prefers to wield power and seek legitimacy for it by setting broad parameters of the national discourse and by defining terms for issues which acquire prominence in the national politics. In effect, these issues get articulated within a framework of power established by such

an elite. The national discourse is thus detached from the logic of numbers; the principle of majority is made to adapt itself to the normative requirements of the system generally laid down by the ruling elite. Indeed, the moment for a revolutionary change comes in a democracy but only when numbers are seen to bear merit or the proposition of merit attracts numbers. Such a moment, it seems, is yet to arrive in Indian politics. Meanwhile, the established power of the ruling elite at the national level will continue to play a decisive role in determining the terms for defining as well as 'settling' any issue considered by them to be of 'national importance'. Its politics is to keep considerations of merit on any such issue unaligned with numbers. The language issue is not an exception to this general rule.

The use of language by the elites as an instrument of social and cultural exclusion and, thus, as the means of their rule in the society is not a new phenomenon in Indian history. In the classical times, Sanskrit performed this role. As it was considered the language of the deities and celestial beings and their earthly/worldly surrogates, access to it on earth was restricted, by and large, to the two upper varnas of the Brahmins and the Rajanyas. It was the only recognized vehicle of serious thought and scholarship. Even the rules by which the laity was supposed to lead its life, i.e., the principles of *dharma*, were codified and interpreted in Sanskrit, rather than in languages understood by the people. Put differently, by restricting access to Sanskrit, the mechanism of interpretation and mode of application of these rules were securely kept in the hands of the Brahmin–Rajanya dyad, without whose mediation ordinary people could not function in the *dharmic* world. A telling example of this is found in the classical Sanskrit plays in which Sanskrit is spoken by gods, Brahmins and Rajanyas (and that too only by the males) and *Prakrit* is spoken by all others. It is no wonder that the profound thought and high ideals developed by the elite of classical India, but whose medium was not the people's language, almost evaporated with their loss of power. The role of Persian and of English in our history has also been primarily that of serving as an instrument of elite rule.

Of course, such monopoly over knowledge and power exercised through the dominance of an elite language was frontally challenged at least twice in India's history, first by the Buddhist movement and later by the Bhakti movement. But these movements did not quite succeed in breaking the nexus between the elite language and the modes of producing and using knowledge, and between knowledge and power in the society. By rejecting Sanskrit and adopting the people's languages, such as Pali (by the Buddhists) and Ardha Magadhi (by the Jains),as the language of discourse,

Buddhism not only flourished for centuries in India, but posed a serious challenge to the elite rule that was associated with the exclusive use of Sanskrit. But equally interestingly, the decline of Buddhism, among other things, was associated with Sanskrit once again becoming the language of discourse for Buddhist thought and metaphysics in the classical and post-classical period. It eventually paved the way for Buddhism's absorption into the mainstream of Vedantic thought. Similarly, the Bhakti movement used local languages for its discourse and opened up the doors of the *dharmic* world to the masses by challenging the Brahminic monopoly of spiritual knowledge and the Brahmin's role as a mediator in the performance of rites and rituals. However, the Bhakti movement basically did little more than translate the Vedantic discourse and codes of social behaviour associated with it in the language and symbolism of the people. This helped vertical integration of the elite and the masses which was breached when Sanskrit was the predominant language of this discourse but it only partially succeeded in making a dent in the ideological foundations of the Hindu society characterized by the ritual hierarchy of the varna system.

In our times, we are witnessing a third movement, namely, democratization of politics, and through it the ascendancy of the vernaculars. This difference from the previous two movements, in so far as it addresses the issue of production and distribution of knowledge—an issue which is integrally linked with the fact that English is an elite language—is through effecting changes in the relationships of power and patterns of its distribution in the society. While this is an important historical development, making the continued pre-eminence of English in India a difficult proposition, it remains an open question as to how the void created in this process will be filled. As we have already discussed, the reality of democratic politics is far too complex and cannot be comprehended simply in terms of numbers. While numbers cannot, of course, be ignored in a democracy, the process of democracy gets defeated when numbers are not aligned with larger systemic considerations.

There is another reason why the Hindi-speaking vernacular elites, in their bid to challenge the domination of the English-speaking elite, cannot bring the force of numbers to bear upon the language issue. The numbers supporting the case for Hindi still remain, by and large, territorially confined. In such a situation, if Hindi, because of its numerical strength, is sought to be imposed over the non-Hindi-speaking states, it will produce

severe negative consequences for India's unity rather than help the cause of Hindi. This is especially so because the vernacular elite in India as a whole are internally divided on the issue of the 'link' language. On the one hand, the Hindi-speaking elite, which is by and large, monolingual and in effect operates with one-language formula, wants Hindi to be the only 'link language' at the national level. The non-Hindi vernacular elite, on the other hand, although working assiduously towards reducing the pre-eminence of English in their own respective regions, want to retain English as the only 'link language'; they are loath to concede any ground to Hindi at the national level, not even as a second link language after English. Such a situation of intra-elite conflict among the vernaculars prevents those who want to downgrade the use of English at the regional levels from aggregating at the national level. In the meanwhile, the metropolitan elite for whom English has virtually become their first language has been able to muster support in favour of English that is vastly disproportionate to its minuscule numerical strength. This support comes from the growing populations of the literate everywhere in India who increasingly look upon English as a means of social mobility. It is another matter that only a few among them actually manage to cross this mobility barrier. In the process, not only have the urban elite succeeded in maintaining their edge in national politics and in the competition for social mobility, vis-à-vis the large number of Indians educated in the regional languages, but they have also marginalized the role of the regional languages in the national discourse. As a result, the discourse has lost its dialogic character and has become a political exercise for dominance and hegemony.

In articulating their opposition to the dominance of English at the national level, the Hindi-speaking vernacular elite will, therefore, have to find a common ground with the other regional elites. For this to happen the Hindi-speaking elites have to give up their monolingualism. More importantly, they will have to transcend the numerical and parochial terms in which they tend to define the issue. They must link the language issue with the larger problem of changing the nature and tenor of the national discourse as a whole. It is only then that the exclusivist character of the so-called national discourse, monopolized today by the English-speaking elite, will get exposed. In the long run, what is called for is a much greater interaction among the vernacular elites themselves—both the Hindi and the non-Hindi-speaking ones—not just on the language issue but on all issues of national importance. It is through this process that the vernacular elites may evolve a self-consciousness of being a counter-elite or a 'new' *national*

elite. So far, they have been playing a role at the national level but with the mindset of regional politicians.

Thus viewed, the issue of language in India will have to be treated both by the Hindi and non-Hindi vernacular elites, as well as by the others, not in the antagonistic terms of intra-elite conflict—English versus Hindi—but as part of the larger issue of making democracy, development and modernity accessible to the majority of Indians. The primary issue is thus about the prevailing *bolbala* of English and its pre-eminence in our national life which by underlining the power of a small class distorts our national priorities and goals. What role Hindi should have at the national level is only a secondary issue. If, for a moment, the issue of Hindi replacing English at the national level, a proposition which has become a red herring in the language debate, is kept out and Hindi is treated as a regional language, which, along with others, seeks spaces in the national discourse, a series of questions arise about the prevailing role of English in India.

Does our woefully bad performance on the literacy front, which is worse than that of many underdeveloped countries, have to do with the dominance of English in our educational system? Has this prevailing dominance distorted our priorities in education, where disproportionately larger allocations are made for English-oriented higher and professional education at the expense of primary education? Has it really resulted in cultivating 'excellence' in various fields of learning or has it only promoted international mobility for a small elite at a cost disproportionate to its claim on the national resources? Further, has the continued pre-eminence of English helped such causes, avowedly close to the hearts of our modernizing elite, as popularizing science, developing technological skills and instilling 'scientific temper' in our population? Or to achieve these goals is it not desirable to reduce the influence of English and bring upfront the people's own languages in the public discourse on all issues of national importance? (The efficacy of such a measure in our public life is amply demonstrated by such organizations as the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad.) Has the continued predominance of English contributed to national integration or to creating a big divide between metropolitan India and mofussil India, between the centre and the regions? These questions acquire great relevance, even urgency, if the language issue is viewed from a truly national perspective, rather than the narrow perspective of a small class of English-

educated Indians which, ironically, puts forward its sectional perspective as *the* national perspective.

Viewed in this context, reducing the pre-eminence of English emerges as the primary requirement for a national policy on the language issue. The case is obviously not about *abolishing* English, although the proponents of English are fond of raising such a scare. Nor is it anybody's case that English should not be taught in schools and colleges as a subject. Even its use as a medium of instruction for certain specified subjects at higher levels of education is not an issue. If the consensus among our educationists is that certain subjects are best taught in English, its knowledge, like competence in mathematics, can be made a prerequisite for offering such courses. Making knowledge of English a blanket requirement for entry into higher education is, however, not a sustainable policy.

What is at issue is something else. Is there any pedagogic or political justification for the continuation of the dual system of education in which one stream of schooling uses English as the medium of instruction from the nursery level all through to the university level while in the other, much larger stream, its use is either mostly prohibited or introduced at a much later stage and that too indifferently?

The growing preference of the middle and lower-middle classes for English-medium schools is, in fact, due to the poor quality of teaching in general, and of English as a subject in particular, in the non-English-medium schools; it is not an expression of their preference for English as the medium of instruction for their wards. In order to correct this imbalance, English must be uniformly and efficiently taught *as a subject* at an early stage of schooling in all the states and in all schools, but its use as the medium of instruction has to be discouraged and eventually abolished. Of course, the very small number of Indians whose mother tongue is English should be able to receive education through the medium of English just as those whose mother tongue is, e.g., Tulu should have a similar facility.

What we therefore need is a national policy on English rather than on Hindi. If such a policy moves in the direction described earlier, it will considerably weaken, even obliterate, the prevailing dual system of education, which cannot be justified either on pedagogical or political grounds. Such a policy will not abolish English altogether. English will survive, but more on functional terms than as an instrument of elite domination. At the same time, as has already happened with vernaculars in other regions,

Hindi as a regional language will have to progressively replace English in the Hindi belt. It is intriguing as to why any attempt to replace English by Hindi in the Hindi-speaking region threatens our national elite who see any such attempt as a threat also to national integration! Of course, the spread of Hindi outside the Hindi belt, as we have already argued, should best be left to take its own course and to the ground forces of politics and the market. There, of course, are several complex issues involved in the process, but what is important is the clarity of the direction in which the policy should move.

Clarity about policy options cannot be achieved unless the language issue, guided by our experience of the last 30 years, is formulated entirely in new terms. If conducted as a discourse in dominance, as is the case now, it will remain confined to the narrow terrain of intra-elite conflict where the issue tends to get polarized, articulated in terms of a hegemonistic contest between Hindi and English. It not only ignores the role of the regional languages, of which Hindi is indeed numerically the largest, but also keeps the national discourse on modernization and social transformation inaccessible to the larger masses. Instead, the issue needs to be articulated in truly national terms which are in consonance with democratic politics in general and with the principles of pedagogy in particular.

NOTES

1. For a detailed analysis of the political change brought about during this period, through increased participation and assertion of the upwardly mobile rural communities in politics, see writings of Rajni Kothari published around the l967 elections. Especially see 'The Congress System Under Strain', 'The Political Change of 1967', and 'India's Political Transition', reproduced in Rajni Kothari, *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989), vol. I, pp. 59–79, 151–65, 166–79, respectively.
2. For the impact on the educational system created by implementation of the regional language policy in the states, see Krishnamurti B.H., 'The Regional-Language vis-à-vis English as the medium of instruction in Higher Education; The Indian Dilemma', in D.P. Pattanayak. ed., *Multilingualism in India; Orient Longman, 2007*., pp. 15–24.
3. Out of 185 million students enrolled in all educational institutions in India, 40 million (21.62 per cent) receive instruction through the English medium. Data presented in Mary S. Zurhuchen, 'Wiping out English', *Seminar,* 391 (1992), p. 48.

4. Peggy Mohan rightly points out that in India the problem of learning English is not seen as one of acquiring a foreign language. It is seen as making preparations to enter the closely guarded citadel of an exclusive elite class. Learning the language late in one's educational career for instrumental use may be a good pedagogic practice, but not the right strategy for those wanting to make entry into the citadel of the English-speaking elite. See Peggy Mohan, 'Postponing to Save Time', *Seminar,* 321 (1986).
5. In contrast, it is interesting to note that Jawaharlal Nehru, the precursor of the postcolonial English-speaking metropolitan elite, wrote his books *Autobiography* and *Discovery of India* in English. On the emergence of literate vernacular cultures through the colonial discourse, led by the bilingual elites, and generally on the relationship between elite power and national discourse, see Sudipta Kaviraj, *On the Construction of Colonial Power, Discourse, Hegemony,* Occasional Papers on History and Society, second series, 35, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1991.
6. The problem of survival facing many small languages in India, under the threat of increasing linguistic homogenization of every Indian State through the officially recognized regional languages, is poignantly posed by Sumi Krishna in her *India's Living Languages* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1991).
7. For data on the growth of print media in the regional languages, see ibid., pp. 139–53.
8. The extent of internal linguistic-cultural cohesion acquired by the states since they were formed on the basis of a predominant language of the region can be inferred from the fact that in the 1981 census, 95.58 per cent of India's total household population reported one of the 15 regional languages or its variants listed in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution as the language used in their households; 4.42 per cent of Indians spoke the other 106 languages listed in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution. (Figures from Series 1, Paper 1 of 1987). More significantly, the speakers of all the 106 - non-schedule languages (except for Garo, Wancho and Khasi) exhibit a high level of bilingualism far exceeding the national average of 13.34 per cent. See *Census of India, 1981* (Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India), Series 1: 'Population by Bilingualism', Table C-8.
9. Figures on literacy rates are from *Census of India, 1991: Provisional Population Totals* (Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India). Paper-1 of 1991, p. 62.
10. See Krishna. *India's Living Languages,* pp. 58–68.

11. On the problem of standardization facing Indian languages, see Krishnamurti, 'The Regional language vis-à-vis English', in Pattanayak, ed., *Multilingualism in India*.
12. See Krishna Kumar, 'Quest for Self-Identity. Cultural Consciousness, and Education in Hindi Region 1980–1986'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 15. 23 (9 June 1990), pp. 1247–55.
13. Data from *Census of India. 1981*. Series-1: 'Population by Bilingualism'. Table C-8.

PART IV

Representation in Liberal Democracy

CHAPTER 11

Interests and Identities: The Changing Politics of Representation

Indian democracy entered a rather long and turbulent phase of politics in the mid-1970s, when the challenges which emerged from the ground, produced by the very processes of democratic politics, were sought to be met by the ruling elite in the form of declaration of Emergency.[1] This response to problems created in the society by changes at the base of politics has been widely repudiated but the tendency of the ruling elite not to process institutionally the pressures generated by democratic politics has nevertheless persisted.[2]

Such a response by the regime is no longer reserved for direct-action movements or for their perverse expression in the form of communalism, terrorism or insurgencies. It now extends to undermining the electoral mandate. And the techniques employed are not particularly subtle. The old practice of taking shelter under procedural niceties or mobilizing opinion for countering popular pressures, which for a time may appear 'unmanageable', is increasingly found too cumbersome by the ruling elite. Instead, recourse to raw power and reliance on political subterfuges have become an established pattern of response whenever the ruling elite has to contend with pressures generated by democratic politics. The problems created by changing equations of interests and identities in the society are sought to be countered by an assertion of the Mandal Commission Report, but is only one such instance among many. It is this pattern of response that has prolonged and intensified the period of political turbulence and instability in the course of the decade from 1975 to 1989.

D.L. Sheth, *At Home with Democracy*,
DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-6412-8_11

While it is our wont to look for 'deeper' causes of our predicament as a nation, in my view, the clue to many of our problems lies no deeper than in normal politics and its derangement—the politics of elections and parties. Interpreting electoral mandates is, in itself, a complex matter on which unanimity of opinion, shared by different forces in politics, can never be achieved. Nonetheless, the various contentions on the issue form an integral aspect of democratic discourse, out of which a broad consensus, not a unidimensional view, should become possible to achieve. Lately, however, the issue of interpreting the mandate has been almost pushed out of the democratic discourse, making it difficult for democratic politics to acquire stable institutional forms. Instead, the old mindset, developed by operating for long a one-party dominant system in which electoral victory was interpreted as an unconditional mandate for the rulers to rule and not for governmental policies and programmes, continues to operate today in the face of far-reaching changes that have occurred at the base of politics. The result is that the electoral mandate has been systematically dissociated from the processes of government formation and policy-making. By doing so, the ruling elite may have ensured political power for themselves and for a caste–class section in the society which they, by and large, represent. But the institutional authority, even legitimacy, of the government has been severely eroded as a result.

Elections are being increasingly seen by the people as devious means employed by the rulers to periodically renew their licence to rule—more often, to misrule. The perception of those seeking election is not radically different; they have been truthfully described by our media as candidates 'trying their luck' at the hustings, as if they were securing a 'lease' for a fiefdom which they might hold for a specified, but now uncertain, period. The idea of seeking 'representation' of popular will or consent to rule by getting elected to a public office in an accountable system of governance has become quite alien. While this might have brought democratic politics to the marketplace, it has delivered the State to the bureaucracy, which can represent only itself and for that reason is directionless. This eclipse of the idea of 'representation' from the practice of politics has brought about a serious disruption in the representative system. The representative system, which is supposed to politically process the needs and aspirations of the people as a whole, and the problems arising from conflicts among types of aspirations and groups in society articulating them, has been reduced to an arena of contest for securing power and privilege in the society.

Such dissonance between the rulers and the ruled in a system which has so far retained all the trappings of a representative democracy, but has banished the idea which breathes life in it, is at the root of the political turbulence, social unrest and particularly the governmental instability that we have witnessed in this period. Elections, as they are viewed and fought by the politicians, and considerations by which governments are formed after elections, have ceased to give us governments which are truly representative or rulers who are accountable for the norms and procedures of democratic governance. It is not accidental that every government since the mid-1970s, whether it was brought about by a massive electoral majority or through an uncertain verdict in the form of a 'minority government', has functioned as an unstable, make shift arrangement, struggling to keep afloat on a turbulent sea of social unrest. It has lived in the constant fear of being sunk by a wave coming from any direction. This is not because the electoral behaviour of our voters has suddenly turned abnormal or that the logic of numbers has gone awry for managing a democratic form of government. It is so because the rulers are, by and large, dedicated to only their own sectional interests. They cannot rise to the role of being 'representatives' of the people as a whole. In the market place of politics, they succeed in acquiring power, but not the legitimacy to rule.

Changes in the Party System

In a representative democracy, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled are structured by political parties. The crisis of representation which has given rise to political instability, therefore, cannot be understood without understanding changes that have occurred in the party system. Elections not only serve as events around which these changes can be observed, but electoral outcomes, besides determining political fortunes of individual candidates, reflect long-term changes, often irreversible, in the party system. If the clue to the recovery of the representative system is to be found through 'normal politics', it becomes all the more necessary to understand what has happened to the party system over a series of elections and whether there is any scope for retrieving the principle of representation through a restructuring of the party system.

The Change of 1967

The first four General Elections, including the one of 1967, were held and fought in the framework of an established and stable party system characterized by political analysts as a one-party-dominance system or the Congress system as it was more aptly named by RajniKothari. Although the 1967 elections marked the beginning of the decline of one-party dominance both in terms of percentage of votes and seats which the Congress party lost at the national level and the number of states it lost to the opposition parties, the nature of electoral support the Congress received in 1967 was still characteristic of a dominant national party. While it lost in quantity, qualitatively the support for the Congress in 1967 came almost evenly from all the regions and from the various demographic, socio-economic and ethnic categories in the population.[3] A rather sharp decline in the size of support indeed indicated reduction in the strength and spread of the party, but not so much the dismantling of the structure of its dominance.

Even though it was battered at the polls, the Congress party organization, built assiduously over decades, remained more or less intact. This included the established procedures of articulating policies for its government, of selecting candidates for elections at all levels, and an internal democracy peculiar to the party which was based on a system of faction management and consensus-making. This ensured, especially at the State and district levels, representation in the party of all sections of the society. Also available to the party was a wide network of activists in different ancillary sectors like trade unions, educational institutions, cooperatives, local development agencies and so on. Above all, it still had in the electorate a strong contingent of Congress loyalists who positively identified with the party.[4]

What had changed was the environment around the grand old party. Although the party organization accommodated diverse interests and identities in the society, the idea of representation which held them all together electorally was symbolized in terms of the party's historical role in bringing independence to the country and the promise it held for people for social and economic transformation. In this sense, representation was not viewed as the summation of interests of various constituencies, but as an idea which transcended these interests. This 'capital' of the party began to dwindle with the changes that had taken place in the composition and character of the electorate which became visible during the 1967 elections. The electorate was one generation removed from the event of independence. The old,

charismatic leadership of the independence movement had departed from the scene. A large number of young, uncommitted voters had entered the electorate. New alliances of interests had begun to emerge in politics, marked by growing politicization of vast populations of the middle and lower peasantry and the middle-caste groups.[5] This led to a large-scale differentiation of the electorate, with diverse party identifications based on new interests and ideological alignments.[6] If the Congress remained cut off from these developments, not only its dominance but its very existence as a national party was threatened.

There were two alternatives before the Congress immediately following the 1967 elections: to regain its dominance by energizing the party process through governmental performance and by aligning the party organization with the new alliances of interests that had emerged in politics or to recognize the change in the party system which was then taking place—from one-party dominance to a multiparty system—and take to some form of coalitional politics at the national level. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, but not really the leader of the party, however, had different ideas for herself and the kind of party she wanted to lead.

To cut a long story short, she chose for herself and her party a third, risky but innovative, course. By splitting the party she established her supremacy both in the party and in the government, and decided to go directly to the people and receive a fresh mandate by holding mid-term polls in 1971. This choice preempted the development of a multiparty system. It also prevented the politics of coalition building at the national level. At the same time, however, this strategy brought to an end the first phase of the Indian party system, the Congress System, and, along with it, was destroyed the historical organization of the Congress party. Instead, the strategy resulted in establishing hegemony—as distinct from dominance—of the Congress party at the Centre, based on populist politics and plebiscitary elections.

The Change of 1971

The most significant outcome of the 1971 elections was the creation of an independent arena of national politics, delinked from the politics of the regions and the states. The idea of representation was now symbolized in the expectation of a new deal for the masses, i.e., the promise of removal of poverty. A large section of political analysts welcomed this change. They thought that national elections delinked from, and unencumbered by, State politics and fought on the secular plank of *garibi hatao* would form

a long-term voter coalition in favour of the new Congress party led by Indira Gandhi—similar to what the New Deal Coalition in the USA did for the Democratic party in the early 1930s.

As it turned out, *garibi hatao* remained a mere slogan, not only for winning the election but also almost a cynical means to stay in power. In other words, the new idea of representation was not embedded in the system of governance led by the Congress party. Greater reliance now began to be placed on populist slogans as a means of mass communication rather than on strategies of garnering stable electoral support through policies and government performance. The subsequent elections until that of 1984 reinforced and strengthened this tendency. The period was, on the whole, marked by Congress hegemony, which survived on electoral gimmicks rather than processing the demands received from the electorate into government policies and performance. In this respect, the brief interregnum provided by the Janata victory in 1977 also did not make a real break. The conventional factors, which were considered important in the pre-1971 phase in judging the nature of a parliamentary election or predicting its outcome, such as party identification and issue orientation among the electorate or the caste-community calculus and ethnic composition of a constituency, or such considerations as regional and local problems and grievances, or even perceptions of socio-economic interests of different groups in the electorate, remained important in their different ways, but they decidedly lost their *primacy*.

Instead, leadership styles and images, the use of media and various modes of mass contact, the symbolic gestures made to the electorate as elections approached, in brief, all the elements of mass politics became more important factors influencing the outcome of the national-level elections. At discount now were the party organization and the party activists and their work during the period between two elections. What was required for an organization to win an election was a 'for-the-event arrangement' at the time of election, usually manned by apolitical media experts and professional campaign managers: the party machine was to serve them for mobilization of votes. Formulating specific issues for the campaign or cultivating long-term voter support and loyalties, through what used to be called 'party work', became superfluous and non-cost-effective.

The emergence of a national electorate which began to differentiate its voting decisions for Parliamentary Elections from those for the Assembly Elections, however, produced massive majorities for a party elected to power at the national level in the period between 1971 and 1984. But

since these mandates were not meant to be translated into a durable framework of policies or generally in governmental performance, majorities obtained at the elections did not serve as the basis for political stability. At the same time, the arena of national politics ceased to be a monopoly of the dominant party. It now became an arena of intense inter-party competition at the national level, weeding out all vestiges of non-party politics which had survived in the electoral process during the one-party-dominance phase. One indication of this change was that at each election since 1971, over 95 per cent of the independent candidates lost their deposits, the figure reaching 99 per cent in 1984. However, the support lent to a winning party at the polls by the electorate, although massive in size, was qualitatively different from the kind of support the Congress received as the dominant party till 1967. The Congress victories, in the 1980 and1984 elections, e.g., cannot be said to have been based on a heterogeneous and durable support structure consisting proportionately of all sections of the electorate and all regions of the country as was the case with the elections before 1971. The same was the case with the Janata victory of 1977.

In fact, the so-called national electorate which influenced electoral outcomes between 1971 and 1984 became more like an amorphous mass of voters available for mobilization at every Parliamentary Election, rather than a differentiated electorate acting on the basis of perceptions of socio-economic interests and party identifications. This electorate responded more to generalized images of leadership than to specific issues. It was stirred not so much by the promises and proposals for a bright future as by a fear of the country falling apart. Fear, rather than hope, became the *leitmotif* of election campaigns.

Voter preferences, too, were articulated more as in a Presidential election. It is this process of declining party identifications in the electorate and progressive reification of interests and issues in terms of personalities which marked the campaigns, making the leadership image a central consideration for the voters. The change in the electorate and in campaign strategies lent a special character to the elections between 1971 and 1984, characterized as 'wave elections'. Put differently, the idea of 'representation' lost its material base in the needs, interests and aspirations of the people and was symbolized in the person of the leader as the savior. The survey data of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, although not based on comparable samples, shows a sharp fall in party identification and issue orientation among the voters. For example, in 1967, about 70 per cent of the respondents in the sample felt close to a particular party. The figure for 1971 was

38 per cent and for 1980, although based on a smaller sample, it was a mere 23 per cent.[7]

The mandates produced by such an electorate, largely consisting of free-floating, uncommitted voters, even if massive in terms of the majority they gave to the winning party, remained tenuous and fragile. It is not accidental that since 1971 the party in power, even when elected with a massive majority, always felt insecure after about two to three years in power.[8] Put differently, electoral majorities so obtained did not ensure the party in power the legitimacy for its rule. The issue of stability moved away from the arena of elections—the arena that was shaped by the plebiscitary type of elections that we witnessed between 1971 and 1984—into the intra-party politics off actions and 'coteries'.

These elections were, by and large, about obtaining a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer to questions about the continuation of the leadership in power as in a referendum. The answer was often a simple rejection, either of the ruling leadership or of the contending one. In this sense, the outcomes of these elections were based more on the negative vote than on any positive affirmation. Based on such a consent that a party received from the electorate, it tended to view and use its power in absolute terms—uninformed by any sense of mandate. The issue of governmental accountability was rendered irrelevant in the process.

In this peculiar covenant between the electorate and the elected leadership, the voters were not entitled to question the elected leadership about how it used power. They could say 'no' in the next round of elections but, until then, any act of omission or commission by the ruling leadership, backed by brute legislative majorities, was viewed as 'legitimate' in itself. In the process, the concept of a majority government became almost inconsistent with that of a stable government. Direct-action movements and politics, carried outside of the legislatures, acquired as much legitimacy in the eyes of people whose interests and aspirations had ceased to be reflected in government policies and performance, as of a legislative majority itself.

This change in the electoral politics was accompanied by changes in the party system. With the decline of the Congress System since 1967, the Congress party's strategy became one of retaining power at the centre in a system which, in reality, had become genuinely a multiparty system. Homogenized by a series of splits and purges within it, the Congress party, more specifically the ruling leadership, projected itself as the bastion of stability at the centre. The policies and programmes of the party began to

be projected not as those of the party but of the leader. This was qualitatively a different endeavour. During the years of the one-party-dominance system the idea of representation was not held in the person of a leader. It was embedded in the party. Further, the party rules at both the national and State levels and national politics were vertically, even if loosely, linked, in a two-way process, with politics in the states. This was no longer the case. Yet, because of its hegemony at the centre, the Congress successfully forestalled the emergence of coalitional politics at the national level, which would have been politically a more appropriate and timely response to the kind of changes that had taken place in the electoral system. This changed with the election of 1989.

The Change Since 1989

The politically unsettling decade of the 1990s produced far-reaching changes in India's party system. It all began with the election of 1989 which triggered, during the decade, governmental instability (five elections in ten years), political turbulence and a volatile electorate. It was truly a system-changing election. No election since 1989 has produced an electoral majority for one party. With growing electoral and legislative instability massive shifts occurred during the 1990s in support bases of political parties, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The Congress party, which had already conceded substantial OBC votes to different parties in earlier elections since 1967, lost chunks of its support bases to a number of regional and subregional parties—especially from among the dalits, tribals and Muslims—in different parts of the country. It lost to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), its urban and upper-caste support and, to a lesser degree, the tribal and dalit support. At the 1989 election, Congress was reduced to under 40 per cent of the votes and less than 200 (197) seats, pushing the party into a phase of decline.

The 1991 election was an exception that did not change the trend. It was held under the special circumstance of the unfortunate assassination of its leader Rajiv Gandhi that shocked the entire nation. The Congress party, however, won a considerable number of seats to be able to manage the small numerical deficit for continuing in the government for the given term. In short, 1984 was the last election in which the Congress won a majority of seats as a single party with 48 per cent votes and 415 seats. Since then, despite its significant recovery in elections during the current decade (2004 and 2009), winning a majority remains a distant dream. In sum, although

the Congress has tenaciously retained (and significantly improved in the two elections of 2004 and 2009) its political character as a national party, the support it has received across castes, religions and regions has declined. It has yet to recover its old, long-cultivated support bases lost during the 1990s. The BJP, on the other hand, entered the 1990s with a bang (after its miserable performance in 1984) by winning 85 seats in the parliament and 11 per cent of the national votes as against 2 seats and 7 per cent of the votes that it had in the previous election. Since then, in the course of the 1990s, the BJP has steadily maintained its electoral performances.[9]

This change in the party system has produced four long-term negative consequences for the process of secularization of the Indian polity. First, the regional and subregional parties have by now been deeply entrenched in the party system, making the *national parties structurally dependent on them for support*. This is not allowing the coalitional system to attain stability. The other important factor preventing its stability is that sufficient political and legal constitutional recognition is not accorded to pre-electoral coalitions. Until long-term institutional and political solutions are found, the post-1989 structure of inter-party competition seems fated to remain in the grip of the cynical politics of blackmail, or overcome by the electoral desperation of the major political parties, which in turn may result in the communal polarization of the society as a whole.

Second, the change in the nature of political competition has reduced the electoral process into a pure politics of votes. The idea that elections are not the be-all and end-all of democracy, but are means for acquiring political legitimacy for the rule of an elected government has lost appeal, even meaning. Third, political parties have, by and large, been rendered incapable of playing the mediating role of reconciling diverse interests and identities between the State and society. As a result, the parties, at the regional and subregional levels, function more as coalitions of specific ethno-caste and ethno-religious groups than as political organizations articulating collective interests and aspirations of the region as a whole. In this sense, regional politics today is an aggregated register of ethno-caste and ethno-religious interests and identities.

Fourth, the national parties, especially the coalition leaders, are now compelled to find or invent 'national issues' which would motivate and mobilize vast sections of voters to transcend regional/subregional and caste loyalties. This search for the 'transcendent' pan-national politics has led to communalization of politics. Ironically, in such a situation, it is the caste-ethnic and regional politics which serve as a countervailing force to

communal politics. Hence, the political strategies of the two parties, the Congress and the BJP, are competitively similar: how to stall and, if possible, push back the advance of regional and subregional parties. The solution they often resort to is strangely similar: the totalizing politics of the majoritarian versus minoritarian communalism. The prospects for the secularization of politics have been further eroded by the shrinking electoral and political presence of the Left parties, especially, after the 2009 elections.

The Change in the Political Discourse

In the post 1989 phase of political instability and electoral stalemates, which appeared almost irreversible thanks to the steady decline of the Congress party, the BJP and Parivar members saw a big political opportunity for themselves. This was an opportunity they always wanted to create in Indian politics by using every means at their disposal, but never quite succeeded. Now that opportunity virtually fell into their lap—the opportunity of changing the discourse as well as institutional politics in favour of the idea of India as a Hindu Nation. They raised and orchestrated a nation-wide debate on cultural nationalism, and sustained it politically by launching the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.[10] The objective of this politics was to convert the demographic majority of Hindus into a political majority ensuring a durable, if not permanent, *electoral majority*—a step in the direction of making India a Hindu Nation. For realizing this possibility, the BJP (along with the Sangh Parivar) has been working frantically on various fronts, and with a longer timeframe. Its primary concern is about the initiative in the politics of discourse on secularism and thus expanding political spaces nationally on its own and in deepening electoral power in the states through coalitional politics. It worked, in the 1990s, to change the terms of political discourse by radically altering its approach to political mobilization as well as to electoral politics.

First, the BJP transited smoothly from the discourse which it had itself created—namely, of genuine versus pseudo-secularism (as if the party really was committed to secularism) to the new one of Hindu Ekta. This was initially articulated defensively in terms of cultural nationalism, but later, brazenly, as Hindutva—a political doctrine holding that India belongs to Hindus and asserting that all people living in India must identify themselves historically and culturally as Hindus, even as they follow their different religions. Second, the BJP devised a new electoral strategy, which it implemented at two levels. At one level, it forged a stable coalition with

regional parties and thus created a wide political gap, a structural separation, between the Congress and the regional parties. It effectively used coalitional politics to emerge as a major national-level party, an equal contender for power vis-à-vis the Congress. At another level, the strategy involved dispersing the support structure of regional parties and incorporating its disintegrating parts within itself or in the coalition it led. One consequence of this strategy—as it was not merely an electoral strategy—was that in as many states as was possible the Congress faced a strong electoral contender in the form of a major regional party or the BJP. Thus, the politics of many states was reduced to a bipolar competition between the Congress and the BJP, or between the Congress and the BJP's coalitional partners, and at the national level too the Congress and the BJP emerged as the two major contenders for power. This radically changed the old structure of inter-party competition when the Congress was the only major national party that faced disunited opposition of disparate parties.

To this end, the BJP engaged in a series of campaigns beginning with *rathyatra* and then mobilizing grass-roots support of Hindus in the form of bringing bricks to Ayodhya from different parts of the country for building the Rama temple at the site of the Babri Masjid. It may or may not build the temple on the site of the mosque but it literally built, brick by brick, the political edifice of Hindutva in the wider society.[11] As the politics of Hindutva expanded, winning an electoral majority became an expectation incidental to this process. It culminated in the destruction of the Babri structure with its aftermath polarizing communally almost every aspect of India's political and social life.

The communal discourse raised by the BJP was effectively countered by the Left and Liberal discourse on secularism. This discourse prevented long-term issues, crucial for secularism, from entering the public discourse such as the harm the Hindutva movement caused to *institutions* of the secular state and to the idea of the rule of law. These issues remained confined, by and large, to editorial comments in the media and were rarely articulated in political campaigns. In effect, the secular discourse got confined to the narrow electoral terrain. The pro-minoritarian anti-Hindutva campaigns, in contrast, got pitched nationally, expanding the discourse in countercommunal rather than secular terms. It only mirror-imaged the Hindutva discourse. This counter-discourse succeeded in targeting the BJP electorally, but did not succeed in bringing the discourse back in the national-secular space within which Hindu nationalism was in the past *effectively* dealt with—namely, India's distinctive secularism, which maintained the *secularity* of the State,

while promoting sustainable diversity and plurality in society. Had the counter-discourse responded frontally to the BJP's charge of pseudo-secularism, and thus compelled it to hold ground on its claim to genuine secularism, the 'secular' parties would have clearly exposed the anti-secular and anti-national politics of cultural nationalism.

Instead, the 'secular' parties, as well as a section of public intellectuals and civil society groups, responded to the charge of pseudo-secularism dismissively and with contempt, but, as the charge persisted, they responded defensively by shifting the terms of discourse to the idea of pluralism. They now almost unceremoniously dumped the term secularism and privileged pluralism. Now pluralism, not secularism, began to be affirmed as constituting the opposite of communalism. Although both terms were used interchangeably, secularism was now explained and defended as pluralism. The shift to pluralism also appeared defensive not only because it was unexamined and sudden, but also because it appeared to justify the politics of minoritarianism as constituting a legitimate response to the advancing majoritarianism.

To put it in another way, the unanchored secularists could not effectively counter the charge of 'minority appeasement' made by the votaries of cultural nationalism—and this when all that the government of the day did was to protect the constitutionally endowed cultural rights of religious minorities. The terms and arguments they used in defending such measures in public discourse sounded pro-minoritarian rather than secular. Facing the charge of adopting 'double-standards' in the practice of secularism, they assumed a defensive posture and found it convenient to make their counterargument in terms of 'pluralism' and 'diversity'—rather than in the established terms of constitutional secularism, which explicitly recognized the vulnerability of groups (social as well as religious-cultural) and provided for special protective and enabling measures for them. It seemed, they felt more comfortable, rather enthused, in their rebuttal to the 'appeasement charge' by characterizing it as an expression of majoritarian communalism, rather than responding to the merit, if any, of the argument.

In the process, electorally motivated but communally appealing actions of a self-defined 'secular' party in power (may that be in a State or at the center) aimed at placating the communitarian leadership of a religious minority—and thus securing the 'vote bank'—began to be defended in terms of 'pluralism'. It hardly mattered whether such measures compromised the neutrality of the State or its commitment to the rule of law. Such a neo-pluralist view of minority rights and identities, in effect, led to the propounding of a new

principle of secularism in the public discourse by which the State could legitimately abet, even aid, communal political practices of a religious group. This argument was based on a peculiar idea of pluralism which held that the State should not just allow but must also recognize and proactively work for advancing the collective interest and identity of religious communities if these were minorities. Here the underlying assumption is that membership of the State is constituted not of citizens *qua* citizens but of citizens in communities. The new pluralist secularism, however could not escape facing the assertion of a similar communitarian principle by the 'leaders' of the majority community. When these assertions and claims were backed by governmental power (of the BJP-led coalition), they began to be articulated as rights of the totality of Hindus. The assertions, being made implicitly in the language of Hindu rashtra made such totalistic communal claims appear legitimate.

The new discourse considerably enfeebled the constitutionally espoused, distinctive secularism (equal distance from all religions and religious communities) of the Indian State. It diluted the principle of secular neutrality, exposing the state's institutional mechanisms and procedures for the use of partisan ends. The neo-pluralist turn in the discourse legitimated politics of making the State internally pliable to communitarian claims of different collectivities, each claiming an equal opportunity to communalism, along with a slice of the State power in proportion to its numerical power. Such politics pushed the Indian State in the direction of its becoming a permissively communal and, when not communal, a partisan State.

The counter-discourse, however, achieved significant political gains for pluralist secularism. It pushed the aggressive majoritarian-communalism campaigns on the defensive and at the periphery of competitive politics. It acquired moral-political legitimacy, especially after the post-Godhra massacre of Muslims in Gujarat. In the run-up to the 2004 elections, the BJP and the Parivar retreated from the majoritarian-communal campaigns, foregrounding 'development issues'. Leading the coalition of ideologically diverse parties, the language of cultural nationalism was now put on hold. Instead, 'India's emergence as a global power' became the theme song, culminating famously in the India-shining electoral campaign. Strategic reversals, however, are not easily achieved in politics, notwithstanding the short-lived public memory. The party could not live down the Gujarat massacre at the polls. The India-shining campaign could not wash the odium of Gujarat, not even for its 'secular' coalition partners. The suddenly raised and newly secularized discourse failed to strike a chord in the electorate. The BJP and its partners, the

National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, lost the mandate to rule, ushering a new phase of the coalition system.[12]

The idea of cultural nationalism that was made to appear as representing the common sense of Indian nationalism dissolved into pluralist spaces which the new Congress-led coalitional government made quickly available through pronouncements of policies assuring religious minorities the restoration of their rightful place in the polity and safety in the society. It seemed the electoral outcome of 2004 was democracy's moment for self-correction,[13] of mending the breach in its ongoing process of political secularization created by the communal politics—the majoritarian versus the minoritarian of the 1990s.

Summing Up

The politics of the last 20 years (1989–2009) has had serious long-term implications for the secularization process and for the nature of Indian democracy. Not only have different kinds of communities moved to the centre of India's political and public life, they have now acquired a systemic basis and determinative role in national politics. *In everyday politics*, religious communities began to be represented as culturally unified political entities. Ideas and practices concerning the faith became subordinated to this conception of the community and were used for supplying validations for political-communal solidarity of the faith community. *In the political discourse*, religious identities were culturally essentialized and sought to be frozen in time and space. As a result, issues of *rights* and *equality* got reduced in communitarian terms and were used for legitimating social policies for establishing inter-communal parity. In this reductive communitarian politics, the community rather than the citizen began to be seen as the primary bearer of rights, and a collective victim of injustice by its 'other' or the State. Claims to equality, and generally to public goods, as was the case before 1989, were now made by larger communities competing vis-à-vis each other rather than by citizens organized around secular interest or by groups sharing common social, economic or educational conditions of deprivation and backwardness. Thus, the rights and public 'goods' persons could now hold on or aspire to were in their capacity as members of a community; *qua* individuals they were left with some residual political rights and communally unclaimed indivisible public facilities. The secular policy of the State, which 'recognized' all *religions* as equal, now treated the religious community in purely numerical terms. The community rather than faith thus became a religion's primary representation, with all other aspects of

religious life—such as piety-related practices—being incorporated by the religion's communitarian identity. In effect, such issues concerning freedom of faith and practices began to be defined and decided politically by community leadership. Thus, for policy purposes, communities of minority faith began to be treated as totalities, and each believed to represent a commonly shared social, economic and educational status. This has created a new social hierarchy of religions, seeking to remove from the discourse the issue of caste and social hierarchy within religions.

The results of the 2009 national elections have, however, raised expectations about de-communalization of national politics. This optimism stemmed from the belief that the second successive defeat of the Hindutva party would compel it to reconsider its exclusivist politics of majoritarian totalization. This defeat, together with the expanding liberal market economy, working with the political market for votes in the coalitional system which had emerged was expected to make the politics of raising communal passions and engineering riots politically and even electorally unrewarding. This did not happen in 2014. The national electorate which had emerged in 1971 swung towards the BJP coalition based on an appeal for a strong leader and a politics of making India a strong Hindu rashtra.

Notes

1. With the distance of time, it is more useful to see Emergency not merely as a capricious action of one individual politician to survive in power, but a systemic response of a larger section of the ruling elite which supported and collaborated with the Emergency regime, either openly or in a concealed manner. These included not only the Congress party politicians but politicians from other parties, sections of journalists, intellectuals, judiciary, bureaucrats and businessmen, some of whom, spanning across parties and governments have shown a remarkable sense or political survival. The point will become clearer if one conducts a survey of the supporters of Emergency and the public positions they have occupied since.
2. There indeed was, and has been, a powerful counter-response in politics represented by what are now described as the grass-roots movements addressing a host of issues concerning the populations marginalized by elite parties and normally not fielded by the political parties. (Refer to Chap. 6 on grassroots politics.)
3. Sec D.L. Sheth, 'Social Bases or Party Support', in D.L. Sheth (ed.), Citizen and Parties: *Aspects of Competitive Politics in India* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1975), pp. 135–164.

4. According to the post-election national survey of 1967 elections carried out by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (C.S.D.S.), Delhi, 43 per cent or the sample electorate ($N = 1972$) identified with the Congress party; C.S.D.S. Elections Survey Data Files.
5. For the extent and pattern or political involvement of the electorate in 1967, see Bashiruddin Ahmed. 'Political Stratification of the Electorate' in D.L. Sheth (ed.). Citizens and Parties: Aspects of Competitive Politics in India, op. cit.
6. The 1967 Election Survey of the C.S.D.S. revealed extensive growth or party identifications in the electorate. Of the total sample, 71.5 per cent respondents felt a sense of identification with one or the other political party. While 43 per cent of them felt close to the Congress party, 29 per cent showed such political identification for parties other than the Congress. C.S.D.S. Elections Survey Data Files.
7. Election Survey Data Files, C.S.D.S. Delhi.
8. This pattern of political instability in which the party elected to power lost popular support within two or three years of being in power had been so well established in the period between 1971 and 1984 that it was described by Ashis Nandy as the iron law of Indian politics. 'Political Culture or the Indian State', *Daedalus*, Fall 1989, pp.14–23.
9. For a detailed analysis of electoral data concerning the rise of the BJP in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the discussion on its ideology of cultural nationalism, see Yogendra K. Malik and V.B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India*, especially Chapters 6 and 7 (East View Press, Oxford), pp. 179–243, 1994.
10. For an engaging historical narrative showing how RSS kept the politics of Hindutva alive in its worse days and could bring it in the centre of Indian politics in the 1990s, see Pralay Kanungo *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hegdewar to Sudarshan* (Manohar Publishers, Delhi), 2002.
11. Suhas Palshikarhas shown, based on empirical data, how the Hindutva politics expanded and moved towards the centre, occupying social-structural spaces. See Suhas Palshikar, 'Majoritarian middle Ground', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (18 December 2004) pp. 5426–5430.
12. For a detailed and insightful analysis of the post-2004 politics, based on states-level electoral data and national surveys, see Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, 'Revisiting "Third Electoral System": Mapping Electoral Trends in India: 2004–9′ in Sandeep Shastri, K.C. Suri & Yogendra Yadav: *Electoral Politics in Indian States* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) 2009.
13. For a detailed argument, see D.L. Sheth, 'The Change of 2004', *Seminar 545*, January 2005.

CHAPTER 12

Minority Politics: The Shifting Terms of Policy Discourse

Anxiety of Secular Democracy

Building on the political experience of countering the Hindutva movement of the 1990s the Congress-led coalition government initiated and sought to legitimize an entirely new discourse on social policies. As soon as it came to power in 2004 the coalition government announced, and with alacrity implemented, a series of policy measures assumedly with a view to reclaiming the trust and recognizing the stake of the religious minorities in India's secular democracy. Such measures were indeed urgently required considering that members of the minority communities, especially the Muslim and the Christian, felt highly insecure and emotionally shaken by the relentless, and at times violent, assaults on them by the Hindutva movement.

The expectation, however, was also that the new policies of the government would take into account the pervasive sense of insecurity in the citizenry at large caused by a series of 'jehadi' terrorist attacks, and that it would take quick and effective measures for pacifying and mending the deeply disturbed intercommunity relations that had caused communal polarization not just in politics but in the larger society. The challenge, in short, was of addressing the larger picture of communal polarization and devising policies to restore democracy's secularization process that had been severely disrupted by the discourse, politics and intercommunal violence of the 1990s. This had culminated in the horrendous pre-Gujarat assembly elections event of the Godhra train burning followed by massacres of

D.L. Sheth, *At Home with Democracy*,
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Muslims in different parts of Gujarat in 2002. More specifically, the need was of recovering the secular neutrality of the State which had been compromised in the course of the previous two decades by governments at the centre, as well as in the states, whether led by a 'secular', 'left-secular' or 'communal' party. All these parties made instrumental use of the State institutions, variously for private (e.g., in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), partisan (e.g., in West Bengal) or communal (e.g., in Gujarat) ends.

This historical moment was, however, allowed to pass. The newly elected coalition government in 2004 devised policies which remained focused mainly on the immediate issues concerning the religious minorities. It sought legitimation for these policies from the neo-pluralist, countercommunal discourse which, in its view, also made eminent electoral sense for their votebanks politics. At the core of the new policy discourse was the Sachar Committee Report. The political discourse and policy measures triggered by the Report became fused with the ongoing countercommunal discourse that had grown and strengthened in opposition to Hindutva communalism and had produced a major shift in the focus of social policies. The shift has been in the direction of changing the principle of the policy as well as the criteria for recognition of beneficiary groups.

The social policies in India are based on the simultaneous recognition by the constitution of cultural rights of faith communities and development rights of the structurally and historically deprived groups *within every* community of faith. In this recognition lay the secular foundation of social policies in India. This principle enabled the formulation of the policy of Reservations covering the structurally deprived groups *within each religious community*. The relevant policy issue has been of devising mechanisms to ensure that the policy-wise deserving, but so far left out, backward groups among the minority religious communities are included in the official lists of backward communities. Similarly, it is important to ensure that special economic and financial schemes are devised from time to time for alleviating the social, economic and educational conditions of the backward groups within every religious minority.

More specifically, issues like according Scheduled Caste status to the ex-untouchable groups of minority religious communities ought to have been raised and resolved within the existing framework of secular social policies. All these and many other issues could have been effectively addressed by existing policies but that did not seem to suit the post-2004 political strategies of the coalition regime. In effect, a new policy discourse was initiated which sought to shift the focus of social policies *from*

backwardness to communality of groups, wherein religious minorities are treated as totalities in politics and as undifferentiated units of development discourse and policies. This shift has long-term negative implications for the secularization process. By all accounts, every community of faith, while it shares a common religious symbolism and engages in common piety-oriented ritual practices, is a highly differentiated entity from within—socially, economically, educationally and even culturally. Denying recognition of such differences has been at the core of all *communal politics*. Treating such vastly heterogeneous communities as a single unit for social and developmental policies has already begun to manifest trends retrogressive to the secularization process.

Retrogressive Trends

First, it has contributed to the re-establishment of dominance of a small minority of the community elite belonging to the upper rung of its traditional social hierarchy—the caste-like hierarchy, which has both historically existed and exists today within *every* faith community of India in one form or the other—over the entire community. In fact, the policy shift has enabled the elite of a faith community to mask its face while pursuing its own separate politics of cornering benefits meant for the poor and backward in the community. This elite pursuit is particularly facilitated when the social and development policies are made blind to the community's internal structure of inequality within the religious community. Further, such totalization has begun to strengthen the hold of the religious leadership over the lives of the followers of the faith. In this process, a tacit understanding, if not an open alliance, is emerging between the *social elite* and the *religious leadership (the clergy)*,who together seek to establish their claim of being leaders, representatives and sole spokesmen on every issue pertaining to the community or to any section within it.

Second, the totalization of a faith community has begun to suppress the voice and movements of backward and poor sections within the community, e.g., the Pasmanda movement among Muslims and the Dalit Christian movement among Christians.[1]

Third, the totalization politics has led to exteriorization of almost all issues and problems facing a religious community. This, in fact, has become a 'common sense' of neo-pluralist secular discourse. Thus, problems and issues facing a particular section within the community, but not necessarily by virtue of its belonging to that community of faith, could now be credibly

articulated as problems caused almost exclusively by forces from *outside* the faith community.

Fourth, a near-complete denial in the public discourse, and the erasures applied by the commissions and high-level committees to the contribution of endogenous factors in the creation and perpetuation of inequalities and injustices within the faith community, made it possible for the policies to conflate issues of *deprivation* and *discrimination*. Now it became easy to argue that 'socio-economic and educational underdevelopment of sections within a community reflected organic underdevelopment of the community as a whole, which in turn constituted *the proof* of the community being institutionally discriminated by the State as well as its other, the majority community'.

The belief that in India religious minorities lived in conditions of socio-economic deprivation caused by their *systemic* discrimination became sustainable in the *politics of perceptions*, which had become the mainstay of the new policy discourse initiated by the Sachar Committee Report. No wonder even some public intellectuals and social activists, with impeccable secular credentials, believed that their whole communities have been victims of institutionalized discrimination and perpetually kept in a state of backwardness, poverty and illiteracy.[2]

Finally, treating total communities of faith as economically, socially and educationally undifferentiated collectivities led to a politics of marginalization of many smaller religious cultural and linguistic minorities in the states. As is well known, almost every state in India has a dominant cultural and/or linguistic community. What is, however, not generally appreciated is that these states also have several smaller, socio-cultural and linguistic minorities: e.g., Muslims in Manipur, Buddhists in Jammu and Kashmir, Hindi-speaking population in Gujarator the Rajbhars in West Bengal, where children of the poor among the linguistic minority are virtually denied their right to education. They do not get into schools and when they do many drop out because the language used in the school is alien to them.[3] Even worse victims of neglect and non-recognition are the dalits in the hill states of Uttarakh and Himachal Pradesh, tribals in Kerala and the 'nomadic communities' in almost all Indian states. Put differently, the new policies, being primarily oriented to the politics of the larger religious communities, have compromised the secular principle of social policy-making which addressed issues of backwardness of groups across all religious communities.

Implications for Indian Democracy

The politics of the last 20 years (1989–2009)have thus had serious long-term implications for the secularization process and for the nature of Indian democracy. Not only have different kinds of communities moved to the centre of India's political and public life, they have now acquired a systemic basis and determinative role in national politics. In everyday politics, religious communities have begun to be represented as culturally unified political entities. Ideas and practices concerning the faith have become subordinated to this conception of the community and are being used for supplying validations for political-communal solidarity of the faith community. In the political discourse, religious identities are being culturally essentialized and sought to be frozen in time and space. As a result, issues of *rights* and *equality* have become reduced to communitarian terms and are being used for legitimating social policies for establishing intercommunal parity.

In this reductive communitarian politics, the community rather than the citizen began to be seen as the primary bearer of rights, and a collective victim of injustice by its 'other' or by the State. Claims to equality, and generally to public goods, are now made by larger communities competing with each other, rather than by citizens organized around secular interest, or by groups sharing common social, economic or educational conditions of deprivation and backwardness. Thus, 'rights' and the 'public goods' persons could now hold onto, or aspire for, usually become available to them in their capacity as members of a community. As individuals, *qua* individuals, they were left with some residual political rights and communally unclaimed indivisible public facilities. This, it seems, is the result of the policy for minorities that conflated issues of discrimination and deprivation.

The secular policy of the State which 'recognized' all religions as equal now treats the religious community in purely numerical terms. The principle of equality is to be applied to the numerically asymmetrical religious communities. The community has thus become a religion's primary representation, with all other aspects of religious life such as piety-related practices being incorporated and subsumed by the religion's communitarian identity. In effect, such issues concerning freedom of faith and practices are sought to be defined and decided politically by community leadership. It is in this sense that the policies treat communities of minority faith as totalities, each believed to represent a commonly shared social, economic and educational status. The result is the creation of a new hierarchy of religions which seeks

to blank out the issue of caste/social hierarchy within religions from the policy discourse.

This change, marked by the emergence of minoritarian politics in the last two decades, is qualitatively different from the rise of 'caste politics' in the 1980s. First, the so-called caste politics was an expected development in the process of democratization—an inevitable moment of assertion for rights and aspirations for social justice by subaltern classes of all faiths when democratic politics opened up the economy and society that had, by and large, remained closed for centuries.

Second, the political competition in the 1980s was among relatively small and, in themselves, electorally unviable groups which traditionally occupied lower rungs of the social hierarchies across macro-communities of faith. They did create larger political conglomerates for staking claims to political power, but their politics remained structurally confined to the states and the regions. In this process of 'castization' and 'regionalization' of lower-class politics (which encompassed a huge majority of the socially, culturally and religiously diverse communities of subaltern Indians), the politics of class (wage labour versus capital) and communal conflicts (among macro-communities of faith) was prevented from acquiring any visibility in the national-level politics, even as it was being fragmented and absorbed by caste-regional politics. In short, the so-called Mandalized politics of the 1980s had remained manageable by the process of secularization.

The nature of caste politics, however, began to change as a consequence of the communalization of national politics in the 1990s. Even while stoutly confronting the Hindutva movement, it could not politically relate to the countercommunal minoritarian discourse that was present. This confrontation, and collaboration with communal politics over the last two decades, produced two effects: one, a large part of caste politics began to be linked to, and even absorbed by, the pan-national politics of ethno-religious communities; and two, the internal political dynamic of ethnicization of caste, especially of the larger, regionally powerful castes, gradually began to be fused with the culture of religious community, thereby transforming the faith community into an *ethno*-religious community.

This process is well illustrated by the recent organizational and cultural changes in Hinduism which are marked by the growing participation and power of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in organizational activities and events of popular Hinduism. These activities are often sponsored and promoted by the Sangh Parivar such as the religious congregations and festivals as well as management of religious establishments. This

development in Hinduism constitutes at least one important factor lending an ethno-majoritarian political character to Hinduism in the form of the Hindutva movement.

Somewhat different in its organization and character, but similar in consequence, is the fusion of ethno-lingual Gujarati identity with Hindutva that became manifest in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) Gujarat-*asmita* movement led by Narendra Modi, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat.[4] A similar movement seems to be in the making in Karnataka. A classic case of ethnic fusion of caste and religion, however, is the rise of political Sikhism in Punjab marked by the almost complete dominance of the Jat-Sikhs in the organizational and theological affairs of Sikhism, and in the determination of ethnic boundaries of the religious community albeit drawn in impeccable theological terms. The result has been the exclusion of the lower-caste communities of Sikhs from the ethno-religiously defined boundaries of today's Sikhism.

Democracy of Faith Communities

The cumulative impact of the politics of caste and religious communities has been that India is being transformed functionally, although not yet constitutionally, into a democracy of faith communities, changing in the process the very idea of how India is constituted. It is a politics that is harking back to the old idea (of the 1940s): India being constituted primarily and ultimately (firstly and lastly) of Hindu–Muslim–Sikh–Isai.

If we look back at the 1980s and 1990s, we find two competing models of communitarian politics at work: the ethno-caste and ethno-religious. In my view, restoration of the secularization process, rather the fate of secular democracy, will depend on which one of the two will prevail over the other. Although this remains an open question, it is crucial to note that the caste-ethnicity-based political entities—unlike the large, collectivist, macro-level political communities being formed through communalization of the faith communities—are numerous, and transient, micro-level political formations, each comprising a few caste-ethnic communities negotiating constantly among themselves, and with the State, the short-term interest of their constituent members.

By themselves they are politically unviable. Walking in and out of the now splitting, now merging alliances, they remain continuously engaged in finding places in shifting political alliances. As such, they cannot emerge as one, communally united enduring political force with the members sharing

a common system of ideas or symbols. Neither can they emerge as a counterdemocratic communal force nor can they find any strong basis for emotional or ideological unity and attain a Durkeimian kind of mechanical solidarity.[5] The ethno-caste political entities are more likely to be contained, in fact absorbed, by the larger institutional structures of competitive politics. In short, the politics of caste and ethnic identities would always remain subject to the working of the secularization process of democracy. This cannot be held, with equal confidence, for the communalized pan-Indian macro-entities of faith. Thus seen, the threat to secular democracy lies not so much in caste-ethnic politics as in the possibility of the 'nationalization' of communal politics of the faith communities—a politics that has emerged mainly due to the inability of secular leadership to meet the politics of communalism at the national level by raising issues of national concern in terms of the constitutionally rooted idea of secularism.

The results of the 2009 national elections have nevertheless raised expectations about de-communalization of national politics. The optimism stems from the belief that the second successive defeat of the Hindutva party is likely to compel it to reconsider its exclusivist politics of majoritarian totalization. Besides, the expanding liberal-market economy (an important dimension of political secularization not discussed here), working in conjunction with the political market of votes in the coalitional system, is expected to reduce the possibility of mass-mobilizational—communal or otherwise—politics. This might make the possibility of raising communal passions and engineering riots politically and even electorally unrewarding. Moreover, the politics of the minoritarian-communal solidarities that emerged under the threat of majoritarian communal assaults may now lose its appeal and the unity attained by religious minorities is more likely to be expressed politically in terms of their ethno-caste identities and interests of their constituent units at the regional level. This did not happen in 2016 as the politics was swayed by ethno-religious identities giving a definite majority to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government.

Notes

1. A deep apprehension about the adverse impact of the new policy discourse following the Sachar Committee Report on the backward Muslim communities is expressed by the leader of Pasmanda Muslim Movement, Shri Ali Anwar, on several public forums. See particularly his recent article in Hindi:

'Sachar Committee ke Ayane me Musalman', (The Muslim in the Mirror of Sachar Committee) in *Samayik Varta*, April 2007.

2. See, for instance, Javed Anand: Yesterday Once More? Edit Page, *The Indian Express*, Thursday, 21 May 2009.
3. A comprehensive discussion on the role of policies in the treatment of small linguistic minorities in different Indian States is found in Sumi Krishna, *India's Living Languages: The Critical Issues* (Allied Publishers, New Delhi) 1999.
4. For an analysis of the change in the political culture of Gujarat, especially the fusion of the lingual and ethno-religious (Hindutva) identities, see D.L. Sheth 'Growth of Communal Polarization in Gujarat: The Making of Hindutva Laboratory?' Chapter 9.
5. For discussion of Durkheism's Concepts of the Mechanical and Organic Solidarity, see Raymond Aron: *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* 2. (Pelican) pp. 21–33.

CHAPTER 13

Growth of Communal Polarization in Gujarat and the Making of a Hindutva Laboratory

There has been a widespread feeling of shock and disbelief outside Gujarat that the cruel and barbaric acts of violence that began on the morning of 27 February 2002 at Godhra, and have since engulfed a large part of the state, could have taken place in 'Gandhi's Gujarat'. Influential Gujaratis had consistently, over many years, projected a certain positive image of their society to the outside world of a land inhabited by a peaceful, conflict-avoiding and pragmatic people who are vegetarian and teetotallers to the hilt. This image was further reinforced by the fact that the land produced Mahatma Gandhi. Of course, this stereotypical image, like most others, was never an accurate description of the complex reality of Gujarati society—nor was such factual corroboration ever attempted.

However, when the collective acts of a people defy the projected image, one is compelled to turn to previously neglected facts. Let us look illustratively at some facts pertaining to Gandhi's Gujarat which have so far failed to register against its image. First, it is forgotten that Gujarat produced not just the Mahatma but also the founder of Pakistan, M.A. Jinnah. Second, contrary to general belief, a majority of the population in Gandhi's Gujarat are meat-eaters. The 15 percent population of tribals, 8 per cent dalits, 10 per cent Muslims, at least about 20 per cent belonging to smaller, lower-OBC communities like the Chunvalia Kolis, Chharas, Thakaradas and Wagharis have all been traditionally non-vegetarians. Add to it the blue-blooded Rajputs and the Christians, and we find that a majority in Gandhi's Gujarat have been meat-eaters. Third, the production and smuggling of illicit liquor in prohibitionist Gujarat is worth thousands of crores of rupees,

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with a huge number of people employed in the bootlegging industry. If this is quantified, the result will be an impressively high per capita rate of liquor consumption in Gujarat. And this leaves out of account the un-monetized economy of many of the tribal and lower-OBC communities who have a tradition of both producing and consuming liquor and toddy. Hardly anyone has paid attention to the kind of 'Gandhian' violence perpetrated on the tribals for maintaining their tradition of social drinking. When this state asserted its character as 'Gandhi's Gujarat' under Morarji Desai's leadership by imposing total prohibition, vast numbers of tribals were thereby transformed into 'criminals' overnight when they refused to relinquish toddy and liquor drinking. In the 1960s, lakhs of toddy palm trees in the countryside were cut down. Every day hordes of tribals were rounded up in the villages for prohibition offences and brought to the city courts for trial. Many of them 'came to town' for the first time in their lives. They did not know why they were there in the first place, nor what to do and where to go. With fear in their eyes they looked like thirsty and hungry animals trapped in a cage being taken to a zoo. Of course today they have 'come of age' and we see some of them keeping pace with their urban compatriots in carrying out loot and arson operations. Fourth, the declining male/female ratio (934 females per 1000 males in 1991 and 920 females per 1000 males in 2001) suggests, among other things, a relatively high incidence of maternal mortality, female suicide and female infanticide in Gujarat. Fifth, a disturbingly high number of atrocities perpetrated against Harijans should discourage any Gandhian from associating Gandhi's name with societal relations in Gujarat.

So much for 'Gandhi's Gujarat'.

Yet, the fact remains that from the days of the independence movement till about the late 1960s, Gujarat could, relatively speaking, legitimately project itself as 'Gandhi's Gujarat' in certain respects. The political culture of protests and of governance that developed during this period, by and large, affirmed the values of secular nationalism. The numerous instances of nationalist agitation, even though not lacking in aggression and innovation, did not on the whole transgress some basic democratic codes of political mobilization. The Mahagujarat Movement (the movement for Gujarat as a separate linguistic state) and later even the Navanirman Movement (a student movement against corruption) could also arguably claim such distinction compared to the kind of collective expressions of social unrest and political agitation that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. On the whole, the institutions of governance and movements of protest during

this period operated within democratic norms rather than those later adopted by advocates of raw, majoritarian power.

However, it was also during this period that a political and cultural hegemony of the upper caste–middle class struck roots in Gujarat. In this process, the Gandhian strain in Gujarati politics became subordinate to the old, still enduring upper-caste elite culture generally described in literature as the Mahajan culture. This culture is marked by a strong Jain–Vaishnav ethos. The resulting synthesis that emerged after Gujarat was carved out as a separate state in 1960 could best be described as the Mahajani–Gandhian culture. In this culture, some elements of Gandhian thought and practice—such as non-violence, simplicity and building autonomous organizations for social service and constructive work—blended well with the Jain–Vaishnava ethos of the Mahajan culture as expressed in its principle of *Jeevadaya* (non-killing), teetotalism, thrift, prudence and a well-entrenched tradition of devising mechanisms of conflict resolutions.

The Mahajani–Gandhian culture was thus a culture of pragmatism and reconciliation. Individuals and groups, while not defining their politics in terms antagonistic to the State, did not, at the same time, allow the State to occupy any major space in their personal or social life. The individual ideal was to lead the life of a *sadgrahastha* (a good householder)—distinct from that of a common citizen—avoiding conflicts, winning goodwill and cultivating a benign, patronizing attitude towards the poor and deprived in the society. While it indeed reinforced the upper-caste hegemony in Gujarat politics and society, the Mahajani–Gandhian culture did not allow for such political practices that threaten social harmony, promote communal polarization and allow violence on people under their patronage. The collective ideal was 'progress' (*pragati*). In practice, 'progress' meant accumulating wealth at the individual level and, at the social level, establishing trusts, charities and co-operatives and building new non-State organizations and institutions relevant to the emerging urban industrial society of Gujarat. This was the image the Gujarati elite upheld and also projected for the whole of Gujarat. In retrospect, this image reflected a lifestyle and world-view marked by the dominant Jain–Vaishnav culture of Gujarat which had effortlessly incorporated the Gandhian idiom.

Though the views of the cultural elite are not the only factor determining social reality, it is also true that the dominant culture does play an important role in the determination of a people's collective image. It also plays a significant role in forging social policy—it invests symbols with its own preferred meanings and exerts itself to try to enforce compliance with its

own social and cultural codes on the subjugated others. The Mahajani–Gandhian culture that once dominated Gujarat has undergone radical changes in the course of the last three decades. In order to understand the communal carnage that we witness today, we need not go too far back into history. Rather than search for some deep cultural and historical roots it will be more useful, given the urgency of the situation, to focus on specific social and political factors of contemporary relevance that seem to have caused almost complete erosion of the Mahajani–Gandhian culture and, in the process, led to dangerous levels of communal polarization in Gujarat.

Gujarat did not face the intensity of communal conflicts and violence of the kind and degree that took place in many other parts of the country preceding or during partition. In the 1940s, when there was a high degree of communal tension and conflict in several parts of the country, Gujarat with the exception of Godhra had, by and large, remained unaffected. Even at the time of partition, the riots that took place in Gujarat were on a smaller scale and these too occurred only in a few cities: Ahmedabad, Veraval in Saurashtra (the site of the Somnath temple) and (in a more virulent form) Godhra. The riots in these few spots can be attributed to the situation prevailing in the rest of the country at that time rather than to specifically identifiable endogenous factors. In brief, what took place was episodic communal violence, but that did not ever appear as based on any sense of a deep-seated divide between Hindus and Muslims. For example, it is not accidental that communities like the Piranas (part Hindu and part Muslim in their faith and practice) could survive till the recent onslaught by the Tabligi and the Hindutva movements.

The process of communal polarization in Gujarat really began with the 1969 riots in Ahmedabad. And since then, riots of one kind or another have been recurring in some sort of a pattern every few years, in one or the other city in Gujarat. From 1969 to 2002, close to 7000 lives were lost and property worth thousands of crores of rupees was looted or destroyed in these riots. Most of these riots were communal in nature and they were often engineered by interested parties for short-term political gains. But in the process they created long-term consequences in the form of communal polarization. Even the anti-reservation agitation of 1985 that initially targeted the dalits ended up in Hindu–Muslim riots. Communal polarization in Gujarat is primarily a post-independence phenomenon.

There are several factors that have indirectly contributed to the growth of communal polarization. Gujarat has undergone rapid urbanization in the last 50 years. Many former villages have grown into towns, mid-sized towns

have grown into large cities and big cities like Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara have been fast acquiring the character of a metropolis. But more important than the rate of urbanization is the *pattern* of urban growth and spread in Gujarat. Every district, including in the tribal belt, has at least a couple of sizeable cities and a number of middle and small towns. Even the villages are much larger than usual. A large part of rural Gujarat could, in fact, be described as urban hinterland. Urban–rural transactions of all kinds—not just economic, but social, cultural and political—are close and frequent. In brief, it is no longer possible to view the political culture of rural Gujarat as significantly different from that of urban Gujarat. This is reflected in the fact that, in recent years, the two Ahmedabad-based Gujarati dailies have been able to establish between them a lion's share of the newspaper market in Gujarat that includes the rural market. This has not only concentrated and centralized the power of print media in Ahmedabad, but has brought about a much greater uniformity of opinions and attitudes among literate Gujaratis. Both the print and the visual media (the Gujarati channels and the cable network on TV) have created over time a vertically and closely linked system of cultural and political communications which is overly marked by a majoritarian Hindu ethos.

All this, among other things, has transformed the local and rural character of Hindu practices into some sort of folk Hinduism, giving it a strong urban imprint of anonymity and marketized entertainment. The conventional rural character of festivals such as the Navratra has radically changed even in villages. The village youth often go to cities to participate in the religious festivals. The household, sectarian and ritualistic practices of worshipping deities have transformed into public functions and processions. Quite a few of these activities are now systematically promoted and sponsored by the Hindutva organizations. But on the whole, the anonymous and marketized character of this folk Hinduism has yielded participative spaces to the tribals and dalits. The new folk-Hinduism in Gujarat has, however, been appropriated by political Hinduism.

In the process of urbanization, the character of a Gujarati village has also changed significantly. Most economic activities except farming, and often even social and cultural activities, have shifted away from villages to nearby towns. An average village is increasingly becoming primarily a locale for agriculture, with a population directly related to the land. Many larger settlements often designated as 'villages' are more like towns, both in terms of size and occupational structure, and manifest many other urban characteristics. In an average small village, services like those of a barber, a

tailor or a blacksmith are often obtained by making a small trip to a nearby town. Even a priest operates from town and serves several villages by making extensive and hectic trips on motorcycles to perform wedding and death rites and other rituals.

In the course of the last 30 years, the demographic composition of urban centres in Gujarat has radically changed in two major respects. First, there has been a massive influx of OBCs, dalits and tribals into the towns and cities of Gujarat. Second, a sizeable number of non-Gujaratis have migrated and settled in all urban centres of Gujarat. The former type of migration—i.e., the rapidly increasing rate of urbanization of the OBCs, dalits and tribals—threw up a new kind of leadership from these communities by providing them with an urban base. It was through this process that the challenge to the Congress party's Mahajani–Gandhian leadership emerged in the form of the KHAM alliance, comprising the Kshatriyas (OBCs), Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims. The massive infusion of the subaltern communities into politics provided a basis to the Gujaratielite fear of political instability. And the influx of non-Gujaratis generated deep anxiety in the Gujarati middle class and was fraught with chronic urban tensions.

Many of the educated non-Gujaratis who migrated to cities in Gujarat have found significant positions in the corporate sector and higher-level government jobs where knowledge of the English language is at a premium. Here, most Gujaratis, even the university-educated, feel disadvantaged because even middle-class Gujaratis have not developed competence in the English language. More importantly, members of the business communities from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have made significant inroads in the Gujarati business world at all levels. Earlier, as a consequence of partition, a very significant proportion of Sindhi traders had already carved a niche for themselves in the Gujarati business world. Although the percentage of non-Gujaratis in Gujarat is not very high (about 10 per cent) their concentration in the cities makes their presence quite visible.

Labourers from Odisha, Maharasthra and Karnataka as well as from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have in significant numbers entered the urban labour market in Gujarat. On the whole, what has been conventionally perceived as the *Gujarati* character of cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot and many smaller cities has been visibly altered. This is also reflected in the changes in ethnic composition of elected representatives. It is not unusual to find non-Gujaratis in the municipal

governments, corporations, universities and college student unions, as well as in the trade unions.

Although on the surface a fair degree of peace and harmony seems to exist between the Gujaratis and the non-Gujarati linguistic groups, a strong undercurrent of resentment runs among a crosssection of Gujaratis comprising the businessmen, traders and petty-traders, as well as among the professionals and intellectuals. Interestingly, the resentment is not about the cultural differences of language, lifestyle or even religion. The resentment that has grown in the course of the last two decades comes from a sense of economic insecurity and frustration among the Gujarati youth. They feel they are being systematically edged out or peripheralized from their respective, traditionally occupied arenas of economic activity by the non-Gujarati immigrants. Such feelings are expressed more frequently and strongly in the business world against the Marwaris from Rajasthan and the Aggarwals and Guptas from Uttar Pradesh and in the white-collar world against the South Indians who are perceived to enjoy an 'unfair advantage' due to their proficiency in English, which the Gujarati youth lack.

Even though the insider–outsider divide in urban Gujarat has been considered a potential source of ethnic conflicts since the inception of Gujarat as a state, it has all along remained an undercurrent. It did not give rise to any ethnic-chauvinist sons-of-the-soil kind of a movement in the past. This was primarily because the Mahajani–Gandhian political culture dominant at the time was not conducive to such movements. And it is not likely to arise in the future because the present politically dominant Hindutva leadership in Gujarat views any such movement as constituting a threat to its politics of Hindu Ekta. Hindutva political leaders instead desire to garner the 10 per cent non-Gujarati (mainly Hindu) population as a voteblock and co-opt their leadership into the party's power and patronage structure. Thus, the fear that the Maharashtra kind of ethnic conflicts ('insiders' versus 'outsiders') could take place in Gujarat was warded off by the Parivar's politics of Hindu Ekta that took root in the 1990s. In fact, it has almost removed such a possibility from emerging on the political scene in Gujarat. This has been done by co-opting the non-Gujarati leadership in the BJP and directing the Gujarati ethnic passions towards the religious minorities by portraying them as the villains of peace. Even earlier, attempts by the upper-caste middle-class Gujaratis to assert their power by resorting to anti-reservations and anti-dalit agitations of the 1980s and 1990s were thwarted by the Hindutva leadership by supporting the reservations and then co-opting the dalits and tribals into the party and its front organizations.

The BJP politics of Hindutva did not just provide an ideological basis to their goal of converting the religious majority into a political majority and thus forge a massive electoral majority based almost entirely on Hindu votes. It also created a social-cultural infrastructure in support of this politics. The Hindutva politics of the1990s succeeded in erasing not only the old Mahajani–Gandhian political culture but also its short-lived successor—the subalternist political culture of the KHAM coalition consisting of the OBCs, dalits, tribals and Muslims. This was achieved by bringing large chunks of the OBCs, tribals and dalits—albeit the latter in smaller proportions—into the patronage structure of the ruling BJP. It set up special wings of Dalit and tribal youth, even as they were being directly recruited in large numbers, along with the OBCs, in the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal. More importantly, this political privileging of the OBCs, tribals and dalits by the BJP gave them a sense of upward social mobility. The BJP succeeded in capturing some Gandhian institutions, trusts and non-governmental organizations and also infiltrated into the vast networks in the larger civil society: co-operatives, educational trusts, trade unions, youth and women clubs. In brief, the party's cadres occupied large spaces in the civil society. The vast network of political patronage established and operated for years by the Congress party was now taken over, expanded and effectively used by the BJP. The upper caste–middle class hegemony, which had been originally challenged by the KHAM coalition, was thus re-established by extending the power and patronage of the ruling BJP and its associate organizations, the VHP and Bajrang Dal, to the KHAM communities while completely excluding the Muslims.

Seen in a larger cultural-historical perspective, the BJP's success in forging political unity among Hindus in Gujarat could be explained by the Congress party's inability to shed its Mahajani–Gandhian character, which was theoretically secular-nationalist but in practice upper-caste Hinduist. And this was what had prevented the Congress party from any longer accommodating, beyond rhetoric, the political and economic interests represented by the KHAM (especially of dalits and Muslims among them) that had brought the party significant electoral victories in the 1970s and 1980s.

Along with extending its power and patronage as a ruling party, the BJP government allowed a free hand to the Sangh Parivar to implement its agenda of Hinduization of the tribals and the dalits. In sum, in the course of the 1990s, the Sangh Parivar's politics of communal polarization succeeded in transmuting the ethnic and caste conflicts into communal

conflicts, thus securing the consolidation of Hindu votes in favour of the BJP. This resulted in the BJP winning three successive elections in Gujarat with a massive majority. This is what one means by Gujarat being a laboratory of Hindutva in the political demography of Gujarat. Yet, the fact remains that the BJP would never find itself electorally as secure as is generally projected by the pollsters. This is because in the Gujarat electoral politics some version of KHAM consolidation against the BJP can never be ruled out.

PART V

Emerging Challenges of Democracy

CHAPTER 14

Revisiting the Reservations Policy

Reservation is by now an established social policy addressing issues of social inequality and marginalization of the numerous communities which, taken together, make up a majority of Indians. Over the years, however, many distortions have crept into the policy process. It is high time that these distortions are removed, as they have already begun to produce social and political consequences undermining the policy's basic rationale. There is, therefore, an urgent need to review the working of the policy and adopt fresh administrative and legislative initiatives for bringing the policy back into achieving the larger and long-term goals it has been meant to serve.

Perusal of the constitutional and legislative debates as well as the established jurisprudence on this issue clearly suggests that the policy was designed to serve three sets of goals:

1. *Ending* social and religious disabilities suffered by certain specified groups on account of their traditionally persistent social segregation and ritual exclusion (the communities of ex-untouchables, officially characterized as Scheduled Castes, the SCs) and spatial and cultural isolation (the tribals, officially categorized as Scheduled Tribes, the STs).
2. *Facilitating and promoting* equal participation of all socially disabled and disadvantaged groups (which, besides the SCs and STs, in this context include communities referred to as Other Backward Classes, the OBCs, comprising a vast number of ritually discriminated and culturally deprived agrarian and artisan communities).

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3. *Protecting*, if necessary through legislative action and executive orders, all these groups, also described in the constitution as socially disadvantaged and weaker sections of society—generally identified as the backward classes—from all forms of social injustice and exploitation.

The overall long-term goal, as was repeatedly expressed by the policy makers in the course of the Constituent Assembly debates, was building a political community of all Indians, based on the principle of social equality.

Beneficiaries of Reservations

The beneficiaries of reservations comprise three types of communities: (a) ex-untouchables, (b) tribals and (c) OBCs, together making up about 65 per cent of the Indian population. In these three beneficiary categories are also included the deprived and marginalized sections of the religious minorities: Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims.

(a) *Communities of the ex-untouchables:* Specific castes/communities who traditionally suffered almost total ritual prohibition resulting in their continuing social discrimination have been identified, enumerated and listed in every provincial state of India and the lists have been consolidated and incorporated in the *schedule* of the Constitution. These communities are thus officially designated as the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The implicit criterion for inclusion in the SC list is the social and religious disability suffered by a caste on account of untouchability, i.e., being at the pollution end of the social hierarchy. Formally, however, any group considered to be eligible for inclusion by the President of India (i.e., by an executive order of the Central Government) can be included in the list. However, only the Parliament has the power to de-list an SC community. Included in the SC category are communities from three different religions—Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism—all having within them communities traditionally suffering the odium of untouchability. Together they constitute about 16 per cent of the Indian population.

The policy entitles the SCs to receive three types of benefit: (a) *political reservations*: seats are reserved in the national Parliament, state legislatures and local government bodies in proportion to their size (percentage) in the

population; (b) *job reservations*: seats are reserved for SCs in all government and public sector jobs, in proportion to their size (percentage) in the population; and (c) *educational reservations*: seats are reserved in educational institutions, especially where there is intense competition for entrance. Here also the quantum of reservation is in proportion to their size (percentage) in the population.

(b) *Communities of tribal and indigenous people:* Specific tribal communities are identified and listed in the constitutional schedules and are officially categorized as Scheduled Tribes (STs). They receive similar benefits of reservations as the SCs, i.e., seats in legislatures and local government bodies, in government employment and in educational institutions. The number of seats reserved for them in each of the three sectors is in proportion to their size (percentage) in the population. They constitute about 8 per cent of the Indian population. The implicit principle of inclusion in the scheduled category of the tribals (STs) is their physical and cultural isolation, their habitat being conventionally in and around hills and forests. Formally, however, like in the case of SCs, inclusion in the lists is by executive order and exclusion only through a decision of the Parliament. Included in the ST list are communities from different religions: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam as well as a large number of communities practising their indigenous tribal faiths.

Over the years the communities belonging to the ST category have become internally highly differentiated; at one end, there are the communities living in relatively isolated conditions suggesting a high degree of physical and cultural isolation and almost totally unexposed to literacy, and at the other end are those communities having high literacy rates, with a significant number of their members being university-educated, leading middle- and upper-class lifestyles. In some states of the North-East, they have been the traditional ruling elites.

There are permanent, independent commissions to monitor the working of social policies relating to SCs and STs, who report their findings, and recommendations for the improvement of their conditions, to Parliament.

(c) *Communities of the socially and educationally 'backward' people:* This category comprises communities generally referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It is the most numerous and heterogeneous

> group of people. Obviously, they are in no need of legislative reservations, as they constitute the numerical majority in many states of India. Over the years their representation in legislatures has vastly increased through the normal processes of competitive politics. In India's representative democracy, political reservation is not their problem. In fact, it is by converting their numerical strength into political power that the OBCs whose entitlement to reservations was ambiguously articulated in the Constitution re-entered the reservations system after independence and have managed to stay there. The story of reservations for the OBCs is one of prolonged struggles, agitations and counter-agitations that have made Indian politics quite volatile and often even tumultuous. At another level, it is an account of democratic politics managing inclusion of members of the socially deprived and discriminated majority through progressive expansion of affirmative action policies and, thus, preventing the Indian State (so far?) from acquiring an ethno-majoritarian character. It was in as late as 1991 that a uniform central policy was adopted, institutionalizing the OBC reservations at the national and state levels, when the report of the Second Backward Class Commission (the Mandal Report) was accepted by the Central Government for implementation, which was subsequently endorsed by the Supreme Court of India.[1]

The quantum of reservations for the OBCs has since been fixed at 27 per cent at the national as well as state levels, which is substantially less than their proportion in the population. Until 1991, several states did not have any provision of reservations. These states were West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Rajasthan and the Union Territories. In the states where the provision was made, the quantum of reservations was arbitrarily fixed at a much lower level, between 2 and 15 per cent. For entrance in prized educational institutions, standards were only marginally lowered for them. The situation, however, has all along been different in the south Indian states, where reservations for the OBCs have existed, in one form or the other, continuing for over half a century. The extent of reservations in these states had reached the point of saturation, covering almost their proportional strength in the population.

Unlike the SCs and STs, the communities identified under the OBC category are not identified and enumerated in India's decennial censuses. A community can enter the OBC category and receive benefits of reservation

only on the recommendation of the statutorily appointed commission. The Second Backward Class Commission listed such communities and estimated their population at 52 per cent, which seems too liberal. (My estimate of OBCs entitled to receive reservations benefits, based on Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) sample surveys, is between 38 and 40 per cent.)

The OBCs comprise, by and large, the lower rungs of the shudras who, in the past, suffered from varying degrees of ritual prohibitions applied to the *a-dwijas* (literally, those not twice born) and remain till today socially and occupationally disadvantaged. A substantial number of the erstwhile non-*dwijas* (shudras), however, had achieved, to a considerable extent, social mobility and a degree of political and economic advancement in the late medieval period and especially during the colonial regime. These communities, e.g., the Reddys, Kammas, Marathas and Patidars, have been kept out of the OBC lists. But a vast majority of the shudras officially included in the OBC category belong to communities that have been ritually and socially discriminated and are backward. Accordingly, a number of such shudra communities, along with many such similar Muslim, Christian and Buddhist groups, have been included in the lists of beneficiaries of the reservation policy.

Even so, a few such communities in the southern states, which by the policy's own criteria would not qualify today for the benefits of reservations, continue to be on the list of beneficiaries. Although their inclusion in the reservation list was justified when the scheme was started, their social and educational conditions have since improved to such a degree that they can no longer be considered as socially and educationally disadvantaged. In the northern and western states, although there are some communities identified by sociologists as 'dominant castes' and have acquired political clout by virtue of their numerical strength, they continue, by and large, to remain backward in social and educational terms. In these states (unlike the southern states), reservation for OBCs is of recent origin and till lately the quantum of reservation for them remained much smaller in proportion to their numbers.

The OBCs today constitute a far more (economically and educationally) heterogeneous category than the SCs and STs. On the one hand, the OBCs include some of the dominant castes of agriculturists who are at loggerheads with the SCs. Some of them have undeservedly entered, and few more have been forcing their entry, into the list of beneficiary communities making use of electoral clout rather than their eligibility. Yet, on the other hand, the

category includes a wide array of socially and economically deprived groups which suffer at least as much (if not more) as the SCs and STs at the hands of the dominant communities. These include the so-called criminal tribes (stigmatized as such during the colonial period), nomadic communities, lower-status and ex-untouchable communities converted to Islam and Christianity, and to a whole range of minor castes subjected to a conditions of 'relative untouchability' and engaged in caste-bound marginal occupations increasingly becoming defunct in the changing economy. They live today in abject conditions of poverty resulting from a total loss of livelihood. On the whole, the OBC is an open and heterogeneous category of 'inclusion' to which claims of entry could be made by *any* community, at any time by representing its case to the permanent commissions specially set up in the states and at the national level specially for this purpose. The commissions are also charged with the responsibility of excluding those communities from the lists which it may find, after due investigation, being wrongly included or having ceased to be backward. As the category comprises the country's largest section of the electorate, this official open-endedness is found politically useful by the political parties cultivating vote banks. All this has resulted in intense competition for seeking OBC support in politics, generating trends which threaten the normative basis of an established social policy.

In short, a good policy is being increasingly discredited largely due to the vote bank politics, and more importantly due to almost a vice-like grip over the policy process of the upper rungs of the OBCs, which have been either wrongfully admitted into the reservations system or continue to be in it despite their ceasing to be backwards. It is they who have prevented benefits from reaching the lower rungs. Besides exercising political clout, these groups having captured bureaucratic power frustrate and even block policy initiatives aimed at achieving the egalitarian and democratic goals of the policy.

The working of the policy of reservations, as described, has over six decades generated a dynamism which has produced demands for its extension to religious groups, particularly Muslims, and to the private sector. These demands have implications for the core goal underlying the policy, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, of 'building a community of Indians based on the principle of social equality'. Since this goal extends to all communities and to all domains, it is appropriate, in what follows, to extensively examine the grounds behind the two demands.

Reservations for Muslims

The demand for a separate reservation quota for all Muslims has raised a new set of issues for consideration. Is the demand consistent with the rationale of the established policy of OBC reservation? What implications does it have for India's existence as a plural, secular democracy? It has become necessary to study the implications of this demand and prevent it from snowballing into the dangerous symbolic politics of mobilization and counter-mobilization around ethnic-religious nationalism.

First, it will reactivate the pernicious pre-partition discourse that essentializes religious communities as social-political monoliths, disregarding vital internal social, economic and cultural differences within them, a discourse now adopted by the Hindutva movement. It is a sociologically established fact that within every religious community there exists a vertical hierarchy of social groups marked by economic, social and educational differences. These differences do not undermine the religious identity of a community as such but that, by itself, does not place different groups following one religion within one single, horizontal, social, economic and cultural space. Cultural plurality in India is more than the existence of different communities of faith. Plurality is more substantively manifested through the various micro-communities and cultures that have grown historically within and across religious boundaries. The claim that a community of faith constitutes a unitary socio-economic and cultural entity, whether made by a majority or a minority, represents a political strategy of a small elite to elicit majority support from its co-religionists. In effect, such elite politics thwarts aspirations for upward social mobility of a majority within a religious community and denies it the economic and social rights which State policy extends to the poor and the backward populations cutting across religions.

Second, by demanding reservation for all Muslims, the Muslim social elite has adopted a strategy of deliberate obfuscation of the terms of discourse on the issue of social justice. Again their strategy mirrors that of the Hindu upper-caste elite who also refuse to recognize the social disadvantages and discrimination suffered by communities at the lower rungs of the Hindu social hierarchy. Just as the latter seeks to project the unity of all Hindus, by including the lower-caste Hindus to get on the Hindutva bandwagon, the former wants to project the communal solidarity of the Muslims by taking over the reins of the backward bandwagon.

Third, such a demand seeks to subvert the very rationale of the reservation policy. The policy of OBC reservation is premised on the secular principle of social and educational backwardness of any class. It recognizes specific communities, cutting across religion as backward or non-backward on the basis of what the Supreme Court has described as a time-tested criterion of backwardness evolved by different states. Thus, any religious community almost invariably comprises backward and non-backward classes. Just as there are castes and classes among the Hindu majority, there are classes and caste—like formations among the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs.

Backwardness is thus a congealed social reality of an occupational or a low traditional status group within a large macro-community of faith. This condition of backwardness among subcommunities of faith may or may not be theologically sanctioned but in reality it operates at the level of relatively closed hereditary cross-generational status groups, which prevents the occupational and social mobility of its members. This is true, for example, of the Julahas or Halalkhors among the Uttar Pradesh Muslims, the Majhabis or Ramgharias among the Sikhs, the fishing communities among the Christians and so on. Similarly, some groups within each community of faith are traditionally 'forward', for example, the Sayeds, Sheikhs and other *Ashraf* communities of the Uttar Pradesh Muslims, the Thangals, Arbis, Arakkals, Koyas and Keys among the Kerala Muslims, the Khatris and Jats among the Sikhs, the Syrians among the Kerala Christians and so on. The claim that an entire community of faith is socially and educationally backward is a travesty of sociological truth and makes nonsense of the principle of social justice.

We must, therefore, distinguish between the political principle of minority relevant for protecting cultural identities and rights and the social principle of backwardness meant to settle issues of equity and justice. Today these two separate logics are being deliberately tangled by the demand that the whole Muslim community be allotted a separate quota of reservation as Backward Class. This would mean a major amendment to the Constitution, one which would violate the secular spirit of the Constitution. India's Constitution recognizes the cultural rights of minorities as fundamental rights and forbids discrimination on grounds of religious affiliation, but it is foundationally opposed to any idea of communal quotas. The new demand of Muslim reservation is simply a stratagem to introduce through the back door the principle of communal quotas into the Constitution. Since the backward sections among the Muslim community are eligible for reservation benefits under the OBC and ST quotas, their aspirations for

social equality can be addressed by the general policy without changing the reservation policy to extend it to religious groups.

Reservations in the Private Sector

Reservation in the State sector is a social policy integral to the institutional structure of a liberal democracy. It is widely seen, including by its opponents, as making good democratic sense, and as a legitimate policy instrument for substantializing liberal democracy's cardinal principle of political equality. It has contributed to breaking the caste-created social-cultural barriers to the inclusion of historically excluded groups—*dalits*, *adivasis* and the *shudras*—into the growing political community created and sustained by the institutions of liberal democracy. The working of the policy not only facilitated political participation of these groups but made possible their entry into the power structure.

The issue of reservations in the private sector is, theoretically (and politically) somewhat different. The issue here is about ensuring conditions of openness and non-discrimination to individuals of diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds, all competing to achieve and maximize their economic goods. Within the logic of liberal democracy, the social justice issue here is more about ensuring fairness in economic competition rather than of the State intervening directly in the determination of the consequences of such competition. To state it differently, the argument of equality in the economic sector is limited to creating a level playing field, rather than to equalizing the abilities or disabilities of the players themselves. Obviously, this argument does not take into account, and tends to wish away, the known and established tendencies of a liberal democracy to favour the intrinsically strong among the competitors who enter the race with a head start. The system usually ends up endowing a minority of the strong (elite in every sector) with a superior morality and the power to define the rules of the game, ostensibly to maintain procedural fairness such that the inequalities in the various non-State sectors (economic, cultural, aesthetic, etc.) remain manageable.

This rather inadequately theorized relationship in liberal democratic theory, between State (political) power and power in the various non-State sectors, whose growth and even autonomy liberal democracy not only allows but promotes, has prevented the emergence of the 'good democratic' argument in support of reservations in the private sector. But in no case can the theory deny the role of the State in devising a policy to ensure a level

playing field in recruitment policies of the private sector. The issue of determining the organizational units and levels of implementation is thus crucial for the policy. It is important to realize that the units of implementation of social justice policy in the economic sector are structurally different from the administrative units for reservation policy in the State sector. Involved here are myriad (hundreds of thousands) non-State economic organizations, each different from the other, not just in size and viability but in their ability to absorb different environmental (social, cultural) and policy inputs. It will be a stupendous task to set up mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and reviewing the working of a policy encompassing such a diverse universe.

Considering the number of units and diversity of the population involved, any uniform policy either in terms of fixing quotas or determining types of beneficiaries appears unworkable. The policy will have to depend on guidelines and a general list of different types of beneficiaries with reference to which optimal numbers for a particular recruiting unit could be decided. In short, an employing unit will have to be given some latitude in choosing numbers and types of beneficiaries with reference to the guidelines and the given generic lists. But in framing, monitoring and implementing the guidelines the State will have to assume the overall responsibility and set up oversight bodies, of course by also incorporating members from the business world and other non-State sectors.

The concept of the beneficiary of social justice policy in the economic sector cannot be identical with that in the State sector: first, because the historical exclusion of communities from political power (which was structured in terms of ritual relationships) is not the same as exclusion from the economy. Second, social justice in the economic sector also needs to address the new forms of exclusion and not confine itself only to the communities suffering from traditional ritual status disabilities. This would mean inclusion of categories like linguistic and religious minorities as well as women and the physically handicapped. Thus, unlike in the State sector, a multiplicity of categories will be involved, each requiring diverse modes of implementation. In other words, identification of beneficiaries will have to be made differently in different local contexts.

In effect, preferences may have to be exercised from a broad spectrum of categories without binding the recruiting organization to a fixed number of categories or a fixed numerical quota for a category. And yet, the State will have to find ways and means of making the policy *target-oriented* so that the preferred presences of different cultural groups are achieved for the sector as

a whole. A social justice policy in the private sector will thus have to link considerations of historical deprivation and discrimination with those relating to contemporary forms of exclusion, i.e., mixing the criteria of deprivation *and* diversity.

Viewed from this perspective, one beneficiary category of the State sector reservation that will have to be included in the policy for the private sector is the *dalit*, or the scheduled caste. It may, however, become necessary in this process to review the existing State lists of SCs and confine the category strictly to the ritually totally barred communities of the ex-untouchables and particularly to those among them who have not achieved any significant level of upward social mobility. The rationale for the inclusion of the ex-untouchable communities is not just diversity, but, more specifically, social justice.

It is important to note in this context that historically the dalits were never formally recognized as a part of the caste system. As such, they were not assigned any specifically defined role or work in the system's production and service domains (nor in any other domain), thus constraining their means of livelihood. This systemic deprivation of livelihood accompanied by social, cultural and moral exclusion of these communities forced them to live in a perpetual situation of moral compulsion and adopt 'means of livelihood' involving work that was discarded as unclean and degrading by the communities whom the system granted one or the other entitlement, ensuring them some kind of right to work. Being ousted even from the system of graded exclusion (caste), these communities remained permanently degraded, leaving them, unlike the other communities, little or no scope for upward mobility. Without economic empowerment that can come through their participation at all levels in the private sector of the economy, the goal of their inclusion can never be achieved.

A similar logic of inclusion will also apply to the scheduled tribes category. Their social and cultural exclusion, however, unlike the dalits, is more a result of physical isolation than of ritual and cultural debasement. The modern economic organization, however, can no longer afford to keep this population permanently on its periphery. The issue of linking the corporate sector and the tribal economy is not just complex but tricky. It calls for working out a simultaneous strategy of *reaching out* (through economic and technological assistance programmes) and *taking in* (through recruitment).

The third category of the OBC is the most problematic for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, the communities of the OBC category—the agricultural and artisan communities—cannot be seen as

economically excluded communities of the caste system. In fact, they constituted the backbone of the caste economy, despite being ritually and socially distanced from the hegemonic power of the *dwijas*. Quite a few of these communities of primary producers have an adequate stock of skills and social capital to successfully adapt to the modern economy, and enter its new middle class as economic entrepreneurs. In every Indian state, there are communities of erstwhile shudras who have made a mark as successful businessmen, 'progressive farmers', building contractors, hoteliers and as small- and large-scale industrial entrepreneurs. Some examples are the *Panchals* of Gujarat and the *Charis* and *Bhandaris* in some South Indian states (especially in the Konkan area). It is, however, also true that many of these communities have lost their crafts and joined the ranks of landless labour. This category, therefore, on the whole would require 'reaching out' schemes through which the organized corporate sector can link with the communities of new entrepreneurs and primary producers in the rural areas.

If the State sector has to use the policy instrument of reservations in representative institutions, government jobs and educational institutions to promote the goal of social equality and equal citizenship, then business organizations too have to develop and adopt a policy instrument to promote the same goals. Since, as discussed, the policy of reservations is inapplicable, it is necessary to have these organizations to satisfy the measure of diversity with respect to caste, community, gender and disability. The State can require that when the business organizations (as partnerships or limited companies) submit their annual report to the relevant regulatory authority they should also submit their employee profile along a particular matrix of diversity. This is the direction along which the private sector must open up to give scope to groups from disadvantaged and discriminated groups in society.

In Conclusion

Let me, in conclusion, assess the experience of reservations in Indian democracy over the last 60 years. Despite tardy and often even dishonest implementation, the policy of reservations in the State sector can claim some significant achievements, not only for the beneficiary groups of SCs, STs and OBCs, but for the whole nation as well.

First, reservation has changed the nature and composition of the Indian middle class, making it more inclusive. At the time of independence, it was a small caste-like social formation. Its membership almost entirely consisted

of the English-educated urban sections of the *dwija* castes. Today, thanks to reservations, members of 'lower castes' have been able to enter the middle class in significant numbers.

Second, 60 years ago, dalits, tribals and OBCs could aspire only to a limited degree of upward mobility and that too as collectivities functioning within the caste structure. Today, with reservations opening for them the gates of the middle class, not only has the incidence of their upward mobility increased, but for achieving it they do not have to depend on ritualistic modes sanctioned by the caste system, such as 'sanskritization'. This changed pattern of social mobility—a larger number of individual members of 'lower castes' acquiring middle-class identity—has deeply shaken the economic and cultural roots of the caste system. For, middle-class identity is no longer perceived in ritual status terms; 'consumerization' rather than 'sanskritization' has become a middle-class marker.

Third, working for over 60 years, reservation has made a cumulative and lasting impact on India's political system. With educational and occupational opportunities provided by reservations, a new political leadership has emerged from among the SCs, STs and OBCs. For example, the very origin and growth of the powerful dalit-based party in north India, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), lay in the formation of a trade union–like association of the dalit and the backward-class government employees. In the course of six decades of reservations, the entire structure of political power in almost all the states and lately at the national level has changed. The established pattern of the upper-caste English-educated elite rule has changed. In almost all provincial states of India, the OBCs and members of the other beneficiary categories of affirmative action are now occupying important power positions in the government and, of course, at relatively less important levels, in the bureaucracy. In this process, several political parties supported by subaltern groups have appeared on the political scene. They bitterly resent and fight reproduction of the traditional, caste-hierarchical (*jajmani*-type) client–patron relationship in politics, which had for long characterized Indian politics: the vertical political relationship between the leadership of the lower-status, rural groups and the English-educated, upper-caste elite. Leaders of these communities now aggressively assert their interests and identities in the electoral arena. Put differently, this new political class, empowered by reservations, worked for ending the upper-caste, elite-oriented Congress monopoly of power. In this process, it gave a material basis to its own power in the rural economy. In short, reservation has contributed to changing the old balance of power in the society. Viewed

from a long-term perspective, the political inclusion of the hitherto excluded groups, initiated by the social policy but realized through competitive democratic politics, has resulted in the disruption of the reproductive process of caste being periodically incarnated into an ideologically sanctified power structure that assigned political power to hereditary groups.

Fourth, reservation has made a significant impact for individuals of the beneficiary categories. The most crucial impact is that education has become a social and cultural value for the members of all the beneficiary categories. They now see education as an accessible means for them to individually attain modernity and social mobility. Further, having entered the educational institutions they are also changing the curricula and the student culture of these institutions such that what was hitherto excluded, but significant from their perspective, has now been included. This has meant changes in the syllabus, in the vocabulary of the classroom and in the public discourse that is fed by the debates coming from universities and colleges.

As a consequence, some of them, having now entered the middle class, unlike their parents, go to great lengths to educate their children so that they can receive benefits of reservation and are able to stay in the growing, competitive Indian middle class. Having entered the middle class not only has their lifestyle changed, they now redefine the conventional, caste-like culture of the middle class increasingly in non-ritual status terms. Even for many non-educated but of the aspirant generation, alcoholism is on the wane and savings on the rise. This expansion of opportunities has enabled members of these communities to attain, in greater numbers than before, high professional stature and positions of power.

Successful individuals always had a role model impact, but now with large enough numbers from among these groups having entered the power structure, they have been able to install protective mechanisms within the bureaucracy and political parties, facilitating entry of their compatriots into the power structure. For example, in the Surat district of Gujarat, as far back as in the 1960s, about 40 per cent of primary school teachers were tribals. This opened up, on a long-term basis for the tribals of the district, the doors of political power in Gujarat. In the course of 20 years, a few of them became not just Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) (which was mechanically possible through quotas) but Ministers and even Chief Ministers of the states. Once they became a critical mass in power it became easy to build other linkages. By using their

political influence they acquired a say in decision-making, including in recruitment matters, thereby further expanding the linkages.

Yet the policy of reservations is far from achieving some crucial physical targets. The scheduled quotas still remain unfilled at higher levels of government jobs. The capacity to receive benefits of the policy, e.g., attainment of minimum educational levels, remains abysmally low among several smaller communities comprising the SC, ST and OBC categories, which have been kept out of the policy's reach. The other enabling measures envisaged to complement reservations remain, by and large, inadequate. Yet, it cannot be denied that reservations have helped the SCs, STs and the OBCs. By providing a concrete basis to their mobility aspirations, it has induced them to achieve higher levels of literacy and living standards. For example, in the south and west Indian states, where the policy has been more efficiently implemented, educational and occupational profiles of SCs and OBCs have shown greater improvement.

The need to continue and strengthen the policy of affirmative action is greater today than ever before. As the economy is freed from the State control, the government has to see that the weaker and vulnerable sections in the society are not only protected from predatory market practices, but that they are enabled to participate in it and derive benefits of the expanding economy. No economic reforms can work unless a vast majority of a country's population—who in India are known by such terms as SCs, STs and OBCs—acquire a stake in them. Liberalization does not mean, even in the most liberalized economies of the world, that the government ceases to rule and surrenders the fate of the country's poor and deprived to the 'market forces'.

For the market to really become an equalizing force the State has to perform more astutely its role of maintaining and creating, where they do not exist, level playing fields. Affirmative action is the most potent instrument for achieving this state. For such a policy to be effective the State has to proactively dispense social justice to those of its citizens who still exist on the peripheries of both the market economy and the civil society. Even a minimalist State cannot escape this responsibility. If it does, then not just economic reforms but its very existence as an ethno-neutral and democratic State may face danger.

It is in this light that there is a need to reinvent the affirmative action policies along the following lines:

1. *To exit*, from reservations, those beneficiary communities that may be found, after careful investigations, to have ceased to be socially and educationally backward. This will enable the extremely backward communities, who are technically entitled to reservation benefits but do not receive them in reality because a lion's share of such benefits have gone to a small number of well-to-do and socially dominant communities among the OBCs, to benefit from the reservations and be set on the same upward social mobility trajectory that the dominant communities among the beneficiary community have hitherto enjoyed.
2. *To introduce* special developmental and promotional measures for the poor and 'backward' households among the upper-caste communities who due to their disadvantageous physical locations and parental background remain deprived and disadvantaged. These will include households in remote rural areas where villages are poorly connected by road or rail and are ill-served by education and health services. These developmental and promotional measures should not be confused or tied with the reservations made for the socially deprived under affirmative action policies, which are founded on an entirely different value premise and rationale.
3. *To adapt* the recruitment policy of the corporate (private) sector to the principle of diversity. It is now being increasingly recognized that having culturally diverse personnel working at any workplace is not just a healthy management practice but is beneficial to the company as well. The policy of diversity should particularly be conceived as special promotional measures for the routinely unrepresented cultural groups in business and organized economy. The affirmative action in the private sector is about aligning the globalizing economy to India's culturally diverse society. In no event, however, the prevailing system of reservations should be reproduced in the private sector, for reservations are about inclusion of the traditionally and systematically excluded groups in the power structure of the State and its institutions.

Note

1. http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1363234/

CHAPTER 15

Entering the Twenty-First Century: Changes in National Politics and Discourse

The politics of the two decades during 1989–2009, although highly tumultuous, have produced profound systemic changes. The principles and practices around which the competitive, representational politics evolved for over half a century and got organized in the form of a party system, which regularly and fairly smoothly processed electoral outcomes into government formation, were severely disrupted by the end of the 1980s. At another level, accompanied by changes in the nature of the political competition, the very idea of 'representation' changed, at least in political practices, making communities the basic units for organizing politics and framing social and developmental policies. In the process, it transformed our established understanding of secularism, more particularly, the relationship between secularism and democracy.

Looking back today, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, these changes seem to have taken shape as two long-term systemic trends: (a) the growth of a coalitional party system and (b) the increased autonomy of the economy from the political system, creating a fairly stable basis for the political economy of India's liberal democracy. In this chapter,

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National Fellow of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) affiliated to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. For a larger, full-fledged argument, see D.L. Sheth: "*Political Communalization of Religions and the Crisis of Secularism*" in Surinder S. Jodhka, Gurpreet Mahajan (eds) *Religion, Community and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policyin India* (Routledge India 2010).

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however, I will focus on the dynamic of changes, and not elaborate on the nature of consequences they seem to have produced, namely, the market democracy and neoliberal economy. The two changes I wish to discuss here are (I) the change in the party system and (II) the change in the political discourse on secularism.

The Change in the Party System

The politically unsettling decade of the 1990s produced profound changes in India's party system. It all began with the election of 1989 which triggered, during the decade, governmental instability (five elections in ten years), political turbulence and the making of a volatile electorate. It turned out to be truly a system-changing election. No election since 1989 has produced electoral majority for one party. After 20 years and seven national elections, the new (coalitional) party system that has emerged is yet to acquire institutional stability.

With growing electoral and legislative instability, massive shifts during the 1990s occurred in support bases of political parties both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The Congress party, which had already conceded substantial Other Backward Classes (OBC) votes to different parties in earlier elections (since 1967), also began to steadily lose chunks of its support bases to a number of regional and subregional parties—especially from among the dalits, tribals and Muslims—in different parts of the country. To the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) it substantially lost its urban and upper-caste support and to a lesser degree the tribal and dalit support. At the 1989 election, the Congress was reduced to under 40 per cent vote and less than 200 (197) seats. Since then it remained in a declining mode, the only exception being the 1991 election held under the special circumstance of the unfortunate assassination of its leader Rajiv Gandhi; it won enough number of seats to be able to manage the small numerical deficit for continuing in the government for the given term. In short, 1984 was the last election in which the Congress won majority seats as a single party; it was a phenomenal electoral success with 48 per cent vote and 415 seats. Since then, despite its significant recovery in elections during the current decade (2004 and 2009), it has not been able to get a clear majority in the Parliament. In sum, although the Congress has tenaciously retained (and significantly improved in the last two elections) its political character as a

national party, receiving support across castes, religions and regions, it has yet to recover its old, long-cultivated support bases it lost during the 1990s.

The BJP, on the other hand, entered the 1990s with a bang (after its miserable performance in 1984) by winning 85 seats in the parliament and 11 per cent national votes as against 2 seats and 7 per cent vote it had in the previous election. Since then, in the course of the 1990s, the BJP steadily maintained its electoral performances.[1] Its pre-2004 dream of reaching the number of seats needed for registering a clear majority in the parliament, however, went awry. The political stagnation was due to the capturing of large electoral spaces by the regional parties in the 1990s. To sum up, the change in the party system has produced four long-term negative consequences for the secularization process. First, the regional and subregional parties have by now been deeply entrenched in the party system, making the national parties structurally dependent on them for support. This is not allowing the coalitional system to attain stability. The other important factor preventing its stability is that sufficient political and legal-constitutional recognition is not accorded to pre-electoral coalitions. Until long-term institutional and political solutions are found, the post-1989 structure of inter-party competition was fated to remain in the grip of cynical politics of blackmail or that of electoral desperation often leading to communal polarization.

Second, the change in the nature of political competition has reduced the electoral process into a pure politics of votes. The idea that elections are not the be-all and end-all of democracy, but are means for acquiring political legitimacy for the rule of an elected government, has lost appeal, even meaning. Third, political parties have, by and large, been rendered incapable of playing the mediating role of reconciling diverse interests and identities between the State and society. As a result, the parties, at the regional and subregional levels, function more as coalitions of specific ethno-caste and ethno-religious groups than as political organizations articulating collective interests and aspirations of the region as a whole. In this sense, regional politics today, is an aggregated register of ethno-caste and ethno-religious interests and identities.

Fourth, the national parties, especially the coalition leaders, are now compelled to find or invent 'national issues' which would motivate and mobilize vast sections of voters to transcend regional/subregional and caste loyalties. This search for the 'transcendent' pan-national politics has led to communalization of politics. Ironically, in such a situation, it is the caste-ethnic and regional politics which serve as a countervailing force to

communal politics. Hence, the political strategies of the two parties, the Congress and the BJP, are competitively similar: how to stall and, if possible, push back the advance of regional and subregional parties. The solution they often resort to is strangely similar: the totalizing politics of the majoritarian versus minoritarian communalism. The prospects for the secularization of politics have been further eroded by the shrinking electoral and political presence of the Left parties, especially since the 2009 elections.

The Change in the Political Discourse

In the post 1989 phase of political instability and electoral stalemates, which appeared almost irreversible thanks to the steady decline of the Congress party, the BJP and Parivar members saw a big political opportunity for themselves. This was an opportunity they always wanted to create in Indian politics by using every means at their disposal, but never quite succeeded. Now that opportunity virtually fell into their lap—the opportunity of changing the discourse as well as institutional politics in favour of the idea of India as a Hindu nation. They raised and orchestrated a nation-wide debate on cultural nationalism, and sustained it politically by launching the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.[2] The objective of this politics was to convert the demographic majority of Hindus into a political majority ensuring a durable, if not permanent, *electoral majority*—a step in the direction of making India a Hindu nation. For realizing this possibility, the BJP (along with the Sangh Parivar) has been working frantically on various fronts, and with a longer timeframe. Its primary concern is about not losing the initiative in the politics of discourse on secularism and thus expanding political spaces nationally on its own and deepening electoral power in the states through coalitional politics. It would be interesting to see how the BJP worked in the 1990s for changing the terms of political discourse by radically altering its approach to political mobilization as well as to electoral politics.

First, the BJP transited smoothly from the discourse which it had itself created—namely, of genuine versus pseudo-secularism (as if the party really was committed to secularism) to the new one of Hindu Ekta. This was initially articulated defensively in terms of cultural nationalism, but later, brazenly as Hindutva—a political doctrine holding that India belongs to Hindus and asserting that all people living in India must identify themselves historically and culturally as Hindus, even as they follow their different religions. Second, the BJP devised a new electoral strategy, which it

implemented at two levels. At one level, it forged a stable coalition with regional parties and thus created a wide political gap, a structural separation, between the Congress and the regional parties. It effectively used coalitional politics to emerge as a major national-level party, an equal contender for power vis-à-vis the Congress. At another level, the strategy involved dispersing the support structure of regional parties and incorporating its disintegrating parts within itself or in the coalition it led. One consequence of this strategy—as it was not merely an electoral strategy—was that in as many states as was possible the Congress faced a strong electoral contender in the form of a major regional party or the BJP. Thus, the politics of many states was reduced to a bipolar competition between the Congress and the BJP, or between the Congress and the BJP's coalitional partners, and at the national level too the Congress and the BJP emerged as the two major contenders for power. This radically changed the old structure of inter-party competition when the Congress was the only major national party that faced disunited opposition of disparate parties.

To this end, the BJP engaged in a series of campaigns beginning with *rathyatra* and then mobilizing grass-roots support of Hindus in the form of bringing bricks to Ayodhya from different parts of the country for building the Rama temple at the site of Babri Masjid. It may or may not build the temple on the site of the mosque but it literally built, brick by brick, the political edifice of Hindutva in the wider society.[3] As the politics of Hindutva expanded, winning an electoral majority became an expectation incidental to this process. It culminated in the destruction of the Babri structure with its aftermath polarizing communally almost every aspect of India's political and social life.

The communal discourse raised by the BJP was effectively countered by the Left and Liberal discourse on secularism. This discourse, while it indeed achieved the important goal of halting the advance of the BJP, prevented long-term issues, crucial for secularism, from entering the public discourse. Issues such as the harm the Hindutva movement caused to *institutions* of the secular state and to the idea of the rule of law, when raised, remained confined, by and large, to editorial comments in the media. They were rarely articulated in political campaigns. In effect, the secular discourse got confined to the narrow, electoral terrain. While the pro-minoritarian anti-Hindutva campaigns got pitched nationally, they expanded the discourse in counter-communal rather than secular terms. It only mirror-imaged the Hindutva discourse. This counter-discourse succeeded in targeting the BJP electorally, but did not succeed in bringing the discourse

back into the national-secular space within which Hindu nationalism was in the past *effectively* dealt with—namely, India's distinctive secularism which maintained *secularity* of the State, while promoting sustainable diversity and plurality in society. Had the counter-discourse responded frontally to the BJP's charge of pseudo-secularism and thus compelled it to hold ground on its claim to genuine secularism the 'secular' parties would have clearly exposed the anti-secular and anti-national politics of cultural nationalism.

Instead, the 'secular' parties, as well as a section of public intellectuals and civil society groups, responded to the charge of pseudo-secularism dismissively and with contempt, but as the charge persisted they responded defensively by shifting the terms of discourse to the idea of pluralism; they now almost unceremoniously dumped the term secularism and privileged pluralism. Now *pluralism*, not secularism, began to be affirmed as constituting the opposite of communalism. Although both terms were used interchangeably, secularism was now explained and defended as pluralism.

The shift to pluralism also appeared defensive not only because it was unexamined and sudden, but it appeared to justify the politics of minoritarianism as constituting a legitimate response to the advancing majoritarianism. To put it in another way, the unanchored secularists could not effectively counter the charge of 'minority appeasement' made by the votaries of cultural nationalism—and this when all that the government of the day did was to protect the constitutionally endowed cultural rights of religious minorities. The terms and arguments they used in defending such measures in public discourse sounded pro-minoritarian rather than secular. Facing the charge of adopting 'double standards' in the practice of secularism, they assumed a defensive posture and found it convenient to make their counterargument in terms of 'pluralism' and 'diversity'—rather than in the established terms of constitutional secularism, which explicitly recognized the vulnerability of groups (social as well as religious-cultural) and provided for special protective and enabling measures for them. It seemed as though they felt more comfortable, rather enthused, in their rebuttal to the 'appeasement charge' by characterizing it as an expression of majoritarian communalism, rather than responding to the merit, if any, of the argument. In the process, electorally motivated but communally appealing actions of a self-defined 'secular' party in power (may that be in a State or at the center) aimed at placating the communitarian leadership of a religious minority—and thus securing the 'vote bank'—began to be defended in terms of 'pluralism'.

It hardly mattered whether such measures compromised the neutrality of the State or its commitment to the rule of law. Such a neo-pluralist view of minority rights and identities, in effect, led to the propounding of a new principle of secularism in the public discourse by which the State could legitimately abet, and even aid communal political practices of a religious group. This argument was based on a peculiar idea of pluralism which held that the State should just not allow but must recognize and proactively work for advancing collective interest and identity of religious communities if these were minorities. Here the underlying assumption is that membership of the State is constituted not of citizens *qua* citizens but of citizens in communities. The new pluralist secularism, however, could not escape facing assertion of a similar communitarian principle by the 'leaders' of the majority community. When these assertions and claims were backed by governmental power (of the BJP-led coalition), they began to be articulated as rights of the totality of Hindus. The assertions were made implicitly in the language of Hindu Rashtra made such totalistic communal claims appear legitimate.

The new discourse considerably enfeebled the constitutionally espoused, distinctive secularism (equal distance from all religions and religious communities) of the Indian State. It diluted the principle of secular neutrality, exposing the state's institutional mechanisms and procedures for the use of partisan ends. The neo-pluralist turn in the discourse legitimated politics of making the State internally pliable to communitarian claims of different collectivities, each claiming an equal opportunity to communalism, along with a slice of the State power in proportion to its numerical power. Such politics pushed the Indian State in the direction of its becoming a permissively communal and, when not communal, a partisan State.

In sum, the old, established secular discourse was transformed and replaced by a discourse of 'pluralism'. The majoritarian assault on secularism that refused to recognize the cultural and religious identities and rights of minorities, on the one hand, and the neo-pluralism discourse, which tended to favour the politics of totalizing interests and essentializing identities of the minority religious communities, on the other, resulted in an ongoing political battle between majoritarian and minoritarian communalisms.

The counter-discourse, however, achieved significant political gains for pluralist secularism. It pushed the aggressive majoritarian-communalism campaigns on the defensive and at the periphery of competitive politics. It acquired moral-political legitimacy, especially after the post-Godhra massacre of Muslims in Gujarat. In the run-up to the 2004 elections, the BJP and

the Parivar retreated from the majoritarian-communal campaigns, foregrounding 'development issues'. Leading the coalition of ideologically diverse parties, the language of cultural nationalism was now put on hold. Instead, 'India's emergence as a global power' became the theme song, culminating famously in the India-shining electoral campaign. Strategic reversals, however, are not easily achieved in politics, notwithstanding the short-lived public memory. The party could not live down Gujarat at the polls. The India-shining campaign could not wash the odium of Gujarat, not even for its 'secular' coalition partners. The suddenly raised and newly secularized discourse failed to strike a chord in the electorate. The BJP and its partners, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, lost the mandate to rule, ushering a new phase of the coalition system.[4]

The idea of cultural nationalism that was made to appear as representing the common sense of Indian nationalism dissolved into pluralist spaces which the new Congress-led coalitional government made quickly available through pronouncements of policies assuring religious minorities the restoration of their rightful place in the polity and safety in the society. It seemed the electoral outcome of 2004 was democracy's moment for self-correction,[5] of mending the breach in its ongoing process of political secularization created by the communal politics—the majoritarian versus the minoritarian of the 1990s.

Summing Up

The politics of the last 20 years (1989–2009) has had serious long-term implications for the secularization process and for the nature of Indian democracy. Not only have different kinds of communities moved to the centre of India's political and public life, they have now acquired a systemic basis and determinative role in national politics. In everyday politics, religious communities began to be represented as culturally unified political entities. Ideas and practices concerning the faith became subordinated to this conception of the community and were used for supplying validations for political-communal solidarity of the faith community. In the political discourse, religious identities were culturally essentialized and sought to be frozen in time and space. As a result, issues of *rights* and *equality* got reduced in communitarian terms and were used for legitimating social policies for establishing inter-communal parity. In this reductive communitarian politics, the community rather than the citizen began to be seen as the primary bearer of rights, and a collective victim of injustice by its 'other' or

the State. Claims to equality, and generally to public goods, were now made by larger communities competing vis-à-vis each other rather than by citizens organized around secular interest or by groups sharing common social, economic or educational conditions of deprivation and backwardness. Thus, rights and public 'goods' persons could now hold or aspire to were in their capacity as members of a community; *qua* individuals they were left with some residual political rights and communally unclaimed indivisible public facilities. The secular policy of the State which 'recognized' all *religions* as equal now treated the religious community in purely numerical terms. The community rather than faith thus became a religion's primary representation, with all other aspects of religious life—such as piety-related practices—being incorporated by the religion's communitarian identity. In effect, such issues concerning freedom of faith and practices began to be defined and decided politically by community leadership. Thus, for policy purposes, communities of minority faith began to be treated as totalities, and each believed to represent a commonly shared social, economic and educational status. This has created a new social hierarchy of religions, seeking to remove from the discourse the issue of caste/social hierarchy within religions.

The results of the 2009 national elections have, however, raised expectations about de-communalization of national politics. The optimism stems from the belief that the second successive defeat of the Hindutva party is likely to compel it to reconsider its exclusivist politics of majoritarian totalization. Besides, the expanding liberal-market economy (an important dimension of political secularization, not discussed here), working in conjunction with the political market of votes in the coalitional system, is expected to reduce the possibility of mass-mobilizational—communal or otherwise—politics. This might make the politics of raising communal passions and engineering riots politically and even electorally unrewarding. Moreover, the politics of the minoritarian-communal solidarities that emerged under the threat of majoritarian communal assaults may lose its appeal as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century. Consequently, the unity attained by religious minorities may express politically in terms of their ethno-caste identities and interests of their constituent units at the regional level. This is, for example, already happening in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the form of the *pasmanda* Muslim movement and in Punjab in the form of the *adidharmi* movement.

NOTES

1. For a detailed analysis of electoral data concerning the rise of the BJP in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the discussion on its ideology of cultural nationalism, see Yogendra K. Malik and V.B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India*, especially Chapters 6 and 7 (East View Press, Oxford), pp. 179–243, 1994.
2. For an engaging historical narrative showing how RSS kept the politics of Hindutva alive in its worse days and could bring it in the centre of Indian politics in the 1990s, see Pralay Kanungo's *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hegewar to Sudarshan* (Manohar Publishers, Delhi), 2002.
3. Suhas Palshikar has shown, based on empirical data, how the Hindutva politics expanded and moved towards the centre, occupying social-structural spaces. See Suhas Palshikar: "*Majoritarian Middle Ground*", Economic and Political Weekly, (18 December 2004) pp. 5426–5430.
4. For a detailed and insightful analysis of the post-2004 politics, based on states-level electoral data and national surveys, see Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar. "*Revisiting 'Third Electoral System': Mapping Electoral Trends in India: 2004–9*" in Sandeep Shastri, K.C. Suri & Yogendra Yadav: *Electoral Politics in Indian States* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) 2009.
5. For a detailed argument, see D.L. Sheth, "*The Change of 2004*", Seminar *545*, January 2005.

CHAPTER 16

Democratizing Global Governance: A Minimalist Perspective

Proposals for democratizing global governance are often made in pure normative terms, remaining oblivious of the power dimension involved in such a process. Although formulated in rather pretentious language of the policy maker, in reality they read like 'wish lists' of well-meaning democrats addressed to non-competent, often even non-existent, global authorities. It is high time that such proposals, for them to be taken seriously, are grounded in the emergent empirical reality (of the post–cold war world) and account for the changes that have occurred in the organizational structure of the global power system.

First, it must be recognized that the anarchic space of international relations is now being inhabited, increasingly thickly, by organizations and actors wielding significant financial and political power globally—across regions and nation states–directly affecting the lives of ordinary people, everywhere. Second, these actors and organizations, although seen and legally treated as transnational entities, also represent interests and power of some specific nation states. Third, the old supra-national organizations, i.e., United Nations and several other international agencies, are steadily losing their salience in the emergent, post–Cold War system of global

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power. But then there are also the post–World War II international financial institutions which have acquired a great deal of unmandated power and influence (which they often exercise) over the world's poorer and peripheral nation states. In a nutshell, the relatively legitimate political authority of the post–World War II international institutions and organizations is overlaid by the raw, unrepresentational *power* of the old (of the cold war time) and the new (post–cold war) *global* actors and organizations. By attributing the term *governance* to these different sets of actors and organizations they are made to appear as if they constitute elements of a coherent structure of a world political authority, enjoying a degree of legitimacy.

In sum, enormous power is wielded today by actors and organizations operating from the non-national, and at times non-institutional, global spaces and these together constitute a dominant structure of global power. Even though lacking in democratic and often even legal legitimacy, they are able to enforce their will—thanks to the support and sponsorship they enjoy of the world's economically and militarily most powerful nation states—over the world's vast majority of less powerful (semi-peripheral) and powerless (peripheral) nation states. In defining global governance, it is therefore necessary to take account of the disarticulation of power between the old inter-state system and the new global power. In brief, the crucial issue of global governance today is the illegitimate and undemocratic nature of the existing structures of global power. Giving these structures the label of *governance* in fact obscures the basic issue of their illegitimacy. For democratizing the existing global power structure it is therefore not enough to just go on making normativist proposals for its regulation and reform. The challenge is to evolve civil-societal as well as inter*national* politics to counter and prevent ad hoc and illegitimate use of global power by *a* nation state or a group of nation states who have hegemonized the global power structure. It is through this process of politics (soft politics of discourse and the hard politics of democratic national and civil-societal organizations) that legitimate and durable structures of global governance can come, and should be brought, into existence.

It is with the above concerns in mind that I wish to elaborate two different but overlapping perspectives within and between which various conceptions of global governance and global democracy are articulated. Elaboration of these perspectives here is meant to provide a theoretical reference for assessing specific proposals and initiatives for democratizing global governance—proposals that have recently emerged from civil society movements as well as from within the existing global institutions. For the

sake of convenience, I shall characterize these perspectives respectively as (i) the Institutional Perspective and (ii) the Movements Perspective.

The Institutional Perspective

In this perspective, the issue of global governance is problematized in terms of creating economic and political conditions compelling the existent (dominant) global power structure to acquire institutional legitimacy. It, however, sees the emergence of this power structure as a historically given condition of life contingently brought about with the end of the cold war. It also sees it as an imperfect condition, which can be and ought to be reformed and regulated so that governance becomes accountable, with its institutions opening up to a variety of concerns, interests and aspirations of a much wider population of the emerging global society. In this process, the institutionalists see an unprecedented opportunity not only for establishing democracy as a universal norm, but also as a form of governance that could be uniformly realized at all levels—global, regional, national and local—and everywhere in the world. It is assumed that with democratization of the global economic and political power, globalization will grow to become a positive historical force, uniting the present economically, culturally and politically divided world.

This perspective thus sees institutional power as a driving force for creating a one-world community and producing economic affluence for its members. But macro-economic stability of the global economy is considered a necessary condition for the institutional power to remain productive. It is therefore crucial to maintain such stability in the process of democratization of global power. It is in this context that the model conceives the role of the global civil society in the process of democratization of global power, i.e., balancing the stability need of the global economy with that of securing for it a degree of democratic legitimacy. Thus, the institutionalist politics is about subjecting the existing structure of global power to institutional regulations as well as democratic controls to be exercised by as large a number of participants as possible, from different sectors of the global civil society. In the course of exercising such control, however, the logic of institutional procedures will have precedence over the representational logic of making governance accountable by ascertaining popular will.

The theory of democracy on which the institutionalist idea of global governance is premised is thus obviously a theory of liberal representative democracy—a model developed by the nation state democracies. As this is a State-centred model of governance, the proposals for democratization ensuing from it operate on the assumption that the diverse, existing organizations of global power represent a global state in the making. For its democratic functioning and legitimation, such a proto-global state would of course require, symmetrically, a global civil society and citizen participants on whose consent and vigilance it is expected to be kept on the democratic course. Such a concept of democratization is thus expected to duly flow from the model. It is the familiarity of concepts of liberal democracy widely experienced at the nation state level, rather than the model's own intrinsic merit in bringing about global democracy, that make such (unwarranted) assumptions and expectations about global governance sound logical and also commonsensical.

Strange though it may seem, the model conceived by the institutional realists assumes what is non-existent as real; namely, the existence of a nodal centre of global governance (a proto-global state) and its will and need to function as a democratically legitimate authority. Furthermore, the institutional realists see democratization of global power as a *real* historical process moving inevitably, even if in fits and starts, in the direction of its ideal: becoming a central political authority exercising legitimate power all over the world. It is perhaps to expedite this (teleology) that the institutionalists want a largest possible number of citizen participants and political activists to embrace this ideal and vigilantly work for it, i.e., making a liberal democratic global state possible.

The politics of the institutionalist model is thus the politics of knowledge and advocacy in which funding constitutes a vital element.[1] It is aimed at making centralized (nation state–like) global governance—expected to be tempered and mediated by another faintly existing process, i.e., the making of a *global* civil society—a self-fulfilling prophecy. A liberal democratic theory, wedded as it is to positivist knowledge, is thus expected to generate the politics of making the *ideal* a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is hoped that the progeny of this marriage, i.e., the cosmopolitan democracy, will enable the institutionalist model to protect global decision-making from the globally unmanageable implications of the principle of popular sovereignty—a principle that is still invoked in legitimation contests within state democracies. It is even expected to free global governance from the messy politics of

popular representation. At least this is how it seems the self-binding principle is likely to work in practice for democracy at the global level.

It must, however, be admitted that the idea of cosmopolitan democracy is necessitated by the democratic overstretch, i.e., democracy's extension to ever-enlarging scales, which threaten to make it unmanageable and, in the end, an unrealizable system of governance. The application of the self-binding principle of cosmopolitan democracy globally, however, enables the governance to privilege professional expertise over public opinion and allows it to establish the global power's monopoly of violence, and its politically legitimated use against the deviant and dissenting groups and nations refusing to accept the macro-ideology and power of global governance. Further, it can help global governance to hide its other face, i.e., the face of power represented, in reality, not by global institutions but by the world's few economically rich and militarily powerful *nation states*. This model of global democracy, it seems, is being empirically perfected in the creation and functioning of the European Union, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the re-launching of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the end of the cold war. All these different types of organizations are at one level collectively seeking legitimacy for their role in global governance, and at another level each one of them is engaged in maintaining and expanding its hegemonic power globally. Similarly, the principle of democratic control (authenticity), expected to be exercised by a vast number of the informed and vigilant global public (again an expectation premised on an assumed existence of a global state with its non-substantively, i.e., only symbolically, existing global citizens), is guaranteed to create in practice a small class of jet-setting and Internet-savvy intellectual-activist elites and their organizations, supposedly representing the voice of the global civil society. For, it is the idiom and language only of this class—whether of dissent or collaboration—that will be intelligible to their interlocutors/counterparts representing the global power structure: the bankers, the businessmen, the technocrats and the politicians of the powerful (G-8) nation states.

The global-level civil society actors would naturally claim authenticity for themselves, as sole translators and communicators on behalf of the globally submerged groups of social activists of *many* vernacular worlds. The voices of the vernacular masses, if at all they reach the portals of global democracy, will be heard as making such a racket that they may make it necessary to frequently invoke the principle of self-binding democracy. In brief, although the idea of global governance is premised on the

nation state–oriented theory of liberal democracy, its proponents are in reality unprepared and unwilling to devise institutional mechanisms of popular representation at the level of global governance. Thus, while claiming democratic legitimacy for itself, global democracy will function as a site of competition and conflict as well as collaboration and cooperation among various types of globally active *metropolitan* elites. Such global democracy, albeit a formally legitimated structure of governance, can be characterized, at best, as metropolitan democracy. It, however, will keep the institutionalists constantly busy performing the challenging theoretical task of interpreting the real lifeworld of metropolitan hegemony as representing/approximating the ideal of cosmopolitan democracy.

Thus seen, the institutionalist perspective invests global governance with enormous power to produce wealth and keep, albeit not necessarily just, peace. And this is considered to be a good enough reason for it to secure a degree of democratic legitimacy. This kind of democracy (global-liberal), however, can hardly be expected to properly recognize, and deal democratically with, such issues as gender justice, ethnic identities and cultural diversity, and ecological care. To this perspective of global governance belong such initiatives as related to taxation, instituting a world parliament, reforming the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO. They easily fit the vision of global governance as a network of liberal democratic institutions lateral and associational rather than representative in their character but nonetheless producing legitimation for the elite rule. It is through the politics of this perspective that the unfinished neo-liberal project of globalization can eventually be completed, i.e., by marrying global capitalist economy to global (non-representational) liberal democracy.

The Movement Perspective/Alternative Governance

In contrast to the movement perspective, the issue of global governance is problematized in terms of pluralizing and deepening democracy and, in the process, building politics for creating competing and alternative forms of democracy vis-à-vis the singularly and the universally propagated, often even enforced, form of liberal representative democracy. The proponents of this perspective (for short, the alternativist) view the existing, post–cold war global power structure as exclusionary and hegemonic in practice and undemocratic even in theory. This is because any of its governing institutions are not meant to be responsible or accountable to constituencies outside itself. It is at best self-responsible, and accountable

only internally to the professional scrutiny of experts. The politics involved is of knowledge and of movements, aimed at delegitimizing the existing anti-democratic and dominant global power and for building alternative forms of global governance which would privilege the idea of global citizenship over that of consumership. The theory of democracy on which this perspective is premised is of participatory democracy where economic and political power is shaped and legitimated through a bottom-up process of democratization.

The alternativists thus conceive democratization as a process of creating at all levels—from local to global—a system of multiple and overlapping governances which are horizontally interlinked. These governing agencies are sought to be made responsible not only to each other, but accountable directly and generically to people in their different constituencies.[2]

Interestingly, however, unlike the institutionalists, who by and large represent a coherent view of governance (vertically legitimated structure of political and economic power) and democracy (consented elite rule), the alternativists are of different hues. Two broad types could be easily discerned: the maximalists and the minimalists. The maximalists, like the institutionalists, believe in increasing the power of the governing institutions, but seek their democratic legitimation through popular participation, which for them, unlike for the institutionalists, is not merely a form of eliciting democratic consent, but a means of involving people in the process of decision-making. They, however, do not view the prevalent structure of global power as constituting any basis for global governance. In fact, they view it as unjust and anti-democratic power, which must be replaced through democratic movements giving rise to alternative structures of global governance which are just, egalitarian and genuinely democratic. However, in this model too, power is conceived as embodied in a central, State-like organization, but it has to be derived from global citizenry and its use democratically controlled not just through rules and procedures but directly by the civil society. Thus, global citizenship and global civil society are the two concepts crucial to this model, particularly for ensuring democratic decision-making and accountability of governance. Insofar as both the institutionalists and the maximalists are enamoured by the role of State power for achieving their respective economic and social objectives, they share between them an attitude of govern-mentality with respect to their thinking about social transformations. The source of inspiration of this model, perhaps its origin, lies in the ideology and politics developed by the European Left during the cold war. The global democracy initiative

represented by the World Social Forum, when viewed in terms of its theory of power, seems to belong to the maximalist alternative model.

The other, the *minimalist model* of alternative governance, does not occupy much space in the discourse of global governance and democratization. It allocates increasingly minimum power to the higher levels, i.e., the national, the regional and global, and invests local governance with maximum power, because it is at this level that democracy is embodied in its true and primary form. Upper rungs of governance can function democratically insofar as they derive their legitimacy and power from this primary source. It provides for articulation of such a system of upwardly diminishing power, horizontally in different domains of life—political, economic, ecological and so on—seeking, in the process, to resolve dichotomous separations existing in today's globalizing world between economy and society, politics and culture. The inspiration of this model is largely derived from the Gandhian vision of governance and democracy which emphasizes non-violence as a precondition for civil life and celebrates diversity as a manifestation of unity of all life—human and non-human.

This vision is being politically reinvented today by a section of grass-roots (micro-)movements in India in the process of their devising a new politics of discourse and protests aimed at countering the existing structures and policies of hegemonic globalization. This politics of micro-movements is also an account of the minimalists model for democratizing global governance and, as such, it is articulated in their critique of (and the politics of protests against) hegemonic globalization and of the existing form of the nation state–oriented liberal democracy. In what follows, I shall, therefore, elaborate the minimalist model based on the discussion of (a) the movements' critique of hegemonic globalization and (b) of existing democracies leading to (c) proposals for democratizing governance at national as well as global levels.

Movements' Critique of Globalization

In the mid-1990s, when different sections of the poor in India began to acutely feel globalization's adverse impact, a high degree of political and strategic convergence occurred among different types of groups and movements—of the Gandhian, neo-Gandhian and social democratic persuasion—on a wide range of issues concerning globalization. It revitalized the entire spectrum of grass-roots movements in the country, giving rise

to a new discourse *and* politics aimed at countering the forces of hegemonic globalization. What follows is an account of terms in which the movements view and resist globalization.[3]

First, activists of grass-roots movements see globalization as an incarnation of the old idea of Development (with a capital D), but representing politically, more explicitly, the institutions of global hegemonic power and creating new forms of exclusion socially. Globalization thus has intensified and expanded the destructive forces of development—forces which disrupt communities, cultures and livelihoods of the poor without offering them any viable and dignified alternative. Similarly, globalization, like the Development Establishment during the cold war, works for the constituent elements of its power structure—the techno-scientific, bureaucratic, military, managerial and business elites and a small consumerist class.

Second, the movements' activists who, by and large, were not to engage in the debates on international relations during the cold war now become acutely aware of the role that *politics of discourse* plays globally and nationally, in influencing policy choices of governments and international organizations. Consequently, they are now participating actively in shaping the terms of discourse globally on such issues as biodiversity, global warming, construction of big dams, regulations concerning international trade and intellectual property rights and so on. In this process, they have become active in a variety of global 'conventions', forums and campaigns opposing the policies of the global power structure as well as in building more durable transnational alliances with similar movements in other countries, both in the South and the North. In performing this 'global role' they often explicitly articulate their long-term objective in terms of building and sustaining institutional processes for global solidarity. Put differently, their aim is to create global politics of popular (civil society) movements with a view to building an alternative institutional structure of global governance, based on democratic principles of political equality, social justice, cultural diversity and non-violence, and ecological principles of sustainability and maintaining biodiversity. Leading this discourse globally, a group of Indian activists interpret global solidarity in terms of the ancient Indian principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (Earth is one family) and link it to Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* (self-governance) and *swadeshi* (politics of establishing peoples' own control over their environment—economic, social and cultural). It is in this context that the movements differentiate between the two types of politics they engage in: politics of establishing global, human solidarity and of opposing

contemporary globalization, a distinction that has been conceptually aptly captured by Boaventura de-Souza Santos as the hegemonic versus counter-hegemonic globalization.

Third, both the Gandhian and the Left and social democratic strands of movements see globalization as intensifying further the already existing economic and social inequalities in the country. Thus, while the proponents of hegemonic globalization celebrate the growth of the middle class, the movements' activists see this phenomenon quite differently. In their view, the programmes of economic reforms being implemented as a part of the globalization package have consolidated and enriched the *old* middle class. The 'growth' of this class, in their view, largely represents the rise in the purchasing power of the small middle class that emerged during the colonial rule and expanded during the initial four decades after independence, covering largely the upper and middle strata of the traditional social structure. The economic reforms, far from improving the living standards of the traditionally socially excluded poor, have pushed them further down the social and economic ladder, and below the poverty line. Indeed, some fragments of the traditional lower social strata have entered the 'middle class', but this has been due to the long-existing social policies of the State—like affirmative action. In fact, with the State shrinking in the process of globalization, there has been a reversal of this process.

Fourth, the movements take into account the structural parliaments of the under-classes. They are particularly concerned about the new State policies by which the upward mobility and the means of entering the market are being monopolized by the upper strata of caste society. By using their traditional status resources—land, wealth, social privilege and education—they have kept the traditionally socially excluded group on the market's periphery. For these large segments of the population disadvantageously located in the traditional structure, such exclusion means malnutrition, semi-starvation, disease and destitution. This relationship of the traditional social structure and globalization is emphasized by the movements but is, strangely, ignored in the academic debates on globalization.

The movements' activists thus find it astounding that colonial-type exploitation of primary producers (the vast populations of tribals, artisans, small and marginal farmers and landless labourers) by a small class of urban-industrial elite, and their cognate groups of upper-caste rural elite, persists, even thrives, in the so-called open economy of the market. In brief, in India,

the market economy, instead of making a dent on the iniquitous social structure, is being absorbed by it.

The result is that the poorest among the poor today are able to become neither full wage-earners in the economy nor even full-fledged citizens in the polity. For them there is no transitional pathway in sight that can lead them into the market. Nor can they return to the old security of the subjugated, which they arguably had in the traditional social order. They have even lost the claims on the State which the bureaucratic-socialist State at least theoretically conceded. In short, the social-systemic nature of their exclusion continues under globalization as it did under development. Worse, globalization has made issues of poverty and social deprivation (the perpetuation of under-classes) evermore invisible and unintelligible in the global discourse. All this has blunted the issue of legitimation in the process, with the old international agencies conceding to the political and economic hegemony of the few rich and militarily powerful countries globally, and of a small class of metropolitan elite within the country.

In sum, the movements' activists in India view globalization as a new, post–cold war ideology justifying the rule of a hegemonic structure of global power seeking to establish monopoly of a few powerful countries over resources of the whole world. As such, they find globalization to be inimical to basic democratic and ecological values: liberty, equality, diversity and sustainability. To them, its impact on poorer countries has been to produce new and more dehumanized forms of exclusion and inequality—worse than those created by the cold war development model, or even by the colonial rule. They are particularly concerned about its adverse impact on democracy in India. For, when the poorer classes have found a long-term stake in democracy and have begun to acquire their due share in governance, the power of the State (elected governments) itself is being denuded and undermined by the global power structure in collaboration with the country's metropolitan elites. In other words, they see globalization as undermining and delegitimizing institutions of democratic governance. They see it as a force which seeks to undo India's democratic revolution.

The Movements' Politics of Participatory Democracy

The idea of participatory democracy, as mentioned earlier, has been central to Gandhian political thinking and practice, and has inspired many activists from the days of the freedom movement till today. Gandhi articulated this idea through the concepts of *swaraj* (self-governance) and *swadeshi*

(community's control over resources) and by invoking the imagery of the 'village republic' (*gram swaraj*) as representing India's democratic tradition.[4] These formulations were, however, stoutly refuted and virtually banished from mainstream political discourse after independence as they were thought to represent Gandhi's impractical idealism. The idea of participatory democracy has, however, not only been kept alive but developed conceptually and in practice by a section of grass-roots activists who liberally draw on Gandhi's economic and political thinking—although many of them may not want to wear the Gandhian badge. In a different political and ideological context, M.N. Roy had critiqued a representative form of democracy and pleaded for participative democracy. Based on his vision of participative democracy, Roy had prepared a detailed proposal for the Constitution of Free India. These proposals, which did not receive any serious response in the then prevailing nationalist politics, have now been revived and reformulated by some activist groups in the changed context of globalization.

The first comprehensive and politically effective proposal on participatory democracy for Independent India, however, came from Jayaprakash Narayan (JP). A popular socialist leader of the independence movement, JP joined the Gandhian movement about five years after independence. He raised high the political profile of the movement when in 1954 he made a public pronouncement of dedicating his whole life to the movement; in his words, to 'the Gandhian way'. The issue of deepening democracy was central to his agenda for the movement, without which, he believed, only the elite rule would be perpetuated in the name of democracy.[5] This concern found a lasting expression in his treatise on non-party democracy in 1959. He critiqued the idea of representation by political parties and argued for a more participative and comprehensive form of democracy constituting a broad democratic base from where the power would flow upward to units using power allocated to them by the units below, on conditions of accountability and transparency. The amount and kind of power to be allocated to a higher unit would be as per the requirement of the unit. JP's thesis, however, made little impact then beyond the Gandhian circles. It, in fact, drew sharp criticism from the liberal democratic theorists as well as the party politicians who saw it as a naive exercise of an idealist, unaware of its dangerous consequences for democracy itself. The document was virtually 'withdrawn' from public discourse, but within two years JP came up with a politically more potent and comprehensive statement on the issue of participatory democracy.

Here JP rebutted arguments of his critics and elaborated his basic thesis by theoretically and historically establishing the need for a comprehensive democracy, where both economic and political power are primarily held *and* exercised directly by the people from the base of the polity. It did not take very long for his vision of democracy to find powerful political expression. He launched a massive movement in the early 1970s with the aim of, in his own coinage, restoring peoples' power (lokshakti) in democracy. This idea of peoples' power fired the imagination of many young women and men which, besides upstaging the government in Delhi, gave rise to a new genre of micro-movements, celebrated and characterized by theorists as the 'non-party political process'. This genre of movement groups that emerged from what became known as the 'JP movement' has since been working at the grass roots. They articulate participatory democracy in terms of empowerment of people through everyday struggles for their rights as well as by harnessing their collective efforts to develop local resources for collective well-being.

Participatory Democracy and Political Theory

In theoretical discussions and in the practice of representational politics, participatory democracy has been treated, respectively, as a para-political idea and a peripheral political activity—a desirable but not an essential characteristic of a modern democracy. It is in the politics of grass-roots movements, where the scope of democracy is being actively searched and expanded through their everyday political struggles, that participatory democracy is conceived as not just a desirable but a necessary organizational form and political practice. Under conditions of globalization, where the national-level institutions of representation are being subordinated to hegemonic global power with the structures of political and economic decision-making becoming more remote—even alienated—from people, the movements' continuing politics of participatory democracy has acquired a new relevance.

In view of the movements' activists' theory of democracy, the prevailing conception of participation is in passive terms of limiting citizens' roles and activities to the institutional arena of elections, parties and pressure groups. Such a conception of participation, it seems, is meant to secure the decision-making procedures of representative governments from the high-intensity politics of mass mobilization and direct action, which the occasionally surfacing popular movements generate in a representative democracy.

This indeed has succeeded to a large extent in lending institutional stability, and even political legitimacy, to liberal representative democracy, making it appear as if it is the only natural form that democracy can have. But it has, at the same time, bogged down our political imagination to viewing the old, 'actually existing' liberal democracies of the West as the highest stage democracy can ever achieve. In the process, such thinking has pre-empted options of our new and growing (non-Western) democracies to evolve and experiment with institutional alternatives for deepening democracy and choosing forms appropriate to our own cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, the theory, by treating persistently and for long liberal representative democracy as the ultimate form of democracy, has encouraged the view that in it humankind has achieved the highest state of political development beyond and outside which no democratic possibility exists. This even emboldened a North American political thinker to see the arrival and universalization of liberal democracy as heralding the end of history.

This high-intensity discourse sustained throughout the cold war has, ironically, produced an array of theoretical arguments which has succeeded in keeping representative democracy at the level of what Boaventura de-Souza Santos aptly describes as low-intensity democracy—which probably also suits the contemporary politics of hegemonic globalization. This, however, has resulted in a major theoretical casualty, i.e., of pushing—if not altogether discarding—the concept of participatory democracy on the margins of democratic theory.

Keeping democracy a low-intensity national-level operation may be conducive to integration of the world (capitalist) economy, for it helps national governments of the peripheral countries to disperse and dispel popular democratic movements opposing implementation of structural adjustments and other policies handed down to them by the global power structure. But it is precisely for this reason that peripheral countries of the world undergoing globalization need to create a strong infrastructure of democracy at the grass roots, without which their democracies cannot survive at the nation state level, worse, it may even endanger the very survival of their poor citizens.

Two moves made by the theorists of representative democracy have made it possible, on the one hand, to incorporate the concept of participation within the theory's structural-functional paradigm (i.e., participation conceived as a particular form of political behaviour of citizens through which they elect governments and are expected to keep their functioning on

a democratic track by working through their representatives), and, on the other, to treat participatory democracy either as an archaic form of governance or an impractical ideal, which if actually practised—or even experimented with—is fraught with dangerous consequences for democracy itself.

The first argument is elaborated through historicizing democracy in linear, evolutionary terms. It traces the history of democracy from its origin in the Athenian city state where it functioned as a direct, participatory democracy through successive forms it assumed, till it acquired a complexly evolved form of representative democracy—making it possible to function at a much larger scale, as that of a nation state (sometimes the State of a continental size). This transmutation has in its view equipped representative-liberal democracy to function even at a global scale and carry out a plethora of programmes and policies pertaining to every aspect of the lives of its citizens.

The point of this exercise, it seems, is to show that the beliefs and practices historically associated with the participatory democracy of a city State have no relevance today for a democracy located in the nation state and even less for tomorrow when it is likely to encompass the whole globe as its territorial domain. Participatory democracy, the theory concedes, is indeed a noble idea and some of its elements ought to be functionally incorporated in representative democracy. But it is a regression to think of citizens directly controlling and participating in governmental decision-making and may even turn out to be a recipe for disaster in today's world. In the derivative theoretical discourse of Indian democracy, this fixing of participatory democracy to the dead and gone past of the West has delegitimized any historical-theoretical exploration premised on its existence in India's past. Hence, the idea of democracy as symbolized in the concept of the village republic is treated by the Indian political theorists as an atavistic idea, not deserving any serious theoretical discussion.

The distinctive feature of movements politics is, thus, to articulate a new discourse on democracy through a sustained political practice. This is done at three levels: (a) at the grass-roots level by building peoples' own power and capabilities, which inevitably involve political struggles for establishing rights as well as a degree of local autonomy for people to manage their own affairs collectively; (b) at the provincial and national level through launching nation-wide campaigns and building alliances and coalitions for mobilizing protests on larger issues (against 'anti-people projects and policies') and creating organizational networks of mutual support and of solidarity among

movements; and (c) at the global level, by a small section of movements activists who in recent years have begun to actively participate in several transnational alliances and movements for creating a politics of counter-hegemonic globalization. In all this, the long-term goal of the movements is to bring the immediate environment (social, economic, cultural and ecological) the people live in within their own reach and control.

Notes

1. I gratefully acknowledge contributions of Vijay Pratap and Ritu Priya to the earlier version of this paper which was prepared for the NIGD Working Paper edited by Leena Rikkila and Katarina Sehm: From a Global Market Place to Political Spaces, Helsinki, 2002.
2. Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Shankar Singh and others founded the MazdoorKisan Shakti Sangathan which led the national campaign for the people's Right to Information which led to the enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2005.
3. The following account is based on my close and continuous association and interaction with activists of several movement groups throughout the country, since 1980. I have also extensively used the materials they regularly produce and disseminate in the form of booklets, pamphlets, leaflets and newsletters, which do not easily yield to the academic style of citations. As such, it incorporates parts of my earlier writings on grass-roots movements, cited here. The activists and movements appearing in this paper by their names suggest my greater, often accidental, familiarity with their work, inasmuch as the absences suggest my ignorance—and the lack of space—but in no case any lack of their salience in the field.
4. For concise and pointed exposition of these concepts, see M.K. Gandhi (1968a, b, c, d, e) in Shriman Narayan (ed.): *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*; Volume Four, Chapter 16 "Swadeshi" (pp. 256–260), Volume Five, Chapter 15, "Non-Cooperation" (pp. 203–208), Chapter 16, "Civil Disobedience", (pp. 209–216), Chapter 39, "Swadeshi" (pp. 336–339) and Chapter 42, "Village Communities" (pp. 344–347), Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad.
5. For a perceptive, cogent and authentic account of JP's life and work, see Bimal Prasad (ed) 'Introduction' in "Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works", Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001.

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Note: Page number followed by 'n' refers to notes.

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