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## **Authority and Leadership in the Emerging Indian Scenario A Socio-Political Perspective**

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The Indian sub-continent has witnessed two powerful tremors within a short span of two months. The new millennium seems to be opening up with tremors of various nature for India. The first one was the earthquake that shook Gujarat beyond any reparable measures. The second tremor was the 'Tehelka Scam' which has turned topsy-turvy the entire edifice of Indian political scenario for the present. Tremors are not anything strange to the Indian social, cultural, political, economic and ecological landscape. But since these tremors have uncapped a can of worms as well as caused a chain of reactions they call for in-depth analysis and action.

The earthquake that devastated Gujarat is unprecedented in more than one sense. Significantly, this tremor occurred when the entire nation was celebrating Republic Day. In a special way, in Delhi the Republic Day parade like every year was a show of rich and diverse cultural grandeur. But above all it was a show of military strength especially to drive home the message to our 'hostile neighbours' that we are on the path to become one of the 'super pow-

ers.' Interestingly, this enhancement of the military power could not be used for the rescue and relief operations, since the entire communication network systems had given way with the tremor. While the political leaders were beaming with the glory of the strike-power of our army, the victims of the devastating earthquake suffered due to the lack of political will on the part of the State government.

The second tremor caused by the Tehelka tape's related scam in the defence deal was political in nature. But its impact was felt on every political party, whether it was one of the ruling parties or the opposition parties. The leaders of the extreme rightist party stood accused in the scam. But interestingly, the leaders of the so called socialist party also stood exposed in their underhand dealings. Above all this Tehelka tremor once again derailed the Indian polity and society, which was limping back to normalcy after the earthquake, the after-effect of downward trends in the market as the fall out of the liberalisation processes etc. These two tremors will have a long lasting

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Abstract: The Indian sub-continent has witnessed two powerful tremors within a short span of two months. The new millennium seems to be opening up with tremors of various nature for India. The first one was the earthquake that shook Gujarat beyond any reparable measures. The second tremor was the 'Tehelka Scam' which has turned topsy-turvy the entire edifice of Indian political scenario for the present. Tremors are not anything strange to the Indian social, cultural, political, economic and ecological landscape. But since these tremors have uncapped a can of worms as well as caused a chain of reactions they call for in-depth analysis and action.

impact on the socio-political processes of India in the days to come. These events in a special way will sketch the trajectory along which the political economy and the cultural discourse are likely to traverse in the coming days.

## Historical Continuity

Scams and scandals are not anything new to Indian political history. As early as 1957, the Haridas Mundhra Jeep deal was brought before the parliament for deliberation. This was just 10 years after attaining Independence. Interestingly, this was the period when the 'freedom fighters' continued their dream of a socialist republic and sovereign nation-building. They also contemplated pro-people and corruption-free governance. Down the line in history, there have been the Maruti Project scam during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's regime in mid 1970's, the Jaguar deal during the Janata regime (1977-79), the Bofors scam of 1986, the JMM bribery scam in the 1990's to name a few. The heart of the matter is that the cases and scandals have been multiplying as independent India is making strides to forge ahead in its exercise of nation building. But the point of departure has been observed in the manner in which files related to scams used to be tabled in the parliament for a long drawn out discussion. The difference is also palpable in the way in which both the ruling party and the opposition party used to engage in the exercise to go into the root cause as well as in identifying the persons involved in the scandal. The ruling dispensation till mid 1970s used to allow the debate to be carried out in the parliament. It did not engage in protecting

the accused nor in witch hunting. The opposition on the other hand responsibly used the forum of the parliament to highlight the scams involved in the government dealings. But from mid 1970 onwards not only has there been an increase in scams but they have also provided enough mechanisms to cover up the deal. Moreover, the opposition whichever party it may belong to engaged in 'disruption par excellence.' But when skeletons rolled out of its own cupboards, it would shrink into its shell.

Along with these two tremors of the recent past two major events that took place in India in the early 1990s have also coloured the contours of Indian social, political and psychic milieu. The first one was the introduction of the New Economic Policy in July 1991 (NEP-1991) by the Congress government at the centre. The Indian economy was undergoing a severe crisis especially in the late eighties. With the introduction of the New Economic Policy the Indian public was promised revolutionary changes in the downward looking economy. Economic reforms that were advocated through the New Economic Policy were not aimed at restructuring the sluggish Indian economy. On the other hand, it was an attempt to liberalise trade policies for the benefit of external agents, to open up market for upper class consumer goods, and to make basic Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) for the benefit of Multi-National and Trans-National Corporations.

The explicit objective of making a market friendly state led to a series of

crises in all aspects of economy. The marginalised and the vulnerable communities of India who never had any say in the market policy and programmes were pushed further to the periphery. Yet, it is they who continue to pay for the 'crashes' and 'crises' in the market, whether it be in the stock market, in the closing down of the cooperative banks, in the down fall of the value in rupees or in the steep rise in the prices of basic and essential goods. It is significant that successive governments, irrespective of their party affiliation, have carried forward the economic reforms. This aggressive pursuance of the reform policies has compounded the crisis within the Indian agriculture, industry, export, job opportunities and the availability of basic necessities of life.

Following in the line of introduction of NEP, the demolition of *Babri Masjid* on December 2 1992 by the various troops of fundamentalist forces has altered the very political processes of India once and for all. Needless to say, the storm was brewing for a long time to raze to the ground the *Babri Masjid* and in its place construct a *Ram* temple. The argument presented in favour of the destruction of the mosque was that Mogul emperor Babur had destroyed the temple and in its place constructed the mosque. The central question here is not whether the mosque came first or the temple was already there. The heart of the matter is the total disregard shown by the proponents of the temple to every avenue open for an amicable solution to the *Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi* controversy. One can identify the arrogance of the fundamentalist forces in the following manner:

total disregard for traditional consensual method of initiating a process for an amicable solution, the disrespect to judicial procedures, disregard of the past history of communal violence and orgy in similar circumstances.<sup>1</sup> The historical course the Indian society and nation have taken after the Babri Masjid proved these factors beyond any doubt.

It is often argued that the secular fabric of India was disturbed and destroyed after the vandalism that was unleashed on Babri Masjid. But this is only a part of the entire episode. The reality is that the Indian political and social discourse has not been the same since the demolition of Babri Masjid. The destruction of the mosque and the communal frenzy that followed it all drove home the message that in a socialist, secular, democratic country it is not only possible but extremely easy for a group of people to create space for a crisis which would have lasting consequences for the entire population. But this once again is the beginning of the history. Once the evil designs were enacted these forces also had the audacity to claim legitimacy for such an act and attempt to emerge as the 'heroes' of the segment or interest that they claim to represent. In this regard the proponents of New Economic Policy are as guilty as the storm troops of the fundamentalist Hindutva forces in directing this country into an unresolvable crisis. Above all, these events and their after-effects provided space for authoritarian rule.

Many intriguing and interrelated questions continue to haunt the reason and the sense of the Indian citizens.

What are the factors that have necessitated a democratically elected government to shift towards an authoritarian form of governance? Is traditional and consensual leadership giving way to parochial and partisan leadership? In the given situation is political power becoming subjected to market principles? Are the fundamentalist forces products of a market economy or are they sole representatives of a community which in spite of being a majority community considers itself the victim of minority communities? These are some of the questions that are directly related to the structure and the function of Indian society and polity. These questions also call for an examination of two fundamental political aspects, authority and leadership in the emerging Indian political scenario.

## Authority

Authority like many of the modern political concepts eludes any clear-cut definition. Hence, before we enter into a discussion of this reality let us look at the working definition of some of the related concepts. *Authority* refers to an interpersonal relationship in which one person looks upon another as superior. *Authoritarianism* on the other hand is a form of rule in which one person or a small group has a monopoly of political power. *Autocracy* is usually defined as a rule by one person. Political scientists define *despotism* as an authoritarian rule in which power is used to the detriment of most subjects. *Totalitarianism* refers to a form of government that exercises nearly total control over individual citizens—a relatively recent and extreme form of authoritarianism.

*Oligarchy* is a government by a small group (IES 1995: 105).

Authority refers to a distinctive form of compliance in social life. Social scientists have presented three accounts of the basis for this special compliance. According to Talcott Parsons, authoritative institutions reflect the common beliefs, values, traditions and practices of members of a society. Hobbes on the other hand sees political authority as offering a coordination solution to shared values or lack of shared values. The Weberian school argues that although social order is imposed by force, it derives its permanence and stability through techniques of legitimation, ideology, hegemony, mobilization of bias, false consensus and so on, which secure the willing compliance of citizens through the manipulation of their beliefs (SSE 1985 55).

According to political sociologists, authority is a two-tier concept: it refers to a mode of influence and compliance, and to a set of criteria which identify who is to exercise this influence. In this regard, 'being an authority' concerns matters of belief. On the other hand, 'being in authority' concerns the individual's place in a normative order with recognized position of *de jure* authority.

The concept of authority, like the related concepts with which it is frequently associated—power, influence, and leadership—is used in a variety of ways in political philosophy and the social sciences. Whether it be defined as (1) a property of a person or office, especially the right to issue orders; (2) a relationship between two offices, one

superior and the other subordinate, such that both incumbents perceive the relationship as legitimate; (3) a quality of communication by virtue of which it is accepted, the phenomenon of authority is basic to human behaviour (*IESS* 1, 1968: 473). Thus, authority takes into account the office from which the power and influence is exercised. It also designates the relationship of enforcing power and subordinating power and influence.

Since the emergence of the social sciences, authority has been a subject of research in a variety of empirical settings; the family (parental authority); small groups (informal authority) or leadership; schools, churches etc (organizational authority); local governing units, nation-state and international organization (political authority). The twentieth century social scientists have addressed themselves to the question of 'how authority and power are in fact distributed in society.' Irrespective of all these attempts the problem of definition remains. The ambiguity of everyday language, the mixture of fact and value implicit in the term, the omnipresence of the phenomenon in all cultures, and the multiple approaches to the study of authority by social scientists from a great range of disciplines, all these factors contribute to the confusion accompanying the concept.

Max Weber (1922) had tried to present a sociological understanding of authority. He distinguished between three pure types of authority – 1) legal-rational, 2) traditional, 3) charismatic – according to the kind of claim to legitimacy typically made by each. Legal-

rational authority is based on the formally defined rights and obligations of people who possess official status. Traditional authority is based on customs and long-standing practice. And finally charismatic authority is derived from a person's unique vision, inspiration or sense of destiny. In the last two cases the obligation is to a person, the traditional chief or the heroic or messianic leader. Legal authority is more restricted in scope; obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal network of positions. Weber's argument proceeds from the premise that in a complex system of human relationship, a minority of people have the ability to control the actions of the great majority.

Many researches that have been undertaken about authority have raised the following questions to comprehend the reality. 1) What is the impact of the dominant style of political authority in a given country on the ways in which authority is exercised in the many different primary groups and intermediate organizations making up the society? 2. How are attitudes and behaviour shaped in infancy, childhood, and adolescence so as to affect the degree and kind of subsequent political participation and attitudes and behaviours towards political authority? Political socialization is shaped and also is affected. 3) What are the strengths and bases of support of differing forms of political authority at the local and national level and between governmental institutions as diverse as the chief executive, the bureaucracy, the legislature, and the courts? 4. How does political authority vary from culture to culture and from traditional to modern societies in terms of each of these prob-

lem areas (*IESS* 1 1968: 475)? 5) What are the factors that contribute to the shift from a democratic form of governance to an authoritarian form of government in a given context?

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. 1). What clearly distinguishes authority from coercion, force and power on the one hand, and leadership, persuasion, and influence on the other hand is legitimacy. If the character of the communication is questioned, then authority is diminished and the bond that holds the participants together is in danger of being severed. Authority is strongest when the subordinates anticipate the commands of superiors even before they are voiced. 2) Authority is exercised most characteristically within a network of clearly defined hierarchical roles: parent-child, teacher-pupil, employer-employee, ruler-ruled. These authority relations are institutionalized; duties and obligations are specified, behaviour is reasonably predictable, and the relations continue over time. In a system of well established authority, men of great ability are less in demand. Charisma is transformed through routinization; the entrepreneur is replaced by the bureaucrat. 3) Most of the social scientists agree that authority is but one of several resources available to incumbents of formal positions. Even in non-formal settings, legitimacy of a position gives a person lots of space for exercising his/her authority and power. In a society like ours based on caste, it is the very placement of the dominant castes at the top of the hierarchy of the ladder which gives them greater privilege than those castes who are the bottom of the hierarchy.

Social scientists argue that there are evidences that excessive reliance on authority in due course of time provides space for authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is usually defined as a form of rule in which one person or a small group of persons appropriate to oneself/themselves the monopoly of political power. Authoritarianism is associated with the following factors: emphasis upon rigid hierarchy and stratification in political and other structures; rejection of democratic political processes; reliance upon the "great leader" in solving social problems and upon coercive social controls in maintaining social order; chauvinistic nationalism as a stance toward one's own nation and toward international affairs; an ethnocentric view of relationships among various groups within the nation; readiness to place severe restrictions upon the civil rights and civil liberties; religious fundamentalism and its extension into political and other spheres; punitiveness as basic emotional-moral response to deviance; rejection of innovation, experimentation, and openness in political and other systems (*IESS* 12, 1968: 27).

At this juncture it is appropriate to briefly deal with the aspects of authoritarianism and authoritarian personality. Soon after the Second World War a group of social scientists in the United States, under the leadership of T.W. Adorno, sought to identify the factors giving rise to anti-Semitism. Their research led to the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). According to them authoritarianism consists of the following aspects: 1. Conservatism: rigid adherence to conven-

tional middle-class values; 2. Authoritarian Submission: submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group; 3. Authoritarian Aggression: tendency to be on the look out for, and to condemn, reject and punish people who violate conventional values; 4. Anti-intraception: opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded; 5. Superstition and Stereotype: belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate, the disposition to think in rigid categories; 6. Power and Toughness: preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension: identification with power figures; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness; 7. Destructiveness and Cynicism: generalised hostility, vilification of the human; 8. Projectivity: disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses; 9. Sex: ego-alien sexuality; exaggerated concern with sexual 'goings on' and punitiveness towards violators of sexual mores (SSE 1985: 54). An elaborate discussion on various aspects of authoritarianism is beyond the scope of this paper. But we would take up few case studies to highlight the emerging trend of authoritarianism in the Indian context.

## Leadership

To most sociological writers leadership is the exercise of power or influence in social collectivity, such as groups, organizations, communities, or nations. This may be addressed to any or all of three very general and related functions: establishing the goals, pur-

poses or objectives of the collectivity; creating the structures through which the purposes of the collectivity are fulfilled; and maintaining or enhancing these structures. Most theories of leadership are conservative in that they are addressed to the maintenance of social systems rather than to their change (IESS 9, 1968: 101).

The traditional understanding of the term 'leader' was 'a person clearly distinguished from others in power, status visibility, and in a number of character traits, such as decisiveness, courage, integrity and intelligence. Most definitions would point to the office or the ability of the leader to lead or to conduct oneself as the leader. But political scientists today do not limit their analysis to the leader and the led alone. Leadership is related to the act of leading in a particular context. This understanding has 4 aspects: 1. The *leader* with his characteristics of ability and personality and his resources relevant to goal attainment; 2. The *followers*, who also have relevant abilities, personality characteristics, and resources; 3. The *situation* within which the relationship occurs; 4. The *task* with which the interacting individuals are confronted.

The effective leader is said to be group oriented, fulfills group needs and oils the wheels of human interaction. But this is only one style of leadership, it is egalitarian in its assumptions, manipulative in its strongest, and sometimes no more than the hypocritical claim of a leader to be only the mouthpiece for his followers. There are also leaders who do not read consensus, but impose it. Followers can be bought, but

the purchaser is not a leader; he is an employer. Domination can also be achieved by force. The right to dominate is voluntarily given to one who has the gift of leadership; what Max Weber called Charisma. Weber saw charisma as one among other styles of domination, but in fact all effective leaders commanded some measures of devotion (SSE 1985: 449).

In the most preliminary form of understanding, the exercise of power or influence implies 'making things happen' through others. Leaders may engage in a number of activities in furthering this purpose. They may coordinate, control, direct, guide, or mobilize the efforts of others. Leaders may be involved in both internal and external matters of the organization or the group. Important social values are also frequently associated with leadership conceptions, and attempts are made to legitimate social systems in terms of particular theories or ideologies of leadership. Democratic and idealistic leaders succumb eventually to corruption inherent in power. This becomes all the more crucial when the claim for power is more severe between many contenders.

A brief note on the historical development of the understanding of leadership is called for here. Historically, the concept of leadership was derived from the leadership in a religious sectarian setting or in groups of primary relationships. Moses, Jesus, Muhammad etc. the solitary, dramatic personality who mobilized and inspired masses to new goals and methods of religious salvation became an important prototype of leadership. Tribal leaders also represented this

type. Power was vested in the status, as well as in the person of a ruler. The personification of leadership was thus further reinforced.

By the twentieth century change was affected in this type of understanding of leadership. 1. The democratic revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries depersonalized the concept of authority. Power, prescribed and defined in constitutions and law, was vested in the office, not the person. 2. The positivistic influence of the social sciences drastically modified the concept of political leadership. Leadership came to be viewed, not as a set of fixed traits and attributes, but as a role that satisfies mutual expectations of leaders and followers. Leadership is a nexus of need fulfilments that binds situational demands and group membership. 3. Leadership is a differentiated role that enables group purposes to be realised (IESS 9, 1968: 107). Thus, not just the personalities or the means and the strategies that are employed in group interaction, but the very objectives of the group came to be realised as fundamental to the understanding of leadership.

Historically speaking, most of the modern states that moved away from colonialism to independence opted for democratic form of government. In their attempt to build a nation state, they delineated the functions under executive, legislative and judiciary. These three were supposed to be three pillars that uphold the democratic principles. But it can be observed from most of these democratic regimes that the executive is no longer merely an arm of government but has become the organising



centre of the political system itself. Twentieth century social thought has expressed the paradox that leadership is a solution to the problems of both excessive and insufficient political power. Strong executive leadership was offered as a solution to two general and characteristic maladies of political systems. 1. The ideologists of authoritarian movements and regimes proposed strong leadership as a substitute for atrophied traditional primary-group identifications—community, church, family etc. The breakdown of traditional norm-fostering groups, they argued, leaves society open to conflicts that could be overcome or avoided by strong identification with political leaders. This was a seminal explanation of fascists and communists in Western industrial systems and of nationalist movements in pre-industrial, developing countries. 2. Only effective leadership can furnish integrative direction and action as a cure for the stalemated pluralism endemic to Western democratic systems. The pathology of political pluralism is immobilism. Under such conditions, only strong executive leadership can furnish decisive national purpose (*IESS* 9, 1968: 107).

With the changing times, the principles of democracy in general and the features of executive leadership in particular also changed. Some of the features of executive leadership are as follows: 1. It is a leadership at a distance. Though leadership in executive situation is interactional yet it is a leadership in distance. Interaction takes place through mass media. Thus, mass media has become one of the powerful weapons to maintain legitimacy of leadership.

2. Executive behaviour is multirole conduct, fulfilling a variety of expectations that flow from various clienteles—from those immediately around the executive, from political parties and political associations, from the various bureaucracies and their political networks, and from the general public. One of the main tasks facing a chief executive is maintaining these different roles in balance. What is usually referred to as ‘style’ of leadership has its referents in patterns of role management. 3. It has a corporate character. Modern executive leadership is an organizational process. In its organizational context, executive leadership presents a complex face. The chief executive today has become a symbolic individual, whose many roles are collectively filled by several men. His manifold duties are all largely carried out in his name by others. Executive leadership has become institutionalised. 4. Executive leadership is a process that operates within an institutional framework. At any given time there are prescribed norms that bound and define the scope of authority and the channels of its exercise (*IESS* 9, 1968: 107).

Generally, the democratic chief executive is legitimated by his identification with the central values of his social system, both nonpolitical and political; by the manner in which he is recruited; by the symbolic and effective representation he bestows; and by his decision-making performance. Chief executives are legitimated by their identification with the most pervasive goals in a society, that is, their embodiment of a national consensus. Crises of legiti-

mation arise when acute tensions develop between several levels of legitimation. Over moralization of politics makes political tasks delicate; the executive has to wear different faces at different stages of the policy-making process; the conflict between the expectations of the status or position and the political capabilities to fulfil such expectations. When the crisis of legitimation intensifies and becomes volatile, the ruling dispensation searches for alternative forms of being in power and authority. Either it can take to authoritarianism or to oligarchy.

There are some reasons why a society or a nation can move towards oligarchy (*IESS* 9, 1968: 101). The masses through incompetence and apathy cannot and do not want to participate actively in the political process; they prefer to be led. 2. Democracy is structurally impossible in a large and complex social system; there is no way of arranging the systems so that the views of the many individual members can be heard and taken into account. The impracticality of democracy is especially apparent in organizations or nations undergoing conflict with others. Especially during periods of crisis, organizations need firm leadership and precise adherence to orders. 3. The tendency toward oligarchy results from the character of leaders themselves and of the role they must play. Because of their cultural and educational superiority over the masses, leaders form a distinct elite. The status, the perquisites and privileges associated with the leadership role serve further to separate the leaders from the masses. Leaders therefore develop a vested interest in their positions, which they must

protect. Furthermore, a personal lust for power, which is characteristic of leaders, intensifies their efforts to enhance their power, and leaders will resort to ulterior devices towards this end.

In 'democratic' parties leaders will employ emotional and demagogic appeals to manipulate the gullible masses. They will control the press, using it to describe themselves in the most favourable light, while deriding their opposition. They will exploit their special information and knowledge of the organization/nation/administration to manoeuvre opponents. The revolutionaries of today become the reactionaries of tomorrow. This could be clearly and categorically seen in the evolution of Mr. George Fernandes. He was considered by the masses of India to be one of the young Turks who opposed the authoritarian regime of Mrs. Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, who imposed internal emergency in 1975. He won the election in 1977 while being imprisoned during the emergency. But later he has aligned himself with the reactionary forces that came to power in the centre and was recently accused in the defence deal scam.

Taken together, it can be stated that leadership is usually understood as an extensive phenomenon which has a much wider domain than the government. With the change in political scenario, the idea of leadership itself has undergone a radical transformation. To cite an example, it is argued that a great and effective leader must necessarily command popular support. But in the Indian context, most of the leaders in the name of being popular among the

masses or to be precise among the vote bank, enter into popular measures which ultimately do not benefit the masses. The leaders too in the course of time lose their support with their social base, because popular slogans do not take into account the basic needs of the people. With the dwindling of the popularity of the leaders, the masses begin to oppose the strategies of the leaders, and this leads to conflict between the leaders and the followers. It is often at this juncture the leaders take recourse in authoritarian measures.

### **Authoritarian Leadership in India**

Ayesha Jalal in the discussion on authoritarianism in south-Asia states that authoritarianism is defined as organized power embedded in the institutional structure of the state. While an element of covert authoritarianism inheres in any state structure, the degree of its overt manifestations is contingent upon the existence or the absence of formal, much less substantive, democracy. Far from reflecting a neat and sharp dichotomy, democracy and authoritarianism are reflective of the ongoing struggle between dominance and resistance. It seems apt to view democracy and authoritarianism as both antithetical and interdependent historical processes, co-existing in tension while at the same time each informing and transforming each other (Jalal 1995: 3).

The author goes on to demonstrate that the bureaucratic authoritarianism inherent in the colonial state structure remained largely intact. It proved difficult at the very onset to establish the

principle of legislative supremacy over the executive. It was hoped by many serious analysts that education and socialization in course of time in free India would reduce the effect of authoritarianism within the government machinery. But this did not happen. On the contrary, with the development of modern education and technology, bureaucratic authoritarianism became more rigid and powerful. Various reviews of the educational system revealed the fact that the education itself produces '*babus*' or officials who maintain the status-quo.

It is further argued that the extension in India of universal adult franchise did not energise the polity with the spirit of citizens' rights as distinct from the formal periodic exercise of voters' rights. The subservience of democratic politics to authoritarian states coupled with the attraction of caste and communal modes of mobilising the voters prevented the rise of an ethic of a representative's accountability to citizens that would be the hallmark of any substantive democracy. Though adult franchise opened up avenues for the lower strata to participate in the electoral politics, they were constantly kept out of political processes. Any attempt by them was seriously resisted. Moreover, any attempt to raise objections to the derailment of democratic principles was countered by imposing preventive and punitive measures.

Ayesha Jalal presents an encounter of authoritarianism as experienced by the Indian citizens. By imposing emergency on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1977, Mrs. Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India,

bolstered central authority through an overt authoritarianism based on pressing civil, police and military institutions of the state in the service of the ruling party. On the other hand, Mrs. Gandhi suppressed every form of civil, political and Constitutional rights (Jalal 1995: 74). Like the rigid caste system, a select group of ruling class had all the privileges of an authoritarian regime, and the masses had only responsibilities. The epitome of this was seen in the excesses carried out by her son Sanjay Gandhi in the name of 'population control,' which was in reality forceful sterilization; the 'beautification of Delhi' the capital of India which in fact targeted the slums, the poor and the marginalised. This form of authoritarian behaviour was not limited to ruling Gandhi family but it was equally a handy work of the coterie which surrounded Mrs. Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi.

During the emergency the upper and the middle class were the beneficiaries of time bound, disciplined work culture of the government officials. But the issues of the masses like imposition of minimum wages, redistribution of land and social dignity did not figure in the agenda of the authoritarian rulers. In this regard it needs to be stated that from mid 1970 onwards a progressive evolution in the enforcement of authoritarian principles can be identified in India. The following pages take up the unfolding of authoritarianism in Gujarat. Here an attempt is made to review the entire phenomenon from historical and socio-political perspective.

## Gujarat: A Case Study

The powerful earthquake that struck Gujarat on the Republic Day this year has left a trail of destruction, devastation and death. It has also incapacitated the survivors of the tremor physically, psychologically, socially and politically. While they were slowly recovering from the trauma of the earthquake, most of them were struck again by the tardy and sluggish manner in which the rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations have been undertaken by the government agents. The government of Gujarat has abdicated its responsibilities to the army and the NGOs and has taken a back seat in terms of rehabilitation and reconstruction. There are also reports that even during such a human misery, social and religious divisions have shown their fiendish *avatar*. The ruling dispensation instead of correcting these aberrations has joined hands with the communal and casteist forces to reestablish the age-old divisions based on caste, class and religion.<sup>2</sup>

Even three months after the deleterious and devastating earthquake there are no clear statistics about the extent of damage, the number of the dead and gravely wounded. The Gujarat government in the early phase after the tremor projected 30,000 deaths. But now it has become silent with regard to number of deaths as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction. When the victims from the upper castes took out a protest march to the state capital the Chief Minister immediately announced a relief package. But in terms of the entire population of Kutch region, the ruling dispensation is yet to announce

any comprehensive relief package. It continues to vacillate between public pronouncements and lack of political will to carry out even the elementary survey to ascertain the extent of damage and the minimum facilities to be provided to the victims of the earthquake so that they face the draught and the monsoon.

One needs to state here that the perception and the behaviour of the present government as presented above should not be viewed in dismay. If one looks at the track records of the present and past governments formed by various political parties one would find historical roots for non-performance in the socio-political structure of Gujarat state. The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) elections or the elections for the local governing units should have been held in Gujarat by May 2000. But the ruling party that is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) conveniently postponed the elections to the local governing units. The only explanation given by the government was that the state is faced with a severe draught and hence elections could not be conducted. But the real reason was that the ruling party was drubbed by the electorate of Gujarat in the *zilla* and *taluka panchayat* elections held in September 24, 2000. The Congress Party won 22 out of 23 *zilla* panchayats. In the 1995 elections, the Congress won only 1 and the BJP was successful in all the rest (Mathew in *The Hindu* 2001: 10). Thus, political manipulations of the ruling party and the desire to be in power by any means, deprived the people of Gujarat of having locally and democratically elected members who would have contributed

to rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations.

It needs to be stated here that it is not this or that particular political party that engages in such an exercise. But within the emerging political culture of today almost all the political parties and rulers indulge in similar political manipulations or hold on to power despite of losing legal and moral credibility to govern. This has to be once again comprehended against the backdrop of the society and polity of a nation or a region. The crisis of people-oriented, ideologically-motivated, principally-elevated political leadership has been on the wane in Gujarat for a long period of time. This is all the more significant since it is Gujarat which gifted to the world Mahatma Gandhi, the person who advocated and in his own way tried to put into practice the slogan 'ends do not justify the means.' But over a decade, not only means but ends also have been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency in Gujarat. Thus, the history unfolding itself in Gujarat is only a logical consequence of the principle of accommodating fundamentalist forces who in the name of religious authority led the state to authoritarianism. Here under the garb of religious supremacy of the majority community a systematic and sinister attempt is made to suppress and oppress the aspirations of the marginalised and vulnerable communities, especially the Dalits, the Tribals, the minorities, the most backward caste communities. In a special way it is the women from these communities who have to bear the brunt of the politically and economically motivated religious obscurantism.

At this stage it is expedient to present the deepening crisis of political leadership in Gujarat. Sujata Patel in her perceptive analysis of the 'Legitimacy Crisis and Growing Authoritarianism' (Patel 1988: 947) in Gujarat argues that by trying to appease the Hindu majority and the fundamentalist forces, the Congress Party in the state had endeavoured to gain legitimacy to its rule. But interestingly, the Congress tried to 'govern' at a time it had lost its legitimacy to be in leadership in the state. Here reference is made to the imposition of Section 295 A of the Indian Penal Code against a group of social scientists who published a critical article about the historical development of Swaminarayan Sect. An article titled "Sect Literature and Social Consciousness: A Study of Swaminarayan Sect 1800-1840" was published by the Centre for Social Studies, Surat, in October 1986. This article based on historical accounts of the sect by contemporary British and other observers examined the literature of Swaminarayan sect and argued that from the rationalist perspective many of the more fantastic acts attributed to the founder of the sect, Sahajanand Swami do not have any historical validity.<sup>3</sup>

This critical analysis of religious literature angered a section among the Swaminarayan sect and they filed a criminal case against the authors of the article under Section 295 A. The most intriguing thing is that it is not that a group of fundamentalist forces refused to accept truth. But that a legitimately elected people's government should sanction prosecution of its citizens without even undertaking any verification of the case presented before it. Sujata argues further

that to comprehend this action of the Congress government one needs to look at the political compulsions and the political manipulations that the Congress Party and government were engaged in Gujarat. Sujata of the view that the Congress struck down by the momentum of forces which it could not control found itself only articulating an authoritarian face, little realising the fact that taking shelter in draconian laws cannot compensate for lack of legitimacy (Patel 1988: 947) Thus, from the 1980 the fortunes of Congress party received a drubbing from the people of Gujarat.

Above all, Sujata drives home the socio-historical fact that the entire exercise is in fact to protect the political and economic interest of the influential patidar community of Gujarat. The ruling dispensation immediately sanctioned prosecution of those who 'outraged the religious sentiments' of the sect. But in reality this was done because the Swaminarayan sect had the support of the important patidar families. After reviewing the entire episode, Sujata is of the view that the Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsingh Chaudhary had tried to hit two birds with one stone. The first aspect is that the Chief Minister had communicated the message that he was ready to go to any length to compromise with the patidar lobby to remain in power. In the process of protecting his own interest he is ready to go to any extent to use the government machinery to protect the interests of the patidars. Through this act the Chief Minister had communicated the message that by safeguarding the interests of the patidars he was conserving his own interests.

David Hardiman in his analysis of the 'Class Base of Swaminarayan Sect' points to two inherently negative aspects of the sect (Hardiman 1988: 1907). Hardiman illustrates through historical data that the adherers of Swaminarayan sect were very happy to claim to have worked from the beginning hand-in-glove with British imperialism. Their confidence in the permanence of the connection was reflected in the saying of the sect "the *topi* (i.e. the British) and the *tilak* (mark of the Swaminaraynis) came together, and they will leave together. Both Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel are reported to have had a low opinion of the sect. Gandhi considered that it 'had an undesirable effect on Gujarat,' and Patel is reported to have made sarcastic remarks about the supposed divinity of one of the contemporary leaders of the sect (Hardiman 1988: 1909).

Hardiman goes on to unravel the fact that the sect preached the maintenance of a 'proper social order based on values and virtues.' This proper social order is one in which there is strict caste hierarchy in which everyone knows his or her place. The morality of the sect was maintaining a inequitable social order. Hardiman argues further that the Swaminarayan sect is the ideological voice of an emerging class of commercial farmers and capitalist entrepreneurs. It is these two economically powerful groups who have greatly contributed to the development of Gujarat. But in turn they seem to hold the state to ransom.

## Future Trends

In the emerging Indian socio-political scenario indications like conser-

vatism, authoritarian submission, tampering with text books, insisting on mono-culture and culture policing point to the slow and steady progress of authoritarianism. This is irrespective of the political affiliation of the perpetrators of authoritarianism. Similarly this reality is not limited to one particular region, but a trend that can be perceived in the entire nation. In the words of Kumaresh Chakravarty one should examine whether there is a potential or actual crisis today, and whether authoritarianism is one of the possible political choices before the classes in power for managing the economy and society.

Kumaresh Chakravarty argues that in the current phase of globalization, the much touted 'consumer revolution' generates a process of faster alienation of a significant section of the population—the one described as the 'middle class'—from society in an abstract generalised sense, and the masses of the working people, in the more empirical sense. This has become all the more crucial with the demise of socialism-in-practice, or the socialist critique of capitalism. This provides space for more systematic authoritarianism and makes it more difficult for any democratic movements to resist this process. But this does not mean that alternative assertions are impossible. This would depend upon alternate ideology of resistance, its dissemination and acceptance (Chakravarty 1996: 861). This calls for greater participation of civil society in the issues that the common person. Moreover, the civil society is also called upon to present a critical appraisal of the shift to authoritarianism by a democratically elected leaders.

## Models of Leadership among the Marginalised Communities

Before we conclude our presentation it is appropriate to dwell on the two models of leadership from the most marginalised communities of India. The first one was Birsa Munda who was one of the most powerful, penetrating and passionate leaders of the Tribals of Jharkhand. The other was Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, a philosopher, social reformer, social visionary and revolutionary from the Dalit community.

The songs of Birsa and the Birsaites express the role of leadership in a crisis situation.

Afflicted with oppression of the  
*zamindars*,

the misery of the people, the country  
is adrift.

Fly to the bow, arrow and axe  
today for us death is better than life.

Birsa Bhagwan<sup>4</sup> is our leader.

He has come down for us in the land.

Let us get ready with the quiver, ar-  
row and sword,

we shall assemble on the Dombari  
hill,

the Father of the earth speaks up there.

We shall not be afraid of the monkeys

we shall not leave the zamindars,

money lenders and shopkeepers

they occupied our land.

We shall not give up our khuntkatti<sup>5</sup>  
rights.

From the jaws of leopards and snakes  
we reclaimed our land.

The happy land was seized by the  
enemies (Singh 1983: 279).

Baba Saheb Ambedkar presents another model of leadership for the marginalised communities. In the year

1947 when it had become clear that the framing of the future Constitution of India would be entrusted to a Constituent Assembly, the Working Committee of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation had asked Dr. Ambedkar to prepare a Memorandum on the Safeguards of the Scheduled Castes for being submitted to the Constituent Assembly on the behalf of the Federation. Dr. Ambedkar agree to do so. But he did not limit his work only to the rights of the Dalits but also brought out a comprehensive understanding about Fundamental Rights, Minority Rights and Rights of the Scheduled Castes. He was also aware of the fact that there would be severe criticism of his view that the Dalits are not minorities (Ambedkar 1989: 383).

According to Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalits are a minority because their social, economic and educational condition was worst than that of the citizens and other minorities of India. He went on to argue that the Dalits need special safeguards against the tyranny and discrimination of the majority. Dr. Ambedkar's argument springs from his perceptive reading of history. He demonstrated the fact that the Dalits are economically dependent upon the caste Hindus. This economic dependence has other consequences besides the condition of poverty and degradation which proceeds from it. The Hindu code of life bestows many privileges on the upper castes while it heaps indignities upon the untouchables. These have led the untouchables to perpetual slavery. Thus, as a leader of the enlightened and committed group of the Dalits Dr. Ambedkar pointed out the socio-historical evil af-



fecting the Dalits (Ambedkar 1989: 426). But he did not remain confined to the problems of the Dalits but went deeper into the social malice of the Indian society and argued for social democracy as the remedy not only for the emancipation of the Dalits but the entire Indian society.

While debating about the principles of democracy Dr. Ambedkar set out four premises on which political democracy rests: 1) the individual is an end in himself; 2) the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution; 3) the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his Constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege; 4) the state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others. Dr. Ambedkar stated that these rights are based on the political principle of one man, one vote. But he does not remain content with these political rights alone. He argues for the bold economic principle one man, one value. He tried to ensure the attainment of this principle of social democracy through one man, one vote and one

value. By engaging in this exercise as the leading figure in the framing of the Indian Constitution, he argued for provisions of fundamental rights for all the citizens of India. But knowing the social structure of India he also strongly advocated for safeguarding the rights of the marginalised communities as well as making special provisions for them.

In conclusion, one has to admit that a streak of authoritarianism as well as an attempt to uphold democratic principles are running parallel in India as in many developing countries. As stated above, the civil society cannot dissociate itself completely from the state which is slowly moving towards authoritarian rule. If the civil society does not provide alternative forms of governance through its constant search for the right kind of authority and leadership, the fundamentalist and authoritarian forces would find a fertile ground for imposing their kind of power, influence and leadership. The models of leadership found among the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in India offer immense scope for alternative styles of leadership.

## Notes

1. For an elaborate discussion on the issue refer to Prakash Louis, *The Emerging Hindutva Force: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000.
2. Prakash Louis. "Gujarat: Earthquake and After," *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 17, 2001, p 908-910. For a more elaborate presentation see forthcoming issue of *Indian Journal of Human Rights*, Prakash Louis, "Dalits even in Disaster: The Politics of Relief Operations in Gujarat."
3. "Gujarat: Government Bows to Religious Bigotry," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 2, 1988, p 688.
4. Birsa Munda was a leader of the Tribals of Jharkhand who fought against both the colonisers as well as the native oppressive rulers. He was not only a leader in the traditional sense of the term but also an organizational leader. With the colonization of Jharkhand by the Hindutva forces, a systematic attempt is made to project Birsa

Munda as a Bhagwan, that is, God. This is done on the one hand to undermine his revolutionary contribution in the Jharkhand movement. On the other hand it is an attempt to 'convert' the tribals into Hinduism by introducing the concept of Bhagwan in their cultural discourse and worship.

5. Khunkatti rights are the traditional land ownership rights of the Mundas which was practiced for centuries.

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### *Abbreviations used*

*IES: International Encyclopedia of Sociology*

*IESS: International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*

*SSE: The Social Science Encyclopedia*

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