

8 The Party System*†

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THE PUZZLE OF PARTY SYSTEM FRAGMENTATION

This chapter aims at providing a long-range overview of the process of fragmentation of the Indian party system at the national level over sixty-two years since independence in 1947; from the first general elections in 1952 to the fifteenth general elections in 2009, as also the evolution of coalitions and possible trends towards reconsolidation into a less fragmented system with fewer poles.¹ It describes and analyses the process of fragmentation of the one-party-dominated national party system, dominated by the encompassing centrist umbrella-type Indian National Congress (henceforth Congress) party. This process has resulted in an evolving national party system, still in flux, in which no party has achieved a parliamentary majority in the last seven general elections (1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009), necessitating minority and/or coalition governments. The party system at the national level is, in the Lok Sabha, level has become increasingly fragmented since 1989, even while party systems at the state level have become bipartisan or bipolar, hence less fragmented, in more and more states. An indicator of the fragmentation of the national party system is the Laakso–Taagepera index (N) of the effective number of parties. The values of N by votes/seats (Table 8.1) were 4.80/4.35, 5.10/3.70, 7.11/5.83, 6.91/5.28, 6.74/5.87, 7.6/6.5, and 7.98/5.01 in 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009 respectively, whereas in the eight general elections between 1952 and 1984 the effective number of parties by seats exceeded three only once (3.16 in 1967), and the effective number of parties by votes exceeded five only once (5.19 in 1967).²

This chapter is an overview of the party system and focuses on parties' electoral trajectory, and hence their position, in the evolution of the party system, rather than on their social bases or organizational dynamics.

*I thank Adnan Farooqui for research assistance in preparing some of the tables in this chapter.
†The names of all political parties appear in their abbreviated forms here. For their full forms see the list of abbreviations in the preliminary pages of this volume.

Table 8.1: Effective Number of Parties in Lok Sabha Elections

S. NO.	YEAR	EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF PARTIES (VOTES)	EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF VOTES (SEATS)
1	1952	4.53	1.18
2	1957	3.93	1.76
3	1962	4.4	1.85
4	1967	5.19	3.16
5	1971	4.63	2.12
6	1977	3.4	2.63
7	1980	4.25	2.28
8	1984	3.99	1.69
9	1989	4.8	4.35
10	1991	5.1	3.7
11	1996	7.11	5.83
12	1998	6.91	5.28
13	1999	6.74	5.87
14	2004	7.6	6.5
15	2009	7.98	5.01

Source: See *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy*, XV/1-2 (Jan.-June 2003), Statistical Supplement, Tables 1.1-1.13, 293-307. For 2004, the index was calculated by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, and for 2009 by the author.

The chapter describes the evolving fragmentation at the electoral and legislative levels in terms of the shifts in vote shares, seat shares, and the evolution of electoral alliances at both the national and state levels, since the national party system is an aggregate of state-level party systems. It also assesses competing explanations for these shifts to uncover their underlying logic.

There are, broadly speaking, two classes of explanations for the configuration of party systems in the comparative literature. One can be called in the social cleavage theory of party systems, and the other political-systemic theory of party systems, of which the most elaborate are the electoral rules theories of party systems, with theorizing based on the division of powers among various levels of government being an influential recent development.³ The social cleavage theory postulates that the party system will reflect the principal cleavages in society, as for example between capital and labour in ethnically homogeneous industrialized societies

the other broad category of explanations outlined. However, before this it is logically necessary to lay out the historical background to the adoption of the FPTP system and the patterns of fragmentation in the unavoidable minimum detail.

PATTERN OF FRAGMENTATION OF PARTY SYSTEM: 1952-89

After Independence, India opted for the Anglo-Saxon type single-member constituency, simple plurality electoral system, or FPTP system.⁶ The latter system was adopted in the Constituent Assembly and early parliamentary debates, not so much from a focused debate on the merits of alternative electoral systems as regards their effects on the representation of parties and social groups, but from a default assumption of this system being somehow natural, carried forward largely unconsciously from British and colonial practice since 1935. There was an awareness that this system would tend to under-represent territorially dispersed groups like the Scheduled Castes and Muslims, but that was sought to be remedied by the device of reservation for Scheduled Castes, guaranteeing representation, and promises to be fair to minorities rather than by electoral-systemic engineering. The two-member and three-member constituencies that existed in the first two elections and encompassed one-third of the seats in the first two Parliaments, were, in embryonic form, distributive vote systems, but were abolished in 1961. It was felt that a proportional representation (PR) system, where the allocation of seats to individual legislators is more difficult to understand, would not be workable in a largely illiterate country, and also that the country required stable, single-party majority governments, which would be the likely result of the FPTP system whereas PR systems would produce unstable, multi-party coalition governments.

Congress Hegemony, 1952-67

The first four general elections to the Lok Sabha, 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967, coincided with elections to all the state assemblies. In the first three of these, the Congress Party won an over two-thirds majority of seats in the Lok Sabha on the basis of only a

plurality of votes of 44-8 per cent (Table 8.2). It also won a majority of the seats in nearly all state assemblies elections from 1952-62, again on the basis of mostly a plurality of votes against a fragmented opposition.

The Bipolarization of State Party Systems, 1967-89

The 1967 election marks a break, with the Congress winning only 283 seats on the basis of its lowest ever vote share until then (40.8 per cent), and losing power in eight out of 16 states. The 1971 elections saw a restoration of a two-thirds Congress majority in the Lok Sabha with 43.7 per cent votes and 352 seats. However, from the vantage point of 2009, the post-1967 period represents a secular decline in Congress strength nationally, and in state after state. In the 'exceptional' post-Emergency elections of 1977, the Congress faced a temporarily united opposition consisting of the JP, formed just before the elections, and having a seat adjustment with Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy, and the CPI(M), thus consisting of virtually the entire opposition except for the CPI and the DMK. The Congress was troubled, plunging to its lowest-till-then vote and seat figures of 34.5 per cent and 154 seats respectively. The JP won a majority (295 seats) on the basis of 41.3 per cent of the vote. This was a Congress-like victory in reverse, that is, a catch-all umbrella party winning a seat majority on the basis of a vote plurality, but not, however, against a fragmented opposition.

In 1980, another Congress restoration took place following the disintegration of the JP, again a near two-thirds majority of 353 seats (out of 542) on the basis of a plurality of 42.7 per cent. The 1984 elections, another exceptional election following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, saw the highest-ever Congress vote share (48.1 per cent) and 415 seats, or a three-quarters majority. The 1989 elections marked another turning point, with the Congress crashing to 38.5 per cent and 197 seats against an opposition electoral alliance consisting of seat adjustments, of the National Front coalition (of the JD and regional and minor parties) supported by the BJP and the Left parties, which

Total Seats		1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Table 8.2: Party Seats, Seat Shares, and Vote Shares 1952-2009																
Indian National Congress (INC)		361 (479)	371 (409)	361 (488)	283 (516)	352 (441)	554 (492)	353 (492)	415 (577)	197 (510)	232 (402)	140 (529)	147 (474)	114 (453)	145 (414)	206 (440)
Congress (INC),		45.0%	47.8%	47.4%	75%	73%	59.4%	68%	28.4%	34.5%	42.7%	48.1%	39.5%	36.5%	28.8%	25.9%
BSP		3.1%	0.6%	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
BJD in 1977,		3 (94)	4 (130)	14 (196)	35 (271)	22 (160)	295 (405)	22 (160)	86 (226)	170 (468)	161 (471)	179 (384)	182 (339)	182 (364)	116 (433)	124 (434)
SWP III 1971		16 (49)	27 (110)	23 (106)	23 (87)	7 (91)	11 (48)	6 (66)	12 (50)	14 (42)	12 (43)	9 (58)	4 (49)	9 (33)	4 (56)	0.7%
JDU in 1999.		18 (173)	44 (178)	8 (56)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CPIM)		19 (62)	25 (85)	22 (53)	36 (64)	33 (64)	35 (64)	32 (75)	33 (71)	33 (72)	43 (69)	16 (62)	3.7%	3.7%	0.7%	0.7%
LKD,		16 (338)	3 (19)	41 (294)	3 (174)	0 (17)	0 (17)	0 (17)	0 (17)	0 (17)	0 (17)	-	-	-	-	-
INC III 1977		10 (44)	17%	9.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
SP in 1991.		5.8%	10.4%	6.8%	2.4%	2.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
SPK KMP		9 (145)	19 (189)	12 (168)	13 (109)	2 (63)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
in 1952		12 (24)	25%	1.8%	3.8%	2.4%	2.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
SSC SOC		42	31	34	45	53	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Lok Sabha		38	42	47	50	53	55	57	59	61	62	63	64	65	66	67
Others		47	56%	7.6%	10.5%	10.0%	13.8%	9.6%	9.1%	14.6%	8.9%	11%	21.2%	12.2%	26%	26.3%
Others		96%	63%	69%	86%	10.2%	9.6%	9.1%	14.6%	11.5%	11.5%	21.2%	21.1%	27.1%	28.6%	23.6%
Others		16.5%	7.6%	10.5%	10.0%	13.8%	9.6%	9.1%	14.6%	11.5%	11.5%	21.2%	21.1%	27.1%	28.6%	23.6%
Independents		38	42	47	50	53	55	57	59	61	62	63	64	65	66	67
(IND)		76%	85%	4%	67%	27%	17%	0.9%	22.6%	0.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	0.9%	0.9%	1.7%
Independents		16.5%	7.6%	10.5%	10.0%	13.8%	9.6%	9.1%	14.6%	11.5%	11.5%	21.2%	21.1%	27.1%	28.6%	23.6%
Notes:		a. Elections were not held in Jammu and Kashmir (6 seats) and Punjab (3 seats); 3 counterminded seats results excluded.														
d. Figures in parentheses are sets contested; upper percentage is seat share, lower percentage is vote share.		c. Elections were not held in Assam (14 seats).														
e. Figures are sets contested, upper percentage is seat share, lower percentage is vote share.		f. Figures in parentheses are sets contested, upper percentage is seat share, lower percentage is vote share.														
Sources: Buleit et al. (1995); Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections, Vol. I (Ver. I)—National and State Abstracts, for 1996, 1999, for 2004 and 2009.		2009, Election Commission of India, General Elections, Vol. I (Ver. I)—National and State Abstracts, for 1996, 1999, for 2004 and 2009.														

(contd.)

resulted in a large number of one-on-one contests with the Congress.

The post-1967 period also saw a very important de-linking of parliamentary and state assembly elections after 1971, and a suspension of organizational elections within the Congress from 1972 to 1992, hand-in-hand with the centralization of power at the top of the party apparatus. It also saw the emergence of anti-Congress alliances, then of a principal opposition party to the Congress in state after state, in most states representing a consolidation of the non-Congress space at the state level. The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) showed an upward trend in state after state over 1967–89.⁷ This is particularly so if one considers opposition coalitions—and first party plus its pre-election coalitions—as a single party for the purposes of the IOU. In other words, a consolidation of the non-Congress opposition, state by state, broadly in tandem with such consolidation in state assembly elections, took place over the period, and even led to the displacement of the Congress as one of the two leading parties or coalitions. This bipolar consolidation was the key feature and driving force of the fragmentation of the national party system.

The following pattern of bipolarization is discernible state-wise over 1967–89 for Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh (MP), and assembly elections. In Madhya Pradesh (HP), and the Union Territory of Delhi, the movement towards a two-party system began as early as 1967 with the consolidation of the non-Congress vote behind the BJPs ancestor of the BJP. This system has remained stable to date. In three other states, Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura, a bipolar, Congress versus Left, two-alliance system emerged. Here the Congress (West Bengal) or Congress-led alliance of state-based minor parties contested against a Left Front (Kerala, Tripura) coalition since the late 1970s. In five other states, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir (JK), Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Goa, a Congress-regional party two-party system came into

being over 1967–89, changing in the 1990s with the rise of the BJP in all of these states, often in alliance with the regional party.

In one major state, Tamil Nadu, the process began in 1967, and led to the elimination of the Congress from the top two positions. It became an essentially bipolar contest between the two leading parties, the DMK and the AIADMK, with one of the two being allied to the Congress for parliamentary and state assembly elections. In this arrangement, which was the lion's share of seats in parliamentary elections in exchange for the regional ally receiving the lion's share of state assembly seats. Since 1996, the regional parties have been contesting the majority of Lok Sabha seats too, giving a few to their Congress or BJP allies.

In the Northeastern Rim states of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur, and in Sikkim, an unstable two-party or two-alliance contest prevailed between the Congress and a variety of regional parties. Finally, the Congress retained preponderance until 1989 in seven major states, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Orissa, where no alternative party or alliance consolidated itself as a successful challenger for parliamentary elections, although a broad-front anti-Congress alliance, if put together, could have challenged the Congress, as happened in 1967 and 1977.

However, just after the 1989 elections and the state assembly elections in early 1990, the Congress remained the leading party in more states (12) in terms of Lok Sabha seats and in terms of vote share (17) than any other, and remained one of the two leading parties in more states (20) in terms of Lok Sabha seats (20) and vote share (24) than any other. In the state assemblies, it remained the leading party in more states (9) and in terms of vote share in more states (9) and in terms of vote share than any other, and one of the two leading parties (Kerala, Tripura) contested against a Left Front (CPI (M), CPI) since the late 1970s. In Kerala, and smaller Left parties, the two coalitions in Kerala) alternated in power.

In the first time, the

coalition in both Lok Sabha and state assembly elections (except Haryana, which did not have assembly elections in 1989–90).

PATTERN OF FRAGMENTATION OF PARTY SYSTEM, 1989–2009

The 1989 election results were not just another repeat of a broad-front anti-Congressism of the JP kind, but signified a more far-reaching and seismic shift in the party system, rooted in the shifts in party organizational strength and support bases at the state level in an increasing number of states, and in India's political economy and changing patterns of social mobilization. The shifts in major party vote shares and seats over 1989 to 2009 in the Lok Sabha are shown in Table 8.2. The major trends of 1989–2004 are the relative decline of the Congress, and the rise of the BJP and regional or single state-based parties.⁸ While the Congress retained a vote plurality in all seven elections over 1989–2009, it failed to convert that into a seat plurality in 1996, 1998, and 1999.

Prior to 1989, the BJP and its predecessor the BJS, the political arm of the RSS, had never exceeded 10 per cent of the vote or 35 seats nationally, except in 1977 when, as a component of the JP, it won 99 of the 295 seats won by the JP (more than the 86 seats it won in 1989). Its rise since then has been steady in terms of both vote and seat shares. It experienced a meteoric rise in seats from a derisory two in 1984 (despite 7.4 per cent votes) to 86 (out of 226 contested, mostly in de facto alliance with the JD) in 1989 owing to the combination of three effects—seat adjustments with the JD, resulting in one-to-one contests against the Congress in most of the seats it contested in UP, Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, HP, and MP, an increase in contested seats and a sizeable and regionally concentrated swing in its favour.

In 1989–91, the BJP contested alone with a communally polarizing platform against the backdrop of the Babri Masjid agitation of the late 1980s, the upper-caste backlash against the National Front government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations for reservation of seats—and marginally by the breaking away of factions called the Congress (Twan) and the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress. For the first time, the

government jobs for backward classes defined in caste terms, and the Rath Yatra launched by L.K. Advani to 'liberate' the claimed Ram Janmabhoomi' inside the Babri Masjid and the communal violence that followed in its wake. Its vote share zoomed to 20.1 per cent, and it won 120 seats (of an unprecedented 468 contested), becoming the second largest party in terms of seats and votes. It swept UP and Gujarat, and turned in strong performances in its traditional strongholds of MP, HP, and Rajasthan, winning over 40 per cent votes in each. More significantly, and portending developments to come, it significantly increased its vote share in several states of the peninsula and the east.

The BJP came to form state governments on its own for the first time ever in 1990. It formed the JP in 1977–9, during which period the Jana Sangh component of the JP had dominated the government and occupied the Chief Minister's post in MP, HP, and Rajasthan. Thus, the BJP had arrived as a state-level political force, whereas earlier it had essentially been a sub-state force, thereby contributing to national party system fragmentation.

In 1991, with the external support of the eleven-member AIADMK and some smaller allies, the Congress was able to form a minority government dependent on abstention in confidence votes by a section of the opposition. It began adding to its numbers by splitting small parties such as the TDP and Ajit Singh's faction of the Lok Dal in fractions of one-third or more (legal under the Anti-Defection law), and attained a majority on its own exactly half-way through its term (end 1993).

In 1996, its vote share declined still further to a then-historic low of 28.7 per cent, having been hit badly by the breaking away of the bulk of its Tamil Nadu unit—which formed the TMC and won 20 seats—and marginally by the breaking away of

factions called the Congress (Twan) and the Madhya

Pradesh Vikas Congress.

For the first time, the

124 THE OXFORD COMPANION TO POLITICS IN INDIA

Congress was overtaken as the single largest party by the BJP, winning only 141 seats compared to the BJP's 161, although it remained the single largest party by vote share with 28.8 per cent compared to the BJP's 20.3 per cent.

In 1996, the BJP experienced the limits of contesting alone with a communally polarizing agenda. Despite being catapulted to its higher-ever seat tally of 161 seats due to its more regionally concentrated vote, making it the largest party in the Lok Sabha and capable of forming the government for twelve days, its vote share remained stagnant at 20.3 per cent, and it failed to win parliamentary support from enough other parties to form a minority or coalition government. Six states—UP, MP, Gujarat, Bihar, and Maharashtra—accounted for 143 of its 161 seats, with UP and MP alone accounting for almost half.

These results can be seen as a delayed reflection of the realignment of political forces represented by the results of the elections to the assemblies of 15 states between November 1993 and March 1995, which by and large represented major gains for the BJP, some regional parties like the TDP and Shiv Sena, and state-based parties such as the SP, the SMT, and the BSP, while at best a holding operation for the Congress in some stronghold states such as HP and MP (Yadav 1996).

A United Front (UF) government consisting of 11 parties participating in government, including two parties represented only by Rayya Sabha members and three parties as formally part of the UF coalition but not participating in government, and supported from outside by the Congress, was formed in June 1996. The Congress withdrew support to Prime Minister Deve Gowda in April 1997, but continued to support the UF government after his replacement as Prime Minister by I.K. Gujral, eventually withdrawing support to the UF in November 1997, precipitating fresh elections in February–March 1998.

In 1998, the BJP shelved its overt Hindutva agenda to strike explicit or tacit alliances with a range of state-based parties, both regional and others, many of which had earlier been with the UF, a strategy that it consolidated after its victory.⁹ The BJP strategy was certainly helped by the fact that the Congress had toppled the UF government, and

Table 8.3: BJP-led Coalition in 1998

S.NO.	PARTY	SEATS WON	VOTE (IN PER CENT)	SEATS WON	VOTE (IN PER CENT)
1	BJP	182	25.59	1	BJP
2	AITC	7	2.42	2	TDP
3	SHS	6	1.77	3	JD(U)*
4	JNP	1	0.12	4	BID
5	HVP	1	0.24	5	DMK
6	SAD(B)	8	0.81	6	SHS
7	AADMK	18	1.83	7	AITC
8	PNK	4	0.42	8	INLD
9	MDMK	3	0.44	9	SAD-B
10	LKS	3	0.69	10	MDMK
11	BID	9	1.0	11	PMK
12	TRC	0	NA	12	HVC
13	SMT	12	1.77	13	MADMK
14	Independent (Maneka Gandhi)	1	0.10	14	ABCLC
15	Independent (Satnam S. Kairth)	1	0.09	15	MSP
16	Independent (Buta Singh)	1	0.09	16	SDF
Post-election Allies		17		Independent (Maneka Gandhi)	
17	TDP	12	2.77	18	Janataki BSP
18	JRNC	3	0.21	19	AC
19	HL(DR)	4	0.53	20	Democratic Bahujan Samaj Moicha
20	AC	2	0.05	21	TRC Post Election Allies
21	MSP	-	0.05	22	JNKC
22	SDF	1	0.03	23	RLD
23	Anglo Indians*	2	NA	Total	303
24	BSMC	1	0.05		41.65
25	Citizen Common Front	1	0.02		
26	RPF (Anand Mohan)*	1	0.07		
Total		284	41.07		

Source: http://www.eci.gov.in/StatisticalReports/L5_1999/Vol_L_5_99.pdf, accessed on 3 May 2008.
Notes: *Nominated members
*Anand Mohan defected from RPF to support the NDA

Post-election adherents like the National Conference and Ajit Singh's RLD, the number went up to 303 seats (see Table 8.4). The Congress got a lowest-ever 111 seats, and only 134 with allies. However, in terms of vote share, the BJP alone declined to 23.8 per cent, while the Congress rose to 28.4 per cent, remaining the single largest party. The NDA formed the government with the twenty-nine member TDP and five other smaller pre-election allies opting to support it from outside.

Table 8.4: NDA Coalition in the 1999 Election

S.NO.	PARTY	SEATS WON	VOTE (IN PER CENT)
1	BJP	182	23.75
2	TDP	29	3.65
3	JD(U)*	21	3.10
4	BID	10	1.20
5	DMK	12	1.73
6	SHS	15	1.77
7	AITC	8	2.42
8	INLD	5	0.55
9	SAD-B	2	0.69
10	MDMK	1	0.44
11	PMK	5	0.65
12	HVC	1	0.07
13	MADMK	1	0.11
14	ABLIC	2	0.22
15	MSP	1	0.06
16	SDF	1	0.03
17	Independent (Maneka Gandhi)	1	0.54
18	Janataki BSP	0	NA
19	AC	0	0.02
20	Democratic Bahujan Samaj Moicha	0	
21	TRC Post Election Allies	0	
22	JNKC	4	0.12
23	RLD	2	0.37
Total		303	41.65

Source: http://www.eci.gov.in/StatisticalReports/L5_1999/Vol_L_5_99.pdf, accessed on 3 May 2008.
Note: *Samata Party, Lok Shakti, and JD (Shardad Yadav group) agreed to formally merge to form the JD(U).

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO POLITICS IN INDIA

(Table 8.5 contd.)

In 2004, the incumbent BJP-led NDA coalition contested against the newly formed Congress-led coalition, called the UPA after the election, and lost (see Table 8.5 for detailed results, alliance-wise, and Table 8.6 for shifts in alliances). The major change was that the Congress party became 'coalitionable' in a significant way for the first time, following a conscious decision to adopt a coalition strategy. The NDA consisted of 13 parties, having lost the DMK, MDMK, and PDMK in Tamil Nadu, the INLD in Haryana, and Ran Vilas Paswan's newly formed LJNJP in Bihar, and having added the AIADMK in 'Tamil Nadu', the SDF in Sikkim, the MNF in Mizoram, IFDP, and the NPF. It won 189 seats, the BJP winning 138 cent votes, with its lead party, the NLP, winning 138 seats (down by 44) and 22.2 per cent votes (down by 1.6 per cent). The Congress-led alliance consisted of 19 parties. This meant the addition of eight new allies—including the DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu—since the 1999 elections, and the dropping of two old allies, the AIADMK and Ajjit Singh's RLD. The Congress-led alliance won 222 seats and 36.53 per cent votes (only a whisker ahead of the NDA in vote share, but 33 seats ahead). With the external support of the Left parties (61 seats) it gained a majority in the Lok Sabha and formed a government. The UPA also enjoyed the unilateral external support

Table 8.5: Coalitions in the 2004 Election

PARTY	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON	VOTE CHANGE (IN PER CENT)	FRONT	CHARGE	
					FROM 1999	TO 2004
Congress allies	535	222	69	36.53	-0.39	CPIM
Congress	414	145	31	25.44	-1.85	JD(S)Left
TRS	6	5	5	0.60	0.60	KEC
IND (Congress)	6	1	1	0.16	0.16	INC(Left)
RJD	28	24	17	2.39	-0.38	FB.
LNP	11	4	4	0.66	0.66	BJP
NCP	22	9	2	1.78	-0.36	SFI
JMM	7	4	4	0.41	0.20	S ³
PPD	3	1	1	0.07	0.07	FLD
MUL	2	1	-1	0.19	-0.03	Others

(contd.)

Table 8.6: Net Effect of Changes in Alliances in 2004

	CONGRESS ALLIANCE (UPA)		NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	
	SEATS	VOTE (%)	SEATS	VOTE (%)
New allies added in 2004	49	6.32	4	2.53
Alliances of 1999	3	2.80	31	3.96
dropped			-27	-1.43
Net Gain/Loss (+/-)	+46	3.52		

Source: CSDS Data Tables.

Notes: New allies of the Congress are: NCP, TRS, DMK, MDMK, PML, LNP, PDP, and JMM. Old Congress allies now dropped include: RLD and AIADMK. New allies of the NDA are: AIADMK, SDF, MNF, IFDP, and NPF. Old NDA allies now dropped include: DMK, MDMK, PIAK, INLD, RLD, ICP, AC, NC, TRC, Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha, JanataRakshak BSP, HVC, and LINP. The LINP was formed after the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections, and in 1999 it was a part of the JD(U).

Arunachal Congress merged with the INC. Fabujan Samaj Morcha merged with the BSP in 2004 before the general elections. TRC merged with the Congress in 2002. HVC merged with the Congress in 2004 before the general elections.

The major difference between 2004 and earlier elections was the success of the Congress' coalitionality, which was critical to its unusually unexpected victory.¹¹ The state-wise pattern was as follows. Coalitions (or merger, with the HYC in HP) were critical to the Congress victory in Tamil Nadu, AP, Bihar, Jharkhand, J&K, and HP. They were critical for the reduction in the Congress margin of defeat/improvement of position compared to 1999 in Maharashtra and Goa. The lack of a coalition (due to the BJP's decision to contest alone) was critical for the margin of Congress victory and BJP defeat in Assam, Haryana, and Jharkhand (where an NDA coalition of not only the BJP and JD (U), but also the JMM, was a possibility). In 2009, the UPA coalition defeated the depleted NDA by a much greater margin with the Congress winning 206 seats on its own and 263 with its

pe-electoral allies, of which, compared to 2004, it had lost the Left as a partial seat adjustment partner in Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, as well as the JD, LJP, TRS, PMK, MDMK, and TDP, but added the AIITC and the NCA. (Table 8.7). The NDA suffered major ally depletion with the loss of the TDP, BJD and the split in the Shiv Sena but added the AGP, RS, and RLD. The Congress-led UPA formed a six-party government of the Congress, AIITC, DMI, NCP, NC, and Muslim League but excluded some pre-electoral (JMM, Bodoland People's Front, KCM) and all postelectoral supporters who consisted of 9 parties and 3 independents totaling 59 MPs. This coalition resembled the NDA in that the legislative coalition including post-electoral allies constituted a considerable surplus majority and hence provided insurance against

Table 8.7: Coalitions in the 2009 Election

(contd.)

(Table 8.7 contd.)

PARTY	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON	VOTE SHARE (IN PER CENT)
(Left Front subtotal)			
BSP	500	21	6.17
BID	18	14	1.59
AIADMK	23	9	1.67
MDMK	4	1	0.27
IDS	33	3	0.82
TDP	31	6	2.51
HC	10	1	0.2
NM(P)	16	1	0.23
CPI(M)	82	16	5.33
CPI	56	4	1.43
AlFB	21	2	0.32
RSP	16	2	0.38
Fourth Front	27	4	4.7
SP	193	23	3.43
RJD	44	4	1.27
Others with seats	14	2	6.09
AUDF	25	1	0.52
NPF	1	1	0.2
SDF	1	1	0.04
BVA	1	1	0.05
Swabhimani Paksha	1	1	0.12
Independents	3,629	9	5.16
Others without seats		0	7.09

Source: CSDS Data Tables.

Note: The cells for Seats Contested for the alliances are left blank bipolarities (for example Congress-BJP, Congress-Left, Congress-regional party), contributing to fragmentation at the national level, and contributing directly or indirectly to the potential bipartite consolidation of a Congress-led alliance versus a BJP-led one, although both alliances are as yet unstable, marked by the exit and entry of smaller parties.

Furthermore, both alliances are not perfect one-on-one seat adjustments but partial ones, in which the total seats contested by each alliance may exceed the total number of seats (Table 8.7). For example, in 2009, the Congress alliances with its partners were defected by any ally, rendering no ally pivotal, and also from the fact that the BJP numbers, down to 116, made it like the Congress during the NDA, in being too small to form a viable alternative coalition given that several parties like the Left, SP, RJD, TDP and BSP would not be prepared to ally with it due to differences on secularism and their need for religious minority votes.

Most states remained or became bipolar in the 1989–2006 period, except notably UP. However, in a number of apparently bipolar or two-party states, if we look at vote shares we find the presence of a significant, often growing, third party that has a vote share in double digits, but is not yet large enough to win a significant number of seats. It is obviously cutting into the potential vote share of one or both the two main parties or alliances in a way that makes it a threat to either or both of the two main parties as well as makes it attractive as a potential ally of either one of them in order to defeat the other. This is the case in states like Assam, Orissa, Goa, West Bengal, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh.

This rising third party was the BJP in all of these states, and the BSP in Punjab, UP, and, in a small way, MP. By emerging as a significant third party in vote share at the state level and hence both threatening to cut into the votes and seat prospects of either or both the dominant parties, thereby creating incentives for the weaker of the two leading parties to ally with it, typically the regional party, since both the BJP, nationally, and the regional party in the state face the Congress as their principal opponent. This was the pattern in Maharashtra, Punjab, Orissa, Goa, Bihar, and West Bengal (following the Congress split in which the AITC emerged as the major Congress faction).

In some of these states, possibly Maharashtra and Orissa, the BJP can potentially go on to eat up the share of its regional alliance partner and transform the state into a Congress-BJP two-party state, as happened in Rajasthan and Gujarat over 1989–91.

Thus, a process of bipolar consolidation has been taking place in many states, but of multiple bipolarities (for example Congress-BJP, Congress-Left, Congress-regional party), contributing to fragmentation at the national level, and contributing directly or indirectly to the potential bipartite consolidation of a Congress-led alliance versus a BJP-led one, although both alliances are as yet unstable, marked by the exit and entry of smaller parties.

Furthermore, both alliances are not perfect one-on-one seat adjustments but partial ones, in which the total seats contested by each alliance may exceed the total number of seats (Table 8.7). For example, in 2009, the Congress alliances with its partners were explicitly limited to the partner's main seat only, so that the latter were free to contest seats against the Congress in other states and did so, contributing to a larger effective number of parties by votes in 2009 despite the effective number of parties by seats shrinking. What this reflects is the drive by several smaller parties like SP and the NCP to expand their base horizontally across states, which brings them into conflict with the Congress which needs to have as broadly multi-state a base as possible to be able to defend its status as the leading national party.

EVOLUTION OF ELECTORAL ALLIANCES AND COMPETING EXPLANATIONS FOR FRAGMENTATION (AND RECONSOLIDATION?) OF PARTY SYSTEM

There are broadly seven explanations for the fragmentation of the Congress-dominated national party system over the decades, none of which excludes the others. One of these can also potentially explain the process of re-consolidation of the party system into one with larger alliances and fewer poles. I shall outline the competing explanations in roughly chronological order of their relevance and applicability to the others. One of these can also potentially explain the unwillingness of the groups that controlled the Congress to accommodate them.

The fourth explanation, dovetailing with the first and the third, and complementary to them, is that of the growing centralization of and suspension of democracy within the Congress party since 1972, leading to the exit of both traditional voters and politicians whose voices were not being heard, particularly certain regional groups and intermediate and backward-caste farmers in the northern belt, to new or other parties. This is in line with the logic of 'disillusioned' voting, whereby voters of a party from whom they fail to get their desired policy dividends or have their voices heard turn away to rival or new parties. This explanation stresses the importance of the organization and functioning of parties as machines to retain and expand their voter base.¹⁵

The fifth explanation is that of the influence on

coalitions of non-Congress forces for national elections such as in 1977 and 1989, and of non-BJP forces in 1996, since doing so became easier without compromising their fundamental interests at the state level where their basic social constituencies and power bases lay. Delineating also meant smaller agendas and less crowded bargaining tables, and hence less insurmountable action problems, or, to put it simply, one-at-a-time battles with the Congress.¹³

The third explanation emphasizes the growth

in political consciousness and assertion of newly prosperous or newly mobilized sections of the electorate primarily intermediate and backward-caste peasants in the Green Revolution areas of north India, which acted both as a farmers' and intermediate castes' lobby from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.¹⁴

These castes had not been part of the core base of the Congress in the northern belt, and had not been granted a position of commensurate influence in the party power structure. Fragmentation, whereby these castes or interest groups tended to vote or form new parties of the erstwhile socialist PSP/SSP/agrarian Lok Dal/JD kind, was rooted in the inability or unwillingness of the groups that controlled the Congress to accommodate them.

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or have their voices heard turn away to rival or new

parties. This explanation stresses the importance

of the organization and functioning of parties as

machines to retain and expand their voter base.¹⁵

The fifth explanation is that of the influence on

incentives of a systemic feature of the policy, the

division of powers in the Constitution between the

Centre and the states. With the powers that are more

relevant to the daily lives of people in a largely rural

society, such as agriculture and land use, irrigation and

130 water supply, electricity, police, education, health, and other social expenditures being vested in the states, there are incentives to organize to capture power at the state level.¹⁶

The sixth explanation is the growing politicization of communal and caste cleavages in the 1990s, leading to the collapse of a catch-all party like the Congress in states like UP and Bihar where such polarization led to a collapse of the middle ground, and the gravitation of huge chunks of the electorate—SCs, Muslims, OBCs, and upper castes—to communal and caste-based parties such as the BJP, BSP, SP, and (in Bihar) RJD.¹⁷

The seventh explanation, which I consider the most comprehensive and powerful, is one that attaches greatest significance not to social cleavages or the dominant Congress party's structure and functioning, but to the systemic properties of the FPTP electoral system working themselves out in making state-level power politically attractive. This explanation is based on the proposition known as Duverger's Law, namely, that the FPTP system (single-member district, simple plurality system) inclines towards a two-party system because of the inclinations towards a two-party system because of the behavioural incentives set up by the systemic features of the political system, the second and the seventh relating to the electoral system specifically, and the seventh specifying a mechanism whereby the behaviour of politicians, voters, and parties determines the change in the party system over time.

The fifth explanation emphasizes the importance

of Duverger's Law applies essentially at the constituency level.¹⁹ It need not translate to the same two parties. Some national, some consist of a variety of parties, some national, some consist of two parties.²⁰ Indeed, they can consist of the same two parties.²¹ In fact, they can consist of a variety of parties, some national, some purely state-level. The consolidation of two-party or two-alliance systems at the state level, which I have described in the foregoing sections, is the playing out of Duverger's Law in practice.

The first, third, and sixth explanations are all variants of the social cleavage theory of party systems, which postulates that parties will be formed around social cleavages and the party system will reflect this in its axes of polarization.

The second, fifth, and seventh relate to the behavioural incentives set up by the systemic features of the political system, the second and the seventh relating to the electoral system specifically, and the seventh specifying a mechanism whereby the behaviour of politicians, voters, and parties determines the change in the party system over time. The fifth explanation emphasizes the importance of the federal division of powers as an incentive for the formation of state parties, and for structure for the formation of state parties, and for voters to vote for such parties.

These two effects taken in combination will tend

against a leading party.

front anti-Congressism in the 1960s and early 1970s was characterized by *intra-state alliances* of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) type or the JP, where, within each state, the component parties of the alliance or the Janata Party, for example the Jana Sangh, BKD (BJD), Socialists, Swatantra, and Congress (O) had their state units, strongholds, and interests without any ideological glue. The second phase again of broad-front anti-Congressism, was that of the JP, which unified ideologically disparate non-Congress parties in order to enable one-on-one contests aggregating votes at the constituency level, so as to win, reflects the imperative of aggregation to win regardless of ideology. This also consisted of intra-state alliances of disparate parties within the overall umbrella of unification of those parties at the national level. Intra-state alliances cannot be stable unless there is both an ideological and programmatic compatibility and an intra-state territorial compatibility, in that some of the parties have pockets of strength within the state which are not contested by their allies in the state; this applies to both the classic case of Kerala (for both the Left and the Congress) and in West Bengal. This territorial alliance was also fundamentally different from that of the Congress and the AIADMK from 1977 to 1996, in that it was not based on a trade-off of state assembly seats for Lok Sabha seats between the national and regional parties.

The National Front coalition was a new departure in three senses. First, learning from the Janata experience, it did not try to unify very different parties, but put together a coalition of distinct parties based on a common manifesto. Second, it brought in the explicitly regional parties like the DMK, TDP, and AGP, and the Left parties, unlike the SVD or Janata phase experiments. Third, it also marked the beginning of *inter-state alliances* of parties or *territorially compatible alliances*, where parties do not compete on each other's turf. However, the territorially compatible loose alliance put together by the National Front-BJP-Left in 1989–90 founded on the rock of ideological incompatibility. This indicated once again the unsustainability of a broad anti-Congress coalition, unless its ideological summarized as follows. The first phase of broad-

extremes moderated or set aside their positions (as the Jana Sangh did in post-1967 SVD coalitions and in the Post-1977 Janata phase). Another clear case of a territorial alliance was the post-election coalition of the UF from 1996–8; however, it had a certain secular ideological mooring, ranged as it was against a hardline, perceived 'anti-system' BJP.

The period since 1991 has also seen the growth and sustenance of *intra-state alliances based on ideology* (like the BJP-Shiv Sena) and based on the territorial compatibility of two kinds, different from both the Left Front kind and the Congress-AIADMK trade-off kind of 1977–96. This consists of intra-state alliances, which are the reverse of the historical Congress-AIADMK kind in which there is no trade-off of Lok Sabha for state assembly seats between the regional and the national party. On the contrary, the regional party allies with the state unit of the national party, with the former getting the lion's share of both Lok Sabha and assembly seats. Examples are the BJP-AIADMK-smaller parties in 1998 and 2004, the BJP-DMK-smaller parties in 1999, Congress-DMK in 2004 and 2009, the BJP-TDP in 1999 and 2004, the BJP-AITC in 1999 and 2004, Congress-AITC in 2009, BJP-BJD in Orissa in 1998, 1999, and 2004, BJP-HVP in 1996 and 1998 and the BJP-INLD (Chhattisgarh) in 1999, RJD-Congress in 2004, and JD(U)-BJP in 2004 and 2009.

There is also the reverse of this pattern, viz., an alliance between a minor state party and a national party, in which the latter gets the lion's share of both Lok Sabha and assembly seats, the key being territorial compatibility, in which the national party does not contest in the smaller regional party's intra-state强holds. Examples are the BJP-LKS in Karnataka in 1998 and 1999, the BJP-Samata in Bihar over 1996–9, the BJP-HVC in HP, and the Congress-JMM-smaller parties in 2004 and over a quarter-century of the Congress-led United Democratic Front in Kerala and the Congress-led alliances in Assam since 2001. It is anybody's guess how long these non-ideological alliances will last. In some of these cases, the base of the smaller party or even the regional party which is a senior partner may be eaten up by a larger, better-organized party like the BJP, as in fact

happened to the Janata Dal in Rajasthan and Gujarat from 1989 to 1991.

The clear emphasis of alliances since the 1990s has been on territorial compatibility at the expense of ideological compatibility, particularly the BJP's alliances of 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2009, and even the UF Congress alliances of 2004 and 2009, and the most important coalitions of 1996 and 1998. This is an improvement on the SVD and JP alliances, which were neither programmatic nor territorially compatible. However, the most important point to be noted is that in the whole history of alliances since the 1960s, with the exception of the Left Front, limited to three states, alliances have been driven by the imperative to aggregate votes to win and not by ideology, programme, or social cleavages, except for overarching differences between the Congress and the BJP on secularism.²¹

With this observation I return to the competing explanations for fragmentation of the party system. It is clear that the explanations deriving from the social cleavage theory of party systems—that is, the first, third, and sixth explanations, can explain fragmentation of certain kinds. The first can explain the shift away from the Congress to regional parties in certain states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Punjab, J&K, and the Northeastern Rim states, including the formation of such parties as in the case of Assam. These were not simply cases where regional parties were formed due to economic incentives deriving from state-level powers. The third can explain the shift of votes away from or consolidation behind the agrarian parties of the Janata family—the BCD, Socialists, BLD, Lok Dal, JD, and so forth, again including the formation of new parties. The sixth can account for the rise of communal and caste-based parties like the BJP, Shiv Sena, BSP, and SP, including the formation of new parties. The fourth can explain the exit of former Congress voters to rival or new parties. The fifth explanation reinforces all of these in that it explains the incentives for single site-based party formation. The second explanation further reinforces these by explaining how delinked state assembly elections facilitate collective action for alliances.

However, while these explanations can account for various types of fragmentation, they cannot explain the periodic counter-tendencies towards alliances that tend to reconsolidate the party system. It is here that I find the seventh explanation, based on Duverger's analysis of the systemic properties and imperatives of the FPTP electoral system, useful. This explanation can account for both fragmentation at the national level and tendencies towards alliances. The key point here is to remember from the account of the first two sections that fragmentation of the party system at the national level is a product of its opposite at the state level, that is, the concentration of vote share between two parties or alliances, but different pairs of parties or alliances in most states, leading to a multitude of parties at the national level, each with a limited base in one or a few states. This latter phenomenon is explained by the systemic tendencies of the FPTP system captured by Duverger's Law, which have been working themselves out at the state level since 1967. The seventh explanation also fits well with the tendencies towards broad alliances driven, as we have seen, by the imperative to consolidate votes at the constituency and state levels, rather than by ideology, programme, or consolidate positions...

He thus makes the social cleavage theory of party systems appear somehow natural. For recent works within the electoral rules theory of party systems, see Lijphart (1994), Tagore and Shugart (1989), Grofman and Lijphart (1986); and older classics, Duverger (1963), Rae (1967). For recent emphasis on the division of powers between various levels of government in federal systems as an explanatory variable, see Chhibber and Kollman (1998 and 2004).

4. Tagore and Shugart (1989) emphasize ballot structure, district magnitude, and electoral formula as the basic variables. Lijphart (1994) emphasizes, in addition, alternative variable, effective threshold of representation, and assembly size, and considers the special cases of Presidentialism and *apparetement* (linking of party lists).

5. See Lijphart (1994: 22, Table 22).

6. For a detailed analysis of the early debates on adopting an electoral system, see Sridharan (2002b: 34–69).

7. A measure of the fragmentation of the opposition space represented by the percentage share of the largest non-Congress (in today's terms, non-ruling party) vote

create so diversified an ideological space that bipolar consolidation will be impossible at the national level.²²

NOTES

1. This chapter is an updated and more developed version of Sridharan (2002a), and also draws upon, in parts, Sridharan (2004).

2. For the Lakso-Tagorepa index of the effective number of parties at both the national and state assembly levels, see *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy*, XV (1–2), 2003, Statistical Supplement, Tables 1.1–1.13, pp. 293–307. For 2004, the index has been calculated by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi; author's computation for 2009.

3. See Lipset and Rokkan (1967), for the classic statement on the social cleavage theory of party systems, and Fairclough and Mair (1990), for a modified version which essentially argues that social cleavages do not translate automatically into party systems but offer easy mobilization opportunities. Much the same is argued by Rothari (1997: 56), when he says:

Those who complain of 'casteism in politics' are really looking for a set of politics which has no basis in society... Politics is a competitive enterprise...and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging alliances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions...

He thus makes the social cleavage theory of party systems appear somehow natural. For recent works within the electoral rules theory of party systems, see Lijphart (1994), Tagore and Shugart (1989), Grofman and Lijphart (1986); and older classics, Duverger (1963), Rae (1967). For recent emphasis on the division of powers between various levels of government in federal systems as an explanatory variable, see Chhibber and Kollman (1998 and 2004).

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7. A measure of the fragmentation of the opposition space represented by the percentage share of the largest non-Congress (in today's terms, non-ruling party) vote

in the total opposition vote. The higher the IOU, the less fragmented the opposition space.

8. Regional party is something of a misnomer as it implies a party strong in two or more states in a region. All the regional parties, however, are single-state-based parties, except the Janata Dal (United), which is strong in Bihar and Karnataka, and the CPI (M), strong in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala, if one considers them regional parties. These sets of states do not constitute recognizable regions. The JD (U) and the CPI (M) are really national parties with a limited geographical spread, the former being a rump of the once much larger Janata Dal.

9. For the BJP's use of coalitions as a strategy to expand its base across states, see Sridharan (2005).

10. For details of the alliances, pre- and post-election in 1998, see Avara (2000: 84–5, 190, 194).

11. For details of the argument and figures, see Sridharan (2004).

12. For a concise overview of regional parties in the party system up to the mid-1990s, see Manor (1995).

13. See Chhibber (1999: 103); Chhibber and Kollman (2004).

14. See Brass (1980), for Singh (1990), Frankel (1991), and (1989).

15. See Kohli (1991), for an analysis of the 'crisis of governability' centred on the centralization of the Congress Party. This argument gels with Riker's ideal type of disillusioned voting, in Riker (1976). See Chhibber (1999: ch. 5), for an argument emphasizing the exit of traditional supporters of the Congress, rather than the entry of new groups into politics.

16. See Chhibber (1999: chs 2 and 5).

17. For a general analysis of the decline of the Congress and the emergence of a post-Congress polity, see Yadav (1999). For specifics that show the polarization of the vote by community and caste, see Heati (1999), and for the BJP vote see Heath and Yadav (1999). See Chandra (1999), for an analysis of the rise of the BSP.

For a view that Duverger's law does not apply to a significant fraction of constituencies over time, see Dwarkar (2007).

18. See Sridharan (1997), for a detailed version of the argument presented in capsule below.

Dwarkar's (2007) argument is still consistent with convergence towards state-level bipolar, its not two-party systems, in most states.

19. For a view that Duverger's law does not apply to a significant fraction of constituencies over time, see Dwarkar (2007).

20. Dwarkar's (2007) argument is still consistent with convergence towards state-level bipolar if not two-party systems, in most states.

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO POLITICS IN INDIA

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21. For a detailed overview of state-level coalition politics in India, see Sridharan (1999). For a detailed state-wise analysis of the BJP's coalition strategies since 1989, see Sridharan (2005). For a detailed analysis of the Congress' coalition strategies and their criticality in the 2004 elections, see Sridharan (2004).
22. Ordeshook and Shvetsov (1994) argue that Duvverger's law will work even under conditions of social (ethnic, religious, linguistic, and so on) heterogeneity, while Tagore and Shugart (1989) tend to argue that the effective number of parties will increase with the increase in social heterogeneity.
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BARTH
SOCIAL CLEAVAGES,
IDENTITY, AND POLITICS

9 Class and Politics

John Harris

Why should we bother any more about class in political analysis in India? Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph argued, after all, in their work on India's political economy twenty years ago, that class politics is not a strong determinant of political action. 'Class politics in India [they say] is marginal (in the sense that) India's parties do not derive their electoral support or policy agenda from distinct class constituencies or from organised representatives of workers and capital' (1987: 20). Is class not very largely a redundant category? Or, if not redundant, is it not one of limited analytical power? There are several reasons why these views may be held.

The concept of class is usually associated with Marx— even though he in fact wrote rather little about it—and arguments about the likely processes of class formation and class struggle deriving from his analysis of capitalism appear to have been falsified by the course of modern history. The expectations of classical sociologists with regard to the character of 'industrial society' in general have not been fulfilled. The industrial working class has nowhere

developed either the size or the coherence that Marx, in common with classical sociologists, anticipated. And though 'class politics' have had moments of great significance in Western societies, where some major parties retain at least a sense of their particular association with capital or with labour, it seems plain that politics is now rarely driven very directly by class interests. If political parties were once highly organized and linked with society through ideology and mass movements, they are now more frequently the followings of more or less charismatic leaders, or depend upon the findings of focus groups which are fed back to potential supporters through media sound bites, for the mobilization of support.

In part, at least, it seems that these trends have come about because the actual class structure of contemporary societies is so much more complicated than the notion of a fundamental opposition between 'capital' and 'labour' suggests. Both 'capital' and 'labour' are divided into diverse fragments, and in modern societies very large numbers of people do not fit very clearly into either of these fundamental class categories. In the contemporary world, too,

there is a lot of evidence showing that workplaces are much less significant arenas of politics than are living places (a point that is taken up further below).

The 'middle class' is notoriously difficult to define precisely, and yet there can be no doubt that in many societies large numbers of people, quite commonly a majority, are part of the 'middle class'. To these basic difficulties of definition notwithstanding, for the difficulties with class analysis is added the further understanding of historical trends.

THE CONCEPT OF CLASS

The concept of class, whether derived from Marx or from Weber, refers to the significance of economic endowments—whether material means of production or possession of particular skills ('human capital'), or cultural traits (sometimes referred to as 'symbolic capital'), or social connections (sometimes described as 'social capital'), which influence a person's power in the markets vis-à-vis labour or money—for the differences in the matrices of opportunities and constraints that confront all human beings as they 'make out' through their lives. Herting and Agarwala (2006) have discussed this at length. Different groups of people broadly share particular matricies according to their positions in the structures of production and distribution through which societies are reproduced; and their relationships (class is fundamentally a relational concept) are substantially determined by these differences in class positions. This is the 'class-in-class structure', or what Marx refers to as 'class-for-itself'. It is another matter as to whether the groups themselves. A Marxian interpretation of historical social processes of class formation—those that bring about collective organization amongst people who broadly share class positions—and of class struggle, when classes pursue their interests in opposition to those of others. A Marxian interpretation of history finds in these processes the essential dynamics of societal change over time, while in the Weberian view class only one dimension of power relationships (the other being those of status' or honour, and of 'party')

and it is envisaged that change comes about as a result of complex interactions amongst the different dimensions of power.

Another important idea is that people who share a class position have interests in common, and a great deal of the difficulty or misapprehension surrounding the idea of class follows from the notion that people can be expected to act in pursuit of class interest. Clearly, they very often do not (as in the case of the blue-collar workers of Kansas in the recent past), and then it is sometimes argued that this demonstrates 'false consciousness'. It is very questionable as to how far this is a useful idea, if at all. Rather, we must come to terms with the ways in which perceptions of interest are filtered cognitively. In this connection, it may be important to take account of the ways in which class relationships are actually experienced. In the context of rural India, it is still quite commonly the case that class relationships are experienced in terms of caste. The majority of labourers frequently come from a particular Dalit group—*parayars*, for instance, in northern Tamil Nadu—while property-owning rich peasants are from a particular 'dominant caste' (in this case *mudaliars*). The class relation between labour and capital in these circumstances may then have an important religious dimension, for *Parayars*—historically at least and sometimes still in the present—also perform a range of religious services for members of the dominant caste (Harris 1994). Such cultural 'embedding' of class relationships influences the way in which they are perceived; it may legitimate, and will hence exercise a strong influence upon class consciousness and the possibilities of class struggle.² Specifically, caste loyalties may obstruct the formation of class consciousness, or in some circumstances enhance it, as has happened in parts of the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, where there are particular concentrations of *paraiyar* labourers (Battelle 1974; Bouton 1985). Class analysis entails, therefore, taking account of the cultural context (the biologically specific habits of thought and behaviour of a particular group of people), and the intersections (in Weber's terms) of 'class', 'status', and 'party'. From a political point of view, it has to be recognized that classes-for-themselves do not just arise but are made,

by political leaders in particular historical contexts.

The cases of the two Indian states in which class-based political mobilization has occurred—West Bengal and Kerala—help to make this point. It is hard to explain in purely 'structural' terms how and why it has come about that class politics have developed in these states. If it is present in West Bengal, for instance, why is it not in Bihar?

The critical matter for politics is whether or not class consciousness is developed, amongst whom, and in what ways. Here we face difficult questions, both *vis-à-vis* analysis and political practice, surrounding the aggregation or the fragmentation of classes both in- and for-themselves, as well as regarding the ways in which the possibility of the development of class-for-itself is affected by culture. While in the context of a capitalist economy it makes sense, on one level certainly, to conceive of the class structure in terms of the broad opposition between 'capital' and 'labour', and to explore explanations for historical change in terms of struggle between the capitalist class and the working class, it is clearly the case that each of these class categories aggregates together groups of people who, though they may have in common such fundamentals as ownership, or not, of means of production, are in other ways very different. A big question, for instance, concerning the politics of the working class in India is whether or not those in the organized sector or in 'formal' employment recognize commonalities of interest with those in 'informal' work. Another big question concerns the relationships of different fractions of the capitalist class. With regard to India, this question has generally been framed in terms of the relationships between agricultural or landed capital and industrial capital—between 'rich farmers' and 'big business'—while in other societies, and increasingly in India, the big issue concerns the relationships between 'finance capital' and 'industrial capital'. Then there is the question of the definition of the 'middle class'—those apparently increasing numbers of people who own small capitals or whose endowments are in terms of professional skills or attributes that may be described as 'cultural capital'

or perhaps 'social capital', rather than as ownership

of physical or financial means of production—and of its relations with capital and with labour. Deshpande

142 THE OXFORD COMPANION TO POLITICS IN INDIA

(2003, ch. 6) discusses the definition of the middle class and its class practices in India. In the light of these general considerations, we now examine the class structure and class formation in India.

CLASS STRUCTURE AND CLASS FORMATION IN INDIA

The Working Class

The Rudolfs point out, fairly enough, that 'Organised labour as a potential actor in class politics [in India] must contend with formidable obstacles' (1987: 24). In the first place, as is by now generally understood, the overwhelming majority of those in the Indian labour force are in informal employment, unprotected by labour legislation and with very little access to social security. Barbara Harriss-White estimates that approximately 83 per cent of the population work wholly in the informal sector' (2003: 5); while Rina Agarwala calculates that only 7 per cent of the labour force as a whole, or 18 per cent of the non-agricultural labour force, is in formal, protected employment (2006: 422). According to her, 45 per cent of India's non-agricultural labour force is constituted by those who are self-employed or are micro-entrepreneurs, and another 38 per cent are part of the 'informal proletariat'—casual workers and regular workers—in informal enterprises. And one of the consequences of economic liberalization in India, as elsewhere in the world, has been to encourage the informalization of labour, so that the share of organized, formal employment in the labour force as a whole has been declining. Clearly there is a great deal of variation in the conditions of life and labour of the Indian 'working class', and it cannot be expected that a common political class consciousness can be at all easily developed.³

The 'organized working class' potentially plays a particularly important role in politics, as it has an exceptional ability to challenge the structural power of capital. The extent of working-class organization, it has been shown (Rueschmeyer et al. 1990) exercises an important influence upon the prospects for social democracy, and upon the pattern and rate of economic development. Those in protected, formal-sector employment, however (the 7 per cent of the Indian labour force, according to Agarwala's calculations), may

constitute a privileged 'labour aristocracy', concerned above all with the preservation and extension of their own advantages. This charge is often laid at the door of the Indian formal working class. It is commonly held, too, that it is fragmented, and therefore weak, because of the way in which unions have been incorporated into competing political parties, with the result that workers are divided by party political allegiances.⁴ It is also the case, as Chhibber has shown, that the organized working class was very effectively co-opted by the Congress in the period after Independence through the formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), 'which was sworn to uphold Congress policy in industrial matters (and) under the aegis of a largely friendly government and bureaucracy...grew by leaps and bounds'—in opposition to the Communist All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The resulting 'demonobilization of labour removed from the scene the agent that could have been pivotal in giving the state more leverage against the business class' (Chhibber 2003: 126). While this argument is a strong one, it does not mean that industrial peace was lasting, and Teitelbaum (2006) has recently questioned the common view that organized labour is fragmented and weak. He shows that the numbers of functioning unions (as opposed to those of all that have been registered) have remained fairly constant and that their average size has tended to increase, and that fragmentation at firm level is probably much less than has been commonly supposed. (On average companies tend to negotiate with one or two unions'.) The level of industrial disputes has remained high, absolutely and relatively, while the continuing strength of labour is also shown by the continuing failure of the state to 'reform' protective labour legislation, and by the ways in which union resistance has slowed the pace of economic reforms.

Teitelbaum concludes that, contrary to common scholarly belief, there is a 'continued prevalence of conflict and aggressive representation of working-class interests in India' (2006: 415).

The idea of the existence of a 'labour aristocracy' barricaded up in a kind of citadel of security and privilege may also be questioned. It is true that agricultural employment has often been subject to

principle of particularism' because of the importance of personal contacts and recommendation in entry into these jobs. This has tended to build self-reinforcing networks that are likely to be restricted to people from particular caste and residential backgrounds, and may enhance consciousness of caste loyalties at the expense of the development of any sense of class identity. However, it is also true that these putative aristocrats of labour often share common places of residence with the informal proletariat, and that this tends to associate them with wider popular interests and grievances. The constraint on the formation of a radical proletariat is rather the fact that aspirations to become part of the petite bourgeoisie are often strong amongst those in formal employment. The conclusion of my own research in Coimbatore, for instance, was that

(The city) does not have a labour aristocracy in the sense in which this term has commonly been used. But neither does it have an effectively radical proletariat, when petty bourgeois aspirations are common and the community of working people is both divided in several ways and susceptible to populist politics. (Harriss 1986: 281)

The deliberate casualization or informalization of the conditions of employment that is sought in the context of economic liberalization and is very widely attested (Castells 1996) is aimed specifically at the disengagement of labour, and historically it has proven difficult—with a few exceptions, such as amongst load carriers and dock workers—to organize those in informal employment whose conditions of work are characterized by irregularity and insecurity. There are now indications of change, however, as some groups of informal workers, such as construction workers and women employed in rolling bids, have begun to become organized. Agarwala has shown that such informal working-class politics are taking on a different character, with demands being targeted at the state rather than being directed against employers, and for welfare benefits rather than for workers' rights. Some of the organizations involved set out specifically to link the issues of women's rights, rights to housing, and rights to livelihood (Harriss 2007); and the informal workers' unions 'appeal to state responsibilities to citizens, rather than to workers' rights' (Agarwala 2006: 432). They are struggling not

against informality (the historical objective of Trade Union organization), but for rights within this status. Agarwala maintains that, nonetheless, the emerging identity of informal workers simultaneously asserts their informality and their position within the working class' (Agarwala 2006: 437). It should not be assumed that the informal proletariat will be forever quiescent, nor that links cannot be made between 'organized' and 'unorganized' workers, as has happened in those countries in which there has been a development of what is described as 'social movement unionism' (Waterman 1991).

CAPITAL/BIG BUSINESS

While arguing that 'Organised capital, the second actor, also faces formidable ideological, sectoral and structural constraints', the Rudolfs still concede that "'Business interests' in India, while not publicly represented in competitive party politics, are better represented than those of organised labour...' (1987: 25, 31). But the argument that private capitalism in India is essentially dependent upon the state is a key element in their general case that Indian politics are 'centrist'; and that class cleavages are not at all pronounced. The argument rests on the fact that the public sector has been pre-eminent in the industrial economy and that while some firms were able to benefit from the extensive regulation of industry by the post-Independence state, the system of licences and controls still meant that business was subject to dictation by the state. Other scholars disagree, or present a more qualified view. Vivek Chhibber, in particular, in a richly documented study of the relationships of state and big business (2003), has shown that contrary to the paradigmatic case of South Korea, the Indian state was not successful in disciplining big business (which is part of the reason why, as I discuss later, India's developmental state was less successful in securing economic growth). Still, there is a lot of evidence suggesting that India's economic development was constrained by a political climate that was at least ambiguous with regard to private-sector development, if not actively hostile to it, and that higher rates of economic growth have followed from a shift in political attitudes and hence in

the 'investment climate,' starting in the 1980s (Kohli 2006). And while there undoubtedly are differences amongst big business, based on the differing needs and interests of different sectors and between the old business houses and new groups (like Reliance), partly reflected in the shifting political influence of 'the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) on the one hand, and the newer Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on the other. Indian capital is not (in Kohli's view) so factionalized as to have inhibited the development of common positions and a move towards India Incorporated—or, in other words, the kind of partnership between state and private capital that is characteristic of South Korea.⁵

THE MIDDLE CLASSES

There is continuity between the big bourgeoisie and the 'middle class,' and an important fraction of the internally varied social group that may be described as the 'middle classes' is that of the petite bourgeoisie, the owners of small capitals, who have at times played a significant role in the politics of many countries. In India, the idea that the social groups described by Michael Kalecki as 'intermediate classes,' of 'small landowners, rich and middle peasants, merchants of rural and semi-rural townships, small-scale manufacturers and retailers,' might be class elements of significance for the general direction of Indian politics and political economy is one that has been revived and advanced by Barbara Harris-White (2003).⁶ She argues that these groups 'consolidate themselves above all in the informal and black economies' which account for at least 38 per cent of the Indian economy as a whole, and comments that while it has been argued that they 'show no signs of concerted class action, relying instead on particularistic tactics,' it is precisely the mass reliance by this class coalition on such tactics (that) is a generalised characteristic of their politics' (ibid.: 53). Harris-White argues that these intermediate classes, which she also refers to as 'local capital,' redefine the state's official development project, and that they exercise considerable power,

not primarily through political parties but rather 'collusively, in overlapping organisations of diverse kinds: cultural, co-operative and philanthropic, as well as trade associations' (2003: 52).

These intermediate classes constitute only one fraction of the middle classes, however. 'The dominant fraction,' Fernandes and Heller suggest, 'consists of those with advanced professional credentials or accumulated cultural capital who occupy positions of recognised authority in various fields' (2006: 500). This is the fraction of the middle class that in Deshpande's 'definition to think with' (2003: 139–42) articulates the hegemony of the ruling bloc in Indian society, in the senses both of 'giving voice to' and of linking or connecting (the relations between the ruling bloc and the rest of society), and it is the class that is most dependent on cultural capital, especially including the ability to use English, and the cosmopolitan manners of the upper castes. It is people from this fraction who are described by Fernandes and Heller as 'the new middle class.' The petty bourgeoisie (or what I have referred to as the intermediate classes) is a middle category, some members of which may aspire to and try to emulate the practices of the dominant fraction. The third, and most numerous, are the subordinate middle class fraction of salaried workers who have some educational capital, but do not occupy positions of authority over other workers (Fernandes and Heller 2006: 500); and in Deshpande's view, this is the 'mass fraction,' engaged in the 'exemplary consumption of ideology (that are produced by the elite fraction), thus investing them with social legitimacy' (2003: 141).

Lately, one of the more striking features of Indian politics has been the apparent withdrawal of the middle classes from party politics, as evidenced through the changing social composition of those who vote in elections (Alam 2004; ch. 2, 26–44). This does not mean, however, that they do not play a pivotal role in Indian politics, as I shall argue in the later sections of this chapter. It remains, here, to consider the classes of India's dominantly rural society.

Agrarian Classes

India is still primarily an agrarian society, which has for long exhibited distinct class differentiation. While it is a 'peasant' society in which large numbers

of people hold what may be seen as an ambiguous class position, having at once some ownership rights over means of production whilst also being workers, there have also long been landless workers on the one hand, and landlords and dominant peasants who have employed their labour power on the other. A crucial question with regard to recent politics has been whether or not, or the extent to which, the process of differentiation that Lenin argued was taking place after the abolition of serfdom in late nineteenth-century Russia—towards class polarization between capitalist farmers and labour—is underway.⁷ In post-Independent India, the abolition of the tax-farming superior rights-holders, the zamindars, in the first phase of land reform, which had the effect of enhancing the rights and the power of the rich peasants, the main beneficiaries of zamindari abolition, may be seen as having created conditions for the kind of process that Lenin described. Then the advent of high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice in the later 1960s, during the so-called 'green revolution,' and the filip that this gave to modern agriculture, seemed to many observers in the 1970s to be bringing about further class differentiation in rural society (Frankel 1971). The Indian case provided the main fuel for a major debate that took place at that time between those who held that class differentiation on the lines defined by Lenin was indeed taking place, and other scholars who argued—drawing their inspiration from Lenin's Russian contemporary, the agricultural economist, A.V. Chayanov—that the peasant economy of independent small producers was still reproducing itself (Harris-White 1982). Some political leaders and policymakers in India feared that the process of differentiation was leading to class polarization and agrarian conflict—as was reflected in a Home Ministry report of 1969 on 'the causes of the present agrarian unrest' (Frankel 1978/2004: 373–4). It seemed to many at the time that the green revolution was turning red'. Then, also, and even more so subsequently, there was widespread recognition of the political weight of the rich peasantry that benefited so much from agricultural modernization,

and the influence that it exercised on India's economic development (Mitra 1977; Bardhan 1984/1998 and see below). Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph,

however, found in the evidence that they advanced to demonstrate the dominance of those they labelled 'bullock capitalists'—'yeoman farmers' owning between two and a half and fifteen acres of land—further justification for their view that Indian politics is distinctly 'centrist'; because the politics of the agricultural economy remained, as they saw it, sectoral rather than class oriented (1987; ch. 13, 333–92).

The twenty-five years or so that have elapsed since the debates of the 1970s were at their height have shown that none of the models of agrarian class formation that were then being explored has proven very robust. The trends of change in rural society may be summed up in the following three (interlocking) propositions:

1. *The differentiation and polarization of peasant classes has been nearly frozen.* Though the tradition of studies of 'agrarian change' has been much less vibrant in recent years than it was in the 1970s, research shows that there has generally only been what Byres referred to as partial proletarianization, and that small and marginal peasant producers have continued to reproduce themselves (Byres 1981; Harris 1994; Harris-White and Janakarajan 2004). This commonly takes place now as a result of the role of migration (both rural–rural and rural–urban), and short term and long term, of the remittances associated with it, and of increasing employment outside agriculture. It has also been assisted by the improved availability of institutional credit (though this has latterly become more restricted again), in some cases by micro-finance schemes, and by state welfare provision (Harris-White and Janakarajan 2004). The rural partial-proletariat and the increasing mass of rural workers reckoned now to be almost 50 per cent of the rural population as compared with 28 per cent in 1951) constitute, as Herring and Agarwala put it, 'the truly awkward class; largely unattached to anyone's land, selling labour power as a commodity in an unpredictable market, often uprooted by pushes and pulls of market forces, and largely without representation' (2006: 344).

2. *Land is no longer the principal basis of status and power, and neither does it serve to limit the livelihood possibilities of the poor.* The latter part of this proposition is explained by the increased

(Hasan 1998). And now, while it remains true that the class interests of rich farmers are still a significant factor in India's political economy (as is discussed below), the crisis of the agricultural economy over much of the country in the early years of the twenty-first century is one marker of the declining political weight of this class. The fact that they are so divided, notably over the reactions to the globalization of the Indian economy—which is supported by the Shetkari Sanghatana, one of the biggest farmers' organizations, and opposed by others—does not help their case. Class interests are not necessarily perceived in the same way, and the differences profoundly affect class formation and the possibilities of class struggle (Herring and Agarwala 2006; and Herring 2006).

3. 'The poor loosen the ties of dependence but exercise little leverage over the political space'.⁸ Here, the category of 'the poor' refers to numerous rural labourers and small peasant petty commodity producers. There is now abundant evidence of what Frankel and Rao described as the decline of dominance—referring to 'the exercise of authority in society by groups who achieved socio-economic superiority and claimed legitimacy for their commands in terms of superior ritual status' (1989: 2).⁹ The reasons for this decline include those changes in the basis of status and power in rural society that were just described. Simultaneously, there has developed much greater assertiveness amongst people from lower castes and classes—assisted by the expansion of literacy and education. This has usually had a distinctive base in caste differentiation, however, as in the mobilizations of particular Other Backward Caste (OBC) groups in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in particular, and in those of Dalits and of tribal people. 'The poor' have loosened ties of dependence, but the class interests of rural labourers and semi-proletarians are only weakly articulated politically—except perhaps in Kerala and West Bengal, where the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[Marxist]) is well organized.

Though class struggle did not develop in the Indian countryside in the wake of the green revolution, as was feared it would at the time—it did not, after all 'turn red'—Indian rural society is now played a major political role (Naddani 1987; Omvedt 1993), but have become less significant since the early 1990s. Zoya Hasan has suggested, with regard to Uttar Pradesh, that this form of mobilization of class interests has been eclipsed by the politics of Hindutva

The development of industrial capitalism is reckoned to be conducive to democracy because it weakens landlord power, with its interests in forms of control over labour that entail the lack of freedom (whether through actual bondage or looser forms of control such as are involved in what is described as 'semi-feudalism' (Bhaduri 1973; Harris 2006b). Up to a point, at least, capitalist actually strengthens subordinate classes, as Rueschmeyer *et al.* have argued (1990), and according to their comparative analysis, historically democratization has depended above all on the development of the working class and a shift in the balance of class power in its favour. This structural explanation of the rise of democracy is in distinction to the earlier theory advanced by Lipset (1959) on the basis of a comparative cross-country analysis, which seemed to show that democratization is associated with 'modernization', brought about by economic development and widespread higher education that strengthen the 'moderate' middle class. As Rueschmeyer *et al.* argue, the middle class has historically been ambivalent with regard to democracy, fearing and seeking to curtail it when it threatens to give power to lower classes (as we perhaps see in India in the present, a point that is discussed later). But whether holding to either one of these views—the modernization/middle class theory associated first with Lipset, or Rueschmeyer *et al.*'s argument about the role of the working class—it is hard to explain the emergence of a formally democratic regime in India after Independence, given the relative weakness of both these classes in the later colonial period. The Indian case fits rather better, in fact, with what are described as 'transition' theories of democratization, which focus on the agency of political elites and conceptualize democracy as a set of government institutions and procedures that are negotiated between political leaders, especially between reformers within an authoritarian regime and moderate dissidents. This is a description that fits quite well the predominantly English-speaking, upper-caste and middle-class elites, many of them lawyers, most of them Congressmen, who participated in the Constituent Assembly that decided upon Parliamentary democracy as the institutional framework for the new Indian state. Their leaders had,

that has been described by the Prime Minister as 'the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country' (Herring and Agarwala 2006). This Naxalite insurgency is said by its leaders to be a 'class war', and is underlain by a range of factors that include the economic exploitation of landless workers, as well as other dimensions of subordination and oppression. Alpa Shah, however, provides a more complex view of the activities of the Maoist Communist Centre in Jharkhand, showing the continuities between the local state and the MCC:

the MCC's initial grassroots support is a rural elite—including entrepreneurs who tried to maintain their dominance through their connection with the informal economy of the state. The primary reasons they supported the MCC were not ideological but because connection with the MCC held the promise of protection to further capture state resources. (Shah 2006: 309)

The insurgency has roots that are more tangled than the claim of class war might lead one to suppose. In the remainder of this chapter I want to show the relevance of the foregoing analysis of class structure and class formation for the understanding of key issues and the historical trends of Indian polities—for the nature of Indian democracy, the political economy of development, and for the current reshaping of Indian society and the state.

CLASS, THE STATE, AND DEMOCRACY

The balance of class forces in India in the later colonial period was not such as to be conducive to democracy according to leading theories of democratization. As Barrington Moore reasoned in his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, India presents the paradox of the establishment of political democracy in the absence of an industrial revolution. Even though, by comparison with other colonial territories, India had seen a more significant development of local industrial capitalism and the leading classes associated with it—the capitalist big bourgeoisie and the industrial working class—the country was still overwhelmingly an agrarian economy and society, subject to the power of landlords and *Naxal* peasants from the dominant landholding castes.

mostly successfully and under the influence of the Gandhian line of class consolidation, sought to control the mobilization of popular, lower-class forces (in class struggle) during the fight for Independence, nipping order of property and class relations (Pandey 1982). For most of them the establishment of the authority of the Central government was of paramount importance, and alternative forms of more decentralized political organization and the possibilities of direct democracy received little attention (Austin 1966).

The fact that Indian democracy was the gift of a middle-class and upper-caste political elite which had often checked popular aspirations to political agency has had profound implications for the way in which democracy has worked in practice in a still largely agrarian society. The relations of the elite and the masses were marked by 'mutual incomprehension', in Kaviraj's words (1991). The use of English by the political elite was associated with ideas about the concepts of the consolidation of rational-legal institutions and structures, and through them of the modernization of Indian society, which the elite was not successful in communicating to society at large.

There was a failure, as Kaviraj says, in developing a common political language, and no reshaping of common beliefs. Eventually the gap came to be filled by the rise of new political elites who were better able to communicate with the masses, but who have not shared the same vision of modernity and have not sought to build democratic political organizations through which people from subordinate classes may acquire agency. Yogendra Yadav has described as the 'second' democratic upsurge those changes of the last fifteen years or so that have brought to prominence a new generation of political leaders from lower-caste backgrounds and the intermediate classes who articulate popular aspirations, but who are themselves completely undemocratic in their organisational set-up as well as style of functioning (1996: 100).

The result has been that, as Khilnani puts it (1987),

of the Indian state, and the particular history of the formation of Indian democracy.

CLASS AND THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT

It is known that the Congress organization was increasingly dominated during the 1930s by prosperous proprietor castes, owning holdings between twenty-one and a hundred acres—rich peasants and smaller landlords, therefore—actual or potential class mobilizations against them having been clamped down, as we have noted; and that 'By-1949 conservative coalitions built by the dominant landowning castes in alliance with urban businessmen had captured effective control of most District and Pradesh Congress Committees' (Frankel 1978: 74). Contemporary ethnographic research, notably like that of FG. Bailey (1963), showed that individuals from amongst these dominant landowning castes came to function as mediators or brokers between the mass of rural people and the political system (given the state of 'mutual incomprehension' that I have referred to), and that they were able to deliver votes for particular candidates in elections by drawing on caste and factional loyalties, and on the material dependence of poor peasants and landless labourers upon them. The local power of rich peasants was enhanced in many parts of the country through the effects of the first phase of land reforms in the early 1950s with the abolition of the zamindari system in large parts of, in particular, northern India, which removed the upper layers of rights-holders and secured rich peasants rights to property, and their dominance was secured by the persistence of the hierarchical ideology of caste, through which they were able to claim 'legitimacy for their commands' in terms of superior ritual status' (Frankel and Rao 1989/1990: 2).¹⁰ Over time, as Frankel (1978) has shown in her detailed analysis of Indian politics through the 1950s and 1960s, these dominant rich peasants and their leaders became increasingly able to resist and manipulate the efforts of the Central government, in the time of the Nehruvian state, to bring about social and economic reform. One of the crucial events in the history of this period was

the defeat at the Nagpur Congress of 1959 of the 'Resolution on Agricultural Organisational Pattern', which had proposed radical land redistribution and agrarian reform, as a result of the criticism mounted by Charan Singh and others who represented rich peasant interests. The ability of the Central government to implement its programmes became increasingly constrained. The Central leadership was 'locked out' by local power-holders from amongst the dominant peasant proprietors, and performance came to depend increasingly on state-bureaucratic agency to bring about social transformation (Kaviraj 1988). In the 1970s, these rich peasant-kulaks matched boldly through the door of politics, as Byres memorably put it (1981), when they became more strongly represented in the Lok Sabha than ever before, in 1977, at the elections held after Indira Gandhi's Emergency. And in the 1980s the 'Farmers' Movements', of which they were the leaders, became a powerful political force.

The rich peasant/farmers thus came to constitute one of the dominant class interests in post-independence India. Another, according to the analyses of Bardhan (1984), Frankel (1978), and, more recently, Chhibber (2003), is that of the big bourgeoisie—as explained above. The 'strangling embrace' of these two dominant classes—each of them powerful, neither able to establish control over the other—left the Indian state with a significant degree of autonomy, but little capacity to discipline or exercise authority over either of them, and it was for this reason that the Indian would-be developmental state was relatively unsuccessful by comparison with those of East Asia.¹¹ As Bardhan (most influentially) and others have shown, the inability of the state to discipline the dominant classes led to the frittering away of public resources in a variety of subsidies and transfer of payments that crippled the state development project. For Bardhan, too, these two dominant proprietary classes were joined by a third, the (middle) class of white-collar workers and public-sector professionals, who were able to secure unproductive rents through their power to make demands upon the public purse and manipulate controls and regulations. What the Radicals described as the 'centrism' of Indian politics and the lack of political class cleavages is to be

explained in terms of this compromise of class power in the Indian state.

The final question to be addressed is that of the ways in which the politics of class underlie the current conjuncture of Indian politics and the 'reinvention' of India through neo-liberalism in public policy, the rise of Hindu nationalism, and the re-shaping of Indian democracy that is associated with the 'second democratic upsurge'. We shall be concerned particularly with the politics of the middle class, especially its dominant fraction.

HEGEMONIC ASPIRATIONS: NEW MIDDLE CLASS POLITICS¹²

The class structure of India during the late colonial period and the circumstances of the time, we have seen, gave the elite fraction of the middle class in India a strategic role in the creation of the new Indian state. In India, as elsewhere in the world, it has been the middle class, and not the working class, that has been of pivotal importance in determining the political outcomes of capitalist development. After Independence the middle class played a vital role in the dominant class coalition, both as a manager of the ruling bloc (as Deshpande argues) and as an important actor in its own right, articulating the developmental project of the dominant classes (the big bourgeoisie and the dominant peasantry) of the Nehruvian state around secular nationalism and state-led developmentism, and expanding its own niche in the manner that Bardhan explains). However, it was not successful in establishing hegemony, given the failure to establish a common political language, of which Kaviraj speaks so eloquently, and the inherent contradictions of development planning, which led in the end to the frustration of the aspirations of many in Indian society. Gradually, therefore, new claims arose from below, which the middle-class political elite sought to meet mainly through accommodation within the pyramidal structures of patronage of the Congress party or sometimes through exclusion. By the 1990s, however, the drift of the Congress had reached a point of crisis. The party lost power, and in the aftermath the government of V.P. Singh sought to implement the long-standing, long-neglected,

recommendations of the Mandal Report concerning the extension of reservations—partly, at least, it seems reasonable to assert, in order to consolidate its own support. Opposition to Mandal from many in the different fractions of the middle class brought them together in the embrace of Hindu nationalism, in opposition to the independence and assertiveness of the lower classes. At the same moment in modern Indian history, at the beginning of the 1990s, the economic conjuncture in the aftermath of the Gulf War provided an opportunity for influential policymakers from amongst the leading fraction of the middle class to bring about an important shift in policy towards economic liberalisation, which has been widely supported by the 'new middle class'. As Fernandes and Heller put it: 'The political project of the new middle class represents an opportune-alliance of market-oriented commercial and professional interests eager to exploit new market opportunities and socially conservative elements protecting a range of status privileges' (2006: 504). This political project, sometimes described in terms of 'elite revolts'¹³ has substantially reshaped the political economy, politics, and society of India through a distinctive combination of economic liberalism and social liberalism. Once again, the middle classes have played a strategic role.

The 'new middle class' is defined above all by its politics and 'the everyday practices' through which it reproduces its privileged position' (Fernandes and Heller 2006: 497). The unifying claims of the discourse of Hindu nationalism and the meritocratic ideas associated with economic liberalism are in fact belied by the ways in which the new middle class draws on cultural capital to create and maintain its social distinction. It is also strongly associated with what I have described as 'new politics', based in neighbourhoods rather than workplaces, and built up around local associations in civil society (Harris 2006c). Through their activities, such associations are held by middle-class activists involved in them to be diverted the 'dirty river' of the corrupt old politics' of political parties and the social movements associated with them. These arguments, however, abstract civil society from the field of class relations, whereas the

reality is that civil society is distinctly stratified in class terms. On the whole, it is a sphere of middle-class activism, outside the arena of formal politics. Such activism is one of the defining features of the middle class, which—as we have noted—has steadily withdrawn from participation in electoral politics. Members of the informal working class, on the other hand, are largely excluded from active participation in civil society organisations, so that increasing opportunities for political participation in the 'new politics' of civil society organizing may be associated with increasing political inequality. 'New politics', holding out the promise of empowerment, constitutes the governmentality of the post-liberalization state in India, but it is exclusive with regard to the lower classes of the informal proletariat (Harris 2007).

The big bourgeoisie, however, is actively supportive of middle-class activism, as for example in the city of Bangalore, where several big companies joined with leading civil society organizations in the Bangalore Agenda Task Force, pursuing the objective of creating a 'global city'. Big business and such leading civil society organizations are part of what Solomon Benjamin (2000) describes as the 'corporate economies' of Indian cities. These are the spaces of the industrial, bureaucratic, and IT-sector elites; they are plugged into higher level political circuits, and have direct links with state-level and national parastatal agencies (including finance corporations and development authorities). They operate through 'master planning' and mega-projects, which have made it possible for the capitalist class to achieve 'hegemony' in the shaping of the urban form' (as Janaki Nair [2005] puts it), that is quite unprecedented, bypassing local municipal authorities.¹⁴ In this way the corporate economy elites often ride roughshod over the right or claims of the populations of the 'local economic zones' (Kohli 1996a, and the collection edited by Stanley Kochanek 1996b, and 1974).

¹³ The definitional quotation, from Ajiaz Ahmed, appears on p. 43.

¹⁴ A text taken from Lenin's work and a series of classic studies concerning the differentiation of the peasantry can be found in Harris (1982).

all the metropolitan cities to establish modern, 'global cities', attractive to international capital.

CLASS MATTERS

The Rudolphs' argument, in their important work on India's political economy, that 'India does not have class politics', only holds in the limited sense in which they use the term 'class politics'. This is in a way that obscures in particular the central, strategic role that has been played in Indian politics by the middle classes. Their argument also neglects the ways in which class relationships continue to influence the style and functioning of Indian democracy, and India's political economy. The arguments of this chapter have shown that the marginalization of class in the study of Indian politics seriously limits analysis.

NOTES

1. Articles in a special issue of *Critical Asian Studies*, edited by Ronald Herring and Rina Agarwala, including especially the editors' introduction, and a paper by Vivek Chhibber, analyse in some detail why it is that the concept of 'class' has tended to disappear from South Asian studies. See Herring and Agarwala (2006) and Chhibber (2006).
2. For a comparable case from another society, see Newby (1977) about agricultural workers in England.
3. The work of the late Rajnarayan Chaudhavarkar on the question of the formation of working-class consciousness is outstanding (1994, 1999, and 1981, pp. 603–47). Other key sources are the works of Jan Brennan (1987, 1997, 1999), and the collection edited by Perry et al. (1999).
4. The Rudolphs argued, for instance, that 'Organisational innovation undermines the possibility of collective bargaining by a few powerful, representative unions and of a major voice for labour in national policy' (1987, p. 25).
5. Kohli refers, here, in part to the seminal work on Indian business organization by Stanley Kochanek (1996a, 1996b, and 1974).
6. The definitional quotation, from Ajiaz Ahmed, appears on p. 43.
7. A text taken from Lenin's work and a series of classic studies concerning the differentiation of the peasantry can be found in Harris (1982).
8. This statement is quoted from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Bangladesh, authored by Bouton, M. 1985. *Agrarian Radicalism in South India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

principally by Hussain Zillur Rahman in 2005, but it clearly applies more widely across South Asia.

⁹ See also Mandelsohn (1993).

¹⁰ Defining the political relations that they describe in terms of 'dominance'.

¹¹ See Corbridge and Harris (2006) for a comparative discussion.

¹² This section heading reproduces the title of the essay by Fernandes and Heller (2006) on which I have drawn extensively.

¹³ See Corbridge and Harris (2006), following observations made by Sudipta Kaviraj. The term is also used, though more cautiously, by Yogenra Yadav: 'It may be an exaggeration to say that the BJP represents the rebellion of the elite, but it is nevertheless true that its rise to political power has been accompanied by the emergence of a new social group that is defined by an overlay of social and economic privileges' (1999, cited in Fernandes and Heller 2006, p. 504).

¹⁴ As David Harvey has said with regard to the 'Neoliberal state' in general, 'The boundary between the state and corporate power has become more and more porous. What remains of representative democracy is overwhelmed, if not totally though legal corrupted by money power' (2005, p. 78).

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R. Guha - Subaltern Studies 1: Writings on South Asian History & Society
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(1982)

caste will crack and will never be a whole. (Ambedkar 2002: 102)

The opening pages of the Indian Constitution, its Preamble, envisaged a nation where the values of equality, liberty, and fraternity would be supreme. Drawn mostly from the historical experience and cultural traditions of the West, these ideas reflected a vision of liberal democracy and a modern society that were to ensure a dignified existence to each and every individual, and endow them with certain fundamental rights vis-à-vis the state and fellow citizens. They contradicted very fundamentally the spirit of caste and hierarchy as principles of social organization. The Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 38) of the Indian Constitution made it clear further by explicitly stating that

The state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of national life. (as in Siah 2002: 2)

Any form of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth was made punishable by law.

Following the practices in democratic regimes of the Western world, the Indian Constitution invested all legislative powers in certain institutions of governance, which were to be made up of elected representatives of the Indian people. Representatives to these bodies were to be chosen by strictly following the principle of universal adult franchise.

While caste was despised by the middle-class leaders of independent India, they did not simply take a moral position against this 'traditional' institution. The 'mainstream Indian political leadership recognized the 'crippling' impact that the working of the system over the centuries would have had on the subordinated sections of the Indian people, and the implications of this 'ancient' system on building a true democracy and individual citizenship. It was to address these concerns that the Indian Constitution instituted certain legal and institutional measures, albeit temporarily, to enable groups and communities of people who had been

historically disadvantaged in the given social system to participate in the game of democratic politics on equal terms (Galanter 1984).

There will be little dispute about the positive effects the Indian policies and programmes of affirmative action have had in enabling the historically deprived sections of Indian people to participate in the economic and political life of the nation. India has also been exceptionally successful in having been able to institutionalize a healthy system of democratic governance at different levels of its political system. However, while these achievements are certainly commendable, they have not meant an end of caste in the social or political life of the nation. In fact, many would argue that politically, caste is a much more active institution today than it ever was in the past, and this is largely thanks to the electoral processes and competitive politics. Though it may appear that the democratic and electoral experience has belied the hopes of the founders of the modern nation, the survival of caste, or its increased involvement with politics, is no reflection on the working of democratic politics in India, or an evidence of its failure. The available literature on electoral systems and other aspects of political life clearly points towards a process that has been described by the Indian political scientist as the deepening of democracy (see Yadav 1999; Palshikar 2004) and it is becoming more inclusive of social groups and categories of the Indian population (Jayal 2001).

How does one make sense of this apparently contradictory reality? The contemporary Indian political experience also raises questions about the manner in which the institution of caste and its

relationship with modernity and democracy have been

imagined and theorized by sociologists and social

anthropologists, an imagination that has become part

and parcel of the middle-class commonsense on the

subject of caste and its place in modern-day India.

In other words, this 'survival' of caste clearly points

to a flawed understanding of the reality of caste, and

that of the sociology of democratic politics. Thus, it

may be worth our while to begin this chapter with a critical overview of the popular and sociological/anthropological understandings of the caste system.

10 Caste and Politics

Surinder S. Jodhka

Analysing democratic political processes in terms of castes and communities has become commonplace in contemporary India. From the lay public to psychologists of the popular media and serious academic analysts, almost everyone treats caste as an important variable influencing the working of the Indian political process. Caste communities are presented as determining electoral outcomes; and they work as pressure groups and influence the governance agenda of the Indian state at the local, regional, and national levels. Caste considerations also tend to structure political parties, their leaderships, and programmes. This reality of the Indian republic.

Notwithstanding the ambivalent attitude of the early nationalist leadership on the subject of caste, and the frequent disputes that arose about its 'real' value for the social and cultural life of the Indian people during the freedom struggle,¹ the post-independence

political leadership took a clear position against giving it any legitimate place in the political organization of the new democratic nation (Kaviraj 1997; Mehta 2003: 58–9). Articulating the then 'mainstream' position on the subject among the middle-class élite of the country in his well-known book *The Discovery of India*, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, wrote in 1946:

In the context of society today, the caste system and that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework nor can there be political democracy... Between these two conceptions conflict is inherent and only one of them can survive. (p. 257)

The Chairman of India's Constituent Assembly and the first Law Minister of independent India, B.R. Ambedkar, was even more emphatic on this. He said:

You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up morality. Anything you will build on the foundations of caste

CASTE WITHOUT POLITICS: ORIENTALIST IMAGININGS AND ANTHROPOLOGY OF INDIA

As it came to be popularly understood by the early twentieth century, there was something simple and straightforward about the Indian caste system. The Orientalists and colonial administrators had worked out its ethnographic details and theories quite well. In fact, the idea of Scheduled Castes (SCs) or 'Depressed Classes' had also been worked out by the colonial rulers. According to this understanding, caste derived its legitimacy from classical Hindu scriptures. The framework of the *varna* hierarchy, as worked out so meticulously by Manu, was the beginning and the ultimate explanation of the caste system. Though the *varna* theory did not provide any specific position to the 'untouchables' in the Hindu rankings of social grouping, they could easily be accommodated at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, outside the *varna* system, by using the larger logic of the system.

More recent historical research on the subject has seriously undermined this commonsense 'about the caste system. Not only did the colonial rulers, through a process of enumeration and ethnographic surveys, raise consciousness about caste; they also produced the conditions where caste became the single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all "synthesizing" India's diverse forms of social identity, community and organization' (Dirks 2001:5). A similar point has also been made by Peter Mayer about the notion of *lajmanî* system, which, he argues, is popularly believed to be an ancient and pan-Indian reality, but in fact originated in northern India during the late nineteenth century (Mayer 1993).

The influence of colonialism and its forms of knowledge, to use Bernard Cohn's expression (Cohn 1996), was quite fundamental to the way sociology and social anthropology developed in India. The three central categories through which colonial rulers had tried to make sense of India were those of the village, caste, and religious communities. Notwithstanding its cultural and religious diversity, India for them was a land of Hinduism. Though Islam and Christianity were also practised by a

large number of Indians, these were essentially foreign religions. As is well known, Orientalist scholars identified some of the classical Brahmanical scriptures as canonical texts for understanding the Indian tradition and its past history. This ideological 'book-view' of India continued to be an important reference point and a source of knowledge about the 'natives' throughout the colonial period, and greatly influenced the nationalist understanding of Indian society (Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001; Das 2003; Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993).

Interestingly, the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology in India also began with empirically documenting the dynamics of village society and the caste system. Even while they advocated a shift away from the 'book-view' towards a 'field-view' of India, the categories through which India was to be imagined remained, more or less, the same. For example, the village typically became a convenient entry point for anthropologists interested in understanding the dynamics of Indian society (Jodhpur 1998). Similarly, sociologists and social anthropologists universally assumed that the caste system was a peculiarly Indian reality, and an aspect of Hindu religion.

Caste was not merely an institution that characterized the structure of social stratification;

up in the social hierarchy and change their class position. Such mobility at the individual level was impossible in the caste system.

Putting it in a language of social science textbooks, G.S. Ghurye (1991) identified six different features of the Hindu caste system, namely, segmental division of society; hierarchy; restrictions on feeding and social intercourse; civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections; lack of unrestricted choice of occupations; and restrictions on marriage.

Though seemingly simple and obvious, this list represented caste as a total and unitary system. Thus, it was possible to define caste and to identify its core features, which were presumably present everywhere in the subcontinent. Similarly, caste was also not merely about occupational specialization or division of labour. It encapsulated within it the features of a social structure and normative religious behaviour, and even provided a fairly comprehensive idea about the personal lives of individuals living in the Hindu caste society. Indian sociologists also pointed to the difference between varna and *jati*. While in the popular understanding there were only four varnas, the actual number of caste groups was quite large. According to one estimate, in each linguistic region there were about 200 caste groups which were further sub-divided into about 3000 smaller units each of which was endogenous and constituted the area of effective social life for the individual (Srinivas 1962: 65).

Perhaps the most influential theoretical work on

his theory was the specific relationship that existed between status and power in Hindu society. Unlike in the West, where power and status normally went together, in the caste system there was a divergence between the two. In caste society, status as a principle of social organization was superior to power. 'Status encompassed power.'

Such theorizations of caste have been further extended by works of scholars like Moffatt (1979) who emphasized upon the underlying ideological unity and cultural consensus across caste groups in its governing normative order. Srinivas's concept of sanskritization will also fit well in such a theory. Sanskritization was a

...process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice-born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community (Srinivas 1972: 6).

Such theorizations of caste were extensively criticized for their ideological bias and weak empirical groundings (see Bererman 1971; Mencher 1974; Betelle 1979; Gupta 1984). However, they have continued to be popular and influential. Why does this happen? As I have argued elsewhere (Jodhpur 2004) the idea of caste has been very deeply embedded in the modern Indian self-image, which is itself a mirror reflection of the Orientalist and colonial images of India. The Indian past is thus constructed as an unchanging tradition, and its future is imagined through an evolutionary schema where the Western society is presented as a model for imitation in the name of modernization.

In such an evolutionary imagining of India, caste is expected to disappear with the unfolding of the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Politics has no place in such an understanding of caste or processes of social change.

Even when mainstream anthropologists of this genre

talked about social inequality and untouchability, it

was rarely described as being an oppressive system,

with an agency that enforced codes of behaviour and

reproduced regimes of subordination and domination.

In such a framework, caste was also seen as being fundamentally different from class. While caste was traditional, class was to emerge with the process of secularization of occupations and industrialization/urbanization. While caste was seen as a social institution, class represented an open system of economic opportunities.

CASTE, MODERNITY, AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN 'DEVELOPING' INDIA

Notwithstanding their personal predispositions towards a liberal view of democratic politics and faith in evolutionist notions of social change, the inevitability of the Western style of modernization, or their preoccupation with categories inherited from colonial and Orientalist writings on India, social anthropologists recognized the tremendous resilience that the institution of caste was showing on the ground. Quite early on they had begun to report on the likely impact that caste could have on the working of 'modern' institutions, and in turn the implications of a new form of politics for the system of caste hierarchy. For example, some of them were quick to recognize the fact that instead of completely replacing the traditional 'descriptive structures' of caste society with an open system of social stratification based on individual choice and achievement, new modes of governance and the growing use of modern technology could in some ways strengthen caste, while weakening its structural logic.

Commenting on the nature of the change being experienced in caste with the rise of non-Brahmin movements in southern provinces, G.S. Ghurye had argued as early as 1932 that this attack on hierarchy by such mobilizations did not necessarily mean the end of caste. These mobilizations generated a new kind of collective sentiment, 'the feeling of caste solidarity', which could be 'truly described as caste patriotism' (Ghurye 1932: 192).

M.N. Srinivas developed this point further in his writings during the late 1950s. Focusing specifically on the possible consequences of modern technology and representative politics, both of which were introduced by the colonial rulers in India, he argued that far from disappearing with the process of modernization, caste was experiencing a 'horizontal consolidation'. Commenting on the impact of modern technology on caste, he wrote:

...the transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of improbable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* (in the sense we have given to this word), as a substance. (Dumont 1998: 222, emphasis in original)

These attempts at theorizing about the changing realities of caste opened up many new possibilities for looking at the dynamic relationship between caste and the democratic political process. Thus, by the 1960s, sociologists and political scientists began talking about caste and politics in a different language. Discussions shifted from a predominantly moral or normative concern with the corruption that caste had brought into the democratic political process to more empirical processes of interaction between caste and politics. The gradual institutionalization of democratic politics changed caste equations. Power shifted from one set of caste groups, the so-called ritually pure upper castes, to middle level dominant castes. Democratic politics also introduced a process of differentiation in the local levels of the power structure. As Béteille reported in his study of a village in Tamil Nadu during the late 1960s:

...a vast body of new structures of power have emerged in India since Independence. Today traditional bodies such as groups of caste elders (which are functionally diffuse) have to compete increasingly with functionally specific structures of power such as parties and statutory panchayats. (Béteille 1970: 246-7)

However, this differentiation did not mean that these new structures were free of caste. Caste soon entered in their working, but the authority of these institutions had to be reproduced differently. Though traditional sources of power continued to be relevant, introduction of universal adult franchise also made the numbers of caste communities in a given local setting critical. Power could be reproduced only through mobilizations, vertically as well as horizontally. This also gave birth to a new class of political entrepreneurs. Over the years, some of them have begun to work successfully without confining their political constituency to a single caste cluster, thus undermining the logic of caste politics (Krishna 2001).

...the transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of improbable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* (in the sense we have given to this word), as a substance. (Dumont 1998: 222, emphasis in original)

Caste Associations

While sociologists and social anthropologists talked about the horizontal consolidation¹ of castes or its substantialization into 'ethnic communities', political sociologists worked on the phenomenon and possible roles of caste associations in democratic politics. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, different parts of the subcontinent saw the emergence of 'caste associations'. While on the face of it caste associations appeared to be a typical case of Indian tradition trying to assert itself against the modernizing tendencies unleashed by colonial rule, they in fact represented a different kind of process. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph were among the first to study the phenomenon of caste associations in democratic India. They looked at caste associations as agents of modernity in a traditional society like India. They argued that caste association was

...no longer an ascriptive association in the sense in which caste was jati was and is. It has taken on features of the voluntary association. Membership in caste association is not purely ascriptive; birth in the caste is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for membership. One must also 'join through some conscious act involving various degrees of identification....' (Rudolph and Rudolph 1991[1967]: 33, emphasis in original)

Through his study of *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, Robert Hardgrave further reinforced their thesis by arguing that the caste association of Nadars worked like a pressure group, and had played an important role in the upward social mobility of the community (Hardgrave 1969). M.N. Srinivas, too, similarly argued that caste associations came up as agents of social mobility for caste communities at the time when British rulers introduced the enumeration of castes (Srinivas 1966).

A little later, Rajni Kohli also argued more or less along similar lines while writing on caste and the democratic political process in India. In the introduction to the celebrated volume, *Caste in Indian Politics* (1970) that he edited, Kohli argued against the popular notion that democratic politics was helping traditional institutions like caste to 'resuscitate and re-establish their legitimacy'. This could lead to 'disintegrative tendencies' and could potentially

'disrupt the democratic and secular framework of Indian polity'. In reality, however,

...the consequences of caste-politics interactions are just the reverse of what is usually stated. It is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is caste that gets politicised. Dialectical as might sound, it is precisely because the operation of competitive politics has down caste out of its apolitical context and given it a new status that the 'caste system' as hitherto known has eroded and has begun to disintegrate ... (Kothari 1970: 20-1)

Caste federations, he argued,

once formed on the basis of caste identities go on to acquire non-caste functions, become more flexible in organization, even begin to accept members and leaders from castes other than those with which it started, stretches out to new regions, and also makes common cause with voluntary organizations, interest groups and political parties. In course of time, the federation becomes a distinctly political group' (Kothari 1970: 21-22).

Speaking in a less enthusiastic language, Ghanshyam Shah also made a similar point. Although in the long run caste associations did promote competitive politics and participation, they also exacerbated parochialism, he argued (Shah 1975). Notwithstanding the deviation they brought into the process of democratic politics—as understood in the classical Western textbooks on democracy—caste associations did play a role in spreading the culture of democratic politics in areas that were hitherto governed exclusively by tradition. As argued by Arnold *et al.*

The caste association was a social adapter, improvised to connect two sets of social and political forms. It helped to reconcile the values of traditional society with those of new order by continuing to use caste as the basis for social organization, but at the same time introducing new objectives—education and supraregional political power... (1976: 372)

In their comparative study of caste associations in different parts of south India, they found that, interestingly, leaders of these associations did not come from the traditional caste authorities but from the most enterprising of the misfits—the western educated, the lawyer, the urban businessmen who

retired government servants. These men were few in number, but they looked back over their shoulders, hoping that the rest of their community supported them and would help the misfits to establish themselves more firmly in their non-traditional careers' (*ibid.*: 372).

Although caste associations have continued to be important actors in politics and the community life of Indian citizens, the interest of social science research in the subject declined during the ensuing decades. More important and interesting trends emerged in Indian politics during the 1980s and 1990s, which changed the matrix of the caste-politics relation, as I have discussed below. However, before we come to that, it may be useful to also point to some other factors or processes that impacted the caste-politics relation. Perhaps the most important of these was the process of development planning initiated by the Indian state during the post-Independence period. Though 'caste' was rarely treated as a relevant variable in the visualization, designing, or administration of various developmental schemes and programmes initiated by the Indian state during the post-Independence period, they did have far-reaching implications for social and political arrangements at the local and regional levels.

One of the most important developmental initiatives taken by the Indian state soon after Independence was the introduction of land reform legislations. These legislations were designed to weaken the hold of the non-cultivating intermediaries by transferring ownership rights to the tillers of the land. Even though land reform legislations were invariably subverted by locally dominant interests, they ended up weakening the hold of the traditionally powerful but numerically small groups of upper castes (Moore 1965; Frankel and Rao 1989/1990; Jaffrelot 2000; Stern 2001). In a village in Rajasthan, for example, through the 'abolition of jagirs' (intermediary rights), was far from satisfactory; it made considerable difference to the overall landownership patterns, and to the local and the regional power structures. The Rajputs, traditionally upper-caste and the erstwhile landlords, possessed far less land after the land reforms than they had done before. Most of the village land had moved into the hands of those who

were the tillers of land, from 'Shudra' caste categories (Chakravarti 1975: 97-8).

Other similar initiatives of the Indian state aimed at rural social change, such as the Community Development Programme (CDP), Panchayati Raj, and the Green Revolution, directly helped the rich and powerful in the village, who mostly belonged to the locally dominant castes groups, to further consolidate their hold over local and regional politics.

THE THIRD MOMENT OF CASTE: DALIT MOVEMENTS AND AFTER

As I have tried to show above, a large majority of those who led the freedom movement and inherited power from the colonial masters came from urban, upper-caste families. The rise of middle-level castes during the 1960s also meant a change in the political landscape of India. While in some regions the Congress party was able to accommodate the growing aspirations of these middle-level caste groups (see, for example, Weiner 1967; Manor 1989; Lele 1990), it could not do so everywhere (Jaffrelot 2003). It was in this context that regional politics began to acquire increasing significance. The socialist parties also played a role in making caste an issue in their struggle against the 'hegemonic' Congress party (Vora 2004).

The general election of 1967 is believed to have been the turning point in Indian politics. For the first time during the post-Independence period, the Congress party was defeated in as many as eight states. From then on, the flavour of regional politics changed significantly. While in some cases these agrarian castes formed their own political parties, elsewhere they emerged as powerful factions within the Congress party, invariably around a caste identity. Over the years, they were able to virtually oust the ritually upper castes from the arena of state/regional politics. Scholars working on Indian politics have documented this story quite well (see, for example, Nayar 1966; Kothari 1970; Frankel and Rao 1989/1990; Brass 1990; Hasan 1998; Kohli 2001; Vora and Palshikar 2004).

However, by the 1980s India began to witness new trends in the domain of caste politics. The introduction of separate quotas for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by the then Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, on

the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in 1990 revived the question of caste and politics, and gave a new political legitimacy to caste, normalizing it as a mode of doing politics. However, this resurgence of caste in its new *avatar*, as Srinivas (1996) famously put it, was not merely a consequence of the act of the wily politicians who, on one fine morning, decided to implement the Mandal Commission Report on reservations for OBCs in an attempt to consolidate their votes. It was also not simply a case of tradition reasserting itself due to the oft-quoted weaknesses of Indian modernity. Caste appeared in a very different mode during the 1990s. In fact, some important processes that began to unfold themselves around this time expanded the meanings of democratic politics in the country.

Castes are unequal not merely in the ritual

domain. Their inequalities are far more pervasive. In

most of mainland rural India where caste seemingly

matters more, it is also a reality that conditions social

and economic relations (Chakravarti 2001). The

political economy of Indian agriculture, for example,

has been closely tied to caste. Thus, apart from

asking questions like 'what happens to caste when it

participates in modern democratic politics' or 'what

happens to democracy when caste communities act

like vote-banks', one should also examine the question

about whose, or which caste groups, participation in

politics is being talked about.

The existing formulations on the subject of caste and democracy are mostly based on the experience of middle-level caste groups (as discussed above). It was these caste groups whom Srinivas had described as the dominant castes' (Srinivas 1959). Although some of them were at one time quite marginal to the local power structure, they were mostly above the line of pollution, and more significantly had traditionally been cultivators and landowners. When electoral politics based on the principle of universal adult franchise offered them new opportunities, they were able to politicize themselves rather easily.

Notwithstanding considerable regional differences, the first three decades after Independence saw a growing consolidation of the middle-level caste groups at the local and regional levels of Indian politics. While those at the middle levels of the traditional caste

hierarchy gained from the developmental process and democratic politics, those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy continued to experience social and political exclusion. In fact, in some regions, the rise of middle-level caste groups in state politics meant a stronger master to deal with for the Dalits at the local level. Indian society and polity witnessed several shifts during the 1980s and 1990s. These shifts have also transformed the paradigm for understanding caste-politics relationships. The growing consolidation of democratic politics at the grassroots brought about some important changes in the grammar of Indian politics. Political scientists described this as a shift from the 'politics of ideology' to the 'politics of representation' (Yadav 1999; Palshikar 2004).

This shift was clearly reflected in the nature of social and political mobilizations that appeared during the 1980s. These 'new social movements' questioned the wisdom of the developmental agenda being pursued with much enthusiasm by the postcolonial state in India. The following decade saw the beginning of liberalization policies and a gradual withdrawal of the state from the sphere of economy, and eventually a disenchantment with the Nehruvian framework of development and social change (see Jodhka 2001).

Coupled with the changes in the geopolitics of the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the unleashing of new technologies of telecommunications, this period also saw the beginning of a new phase in the reach of global capital. This process of 'globalization', as it came to be known, was not confined to the economy alone. It also influenced culture and politics everywhere, and opened up new possibilities for social action and networking. It was around this time that new political questions like environment, gender, and human rights came up almost simultaneously in different parts of the world. Networking across national boundaries gave them a different kind of legitimacy and strength. For example, the movement against the construction of the dam across the Narmada river invested considerable amount of energy in mobilizing internal public opinion and global funding agencies against the project. Similarly, the question of human rights violations is watched and commented upon by global agencies. The question of gender rights is articulated

more or less similarly at the global level, and women's organizations working in India actively network with their counterparts in other parts of the world.

It was in this new context that the question of caste and politics began to be articulated in the language of identity politics by Dalit groups in different parts of the country. A common identity of the SCs or ex-untouchable communities was that of a constructed, modern identity' (Kaviraj 1997: 9) which was mobilized by a new leadership that arose from within the Dalit groups, and used the language of equality and democratic representation.

The questions of caste oppression and untouchability were first raised from below during the freedom movement by people like Jyotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Dalit groups also launched movements for dignity and development during the first half of the twentieth century (Juergensmeyer 1982; Omvedt 1994). The British colonial rulers also introduced some special provisions for the welfare of the 'depressed classes'. Following the initiatives of colonial rulers, independent India also institutionalized some special provisions for the SCs to enable them to participate in the democratic political process, and share the benefits of development through reservations or quotas in jobs and educational institutions.

Until the 1980s, the Dalit question had remained subsumed within the nationalist agenda for development. In electoral politics, too, the SC communities were mostly aligned with the 'mainstream' political formation, the Congress party. The question of autonomous Dalit politics and identity was confined to only a few pockets, in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, or Andhra Pradesh and was largely a concern of urbanized individuals who articulated the question of Dalit identity through literature and other cultural forms (Mendelsohn and Vizevary 2000).

However, over the years the size of the Dalit middle class grew, thanks largely to the policy of reservations

at large. They began to form separate associations of SC employees, and mobilized themselves during events of discrimination suffered by their caste fellows (Mendelsohn and Vizevary 2000). It was around this time that Ambedkar was rediscovered as a universal icon of Dalit identity and a symbol of their aspirations (Zelliot 2001).

These new developments in the larger ideological and social environment were happening at a time when rural India was experiencing disintegration in its traditional social and power arrangements. The ritually 'pure' dominant castes who had gained from the institutionalization of democratic politics and rural development programmes initiated by the Government of India during the first three decades of independence also began to experience internal differentiation. Those in the upper segments of the rural economy began to look towards cities for further mobility (Jodhka 2006) and those at the bottom began to question their subordination. Continued experience of participation in the democratic political process over three or four decades also gave those at the bottom a sense of self-worth.

As discussed above, even though traditionally upper castes were politically marginalized with the introduction of universal adult franchise after Independence, it did not lead to a democratization of rural society. In caste terms, rural power revolved around the landowning dominant caste and in class terms, it was the rich landowners and moneylenders who continued to control the rural economy (Thorner 1956; Jodhka 2003). Independent studies by scholars from different regions tended to suggest that panchayats too became an arena of influence and power for the already dominant groups in rural India (Frankel and Rac 1989/1990).

However, more recent studies have pointed to

a process of loosening of the traditional structures of power/domination. On the basis of his work in Rapasthan, Oliver Mendelsohn, for example, argued that while Srinivas was right in talking about 'dominant caste' during 1950, such a formulation made less sense in present-day rural India. The 'low caste and even untouchable' villagers were now less beholden to their economic and ritual superiors than was suggested in older accounts' (Mendelsohn 1993: 808). Similarly,

'land and authority had been de-linked in village India and this amounted to an historic, if non-revolutionary transformation' (ibid. 807).

Writing on the basis of his field experience in Karnataka, Karanth argued that the traditional association of caste with occupation was weakening, and that jajmani ties were fast disintegrating (Karanth 1996). In an extensive survey of fifty-one villages of Punjab, I too found a similar change taking place in rural Punjab, where the older structure of jajmani or *balutedari* relations had nearly completely disintegrated (Jodhka 2002). As was also argued earlier by Karanth in the case of Karnataka, with the exception of a few occupations, no longer was there any association between castes and occupation in rural Punjab. Further, Dalits in Punjab had also begun distancing themselves from the village economy, and disliked working in farms owned by local Jats. They were also trying to construct their own cultural centres like religious shrines and community halls in order to establish their autonomy in the rural power structure. In the emerging scenario, local Dalits have begun to assert for equal rights and a share of the resources that belonged commonly to the village, and had so far been in the exclusive control of the locally dominant caste groups or individual households.

This new-found sense of entitlement and assertion among Dalit communities was directly responsible for the frequent caste-related conflicts and violence being reported from rural Punjab (Jodhka and Louis 2003). A study from rural Bihar also reported a similar erosion of traditional jajmani ties. Here, too, the village community's hold over the individuals' choice of occupation was virtually absent (Sahay 2004). It is in this changed context of a combination of factors that one has to locate the new agency among Dalits. The new class of political entrepreneurs that has emerged from amongst the ex-untouchable communities used the idea of 'Dalit identity' and mobilized the SC communities as a united block on the promise of development with dignity. Some of them, such as Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, have been quite successful in doing so (Shah 2002; Pai 2002).

However, the point that emerges from the 'third

moment of caste' is that caste collectivities do not participate as equals, even in modern democratic

politics. Historical experience shows that different caste groups participate in democratic politics with different sets of resources. While it has become quite difficult for locally dominant groups to prohibit the traditionally marginalized caste communities from participating in the political process, this has not meant an end of social inequalities or caste and rank. Being a Dalit, or in some cases OBC, continues to be a marker of disadvantage and social exclusion. Notwithstanding the rise of autonomous Dalit politics and their substantial empowerment in some contexts/pockets of the country, the realities of caste in terms of power and dominance have not disappeared. Even when ideologically caste has weakened considerably and older forms of untouchability are receding e.g. atrocities committed on Dalits by the locally dominant castes have in fact increased (Bettelle 2000; Shah 2000). The fact that caste violence is almost always a one-way process where Dalits end up at the receiving end also says enough about the continued inequalities of caste groups. It is in this context that any analysis of caste and politics should always begin with the question: whose caste and politics are we talking about?

CASTE AND FUTURE OF CASTE POLITICS

Social science discourse on the subject of caste and democracy has indeed been able to go beyond the rather simplistic notions of modernity and democracy that guided the visions of the nationalist leadership at the time of India's Independence from colonial rule. Looking back, we can now understand that their over-enthusiastic faith in the project of modernity and change, and the belief that all relations active in Indian society could be erased and entirely new ones written down through a heroic, comprehensive legislative act' (Kaviraj 2000: 98) had its origin in the then prevalent flat functionalist and evolutionary notion of democracy. As has been convincingly argued by social scientists over the last three decades or so, even the ideas of tradition and modernity are of little value when presented as dichotomous categories. They tend to de-historicize the experience of change. Norwithstanding its pan-Indian character, caste relations had divergent structures and regional

specificities. As I have tried to show elsewhere (see Jodhika 2004), even ideologically they were not completely identical. More important for us is to recognize the fact that participation in the political process does not mean the same thing for everyone. Caste, after all, is not a monolithic unit, a single static identity. As the social scientific writings on caste and politics discussed above show, caste and democratic politics can coexist and support each other, while also changing the assumed essential logic of the two. As Sudipta Kaviraj, writing in a slightly different context, argued, caste groups instead of crumbling with historical embarrassment, in fact, adapted themselves surprisingly well to the demands of the parliamentary politics. Their participation in electoral politics also transformed 'the structural properties of caste in one fundamental respect: it created a democracy of castes in place of a hierarchy' (Kaviraj 2000: 103). In competitive electoral politics, what mattered for a political party was the number of votes a given caste group had, and the extent of its spatial concentration. Thus, in the Indian case 'democratic equality' the experience of participating in electoral politics, 'has mainly been translated as equality between caste groups, not among caste-less individuals' (ibid.: 109, emphasis added).

While it is true that in electoral politics the number of votes a particular caste group has matters much more than its ritual status in the 'traditional' hierarchy, such arguments need to be qualified. Do caste groups vote en bloc for a specific party or a candidate? How are cross-caste alliances worked out, making them viable for the electoral process? How do the processes of internal differentiation within caste categories—along caste, sub-caste, and class lines— influence voting behaviour and electoral outcomes? What could be the future of caste in democratic politics?

While popular interest in elections has grown,

about the complex relationship of caste with electoral politics. The electoral victory of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh in 2007 also pointed to the role of the political leadership, and their ability to build viable cross-caste alliances.

According to some commentators, it is the leaders and media experts who present/analyse electoral politics in caste terms, and make caste appear to be the single determining sociological variable in electoral politics. While the BSP is popularly seen as a political party of the Dalits and is led by a Dalit woman, in its electoral mobilizations 'it did not pay too much attention to caste arithmetic and it did very well by imaginatively bringing a coalition of interest between different groups' (Gupta 2007: 3388).

More importantly, however, such alliances, of caste-based political parties or caste communities, inevitably also end up introducing an element of fluidity in the electoral process. Apart from creating an ambiguity regarding the political strength of a particular caste group, such alliances increase the role of individual political entrepreneurs. While in the short run such a process could give the impression of a heightened sense of caste identity, in the long run it is bound to erode the logic of caste politics. At the social and economic levels, too, caste groups are undergoing processes of internal differentiation and dispersion through migration. Such processes are bound to fragment and weaken caste identity and the sentiment of caste solidarity. In other words, the future of caste in politics is anything but bright.

NOTES

1. For a useful exposition of contestations on the subject of caste among the Indian social reformers during the colonial period, and later among the leaders of the nationalist freedom movement, see Bayly (1999).
2. See, for example, the surveys carried out by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi (<http://1/www.lokniti.org>).

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11 Gender and Politics

Amrita Basu

address gender inequality and to honour their pre-election commitments?

A second set of issues concerns the relationship between women's leadership and their exercise of power. A significant number of women have occupied leadership positions in India at the state and national levels. What impact have they had on women's participation in party politics during their tenure in office? What are the systemic and structural obstacles to their effectiveness?

A third issue concerns the relationships between political parties and social movements in which women have been active. While some movements have deliberately refrained from allying with political parties, others have worked closely with them. Some movements have feared that a close relationship with political parties might lead to their co-optation and deradicalization, while others have seen parties as vital to advancing women's political interests. What are the costs and benefits of each strategy? How successfully have women's movements strengthened parties' commitments to gender equality?

Parties have also allied with ethnic/religious movements, many of which have mobilized extensively among women. The intersection of party and movement-based mobilization has acquired unprecedented significance amidst the growth of ethnic and religious politics. Examples include the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). These parties have not only viewed women as vote banks, but also made them figureheads and spokespersons for their parties, and often very militant ones at that. They have involved women in activities that break with their traditional gender roles. And yet they have generally not offered women lasting institutional power, nor rights that would increase their autonomy from their families. What explains the ability of these movements to appeal to women while undermining their interests? What implications has this had for these parties' representation of women's interests?

The place of women in Indian politics reflects the opportunities and constraints that are associated with its democracy. Women have been key actors in the numerous social movements and non-governmental organizations that underlie India's vibrant civil society. India's most influential, if controversial, Prime Minister was Indira Gandhi, and her daughter-in-Law Sonia Gandhi, is the major force within the Congress party today. India's President is Pratibha Patil, and several state leaders have been women, including Mayawati, who served four times as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Over a million women are represented in the three-tiered panchayats. Moreover, with the growth of a multi-party system since the early 1990s, political parties have increasingly sought women's electoral support. And yet most women continue to lack effective political power in parties and the state. Women's access to power is still mediated by their relationship to male kin, and is often indirect and symbolic. Parties have done little to provide women access to the networks and resources that would enable them to ascend the ranks of party hierarchies.

party, BJP, and Communist Party (Marxist) [CPM], have all approached women's issues in very different ways. As a right-of-centre confessional party, the BJP has mobilized women around Hindu nationalist themes, but has interspersed these with displays of its secular commitments. As a Left-leaning secular party, the CPM has mobilized poor women around questions of poverty and redistribution. As a centrist party with historically secular, socialist leanings, Congress has claimed women's support through its commitment to minority rights and secularism. However, these parties' ideologies have not determined their positions on gender inequality. The Congress party has sacrificed and the BJP has asserted commitments to secular law and a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), in both cases on grounds of electoral expediency. All three parties have been most successful in organizing women when they have allied with social movement organizations, whether in the form of women's movements or religious organizations.

The anti-colonial movement in India entailed extensive women's mobilization, followed by substantial institutional gains. Many scholars have commented upon women's varied and extensive roles: from participation in 'terrorist' groups to non-violent civil disobedience, and from the activism of the urban middle classes to that of the rural poor. The aftermath of Independence witnessed the drafting of a Constitution which protected women from discrimination, and directed the state to work towards gender equality. Women achieved the right to vote without much of a struggle, and became active in large numbers in public and professional arenas. Most strikingly, the number of South Asian women in leadership positions is to a significant extent the result of women's involvement in nationalist movements.

For women's rights activists, the major failure of

the Congress party resulted from its ambivalent stance towards secularism. When Congress tried to pass the Hindu Code Bill providing equal rights to men and women within the family, in 1944, it encountered deep-rooted opposition from conservative religious groups, which viewed secular law as undermining religious and patriarchal authority. The Bill Congress passed in the mid-1950s was deeply compromised by concessions to this opposition. Its secular commitments further

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTIES

In keeping with their core ideological commitments, the three major political parties, that is, the Congress

declined in the mid-1980s around the infamous Shah Bano issue. An elderly Muslim woman sought maintenance from her husband under the Indian Penal Code. When a judge ruled in her favour, the orthodox Muslim community vigorously opposed his decision, and then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi placated them by passing the so-called Muslim Women's Protection of Rights in Divorce Act in 1986, which denied Muslim women the right to demand maintenance from their husbands beyond a three-month period. To the extent that women's rights were inextricably linked to the secular democratic framework, a growing chasm developed between the Congress Party and the women's movement.

The undivided Communist Party and, after its split in 1964, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the CPI(M), had strong women's organizations that mobilized women. However, until the early 1980s, these organizations were unequivocal in subordinating gender to class inequality. The growth of the autonomous women's movement, followed by the growth of the religious right, led some Communist activists to raise questions of gender inequality more forcefully. The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), which was affiliated with the CPI, became more active in 1981, the CPI formed the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). Unlike its predecessors, AIDWA accepted members who were not affiliated to the CPI(M), collaborated actively with autonomous women's groups, and addressed violence against women.

Women have also played extremely important roles in Hindu nationalism. First, they are among the movement's most extraordinary orators. In its most militant phase in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vijayraje Scindia, Uma Bharati, and Sadhvi Rithambara were at the forefront of the movement. Indeed, according to a PUDR report, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara were in Ayodhya in December 1992, goading mobs to destroy the mosque. Their voices on cassettes that the government banned were filled with vicious anti-Muslim propaganda and injunctions to violence. This association of women and violence is not confined to the leadership level. Thousands of ordinary women have been associated with violent Hindu

nationalist campaigns. The Durga Vahini, the women's organization affiliated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, the women's wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), train women to use rifles and wield *lathis*. According to a PUDR report these women's organizations have played an important role in the many riots that have taken place since the early 1990s. They have directed Hindu mobs towards Muslim localities, prevented the police from aiding Muslim families, and engaged in post-riot looting of homes and shops. In Gujarat in 2002, Hindu women's organizations either failed to prevent the violence, or participated in it.

In contrast to the VHP and RSS, the BJP has presented itself as an advocate of secularism, democracy, and women's rights. It has taken a strong stand in favour of the UCC, which would extend the same rights to men and women regardless of their religious backgrounds. It has expressed a commitment to reservations for women in Parliament. It has condemned sexual violence and supported the creation of more employment opportunities for women.

Indeed, there are striking similarities between the 2004 election platforms (see Table 11.1) of the BJP and the Congress party. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) manifesto promised to unveil a National Policy on Women's Economic Empowerment, which would ensure means of livelihood for all women and increase the incomes of all working women. It committed itself to a national childcare plan, workplace flexibility, greater career opportunities, and hostels for working women in every town, and the removal of gender disparities in education, wages, and property rights. It promised to promote female self-employment and entrepreneurship. It pledged to enforce laws against female foeticide, dowry, child marriage, trafficking, rape, and family violence. It guaranteed introducing a Bill to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in the Parliament and state legislatures in the first session of Parliament.

The Congress party manifesto was similar. It also proposed 33 per cent reservations for women in the Parliament, legislation curbing dowry, raising the age of marriage, and improving widows' conditions. It supported the creation of micro-credit schemes

and producer cooperatives. In addition, it devoted more attention than the BJP to decentralization through the panchayats and to complete legal equality for women. This includes giving women an equal share in matrimonial property and equal rights of ownership over assets. Although the Congress manifesto devoted more attention to women than the NDA manifesto, the BJP would have supported all of its provisions in principle.

Not all of the BJP's positions or actions on women's issues are conservative. This lack of consistency is also evident in the BJP itself. Although the BJP closely aligned itself with the VHP on the temple issue in the early 1990s, it has not articulated a position on questions that many fundamentalists consider vital in developing a coherent worldview: how to govern the economy, reform the legal system, and create a religious state.

The BJP's relatively liberal positions on women's rights are in part a product of electoral exigencies. Particularly during the early period of its ascent in the 1980s, BJP was especially keen to distinguish itself from the Congress party. Its support for the UCC in the 1990s was in part a response to Rajiv Gandhi's handling of the Shah Bano issue. It signalled that unlike Congress, which was swayed by religious fundamentalists, the BJP was committed to secularism. Expediency has also meant that the positions the BJP women's organization assumes are often inconsistent. It is difficult to identify a single one of the vital issues

before the women's movement—dowry, sati, female foeticide—on which the BJP Mahila Morcha holds a unified position. Like all political parties, it also makes certain promises that it does not keep. For example, it did not implement reservations for women, which it pledged to do at election time.

The contradictions between the BJP's various positions are best explained by its combined party and movement identities. As a political party, the BJP is guided by an electoral logic that has entailed extending its base from upper-caste, upper-class men to include women and lower-caste groups. However, through its connection with the RSS and the VHP, the BJP also seeks legitimacy on the basis of a militant movement identity. The BJP-affiliated women's organization, the Mahila Morcha, is responsible for electoral campaigns, whereas the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, which is affiliated with the RSS, and the Durga Vahini, which is affiliated with the VHP, refrain from direct involvement in party politics. Their work entails educating girls and women in the principles of Hindu nationalism.

ELECTIONS

Women's voting rates increased from 37 per cent in 1952 to a high of 63 per cent in 1984; they fell to 47 per cent in 1991 (Kumari and Kidwai 1998: 2).

However,

women are under-represented in Parliament

(Fig. 11.1), and in higher level decision-making bodies. The representation of women in Parliament

Table 11.7: Major Party Election Results

	1991			1995			1998			1999			2004			% SEATS
	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	SEATS	%	
Congress	37.3	225	29	143	25.4	140	28.4	112	26.6	149	148	112	26.9	149	148	48.3
BJP & Allies	19.9	119	24	193	36.2	250	41.3	296	35.9	189	189	189	37.9	189	189	26
Janata	10.8	55	joined with UF	joined with UF	1	joined with UF	1	joined with UF	1	joined with UF	1	joined with UF	1	joined with UF	1	joined with UF
United Front	-	31	180	20.9	98	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	262
Communist ^a	-	48	joined with UF	joined with UF	5.4	32	7.0	53	5.4	32	7.0	53	5.4	32	7.0	20
Others																24
																23
																73
																134

Sources:

India Today, 15 July 1991, 16 March 1998; *Economic Times* website, *economictimes.indiatimes.com*; and *The Hindu*, 20 May 2004

Notes:

^aThe more relevant figures in 2004 for Congress and allies were 35.82 and 219, respectively

^bIncludes both the CPM and the CPI

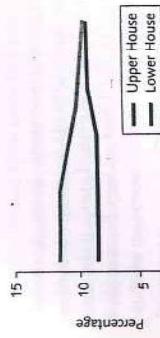


Figure 11.1: Women in Parliament

Source: Women in Parliaments World Classification. <http://www.ipu.org/wmnrc/classif/300908.htm>.
(45 women) in 2004.

Political parties' record in nominating women to run for political office is very poor. As Tables 11.2 and 11.3 demonstrate, the number of women candidates that political parties have nominated to run for office was low throughout the 1980s and the 1990s when the women's movement was extremely active. With the decline of the Congress and the growth of the BJP, a major party realignment was underway. The percentage of women candidates from all parties was 4.5 per cent in 1984, and increased in the intervening elections to 7.6 per cent in 1999. The proportion of female

candidates who were elected, 8.9 per cent in 1999, was hardly greater than that in 1984, at 8.2 per cent. The data in Tables 11.2, 11.3, and 11.4 highlight the extent to which women's under-representation in political office results from party biases, for women are much more likely to be elected than men. In 1999, women constituted 7.6 per cent of all candidates, and 23.3 per cent of all candidates who were elected. Women were thus three times more likely than men to be elected. Similarly, in the preceding elections in 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, and 1998, women were two or three times as likely as men to be elected. The relatively small number of women in political office is thus more a reflection of biases on the part of parties than that of the electorate. It may be that parties only ran women in elections they considered winnable. If they felt that the electorate was less likely to vote for a woman, all else being equal, it made sense to run women in seats where victory was more likely. That 61.8 per cent of women candidates were elected in 1984 fits with this explanation.

In 1999, 7.6 per cent of all candidates and 8.9 per cent of all elected candidates were women. The second and third columns from the right make it clear that women are somewhat more likely to be elected than men, but this gap is decreasing over time (most likely because parties are running women in less safe constituencies; see Table 11.2).

Both Congress and the BJP claim to be strong advocates of reserving a third of the seats in

Table 11.3: Proportion of All Candidates and Elected Candidates of All Political Parties

ELECTION YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATES ELECTED	NO. OF WOMEN CANDIDATES	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED	PERCENTAGE OF ALL ELECTED CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN		PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF ALL ELECTED CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)
				ALL	INDEPENDENTS				
1984	224	2	0.9	0.9	0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
1989	225	85	10	5	0	37.8	4.4	50.0	5.9
1991	477	120	26	8	0	25.2	5.5	30.8	6.7
1996	471	161	27	4	0	34.2	5.7	51.9	8.7
1998	388	182	32	15	0	46.9	8.2	46.9	8.2
1999	339	182	25	15	0	53.7	7.4	60.0	8.2
2004	364	138	30	10	0	8.2	37.9	33	7.2

Table 11.4: The BJP

ELECTION YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATES ELECTED	NO. OF WOMEN CANDIDATES	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN		PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)
				ALL	INDEPENDENTS				
1984	49	40	82	0	0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1989	510	197	38.6	11.0	15	37.8	4.4	50.0	5.9
1991	502	244	48	21	21	48.6	9.6	43.8	8.6
1996	529	140	49	16	16	26.5	9.3	32.7	11.4
1998	477	141	38	10	0	29.6	8.0	26.3	7.1
1999	485	114	51	14	14	25.2	11.3	27.5	12.3
2004	417	145	45	12	12	10.8	7.8	26.7	8.3

Table 11.5: The Congress Party

ELECTION YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATES ELECTED	NO. OF WOMEN CANDIDATES	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN		PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES WHO WERE WOMEN (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ELECTED (EXCLUDING ALL INDEPENDENTS)
				ALL	INDEPENDENTS				
1984	49	40	82	0	0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1989	510	197	38.6	11.0	15	37.8	4.4	50.0	5.9
1991	502	244	48	21	21	48.6	9.6	43.8	8.6
1996	529	140	49	16	16	26.5	9.3	32.7	11.4
1998	477	141	38	10	0	29.6	8.0	26.3	7.1
1999	485	114	51	14	14	25.2	11.3	27.5	12.3
2004	417	145	45	12	12	10.8	7.8	26.7	8.3

Source: For 2004 data: 'Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha', Election Commission of India, accessed online: <http://ecil.nic.in>.

In Statistical Report ICS 2004/vol/L52004.pdf, Allo Rana (2006).

Parliament for women. 'We want to field more women candidates but there are few of them,' BJP President Venkaiah Naidu claimed (Singh 2003). However, the data does not bear out Naidu's contention that women do not win elections. As Table 11.4 shows, the BJP's record of nominating women to run for elections has been unimpressive. Women formed only 5.7 per cent of its candidates in 1996, 8.2 per cent in 1998, and 7.4 per cent in 1999. Women, however, were much more likely than men to be elected. The percentage of women candidates who were elected was 51.9 per cent in 1996, 45.9 per cent in 1998, and 60 per cent in 1999. The most likely explanation for the greater success of BJP women is that Congress was more willing to run female candidates in contests where the party was not confident of winning.

Compared to the BJP, the Congress party (Table 11.5) has fielded more women candidates and their performance has been less impressive. The percentage of Congress candidates who were women was 7.9 per cent in 1984, and then hovered between 9–11 per cent between 1989 and 1999. The Congress party nominated more women than the BJP in every election. However, a larger proportion of women candidates were elected from the BJP than from the Congress. Between a quarter and a half of all female Congress party candidates were elected, compared to 52–60 per cent of BJP women candidates. Since the Congress nominated a larger number of female candidates than the BJP, the total number of women Members of Parliament (MPs) is not strikingly different for the BJP and the Congress. However, this figure masks the significantly different rates of electoral success among women from the two parties.

For the 2004 elections, women constituted 3541 out of 5435 contestants. Party nominations of women for political office were consistent with previous years. Women formed 8.24 per cent (39 out of 334) of BJP candidates, 10.79 (45 of 372) of Congress candidates, and 11.59 per cent (eight out of 61) of CPM candidates.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The major phases of social movement activism in the post-Independence period preceded and then followed

Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of national Emergency (1975–7). A wide range of movements emerged, opposing deforestation, the violation of tribal land rights, the mistreatment of slum dwellers, and the oppression of the lower castes. Women and questions of gender inequality were at the forefront of these movements. During this same period, numerous urban feminist organizations were formed autonomously from political parties. They included the Samata Manch (Equality Forum), Stree Sangharsh Samiti (Women's Struggle Committee), Stree Mukti Sangathan (Women's Freedom Organization), Feminist Network Collective, Street Shakti Sangathan (Women's Power Organization), Purogami Sangathan (Forward Stepping Organization), the Forum against Oppression of Women, Saheli, the Progressive Organization of Women, the Women's centre, Kali for Women, and Manushi. Their primary concerns included violence against women, as manifest in 'dowry deaths'; the rape of women by the police and security forces; and domestic violence.

Urban feminist groups were fiercely committed to retaining their autonomy from political parties to prevent the lure of resources, influence, and power from blunting their radicalism. While largely retaining their autonomy from parties and staying out of the electoral domain, they worked closely with the courts and the bureaucracy. The grassroots movements with which women were closely associated were those of the poorest and most marginal groups (tribals, the landless poor, slum dwellers, subsistence agriculturists), which generally had little electoral clout and no electoral aspirations. The urban feminist movement was primarily drawn to non-electoral issues like violence against women.

Correspondingly, the most important gains that women achieved were in the courts and the bureaucracy, not in the electoral arena. The government appointed women to some key posts and created the National Commission on the Status of Women to investigate women's conditions and make recommendations. Struggles that got lodged in the courts often remained there for a long time, legal battles diverted women's attention from grassroots struggles, and the focus on rights was associated with the narrow construction of women's interests and identities (Menon 2000). Nonetheless, these battles

provided women with arenas within the state in which they could seek redress.

By contrast, both grassroots movements and the feminist movement put less effort into electoral politics and had less of an impact on it. Unlike a range of other social movements, the women's movement played a relatively small role in the two crucial elections that removed the Congress party from power (in 1977 and 1986). In 1977, the Gandhian Socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan organized the movement for total democracy that ultimately brought about the downfall of the Congress and the election of the Janata party. A decade later, VP Singh resigned from the Congress and formed the Jan Morcha (Peoples' Front), an avowedly 'non-political' movement which brought new groups into politics and helped bring the National Front to power in 1989. It was during this period that the women's movement began to interact more closely with political parties and the state. In 1996, women's organizations met and formed the National Alliance of Women, which lobbied political parties to allocate more tickets for women to contest the parliamentary elections, and demanded that parties and the Parliament unconditionally implement 33 per cent reservation of seats for women. Its other demands included: 33–50 per cent allocation of seats at all levels in decision-making bodies, from the panchayats to the Lok Sabha, for women; the public declaration of assets of political candidates; right to recall elected members; and the right to information that affects all people.

The past two decades have witnessed a confluence of two trends: on the one hand attempts by political parties to foster closer ties to social movements and non-governmental organizations, and on the other, the attempt by some feminists to work with parties and the state. As one scholar argues, women cannot easily give up on the state because it will not give up on women (Randall 1998: 204). The attempt to achieve greater power within the state may represent both a positive response to the state's invitation and a defensive attempt to safeguard the gains women have achieved. Many activists have expressed frustration that the protest tactics they had pursued for so long had not yielded better results.

The most important instance of collaboration between women's organizations and the state has

occurred around the issue of reservations for women in local government. Women's representation on the three-tiered panchayats in the rural areas provides an important case study of both the modest gains and serious constraints that surround women's increased representation in local governing bodies. They also suggest the different costs and benefits to women of a strategy that relies on the state, as opposed to one that relies on political parties.

The enactment of the Constitutional Amendments (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth) providing 33 per cent reservation for women to the three tiers of local self-government (*panchayati raj* system) represented a milestone in the process of decentralization. The Seventy-third Amendment Act made the *gram sabha* (village assembly), comprising all adult villagers, the focal point of village governance. The amendments contain provisions for the reservation of 33 per cent of elective seats for women in the village, block, and district councils (Seventy-third Amendment) and an equal number in the urban municipal councils (Seventy-fourth Amendment). As a result, an estimated five million women entered local politics directly or indirectly in the last ten years. India's population consists of 1.5 per cent Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 7.5 per cent Scheduled Tribes (STs). Consequently, 22.5 per cent of seats are reserved for them, out of which one-third are for women. The reservation of seats in each state is proportional to their population. The reservation of seats for women, SCs, and STs applies also to office bearers, so that one-third of *sarpanches* (heads of panchayats) must be women.

As regards urban local bodies, the Seventy-fourth

Amendment now provides three types of institutions

of urban self-government with one-third reservation

of seats for women. These are, first, *nagar* (town)

panchayats for areas that have both rural and urban

features. Second, for smaller urban settlements,

provision is made for municipal councils, and third,

for larger urban areas, municipal corporations.

Municipalities with large areas contain wards (section

of the village). The first elections for the three tiers of urban local bodies were held in most states in 1994–5.

While women's role in the village councils has been well researched, there is a dearth of material on the female elected representatives of the local urban bodies.

The state panchayat laws do not provide for a formal involvement of political parties in elections to village panchayats, except in the three states of Kerala, Tripura, and West Bengal. It is often difficult for women to win panchayat elections without support from a political party. However, most parties are disinterested in panchayat elections at the local level. The TDP in Andhra Pradesh, BJP, and the Janata Dal (JD) prefer party involvement in elections to higher-level panchayats. The CPM is the exception to this rule, for it has been actively involved in panchayat elections at the local level in Kerala and West Bengal. The record of most political parties in supporting women candidates for panchayat elections has been poor. Women's participation in the panchayats is constrained by a dearth of financial resources, the lack of independent staffing, and reliance on an uncooperative bureaucracy. The key functionaries, namely the secretaries, are state government employees, and they often fail to appear at panchayat meetings, so that meetings must be postponed. There are innumerable occasions when women sarpanches have to visit the panchayat samiti office to get schemes implemented and encounter condescension by the bureaucracy. Bureaucratic regulation and surveillance undermines the authority of women sarpanches.

The Constitutional Amendment Act (Article 243 G) is vague about the extent to which the state can usurp the panchayats' power. Reluctant to abdicate their power, legislators at the national and state levels have suspended the functioning of panchayats and exercised vigilance control over them. Despite the constitutional provisions mandating elections at all levels of the panchayats every five years (Article 233 B), elections to the panchayat are erratic.

A major impediment to women's effective

exercise of power in the panchayats is the growing violence, harassment, and corruption that pervade

the political process. Violence and killings, especially against Dalit women, have been on the rise. Sukhiya Bai, a tribal woman sarpanch from the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh, was harassed to such an extent

that she committed suicide by pouring kerosene over herself on 11 February 2003 (Panchayati Raj [PR] update, March 2003). Young Suman Mahajan Karkale, a Dalit woman sarpanch from the Nanded

district of Maharashtra, was faced with character assassination and intimidation to prevent her from carrying out her functions. Despite her representation to the CEO of Nanded division, she has not received any redress (PR update, August 2002). Men from her village physically attacked S. Ponni, a female panchayat member from Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu because she questioned the panchayat President (Tambiah 2002).

To what extent have women panchayat members acquired a sustained commitment to political participation? A longitudinal study in two districts in Haryana and one district in Rajasthan showed that in the two elections of 1994 and 2000, the overall percentage of women who won the elections was less than 33 per cent. In the second round, only 30 per cent of the earlier number re-contested the polls in the de-reserved seats (given the rotation of constituencies). Nearly all the women said that the de-reservation of seats was a major reason for their not contesting the elections again. They feared that in unreserved seats, money, muscle power, and the vested interests of the liquor and drug mafia would all work against them. The small numbers of women who did contest elections in reserved or partially reserved seats for caste constituencies demonstrated increased confidence, and were ready to take on elections to the state legislative assemblies (Kaushik 2004).

There are nationwide studies of the impact of the panchayat reforms on women. Most of the available data examines the local and to some extent the state level and the mixed results across states in part reflect the different cultural and political environments of these states. These studies suggest that the most promising aspect of panchayat reforms is that women have acquired resources and the development of skills, which have enabled them to excel in managing development. They have been able to articulate their priorities for basic needs and amenities such as food, drinking water, schools, healthcare centres, roads, and security. Two detailed village surveys carried out in two districts, Birbhum in West Bengal and Udaipur in Rajasthan, found that women invest more than men in projects that meet community needs, which are for water and roads in West Bengal and water in Rajasthan (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). In West Bengal, the panchayats are authorized to establish informal education centres. In Rajasthan, while the panchayats can spend money on local infrastructure, they cannot run schools as in West Bengal.

In rural Punjab, over 4500 women heading 2446 panchayats have a common minimum programme: to work for the uplift of weaker sections of society, adult literacy, pensions for the aged and the poor, better education and healthcare facilities, and the development of their villages in their five-year term (Grassroots Sept. 2003). Another success story is the Belandur gram panchayat in Karnataka, where six out of twelve members are women. It is estimated that collections of local taxes have risen more than seven times. With the devolution of responsibility to the panchayats, the cost of the delivery of government services has gone down significantly, and a system of transparency and accountability has developed.

Women panchayat members have also taken up questions of gender inequality in many places. In UP, 100 village leaders have banned the practice of giving or demanding dowry (Grassroots Sept. 2003). In Aksa district in Maharashtra, an all-women panchayat had the only liquor shop of the village closed down as it was resulting in the men of the village returning home drunk and beating their wives. In Himachal Pradesh in the Kherian Gram Panchayat of Kangra, a woman sarpanch put an end to the practice of female foeticide by imposing a penalty of Rs 500 on anyone guilty of the practice. Other panchayats have followed suit.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, awarded a woman sarpanch in Janjuna taluk in district Sehore the 'Outstanding Woman Panchayat Leader Award' for 2003. Her other achievements included providing women with land rights, distributing land to ninety-five couples under a housing scheme, and ensuring that the documents were in the woman's name. In Orissa, the Narayapur gram panchayat under the leadership of its sarpanch Rajeshwari Rao passed a resolution banning child marriage. Even families who had performed child marriages before the ban was put in place were not spared—the adults responsible were required to pay a fine of Rs 1000, to be used for the children's education. Those who attend a child marriage

ceremony or support it in any way were rendered ineligible for any post in the panchayat (PR update July 2000).

If there has been resistance to women's representation in the panchayats at the local level, there has been much greater resistance to reservations for women at the national level. There has been a great deal of debate within both the women's movement and political parties about the desirability of reservations for women in the legislative assembly and Parliament. The urban feminist movement largely supports reservations, while political parties have been ambivalent. However, the former does not hold uniform positions on the form the Bill should take and the strength of feminists does not rival the influence of political parties.

Three successive governments, dating back to 1996, have supported the Eighty-first Amendment Bill guaranteeing at least 33 per cent reserved seats for women in Parliament and the legislative assembly. However, although most political parties have endorsed the Bill in their election manifestos, they have not supported its passage in Parliament. It was defeated in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2000, when a range of parties expressed either ambivalence or opposition to it. As a compromise measure, the then Home Minister, L.K. Advani, supported the Chief Election Commissioner's proposal to require all political parties to reserve 33 per cent of seats for women contestants. Critics fear that political parties will nominate women in unwinnable constituencies. As we have seen, thus far parties' records in nominating women contestants have been poor. Women constitute only 10–12 per cent of the membership of political parties (Rai 1997: 105). The Congress-led national government has committed itself to the passage of the Bill, which was debated in the upper house of Parliament in 2008; however, many parties remain opposed to its passage.

There has been far more resistance offered to state- and national-level reservations for women by political parties than by the broad public. A survey by India Today indicates that 75 per cent of women and 79 per cent men favour the active participation of women in politics, and 75 per cent of both men and women favour reservations in legislative bodies (cited in Rai and Sharma 2000: 159). Interestingly,

many parties have opposed the Bill on the grounds that it does not take account of caste inequality. The Janata Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal (Jalal Prasad Yadav), Samajvadi Janata Party, and Bahujan Samaj Party have all opposed the Bill, because it makes no provision for reservations on a caste basis for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The women's movement largely supports the Bill. Vasanth and Kalpana Kannabiran, two prominent activists, argue that it is important to look beyond the actions of the elites who have supported the Eighty-first Amendment:

...at a deeper level, the reason why this negligible group is able to speak out so loud and clear is because masses of underprivileged women have a far more important political presence than ever runs and refuses to be contained by the vote bank politics of mainstream parties. (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1997: 197)

Opposition to the Eighty-first Amendment Bill
from some segments of the women's movement partly reflects a distrust of political parties. One worry is that quotas could form a ceiling rather than a minimum; another is that women candidates might be pitiable because of their dependence on male party leaders (Kishwar 1996: 2867–74). An even more significant worry is that reservations treat women like a homogeneous group, which increases the likelihood of the 'biwi (wife) brigade' of educated, upper-class, upper-caste women being elected, particularly because the Bill does not provide for sub-quotas of OBCs (Menon 2000; Raman 1995).

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Women who have been elected to Parliament without the support of an organized constituency have been few in number, and relatively ineffective in challenging gender inequality. The representation of women in Parliament has not increased much from the 4.7 per cent (or 22 women) in the first Parliament (1952–7). The largest number ever was the 8.1 per cent (44 women) who were elected in the 1984 elections. Forty-nine women were elected to Parliament between 1991 and 1996 (5.2 per cent). Women occupied 4.1 per cent of the 22 per cent of parliamentary seats that

were reserved for SCs. Two women MPs were from the STs; most of them were upper caste. Women MPs are disproportionately educated and affluent compared to the general female population.

The power of women MPs is generally very limited. They are expected to strictly adhere to party policy with respect to women, and none of them have placed questions concerning gender inequality high on their agendas. Although they have regular contact with women's wings of political parties and with the party leadership on issues regarding the family, they do not have much to do with autonomous women's organizations.

The women's movement has even fewer links with women who command political power. Consider the roles of some women who have emerged as power brokers within Indian politics today. They include the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, who was positioned to become Prime Minister in 2004; Jayaram Jayalalitha, who heads the regionally based AIADMK and is the former Chief Minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu; Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi; Vasundhara Raje, former Chief Minister of Rajasthan; Uma Bharti, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Mamata Banerjee, the head of the Trinamul Congress party of West Bengal; Mayawati, four times Chief Minister of UP; and Rabri Devi, the former Chief Minister of Bihar. Three of these women, Gandhi, Jayalalitha, and Mayawati, were directly responsible for the downfall of Bharatiya Janata Party governments. Following the 2003 Assembly elections, which brought five women Chief Ministers to power (Dikshit, Raje, Bharati, Jayalalitha, and Rabri Devi), women governed over half the country.

All these women, with the possible exceptions of Mayawati and Uma Bharati, rose to power as appendages to men rather than through movements or institutional channels. Rabri Devi only emerged from her role as housewife and mother of nine children when her husband was imprisoned, and she replaced him as the Chief Minister of Bihar. Sheila Dikshit rode to power on the coat-tails of her powerful father-in-law, Uma Shankar Dikshit. Vasundhara Raje Scindia is the daughter of Vijayraje Scindia and is of royal lineage; Jayalalitha was the mistress of actor-turned-politician M.G. Ramachandran, whom she succeeded as Chief

Minister of Tamil Nadu. Sonia Gandhi is the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the daughter-in-law of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi's popularity precipitated a backlash against her. The BJP engaged in a vicious smear campaign that directed attention to her foreign origins, leading Sonia Gandhi to withdraw her candidacy for prime ministership, though she remains a major force behind the scenes. These women have demonstrated extraordinary ambition and skill in acquiring the power they have achieved. Nonetheless, women experience more constraints than men in gaining political power.

Thus, while India's women leaders may be important symbols of the nation, in the absence of support from organized movements they have not become powerful in their own right. In such a scenario, their connections to male family members assume paramount importance. Nor do these women share common values, ideas, or agendas. Their role in bringing down governments may be as close as they will ever come to collaborating. Their deepest commitments are to their parties and to themselves, not to the collective interests of women.

And yet, there is also enormous opportunity in a possible alliance between the women's movement, as it seeks out a national presence and a role in the state, and the small number of party women who are staking out independent positions. It is precisely such an alliance that is needed to address the problem that Gail Omvedt identifies when she describes the women's movement as anti-political (Omvedt 1993: 310). There is no question that the farmers' movement and caste-based, ethnic, and religious nationalist movements have all had a much bigger impact than the women's movement on electoral politics. The question of how to engage in elections selectively and creatively poses an important challenge for the women's movement.

As a general matter, the stronger the democratic institutions and practices, the greater the opportunities this affords individual women to achieve representation, and women's movements to work with the party system. High levels of women's activism in democratic settings is an index of the strength of both political parties and women's movements, which have often pressured political parties to increase women's representation and address gender inequality. Many

feminist demands assume the existence of a democratic framework that includes an independent judiciary, an accountable state, and a representative Parliament.

Unlike most nations in South Asia, and indeed in the postcolonial world, India has enjoyed a long history of strong, legitimate institutions, numerous and varied political parties, and regular open elections. This has enabled a strong women's movement to emerge and endure without incurring state repression. The women's movement has played a critical role in bringing questions of gender inequality before the courts, bureaucracy and, increasingly, political parties. With the growth of a multi-party system and the rise of the BJP, the women's movement has sought alliances with Left and democratic parties. Conversely, women have also become an increasingly important constituency for political parties.

However, if, from feminists' perspective, democracy is part of the solution, it is also part of the problem. First, the alliance between certain civil society groups and political parties has also led parties to co-opt the demands of autonomous women's groups. The willingness of the BJP to take up the UCC has led the women's movement to drop the demand. Moreover, civil society not only gives rise to feminist and human rights movements, but also to chauvinist ethnic and religious nationalist movements, which have strong ties to parties. Thus democratization may paradoxically be linked to the growth of anti-democratic movements, which effectively mobilize women without advancing their interests. This is one of the critical challenges that women's movements must confront in the years to come.

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12 Regionalism and Secessionism

Sanjib Baruah

Not all states are hardwired to respond to secessionist demands the same way. Were the majority of Quebecois to vote to secede from Canada, the split would probably occur peacefully. A break-up would be bitter for sure, but it is hard to imagine Canadian tanks rumbling through the streets of Montreal trying to prevent this outcome. China, on the other hand, is likely to react differently: regions aspiring to nationhood there routinely face the full might of the Chinese state. Indeed, China does not rule out the use of force even in the case of Taiwan—a separate country, though not universally recognized. From its perspective, the wishes of the people of Taiwan are quite immaterial (Bert 2004).

Secession—that is, when regions seek separate nationhood—has been aptly called a 'state-shattering form of self-determination' (Wohlfarth and Felgenhauer 2002: 251). In order to explain the difference in attitudes among states towards secession, Wayne Bert points to a distinction made by Richard Rosecrance between traditional states 'anchored in the 19th century and focused on territory sovereignty, material production, nationalist rhetoric and national defence' and virtual states that are 'based on mobile capital, labour and information, or a "negotiating entity" that depends as much on economic access abroad as on economic control at home.' However, while Canada may not be a 'traditional state', it can hardly be called a 'virtual state'. Bert brings in Kenneth Waltz's notion of the 'perilous lives' of weak states to explain Chinese attitudes (Bert 2004: 122–3, 129). However, the 'weakness' reflected in Chinese attitudes towards secession is very particular. A classification that might deal better with the difference is perhaps Robert Cooper's categories: 'postmodern' states that perceive no security threats in the traditional sense, 'traditional' modern' states that 'behave as states always have, following Machiavellian principles and *raison d'état*', and the failed states in the 'premodern' zone (Cooper 2002: 12–15). None of these taxonomies are satisfactory. Yet the need for such distinctions suggests that a convincing explanation must take the national identities of states seriously, and that 'they cannot be stipulated deductively. They must be investigated empirically in concrete historical settings.'

(Katzenstein 1996: 24). Chinese insecurity vis-à-vis claims to nationhood by regions can be understood only through a historical understanding of Chinese state identity. With the century of national humiliation being the 'master narrative of modern Chinese history', the notion of reclaiming and reifying lost 'sacred territory' as a means to 'cleansing national humiliation' (Callahan 2004: 205; 212) is central to the identity of the Chinese state.

Indian attitudes are closer to the Chinese, and not to the Canadians. In the history of postcolonial India, a number of regional or ethnonational movements have turned into armed independentist¹ movements. Confrontations between security forces and militant regionalists have been deadly. Civilians have paid a heavy price, accounting for serious blots in India's human rights record. Yet, India has also been relatively successful in taming independentist aspirations. The best-known success story is the Dravidian movement of the 1960s. The contrast with Sri Lanka, as Linz *et al.* (2007) point out, is striking. If Tamil separatism in India became a non-issue by the 1970s, in Sri Lanka, from a non-issue it became one of the world's most violent and intractable conflicts. India's success is explained this way:

Virtually all the strategic decisions facing multinational India, the rejection of a unitary state, the acceptance of multiple but complementary political identities, the upgrading of regional languages and the maintenance of English as a link language, the maintenance of polity-wide careers, the constitutional espousal of 'equal distance and respect' for all religions, and the creation of mutually beneficial alliances between polity-wide and regional parties, India, unlike Sri Lanka, made choices and alliances, especially in South India, that increased the chances of peaceful democracy in a potentially conflictual setting. (Linz *et al.* 2007: 93–4)

Regional—or self-determination—movements in India are said to have followed an inverse 'U' curve. Heightened mobilization of group identities are followed by negotiations and eventually such movements decline 'as exhaustion sets in, some leaders are repressed, others are co-opted, and a modicum of genuine power sharing and mutual accommodation between the movement and the central state authorities is reached'. Whether

particular regional movements have gone through this inverse 'U' curve has been a function of the level of institutionalization of the authority of the state, and whether leaders have been secure enough to seek accommodation and compromise. The different trajectories of the Tamil, Sikh, and Kashmiri movements—the first being accommodated, and the latter two turning into violent confrontations between the state and militant regionalists—is the result of changes in the level of institutionalization of the Indian state, and the sense of security of leaders at the helm (Kohli 1997: 326–9).

Whether a government is democratic or authoritarian does not determine attitudes towards secession. Democratic India and authoritarian China both reject plebiscite as an instrument to decide the claims of regions to nationhood. Their positions vis-à-vis such claims are based on legal and historical arguments, and not on the wishes of the people living in the region. Thus, if China were to take a turn towards democracy, it is unlikely that attitudes towards its restive regions would change. If anything, politicians uncertain of popular support might be more inclined to pursue an aggressively nationalist agenda, and view all regional claims as threats to national unity. But in the case of Canada, since its political discourse acknowledges 'the remedial theory of secession', the policy might find it easier to accept the Independence of Quebec (Bett 2004: 118–19).²

International factors are important in determining the success or failure of a region's claims to nationhood. Successful secessions do not occur only because regional movements, with aspirations for independence, gain strength and emerge victorious. Changes in the international environment play a decisive role. In South Asia, this became apparent in 1971 when India intervened in Bangladesh's liberation struggle and ensured its success. Changes in the international institutional environment have in recent years made available attractive alternatives to state-shattering forms of self-determination. The political space for regions in the European Union and paradiplomacy—international activities on the part of regions and stateless nations—has taken the wind out of some long-standing demands for nationhood. There are a number of regional 'embassies' in Brussels

engaged in lobbying the European Commission and networking with each other. For regions such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, Scotland, or the Tyrol, this form of international recognition compensates for the relatively marginal status within the nation-states in which they are located. Even in the case of China, Hong Kong's two-systems-one-country model hardly fits the standard conception of indivisible sovereignty, and its potential success might have implications for Tibet and Taiwan as well (Pei 2002: 332). A solution to the Kashmir crisis might also ultimately lie in thinking outside the box of absolute and indivisible national sovereignty.

The rest of this chapter will have four sections. I will first present a constructivist view of regions and argue that like nations, regions are contested constructs. Second, I will look at how the postcolonial Indian state has tried to stabilize regional identities through three waves of reorganizing states. Third, I will look at the implications of the growing influence of regional parties in India's national politics. The fourth section has a few reflections on the tensions between the nation and the region in South Asia.

REGIONS AND NATIONS: CONTESTED CONSTRUCTS

Neither regions nor nations are self-evident and pre-political realities on the ground. Regionalism and aspirations of regions to independent statehood can be located in the process that some geographers describe as the territorialization of political life; it never becomes fully accomplished once and for all, but remains a precarious and deeply contentious outcome of historically specific state and non-state projects (Jones and MacLeod 2004: 447). Regions are 'relatively permeable, socially constructed, politically mediated and actively performed "institutional accomplishments"' (Philo and Parr, cited in Jones and MacLeod 2004: 434). Defined in this manner, one would hardly expect a sharp dividing line between regions and nations—they are both territorializing projects, and sometimes there may exist tension between the two.

'The retrospectively constructed official nationalisms of India and Pakistan,' writes historian

¹Independentist here refers to the demand for autonomy or independence from the central state.

²Bett (2004: 118–19) notes that the Canadian case is instructive for India, as the former has a much longer history of regionalism than the latter.

Ayesha Jalal, 'have sought to ignore, if not altogether delegitimate, the multiple alternative strands of popular nationalism and communitarianism that lost out in the final battle for state power' (Jalal 2001: 74). Indeed, the foundational myths of India and Pakistan deliberately obscure the fact that these two national projects developed in explicit opposition to alternative regional imaginings. The fate of Punjabis or Punjabi regional identity under the pressures of the politics of the Partition of 1947 illustrates the tension. Western Punjab today is the core of Pakistan, providing a sharp counterpart to any conception of Punjabi identity founded on regionalism' (Singh 2006: 17). Muslims constituted more than half the total population of pre-Partition Punjab, but today they rarely represent themselves through the idiom of *Punjabiyat*. Instead, they identify themselves as Pakistanis and as speakers of Urdu—Pakistan's national language. Punjabi Hindus too deserted the cause of *Punjabiyat* (Jodhka 2006: 13). They mostly identify as Hindi speakers, and are on the forefront of Indian nationalism—both in its secular and Hindu variants. Thus in north India, religion, not language, has been the primary line of cleavage, though political elites 'seeking to advance the interests of their religious communities' have made language into a 'symbolic barrier', even when it was not really a barrier to communication (Bresser 1974: 22, 27). So in a diminished post-Partition Punjab, it was left to the Sikhs to carry on the mantle of *Punjabiyat*. Indian attitudes towards Punjabi regionalism cannot be separated from the historically constituted identity of the postcolonial Indian state. This is even more the case with Indian attitudes towards Kashmari regionalism.

Students of regionalism in postcolonial India cannot entirely exclude from their consideration the two Partitions in the subcontinent: the contested process of imagining and constructing two, and subsequently three, nation-states. The resistance to cross-border regions, as well as the erasure of the historical memories of some of these regions from the public discourse of the post-Partition states, and the facts of the continuous movement of people, goods, and ideas through the porous post-Partition borders, are part of the politics of regionalism in

the post-Partition subcontinent. So are the regional conflicts within each post-Partition nation-state, as well as the efforts to create new intra-state regions, the phenomenon of regional parties, and tensions between the region and the nation.¹

The uneasy relationship between region and nation is nicely illustrated through the political history of India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh (UP). In the years immediately following the Partition and Independence, when there was considerable fear of further fragmentation, UP became a counterpoint to the idea of linguistic states, and was constructed as postcolonial India's 'heartland'. Apparently Jawaharlal Nehru believed that there was less 'provincialism' in UP than in any other part of the country. There was an effort to use the Hindi-speaking states of northern India as a buffer to contain the linguistic principle as the basis for statehood' (Kudaisya 2006: 22, 381). Ironically, representing itself as India's heartland has not been rewarding for UP. Due to this self-image, says Ganesh Kudaisya, UP 'has failed to develop a regional identity of its own; its public life has been marked by a lack of cohesiveness; and the state's successive political leadership has failed to develop a regional agenda'. Kudaisya believes that it is time for UP to rethink its status as India's heartland. He favours breaking up UP into regions. The separation of Uttarakhand from UP in 2000 is, for him, a step in the right direction (*ibid.*: 411–14).

In discussions of Indian politics, the terms 'region' and 'regional' are sometimes used quite loosely. Thus, a regional party can be any political party with a 'regional' political presence, that is, a party that contests and wins elections in only one or two states. However, not all such parties have regional agendas. Parties like the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) of Assam, the Akali Dal of Punjab, the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, the Takiy Desam of Andhra Pradesh, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and its various offshoots in Tamil Nadu have regional agendas, or at least they did at some point in their political careers. But the small Marxist parties of West Bengal do not. The Shiv Sena in Maharashtra may have started from a regional platform. However, today, while its electoral profile may be regional, its ideology is indistinguishable from a pan-Indian party of the Hindu

right. But while it is important to find a more precise way of defining terms like 'region' and 'regional', this essay takes a constructivist view. Regions cannot be defined objectively.

It may be useful to distinguish *regional spaces* and *spaces of regionalism* (Jones and MacLeod 2004: 435). A good example of a regional space may be the category northeast India, which points to little more than directional location. Following Peter Sahlins' insight, it can be said that this official identification has not 'stuck' as vernacular practice (Sahlins 2003). Therefore northeast India is a regional space, but not a space of regionalism. When state identifications do not 'stick', insurgent spaces of regionalism can thrive in civil society (Jones and MacLeod 2004: 441–2). This has been made abundantly clear in northeast India. For the state is not the only actor in the territorialization of political life. Regional projects often originate in society and in order to 'stick', state identifications have to resonate in society. But states have an interest in stabilizing territorial identifications, and such a territorialization of political life can be the foundation for a federal polity capable of generating legitimate policy outcomes. On the other hand, state attempts at stabilizing territorial identification are always open to challenges (Sahlins 2003).

Regions are political projects and contested constructions, even when they appear to be pre-political and almost 'natural'. For instance, as a territory inhabited by the Telugu speaking people Andhra has a history stretching back more than a millennium, although Andhra Pradesh, as a state of the Indian Union, goes back only to 1953, with significant new areas added in 1956 (Talbot 2001: 4). As far back as the early centuries of the second millennium, 'regional societies' in the Deccan had 'matured and became more self-confident', and regional languages such as Telugu began performing roles that were earlier reserved for Sanskrit. Thus, 'well before the modern age' language was important in Indian conception of culture, region, and community' (*ibid.*: 7–9). Many other regions in India—not always language-based—have similar long histories. Manipur, for instance, claims that theirs is one of the oldest instances of state formation in Asia. The Chaitanya Kumbhabha, or the royal chronicle, lists a

continuous lineage of kings that supposedly goes as far back as the year AD 33.

However, antiquity does not explain why some regional identities are more resilient than others. Benedict Anderson's lament about nations celebrating 'their hoainess but not their astonishing youth' (*Anderson 1986: 659*) applies to regions as well. The medieval Telugu linguistic region bore little resemblance to the bounded enumerable community of modern Telugu speakers. Linguistic ties of the medieval era did not have the focus and intensity of modern linguistic nationalisms' (Talbot 2001: 9). The connection between language and regional or national identity is quite contingent. In the Tamil case, it was the particular discursive practices around the theme of love and devotion for the Tamil language that enabled Tamil speakers to imagine themselves as 'a singular community and a potential nation unto themselves'. Thus, when the intensity of 'language devotion' led a young devotee to burn himself alive in 1964, says Sunithi Ramaswamy, it was a case of ideology transforming 'its speakers, who ought to have been masters of the language, into its subjects, a critical reversal of the patrimonial imagination it inherited from European modernity' (Ramaswamy 1997: 243–4, 256).

The historical factors that animate particular regionalisms are contingent, though not the conditions that made regional and national imaginings the global norm (Anderson 1983; Gelner 1983). Once the history of 'language devotion' had engendered the Tamil regional narrative with powerful notions of community and homeland, it became possible for Tamil regionalism to take an independent turn in the 1950s and early 1960s. But subsequently the demand for a separate Dravidian Nadu became more moderate, and eventually the theme of independence disappeared altogether. Tamil speakers acquired a state of their own and regional political parties—offshoots of the Dravidian movement—have continuously formed the state government in Tamil Nadu since 1967. Hence the frequent reference to the Tamil case, as evidence of India's ability to contain regionalism (*see Linz et al. 2007: 50–106; Kohli 1997*).

The territorialization of political life involves state

powerful of regional narratives can be contested. This would not come as a surprise to most contemporary students of identity, who subscribe to the constructivist position that identities are 'ultimately fluid, chosen, instrumentalizable, responsive to change in relevant incentive structures, and susceptible to manipulation by cultural or political entrepreneurs' (Lustick et al. 2004: 213). Nor would changes in the saliency of particular regional identities surprise those who take a more objectivist view of ethno-cultural landscapes. Rather than hierarchical or parallel, the predominant pattern of ethnic groups' relations in India has been described as one of segmentation. Within 'languages, tribal, or religious groups', there are supposedly 'parallel ethnic structures' with 'internal hierarchical ethnic group relations' and a complete societal division of labour'. There are thus 'ethnic groups within ethnic groups' in India (Brass 1974: 11–12).³

As I will elaborate in the next section, the Indian Constitution makes breaking up and creating new states relatively easy. While this might have allowed the accommodation of regionalism in some cases, it also provides incentives for political projects built around alternative regional narratives. It makes exit options available to regions within regions. Thus, even in ancient Telegu country, the demand for a separate Telengana has been recently revived. Other examples of contested regional narratives include that of the Bodos in Assam. While the Bodos appear to have settled for a compromise—in the form of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council—the Bodoland narrative fundamentally challenges the ethnic Assamese construction of Assam (see Baruah 1999: 173–98). Meiteis and the Nagas have diametrically opposite views about Manipur's past, present, and future. Contested regional narratives are a persistent theme in the political conflicts of northeast India today.

Contested constructions of regions also produce

¹ However, antiquity does not explain why some regional identities are more resilient than others. Benedict Anderson's lament about nations celebrating 'their hoainess but not their astonishing youth' (*Anderson 1986: 659*) applies to regions as well. The medieval Telugu linguistic region bore little resemblance to the bounded enumerable community of modern Telugu speakers. Linguistic ties of the medieval era did not have the focus and intensity of modern linguistic nationalisms' (Talbot 2001: 9). The connection between language and regional or national identity is quite contingent. In the Tamil case, it was the particular discursive practices around the theme of love and devotion for the Tamil language that enabled Tamil speakers to imagine themselves as 'a singular community and a potential nation unto themselves'. Thus, when the intensity of 'language devotion' led a young devotee to burn himself alive in 1964, says Sunithi Ramaswamy, it was a case of ideology transforming 'its speakers, who ought to have been masters of the language, into its subjects, a critical reversal of the patrimonial imagination it inherited from European modernity' (Ramaswamy 1997: 243–4, 256).

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³ The territorialization of political life involves state as well as non-state actors, and thus even the most

what subsequently became Maharashtra. The Naga demand for Nagaland—greater Nagaland—can also be seen as the irredentist face of the contested nature of regions, though it also marks the rejection by Nagas of the unilateral determination of the boundaries of Nagaland, without taking into account the wishes of the people.

STABILIZING REGIONS AS A STATE PROJECT

During the early years after Independence—following the Partition and the merger of what were ‘native states’ during British colonial rule—India’s provinces and their boundaries seemed incoherent. There was an unmistakably provisional quality to those borders. The provinces were classified into Parts A, B, and C states: colonial era provinces, former ‘native states’ or groups of ‘native states’, and a third mixed category of smaller territories. It was generally expected that these units would be reorganized. During India’s anti-colonial resistance, the Indian National Congress had committed itself to a postcolonial political order of linguistically defined regions. As far back as 1922, it began organizing the branches of the movement not along the colonial structure of presidencies and provinces, but along language lines. In 1928 a committee headed by Motilal Nehru outlined a vision of a future polity organized into linguistic states. But after Independence, the Congress rejected linguistic reorganization despite its previous commitment to it. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the post-Independence Congress party was initially unwilling ‘to bring these identities into the decision-making process at the center and politicise them’ (Adeney 2002: 25) fearing that it might threaten the unity of the fledgling new nation. However, the Constituent Assembly had left the task of reorganizing state boundaries to future Parliaments, giving it unlimited powers to take on the task. Eventually, pushed by powerful political pressures from below, Nehru reversed his position on linguistic reorganization because of electoral considerations.

Alfred Stepan’s *Arguing Comparative Politics*

puts Indian federalism in a very different context

from the older literature on comparative federalism.

Distinguishing between ‘holding together’ and ‘coming together’ federations, he argues that US-style ‘deconsolidating’ federalism is unsuitable for a robustly politically multinational country like India. Requirements of supermajorities—the support of two-thirds of state legislatures for constitutional amendments—make the United States an extreme outlier on the deconsolidating end of federations, and far from the norm (Stepan 2001: 315–61). Stepan showers praise on Article 3 of the Indian Constitution, which allows Parliament to create new states and redraw state boundaries with a simple majority, barely consulting the relevant state. This is unthinkable in a ‘coming together’ federation, which must be ‘deconsolidating’ in order to protect state rights. Stepan has a highly positive assessment of the way India’s political classes have used the Constitution’s deconsolidating feature. He marvels at the ‘relatively consensual manner’ in which ‘most of the boundaries of the states in India were redrawn between 1956 and 1966, and later a process of creating new tribal states in the North-east was begun.’ The deconsolidating features of Indian federalism, Stepan believes, explain ‘the survival of India as the world’s largest multi-cultural, multi-national democracy.’ This feature has ‘allowed the majority at the center, to respond to minority demands from states for greater linguistic and cultural autonomy’. Had India been a unitary state, ‘neither the majority, nor the minorities, would have had this constitutional flexibility available to them’ (ibid.: 354).

By the 1960s, it appears that a few discernible rules, albeit not formally articulated, had emerged in the Indian Central government’s approach to regional demands. Such demands had to first, stop short of secession; second, groups making demands had to be linguistically or culturally defined—and not defined by religion; third, be backed by popular support; and fourth, be acceptable to linguistic minorities when it is a matter of breaking up a multilingual state (Brass 1974: 18–19). However, there were exceptions; and in any case these rules were not applied to the two later waves of reorganization. The special regional dispensation of small and financially dependent states in northeast India, for instance, was the product of a national

security-driven policy process in a border region inhabited by many minority groups (Baruah 1999: 91–115). The considerations were also very different when the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand were created in 2000. While the demands were old, the interests of political parties in the highly competitive political environment of the period pushed the process. According to one scholar, the fact that no transborder regional community was invoked and that there were no perceived national security threats facilitated the process. Ethnic communities in the three new states, writes Maya Chadda, ‘were unconnected with foreign enemies or cross border nationalities, unlike in Punjab, Kashmir, and Assam.’ To her, this latest wave of states reorganization illustrates the value of the flexibility that the Constitution gives to the Parliament. The Constitution, she points out approvingly, said little about the kind of federal units the Indian Union was to have, or the basis on which they would be created, i.e., geography, demography, administrative convenience, language, or culture. That decision was left entirely to the wisdom of Parliament (Chadda 2002: 46–7).

The argument for a holding together federation being deconsolidating is based on the idea of reconciling diversity with policymaking efficacy (Stepan 2001: 338–9). However, efficacy can sometimes be in conflict with legitimacy. The idea of divided sovereignty and citizens with dual allegiance—to the national and regional political communities—is central to the federal vision of a legitimate political order. Federalism, as a political principle understood as an aggregate of politically organized territories (Piccone and Ullman 1994: 5) is arguably the opposite of the nation-state. In that sense federation building, and not nation building, is the appropriate project for India (Baruah 1999: 200–13). The relative success of the first wave of states reorganization in India was because it was built on the principles of the ‘security for territorially concentrated linguistic groups’, and dual, but complementary, allegiances. However, later reorganizations, including the belated recognition of a Punjabi state, were not based on the same principles (Adeney 2003: 57–8).

A Panjabī Punjab was not acknowledged till 1966,

when Haryana was separated from Punjab, because the demand came from a religiously defined—and not a language-based—group. Arguably, the decisions and non-decisions of India’s central political elites, made possible by the deconsolidating features of Indian federalism, account also for some of most serious regional challenges that India has faced. The persistent political turmoil in northeast India provides another example. The national security-driven process of making and breaking states has reinforced the idea of *de facto* ethnic homelands, in the imaginations of both local activists and tacticians of conflict management, perpetuating a politics of violent displacement and ethnic cleansing (Baruah 2005: 183–208).

REGIONALIZATION OF NATIONAL POLITICS?

The so-called regionalization of Indian politics—which refers to the increasing role of regional parties in national politics—has often confused outside observers. The phenomenon is often miscast as a force tending towards the disintegration of the Indian Union. But in India, regional parties are not even all regionalist in the sense of representing demands for cultural autonomy or grievances against the central state. Many of them are no more than ‘merely personality-driven offshoots of parties that were once nominally national in scope’ (Jenkins 2000: 62–3).

Yet, whatever their agendas, regional parties increasingly share the same political space as polity-wide parties. They are electoral allies of polity-wide parties, and not only do they form governments at the state level, they also participate in coalition governments at the Centre. India has come a long way since the period immediately following Independence, when regionalism was viewed as a challenge to national unity. But while politics in India may have made its peace with regionalism, its implications in terms of public policy and the health of the polity are far from clear.

While many of India’s current crop of regionalist politicians are not secessionists, they do not have a coherent view of Indian identity: ‘They view the economy as a cluster of regional units each engaged in zero-sum relations with one another, and with the

Centre' in matters of culture they are 'prochaoil—devoted to tending their own vernacular gardens' (Khilnani 2004: 26). This is hardly a satisfactory situation. Under these conditions, it is easy to see why in Indian politics the label 'regional' says so little about policy preferences. Few would argue that regional issues have moved up on the national policy agenda because of the growing influence of regional parties. Regional parties have formed state governments, while participating in coalition governments at the Centre during India's economic reforms. Yet they have rarely questioned the economic agenda of the Central government, even though many states may have faced a fiscal crisis as a result of those policies. Instead, regional parties prefer getting financial deals for their states, in exchange for political support to the government in New Delhi (Sridhar 2004). Indeed, the most significant impact of the Congress party's fall from dominance in 1989 has been not on economic policy, but on the politics of patronage. In the period of Congress dominance, voting for a regional party may have jeopardized Central government allocations for roads or schools. But voters no longer have to make this trade-off. Even by voting for 'parties espousing an aggressive regional, ethnic, or linguistic agenda' they stand 'a reasonable chance of that party gaining access to discretionary expenditures' (Rodden and Wilkinson 2004).

The logic of a 'patronage-democracy' (Chandra 2004: 258) explains this paradox. Basic public goods, such as the security of life and property, access to education and public health, and a minimum standard of living, have become market goods rather than entitlements. Elections are 'auctions for the sale of government services.' Individual politicians are more important in patronage politics than the political party or party ideology, because groups of supporters are beholden to them. A collective allocation of resources through policy might be credited to a party or its leadership, but credit for goods delivered through patronage goes to individual politicians. They use patronage to develop their power base, which in turn gives them leverage in negotiations with political parties for positions within the party and the government (*ibid.*). This also explains the phenomenon of dynastic politics—a son, a daughter,

or a spouse following a parent or a spouse as a Member of Parliament or a state legislature. The dynamics of a patronage democracy are apparent during election campaigns. The allocation of tickets by political parties—especially by resourceful polity-wide parties—is the most intense part of an election campaign. Parties dispense resources to fight elections, and being a candidate of a winning party means access to governmental patronage resources, and even direct control of such resources through ministerial positions. Individual politicians may generally prefer contesting as candidates of polity-wide parties because they control more resources compared to regional parties, given their countrywide fund-raising abilities. Considerations of electability, and ties to personalistic networks that connect the party 'grassroots' to the Centre shape the selection of party candidates.

Parties realize that in order to win, they have to be tuned in to local realities, and when possible, even understand the nuances of regional issues. Under these conditions, a polity-wide party may sometimes decide not to go it alone, and instead form an electoral alliance with a regional party. In the 1990s, politicians in Assam in their political rhetoric sought to blur the distinction between polity-wide and regional parties. The AGP tried to present itself as a 'regional party with a national outlook. But the local Congress party leader responded by saying that while the Congress may be a national party, it has 'a regional' outlook' (Prabhakara 2004). While the AGP, with its roots in a social movement, was trying to improve its access to institutional channels and widen its appeal as an electoral party, the Congress was not willing to be an inert player either. It understood the challenge presented by the electoral appeal of its regional competitor, and tried to adjust its political rhetoric accordingly. Indeed, when regionalism is successfully mobilized, the logic of India's patronage democracy can even turn polity-wide and regional parties into natural allies, with little consequence for public policy.

that is now part of mainstream Indian politics, or from claims of regions to nationhood. But trust and understanding between citizens is a necessary condition for making policies using universalistic criteria. Trust, in this context, is the willingness to wait: certain regions or groups can be helped more than others because of the expectation that other policies another time will have the effect of benefiting other groups' (Barry 1999: 263). Given the legends of India's mainstream regional parties, one legitimately asks, with friends like these, who needs enemies? Indian attitudes towards its restive regions are those of a traditional 'modern' state outlined at the beginning of this essay. They are somewhat dissonant with India's current image as a mature democracy, a dynamic economy, and an emerging major power. A hyper-nationalist militarist reaction to regions claiming nationhood is especially incongruous when the claim involves an implicit critique of the modular nation form.

A scholar of the Punjab conflict has proposed an alternative reading of South Asian history, focusing on constitutional designs that could have averted the Partition of 1947 (Singh 2000). Such alternatives, he maintains, might have been more attuned with the provincial realities of sub-continent India than what the postcolonial Indian state could offer in terms of regional autonomy (Singh 2003: 52). In a more recent essay, he acknowledges that undivided Punjab may now be a hopelessly romantic idea. Watching the changing-of-guards ceremony at the Wagah border, which divides the Indian from the Pakistani side of Punjab, left him with unsettling thoughts: about the transnational academic project of Punjabi Studies, with which he is associated. With the symbolism, the aggression, and the choreographed Punjabi machismo, the daily ritual on the Wagah border, he writes, had all the hallmarks of the Balinese cockfight—the subject of a famous essay by Clifford Geertz (1973). Even considering the ritual nature of this display of a highly charged sense of nationhood, the ceremony at Wagah made apparent that 'however much West Punjab resembles the East, it is also now part of a distinct cultural and religious tradition with a strong sense of difference' (Singh 2006: 17).

The early 1990s saw the end of the movement

for an independent Khalistan: the militant assertion

of Punjabi regionalism. It was not a political settlement that brought it to an end, but a successful counter-insurgency campaign that killed thousands of rebels—actual and suspected—and their sympathizers. Between 35,000 and 70,000 people were victims of the troubles in Punjab. Human rights groups have documented political killings, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, and secret cremations of victims (Kumar *et al.* 2003). An activist describes the condition in Punjab, after the end of the movement for Khalistan, as the peace of the graveyard (Bose 2003).

This was an extraordinarily violent response to a regional movement, which has its roots in the tensions between the region and the nation in the subcontinent's modern history and—considering the significant support that the movement enjoyed in the Sikh diaspora—also had the mark of our post-national times.

NOTES

1. Independentist is a more neutral term than 'separatist' or 'secessionist'. The term is commonly used in Puerto Rico to refer to political groups that stand for Puerto Rican independence.
2. Some critics, however, challenge the notion that there is a consensus in Canada about secession being 'no big deal'. The 'admirable Canadian plaudits', as Andre Liebich puts it, was 'briefly shattered' just before Quebec's second referendum on independence in 1995, when polls indicated that the Independence option might win (Liebich 2002, p. 9).
3. Brass here elaborates the ideas of Donald Horowitz and Myron Weiner.

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