

13 Politics and National Identity

Sunil Khilnani

Seen from a distance, India's democracy—identifying as it is within a society where economic unevenness is also rising—seems to be eliciting forms of political identification and representative agencies that threaten its cohabitating diversities. The most spectacular manifestation of this has been the rise of the party of Hindu nationalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which hopes to endow with political significance the fact that a majority of Indians worship in the Hindu faiths, and thus to redefine the nature of India's secular state. From the opposite direction comes a proliferation of parties rooted in regional identities—vocal in their demands—that also seem a threat to the Indian Union. Yet, recent predictions defying 2009 elections, serve to remind us that matters are more complicated.

Since the late 1980s, the rise of the BJP has been matched by two other and even more significant processes. The first is a rebalancing—driven in part by economic developments—of the relations between the national government in New Delhi, the 'Centre', and the regional states. The second is the rise of lower-caste parties. India's democracy has ensured that the relation between particular and collective belonging, the question of the form and content of the Indian nation, has stayed continuously in contention: democratic politics is, precisely, a perpetual struggle to persuade people to see themselves in certain ways, a competition over political identifications.

The character of India's unsettled democracy can be considered from at least three perspectives: the relationship between democracy and equality; between democracy and liberty; and between these domains has been mixed, and each merits a full discussion in its own right. The focus in this essay is on democracy and diversity, and will be limited to a discussion of diversities within India (rather than the relationship between India's diversities and the world).¹ I would like to suggest that from this perspective, India's democratic frame has been relatively effective in giving space to India's diversities, and self-correcting in the moments when diversity has been devalued. I begin by outlining the two main and opposing twentieth century responses to the fact of India's diversities, responses that gave rise to rival

ideas of the Indian nation and nationalism. I turn then to the view of Indian identity associated with Jawaharlal Nehru, and briefly sketch his efforts to give form to a provisional view of Indian identity—one that relied on political skills for its sustenance, and that required regular restatement.

Finally, I take up some of the ways in which India's democratic frame has encouraged the emergence of a range of political identities—including some that wish to limit the country's diversity. But I hope to show that such movements themselves have been constrained, if also fostered, by the workings of Indian democracy.

CONSTRUCTING A NATION

The fact of India's diversities, which gave its peoples many particular attachments, has led most observers to doubt India's capacity to be a nation. This was the premise of British colonial rule in India. Colonial administrator John Strachey put the point across brusquely in 1885: 'there is not, and never was an India, nor ever any country of India', he declared, 'possessing according to European ideas, any sort of unity physical, political, social or religious; no nation, no "people of India".'² The single trait that struck outsiders as common across the subcontinent was the caste order: but this was more a principle of division rather than unity, and one that no Indian intellectual was morally inclined to justify. Tocqueville, in his notes for a planned work on India, voiced a common view when he explained that India had been repeatedly conquered because its civilizational order deprived Indians of patriotic feeling. Instead of a nation, in India each caste forms a separate little nation, which has its own ethos, customs, laws and government. The national spirit of the Hindus is trapped within caste. Their country is their caste' (de Tocqueville 1962).

The European belief that India was not—and could not—be a nation was predictably manifest in the taxonomic practices of the British Raj. These divided the subcontinent between the princely states and British India, enabling the British to rule the latter as a series of segmented communities, with separate electorates for each designed to defend their now

and politics in India, it is therefore important to be able to move between the perspectives of political understanding and political judgement.

Democracy, in the sense of a system based on the separation of powers, a free press and liberties of association, on universal suffrage and individual rights, and on the routine alteration of governments through open elections, is now fully consolidated in India (since Independence, the country has held fifteen national elections and many more in its regional states). In this respect, India's political system has succeeded in institutionalizing uncertainty (Przeworski 1991: 13–14). Democracy as a type of government, a political regime of laws and institutions, has achieved a real—that is to say, inherently problematic—existence. Equally significantly, however, the idea of democracy has penetrated the Indian political imagination: an idea which assumes the plasticity of the human world and which refuses the divine ordination of the social order, which promises to bring the alien apparatus of the state under the control of the collective will of a community.

frozen identities; and each was encouraged to establish its own preferential relationships with the Raj.³ The Raj's policies helped to constitute India as a society composed of communities, which, it proclaimed, posed hazards to one another in the absence of the pacifying effects of imperial power. Equally, however, the Raj introduced Indians to the possibility of conceiving of themselves as individuals, whose rights and interests were defendable in courts of law, and who could associate to pursue common interests.⁴ The result was a bifocal perspective on the idea of representation (and of what exactly required representation). Communities were seen variously as possessing indivisible identities, each of which could press the state for uniform treatment, regardless of size; or, alternatively, as numerical aggregates of individual interests, with the state giving greater due to numerically weightier groups. By the 1940s, these conceptions were to clash with horrible confusion. Jinnah and the Muslim League argued that every Hindu and Muslim should be treated in the first instance as a member of their community (rather than as individuals), and that the state should give equal regard to each community (an argument with a liberal pedigree, which could be construed as one for the protection of minorities). Congress, on the other hand, in claiming to speak for all Indians, wished to disconnect individuals from their more particular communities, and to persuade them to view themselves as members of a larger community—as Indians.

The imperially induced perturbations in conceptions of collective identity provoked Indian elites into specifying forms of political community in various, sometimes conflicting, ways: invoking religion, caste, region as well as nation—as they grasped for a stable entity that could lay claim to displacing the British. 'Indian nationalism' is in many ways a misleading shorthand term used to describe a period of intellectual and political ferment in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which encompassed the different projects of anti-colonialism, patriotism, and nationalism. The possible bases for a shared community across the subcontinent were vigorously debated in regional languages (especially in Bengal and Maharashtra, two regions exposed longest to the British), and a sense of regional identity came into

being as part of the struggle to define a larger Indian community. The belief that Indian nationalism had subsequently to unite and subordinate these regional identities is thus a misreading of the relationship between nation and region in India. In fact, the senses of region and nation emerged simultaneously through parallel self-definitions. This point is essential to any understanding of the distinctive, layered character of Indianness, as also to understanding the relationship between region and nation today.⁵

By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the debate over the nature of India's identity had, in the broadest terms, taken two directions. The first accepted the diagnosis that India's internal diversities and myriad particularisms were disabling, and wished to expunge these. This view, much impressed by the prowess of European nationalisms, sought to interpret nationalism in India in terms of an overarching religious identity which found in religion a social glue for the nation. This idea of 'communalism', as it came to be called in India, was adopted by both Muslim and Hindu nationalism. It insisted that homogeneity was the only possible basis for nationhood—as the BJP manifestos of the 1990s were to put it, 'one nation, one people, one culture.' The importance of Western ideas and models in shaping this religious nationalism is significant. V.D. Savarkar, the ideologue of Hindutva (the ideology of today's BJP), was a non-believing Brahmin from western India, an admirer and translator of Mazzini, who founded a secret society modelled on Young Italy (its members, planning to assassinate the Viceroy, learned bomb-making from a Russian revolutionary in Paris); others, like Aurobindo Ghose, educated at King's College, Cambridge, returned to rediscover and propagate his spiritual traditions, while Vivekananda, also steeped in European thought, urged upon his young followers the 'three Bs': beef, biceps, and the Bhagavad Gita.

Contrasting with this emulative view was another strand, itself rich with internal disagreement and diversity that rejected the European (and Japanese) specifications of nationalism. Thus, Tagore, both in his well-known lectures on *Nationalism* and throughout his thought and writing, stressed the distinctiveness of India's identity as compared with other cultures: the 'idea of India', he insisted, militated 'against the intense

consciousness of the idea of separateness of one's own people from others'.⁶ Tagore saw India not as an exclusively Hindu civilization, but as a confluence of many cultures: strikingly, he preferred to evoke India through the imagery of rivers and oceans, rather than by the more common nationalist invocation of land. For his part, Mahatma Gandhi located India's unity in a self-produced religious morality, one that assembled electric elements from folk and popular devotional Bhakti traditions, as well as from Christian and Islamic scriptures. While he refused to separate religion and politics and certainly used Hindu symbols, he recoiled from the martial vision of Hindu nationalists, and instead resurrected an older, feminized patriotism that valued India's differences. Nehru too saw heterogeneity as India's strength—he had a Madisonian sense that large-scale mixture was good for liberty, for cultural and intellectual creativity, and as a way of spreading risks. But while Gandhi rejected the modern state, and Tagore too had misgivings about it, Nehru saw it as necessary if India was going to make its own way in the world.

Nehru in command of the Indian state for the first seventeen years after Independence, is the link between the ideas of Tagore and Gandhi and their translation into state practice. He had to devise a nationalism particular to India that would also be compatible with the exigencies of the modern (and very un-Indian) state. No Indian intellectual understood more clearly the potentialities of nationalism in India. He saw at once its power to unite the country and its power to endanger it, both internally and externally. His view was based on a critical reading of the experience of other nationalisms—the spectres of Balkanization, or the self-destructive militarism of imperial Japan—as well as of India's own history, and it manifested a willingness to invent and, crucially, to temporize, when it came to defining the terms of India's identity.

Recent academic theorists have urged us to see nationalism as the global diffusion of a standardized, modular form devised in the West—whether in the Gallic version of a community of common citizenship or the *volksisch* idea of a shared ethnic or cultural origin. While certainly attracted by the political and economic example of the modern West, Nehru was far less taken by its cultural models. By 1947, he was

convinced that Indian nationalism could not simply model itself on European examples.⁷ Nor did he accept that all nations had to specify their identities in identical ways.

Nehru's understanding of the link between culture and power avoided the liberal presumption that individuals could transcend their cultural inheritance, and remake themselves however they—or their state—saw fit; a view that placed abstracted individual rationality before any sense of cultural identity.⁸ Equally, though, he steered away from the perception of cultures as self-enclosed wholes, as hermetic communities of language or belief—a view that sustains, on the one hand, the conservative idea of the state as an instrument at the community's disposal, and on the other the more benign view of the state as a curator of cultural exhibits, responsible for preserving communities. Rather, cultures were overlapping forms of activity that had commerce with one another, mutually altering and reshaping each other: this, Nehru insisted, was one of the most vivid insights to be gleaned from a study of India's history. India was a society neither of liberal individuals nor of exclusive communities or nationalities, but of interconnected and historically accredited differences. As he put it in a remarkable metaphor, India 'was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and revere have been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously' (Nehru 1946).

Nehru used a romanticized version of India's past to create an enabling fiction: one that might resist both the divisive effects of the colonial state and the legacy of India's deeply inequitable social order. But his essential point, about the nature of differences and connections in India—the image of Indian identity as layered—was not off-beam. That he was able to transform this metaphor into a policy of state is striking in at least two respects. First, in the particular political circumstances after Partition, the pressures were for other, more simple definitions. With the creation of Pakistan as the putative state of all Muslims in the subcontinent, many in India felt that the Indian state should become Pakistan's mirror: defining itself through the possession of the Hindu majority and become a Hindu state. Yet, a combination of political

consciousness of the idea of separateness of one's own people from others'.⁶ Tagore saw India not as an exclusively Hindu civilization, but as a confluence of many cultures: strikingly, he preferred to evoke India through the imagery of rivers and oceans, rather than by the more common nationalist invocation of land. For his part, Mahatma Gandhi located India's unity in a self-produced religious morality, one that assembled electric elements from folk and popular devotional Bhakti traditions, as well as from Christian and Islamic scriptures. While he refused to separate religion and politics and certainly used Hindu symbols, he recoiled from the martial vision of Hindu nationalists, and instead resurrected an older, feminized patriotism that valued India's differences. Nehru too saw heterogeneity as India's strength—he had a Madisonian sense that large-scale mixture was good for liberty, for cultural and intellectual creativity, and as a way of spreading risks. But while Gandhi rejected the modern state, and Tagore too had misgivings about it, Nehru saw it as necessary if India was going to make its own way in the world.

Nehru in command of the Indian state for the first seventeen years after Independence, is the link between the ideas of Tagore and Gandhi and their translation into state practice. He had to devise a nationalism particular to India that would also be compatible with the exigencies of the modern (and very un-Indian) state. No Indian intellectual understood more clearly the potentialities of nationalism in India. He saw at once its power to unite the country and its power to endanger it, both internally and externally. His view was based on a critical reading of the experience of other nationalisms—the spectres of Balkanization, or the self-destructive militarism of imperial Japan—as well as of India's own history, and it manifested a willingness to invent and, crucially, to temporize, when it came to defining the terms of India's identity.

Recent academic theorists have urged us to see

consciousness of the idea of separateness of one's own people from others'.⁶ Tagore saw India not as an exclusively Hindu civilization, but as a confluence of many cultures: strikingly, he preferred to evoke India through the imagery of rivers and oceans, rather than by the more common nationalist invocation of land. For his part, Mahatma Gandhi located India's unity in a self-produced religious morality, one that assembled electric elements from folk and popular devotional Bhakti traditions, as well as from Christian and Islamic scriptures. While he refused to separate religion and politics and certainly used Hindu symbols, he recoiled from the martial vision of Hindu nationalists, and instead resurrected an older, feminized patriotism that valued India's differences. Nehru too saw heterogeneity as India's strength—he had a Madisonian sense that large-scale mixture was good for liberty, for cultural and intellectual creativity, and as a way of spreading risks. But while Gandhi rejected the modern state, and Tagore too had misgivings about it, Nehru saw it as necessary if India was going to make its own way in the world.

Nehru in command of the Indian state for the first seventeen years after Independence, is the link between the ideas of Tagore and Gandhi and their translation into state practice. He had to devise a nationalism particular to India that would also be compatible with the exigencies of the modern (and very un-Indian) state. No Indian intellectual understood more clearly the potentialities of nationalism in India. He saw at once its power to unite the country and its power to endanger it, both internally and externally. His view was based on a critical reading of the experience of other nationalisms—the spectres of Balkanization, or the self-destructive militarism of imperial Japan—as well as of India's own history, and it manifested a willingness to invent and, crucially, to temporize, when it came to defining the terms of India's identity.

Recent academic theorists have urged us to see

skills and chance events—such as the death of Gandhi at the hands of a Hindu extremist, and shortly thereafter, of Sardar Patel), Nehru's main rival for power, and himself a sympathizer with the Hindu cause—made it possible for Nehru to temper this mirroring ambition. And so, after 1947, the subcontinent contained within it, in the shape of Pakistan and India, two radically different conceptions of dealing with diversity within the frame of the modern state, two distinct ideas of state and national identity. That Nehru could consolidate his alternative conception is also striking in a second respect, because there were few intellectual or theoretical anchors against the political tides towards narrower and religious conceptions of national identity. Today, the idea of 'multiculturalism' is a familiar if vague one, ensconced within a large academic penumbra; but during the middle decades of the twentieth century this was a radically unusual way to envisage the construction of a new state, particularly one of India's size and assorted diversities.

DEFINING A NATIONAL IDENTITY FOR A DIVERSE SOCIETY

It required, then, a major act of intellectual and political imagination on Nehru's part in order to materialize this conception of a plural Indian identity through a format of state arrangements that imprinted subsequent practice. As I have suggested, Nehru achieved it not from a position of pre-eminence, or on the basis of a shared consensus, but through political skill, and often from positions of vulnerability.⁹ Three aspects of this achievement are worth recalling. First, he used the instruments of the inherited colonial state, and transformed the states orientation. Unusually, perhaps even uniquely among anti-colonial nationalist movements, the pre-independence Congress party lacked the capacity to impose by force its definition of a national identity. Unlike many other anti-colonial movements—such as in Algeria, Indonesia, and Vietnam—the Congress had no military arm (Subhas Bose was alienated from the Congress party precisely for choosing to oppose the British in this way). Consequently, it could not turn this 'against its own' peoples in order to impose nationhood—again, unlike these other movements. In

this respect the acquisition of the state in 1947, with its military and bureaucratic arms, provided Congress with the minimal preconditions for sustaining any sense of nationhood. But now a new justification was offered for the use of these instruments: they were not, as the Raj had proclaimed, merely there for keeping social order and meting out even-handed punishments and rewards. They were a means to impart cohesion and to draw Indians into a shared project of development. Nehru managed at once to pull nationalism away from a primarily culturalist definition and towards a developmental content, and thereby recast the purposes of the colonial state. With the British gone, but with their state largely intact and in the possession of Indians, the state's energies were directed towards remedying an array of social ills: poverty, caste injustice, and 'communalism' (the use of religion for political ends), whose defeat Nehru believed required the agency of a unitary and expansive state. In retrospect, this over-reliance on the state was to debilitate the very project of development that had sanctioned it. Interestingly and fatefully absent from Nehru's redescription of the state and its purposes was the use of mass education—or of the daily inculcation of a nationalist ethic through ordinary schools, a technique used by most nation-states.¹⁰ In this respect, the Nehruvian state failed both to educate and to inculcate. But it did serve to hold the country together.

Second, the Constitution was to play a key role in formulating the relation between Nehru's conception of India's diversities and its democratic order. The Indian Constitution is best seen not as a strong ideological statement of a logically consistent world view, but rather as a force field that tries to stabilize a range of often contradictory considerations. The basic elements of the institutional design that set the terms for Indian identity were fourfold: universal suffrage within a single electorate, the allocation of powers between the Central state and the regional governments, policies of 'reservation' or affirmative action directed at improving the position of historically disadvantaged caste groups, and legal pluralism in civil law—intended to instill in religious minorities trust in the new state.

As Nehru conceived it, and as the Constitution articulated it, Indian national identity was neither

exhaustive nor immutable. Rather, Indianness was an assemblage of other belongings, themselves alterable within limits: attachments of language, of culture, and of religion, with these elements only weakly arranged in a lexical ordering. The mobility of such elements was recognized in several ways.

Among the provisions in the Constitution, the Central state tacitly adopted the principle that India's internal units—the regional states comprising the Union—were not based on naturally fixed identities and boundaries. These boundaries could be redrawn, and the Central state could quite easily create new units through legislating into existence more states (as it has done over the past fifty years—most recently in 2000, when three new states were created). Regional identities were thus not seen as requiring absorption within an encompassing Indian one; rather, the Constitution enabled the state to recognize new identities, to accede to the claims of various cultural groups for their own regional governments. The Constitution also accepted the principle of treating its constituent units asymmetrically. Thus it was accepted that Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, would be treated differently, and it was granted more autonomy than other states of the Union, though ironically this has since been undermined by New Delhi's unwillingness and inability to allow democratic politics to consolidate there.

Further, on the issue of language, a basic marker of regional as well as national identity and a subject of considerable contention in pre-Independence debates, the Constitution achieved a deft compromise. Instead of adopting a 'national language', the decision was taken to defer this choice, and to create the category of 'official languages', those in which public business could be done. Alongside Hindi and English, India has a 'schedule' or list of around another 22 nationally recognized languages, a list that has expanded over the past five decades at virtually no political cost. (The most recent constitutional amendment to include more languages was in 2003, and more can be expected.) The status of English and Hindi has meanwhile been subject to parliamentary review every ten years, which has allowed their continued use and acceptance on pragmatic grounds without giving them a permanent and irrevocable status.

The still trickier matter of religion was also handled through improvisation. With the decision to end the Raj's practice of divided electorates (where Muslims voted only for Muslims, Hindus for Hindus, and so on) and to establish universal suffrage within a single, common electorate new protections had to be found for religious minorities in order to keep their trust in the state. In parallel to the recognition of Indians as possessing regional linguistic identities, the Constitution enabled the law to recognize Indians as attached to religious communities. Thus, the legal pluralism of colonial practice was now established as a constitutional feature: on matters of civil and customary law, citizens could choose to be governed either by their own religion or by the state's civil law. Given his views about the mutable, transnational nature of cultures, Nehru had hoped, and expected that these protections would change, and that individuals and their communities would in time opt for a common civil code—and indeed these provisions too were subject to parliamentary review. In this case Nehru's optimism was perhaps misplaced. In later decades Hindu nationalists were able to use such special provisions as fodder for their attacks, while conservative Muslim clerics have found in them a means to control their flock.

The issue of caste identities, too, was handled

with contingent expedience. The 'reservation' of places in educational institutions and in government

employment for those groups at the very bottom

of the caste order was similarly subject to

parliamentary review every decade. In fact, it became

a permanent fixture of India's democratic politics.

The determination of groups eligible for the benefits

of 'reservation' was left to the regional legislatures,

giving politicians a resource to manipulate.

Thus, the fundamental markers of identity—

language, caste, and religion—were granted a degree

of fluidity and revisability from the viewpoint of how

the state recognized their claims. This provisionism

rendered language, caste, and religion as part of

political rather than cultural categories. As such,

their form and implications depended heavily on

the skills of political leadership—skills that in

subsequent decades were available in erratic supply,

thereby placing the burden of intervening in disputes

over the terms of identity on non-elected bodies and the courts.

Nehru made it a point to regularly restate the principles underlying his practice.¹¹ However, perhaps the most noteworthy—and third—aspect of how he handled the dilemmas of national identity was his willingness to defer certain potentially divisive matters of identity. This tactic of temporizing in response to calls for decisive definitions of a uniform Indian identity—for instance, from advocates of Hindi as the national language, or Hindu reformers who wished to abolish multiple legal codes in favour of a common one—has been seen as a potential weakness both from the perspective of Western theories of nationalism (theories that guided the thinking of Hindu nationalists), and from liberal theory. In fact, it was one of the more creative and enabling aspects of the nationalist imagination installed after 1947.¹²

CONTESTING NATIONAL IDENTITY

Nehru was able to institute a certain conception of the national community. But this specification of diversities within a democratic frame represented a contingent historical success. The initial conception failed to foresee exactly how its provisions would subsequently come to be used. This of course is the risk of revisability, and what triumphed was not a work of ideological purity or philosophical beauty, but a messy work in perpetual progress. Alternative versions of nationalism, which invoked narrower ideas of religion and culture, continued to be present as live political projects, and much of Nehru's prime ministerial life was spent trying to contain and limit these alternatives, whether in the form of Hindu communalism' or break-away claims. Indeed, within two decades of Nehru's death in 1964, India's layered, plural self-definitions faced challenges from these quarters.

By the mid-1980s, Indian intellectuals were puzzling over why, four decades after the end of colonialism, the identities of religion and caste had begun to invade national politics. This, the first serious challenge to India's plural identity, has generated an important debate about the nature of Indian

secularism.¹³ But such debates were themselves symptoms of much wider changes in society, and in terms of political identity.

It is impossible to briefly recount even a conceptual narrative of Indian politics over the past quarter century, but some points must be noted. The axis of connection between state and society since 1947 had been the Congress party: it had served as a kind of translation machine, enabling communication between the élites and the masses. But Congress was entering a period of crisis, brought on partly by historical fatigue and the waning of the earlier anti-colonial aura—an inevitable generational obsolescence—and partly by the political 'awakening' of the lower castes and the poor, who from the 1980s were coming into the democratic system in increasing numbers. At previous moments of expansion in the political arena—for example in the 1920s or again in the 1950s, Congress had been able to reach out and accommodate this: either by reorganizing itself as it had done under Gandhi in the 1920s, or by reorganizing the Indian state system, as it had done under Nehru with the creation of linguistic states in the 1950s. But now, in the 1980s, Congress receded: unable to find innovative modes of response, it centralized and blocked internal channels of communication.

The results of this recoil were immediately felt. Regional groups and newly politicized castes were no longer able to find a voice within the party. Dissent was forced out, either onto the streets or into new political parties,¹⁴ and demands against the Central state were now asserted more aggressively. In the 1950s, the regional call was for cultural recognition in the form of unilingual states; by the end of the 1960s, movements in western states like Maharashtra were calling for the restriction of economic opportunities to their own 'native sons'; and by the 1980s, demands had escalated to full-throated separation in states like Punjab and Kashmir.

In reaction, the Central state now resorted to

Moreover, a crucial change in the treatment of the terms of national identity became evident. Previously, national leaderships had never invoked religion for electoral purposes. This taboo fell in the 1980s. Thus, the insecurities of different religious minorities were played on: Hindu minorities in Kashmir and Punjab, Muslim minorities in north India, all were invited to support Congress in return for safety and favours. The implications of this deviation from the Congress principle became clear in the Congress-orchestrated anti-Sikh violence that followed Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. The Indian nationalism of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru had both resisted invoking religion for political purposes, and had also avoided defining the nation in terms of a majority community—both men saw that India was a nation of incipient minorities, where every citizen might potentially define themselves as a member of some minority. However, now the appeal to a more simplified sense of democracy—as the rule of the majority, which had a permanent (because religious) identity began to change Nehru's pluralist rendition of national identity.

This was manifest in two ways. First, the new majoritarian sense of democracy exacerbated the alienation of those in the regions. Here, one has to recall the distribution across the country of both the electorate and seats to the national Parliament. India's largest state sends 80 members to India's 543-seat Parliament; smaller states like Punjab and Kashmir send, respectively, just 13 and 6. It is possible to win national elections while simply ignoring the claims of dissident states. In a paradox of democratic procedure—one that Europeans today find themselves wrestling with—certain smaller regional states were faced with structural disenfranchisement. Second, the currency of a language of majoritarian democracy gave purchase to the rivals for Central power, enabling their own claims to represent the nation. Thus, the practices of the Congress began to revive the imagination of Hindu nationalists. The BJP, a direct beneficiary, explicitly styled itself as the legitimate heir to the Congress, and indeed it shared more with the political horizons of the Congress era than with the pattern of politics that began to emerge from the mid-1980s. The

BJP did offer a bold restatement of nationalism, albeit one entirely contrary to Nehru's.

CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL IDENTITY: HINDUTVA AND REGIONALISM

The BJP is the most recent incarnation of a Hindu nationalist party, created in 1980 out of the old Bharatiya Jan Sangh (Indian People's Party), itself an upgrade of the pre-1947 Hindu Mahasabha. But the BJP is a curious political phenomenon, not quite a political party like any other. In fact, it is merely the visible peak of a much larger, largely subterranean, mass of organizations known as the Sangh Parivar, all of whom are committed to the ideology of Hindu nationalism, or *Hindutva*—organizations that range from political associations, civil society groups, religious sects, and para-criminal gangs. The organization that directly controls the BJP is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a hierarchical, cadre-based movement founded in the 1920s in direct emulation of Mussolini's Brown Shirts, and which espouses Hindu supremacism. It was the extremist Hindus associated with the RSS who were responsible for Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, yet and for many years the RSS was a banned entity. Yet today, this extraordinary manifestation of esoteric power has become an extremely powerful element in India's political life, while remaining untransparent and unaccountable to constitutional norms. The RSS leadership determines all senior and significant appointments within the BJP, and virtually all senior BJP leaders (including former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpeyi and former deputy leader, L.K. Advani) have been members of the RSS.

The BJP's definition of Indian nationalism is

contrary to that associated with Nehru. It subscribes

to Savarkar's definition of the ideology of Hindutva

(the literal translation of this neologism is 'Hindu-

ness'), which excludes as non-Indian all those

religions whose origins do not lie within the territorial

space of India (in effect, all religions except Hinduism,

Buddhism, and Sikhism), and which views adherents

of the 'non-Indian' religions as suspect or secondary citizens. Hindutva celebrates a glorious ancient Hindu

past; but in the hands of the BJP, Hindutva also encompasses the armoury of the modern state, and in fact its understanding of nationalism is essentially a modern one, modelled on nineteenth-century European nationalisms. It is important to recognize this modernizing ambition of the BJP. It is not proposing a return to a traditional Hindu polity; it has no pastoral image of a stateless India composed of village republics, nor does it stipulate that all Indians must be Hindus. Its dreams are powerfully statist; to eliminate any legal and political recognition of cultural and religious differences. Although it declares itself as a positive project of 'cultural nationalism' ('one nation, one people, one culture', as its manifesto declare), in fact the BJP advocates a negative programme, one that seeks to efface all the signs of non-Hinduness that are integral to India. It hopes to fulfil the project of creating a modern Indian nation-state that contains a culturally and ethnically pure community, with a single Indian citizenship, defended by a state that has both God and nuclear warheads on its side.

Originally, Hindu nationalism was an ideology of the upper, Brahminic castes, but in recent decades it expanded beyond this elitist base, gaining support among the country's middle classes and castes to whom it offered a religious argot tailored for democratic times. The redefinition of the diverse forms of Hindu religion in the narrow terms of Hindutva achieved two things for the BJP. It allowed the party to successfully exploit an idiom of cultural dispossession, which resonates deeply in Indian politics (especially among the vast numbers excluded from the privileged circle of those who have some knowledge of the English language). And it enabled the BJP to claim to express some of the aspirations of India's expanding and selectively Westernized middle classes. Rising consumerism and the extension of the market during the 1980s did not nourish an individualistic hedonism, nor did it breed liberal individuals. Rather, it was experienced as an opportunity to consume the pleasures of modernity within collective units like the family (or even caste groups); several of the great Bollywood box office hits had as their recurring theme the celebration of domestic consumption, dining, and marriage. For many Indians, modernity is being sampled through the conservative filters of religious

piety, moralism, and domestic virtue, all veins of sentiment that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have effectively mined and recharged.

Yet the rise of the BJP is only one of several complicated ways whereby a half-century of democracy has modified the terms of national identity. Even more important has been the restitution of powers to the regional states—and linked to this, the mobilization of lower-caste parties rooted in the regions. I noted earlier that identities of region and nation had historically emerged in tandem in India, and arguably this process—after some disruption in the later decades of the twentieth century—has now resumed its deeper historical pattern. Regional and national identities are today reinforcing one another, even as each helps the other to a sharper definition. In a counter-trend to the centralizing energies of the 1970s and 1980s, the centre of gravity of India's democracy is being re-calibrated as much by economic developments as political ones. India's regional states are very large: the population of the largest, Uttar Pradesh, is around 166 million (and over the next decade, India is projected to have four states with populations over 100 million and 10 over 50 million). However, growing demographic weight is not the sole impetus: the reinvigoration of regional politics has also been encouraged by a combination of perceived opportunities and threats. First, although the Constitution withheld important fiscal and economic powers from regional governments, in recent years real economic powers have begun to flow to them. The reasons are various, and sometimes ironic: one is that national governments in New Delhi have preferred to pass to regional governments the responsibility—and blame—for liberalizing economic reforms (Jenkins 1999). Second, regional parties have found effective ways to use the opportunities presented by a declining Congress. For instance, they have taken advantage of the fact that the powers to legislate policies of affirmative action, to 'reserve' places in education and employment, lie with regional legislatures. Thus, political parties based on caste have found in these policies a powerful tool for electoral gain. Finally, the threat that the Hindu nationalists might capture power at the national level and use it to impose a singular definition of Indian identity has

also acted as a spur to developing stronger regional poles of opposition. Such developments have resulted in more intense competition for control of these governments. Indeed, since the 1990s, the crucial arena of democratic competition has shifted to the regional states, which have become the basic units of political choice for Indians.

The two national parties, the Congress and BJP, can today only patchily claim to be true national parties. In 2004, for instance, they together managed to win less than half the vote share, with the rest going to regional and lower-caste parties (a proportion that has been relatively stable over the past decade). Although the BJP has sought to position itself as the new national party, it has never won more than one-fourth of the national vote share. It has proved very difficult in India to muster numerical majorities that can win power at the national level; and it is even more difficult to transform such victories, should they occur, into sustainable state power.

The evolution of India's centre-state relations is placing significant constraints on national-level movements and political parties, limiting sweeping ambitions. Electoral outcomes at the regional level have become difficult to sum into legible national choices—on the contrary, some have argued that election outcomes are simply an aggregation of regional verdicts. In the past, people voted in regional state elections as if they were voting in national elections, but now quite different logics are at work. With the delinking since the 1970s of cycles of national and state elections—every year, elections are being held in several Indian states—the possibility of pan-Indian electoral waves around a single issue has dissipated. The BJP has vainly sought to conjure such a single issue, which could work to realign choices in both state and national elections: the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992, and the repeated attempts to revive the Ayodhya temple issue are examples.

That the meanings of India's national politics are

a democratic process there). The emerging politics of the regions is not isolationist; nor does it seek to withdraw from the Centre. On the contrary, these regional parties and the proliferation and fragmentation of the party system are actually helping to hold India together.

Since 1989, India has been governed by coalitions of various sorts, grouped mainly around the Congress and the BJP; the recent 2009 elections can be seen as having consolidated a two-coalition system. These coalition governments in New Delhi have forced regional parties and elites—with invariably parochial horizons—to become involved in national issues, to learn the rudiments of the Constitution, and perform to enter the national imagination, even as they work to extract benefits for their own kind.

Another assumption about the diffusion of power in the era of coalitions was that India's economy and politics would suffer. Yet, the last two decades have seen India's highest growth rates; and while these cannot be claimed as the causal result of coalitions, it is the case that coalition governments have helped to secure a wider consensus for reforms, as well as to ensure their continuity across governments. Politically, too, the emergence of coalition governments in Delhi has had integrative functions for the nation, rather than destabilizing ones. Survey evidence makes clear that most Indians now see themselves as having dual allegiances, at once to their regional state and to India; and in fact Indian Muslims identify with India to a higher degree than do their Hindu compatriots. Indian-ness continues to be consolidated as a textured, rather than flat, conception of political identity.¹⁵

DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The task of accommodating India's diversities into a shared national identity through democratic means has been an intricate undertaking, generating tensions, ironies, and paradoxes. In some important respects, democracy has failed India's diversities, both across space and in time. The instances of Kashmir and Punjab—and one might add the northeast states of Nagaland and Mizoram; and the dates 1984 (anti-Sikh violence), 1992 (the destruction of the

Babri Mosque), and above all 2002 (the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat) are etched into this history of failures, episodes when self-proclaimed majorities tried with bloody determination to redefine India's national identity.

Yet, if one stands back for a moment from particular episodes and locations and views India's democratic experience over time and on a continental scale, the darker shadings in the picture may look somewhat different. Much of the recent discussion on democratic transitions has focused on the shift from authoritarian regimes and dictatorships to democratic ones; that is, a shift from one modern regime to another modern regime form. But India's transition to a democratic regime and its consolidation is quite different, and cannot be mapped by the terms of the 'democratic transitions' literature. In fact, what we see in India is an historical or *spacial* shift, from an ancient regime to a modern political form which makes it truly a transition of Tocquevillian proportions. Such shifts are wrenching, often bloody affairs; think of the violent histories (both internal and external) of America and France since the eighteenth century as they struggled to make themselves democratic nation-states.

India has had its episodes of violence, beginning with the horror of Partition in 1947, and it can expect to face recurring episodes in the future. That any Indian citizen at all should be killed by fellow citizens or by the state because of who they are, because of their identity, or the beliefs they profess, is inexcusable. Yet, if one accepts the calculations of those who have tried to sum the figures, one can put at roughly 15,000 the number of deaths in communal (that is, religious) violence since 1947,¹⁶ and even after adding casuistic figures from the insurrections in Kashmir, Punjab, and the Northeast (all of which received international support), the figures remain low—both relative to India's overall size, and also in comparison to other societies that have gone through this long transition. For the most part, India's many identities have been relatively lightly molested by the state, and by one another. What has been called the Indian model of containing diversities, the 'salad bowl' rather than the melting pot, a model that allows distinct ingredients to retain their individuality—has on the whole been kept to.

Paradoxically, it may well be that the very things that Strachey and Tocqueville had claimed precluded India from becoming a nation have actually provided fruitful material for this task, and this for two reasons. It has made it difficult to entrench majoritarian or dominant identities which, had it happened, may well have led excluded groups to press for exit (as happened within the supposedly homogenous state of Pakistan, with the secession in 1971 of Bangladesh). And second, it has forced India's political elites to be inventive, they could not create a sense of nationhood simply by imitating existing models. There are at least two distinct ways of dealing with diversity: one is through generalization, the project of systematic transformation or erasure of particular identities in favour of more general ones (a project common to both religious and cultural nationalists, as well as Communists, who see class as a universal category). The other, which India has followed, is through composition, the recognition of differences of different kinds, and their locations within a shared frame.¹⁷ In a second paradox, it is precisely the workings of India's democracy that have led to majoritarian excess. The identities of religion and caste that figure in Indian politics today are the creation of democracy, and not the intrusion of the primordial: they are ways of asserting, in the language of modern representative politics, claims to recognition and fair treatment; and as such they will have to be addressed and accommodated by the resources of democratic politics itself. There are, in India's democratic experience, examples of self-correcting mechanisms which show how this might be done. Though at times purely symbolic, one should not underestimate the power of symbolism in a society where the majority are non- or semi-literate (think, for instance, of the symbolic significance of different religious and caste backgrounds of holders of high state office). However, many of these self-correcting mechanisms are not purely symbolic, and have direct practical effects: for example, the reassignment of powers to the regions in ways that have also integrated them into national power.

There is also a paradox in the fact that in India, as in many other places, democratic polities and the protection of diversities rely for their continuance on

non-democratic instruments and agencies. Democracy that is to say, and the proliferation of identities that issue from the workings of its politics, can challenge and sometimes even subvert democracy itself; hence the recourse to agencies outside the democratic field to moderate the pressures of democratic identity assertion. One of the cornerstones of India's democracy today is a non-elected body, the Election Commission, an agency invented in India, and legislated into existence in 1950, on the eve of India declaring itself a republic. Made up of three commissioners with a status equivalent to Supreme Court judges, the Election Commission is charged with the impartial conduct of political elections. However, since its inception its responsibilities have expanded to include, for instance, the supervision of internal democracy within political parties, the maintenance of codes of secular conduct during campaigning, and even the making of essentially political decisions about when elections will be held. The Indian Election Commission has become an important defender of the principle of diversity, a model now adopted in a number of democracies (including South Africa), and it has become the country's most trusted institution: amongst Indians, 46 per cent expressed a great deal of trust in the Election Commission, as compared with only 20 per cent with a great deal of trust in elected representatives.

Notes

1. See Khilnani (2004).

2. Sirachey (1888, pp. 5–8), delivered this judgement

in a lecture in 1885, the very year the Indian National

Congress was formed—a movement whose raison d'être was to refute this view.

3. See, for example, Cohn (1987).
4. On the peculiar character of Indian civil society see Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001, Chs 9 and 15).
5. For studies that offer excellent insight into this process, see Pollock (2003) and Bayly (1998).
6. Tagore to Charles Freer Andrews, March 1921, cited in Sen (2005). See also Berlin (1996).
7. See Nehru (1946).
8. Cf Amartya Sen for a view of reason's prior claims over identity. See Sen (1999).
9. Cf Kothari (1970), for the argument that the Nehru period rested on a consensus.
10. This failure opened opportunities for Hindu nationalists, who have understood the importance of education. See Bonci (2001).
11. Nehru did this in several ways: Nehru's correspondence with his own political colleagues is a continual commentary on his practice, a statement of his principles, intentions, and revisions. See, for example, Nehru (1985–9). In his public speeches, as well in his use of public spectacles, such as the annual Republic Day parades, he sought to reiterate his conception.
12. The Constituent Assembly debates over language are very revealing on the subject of the differing ideas of national identity. See King (1997), Rai (2001), and Dasgupta (1970, Ch. 5).
13. Some of the important contributions to this debate are collected in Bhagava (1998).
14. For a study of the decline of Congress and the rise of rival parties against the background of blockages in internal party democracy, see Chandra (2003).
15. Cf also responses to the question: 'We should be loyal to our region first and then to India.' According to NES, the percentage of respondents who agree with this has declined—67.1 per cent in 1971, 52.9 per cent in 1996, 50.7 per cent in 1998.
16. See Vashayee (2002), for an earlier estimate and Wilkinson (2004).
17. I owe the formulation of this distinction to Sudipta Kaviraj.

- 'Consciousness of Nationality', in Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*. London: Chatto & Windus, pp. 249–68.
- Bhartiya, R. (ed.), 1998. *Secularism and its Critics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chandra, Kanchan, 2003. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohn, Bernard, 1987. *An Anti-apologist among the Historians*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, Joyindra, 1970. *Language Conflict and National Development*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis, 1962. 'Ebauches d'un ouvrage sur l'Inde' in J.J. Chevalier and A. Jardin (eds), *Alexis de Tocqueville: Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Jenkins, R. 1999. *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaviraj, S., and S. Khilnani (eds), 2001. *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khilnani, Sunil, 2004. 'The Idea of India in the Era of Globalisation', in Kay Glans (ed.), *Visions of Global Society*. Stockholm: Assess Publishing.
- King, Robert D. 1997. *Nehru and the Language Politics of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kothari, R. 1970. *Politics in India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 1985–9. *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947–1964*, 5 Vols. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Fund.
- , 1946. *The Discovery of India*. Calcutta: Signet Press.
- Pollock, Sheldon (ed.), 2003. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Przeworski, Adam, 1991. *Democracy and the Market*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rai, Alok, 2001. *Hindi Nationalism*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Sen, Amartya, 2005. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- , 1999. 'Reason before Identity', *The Romanes Lecture*, Oxford.
- Strachey, John, 1888. *India*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Varshney, Ashutosh, 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Willison, Steven, 2004. *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Roots in India*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

14 The Hindu Nationalists and Power

Christophe Jaffrelot

Sometimes, political movements try not to be involved in politics. They may adopt such an attitude for tactical reasons they do not want to appear to be political in order to woo more followers or to escape the repression of the state, which may reject the kind of politics they embody. They may also try to avoid politics because they do not want to compromise and cause any degradation to their ideological purity—their so-called ideals being often, in fact, radical and exclusive. However, a movement promoting a project for the whole society needs to enter the political arena to get its views implemented. One way out, here, may consist in creating a party in charge of the mess that is politics. The Trade Union Congress did it with the Labour Party in Britain. Then the mother organization may have difficulties when it comes to maintaining harmonious relations with its subsidiary. Most of the time, the former disapproves of the way the latter compromises on its principles, and the party may do so well that it may try to emancipate itself. In India, the Sangh Parivar is experiencing such a situation—to some extent. Its matrix, the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—National Volunteers Corps), has developed a strictly codified ideology of Hindu nationalism, which is political to the core—but the movement does not want to appear as political, lest this label dissuade potential followers from joining its ranks, and lead the state to repress postures that are not legitimate from the point of view of the Constitution. The RSS also looked at politics as something dirty, which might distract its activists from the long-term achievements it aimed to achieve. It has, therefore, promoted the emergence of a political party with which relations have been rather complicated, especially when it has been in office.

THE RSS, A NATIONALIST SECT

The RSS was founded in 1925 in reaction to what was then perceived as aggressive pan-Islamism on the part of the Muslim minority. In the early 1920s, the movement in defence of the Khilafat—threatened by the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire during the post World War I peace talks—had in effect occasionally degenerated into outbreaks of violence

directed against Hindus.¹ These incidents provoked a sort of majoritarian inferiority complex among some members of the Hindu intelligentsia, for which the ground had already been laid by the colonial stereotype that described Hindus as a meek, even effeminate, 'race' (Bamford 1985 [1925]).²

The Foot Soldiers of Hindutva

The RSS, created to overcome this feeling of vulnerability, was supposed to enable Hindus to assimilate the qualities perceived as being at the root of Muslim strength, starting with their allegedly intense sense of community. Hindu nationalism, generally speaking, relied on a strategy of stigmatization and emulation of so-called threatening others. As a result Hindu nationalists have always tried to imitate those who, according to them, were posing a threat to Hinduism—mainly the Muslims and Christians—in order to resist them more effectively. For instance, they tried to build pan-Hindu temples which could welcome all the members of the community, like the mosques.

At the same time, RSS ideologues have always endeavoured to demonstrate that the Hindus met the criteria, as codified by nineteenth-century Western scholars, of nation. This ideological construct was primarily based on an ethnic myth, according to which the Hindus descend from the first Aryans who lived on the subcontinent. One of the main instigators of Hindu nationalism, V.D. Savarkar, declared in 1923 in his treatise on 'Hinduness' (Hindutva), which directly inspired K.B. Hedgewar, founder of the RSS: 'All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers' (Savarkar 1962 [1923]: 85).

This conception owes much to the writings of nineteenth-century European Orientalists and religious reform movements such as the Arya Samaj.³ The invention of this tradition of an ethnic Golden Age going back to the Vedic era is the touchstone of Hindu nationalism. Its proponents worked out a national territory clearly delimited by the Himalayas and the sea, from the land covered in the first Aryan invasions, *Aryavarta*, which in the Vedic texts is the sacred land of sacrificial rites. Hindu nationalist ideologues also saw in this prestigious antiquity a common language, Sanskrit, which scholarly research

into Indo-European civilization helped to establish as the mother of all languages. The aim of the RSS was to restore the grandeur of the Hindus' culture, and their supremacy over a land that had been invaded by foreigners so many times.

The very structure of the RSS and its everyday activities—which, like its ideology, have changed little over time—reflect its ambition of acting as a crucible and an agent for a new Hindu nation. In its basic units, the *shakhas* (local branches), dozens of children and adolescents in uniform gather to participate in daily calisthenics and ideological instruction, where they learn of the former glory of Vedic India and the kingdoms predating the Muslim invasions, or those that offered resistance to them. Although the movement arose out of an initiative of Maharashtra Brahmins who have continued to lead it since its founding by Hedgewar, the mission of the shakhas is to recruit members without regard for caste or class. The shakhas are in fact the framework for the psychosocial reform on which the Hindu nation is supposed to be built, as a 'brotherhood in saffron'.⁴ The aim of this institution is to inculcate in the *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) a nationalist conscience and sense of solidarity among equals, which will make the RSS the spearhead of the Hindu nation in a sociological context dominated by caste, sect, and regional distinctions. The ambition of its leaders to make it the matrix of a homogenous Hindu nation from all perspectives (historical references, sociological perspectives, ideological allegiances, and so on) meant that their plan was conceived as a long-term endeavour: the aim was to cover the entire country with a network of shakhas radiating out from its place of origin in central India: Nagpur in Maharashtra.

This aim has, to a large extent, been achieved. In 2004, the movement had 33,758 shakhas and 48,329 *upshakhas* (sub branches), simply because in some cities and towns the RSS has much more than one shakha's renewed membership. The network nevertheless remains fairly sparse in southern India, particularly in Tamil Nadu where the population, which is very attached to Dravidian culture, is not especially receptive to the RSS' Sanskritized references, and is even hostile towards its desire to make Hindi the

national language. Elsewhere, this coverage provides the movement with a means to carry out in-depth actions at the local level.

The Sangh and its Parivar

The value of social work can be clearly seen in the services rendered to populations in distress: the RSS has always come to the aid of Hindu refugees, be they victims of Partition or those who, since 1990, have fled the upsurge of violence in Kashmir.⁵ Its volunteers also participate regularly in rescue operations following natural disasters such as earthquakes. Their discipline and the promptness with which they set up tent camps, collect aid donations, and distribute goods of prime necessity is always noteworthy.⁶ This strategy of social work, which in the eyes of RSS cadres symbolizes a form of Hindu solidarity that should be spread through the society to make it a nation, enables it to gain access to new social milieus.

The RSS's vocation of working in (and on) society acquired a new dimension when it founded a series of specialized institutions. Soon after Independence, anxious to counteract an increasingly active Communist Party, it formed union organizations

on a double front: the Adhik Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), created in 1948 for the students, and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), which was founded in 1955 for the workers and now, with 1.8 million members, is the country's largest union organization.⁸ Other, more sector-based organizations were also founded in the 1950s, such as the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (Ashram for Tribal Welfare) instituted in 1952, which mainly aimed to offset the influence of Christian missions among the tribal populations, whose conversion was perceived as a process of 'denationalization'. In 1964, this stake even justified setting up a new branch, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), also aiming to bring together the greatest possible number of representatives of Hindu sects to form a sort of consistory. This creation again partakes of the logic of stigmatization and emulation of threatening others, since it developed in reaction to the feelings of vulnerability sparked by the proselytism of the international Christian network. RSS leaders endeavoured to transpose its structure, perceived as a model of effectiveness; in other words,

to endow Hinduism with a Church. In 1979, the RSS family expanded with the addition of another new organization aimed to fight untouchability and aid the most destitute. The Seva Bharti (Indian Service, a recruitment agency for volunteer social workers) dispenses healthcare on occasion, but is mainly involved in educational work. This line of action, to some extent, overlaps that of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, which, since 1952, has formed a network of schools with a highly idealized and Sanskritized curriculum. This includes schools in slums and villages where education needs are far from being met.

As early as the 1950s, therefore, the RSS had developed a network of front organizations, which came to be known as the 'Sangh Parivar', the family of the RSS. One of the first components of this nebula—which has not been mentioned yet, but which was bound to play a major role—was the Jana Sangh, a political party founded in 1951. The relationship between this party and its mother organization was to be very complicated, as one could have expected from the very conception of power evolved by the RSS.

THE RSS' CONCEPTION OF POWER: THE RAJ GURU MODEL

The key word in the RSS lexicon is probably 'renunciation'. Indeed, it has always tried to associate itself with the values of asceticism and sacrifice. A medical practitioner by training, Hedgewar refused to work as a doctor or marry so as to better devote himself to the cause of a Hindu nationalist revival. His asceticism and devotion led to his being likened to a guru in the RSS ranks Madhav S. Golwalkar, whom he appointed to succeed himself as leader of the RSS in 1940 shortly before his death, enjoyed the same status, symbolized this time by the nickname 'Guriji', due to his spiritual quest. The members of the RSS consider these two dignitaries of the movement *jivan muktas* ('liberated while living'), and their mausoleums remain places of pilgrimage in Nagpur (Andersen and Dahl 1987: 37, 80).

Beyond these tutelary figures, the entire RSS structure conforms to the same rationale. As early as 1927, Hedgewar undertook to train *pracharaks* (preachers and full-time cadres) in officers' training

camps. They were to spearhead the RSS as artisans of new shakhas throughout India. They were—and still are—young militants with organizational skills, who agree to *forgo* founding a family and undertaking a career, even though many of them are still in university or have already graduated. Their commitment/enrolment is on a voluntary basis, and the organization takes care of their needs with the help of local patrons. This renunciation constitutes a great source of prestige among adolescents they are supposed to attract to shakhas or among associated organizations (ABVP, BMS, VHP, and so on.) they are assigned by the RSS to lead. An invocation of the values of renunciation is of course illegitimate, because these men are not working towards their own salvation; they are looked upon as *karma yogis* because they dedicate all their energy to the salvation of their nation.

In its attempt to fashion Hindu society into a nation, the RSS has always claimed to care little about coming to power. Its aim was to transform society from below through the network of shakhas. Keeping such a long-term perspective in mind, Hedgewar systematically turned down requests from parties for support from the militant forces of the shakhas (Joshi 1970: 15). In his view, changes coming from state-related institutions could never be as effective as those emerging from society itself. In his manifesto, published in 1938, which was the RSS' main ideological treatise before Independence, Golwalkar dismissed as irrelevant any ambitions regarding the state (Golwalkar 1939: 59).

This disinterest in state power and enthusiasm for social work resulted from the conviction that the fundamental principle of Hindu national identity resides in society itself, apart from the state, and that the custodian of social order must be the spiritual counsellor of state power. In the Brahminical interpretation of the Hindu tradition that the RSS developed, he who holds temporal power remains subject to spiritual authority which enables him to preserve the dharma: the king is thus guided by a Brahmin, the Raj Guru. Emphasizing its respect for the spiritual values of renunciation, the RSS offers to fulfil the role of dharmic advisor to the state, as suggested by Golwalkar himself:

The political rulers were never the standard-bearers of our society. They were never taken as the props of our national life. Saints and sages, who had risen above the mundane temptations of self and power and had dedicated themselves wholly for establishing a happy, virtuous and integrated state of society were its constant torch-bearers. They represented the *dharma-sattra* (sic) [religious authority]. The king was only an ardent follower of that higher moral authority. (Golwalkar 1966: 93)

Golwalkar elaborates further:

We aspire to become the radiating Centre of all the age-old cherished ideals of our society—just as the indescribable power which radiates through the sun. Then the political power which draws its life from that source of society, will have no other [goal than?] to reflect the same radiance. (Golwalkar 1966: 103)

These views reveal the limits of the RSS' indifference to power, but help us clarify its relationship to the state: ideally, the movement would like to be the counsellor of a like-minded government in the hands of 'its' political party. But how could the Jana Sangh seize power without diluting the ideology of the Parivar that it was part of?

IN SEARCH OF A POLITICAL STRATEGY

Despite denying any political ambition, in 1951 Golwalkar agreed to form a party under pressure from certain RSS members concerned with the movement's absence in this field. In 1943, the RSS, having been banned after Gandhi's assassination by (former) swayansevak, realized the extent of its isolation in a political system dominated by the secular and progressive ideas propounded by Nehru, who viewed this movement as the Indian version of fascism. Golwalkar assigned a number of pracharakas to build up the new party, the Jana Sangh (People's Association), but drew a clear demarcating line between the two organizations whose hierarchies, for one, were quite distinct.¹⁰

The Jana Sangh: From Instrumentalism to Coalition Politics

The party was structured along the model of the 'RSS networks' of the 1950s. Its leaders, including

Deendayal Upadhyaya, who was the most influential, did not seem interested in capturing power, but contended themselves with propagating the Hindu nationalist ideology. Its ultimate objective was not the conquest of power, the state being an unimportant institution, but the reform of society. In 1962, Upadhyaya still looked upon elections as an 'opportunity to educate the people on political issues' (Upadhyaya 1962: 20). However, the Jana Sangh gradually adopted an instrumentalist strategy, manipulating identity symbols for political mobilization (Brass 1991, especially ch. 3), like the protection of the cow, the promotion of Hindi, or the defence of Ayurvedic medicine. Nevertheless, the Jana Sangh was caught in a stranglehold by the 'Congress system':¹¹ on the one hand the 'Hindu traditionalists'¹² among the Congress at the local level were already active in favour of issues such as protection of the cows and the promotion of Hindi as the national language, thereby depriving the Jana Sangh of arguments; on the other hand, the highest level of the state, embodied by Nehru, and later his daughter Indira Gandhi, strictly defended secular positions and conducted campaigns against the Jana Sangh and the RSS, even banning some of its shashas.¹³

Now this cause of isolation could hardly be counterbalanced by the access to grassroots Hindu society, as the RSS lacked intermediaries who were powerful enough. It was true that the RSS had created a press agency and more or less official organs, but its means remained limited—especially with respect to radio broadcasting, which Indira Gandhi used in an extremely populist fashion in the 1970s. Moreover, the RSS militant network and its offshoots were only expanding slowly, and could not be entirely detailed to the task of political mobilization. The fact that it did not appeal to religious figures (sect leaders, sadhus/holy-men), who preferred to invest their efforts in more conservative organizations such as the Ram Rajya Parishad (Council of the Kingdom of Ram) also proved detrimental.

The effects of these various constraints were clearly felt in 1966, when the Hindu nationalists launched a huge campaign to protect cows with an eye to the approaching fourth general election. The official aim was to secure a constitutional revision that would have enabled the Centre to pass a legislation in this regard, since some states had not prohibited cow slaughter. Faithful to the secular heritage handed down by her father, Indira Gandhi made no concessions, despite the scale of the demonstrations held outside Parliament and the hunger strike undertaken by several religious personalities. The movement also slackened due to a lack of coordination between the Hindu nationalists and these prestigious figures of Hinduism, whose political allegiances or independent spirit created an obstacle to planning such an agitation. Compared to the 1962 elections, the Jana Sangh only progressed by three percentage points, with 9.4 per cent of the vote in the 1967 elections, its ideological isolation limiting the scope of its alliances with other opposition parties.

In the late 1960s, it finally decided to tone down

its Hindu nationalist militancy in order to be more

palatable to other opposition parties loyal to the spirit

of the Constitution, be they socialist or pro-farmer

parties, or those born of splits with the Congress,

such as the Congress (Organization). Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of Emergency in 1975 accelerated

this evolution, which led the Jana Sangh to merge

within the Janata Party (People's Party), a coalition of anti-Congress forces. It supplied the group with the

largest contingent of MPs, and the party won a strong

majority in the 1977 elections. The rationale behind this strategy of integration obviously involved working on the political system from within. The aim was to try and produce a political culture that combined a somewhat watered-down form of Hindu nationalism with the 'Hindu traditionalism' of the former Congress members.

Hindu nationalist influence was reflected in the

government through three types of agendas, revealing

the penetration of the ideological categories inherited

from the RSS. First of all the group of ex-Jana Sangh

Members of Parliament (MPs) backed a bill to amend

the Constitution that aimed to make the ban on

slaughtering cows a matter of federal jurisdiction.

Next, ex-Jana Sangh MPs introduced a bill aiming

to control conversions which were often coupled,

according to them, with bribes or other forms of

pressure. This desire for 'top-down' intervention,

which targeted the Christian missionaries who were

particularly active in tribal areas, reflected, despite the

82.6 per cent Hindus counted in the 1981 census, the

dread of a demographic decline that forms part of the RSS' majoritarian inferiority complex. Finally, the Hindu nationalists took part in a campaign to revise history textbooks, which—having been written by Communist-leaning members of the intelligentsia—did not, according to them, portray the Hindu kingdoms and their struggles against Muslim invaders in a favourable enough light.

Although limited in scope, these projects and demands reveal the Hindu nationalist conception of power. The state is called upon to intervene to make minorities respect Hindu culture and assimilate into it by swearing allegiance to its symbols of identity, and by identifying with its history. For the Muslim and Christian communities, this implies confining their own religious practices to the private sphere, and engaging in a genuine process of acculturation.

These ideological options contributed to the marginalization of former Jana Sangh members, who had to finally withdraw from the Janata Party in 1980. This break prompted the RSS to reorient its strategy along more political lines, in which the religious dimension took on a more instrumental form, as it had in 1966–7.

Even before this split, the problems encountered by Hindu nationalists in 1979 in their relations with other components of the Janata Party had prompted Deoras, who had succeeded Golwalkar in 1973, to unleash an offensive from a political perspective. During a lecture to the VHP, he declared:

Hindus must now awaken themselves to such an extent that even from the elections point of view the politicians will have to respect the Hindu sentiments and change their policy accordingly....If others put up demands which were accepted, but even genuine demands by Hindus are ignored. This is because Muslims and other minorities usually vote in bloc while Hindus are divided. Once Hindus get united, the government would start caring for them also.¹⁴

Since the political wing of the RSS, rechristened the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after the 1980 split, persevered in a strategy of integrating legitimate politics at the price of considerably watering down its Hindu nationalism, the VHP was put in charge of organizing the campaign Doras longed for to spark a 'Hindu awakening'.

The 1980s–90s: Religious Mobilization for Electoral Purposes

The implementation of an instrumentalist strategy in the course of the 1980s generated a much greater Hindu mobilization than it had in 1966–7, both from the standpoint of scale as well as duration and electoral impact. This contrast can partly be explained by changes in the two aforementioned variables, and in the communal relations that rekindled the majoritarian inferiority complex.

The VHP chose to focus its agitation on the demand to rebuild the temple that once stood above the supposed birthplace of the god Ram in Ayodhya (a city located near Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh). The building was said to have been replaced by a mosque in the sixteenth century after the Mughal dynasty rose to power. In 1949, an idol of Ram mysteriously appeared in the mosque—provoking all likelihood by Hindu nationalists—providing demonstrations of fervour that prompted the authorities to place seals on this holy place. A few decades later, the choice of this issue remained a very judicious one, given the extent to which the figure of Ram is worshipped, particularly in north India. The VHP, in fact, immediately rallied several religious figures (sect leaders and sachhus), whose prestige further amplified its capacity for mobilization. The central theme of the agitation was the condition of a prisoner (an allusion to the seals), that Ram had been reduced to, represented as he was in the propaganda as being behind bars.¹⁵

The political nature of this agitation can be deduced from its chronology. The first phase of mobilizations took place in 1984, with elections looming in early 1985. The VHP's plans were thwarted, however, by the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, which brought the problem of national unity to the forefront of the electoral issues. However, the VHP relaunched its movement, which significantly reached its peak in another election year, 1989. The BJP, finally convinced of the strategic relevance of this agitation, became an active participant. Demonstrating a remarkable capacity for planning around the religious calendar and the political agenda, in January, during the Magh Mela (fair held in the Hindu month of Magh, usually

coinciding with the months of January–February) in Allahabad, a Hindu celebration that lent solemnity to the plan, the VHP announced that come what may, the first stone of the temple would be laid (*shilanyas*) on 9 November, the date recommended by VHP astrologers and which fell right in the middle of the election campaign. In the meantime, RSS militants, VHP sadhus, and the BJP candidates running for election canvassed thousands of towns and villages to consecrate bricks stamped with Ram's name, which were to be used to build the temple. This *Ram-shila puja* (consecration of the bricks stamped 'Ram')

followed the same scenario everywhere. The bricks were carried in processions akin to those organized for religious celebrations, in which idols are carried along a precise route, and the ceremonies ended with Vedically inspired rituals.¹⁶ This campaign had a considerable impact until the first stone was laid on 9 November. Due to its association with such an emotionally charged cause, BJP gained some popularity which partly translated into electoral terms: in November 1989, it won 88 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha as against two in 1984, and acquired an absolute or relative majority in the legislative assemblies of three states in the north (Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan). This strategy of manipulating Hindu symbols took on a more explicitly political dimension in 1990 when BJP President L.K. Advani covered 10,000 kilometres in a car made to look like the chariot of Arjuna, a central figure in the Mahabharata. This *Rath Yatra* was greeted along its path by displays of fervour that were particularly intense among women, who at times offered their *mangalsutras* (a necklace received on their wedding, usually made of precious stones and metals) as a sign of their devotion to Ram's cause. Started on 25 September 1990, the itinerary would take Advani to Ayodhya just when the VHP had decided to begin the *Kar Seva* (literally 'service-action', construction of the temple) on 30 October. However, Advani was arrested in Bihar before he could enter Uttar Pradesh. Despite these exceptional measures, nearly 50,000 people (including a number of sadhus) arrived at the mosque on the planned date and stormed it. Repressive measures reportedly claimed several dozen lives, a fact the VHP and BJP immediately exploited: the martyrs' ashes were

carried in a procession throughout India, and tens of thousands of videos showing the massacre of Ram worshippers were sold clandestinely.

The atmosphere thus created partly explains the BJP's electoral gains during the early elections held in May and June 1991; the party, which fielded 473 candidates as compared to 225 in 1989, in fact garnered 19.9 per cent of the votes cast and 119 seats in the Lok Sabha, making it the second largest national party. Its influence now extended to the south of the country, since it captured 2.8 per cent of the votes in Karnataka. In the north, its gains enabled it to take control of a fourth state: Uttar Pradesh.

Why Instrumentalism Works

Many Hindus proved receptive to this discourse: they were aware of the political gains the BJP was pursuing under cover of pseudo-religious rituals, but this did not dissuade them. On the contrary, their support was precisely because they subscribed to the overall party ideology in particular its anti-Muslim bias. The religious sincerity of the Hindu nationalist movement's approach was less important than defending the community that it represented in political terms. This attitude reflects the context that prevailed in the first half of the 1980s, characterized as it was by a reactivation of the Hindu 'majoritarian inferiority complex', as well as the variables that had previously jeopardized the success of the instrumentalist strategy.

The Majoritarian Inferiority Complex Revisited

In 1981, the conversion of several hundred Dalits in Meenakshipuram (Tamil Nadu) to Islam (Mathew 1982) was criticized in the press, and not just by Hindu nationalist sections of the media,¹⁷ as a conspiracy funded by Arab countries. At the same time, the extravagant expenditures (for building mosques, for example) and commercial investments made by Indian Muslims working in the Persian Gulf awakened latent fears in some Hindus through the reinforcement of this minority's social and religious visibility.¹⁸ More importantly, in 1985 Rajiv Gandhi yielded to the pressure levied by certain Muslim leaders who protested against a Supreme

Court decision that in their eyes violated the *Shariat* (recognized as a source of law in the Constitution). This ruling entitled a Muslim woman (*Shah Bano*), who had been divorced by her husband according to customary Muslim law, to maintenance. Rajiv Gandhi, anxious not to alienate the leaders of a minority that traditionally voted for the Congress, agreed to exempt the Muslim community from the article of the Penal Code by virtue of which the Supreme Court had made its ruling. This decision, which seemed to vindicate Hindu nationalist claims that minorities were imposing their will on the government, gave rise to heated protests, even among the intelligentsia.

To some degree, this was a reactivation of the majoritarian's inferiority complex that had been behind the founding of the VHP in the 1920s.

The erosion of secularism

Rajiv Gandhi's pro-Muslim stance in the *Shah Bano* case marks the acceleration in the erosion of the secular stance of the Congress which had begun in the early 1980s. Shortly after her return to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi had tended to exploit communal sentiments for political ends: on the one hand she granted the Muslim university of Aligarh an autonomous status as representing a minority (Graff 1990), and on the other, she made many visits to temples and, in 1983, allowed one of her lieutenants, C.M. Stephen, to state that the political culture of the Congress was on the same wavelength' as the Hindu culture.

This communalization of politics took a new turn under Rajiv Gandhi's government. He in fact attempted to balance the ruling made in the *Siah Bano* affair by deciding to remove the seals from the Ayodhya mosque (Nugent 1990). Such a concession to Hindu nationalist demands in February 1986 left them free to rekindle their agitation at a time when their capacity for mobilization had reached its limit. In 1989, the government once again allowed the shilanyas to take place on a plot of land the property title of which was disputed in the high court. At the time, Rajiv Gandhi was obviously seeking to mobilize Hindu opinion, as evidenced in the themes of his campaign speeches.¹⁹ In fact, this tactic helped primarily to remove any obstacle that the Congress' secular line had imposed until then on the

instrumentalist strategy of Hindu nationalists; first, the latter were left at liberty to act until the repression of October 1990, which came to late to thwart their capacity for mobilization; and second, their propaganda ended up being legitimated by the use of comparable themes within the Congress itself.

Consolidating the Hindu nationalist networks

In 1966–7, the attitude of the religious figures involved in the cow protection movement contributed to reducing its impact. Starting in 1984, the VHP was able to circumvent this obstacle, since it had now gathered together enough religious figures who could obscure the influence of critical sect leaders, legitimize the campaign in the name of the Ram temple, and mobilize the public.

Most religious figures whose prestige went beyond their sect or region continued to remain at a distance from the VHP's regular activities. One of them, the *Dwarka shankaracharya*, even tried to short-circuit the plans of the VHP with Congress support by attempting to undertake the temple construction himself. The Uttar Pradesh government prevented this, but the undertaking had in any case failed to destabilize the VHP, which now had in its ranks religious figures who understood the working of politics, and were able to adhere to a rigorous calendar of actions. Most religious leaders who joined the movement were even less disturbed by the nationalist reinterpretation of certain rituals since they shared the RSS ideology.

Among the religious leaders involved with the forming of the Parliament of Dharma, a VHP consultative institution that claimed to represent a sort of consistory of Hinduism. Since 1984, its plenary sessions had lent the VHP's programme—and particularly its constantly reiterated demand to return the Ayodhya site to the Hindus—the support of an assembly in saffron. Beyond that, many of these ascetics participated actively in the Hindu nationalist agitation, Ram shila pujas, or the *Kar Seva*, during which some of them were arrested for leading several thousands of demonstrators.

Besides, the campaign for the Ram temple made extensive use of audiovisual techniques: cassettes

containing speeches by VHP sadhus were distributed, and over 100,000 copies of a video film showing the martyrdom of the temple builders' were sold in the Hindi version alone, even though it had been banned by the authorities.

The context of the 1980s, marked as it was by the resurgence of the Hindu majoritarian inferiority complex, the removal of secular hurdles, and the emergence of new intermediaries for RSS propaganda, largely explains the magnitude of the Ayodhya movement. The Sangh Parivar pursued its use of power while surfing on this movement in the 1990s.

THE BJP IN OFFICE: THE SANGH PARIVAR UNDER TENSION

In 1996 the BJP became the largest party in the Lok Sabha, but A.B. Vajpayee was unable to form the government. He was in a position to do so in 1998, but only for a year, because of the looseness of the coalitions supporting him and his team of ministers. One year later the BJP mounted a robust coalition, which was to rule India for five full years: for the first time, the Congress was out of power for one complete term of the Lok Sabha. However, this success created tensions within the Sangh Parivar, precisely because it was achieved thanks to the making of a coalition whose partners exerted strong constraints over the BJP.

How the BJP Kept the RSS Happy

In October 1999, L.K. Advani admitted that a new phase had begun in the career of the BJP in 1996, when Vajpayee failed to form a coalition government: 'It was felt that on an ideological basis we couldn't go further. So we embarked on the course of alliance-based coalitions'²⁰—this was a nice way of establishing a direct relationship between the way the BJP had diluted its Hindu nationalism, and the making of alliances. Both phenomena had culminated, in 1998, in the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The BJP and its alliance partners evolved a National Agenda for Government in March 1998, based on which Vajpayee formed his government.²¹ The mainstays of the Sangh Parivar's programme—the Ram temple to be built at Ayodhya, the abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution, and the establishment

of a uniform civil code—were not included in this agenda because most of the BJP's allies disapproved of their Hindu nationalist connotations. In 1999, the election manifesto of the NDA promised 'a moratorium on contentious issues',²² which continued to be the same three ones.

Why have the RSS' leaders ostensibly accepted such a dilution of its ideology? It was because, first, this was not such a high price to pay for having sympathetic rulers in office, who would enhance the legitimacy of the Sangh in the public sphere—and protect the organization. Senior RSS leaders H.V. Seshadri and K.C. Sudarshan—the then joint General Secretary of the organization—were in the front row at the swearing in ceremony of the Vajpayee government in 1999, and gave their blessings to the newly appointed ministers (who sought such a gesture from them). A few months later, Sudarshan declared: 'With a government in power that is not inimical to us, we shall be able to work better.'²³

One of the first decisions Vajpayee made after forming his government in March 1998 was to appoint six new governors, five among whom were BJP members. Among them, S.S. Bhandari, Bhai Malavir, and Satish Bhan were swayamsevaks from whom the RSS could expect benevolent gestures. Indeed, the way the organization could benefit from the BJP being in office was especially obvious at the state level. In Uttar Pradesh, as early as 25 July 1998, Rajendra Singh—the then RSS chief—had formally met top bureaucrats in Lucknow, and lectured them on 'nationalism and honesty'.

Besides, some of the policies implemented by the Vajpayee government met with the RSS' approval.

'This was most evident in the field of education,'

the Minister for Human Resources and Development,

Muri Manohar Joshi, being notoriously close to the RSS leadership. One of the organization cadres at

the movement's Delhi head office even declared: 'He

is the most frequent to come here to consult RSS

Organising Secretary K. Sudarshan. We know that our

project of nation-building cannot be accomplished

without basic education'.²⁴

Though his attempt to institutionalize the recitation of the *Saraswati Vandana* in schools failed in 1998, immediately after the 1999 elections Joshi

appointed personalities who had been close to the Sangh Parivar as heads of the directive body of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). B.R. Grover and M.L. Sondhi, respectively, B.R. Grover—who retired from Jamia Millia Islamia as Reader and became a member of the ICHR in 1998—was one of the historians who had provided the Sangh Parivar with archaeological ‘evidence’ that the Babri Masjid had been built over a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Sondhi, a former Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer who had joined politics, won a Lok Sabha seat in Delhi on a Jana Sangh ticket in 1967. Besides, Joshi also appointed Krishna Gopal Rastogi, a former RSS pracharak, to the search committee for faculty appointments at the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The apprehensions that have been aroused by the placement of RSS fellow travellers in key positions began to materialize in February 2000 when the ICHR ‘suspended’ two volumes of its series called ‘Towards Freedom’ by Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Pandikkar, who were known for being highly critical of the Sangh Parivar.²⁵

The RSS also appreciated his defence policy of Vajpayee’s government. In May 1998, the organization applauded the nuclear tests at Pokharan. In his report before the Abhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha in March 1999, H.V. Seshadri highlighted the achievement of Vajpayee’s government in the field of security issues:

The series of 5 nuclear blasts at Pokharan on May 11th and 13th of last year, carried out on the strength of entirely indigenous input by way of materials and also of sheer scientific and technological excellence placing Bharat at the top of nuclear world on par with any of the giants in that field, the absolute secrecy maintained all through until it was broadcast on the TV by our Prime Minister, the political grit and courage displayed by the central leadership in taking that historic decision in the light of our national security requirements, and the way it has acted as a great moral booster not only to our army but to all our patriotic countrymen—all this has proved to be the one greatest moment of all-round national jubilation and celebration during the Golden Jubilee Year of our Independence.²⁶

Seshadri also congratulated—implicitly—L.K. Advani, the Home Minister, for his policy in Jammu and Kashmir in the warmest terms:

The achievement in the field of internal national security by way of liquidating and nabbing of thousands of saboteurs and insurgents in Kashmir has been unequalled to this day. (Singh 1994)

Bones of Contention

A few bones of contention remained, though, between the BJP and the RSS—or, even more clearly, between the BJP and other components of the Sangh Parivar. In the economic domain, the Vajpayee government gradually betrayed the ideal of Swadeshi by which the Hindu nationalist movement used to swear. In early 1999, the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, an RSS offshoot, had organized a Swadeshi Mela in order to promote the notion of ‘self-reliance’ (Sreedathan 1999: 10–11).

Vajpayee had inaugurated it by saying: ‘We are all part of the same family. It’s good that you have come up with ideas but if I can’t execute them, I’ll say sorry.’²⁷ Economic nationalism was certainly not on his agenda any more. His government introduced the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Bill as early as the first session of the thirteenth Lok Sabha in December 1999 to allow the entry of private Indian and foreign companies into the insurance business, ending the monopoly of the public-sector Life

Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and General Insurance Corporation (GIC). In February 2000, the government enhanced ceilings on foreign direct investment by 2.3 to 100 per cent in eight sectors, including drugs and pharmaceuticals, mining, and the film industry. Then Commerce Minister, Murasoli Maran, declared: ‘We want to create an Indian fever [among foreign investors] just as there was a China fever not too long ago’.²⁸ An agreement to remove import controls on consumer goods was also signed with the United States, and the level of protectionism that India had started reducing since the early 1990s continued to diminish. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Labour Union of the Sangh Parivar, protested on behalf of its anti-globalization ideology,²⁹ and the RSS itself objected to this policy. In March 2000, the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha passed a resolution supporting an ‘India-centric and need-specific’ model of development.

The BJP and other units of the Sangh Parivar were also at cross-purposes on the Ayodhya issue. One

of the VHP’s related bodies, the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, supervised the cutting of stones and the carving of the 212 pillars for the temple in Sirohi (Rajasthan), and in January 2000, Ashok Singh, the VHP Working President, declared that Hindu saints would build the Ram temple at Ayodhya ‘once the chiselling of stones is over’. He argued that there was no legal ban on the construction given that the property acquired by the Centre belonged to the temple deity.³⁰ The RSS itself reaffirmed its interest in Ayodhya during the last election campaign. In September, its supreme Chief, Rajendra Singh, emphasized that Muslims, whose rulers had allegedly destroyed 3,000 temples, should hand over the sites in Benares, Mathura, and Ayodhya, where mosques had been built on so-called Hindu sacred places.³¹ However, the Vajpayee government resisted those pressures, arguing that Ayodhya was one of the issues that had been removed from the BJP’s agenda because of the compulsions of coalition politics.

So long as the BJP remained in office, the RSS resigned itself to the dilution of the BJP’s ideology, but things changed after the 2004 defeat, which was considered by most components of the Sangh Parivar other than the BJP as a rejection of the moderate line of conduct advocated by Vajpayee. Soon after the elections, the General Secretary of the VHP, Praveen Togadia, declared: ‘The Bharatiya Janata Party betrayed the Hindus. The BJP left its core ideology of Hindu Dharma and trust on the basis of which they had been voted to power’.³² In August, the BJP held a *shikshan bhithak* (brainstorming session) in order to reflect upon the party’s strategy. Madan Das Devi, representing the RSS, declared that the Sangh expected the BJP to return to Hindutva. However, Vajpayee stressed the need to keep the NDA intact. The ten-point document of conclusions resolved to continue with the NDA experiment, but committed the party to moving closer to the RSS. A new administrative position was created within the party, that of regional organization secretary, to improve coordination between the Delhi headquarters and the state units. It is significant that the first six holders of this new position were all pracharkas.³³

More importantly, L.K. Advani, who had replaced V. Naidu as party President in 2004, was openly

criticized by K. Sudarshan, who had taken over from Rajendra Singh in 2000 as Sarsanghchalak. In an unprecedented move, the latter said, during the course of a TV interview, that the former—and A.B. Vajpayee—should make room for new faces. L.K. Advani objected, stating that such an attitude reflected abnormal interference on the part of RSS leaders in the working of the BJP. In his concluding statement at the National Executive meeting of the party on 18 September 2005, he declared:

From time to time and depending on the issue at hand, the BJP leadership has had no hesitation in consulting the RSS functionaries. After such consultations, the Party takes its own independent decisions. Some of these decisions may differ—and have indeed differed—from the stated positions of the RSS and certain constituencies of the Sangh Parivar.³⁴

But lately an impression has gained ground that no political or organizational decision can be taken without the consent of the RSS functionaries. This perception, we hold, will do no good either to the Party or to the RSS. ‘We feel that the RSS should continue to play its role to strengthen the ethical, moral and idealistic moorings of the workers as well as functionaries of the BJP, as in the past, and in the largest interest of the nation.’³⁵

The BJP greatly appreciates the continuing interaction we have been having with the RSS and with other organizations in the Sangh Parivar. Their views provide valuable inputs for our decision making process. But the BJP as a political party is accountable to the people, its performance being periodically put to test in elections. So in a democratic, multi-party polity, an ideologically driven party like the BJP has to function in a manner that enables it to keep its basic ideological stances intact and at the same time expand itself to reach the large sections of the people outside the layers of all ideology. (Jafratol 2007: 189–92, emphasis mine)

The last sentence of this excerpt was intended to justify what the RSS leaders called the dilution of the BJP’s doctrinal purity. But this overall plea for the recognition of the party’s autonomy was not appreciated by K. Sudarshan. At the end of 2005, Advani resigned from the post of party President and was succeeded by Rajnath Singh. Ironically enough, this episode recalled the expulsion of Balraj Madhok—a former Jana Sangh President, who had also objected to interference of the RSS in the working of this party—by Advani himself in 1973, after he

replaced Vajpayee as party President.³⁴ In both cases the RSS had decided to intervene in party affairs in an even more systematic manner at the behest of an activist.³⁵ *Sarsanghchalak*: in 1973 Deoras had just taken over from Golwalkar and in 2005, Sudarshan had had the time to impose his own—similar—style. These two men showed that the RSS can be actively interested in party politics.

CONCLUSION

The Sangh Parivar is obviously facing a structural dilemma. On the one hand the RSS views politics as something vulgar, which may endanger its doctrinal purity and the state, which has to be reformed, as an unimportant institution compared with society. On the other hand, its leaders have admitted the need to play a political role as a raj guru of some sort, through a party designed to capture power so that the Sangh Parivar could benefit from such an access to the state apparatus.

Such a stand implies a major contradiction when the party in question needs to be part of a coalition. The RSS could not be the Raj Guru or the Janata Party because in this party, the sālana Saṅghis had secular partners who exposed their dual membership; and twenty years later the BJP could not retain its initial agenda because it had to concede to other members of the NDA that did not share its ideology.

To surmount these contradictions, the RSS needs to win elections on its own. Indeed, things have been much easier at the state level when the BJP got an absolute majority like in Gujarat. Then the xenophobic dimensions of the Hinduva movement found expression in the 2002 pogroms and the rule of law was put on trial, revealing the anti-democratic foundations of the Hindu nationalist movement.³⁶

⁴ To borrow from the title of the book by Andersen and Danile (1987).

⁵ *The Hindu*, 13 March 2004.

⁶ In December 1990, the Hindu nationalists in Delhi—where 14,000 Pandit families had reportedly migrated—claimed to have set up six refugee camps, provided aid amounting to Rs 1.3 million, found work for 1400 people, and registered 800 children in school (interview with Manje Ram Garg, BJP party secretary in Delhi, in charge of the Kashmunti Migrants Cell, 8 December 1990).

⁷ At the time of Partition in 1947, the RSS had organized a food drive to bring meals prepared on the outskirts of Delhi to the capital, which was being flooded by refugees from western Punjab (interview with M.C. Sharma, *Oral History Transcript* [Hindi], 327, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Library, p. 154).

⁸ For more details see Jaffrelot (2006).
⁹ S.P. Mukherjee Papers, 168, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Regarding the origin and history of the Jana Sangh, see Graham (1990).

¹⁰ For an insider's view of the first involvement of the RSS with politics via the Jana Sangh, see Malkani (1980, pp. 113–21).

¹¹ This concept, introduced by R. Kothari in the 1960s, refers to the Congress' capacity to dominate the Indian political space on the basis of the legitimacy it inherited from the Independence movement, by recruiting supporters among local notables and adjusting to new swing of opinion so well that government opposition at the local level sometimes seemed orchestrated by Congress members themselves (Kothari 1964).

¹² By those terms, B. Graham is referring to Congress members involved in associations for the promotion of the Hindi language, defence of cows, and the revival of Ayurvedic medicine (1988, p. 174).

¹³ This was particularly the case in Delhi in 1970 (*The Times of India*, 26 June 1970).

¹⁴ *Hindu Vishwa*, 14 (7–8), March 1979, p. 92.

¹⁵ Regarding the movement's first phase, see van der Veer (1987).

¹⁶ For a detailed report on a *Mohayajna*, see for example the one on Bhopal, *Madhya Pradesh Chronicle*, 11 November 1989, p. 9, and *Dainik Bhaskar*, 11 November 1989, p. 3.

¹⁷ *The Times of India*, 21 March 1981.

¹⁸ In Moradabad, a riot broke out in 1980 in an atmosphere made tense by a tract criticizing plans to build a Koranic school financed by money from the Gulf countries (Sabirwal and Hasan nd.).

¹⁹ He launched his election campaign in Faizabad—a town near Ayodhya—calling for a ‘Ram Raja’ (Kingdom of Ram) an expression coined by Gandhi to name the ideal

state that would come about after Independence, but which acquired strong militant Hindu connotations in the context of 1989.

²⁰ Interview with L.K. Advani, *Outlook*, 25 October 1999, p. 38.

²¹ For the full text, see *Organiser*, Varsha Pradipada Special, 29 March 1998, pp. 27–30.

²² *For a Proud, Prosperous India: NDA Election Manifesto, 1999*, Sabha Elections, New Delhi, BJP office, 1999, p. 1.

²³ Cited in *Frontline*, 24 April 1998, p. 117.

²⁴ Cited in Bhattacharji (1999, p. 23).

²⁵ Over thirty academics, including Irfan Habib, R.S. Sharma, and Ravinder Kumar—all former chairmen of the ICHR—immediately denounced the grossness of ‘censorship’ and ‘plan to spread a distorted and fictitious history of the national movement’ (*The Hindu*, 17 February 2003). S. Gopal, the General Editor of the ‘Towards Freedom’ project, also protested that the ICHR intervention amounted to ‘an infringement of academic rights and freedom of the authors.’ (*The Hindu*, 22 February 2003). According to K.N. Panikkar, the withdrawal of the two volumes was intended to prevent the exposure of the ‘collaborative role’ played by the Hindu Mahasabha vis-à-vis the British during the colonial period (*The Hindu*, 25 February 2000).

²⁶ *The Organiser*, 4 April 1999, p. 12. The RSS has always favoured the development of nuclear weapons. In early 1990s Rajendra Singh—himself a nuclear physicist—declared that ‘The day Pakistan comes to know that we also have a nuclear bomb, there would end the possibility of a Pakistani nuclear bomb being dropped here’ (Singh 1994, p. 9).

²⁷ Cited in *India Today*, 8 February 1999, p. 33.

²⁸ Cited in *The Hindu*, 3 February 2000. Similarly, Vajpeyi's government began the process of public disinvestment from Indian Airlines in January 2000. In that case it was decided to offload 51 per cent equity. Before that, the public-sector equity of the Gas Authority of India had been sold to foreign companies.

²⁹ In February 1999, the Twelfth National Conference of the BMIS was marked by new criticisms such as: ‘The acumbum by successive Indian Government to pressures of international trade regimes exerted by superpowers is a big blow to Indian sovereignty in the economic field’ (*The Organiser*, 28 February 1999, p. 1).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 January 2000.

³¹ *Indian Today*, 27 September 1999, p. 56.

³² *The Hindu*, 15 May 2004.

³³ *The Hindu*, 7 August 2004.

³⁴ See M.R. Varshney (1973).

³⁵ W. Andersen and S. Danile use this word to qualify the RSS swāyamsevaks interested in politics—of which

Deoras was probably the first typical example (Andersen and Danile 1987, p. 114).

³⁶ For more details on this point, see Jaffrelot (2001, pp. 509–34).

REFERENCES

- Andersen, W. and S. Danile, 1987. *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swāyamsevak Sangh and Hindu Renaissance*. New Delhi: Vistaar.
- Bamford, PC, 1985 [1953]. *History of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements*. Delhi: Government of India Press.
- Bhamuk, S.N., 1999. ‘Murti’s Mission’, *India Today*, 6 December.
- Brass, P. 1991. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Graham, B., 1990. *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origin and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Golwalkar, M.S., 1966. *EPOCH of Thoughts*. Bangalore: Vikrama & Sahasra.
- Jaffrelot, C., 1939. *We or our Nationhood Defined*. Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan.
- Graff, V., 1990. *Aligarh’s Long Quest for “Minority” Status—AMU (Amendment) Act, 1981: Economic and Social Strategies of the BMIS*; in C. Jaffrelot (ed.), *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, C., 2007. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kothari, R., 1964. ‘The Congress and Hindu Nationalism’, in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Indian National Congress: Contemporary Highlights*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kothari, R., 1981. ‘Economic and Democracy’, in N. Iyengar (ed.), *In Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1771–81.
- Kothari, R., 1988. ‘The Congress and Hindu Nationalism’, in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Indian National Congress*, in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Indian National Congress: Contemporary Highlights*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Malkani, K.R., 1980. *The RSS Story*. New Delhi: Impex India.
- Mathew, G., 1982. ‘Politicalisation of Religion: Conversions to Islam in Tamil Nadu’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XVII(25), 19 June, pp. 1027–34, and XVII(26), 26 June, pp. 1068–72.

- Minault, G. 1982. *The Khalifa Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Nigent, N. 1990. 'Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress Party and the 1989 Parliamentary Elections: Full Conference on the National and State Politics in Post-Election India, 10-12 May.
- Saberwal, S. and M. Hassan, nd., 'Communal Riot in Moradabad, 1980? Occasional Papers on History and Society, 19, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, mimeograph.
- Savarkar, V.D., 1962 [1923]. *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Singh, R. 1994. *Ever-Vigilant We have to be*. New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan.
- Spear, P. 1932. *The Nobobs*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Sreedathan, G. 1999. 'Swadeshi is the Mantra', *The Organiser*, 7 February.
- Upadhyaya, D. 1962. 'Jana Sangh', *Seminar*, 29 (January).
- van der Veer, Peter 1987. 'God Must be Liberated! A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21(2), pp. 283-301.
- Varshney, M.R. 1973. *Jana Sangh, RSS and Balraj Madhok*. Aligarh: Varshney College.

15 Minorities and Politics*

Bishnu N. Mohapatra

strategy has made it possible to interrogate the claims of the leaders who present their community as a homogeneous entity. It has also helped unmask the ways in which identity politics tends to paper over contradictions inherent within a community such as class, caste, and so on. No doubt these are clear-cut advantages. But the question is how far can we push the logic of anti-essentialism? If a minority community has no coherent ontological dimension, does it mean that the community simply does not exist? Let us take a concrete example. Against the people who argue that the Muslim community has a fixed and undifferentiated essence, scholars have pointed out that it is divided within in terms of class, caste, and other affiliations. In the same way the claims of the Hindu Right that the Hindus form a homogeneous entity is found to be erroneous. From this we can conclude that the idea of a Muslim community is simply a fiction? If community as an entity cannot exist then how do the categories of majority and minority make sense? Are they fictitious too?

This essay is informed by this basic conviction

that it is possible to talk of communities, collective

How does one grapple with the 'minority question' in India? Who shapes or articulates or constructs the discourses on minorities? The categories of 'majority' and 'minority' are enormously complex. What kind of categories are they? Undoubtedly, they are collective categories, more than a mere collection of individuals. Who belongs to the majority and who to the minority, is not always very clear. In the case of India, the status of a group varies as it moves from one level to the other. There are scholars who suggest that to view a society in terms of majority and minority is to view it as being composed of bounded, culturally or linguistically or racially unified communities. Over the years, anti-essentialism has become central to many works on identity politics and on multiculturalism. Against the idea that identities have fixed essences, these works have shown that identities are primarily differentiated, hybrid and multilayered. Broadly speaking, anti-essentialism as a methodological

*Views expressed in this article are those of the author and should not be attributed to any institution.

identities without being essentialistic. One should not adopt an extreme anti-essentialism that makes collective identity and agency impossible. It is not surprising then that several marginalized groups today find such radical anti-essentialism as politically disempowering or debilitating. Some of them, feminists for instance, even take recourse to 'strategic essentialism' as a way out. It is possible to speak of minority or majority community without suggesting that it is either undifferentiated or completely hybrid.

If one were to look into history it is quite evident that majority-minority relations in India have not always been conceived within the 'rights'-discourse. Gandhi's discourse on inter-community relations, even in the tragic days of Partition, was based on fellowship and mutual identification. Talk of rights was never admitted into it for, according to him, that was simply centred on claims and counter-claims. The language of 'fellowship', 'bhairacha' (brotherhood) survives even today. The utility of this language need not be jettisoned. However, since independence, the inter-community relations and the minority rights have been and are still framed within rights-discourse. It is presupposed within a constitutional democratic order where minority communities enjoy certain rights that are not dependent on majority community's goodwill or fellowship. In principle, a democratic state along with its institutions is portrayed as the protector of minority rights. The protection of minority rights in India, as this chapter argues, not only needs a responsive state but also a vigilant civil society.

No doubt the Indian Constitution contains several provisions that are meant to protect the distinct cultural or linguistic or religious identity of the minority communities. It also provides for the functioning and sustenance of institutions created by them. The desire of the makers of the Constitution to create a secular state was also essentially a response to India's plural social order. However, in spite of all these, nearly six decades after the Constitutional Republic was inaugurated, the minorities in India have expressed their feeling of alienation. Even the track record of the Indian state's responsibility to protect the lives of the minorities is, to put it mildly, not satisfactory. Communal violence in the past many decades in India, in which the minority groups

suffer the most, cannot be explained away in terms of the rise of general violence in the country. It is not surprising that the security concern has remained to be so at the top of the agenda of the religious minorities in India. Can this be explained in terms of the gaps that exist between constitutional theory and its practice? Some people try to explain the issue by showing the growing decline of certain foundational values including secularism on the Indian polity. For others, if secularism, on which vested the notion of 'minority rights', has become a highly contested doctrine, then one should look for another foundation. The principle of 'substantive equality' – as some scholars suggest, can be such an alternative foundation. We do not have to be deconstructionists or postmodernists to believe that no foundation, even a desirable principle like substantive equality, in politics can ever be fully secure. Nor can it provide the ultimate resting place for 'minority rights'. For instance, special provision for minorities can be justified on the ground that it addresses the problems of inequality in society. For some it amounts to mere appeasement of minorities and violates the principle of equality. No doubt the positions are based on two different conceptions of equality. Can these contending views be reconciled? In fact some argue that the crisis of Indian secularism lay not in the doctrine itself but in its non-negotiated character. Can one say the same thing with regard to minority rights?

During the days of the Constituent Assembly debates, the issue of minority rights for religious minorities was subjected to much discussion and controversy. By the end of the debate, except granting political safeguards to the religious minorities, other rights meant to protect their identity and prevent discrimination against them were put in place. However, the discussion on religious minorities was filled with anxieties that cannot be explained only by Partition. There was an underlying fear that according too much recognition to the religious minorities would disrupt the project of Indian nationhood. Even the well-meaning liberals belonging to the Congress share this view. The Nehruvian vision that emerged at the end emphasized the idea of non-discrimination and the idea of an inclusive nation. Many who believed in the liberal utopia and the rationality of modernity believe

that the project of development would eventually blunt the rough edges of identity politics in India. This did not happen and the power of majoritarianism kept the idea of an exclusive nation alive. Unless the ideology of majoritarianism in its different forms is squarely tackled, the regime of minority rights in India would remain painfully fragile. To the extent that the special provisions for minorities are viewed as 'appeasement', it would undermine the basis of minority rights. A minimal consensus among different political parties on this is an absolute necessity.

CONTEXTS AND QUESTIONS

India's diversity is indeed proverbial. More than a billion people who live in the country speak about 4600 languages/dialects (including the eighteen recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution [*The Constitution of India 1995: 326*]) belonging to twelve language families and 24 scripts. The country has nearly 2800 ethnic communities and nearly 20000 caste groups.¹ India houses all the major religions of the world. According to the 2001 Census of India (*Census of India 2001*), nearly 80.5 per cent were Hindus, and Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists were 13.4 per cent, 2.3 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 0.8 per cent of the total population, respectively. A cross-cutting of communities across a large territory is a significant feature of India's diversity. It is also worth remembering that these religious groups are not monolithic, they are internally diverse, and there are communities who tend to think of themselves as bearers of plural religious identities (Mayaram 1997; Nandy 1999).² It is within these complex diversities that one has to locate the majority-minority relations in India.

The history of social pluralism and collective living in India is quite complex. Mapping this history is beyond the scope of this essay. Yet, I would like to point out few salient features of this historiography. Scholars point out that in ancient India the state's engagement with social pluralism was by and large positive. The ritual/symbolic incorporation, the argument goes, was one of the important modes through which the state managed the diversities. Of course the over-arching hierarchy was always maintained. During the Mughal period, the rulers

tried to incorporate people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds into the emerging institutions of governance. It is argued that within these 'non-modern' times there was very little possibility of majority-minority conflict. The ineluctable conflict between the 'self' and the 'other' that acts as a propelling force for identity politics in our times was not conceivable in the past. The 'modern' conditions are considered responsible for the rise of the majority-minority problematic. In the case of India, like in other postcolonial societies, colonialism mediated these conditions to a larger extent.

Whether or not the portrayal of a harmonious collective living in India's non-modern past fits into history is not the issue here. There is no doubt that politics of diversities underwent dramatic changes in the 'modern' period. It is also true that the new governmental practices, or to use Foucault's expression, governmentality,³ beginning with the colonial period pressed for the identity concerns of the communities for new forms of mobilization. But it will be futile to suggest today that the only way to restore peace between state and minorities is to revive the traditional resources of tolerance and of ritual incorporation of differences into the formal political structure. These options are neither pragmatic nor do they fit in with the values such as 'equality' and 'rights' on which India's democracy is based. At this point, it is crucial to outline the contexts in which the problematic of minority rights or majority-minority relations in India is discussed in recent times.

Scholars of Indian democracy tend to agree

that the last two decades of the twentieth century

witnessed a great deal of social churning in the

country. A large number of people belonging to the

marginal sections of the Indian society finally 'arrived'

to stake their claims and assert their rights in the

polity. The high turnout of the poor and the Dalits

in the last few elections is projected as one of the

indicators of their growing assertion (Yadav 1997,

Khilnani 1997). The growing agency of the

poor and of the hitherto marginalized social groups in

the country is also felt in the realm of the civil society

in the form of their movements against the state and

the dominant interests in the society. The demand for

political equality has been intense for quite sometime

now. However, the contradiction between the political and the socio-economic one, so aptly pointed out by B.R. Ambedkar (*Constitutional Assembly Debates [CAD]* 1979), still persists and continues to animate democratic politics in the country.

The social churning is only a part of the story. The rise of the Hindu Right during the later part of the last century is equally significant. The mobilization of Hindus around the issue of Ram Jammabhoomi (the birth place of Ram) and the eventual demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, in Ayodhya, shook the secular foundations of the Indian polity. Undoubtedly, with this the relationship between the religious minorities (particularly the Muslims) and the Hindu majority hit its lowest point. Once again, the wreckage of the Babri Masjid brought forth the issue of the nature of Indian polity and state and above all the idea of India' into the domain of fierce contestation. A variety of explanations are offered concerning this tragic event. The votaries of Hindutva interpret the event as a logical outcome of the state's 'policy of appeasement' and consider it as fallout of the postulates of Nehruvian secularism, which they claim to be inauthentic and pro-religious-minorities. The secularists tend to explain the event in terms of growing communalization of the Indian society over a period of time. Some point out the Indian state's eroding capacity to engage with the religious minorities in the country that contributed to the worsening of communal situation in the country. It is true that notwithstanding the campaign of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other Hindu organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, a larger number of people disapproved the demolition of the masjid.³

The reactions of the Muslims were predictable. Most of them were angry and dejected. The projection of this event in the electronic media offended their religious and cultural sensibilities. The communal riots in different cities that followed the demolition, took the level of pathos and helplessness of the Muslims to a different level. The Indian Muslims found themselves, as someone evocatively pointed out, 'in a twilight terrain where hope and despair live in uneasy truce'.⁴

Despair arising out of communal violence was not something new to the Indian Muslims. According to

available data, during 1978–93, communal violence in India increased dramatically in comparison to the previous decade. After the Partition holocaust, communal violence (Varshney 2002; Nandy 1999) subsided till 1960; it rose once again, peaking in 1969 and then a substantial decline between 1971–7. The number of districts (Hasan 1988: 2469) affected by communal violence increased from 61 in 1961 to 250 in 1986–7. Even the Christian minorities have expressed a deep sense of insecurity as a result of increasing atrocities against them in recent years.⁵

Several reports on communal violence over the years have very clearly established that these are not natural outcomes of diversities in Indian society. In many instances the violence is collectively engineered with the direct or indirect complicity of the state and its law-enforcing agencies. The anti-Sikh violence in Delhi and other cities in the wake of India Gandhi's assassination in 1984 demonstrated the point quite well. Once the feeling of insecurity increases in the minds of the minorities; then the presence of secularism as a mere policy of intent or the existence of constitutional safeguards alone are not enough. In this context, demands on the part of the minorities for the effective implementation of the available safeguards and for the protection of their lives and property are of great value. No minority rights-talk in India is or can ever be free from such existential anxieties.

A keen observer of the political scene in India would agree that discussion on minority rights in recent decades has never been conducted in isolation. It usually comes with a host of other related issues such as, gender justice, class, and so on. The Shah Bano case in 1985 and the subsequent legislation, titled the Muslim Women Act, 1986, very clearly exposed the contradiction between women's right to equality and the collective right of the Muslim community. Against this complex backdrop, the issue of minority rights in India has to be discussed. What are the doctrinal issues involved? How did the minority discourse evolve in India? What are the epistemic and political spaces the discourse occupies and how have the political processes in the country affected it? How does one view the enabling aspects of minority rights in a society characterized by intricate diversities? I have deliberately highlighted the issue of religious

minorities in this essay, for I think it is politically not salient today. Although the problem of linguistic minorities emerges from time to time, it does not have the disruptive edge that it once had in the first two decades after Independence. We are familiar with the play of passion that occurred during the formation of the States' Reorganization Commission in the early years of Independence (formed in 1954 and submitted its report in 1956) and also during the formation of Punjab in 1966. It can also be argued that the Indian state's strategy to deal with territorially-confined linguistic minorities within the constitutional framework has been quite successful. One of the well-tested and familiar strategies of the Indian state has been to reorganize existing state boundaries. This is meant by which some minority groups can attain the status of a majority within the confines of the state. One can cite the creation of three new provinces (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand) as the recent examples to support the foregoing argument. Yet, it will be wrong to claim that the problems of the linguistic minorities are over in India. If one were to take a cursory glance at this issue from the vantage point of the tribals living in several provinces of the country, one would clearly see their vulnerabilities and the lack of adequate recognition towards their languages from the state and the dominant linguistic groups. However, in a comparative sense, India's agony over religion and religious identity still remains. This is the reason why a substantial part of this essay is devoted to the issue of religious minorities in India.

MINORITY RIGHTS: A CONTEXTUAL THEORIZATON

The last two decades have witnessed a remarkable upsurge of community mobilizations all around the world. The greater theoretical awareness of pluralities' or diversities' in the context of inequality and hegemony in several societies has been constitutive of a particular kind of collective mobilization that Charles Taylor evocatively called the 'politics of recognition' (Taylor 1994). There are three fundamental ways in which contemporary politics of recognition tends to draw our attention. First, it manifests as a negotiation. Often it interrogates the

notion of a monolithic nation state and puts forward a critique against the process of homogenization in a society. It also unmasks the unequal relationship among various cultural/religious/ethnic groups. Second, the politics of recognition is not only about dignity; it is also about entitlements, substantive rights, and freedom. It is this that has brought the politics of multiculturalism directly into the domain of democracy. Finally, the recognition of ascriptive diversities has raised serious questions regarding the liberal definition of 'rights', 'community', citizenship, and so on. A detailed discussion of the 'multiculturalism' debate is not attempted here. However, I will try to bring out only the key theoretical ideas raised by this debate that has a direct bearing on our discussion on minority rights.

The presence of contesting Christian sects centuries ago raised the issue of majority and minority in the West. In order to avoid religious persecution and violence, it was necessary to articulate the idea of toleration. The pragmatic defense of the initial defense of the existence of internal minorities within a nation-state, quite paradoxically, came through the articulation of individual rights. From this arose the liberal-individualist position—a network of procedures, arrived at lawfully, society makes the varied cultural world of the people remain outside the domain of the public sphere. This stance of 'insularity' is often defended by invoking the principle of equality.⁶ It is not true that liberals usually overlook pluralism in societies. Indeed, the fact of pluralism (Rawls 1993) is recognized by the liberals as an inescapable or an antecedent condition of modern societies. The insistence on neutrality and anti-perfectionism tends to keep the politics of difference at bay.

The idea of an universal citizen is often employed by the liberal individualists as a counter-idea to that of a culturally-rooted individual. During the last three centuries this idea of a 'citizen-man' has been used by the democrats to undermine the privileges of the wealthy and the aristocrats in Europe and to pull down the barriers that existed between the people and the process of democratic governance. Pushing aside the earlier conception of citizenship, such as the civic-republican ideal, based on solidarity, the liberal-individualist tradition completely severed all cultural

attachments making the gap between individual freedom and community-belonging unbridgeable.

The liberal ambivalence towards cultural/ethnic diversity has been subjected to scrutiny in recent times. The argument is that the individual-rights framework, though important, is not enough for the protection of minority cultures and identities in a multicultural society. Ethnic-cultural and religious minorities in several societies are demanding special forms of recognition, often in the idiom of group rights. The conventional liberal suspicion towards these communitarian demands is found to be unjustified.

The defenders of group rights often argue that the liberal-individualist stance neither promotes equality nor freedom; it in fact legitimizes the dominant culture and values in a society. On this view, the cultural world to which individuals belong shape their choices and make their life-plans more meaningful and purposeful (Kymlicka 1995). The defenders of minority rights are often critical of the individualist bias of liberalism and see no objection in supporting special provisions for the minority groups in a society. They also believe that recognition of diversities can make a democratic state more legitimate and responsive. Finally, the relationship between individual well-being and the prosperity of the cultural group to which they belong is viewed as complementary (Kymlicka 1989; Tamir 1993; Raz 1994). One can see in these theoretical exercises attempts to reconcile the demands of unity and diversity, between the citizenship values and the import of cultural membership (Taylor 1991; Parekh 1999).

It is within these contending claims for unity and separateness that the debate on 'minority rights' is played out in the multicultural societies in the West as well as in India. In concrete terms 'minority rights' encompasses several heterogeneous claims. Two types of claims are quite familiar. First, a minority group demands rights against the larger society to protect itself against the majoritarian tendencies of the society. In some cases a minority culture wants rights against its own members, who in the name of individual right can challenge certain collective practices. There are

exceptional circumstances they can demand the right to self-determination as the only option for protecting their culture and way of life in the world. Normatively speaking, the rights that can be morally justified as being granted to the minority groups depends upon specific circumstances and other contingent factors in a given society. It is quite possible that a minority group can start with the demand for special provisions but due to specific circumstances finds self-determination as the only option to counter the forces of majoritarianism. Yet one can see that all such demands tend to share some crucial features. They go beyond an abstract conception of citizenship of liberal democracy; and they make the recognition and protection of cultural differences central to the project of democratization.

Although the protection of minority rights takes different forms in different societies, some of the underlying normative claims can be universal. These 'universal claims' (for example, right against discrimination based on ascriptive grounds, right to form associational life that helps sustain cultural separateness and so on) do usually inform the constitutional practices in many parts of the world. Several international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), articulate the minority rights in universal terms with the underlying belief that these instruments provide the broad guidelines for national states to frame policies towards their minorities. Article 19 of the Declaration of 1992 says that the states shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity' (Massey 1999: 121; Vijapur 1999). It further says that the 'states shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends' (Massey 1999: 121).

The international instruments by and large take the

Declaration, which says, 'Nothing in the present Declaration may be construed as permitting any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, including sovereign equality territorial integrity and political independence of states' (Massey 1999: 124). Whether or not these international instruments are effective is not the issue here. The point is how much of these universal declarations, though useful, offer an adequate framework for understanding the minority rights issue in a postcolonial society like India. This is where the need for a contextual theorization is intensely felt. In fact, in recent years research on multicultural politics, minority rights and such other issues has taken a turn in this direction.⁶ A contextual understanding of minority rights encourages us to examine the ways in which certain values are moulded and mobilized within a given society and the manner in which universal principles are subjected to the logic of space and time. It also prompts us to

focus our attention on the interaction between general ideas and the ways they operate on the ground. I also strongly believe that a contextual reading of minority rights in India is bound to be historical. But before I turn to history, one more thing has to be sorted out. It is the question of the definition of 'minority'. Like most terms in social science, 'minority' is not an easy term to define. Let me cite an oft-quoted definition given by Capotorti: 'a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of the state, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the state—possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, tradition, religion or language.'⁷ Minimally, a weak numerical position as well as socio-economic status remains central to the definition of a minority. But it is difficult to ascertain the levels of the weakness in numbers and a group's status to fit into this definition. For instance, if the Muslims belong to a minority group at the all-India level, it is not so when we consider the province or local level as the relevant unit. For instance, the Muslims are not a minority in Jammu and Kashmir. Jains, numerically speaking, are one of India's religious minorities. But they have never claimed nor have they been accorded the status

of a minority in the country. Two conclusions follow from this. First, although an important dimension, numerical weakness alone does not define a minority. Second, minority status is essentially fluid and it varies across level and time.

In any given context, a minority identity of a group is not solely dependent upon certain objective factors such as population, economic well-being and so on. It is now widely recognized by scholars that the group should also possess a subjective awareness of its distinct status in relation to others. The nature of interaction between the objective and subjective dimensions, to a large extent depends upon historical specificities. Besides these two dimensions, state plays a crucial role in the construction of minority identity. The role of the state and politics should be at the centre of one's understanding of minority rights/identity. The centre of one's understanding of minority rights/identity in postcolonial societies, especially in India.

COLONIAL STATECRAFT AND COMMUNITARIAN MOBILIZATIONS

There is no doubt that colonial state for its own survival exploited the existing ascriptive divisions and through this process ratified their existence in the Indian society. For instance, the granting of separate electorates to the Muslims in 1909, on the plea of a handful of elite Muslim leaders, is a clear example of colonial state's policy of counterpoise.⁸ But to suggest that it is the colonial state alone that created the divisions among ascriptive communities would be an exaggeration. However, there are other ways in which the role of the colonial state and its interventions changed their trajectories and political possibilities. Colonial governance proceeded slowly and haltingly in India. In order to simplify what the colonial administrators saw in India (which was full of complexities, dense pluralities), it had to be put in their familiar grids of mapping, measuring, and counting. Sudipta Kaviraj (1992) argues that the strategies of enumeration initiated by the colonial state robed the communities (caste, religious and

others) of their fuzziness. The enumerated character of communities, he further argues, opened up new possibilities for political mobilization. Enumeration through census⁹ not only offered legitimacy to the colonial epistemology that viewed Indian society as a congeries of communities, it also became an integral part of its 'governmentality'. We do not know how people in India undertook inter-community comparison in the past, particularly in the pre-enumeration period. Armed with numbers and other relevant information, in the early part of the twentieth century, people compared the status of their groups with others. For instance, caste groups in the Madras Presidency reflected quite purposefully on their relative position vis-à-vis other caste groups. In the Bengal Presidency, the linguistic groups such as Oriyas and Biharis always compared their educational and employment status with their rival Bengalis. In the United Provinces, the Muslims also felt relatively deprived in comparison to their Hindu counterparts. With the introduction of the constitutional reforms, the relative deprivation argument was often used by the communities to ask for special representation to protect their interests. The process of enumeration, coupled with the introduction of constitutional reforms, opened up a space for the articulation of majority-minority discourse in India during the early part of the twentieth century.

As early as 1880s, Syed Ahmad Khan raised the fear of Hindu majoritarianism in the context of the colonial state's policy of introducing native representation at the local level. At time passed, the demands for special protection for the Muslims in the legislatures and various services of the colonial state, gave rise to a 'vocabulary of minority' (Hasan 2001) that survived even into the postcolonial period.

The provision of separate electorate, granted in 1909 for the 'minorities' was based on the belief that without special protection, the 'Hindu majority' will dominate these small groups. When the expansion of the electorate after the 1935 Act came into effect, the collective consciousness of the minority groups got inevitably sharpened. Research on provincial politics in the 1930s and 1940s quite clearly suggests that in provinces having a sizeable population of Muslims, the electoral competition gave rise to inter-community

⁹ in a minority and demanded special representation,

the committee recommended reservation of seats for a period of ten years in strict proportion to their population. In the North Western Frontier Province, similar concessions were recommended for the non-similars minorities. In order to protect the educational and cultural interests of the minorities, a proposal for establishing communal councils was also turned down on the ground that it would 'keep the communism' alive.

The discourse on minority rights during the 1920s and 1930s was premised upon the existence of a single-state system. The term minority made sense within the imaginary of a territorial state. The division of people in terms of majority and minority still encompassed a broader conception of political community. The idea of conferring 'universal rights' to citizens irrespective of theircriptive status was widely shared by the Indian leaders during the 1930s and 1940s. Once again, this idea was very much based on the concept of a unified political society. To be a part of a minority (whether religious or linguistic or caste-based) was not to seek a separate state but to seek special collective rights within an evolving conception of constitutional democracy.

Even as late as the 1940s, the Muslim League's demand was not for carving out a separate state but for special protection of the Muslims' interests and constitutional protection of their collective identity. Due to a host of complex reasons, things changed, and the status of being a 'minority' became, in the eyes of the Muslim League and other separatist forces, synonymous with being 'inferior', disadvantaged and permanently crippled. Within the changed milieu, it was not surprising that in the famous Lahore address Jinnah very clearly announced that 'Muslims are not a minority. Muslims are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homeland, their territory and their state' (Hasan 2001: 57). Demand for a separate state for the Muslims, in a sense, was a setback to the 'minority discourse' in the colonial India. However, it is also true that, in spite of or perhaps because of the setback, the interest in resolving the 'minority rights' issue within the framework of a constitutional democracy never diminished.

MINORITY-MAJORITY CONUNDRUM: THE POST-COLONIAL PREDICAMENT

In a constitutional democracy, minority rights are best understood when they are seen along with a broader regime of rights.

Part III of the Constitution of Independent India provides a set of 'fundamental rights' for all its citizens. It too contains rights that are meant to be enjoyed only by specific groups. Take for instance, the Right to Equality (Articles 14–18), Right to Freedom (Articles 19–22), Right to Freedom of Religion (Articles 25–28) which are the fundamental rights meant for all the citizens of the country. Their justifiability makes sure that any infringement with these rights can be contested in the judiciary of the country and the state has to provide adequate constitutional grounds for its suppression. Some of the key rights in the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Indian Constitution embody the principle of non-discrimination. The Article 15 (1) reads thus: 'The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, sex, place of birth or any of them' (*The Constitution of India*, as modified up to the 1 January, 1995: 7). The next provision elaborates the general principle further:

No citizen shall on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—
a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels, and places of public entertainment; b) the use of wells, tanks bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public. (*ibid.*)

The principle of non-discrimination is also reflected in Article 16 which suggests that 'no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state' (*ibid.*). Another area to which the Indian Constitution has extended the principle of non-discrimination is that of education. Clause 2 of Article 29 provides that, no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them' (*The Constitution of India* 1995: 14).

Non-discrimination and the equal treatment of citizens by the state are inevitably related. These two principles together have laid down the foundation of equal citizenship in India. However, the Constitution provides exceptions to the principles of non-discrimination and equality. For instance, it can make special provisions for the welfare of women and children. The state through special provisions can also legislate to improve the conditions of citizens belonging to socially and educationally backward classes or to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The adoption of universal suffrage by rejecting the communal electorate (Article 325) also reflects the constitutional commitment to the principle of equal citizenship. It is true that the individual remains at the core of the equal citizenship principle, enshrined in the constitution. However, one can see clearly in Articles 15 and 16, a productive combination of rights meant to be enjoyed by individuals as citizens and obligation of the state towards the citizens belonging to specific communities.

The awareness of individual and community in their relationship remains central to the Indian constitutional discourse since 1950. Even though, the right to equality, as a fundamental right of the Constitution, applies to all the citizens of the country, it has special significance for minorities particularly for the disadvantaged ones. In a strict sense, these rights are not minority rights; but their significance for the minority community is relatively more significant.

The principle of non-discrimination, though important, is not enough. Similarly, the presence of universal rights alone is not sufficient to address the claims of the minorities. Article 29 (1) of the Constitution says: 'Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same' (*The Constitution of India 1995*). Language is fundamentally social and a right to conserve one's own language is inescapably a collective right. This, the Supreme Court declared, includes even the citizens' right to agitate for its protection.¹¹ According to this judgment, this right is more or less 'absolute', 'unqualified' and 'positive' (Wadhwa 1975: 98). According to Article 30 (1), 'all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer

educational institutions of their choice' (*The Constitution of India 1995: 14*). It further provides in Article 30 (2) that: 'the State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate, against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion, or language' (*ibid.*: 15). The first part of the article protects the right of the minorities to have their own educational institutions. The second involves a limited obligation on the part of the state towards these institutions. It only instructs the state not to discriminate these institutions while providing financial assistance for promoting education. One of the objectives of this article is clearly to do with the protection of the distinctive identities of the linguistic and religious minorities of the country. In a famous judgment connected with Article 30, the Supreme Court declared that,

[T]he minorities, quite understandably, regard it as essential that the education of their children should be in accordance with the teachings of their religion and they hold, quite honestly, that such an education cannot be obtained in ordinary schools designed for all the members of the public, but can only be vouchered in the trends of the religion and in the tradition of their culture.¹²

The special rights for minorities, Justice Khanna observed in another case,

were designed not to create inequality. Their real effect is to bring about equality by ensuring the preservation of the minority institutions and by guaranteeing to the minorities autonomy in the matter of administration of these institutions. The differential treatment for minorities by giving them special rights is intended to bring about an equilibrium, so that the ideal of equality may not be reduced to a mere abstract idea, but should become a living reality and result in true, genuine equality, an equality not merely in theory, but in fact... it is only the minorities who need protection,' and article 30 beside some other articles intended to afford and guarantee that protection.¹³

The relationship between the state and the

minority educational institutions has raised a lot of issues concerning the state of minority rights in India. It has been made clear through judicial pronouncements that the state can lay down some restrictions in the matters dealing with syllabi for examinations, conditions of employment of teachers, and health and hygiene of students, but it cannot force a minority educational institution to teach in a particular language.¹⁴ The state can also prescribe reasonable conditions while giving grant-in-aid to the educational institutions administered by a minority community. The nature of state intervention in the minority-governed educational institutions in the country still remains a sensitive issue. In this, the role of the Supreme Court has been of great significance. Besides the above-mentioned articles, the

Constitution of India also contains special provisions for the education of the linguistic minorities. The issue of linguistic minorities is indeed quite old. The early stirrings of the linguistic groups in India can be traced to the early part of the twentieth century. Within the larger provinces of the British empire several language groups perceived themselves as minorities, and demand for reorganization of provinces on linguistic lines were often raised by them. Because major language groups lived in distinct territories, it was easy for them to put forward their collective claims before the colonial state. As early as the 1920s, the National Congress recognized the identity-claims of the language groups. The recognition of their distinctness and the redrawning of the provincial boundaries were the main strategies through which linguistic minorities were made into majorities within the provincial arenas. In spite of the Congress' early promise, reorganization of provinces was not an easy affair in the Post-Independent India. Even the reorganization of provinces did not resolve the problem of linguistic minorities in the country.

Article 347 of the Constitution states:

[O]n a demand being made in that behalf the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognized by that State, direct that such language shall also be officially recognized throughout that State or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify. (*The Constitution of India 1995: 212*)

A sizeable and vocal linguistic minority can take advantage of this provision in order to get their language recognized by the state. The Constitution allows persons to submit their petitions for the redress of grievances to the state in any language (Article

350), and provides for education in their mother-tongue to the children of linguistic minorities (Article 350A). In the wake of the States' Reorganization Commission's recommendations, a special officer for linguistic minorities was created (Article 350B), whose function was to look into the implementation, or lack of, of the safeguards for the linguistic minorities in the provinces. The unresolved problems of linguistic minorities in India have created tensions among groups in the provinces.

MINORITIES AND BACKWARDNESS

The discussion on economic and educational backwardness of the minority groups in general and the Muslims in particular in India has a long history. During the colonial period, the claims of the minority groups for special provisions and safeguards were inextricably linked to their economic and educational backwardness. As pointed out earlier, the theme of backwardness is still one of the crucial components of minority-rights discourse in the post-colonial period. In the past, so also today, Muslim groups often use the theme of economic and educational backwardness to show their relative status vis-à-vis other communities in the country. The Gopal Singh Committee Report drew attention, among other things, to the educational backwardness of Muslims. It too highlighted Muslim under representation in government employment: (*Dr. Gopal Singh Panel Report on Minorities*, 14 June 1983). More than half of the Muslim urban population live below poverty line, compared to about 35 per cent of the Hindus. In urban areas majority of Muslims are self-employed (53.4 per cent) in comparison to 36 per cent amongst the Hindus. The self-employed category for the Muslims included by and large 'low-status occupations such as cobbler, rickshaw-puller, small artisan, and so on (Razack and Gumber 2000: 11). According to a recent report, 43 per cent Muslims and 27 per cent Christians live below poverty line in comparison to 39 per cent of Hindus in India (Shariff 1999: 44).

'How does educational and economic

backwardness feature in the minority-rights discourse

in the post-colonial India? There is no doubt that

considerable regional and class variations exist as

far as Muslims' economic status is concerned. For instance, a large number of Muslims in UP and Bihar, in comparison to other states, are poor. The situation of Muslims in Kerala, for instance, is not the same as that of Rajasthan. Even within one province, the economic condition of Muslim wage-labourers is not the same as that of the professional class. Yet, the theme of backwardness is incorporated in the minority-rights discourse as a generalized state of affairs, as a marker of the community as a whole, and its collective predicament. The backwardness of the minority communities in general and of Muslims in particular, in the above discourse, does not stand alone as an empirical idea. It usually gets fitted or has been made to fit with the story of discrimination and neglect of minorities by the Indian state. At the level of political common sense, this empirical description is incorporated into the normative notions of 'peripherality' and injustice.

In the contemporary minority discourse, welfare concerns and identity issues are often blended together. Although analytically separate, in reality, they stand imbricated with one another. The issue concerning Urdu language clearly demonstrates the point we are making. The decline of Urdu in north India has had a negative impact on Muslims' ability to get employment. The demand of Muslims to give Urdu a proper status in select provinces was and is still directly related to real economic benefits. This is also related to identity concerns of the community. The neglect of Urdu then becomes a sign of the community's powerlessness, and a reflection of majority community's politics of 'mis-recognition'. In a sense, the concern for Urdu language embodies simultaneously the issue of economic welfare as well as of identity for the Muslims.

Likewise, the demand for the protection of educational institutions managed by Muslims and Christians clearly involves the simultaneous presence of economic and identity concerns.

Since the process of 'mandanization' unfolded in the 1990s, the framing up of welfare issues within the minority discourse has undergone some significant changes. A detailed discussion on this process and its impact on Indian society are beyond the scope of this paper. Still, it is essential to outline some of its significant features for the argument that follows. V.P.

Singh's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission quickened the process, particularly in north India, of making a political block composed of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The already existing contradiction between this block and the upper caste became sharper. The reservation of jobs for the OBCs, no doubt, was the immediate issue against which violent protests broke out in many places in the country. However, its impact on provincial and national politics was quite significant. The growing assertion of Hindutva forces and the decline of the Congress helped create the formation of a new space for political mobilization comprised of deprived communities such as Dalits, OBCs and so on. This new context too created new political possibilities for Muslim groups in India. The OBCs among the Muslims, like their counterparts among Hindus, got the benefit of reservation in government jobs. In the realm of electoral politics, political parties tried to forge a coalition among different deprived groups such as Dalits, OBCs, and Muslims, and so on. The process still continues today.

With such sectional mobilizations, it was difficult to sustain the concept of an undifferentiated deprived Muslim community fighting for its due share in the polity. The element of caste within the Muslim communities was always there. But in the post-Mandal times, it acquired a new salience and the lower-caste identities among them began making their presence felt much more sharply. Its impact on Muslim communities cannot be discussed in an abstract manner. At one level, this heightened sense of caste was also symptomatic of their subaltern status within their community. Only on the basis of micro-studies that we can meaningfully talk about the ways in which subalternization of politics has impacted on the collectivistic concerns of the religious minorities in India.

At one level, this heightened sense of caste was also symptomatic of their subaltern status within their community. Yet, a few general points can be made in this regard. The articulations of Dalit-Christian and lower-caste Muslims surely have opened up new possibilities in the realms of inter-community relationship and electoral politics. As discussed above, the fact of economic and educational backwardness of Muslim

elite of backwardness is now used by the low-caste groups within the Muslim community to undermine their old leadership, and to forge new linkages with similar groups belonging to other religions. The debate on reservation of jobs for Muslims in recent years brings this dimension to the fore (Wright 1997).

To address various minority concerns, a Commission was formed in 1978. Until 1992, when the National Commission for Minorities received statutory status, the Commission had functioned under the guidance of four chairpersons. Very early on, the need for providing a constitutional basis to the Commission was voiced in the Parliament (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 22 February 1978, 28 March 1978, 5 and 11 April 1978, 10 May 1978, 26 July 1978 and 2 August 1978). Members had also expressed their fear that without effective power, the Commission's role in safeguarding the interests of the minorities would be limited. An attempt was made with the help of the Forty-sixth Amendment Bill in 1978 to give it a constitutional status, but without any success. A year later, another attempt (Fifty-first Amendment Bill)

also met with the same fate. In 1990, there was yet another proposal to set up two National Commissions (one for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the other for the minorities) by suitably amending the Constitution. Finally, the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes was given the constitutional status and the Minorities Commission was left out. In 1988, the linguistic minorities were put outside the ambit of the Minorities Commission. On 4 May 1992, the Welfare Minister, Sitaram Kulkarni introduced the National Commission for Minorities Bill in the Lok Sabha. On 11 May, a heated debate ensued between the supporters and the opponents of the Bill on the floor of the Lok Sabha that lasted for nearly five hours on that day and continued even to the next day. The defenders of the Bill offered broadly two reasons for conferring minority commission with a statutory status. The first was an argument for greater efficacy. They argued that armed with statutory power, the Minorities Commission would be an effective instrument of protection of minority rights. The implication was that in its first incarnation, it was a mere advisory institution without much power at its command. The

second was that the Bill, as Sitaram Kesri pointed out, would 'instill confidence in the minorities' (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 11 May 1992: 91). This in turn would increase the legitimacy of the argument.

The supporters of the Bill, mostly belonging to the Congress and other non-BJP parties, grounded their arguments on the principle of secularism. Their starting assumption was that the Indian constitution embodied several provisions exclusively for the minorities. The existence as well as the protection of minority rights remained central to their understanding of secularism. In their arguments, a minority community appears as one that is vulnerable, at least potentially threatened and inadequately represented in various spheres of society. It was also assumed in their discourse that without an effective watchdog it would be impossible to check the acts of discrimination against the minorities. The notion of minority rights, which ran through the arguments of the defenders of the Bill, was broad and contained both the positive as well as its negative elements. They highlighted the ways in which minorities suffer from discrimination and indignities in the society.

National Integration-cum-Human Rights Commission

On the other hand, the opponents of the Bill, mostly belonging to the BJP, described it as 'divisive' and 'retrograde'. Some even described the introduction of the Bill as a play by the Congress to win Muslim votes. In the Lok Sabha, L.K. Advani spearheaded the BJP's opposition to the Bill. In a long speech on 11 May 1992, he argued that the Bill would create separateness and division in the country. He even went further and suggested that it was against the spirit of the Constitution as conceived by its founding fathers. To him, even enacting a commission for the minorities would be an unjustified concession to them. The lack of precise definition of 'minority' also came in for a lot of criticism from the opponents of the Bill. Advani feared that the power given to the Central government by the Bill to decide who is a minority could be used for partisan ends. He also argued that contrary to the objectives of the Bill, the Muslims would be the prime beneficiaries of the Commission. This fitted quite well with the 'appeasement of Muslim thesis' propagated by the Hindutva forces in general and his party in particular. It was also pointed out that a

could act as a proper watchdog for minority rights.

The terms of the debate, as far as the opponents of the Bill were concerned, were not something new. In fact, the suspicion of the Hindu Right towards any special provision for minorities had a long history. However, in this context the old argument took on a new meaning. The position of the Congress and others, from the point of view of the Hindu Right, appeared as an abandonment of the principle of neutrality of the state towards different religious groups in the country.

For the defenders of the Bill, the forces of majoritarianism could only be countered by instituting proper safeguards. Attempts were also made on the floor of the House to ground the proposed National Commission on a shared but minimal understanding of rights of minorities at all levels of the society. The argument is that once a minority is defined in relation to the jurisdiction of a particular law, one group may be a majority within the sphere of a state but can very well be a minority within a district within that

particular state. Similarly, a religious group may be in a majority if one takes the national level into account but a minority within the context of a province or other such levels. The minority problem, as P.M. Sayeed remarked in the House, 'is not therefore just a Muslim problem. It is a political problem and a national problem' (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 11 May 1992: 200). By keeping this in view, some even argued for creating a party between National Minorities Commission and the National Commission for Scheduled Caste and Tribes. Participating in the debate, Syed Shahabuddin emphasized the need for bringing the minority rights discourse within the ambit of continuous deliberation of the House. He said:

Let me caution you, the minorities sometimes, all over the world, tend to exaggerate their woes; their troubles; their sufferings and their grievances. There has to be balance and that balance can only be reached between the claims which are legitimate and the act of omission and commission on the part of the Government which deprived them in actual practice with the enjoyment of those rights, the balance can only be reached if there is a free and [fair] discussion in the national spirit on the floor of this august House. Therefore, I hope at least that will become a routine. It had become a post office. I hope you shall put some life into it. (*Lok Sabha Debate*, 11 May 1992: 201-2)

The Bill was finally passed on 17 May 1992 and came to effect a year later. It provided for a seven-member Commission and the its functions remained by and large the same as provided in the Government order of 1978 and as amended in 1988. The new Commission, while discharging its duty of protecting minority rights, was empowered to exercise the powers of a civil court trying a suit. The point of discussing the debate is to demonstrate the contentious terrain of minority rights in India. Any special provision for the religious minorities immediately becomes a matter of contention. Those who opposed it, accuse the supporters of political manipulation as well as an appeasement of minorities. A minimal consensus on this yet to be achieved by the contending political parties in India. This is one of the reasons why the theme of minority rights, in terms of offering special provisions, creates so much controversy both in legislatures as well as in civil society.

The functioning of the National Commission for Minorities is a case in point. The Annual Reports clearly reveal that there is no doubt that during 1978-92 the Minorities Commission received a large number of complaints concerning the discrimination of minorities from different parts of the country. During the first two years of its existence, it received 441 complaints both from individuals and organizations.¹⁵ In the year 1989-90, the Commission had received 381 representations, of which 243 came from individuals belonging to minority communities and 138 from several minority organizations (*The Twelfth Annual Report of The Minorities Commission* (1-4-1988 to 31-3-1990), chapter VII: 90). Right from its inception in 1992, one of the important functions

of the National Minorities Commission has been to act as a storehouse of grievances pertaining to the minorities in the country. After checking the nature of grievances, the Commission usually takes up the case and advises the concerned authorities for its redressal. From time to time, the Commission sends its committee to look into the incidents of communal violence and recommends the concerned government to how to combat such incidents in future.

There are three areas in which the advisory role of the Commission is clearly evident. The first area deals with the security concern of the minorities

in different parts of the country. The second theme on which it spends a lot of its institutional energy are the incidents of discrimination (related to both individuals and groups) faced by the minorities. Many a time minority communities draw the Commission's attention to the interference of government with their educational institutions. The third area in which the Commission takes a lot of interest regarding the economic and educational backwardness of the minority groups in the country. It generates and compiles data on the theme, produces reports, and from time to time, makes the state and Central governments aware of their duties towards the welfare of the minorities. It is possible to argue that the National Commission has succeeded in raising the problems of the minorities and aggregating them for the purpose of policy-making. At this point it is worth remembering that aggregating the problems of minorities is one thing and to persuade the state to devise and implement the solutions is quite another. In the latter respect, the role of the Commission has been quite limited. Since 1992, not a single Annual Report, submitted by the Commission to the Central government, has been discussed in the Parliament. Often the concerned authorities did not take the Commission's recommendations seriously. According to one of its former Chairpersons, even his letters of recommendations to the Central as well as state governments were often not even acknowledged (Mahmood 2001). From the vantage point of efficacy, it is obvious that the National Minorities Commission has not done that well. As an institution it has not taken roots. However, from the minority rights point of view, it is clear that through its practices, the Commission has helped vitalize a discourse that tries to blend the security concerns of the minorities with that of their dignity that links their economic well-being with their collective identity. It has also highlighted the point that the protection of minority rights needs a responsive democratic state.

Let me caution you, the minorities sometimes, all over the world, tend to exaggerate their woes; their troubles; their sufferings and their grievances. There has to be balance and that balance can only be reached between the claims which are legitimate and the act of omission and commission on the part of the Government which deprived them in actual practice with the enjoyment of those rights, the balance can only be reached if there is a free and [fair] discussion in the national spirit on the floor of this august House. Therefore, I hope at least that will become a routine. It had become a post office. I hope you shall put some life into it. (*Lok Sabha Debate*, 11 May 1992: 201-2)

The contemporary discourse on minorities contains

demands for physical security and non-discrimination. The second one highlights the economic status of the minority groups in the country. The economic and educational backwardness of the minorities remain important. Whether it is the plight of the Dalit Christians' or of the plebeian Muslims, the issue of deprivation is put upfront. The issue of honour and dignity, an overarching theme in recent decades, is often seen in connection with these two issues. I have argued that the identity question and the concerns for economic prosperity, although analytically separable, remain overlapping within the minority-rights discourse.

Significant developments concerning religious minorities in India have occurred during the last three or four years. The constitution of a high-level committee by the Prime Minister in 2005 and the submission of its report (popularly known as *Sachar Committee report*—going by the committee's chairperson, Justice Rajinder Sachar) in 2006; the creation of a separate Ministry of Minority Affairs [Annual Report 2007-2008, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India] at the Centre by the United Progressive Alliance Government in 2006; and finally the gruesome violence against Christian minorities in Kandhamal of Orissa in 2007-8 together demonstrate how the problems of the developmental deficit and the physical insecurities of minority groups continue to shape and animate minority rights discourse in India. Both these concerns, it seems, may not be connected in older ways, but their mutual impingement continues to remain salient in India.

No doubt attempts were and continue to be made

to 'developmentalize' the minority question and take it

out of the nationalism-communalism problematic

of the past. I think the *Sachar Committee report* can

be read as an effort in guiding the minority question

in this direction. Notwithstanding the empirical

richness of the report, the revelation of Muslims'

socio-economic and educational backwardness was

not something new. Years ago, the Gopal Singh report

had conveyed a similar conclusion. However, in a

changed national scenario, findings of backwardness

resonated in new ways among Muslim communities

seized by majoritarian stereotypes and an intense

psychosis caused by violence and discrimination. In

some curious ways, the Sachar Committee report also contained possibilities of transforming the fact of developmental deficits into a larger democratic story. It was not surprising that young Muslims in different parts of the country raised the question as to why even after fifty-six years of constitutional democracy in India equal citizenship in terms of certain basic human development is denied to so many of them. The report, quite predictably, did not answer this fundamental question, but it created new occasions for re-interpreting old questions and revisiting past understandings.

Some argue that a focus on developmental deficits, rather than on identity-related questions, would create new contexts for civic-political rather than ethnic mobilization among the Muslim communities in India. No doubt in the past, excessive emphasis on identity issues, though legitimate, did not push their democratic agency very far. The majoritarian forces saw the interest articulation of religious minorities as a religious group through a lens of exclusivist nationalism. Even some well-meaning liberals fear that mobilization of secular interest through a religious grid may undermine the future of Indian democracy. Though analytically distinct, in some situations the opposition between identity concerns and 'secular' interest cannot be sustained. But the tension between the two will remain for the foreseeable future.

The primary concern of the Ministry of Minority Affairs is to devise policies for and monitor existing programmes meant for minorities. Providing scholarship to students, making credit available to potential entrepreneurs, persuading institutions to create more spaces for deserving individuals, overseeing the functions of institutions such as National Commission for Minorities, and making efforts for a fair distribution of governmental resources are some of the key strategies through which the Ministry addresses the developmental deficits of the minority communities. In some sense, the government of India is devising new modes of governing its minority groups. Whether or not these modes will affirm and strengthen the democratic agency of the minority groups is an open question. As I finish this essay, a bill for the prevention of communal violence is being discussed by the Indian Parliament.

The recent communal conflagration and violence in Kandhamal in Orissa, once again, highlighted the need for ensuring greater commitment and responsibility of the state to protect the lives of its citizens belonging to minority groups. I think 'right to life', in an evocative sense, brings both the developmental and identity concerns of minority communities to a new blend. With greater mobilization of minority communities, the struggle for equal citizenship has entered a new phase in India. But without the establishment of adequate institutions, the protection of minority rights can never be strengthened.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Nandy (1998). See also Singh (1994).
2. The Anthropological Survey of India's People of India, The Constitution of India (as modified up to 1 January 1995 edition)
3. Opinion polls suggested that only 22.7 per cent of the Indian electorate found the demolition justified. Against this, 38.1 per cent termed it as unjustified. See Mitra and Singh (1999: 145–6).
4. Statement of Mohd. Zayyad Haque quoted by Hasan (1996: p. 177).
5. *Lok Sabha Debates* on Atrocities on Linguistic and Religious minorities in the country on 17 and 18 August 2000. Mostly the discussion veered around the attacks on the Christians and the churches in several parts of India.
6. For instance works of Will Kymlicka, Michael Walzer, Rajeev Bhargava, Niraj Jayal, Joseph Carens, Jeff Spinner, etc.
7. Quoted in Rothermund (2000: p. 324).
8. For an early academic articulation of the counterargument see Krishna (1959).
9. For an interesting and incisive discussion on the implications of social categories see Cohn (1987, Chapter 10).
10. Resolution passed on 28 December 1927 by the Indian National Congress at its 42nd session held in Madras quoted in Ansari (1996, Vol. II, p. 95). The two great communities' mentioned in the resolution referred to the Muslims and the Depressed Classes.
11. The judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *Singh vs Pratap Singh*, quoted in Wadhwa (1975, p. 98).
12. The Case of Kerala Education Bill 1957, quoted in Nassey (1999: p. 42).
13. *The Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College Society vs State of Gujarat*, quoted in Massey (1999, p. 43).

14. The judgment of Justice M. Hidayatullah in *State of Kerala vs Rev. Mother Provincial*, quoted in Massey (1999: 45). Also see the judgment in DAV College vs State of Punjab quoted in Mainjani (1998, p. 99, footnote 14).

15. The division of the complaints, minority community wise was the following: Muslims 254; Christians 48; Sikhs 23; Buddhists 15; Parsis 3; Linguistic Minorities 58. *Third Annual Report of the Minorities Commission* (for the year ending 31 December, 1980), Annexure X.

REFERENCES

Documents and Primary Sources

- Annual Report 2007–8, Ministry of Minorities Affairs, Government of India.*
- Annual Reports of the Minorities Commission, 1978–1991. Census of India, 1991, 2001.*
- Commissioner of Linguistic Minorities Reports (Relevant years).*
- The Constitution of India* (as modified up to 1 January 1995 edition)
- Constitutional Proposals of The Sapru Committee, 1945.*
- Constitutional Assembly Debates (C.A.D.) Vols I–XII.*
- Dr. Ganesh Singh Panel Report on Minorities, 14 June 1983.*
- Jawabdar Nuru: Letters to Chief Ministers (1947–1964), Vols 1–5.*
- Law of State Minorities Commissions and Boards (National Commission for Minorities Publication), 1998.*
- Lok Sabha Debates* (Relevant years).
- Minorities India* (Newsletter of National Commission for Minorities), 1991–1998.
- People of India: An Introduction*, (ed. K.S. Singh), Anthropological Survey of India, 1992.
- Readings on Minorities: Perspectives and Documents (2 vols)* Ed. Iqbal A. Ansari, Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1996.
- Social Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report*, Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, November 1996.
- The National Commission for Minorities Act 1992.* India: Human Development Report, Aminul Shahid (National Council of Applied Economic Research), 1999.

Books and Articles

- Alimad, Imtiaz, Partha S. Ghosh, and Helmut Reifeld (eds.), 2000. *Pluralism and Equality: Values in Indian Society and Politics*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Alam, Javed, 2008. The Contemporary Muslim Situation in India: A Long-Term View, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLIII(2), pp. 45–53.
- , 2000. 'A Minority Moves into Another Millennium', in Romila Thapar (ed.), *India: Another Millennium*, Delhi: Viking, pp. 137–51.
- Bard, Robert D. 1978. 'Religion and the Legitimation of Nehru's Concept of the Secular State', in B.L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and The Legitimation of Power in South Asia*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 73–87.
- Bajpai, Rocharan, 2000. 'Constituent Assembly Debates and Minority Rights', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXV (21–22), pp. 1837–45.
- Basu, Amita and Atul Kohli (eds.), 1998. *Community Conflicts and the State in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Baumeister, Andrea, 2000. *Liberalism and the Politics of Difference*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bayly, C.A., 1985. 'The Prehistory of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict in India 1700–1800', *Modern Asian Studies*, 19(2), 1985, pp. 177–203.
- Beghole, J.H., 1967, 'The Indian Christians: A Study of a Minority', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 59–80.
- Bhargava, Rajeev, 1999. 'Should We Abandon the Majority-Minority Model?', in D.L. Seth and Gurpreet Mahajan (eds.), *Minority Identity and the Nation-State*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 165–205.
- , 1998. *Secularism and its Critics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhargava, Rajeev, Anuya Kumar Bagchi, and R. Sudarshan (eds.), 1999. *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bulgiani, Akheel, 1992. 'What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity', *Economic Political Weekly*, XXVII(20–21), pp. 1071–78.
- Bose, Sugata and Ayesha Jalal (eds.), 1999. *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chandhoke, Neera, 1999. *Beyond Secularism: The Rights of Religious Minorities*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, Joya, 1998. 'The Bangla Muslim: A Contradiction in Terms? An Overview of the Debate on Bengali Muslim Identity', in Mushtirul Hasan (ed.), *Islam, Communities and the Nation*. Delhi: Manohar, pp. 265–82.
- Chatterjee, Partha, 1995. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Cohn, Bernard, 1987. *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Das, Veena, 1995. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- , 1992. *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Rights and Survivors in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Engineer, Asgari Ali. 1991. *Communal Riots in Post-Independent India* (second edn.). Hyderabad: Sangam Books.
- Fernandes, Walter. 1999. Attacks on Minorities and a National Debate on Conversions: Economic Political Weekly, XXXIV (3–4), pp. 81–4.
- Frankel, Francine R., Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava, Balveer Arora (eds.). 2000. *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Galanter, Marc. 1984. *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gopal, S. 1998. 'Nehru and Minorities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, XXIII (45–47), pp. 2463–66.
- Gupta, Raghuji. 1985. 'Changing Role and Status of the Muslim Minority in India: A Point of View', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 5(1), pp. 181–202.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. 2000. 'Predicaments of Secularism: Muslim Identities and Politics in Mumbai', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6(2), pp. 255–72.
- . 2000. Government and Myths of State in Mumbai' in C.J. Fuller and Veronique Benet (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, pp. 31–57.
- . 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hardgrave Jr., Robert L. 1993. India: The Dilemmas of Diversity, *Journal of Democracy* 4(4), pp. 54–68.
- Hasan, Mushtaq (ed.). 2001. *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 1997. *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 1996. 'Minority Identity and its Discontents: Ayodhya and its Aftermath', in Pratul Bidwai, Harbarsi Mukhia, and Achin Vanaik (eds.), *Religion, Religiousity and Communalism*. Delhi: Manohar, pp. 167–203.
- . 1998. 'In Search of Integration and Identity: Indian Muslims Since Independence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, XXIII (45–47), pp. 2467–78.
- . 1979. *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India*. Delhi: Manohar.
- Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements in Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jayal, Niraja Gopal. 1999. *Democracy and the State: Welfare, Secularism and Development in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kabir, Humayun. 1968. *Minorities in a Democracy: Calcutta*: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta. 1992. The Imaginary Institution of India in Partha Chatterjee and Granendra Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies*, vol. VII. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–39.
- Khalidi, Omar. 1993. *Muslims in Indian Political Process*.
- Group Goals and Alternative Strategies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXVII(1–2), pp. 43–54.
- Khilnani, Sunil. 1997. *The Idea of India*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Kothari, Rajni. 1988. *State Against Democracy: In Search for Human Governance*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications.
- Krishna, K.B. 1939. *The Problem of Minorities or Communal Representation in India*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Krishna, Sankaran. 2000. *Pastcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, Will. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1995. *The Rights of Minority Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1989. *Liberation, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, Will and Wayne Norman (eds.). 2000. *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larson, Gerald. 1997. *India's Agony over Religion*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1996. 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation', *American Political Science Review*, 90(2), pp. 258–68.
- Madan, T.N. 1993. 'Whither Indian Secularism?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27(3), pp. 667–98.
- Mahajan, Gurpreet. 1998. *Identities and Rights: Aspects of Liberal Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mahmood, Talib. 2001. *Minorities Commission: Minor Role? Major Affairs*. Delhi: Phatos Media & Publishing (P) Ltd.
- . 1997. *Minorities Commissions: Raison d'être, Role and Responsibilities*. National Commission for Minorities Publication.
- Massey, James. 1999. *Minorities in a Democracy: The Indian Experience*. Delhi: Manohar.
- Mayaram, Shail. 1998. 'Rethinking Meo Identity: Cultural Faultline, Syncretism, Hybridity or Liminality', in Moshirul Haan (ed.), *Islam: Communities and the Nation*. Delhi: Manohar, pp. 283–306.
- . 1997. *Resisting Regimes: Myth and Memory in a Muslim Community*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- McCalf, Barbara D. 1995. 'Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 54(4), pp. 951–67.
- Mitra, Saikali. 2001. *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937–39*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Mitra, Subrata K. and V.B. Singh. 1999. Democracy and Social Change in India. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Nandy, Ashis, Sushila Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, and Achyut Vagnik. 1995. *Creating a Nationality: The Ranjamambum Movement and the Fear of the Self*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mohapatra, Bishnu N. 2001. 'Democracy and the Claims of Diversity: Interrogating the Indian Experience', Paper presented at the Conference on Dialogue on Democracy and Pluralism in South Asia, Delhi, 1 March.
- Nandy, Ashis. 1999. 'Coping with the Politics of Faiths and Cultures: Between Secular State and Ecumenical Traditions in India', in J. Pfaltzgraff, Darini Ralasingham-Senayagam, Ashis Nandy, and Edmund Terence Gomez (eds.), *Ethnic Futures: The State and Identity Politics in Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 135–66.
- . 1991. 'Shared and Divergent Values', in Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown (eds.), *Options for a New Canada*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Tully, James. 1995. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Upadhyaya, Prakash Chandra. 1992. 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26(4), pp. 815–83.
- Vashnavi, Ashutosh. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus as Muslims in India*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- . 1993. 'Contested Meanings: Hindu Nationalism, India's National Identity, and the Politics of Anxiety', *Dialectica*, Vol. 122, Summer, pp. 227–61.
- Vijapur, Abdulrahim P. 1999. 'Minorities and Human Rights: A Comparative Perspective of International and Domestic Law', in D.L. Seth and Gurpreet Mahajan (eds.), *Minority Identities and the Nation-State*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–72.
- Wadhwani, Kamlesh Kumar. 1975. *Minority Safeguards in India*. New Delhi: Thompson Press (India) Ltd.
- Weiner, Myron. 1997. *India's Minorities: Who are They? What do They Want?* in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *State and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 459–95.
- Wright Jr., Theodore. 1966. 'The Effectiveness of Muslim Representation in India', in Donald E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yadav, Yogendra. 2000. 'Understanding the Second Democratic Uprising: Trends of Bahujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s', in Francine R. Frankel, Zoysa Hasan, Rajiv Bhargava, Balveer Arora (eds.), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press,
- Zafar, Farzana. 2001. 'Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India' in Musthal Hasan (ed.), *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 81–100.
- Shakir, Moin. 1980. 'Electoral Participation of Minorities and Indian Political System', *Economic Political Weekly*, Annual Number, XVI(5, 6 and 7), pp. 221–6.
- Sharif, Abusaleh. 1999. *India Human Development Report*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Singh, K.S. 1994. *People of India*. The Anthropological Survey of India, vol. I & vol. VIII(1996). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Donald, Eugene. 1963. *India as a Secular State*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Tamir, Yael. 1993. *Liberal Nationalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1994. 'The Politics of Recognition', in David T. Goldberg (ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 1991. 'Shared and Divergent Values', in Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown (eds.), *Options for a New Canada*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Tully, James. 1995. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Upadhyaya, Prakash Chandra. 1992. 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26(4), pp. 815–83.
- Vashnavi, Ashutosh. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus as Muslims in India*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- . 1993. 'Contested Meanings: Hindu Nationalism, India's National Identity, and the Politics of Anxiety', *Dialectica*, Vol. 122, Summer, pp. 227–61.
- Vijapur, Abdulrahim P. 1999. 'Minorities and Human Rights: A Comparative Perspective of International and Domestic Law', in D.L. Seth and Gurpreet Mahajan (eds.), *Minority Identities and the Nation-State*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–72.
- Wadhwani, Kamlesh Kumar. 1975. *Minority Safeguards in India*. New Delhi: Thompson Press (India) Ltd.
- Weiner, Myron. 1997. *India's Minorities: Who are They? What do They Want?* in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *State and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 459–95.
- Wright Jr., Theodore. 1966. 'The Effectiveness of Muslim Representation in India', in Donald E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yadav, Yogendra. 2000. 'Understanding the Second Democratic Uprising: Trends of Bahujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s', in Francine R. Frankel, Zoysa Hasan, Rajiv Bhargava, Balveer Arora (eds.), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press,
- Zafar, Farzana. 2001. 'Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India' in Musthal Hasan (ed.), *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 81–100.
- Shakir, Moin. 1980. 'Electoral Participation of Minorities and Indian Political System', *Economic Political Weekly*, Annual Number, XVI(5, 6 and 7), pp. 221–6.
- Sharif, Abusaleh. 1999. *India Human Development Report*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

PART III

POLITICAL PROCESSES

16 Political Parties

Zoya Hasan

Democratization in former colonial states has been inconsistent and erratic. India has been an exception. It has maintained and consolidated a democratic system, despite the fact that the preconditions often associated with democracy, ranging from industrialization and mass literacy to a minimum standard of living, were absent in the 1950s when India first became a democratic, secular republic (Kohli 1988; Jayal 2001; Frankel et al. 2000). Yet, democracy has not only endured; it has developed into a vibrant system. The democratic process has deepened, drawing historically disadvantaged groups into the political system. Political parties have undoubtedly played a decisive role in this process. It is hard to conceive of India's democratic system and its success without the crucial role played by political parties.

Political parties were significant institutions even before Independence. After Independence, they assumed a new importance. On the one hand, they provide the linkage between institutions and constituencies within the polity, and on the other, they provide the crucial connection between the

political process and policymakers, and bring to the forefront issues affecting the interests of social groups and the public at large. Yet, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with parties. Parties and politicians are accused of weakening the democratic fibre of the country, by practising corrupt politics, by eschewing a long-term perspective on social welfare, and by maximizing their personal gains and influence at the expense of larger national interests. However, without political parties the democratic system would not have worked. Parties remain the principal force around which contestation and mobilization are organized, working to structure political alternatives and formulating policies and translating them into effective choices for the people. Parties are, in short, the agencies and mechanisms through which power is organized and exercised in a democracy.

The most striking 'feature' of India's party politics is that it does not fit neatly into any of the theories of liberal democratic politics or the conventional categories of party systems known in the West. Political parties in India do not correspond to

European or American party processes. At the same time, India's traditional social divisions have not translated easily into the party political system. Congress dominance, for instance, was not based on a particular caste, religion, or class; in fact, no party based exclusively on a single social cleavage such as majority-minority or caste can hope to sustain its dominance throughout the country. Political parties display numerous contradictory features, which reveal the blending of different forms of modern organization and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions. Parties are indeed complex, and an important reason for this complexity is the social heterogeneity that has made it impossible for a single set of parties to emerge across the country as has happened in more homogeneous societies. Thus, there exist many types of parties. Among them should be noted the continued presence of one of the oldest parties in the world, the Congress (established in 1885); the emergence of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); and the world's longest surviving democratically elected Communist party government at the state level in West Bengal.

Major changes have taken place in Indian party politics since Independence (Manor 1990: 62–98). From 1989 the leadership, organization, electoral strategies, and support base of political parties have undergone significant changes. To understand the significance and implications of these developments, it is useful to distinguish broadly two important phases in its development. One-party dominance, moderate levels of political participation, and elite consensus characterized the first phase. This has given way to a second phase of greater democratization and the opening up of the political system to non-elite participants. Major changes in party politics include the replacement of the Congress system with multi-party competition; an intensification of political competition; and fragmentation of the party system and coalition politics. Particularly marked is the decline of one-party dominance, the rise of the BJP as the single largest party in Parliament, and the advent of coalition politics. Since the last six parliamentary elections have not produced a single-party majority, they have necessitated a coalition government.

Equally significant is the democratic upsurge among the hitherto underprivileged and the influence of subaltern sections on the structure of electoral choices and outcomes. A significant aspect of the political process is that on the one hand, parties are the key to democratization, leading to a deepening of democracy; and on the other, they lack strong organizational structure or internal democracy and mobilize support along ethnic lines.

Through a combination of these processes—the creation of new parties and groups and their pursuit of sectional strategies—parties have increasingly fragmented over the years (Sridharan 2000: 475–503). Frequent party splits, mergers, and counter-splits led to a significant increase in the number of parties. Political parties are registered with the Election Commission of India (ECI) under the law. The registered parties are granted recognition at the state and national levels by the ECI on the basis of their poll performance at general elections according to criteria prescribed by it. There are three types of parties according to the criteria laid down by the ECI: national parties, multi-state parties, and state parties.¹

NATIONAL PARTIES AND PARTY DOMINANCE

The Congress party has been the most important political institution in India's modern political history. Led by the Cambridge-educated Jawaharlal Nehru, Congress reaped the rewards of its role during the anti-colonial movement against the British. It won nearly three-fourths of the seats in Parliament in the national elections in 1952, 1957, and 1962. The Congress ruled every state until 1967. However, an important feature of Congress dominance was the large degree of autonomy that provincial units were able to assert in relation to the central party leadership—a far cry from the situation that obtained after Indira Gandhi. Their recommendations for candidates for parliamentary or assembly seats or Chief Minister were almost always accepted by the central leadership. Although led by upper-caste/class leadership, there were Muslims, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and various regional and linguistic groups represented in its higher echelons. It enjoyed enormous prestige with

the rural and urban masses. Its hegemony was based on a concrete set of achievements: an independent model of industrial growth; considerable reduction in large-scale feudal landholdings, which benefited the upper peasantry; growth in infrastructure; expansion in educational facilities and technical personnel. A noteworthy feature of this project was a national responsibility towards society. It did deliver some tangible benefits to the broad mass of the population through various development projects, the initiation and construction of the public sector, and the provision of public services such as health, education, and transport. This political system worked until the split in the Congress in 1969. The split transformed the Congress party from a loose coalition of ideologically diverse groups, which stretched from the Right to the Left to a populist party, in which the supremacy of the parliamentary wing over the organizational was once and for all established. Political rule was entirely dominated by central command and control, and in party affairs, by the high command. From this period onwards, it evolved into an electorally catch-all party. The breakdown of the Congress system was starkly evident after Indira Gandhi's disastrous Emergency experiment, which resulted in a sharp and substantial drop in the vote base. After the defeat of the Congress in the 1977 election and the formation of the first non-Congress government at the Centre led by the Janata Party, a conglomeration of four parties (Janata Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Congress [O], and the Socialist Party), the backward castes emerged as a major force in national politics. However, once again the disengagement with the Janata Party's unifying leadership and its internecine squabbling brought the Congress back to power in 1980. In the 1984 election, held after Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Congress polled the highest vote and seat tally ever as a sympathetic vote swept the country and brought her son Rajiv to power. But the underlying trends signified the collapse of one-party dominance and the end of the Congress epoch in Indian politics (Hewitt 1989: 151–71).

With the decline of Congress dominance, the second phase of party politics began taking shape. New opposition parties and ideologies began to take centrestage from the late 1980s. This period saw

the emergence of the BJP as a major force in Indian politics. It soon overshadowed the Congress as the largest party in the 1996, 1998, and 1999 elections. At no point before 1989 had the BJP received even one-tenth of the national vote. It emerged for the first time as the single largest party in 1996; its vote share increased to 20.3 per cent. The BJP-led government under A.B. Vajpayee lasted only 13 days. Subsequently, the United Front government, consisting of the Janata Dal, some Left parties, and some state parties, formed a government for the first time in 1996, with Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister. In 1998, the BJP-led alliance secured 25.3 of the 543 seats and in 1999, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of 24 parties led by the BJP, won 304 seats.

Among political parties, the BJP is atypical. It is not a denominational party, but it promotes Hindutva interests. The BJP can be better defined as an ethnic party, the promoter of a Hindu ethnicity and nationalism defined along religious lines, which is something much narrower than a broad, encompassing, multi-ethnic Indian nationalism. Its aim is to create a unified Hindu nation through the politics of polarization. It was founded on the ideology of Hindutva, which encourages Hinduness. It is the political outgrowth of an extremist right-wing ideological movement. It has enduring ties with its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and its various fronts like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, sharing features of the fascist type of organizations minus the cult of the supreme leader. Many of its party cadres come from the RSS, and its affiliation to the RSS-VHP network has proved decisive in its recent growth.

During the six years of BJP-led NDA rule at the Centre (1998–2004), the party struggled to achieve what Christophe Jaffrelot called a division of labour, with Vajpayee, perceived as more moderate, on one side, and the RSS and other elements of the Sangh which continued to pursue a Hindu nationalist agenda on the other (1996: 449). The BJP came to power denouncing Nehruvian secularism, advocating militant Hindu nationalism, and encouraging anti-Muslim rhetoric and action (Heath 1999: 232–56). Arguably, the anti-Muslim sentiment was deflected on to the international scene, where a range of issues identified

the emergence of the BJP as a major force in Indian politics. It soon overshadowed the Congress as the largest party in the 1996, 1998, and 1999 elections. At no point before 1989 had the BJP received even one-tenth of the national vote. It emerged for the first time as the single largest party in 1996; its vote share increased to 20.3 per cent. The BJP-led government under A.B. Vajpayee lasted only 13 days. Subsequently, the United Front government, consisting of the Janata Dal, some Left parties, and some state parties, formed a government for the first time in 1996, with Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister. In 1998, the BJP-led alliance secured 25.3 of the 543 seats and in 1999, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of 24 parties led by the BJP, won 304 seats.

Among political parties, the BJP is atypical. It is not a denominational party, but it promotes Hindutva interests. The BJP can be better defined as an ethnic party, the promoter of a Hindu ethnicity and nationalism defined along religious lines, which is something much narrower than a broad, encompassing, multi-ethnic Indian nationalism. Its aim is to create a unified Hindu nation through the politics of polarization. It was founded on the ideology of Hindutva, which encourages Hinduness. It is the political outgrowth of an extremist right-wing ideological movement. It has enduring ties with its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and its various fronts like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, sharing features of the fascist type of organizations minus the cult of the supreme leader. Many of its party cadres come from the RSS, and its affiliation to the RSS-VHP network has proved decisive in its recent growth.

During the six years of BJP-led NDA rule at the Centre (1998–2004), the party struggled to achieve what Christophe Jaffrelot called a division of labour, with Vajpayee, perceived as more moderate, on one side, and the RSS and other elements of the Sangh which continued to pursue a Hindu nationalist agenda on the other (1996: 449). The BJP came to power denouncing Nehruvian secularism, advocating militant Hindu nationalism, and encouraging anti-Muslim rhetoric and action (Heath 1999: 232–56). Arguably, the anti-Muslim sentiment was deflected on to the international scene, where a range of issues identified

Muslims as a threat surrounding India, whether in Kashmir, Bangladesh (infiltration across the border), or the Middle East, where the BJP government dramatically reversed the policy of supporting Palestine to forge a new relationship with Israel. After September 2001, the 'fight against terrorism' became the centrepiece of the BJP's domestic and foreign policy. In some of these actions, the BJP had the support of groups that went far beyond its own traditional social base. The NDA lost control of the government in the elections of April–May 2004, and was defeated by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Congress. The Congress emerged as the single largest party with 145 seats, and the UPA secured 220 seats. The BJP's vote share dipped from 22.2 per cent in 2004 to 18.8 per cent in 2009. Their number of seats dropped to 116 in 2009 from 138 in 2004 (*The Hindu*, 26 May 2009). In 1999 when the NDA was at its peak, the vote share of the alliance was 41.1 per cent which came down to 24.1 per cent in 2009. Marking a major retreat for the BJP, it implied a shrinking of its social base of support, a decline in its voter base in its strongholds and failure to make inroads into other states. It also revealed its difficulties in holding on to allies or adding new ones to compensate for those who left the alliance. Big allies like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Taminoot Congress, and Biju Janata Dal had moved out of the NDA for fear of losing minority support. Its capacity to represent and accommodate diverse interests severely dented, the BJP was increasingly less attractive to existing and potential allies.

The balance between the BJP and the Congress shifted decisively to the advantage of the Congress in 2009. In this election, voters delivered a significant verdict with the Congress and its alliance winning 262 just 10 short of the majority mark. The Congress won 206 seats, crossing the threshold of 200 seats for the first time since 1991. The party has made major gains in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Rajasthan.

REGIONAL PARTIES AND COALITION POLITICS²

The 1980s, a period of great turbulence in Indian politics, marked the appearance of several new

political parties. As the Congress went into a long decline and the Janata Party unravelled, several regional parties emerged in various states and enlarged their support (Verney 2002: 134–58). In the process, national parties were marginalized, or became adjuncts to the state parties in major states of the country. Many of these state-based parties are not confined to one state, but exist in several states, whether recognized or not. Parties such as the Samajivadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal (Secular), Janata Dal (United) have units, and have fielded candidates in many states. National parties such as the CPI(M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Nationalist Congress Party could also be described as multi-state parties because their presence and representation in the Lok Sabha is limited to a few states.

Regional parties with an explicitly regional-ethnic character include the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, the Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, Ason Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam, and the Akali Dal in Punjab. For example, the Akali Dal represents only the Sikhs and the AGP represents caste Hindu Assamese. While the SP and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh (UP) are essentially ethnic in character and represent the backward and lower castes, they also share the characteristics of an electoralist party promoting the interests of distinct social constituencies (Arora 2000).

² See Box 10.1.

institutionalization of caste-based fragmentation and the exponential growth of the BSP and SP in UP at the expense of the Congress (Pai 1998; 2002). The BSP emphasized its distinct character as a Dalit-based party, and attempted to mobilize the underprivileged using caste as a tool to break the existing system, so as to distinguish itself from the Congress and the BJP and create an alternative space as a Dalit party. Subsequent years witnessed a shift in its strategy as the party attempted to gain the support of Brahmins by providing them with tickets, further weakening the influence of national parties. Its social engineering collapsed in the 2009 elections with both Brahmins and Muslims returning to the original Congress coalition of extremes.

On the other hand, the contrasting trajectory of the Left parties that have been elected to power in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura stresses the centrality of broad-based mobilization in determining the salience of social cleavages on patterns of voting and party strategies. The most important of these is the CPI(M), which has run the state government in West Bengal for nearly three decades, and has deep pockets of influence and support in Kerala and Tripura as well, where too it has regularly won elections. The Left parties were able to establish a strong presence in these three states by focusing on distributive policies and radical reforms rather than the politicization of caste differences and subordination (Rodrigues 2006: 199–252).

³ See Box 10.2.

The vote share of Left parties has varied from 7 in 1957 to below 8 per cent in 2009. The 2004 parliamentary election represented a high point for the Left, as it surpassed its own previous record of 56 seats in 1991. The Left bloc had 61 MPs, and the overall vote share for the Left was 8.3 per cent, compared to less than 8 per cent in 2009. However, the elections of 2009 delivered a severe blow to the Left parties. The CPI(M) suffered its worst defeat since its inception after the split in the united CPI in 1964. Its seat share plummeted to 24, its vote share declined from 5.7 in 2004 to 5.3 per cent in 2009. Between the CPI(M) and CPI, the strength of the CPI has declined to just 4 and that of the CPI(M) to 16. Most of the Left MPs are drawn from West Bengal and Kerala. This underlines the limits of the Left

electoral support, which has been unable to grow beyond West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, despite their resolve and attempts to do so. Their vote share has fluctuated in their strongholds at the same time as it has not registered an increase in the other states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu where they have had some presence.

In the 1990s (Arora 2000), political power shifted from the grand encompassing parties which had dominated politics for close to three decades to regional parties and multi-party coalitions. Until the late 1980s, it was taken for granted that national parties would govern India. Regional and state-based parties did, of course, contest elections, but their role was insignificant. In 1992, about 50 parties contested elections, while the number had gone up to 342 in 2009 (Chandra 2009). Since the fragmentation of the party system that set in after the decline of one-party dominance and the coming to power of a non-Congress coalition government more and more parties have been formed with the largest number in last elections—over a hundred new parties formed between 2004 to 2009 (*ibid.*).

⁴ See Box 10.3.

While there has been no actual decline in the number of national parties from 1957, the number of Indians who vote for them has come down. Until 1996 the total number of seats won by regional parties did not change much. Their numbers varied between a low of 31 (1957) and a high of 75 (1984). The major change occurred in 1996 when the number of seats won by them went up to 127, in 1999 it climbed up to 158 and in 2004 to 159 and 28.1 per cent of the vote. This increase has taken place at the expense of national parties, especially the BJP and the Congress, which had just over 120 seats between them in 2009. The combined votes of the Congress and the BJP in the 2004 and 2009 elections was under 50 per cent. The vote share of regional parties remained the same—roughly 29 per cent in the last three elections. This means more than half the voters continued to vote for parties other than the two big parties. Even though the balance appeared to have shifted in favour of a national party reflected in the resurgence of the Congress, regional parties remain significant because states continue to be the principal arena of politics and hence state-specific parties are still relevant (Loek

Niti team, *The Hindu*, 2009). Indeed, a striking feature of this election was the strong showing of regional parties, such as the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar, Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, and DMK in Tamil Nadu.

Six elections between 1991 and 2009 did not produce an absolute majority for a single party or coalition, and, as a consequence, minority and/or coalition governments. However, the 2009 elections resulted in a near majority for the Congress-led UPA which won 262 seats. In the first five national elections from 1952 to 1971, India had a one-party dominant system in which the Congress party received a plurality of votes averaging more than 40 per cent, while the second largest party could win only 10 per cent of the vote. In the 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, and 1999 elections, the Congress majority was well short of the vote share needed for a seat majority. These elections saw the vote share of the second party or alliances go up, thereby making the system more pluralistic and competitive.

More than eighteen state parties have held power both at the Central and state levels, while many more have shared power at the state level. Both regional and state-based parties are contenders for power in all the states except Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Taken as a whole, all these changes have substantially altered India's party system, and the transformation has been far-reaching. Three major trends post-1989, the decline of the Congress, the rise of the BJP and that of regional and state-based parties have led to the formation of minority and coalition governments. After a considerable change in parties and the party system, two coalition blocs have emerged. Both the NDA, led by the BJP, and the UPA, led by the Congress, were propped up by a host of state-based and regional parties eager to share the spoils of office. Some major state parties are not part of the two coalition blocs, and from time to time they attempt to revive a Third Front, opposed to both the Congress and the BJP.

The succession of coalition governments since the 1990s, while reflecting the expanding process of democratization, is based on spatial, not ideological, compatibility. This was the case with the BJP's alliances in 1998, 1999, and 2004, as well as the Congress-led UPA in 2004. Thus, in 2004, the strategic alliance involving all the features of bargaining, negotiation,

of the Congress and the Left, forged in the six years of the Vajpeyi period, formed the lynchpin of the new dispensation built around a strong opposition to communal politics; at the same time, there was a range of issues, especially in economic and foreign policies, where their policies and perceptions differed, resulting in the withdrawal of support by the Left parties in August 2008 on the issue of the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal and the growing strategic partnership between the two countries.

PRAGMATISM OF INDIAN PARTIES

One remarkable feature of political parties in India since the 1990s has been their tendency to move away from ideological frameworks. It is important to note that until this period, there were different types of parties in India. There were parties that represented the interests of the established order, and parties that sought basic social and economic transformations and engaged in struggles on behalf of the interests of the oppressed and those marginalized in society. However, this has changed as most political parties are more like each other on many issues and are devoted to parliamentary politics, including the Left parties. The ideological differences between parties are minimal, and hence they are likely to adopt the same mix of policies when in power. By and large, Indian parties are more pragmatic than ideological, which makes party boundaries highly flexible and permeable.

The majority of leaders and legislators could be in one party or the other because their presence in the party is often influenced by their success in obtaining the party ticket. Parties seem to have no distinct ideology that would distinguish one party from another in the course of election campaigns, for instance, although what they do when they are in power embodies or expresses interests of various kinds (Sarangi 1984: 189–207). The idealism that exemplified the first few decades after Independence has been replaced with a purposefulness characterized by self-interest, flexibility, and dissimulation. The nationalist fervour in the aftermath of Independence has given way to the politics of unbridled power, involving all the features of bargaining, negotiation,

losers in this process. This discrepancy results from the effect of two factors: the change in India's social structure—from an elite-mass structure to one with a substantial middle class sandwiched between these two poles—and the parties' need to continue to cater to a range of groups. Earlier, party leaders used to argue that they represented the interests of the people. Now, since the parties tend to represent sectional interests, they seem to claim that they themselves are 'the people'. On the one hand, this represents a step in the inclusion of marginalized groups. On the other, the parties and their leaders can afford to be undemocratic and authoritarian, because their own interests are subsumed in that of the group (Hasan 2006).

This shift towards pragmatism is a strong tendency in the development of parties globally. Both the Democratic Party in the United States and the Labour Party in Britain, as well as other many parties of the Left have embraced the free market policies first made acceptable by Bill Clinton, and subsequently by Tony Blair. Indian parties are immune to this trend. Quite a few major parties have moved ideologically in a rightward direction, even as they remain politically opposed to the right-wing BJP. Except for the CPI and CPI(M), no other political party uses the term socialism or anti-imperialism; these terms have virtually disappeared from the political discourse. Almost all the political parties today, despite each one's familiar slogan to defend the interests of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the marginalized, increasingly think and act in similar ways. In spite of some differences between parties, there is a fair degree of consensus on economic and foreign policies. No matter which party comes to power the Central and state governments are unwilling to roll back neo-liberal economic policies, which virtually all political parties support, many of which have been pushed through without much opposition or dissent.

Ideological depolarization has other implications as well. Every party becomes a pragmatic party from the electoral point of view. When ideological polarization becomes irrelevant, mobilization of support using other social cleavages, which are electorally salient, tends to rise. Therefore, it is not surprising that we find today many political parties

openly allying with specific caste or religious groups and trying to promote regional and local interests. In short, political parties have undergone a gradual transformation from policy-oriented parties to 'office-seeking' parties.

Although, in general, parties do profess to stick to their party ideology—or at least are known by certain ideological labels—in their actual support they seem to be more pragmatic, inasmuch as they are not reluctant to give up their ideological stance or put it on the backburner if that helps gain them a share of political power. Such a trend has been witnessed among both the national and the state-level parties, which are less inhibited when it comes to sharing power or coalescing in government formation with groups who, till the other day, were their bitter political opponents. Second, the resulting coalitions and alliances are neither ideological nor have any common objective to cement them together; they are merely short-term tactical arrangements established by ambitious politicians and are rooted in the exchange of mutual benefits and compulsions of power. The mobilization of the electorate is done through a strategy of support to regional-cum-segmental or ethnic issues, without extending overriding support to either national or primarily local issues.

ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF PARTIES

In terms of party structure, political parties are varied in organization, functioning, leadership, and decision-making and do not fit into one model. The working of parties varies enormously depending upon the way they have evolved, their status as the ruling or opposition party, their support bases, leadership styles and traditions, and their geographical location and spread (Suri 2005). The organization and support structure of most parties reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of society and the groups they claim to represent. While parties have been instrumental in democratizing state and society, they have tended to become internally less democratic.

Very few parties have properly institutionalized the norms of recruitment and membership.

Almost no party maintains a proper register of

membership, or a record of decision-making or policies adopted. Most parties are mass parties, and very few restrict their membership. Even the BJP does not restrict its membership to the majority community, notwithstanding the primacy it may give to the advocacy of their interests. The self-reported membership of parties in India is fairly high, higher than the global average, and much higher than most countries in Europe and North America (*State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report 2008*: 86). In fact, evidence shows that party membership has actually increased in the last decade (*ibid.*). However, these impressive figures are not based on verifiable membership, as most parties do not maintain membership registers. Self-reported membership can be seen as a form of party identification, but even then it is an impressive phenomenon.

Although a fundamental distinction can be made between mass and cadre parties, most parties in India are mass parties; that is to say such a party attempts to base itself on an appeal to the masses. It attempts to organize not only those who are influential or those who represent special interests, but also any citizen who is willing to join a party. But all mass parties tend to be highly centralized. Only the CPI(M) and the BJP can be loosely described as cadre parties dominated by groups of activists.

Even these two parties, however, no longer fit the description of cadre parties.

The CPI(M) is organized on the principles of democratic centralism, but in reality the centralization of power tends to be high. Although one leader can dictate the 'line' to the party, some leaders do exercise more authority and influence than others within the core leadership. In view of the changes in all types of parties and the unavoidable trend towards transformation into mass parties, the classification of parties as cadre and mass parties is not particularly relevant (*State of Democracy in South Asia 2008*).

Most other parties seem to be similar in their style of functioning, too. Nearly all of them are based on loyalty to leaders rather than loyalty to values or institutions. Nearly all of them lack internal party democracy; they are, in varying degrees, centralized (Manor 1981: 25–40). The Election Commission is

supposed to ensure inner party democracy by insisting on organizational elections at periodic intervals. However, very few parties hold regular elections, and when elections are held they are notional, as invariably the party President nominates the office bearers. As many as 18 recognized regional political parties had not responded to the Election Commissions' reminders to hold organizational elections in 1997 (Gill 1997). Only the seven recognized national political parties bothered to reply to the Chief Election Commissioner's reminders, indicating their commitment to hold organizational elections which has remained a commitment and nothing more than that. In the BSP, no internal elections are held, and all office bearers are nominated by the party President. The Left parties hold elections regularly, but these are largely non-competitive.

However, the national parties have been equally reluctant to hold elections. In the Congress party, elections have invariably been announced and postponed on several occasions. Prime Minister PV. Narasimha Rao actually held an organizational election in 1994, but such was the turmoil during and the fallout after that election, that he nullified it and once again resorted to nomination for the highest positions in the party organization. Elections had been repeatedly promised since the Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, reconstituted the party's top decision-making body in 2004, and renamed it the Congress Steering Committee. But elections were not held, and the party posts were filled by nomination. Until the late 1960s, the Congress had a strongly rooted organizational network, which was the envy of other political parties. It was not a 'cadre-based' organization, but had plenty of substance as an institution. In most parts of the country, thanks to its robust organization, its influence penetrated downward quite effectively, at least to the sub-district level and sometimes further. It was also a formidable instrument for the performance of several other key tasks—three of which were especially important. It could gather and transmit upward accurate information (political intelligence) from lower levels in the system. It could represent the views of important social groups. The Congress leadership has not been able to reverse the process of centralization. This is the root cause of the

deinstitutionalization of the Congress and the decline of political parties. Rahul Gandhi who took over as a general secretary of the party in 2007 has since then shown a keen interest in restoring internal democracy in the Congress, beginning with the Youth Congress.

He admitted 'democracy' in political parties 'is non-existent in India. You cannot enter politics unless you are well connected'. Rahul Gandhi has pushed for holding of organizational elections within the Congress claiming that 'just because I'm the outcome of that system doesn't mean I can't change that system' (*The Times of India* 5 May 2009).

The BJP is also not an institutionalized party; it has not had a contest for the post of the party President since its inception in 1980. Elections have taken place at the state level, but this practice has been 'etiolised in the past few years in favour of an election by consensus'. The BJP's predecessor, the Jana Sangh, also avoided a contest for party posts. The party goes through the formality of elections in accordance with the party constitution, but the name of the President is usually decided by the RSS. The party President nominates the entire team of office bearers. The BJP has always had to struggle to establish its primacy as a political party by reworking its relationship with the RSS.

Parties in India still refuse to lay down settled and predictable procedures for almost everything they do, from the selection of candidates to the framing of an agenda. On issues that are of crucial importance to most parties, the top echelons appear to play a decisive role. At the same time, with issues of a local character, parties have some scope for negotiation, discussion, and consultation. The local leaders cannot hope to influence crucial decisions of parties such as nomination of candidates, but in the bigger parties there is often some room to accommodate the insights and sentiments of local leaders. It is mainly the Left parties, such as the CPI(M) and the CPI, which have stronger institutional structures and norms.

The structure of decision-making in most parties is highly centralized. One major issue of concern is the widespread prevalence of the 'high command' culture (a synonym for the Party President), with the high command taking all the important decisions. The Congress led the way, but most other parties have

been quick to follow the model. The Congress high command structure has become so deeply entrenched that all parties have simply accepted it. Among the contemporary parties, the BSP epitomizes the high command culture to the utmost. Its President, Mayawati, heads the party, and there are no other leaders; the rest are all workers and 'cadres'. Indeed, one of the most enduring images associated with the BSP is that of Mayawati presiding over party meetings: she occupies the lone ornamental chair placed on the stage, while other party members, including senior members, sit on the floor (Ramaseshan 2007: 60–1).

A remarkable feature of Indian politics lies in the advent of parties centred around one person, be it a politician or movie star turned leaders. There is a proliferation of parties that promote family rule and personality cults around the family name, caste, or charisma. Parties have become a preserve of families and are subservient to one supreme leader. The leader can wilfully impose her/his offspring or relatives on the party. Twenty-seven MPs in the Fifteenth Lok Sabha and a large number of cabinet ministers in the second UPA government belonged to prominent political families—an indication that politics has indeed become a family business. Major and mini dynasties control national and regional parties.

Family rule or dynasty is a striking feature of the Congress, but it is only fair to add that neither family rule nor the dynastic pattern is the monopoly of the Congress. Quite a few political families have sprung up in the recent past, and more are mushrooming all the time. In other words, what began in the Congress now extends to the bulk of party politics. From the Karunanidhi clan in Tamil Nadu to the Abdullah and Mufti families in Kashmir, the Thackerays and Pawars in Maharashtra, Sangmas in Meghalaya, Patnaks in Orissa, and the Mulayam Singh Yadav clan in Uttar Pradesh, parties have become a family business propped up by an untemiring focus on these leaders. The most striking change has occurred in the cadre-based DMK which has yielded itself to dynastic pressures and gradually turned into a family enterprise. Family control or dynastic rule is not as pervasive in ideology-based parties as it is in others. One consequence of family dominated politics is that parties have become a closed shop, with

entry restricted only to those who have the right credentials of birth (Sanghvi 2009). As the political class becomes a self-perpetuating dynastic elite Indian politics is rendered less representative. Such politics of inheritance has undermined internal democracy and obstructed institutionalization of parties because it can constrain the individual discretion and personal power of charismatic leaders (Chandra 2005: 87–125).³ In the absence of clear democratic procedures, parties will continue to be plagued by the factionalism that has been so detrimental to both their own interests and the stabilization of party structures (Chandra 2004). All in all, the internal structures of parties, and the lack of intra-party democracy in particular have impeded the growth of strong and vigorous parties.

A larger consequence of the decline of ideology and the rise of one-leader or one-family centred parties is the reduction of party organizations into election winning machines, which depend for their success on the charisma of the leader and their capacity to raise massive funds. An important aspect of the struggle for power is the financing of election campaigns. This has assumed tremendous importance because winning and losing elections has become the only role a party envisages for itself. The party and the leader's ability to win a majority in the national or state elections is the sole basis for judging the success or failure of a party and its top leader. Since most parties function as vote-gathering machines, there is a distinct unwillingness to enlist public support through political campaigns and movements between elections, build cadres, or mobilize people around new political initiatives. The privileging of elections at the expense of other aspects of the democratic process implies that parties are inattentive to the need for constant organizational renewal, or to the requirements of popular mobilization. Leaders are valued for their capacity to attract crowds, strike deals and alliances, and raise resources as elections become more and more expensive in India.

ELECTIONEERING IS LABOUR-INTENSIVE AND EXPENSIVE

in India's sprawling urban and rural constituencies.

Parties and candidates need large sums of money for advertising, polling, consulting, travel, vehicles and fuel, and the printing of campaign materials that are to reach voters in constituencies. Historically, parties

have been dependent for finance on big businesses and wealthy individuals, especially parties of the Right and the Centre (Sridharan 2006: 311–40). During the 1950s and 1960s, the business community contributed the bulk of the funds (Venkatasan 1999). There are laws to limit campaign finances and restrict the expenditure of parties in elections, but they are largely ineffectual because it is easy to circumvent them. Since the 1980s, there has been a closer and more open link between big businesses and the corporate sector and parties after the lifting of the ban on company donations in 1984 (Sridharan 1999: 229–54). The objectives of corporate funding of parties underwent a significant change in the wake of liberalization and the perceived irreversibility of the economic reform process. Nowadays, organized industry and business houses fund parties and dominate policy making for individual benefits.

The growing nexus between politics and the corporate sector and the dependence of parties on the corporate sector for funds is a not a new feature of party politics, but has become more manifest. This is also because the unrealistic ceiling on election funding has made the process of election and party financing less than transparent. The Election and Other Related Laws (Amendment) Act 2003 was one measure that promised major changes in the financing of political parties and their candidates for elections. However, these provisions have failed to ensure transparency in party finances—both how money is raised and spent. Consequently, there is a growing dominance of special interests in the polity leaving parties politically vulnerable to these leading interests. This limits the ability of parties to boldly articulate the concerns of the marginalized and poor people. Political finance reform is necessary for the stability of democracy itself, because election funds raised through corrupt means increase cynicism about parties and politicians (Suri 2005: 1–62).

CRITICAL ISSUES CONFRONTING PARTIES

Political parties in India have played an important role in democratic consolidation. They have done so through a politics of accommodation and consensus that binds the political class together despite their

different party affiliations (Arora 2007). They have facilitated the inclusion of varied groups in the political system, by giving voice to historically excluded groups, and helping them to gain access to the political system. At the same time, it is increasingly difficult to reconcile the absence of intra-party democracy within parties with the robustness and resilience of the democratic polity (*ibid.*).

There is considerable dissatisfaction with parties and politicians as vehicles of representation and governance. Paradoxically voters feel that parties are essential for the functioning of democracy, but do not seem to trust them to make democracy work (*State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report*). The biggest institutional weakness of parties is that they are leader-centric and lack internal democracy, as leaders are unwilling or unable to institutionalize party elections or procedures for the selection of candidates, and increase the participation of members in party functioning (Suri 2005). The absence of internal democracy, dynastic rule, elite capture, and the inability of parties to offer real choices to the people are among the major issues confronting India's parties. By a long way the most disturbing trends are noticeable in political parties which function as family fiefdoms and without a trace of internal democracy. Most political parties lack the political capacity to take the lead in formulating and debating policies which reflect people's aspirations and needs. Although parties and party leaders do profess to stand for ideology, in reality they are flexible and not at all reluctant to give up their ideological stance or put it on the back burner if that helps them to gain a share of political power or to obtain a ticket for contesting an election. Although the divergence between election rhetoric and the actual implementation of government policy remains large, particularly with regard to policies that have distributive and welfare outcomes, the UPA government has attempted to shift away from technocratic strategies of governance to a political approach which focused on inclusive growth through social and welfare measures. At one level, the Congress has stuck to the neo-liberal path of market-oriented reforms, which was aimed at generating economic growth but at another level to contain the ill-effects of the market economy, it came out with legislations like

the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and a host of other social welfare schemes which held out promise of relief, particularly for the rural poor.

Though encountering serious problems with regard to the healthy functioning of parties, the fact remains that there is no alternative to political activity based on party competition. Parties cannot be dispensed with as long as we have a democratic parliamentary system of government. India's democratic stability, which defies conventional theories of democracy, underscores the positive relationship between parties and democracy. In India, the

legitimacy of party-based governments has never been questioned. Even frequent elections for Parliament, state assemblies, and panchayats have not alienated the electorate; in fact, they seem to give the mass of voters a sense of popular control over government. The significant changes in the social composition of India's ruling élite since Independence, both in politics and in the bureaucracy are largely due to parties opening their doors to new recruits from marginalized groups, which ultimately make their way into the government. This is obvious from the significant increase in the number of lower-caste legislators and senior civil servants in influential government positions (Suri 2005). This trend signals a social revolution that is giving voice to previously marginalized groups (Jaffrelot 2002). Despite the erosion of party organizations and the degeneration of politicians, which so preoccupies intellectuals, the media, and the middle classes, the Indian voter, going by the over 60 per cent turnout in national elections and an even higher turnout in state assembly elections, appears satisfied with the choices that political parties offer.

None of this minimizes the seriousness of the problems facing political parties and the political system they run. The most serious problem is the failure of parties to keep their promises to the electorate—promises to implement economic development alongside the reduction of social inequalities. India cannot build a truly inclusive polity without an inclusive economy. Parties need to think why six decades after independence, more than a quarter of our population still lives below the official poverty line, and millions are deprived of the basic necessities of life or face daily preventable problems

such as malnutrition and endemic hunger, or lack of purchasing power. Parties must ask why faster and more effective political intervention to relieve the suffering of millions of the poorest and disadvantaged is not forthcoming. These are the difficult questions confronting our political parties. This is the great unfinished agenda of the nation-building project that parties have yet to implement.

NOTES

1. If a political party is treated as a recognized one in four or more states, it shall be known as a national party throughout India, but only so long as that political party continues to fulfil thereafter the conditions for recognition in four or more states on the results of any subsequent general election, either to the Lok Sabha or to the legislative assembly of any state. If a political party is treated as recognized in less than four states, it should be known as a state party in the state or states in which it is so recognized, but only so long as that political party continues to fulfil thereafter the conditions for recognition on the results of any subsequent general election to the Lok Sabha, or, as the case may be, to the legislative assembly of the state, in the said state or states.
2. All election statistics are available on the Election Commission of India's website www.eci.gov.in.
3. Kanchan Chandra, for instance, argues that the lack of democracy within the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, compared to Karnataka during the 1970s, prevented it from incorporating newly mobilized backward-caste groups.

REFERENCES

- Arora, Balveer. 2007. 'Can Democracy Flourish with Undemocratic Parties', *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 15 August.
- . 2000. 'Coalitions and National Cohesion', in Francine Frankel, Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava, and Balveer Arora (eds.), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chanda, Kanchan. 2009. 'A Rope of Many Strands: Why a Fragmented Party System Stabilizes India's Democracy', *The Indian Express*, 28 May.
- . 2005. 'Elite Incorporation in Multiethnic Societies', in Ashutosh Varshney (ed.), *India and the Politics of Developing Societies: Essays in Memory of Myron Weiner*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 87–125.
- Chandrababu Naidu. 1998. 'The BSP in Uttar Pradesh', *Seminar*, November, 471.
- Ramaseshan, Radhika. 2007. 'Fault Lines in the Indian Party System', in Arvind Sivarankrishnan (ed.), *Short on Democracy: Issues Facing Indian Political Parties*. Delhi: Imprint One, pp. 56–70.
- Rodrigues, Valerian. 2006. 'The Communist Parties in India', in E. Sridharan and Peter Ronald deSouza (eds.), *India's Political Parties*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 199–252.
- Sanghvi, Vir. 2009. 'Politics of Inheritance', *Hindustan Times*, 30 May.
- Satangi, Prakash. 1984. 'Party and Party System: A Conceptual Analysis', *Political Science Review*, 23 (3&4), pp. 189–207.
- Sridharan, E. 2006. 'Parties, the Party System and Collective Action for State Funding of Elections: A Comparative Perspective on Possible Options', in E. Sridharan and Peter deSouza (eds.), *India's Political Parties*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- . 2000. 'Fragmentation of the Party System', in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Parties and Party Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report. 2008. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Suri, Atul (ed.). 1988. *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Manor, James. 1995. 'Regional Parties in Federal Systems: India in Comparative Perspective', in Balveer Aurora and Douglas Verney (eds.), *Multiple Identities in a Single State: Indian Federalism in Comparative Perspective*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers, pp. 107–35.
- . 1990. 'Parties and the Party System', in Arul Kohli (ed.), *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State Society Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1981. 'Party Decay and Political Crisis in India', *Washington Quarterly*, 4(3), pp. 25–40.
- Nayan, Deepak. 2001. 'Democracy and Development' in Niraj G. Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Pai, Sudha. 2002. 'Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh'. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Delhi). 2009. *How India Votes*, 27 May.
- Chanda, Kanchan. 2009. 'A Rope of Many Strands: Why a Fragmented Party System Stabilizes India's Democracy', *The Indian Express*, 28 May.
- . 2005. 'Elite Incorporation in Multiethnic Societies', in Ashutosh Varshney (ed.), *India and the Politics of Developing Societies: Essays in Memory of Myron Weiner*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 87–125.
- Chandrababu Naidu. 1998. 'The BSP in Uttar Pradesh', *Seminar*, November, 471.
- Ramaseshan, Radhika. 2007. 'Fault Lines in the Indian Party System', in Arvind Sivarankrishnan (ed.), *Short on Democracy: Issues Facing Indian Political Parties*. Delhi: Imprint One, pp. 56–70.
- Rodrigues, Valerian. 2006. 'The Communist Parties in India', in E. Sridharan and Peter Ronald deSouza (eds.), *India's Political Parties*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 199–252.
- Sanghvi, Vir. 2009. 'Politics of Inheritance', *Hindustan Times*, 30 May.
- Satangi, Prakash. 1984. 'Party and Party System: A Conceptual Analysis', *Political Science Review*, 23 (3&4), pp. 189–207.
- Sridharan, E. 2006. 'Parties, the Party System and Collective Action for State Funding of Elections: A Comparative Perspective on Possible Options', in E. Sridharan and Peter deSouza (eds.), *India's Political Parties*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- . 2000. 'Fragmentation of the Party System', in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Parties and Party Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report. 1999. 'Toward State Funding of Elections in India: A Comparative Perspective on Possible Options', *Journal of Policy Reform*, 3 (3), pp. 229–54.
- Srinivasulu, Sugata and Pushpa Iyengar. 2009. 'Where the Family Heirs Loom', *Outlook*, 8 June.
- Verney, Douglas. 2002. 'How has the Proliferation of Parties Affected the Indian Federation? A Comparative Approach', in Zoya Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan (eds.), *India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, pp. 134–58.
- Yadav, Yogendra and Oliver Heath. 2000. 'The United Colours of the Congress', in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Parties and Party Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.