CHANGING NATURE OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE: IDENTITY ASSERTIONS AND THE STATE

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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled **Changing Nature of Political Discourse: Identity Assertions and the State** submitted by **Rishikesh** in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is his original work and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree or diploma in any other university.

We recommend that it may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dynamics of Politics

When India embarked upon a new career as an Independent nation-state, there were numerous factors at play, and while devising the new Constitution our founding fathers "were not writing on a clean slate".[1] India adopted a liberal democratic framework of governance not out of an accident, but through careful deliberations and conscious decisions. The new task of nation-building was rooted in a firm belief that the Third World nationalisms had their own unique historical experiences, and as such, their nation-building process was to be conceptualized or "imagined" differently and not merely as a replica of the West (Chatterjee 1986). The same line of thinking informed the belief of our founding fathers while they opted for a democratic structure of polity. Democracy was believed to involve a process of differentiation rather than singularity of forms, and institutions were considered to be dynamic and flexible. As such, democracy was envisaged "not as a set of rules tied strictly to any particular Western system....but as some general principles" subject to change through practical improvisation.[2]

Since then the Constitutional Democracy in India has come a long way, striking deep roots and acquiring widespread social acceptance. Across the ideological divide, there is a unanimity that India has succeeded in establishing a vibrant structure of democracy in its first fifty years as a free nation. Notwithstanding the serious distortions that set in at different points of time, the acceptance of the rules of electoral democracy has provided a functional stability to the political system.

The provision for universal adult franchise in a predominantly agricultural, illiterate and hierarchical society was perhaps the greatest political innovation in India's Constitution-making exercise, and one of the boldest decisions in the task of national reconstruction after 1947. The adoption of protective discrimination, as a tool of social justice for minimizing the structural inequalities, removing the historical prejudices, and providing the equality of opportunity, was another milestone in this grand

design. Abolition of separate electorate on religious lines, adoption of the most comprehensive charter of the Fundamental Rights, and safeguards for the minorities were other important elements of this project of composite nationalism.

Democracy in Action : The Initial Decades

The cumulative effect of the universal adult franchise and periodic elections, progressive legislations, and protective discrimination was reflected at two levels. The hitherto marginalized sections of society were gradually acquiring political consciousness and realizing the value of their vote, which later effectively challenged the vertical solidarity enjoyed by the local notables of the 'Congress System'. At the level of leadership, a new section of the ruling elite emerged on the political firmament claiming to voice the aspirations of the newly politicized social groups. These 'Bullock Capitalists' sought to create a space of their own in the political sphere, thus refusing to play second fiddle to the Congress stalwarts. Over the decades, the Congress monolith found itself increasingly unable to deal with the staggering diversity which was no more docile and which no longer presented a consolidated vote-bank. If the Nehru years remained bogged by "the duality in the rhetoric of change and the reality of compromise",[3] the latter half of the 1960s wrote the script of the historic decline of the Congress system. The resort to personalized and populist politics coupled with the concentration of power at the top led to the Institutional breakdown. The uneven pattern of economic growth over the decades, combined with the centralizing thrust led to strained Centre- states relations, and resulted in the demand for regional autonomy and even for secession. The failure to raise the standard of living of the masses, rising prices, food shortages, industrial recession, devaluation of rupee, unemployment, and corruption severely undermined the social base of the Congress party. Over the first three decades, Indian politics had traversed an arduous path beginning from the high hopes and promises of the formative years to the period of crisis.

The Changed Discourse of Politics : The 1980s and '90s

At the turn of the 1980s, political process in India had entered into a new phase, partly due to the deepening of the democratic politics, and partly due to the structural crisis that had set in over the earlier decades. The increasing political consciousness among the newly enfranchised groups put new demands on the state precisely when the latter was becoming increasingly unable to manage assertions and accommodate diverse interests. Decline of the state institutions severely undermined the legitimacy of the state as the harbinger of change and socio-economic development. While the functional stability of the Constitutional democracy remained more or less intact, the substantive issues of nation-building, such as social justice, welfare, secularism, civil liberties and minority rights were being redefined. It was an era when the consensus on the Nehruvian model of development and modernization had broken down. New idioms of politics were being introduced for consolidation of sectarian identities. In the new milieu, self-representation became the new mantra and the politics of identity came to play a decisive role in the democratic politics. This new phase of identity assertions and community conflicts had coincided with the phenomenon of de-institutionalization of the state (Basu & Kohli 1997).

The last two decades also marked a decisive shift in the developmental strategy. In the new dispensation, the state was supposed to move away from an interventionist regime to a market-friendly paradigm, and was expected to play the role of a 'facilitator' to the market.

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This study is an attempt to inquire into the two dominant trends of the last two decades – the Backward Class politics, and the emergence of the Hindu Nationalism with the rise of the BJP on the political firmament, and their impact on the state. These two dominant currents have in the last two decades not only replaced the Congress from the centrestage but have also made a definite impact on the functioning of the state and the nature of the political process. The relevance of the analysis of these trends becomes more

important because they appear to be fundamentally opposed to each other in terms of their ideological predilections. While Hindu nationalism stands for Hindu unity and seeks to create a consolidated Hindu identity subsuming intra-religious cleavages, the Backward class politics stands opposed to Hindu unity and seeks to initiate a caste-based restructuring of power. And yet the two have managed to decisively shape the political discourse. More importantly, the political parties representing them have, from time to time, entered into electoral alliances with each other. In an era of regionalization, the Backward class politics as well as Hindu nationalism have shown a tremendous potential to alter the nature of the political process and the functioning of the state. While the BJP has become one of the pivots around which the national politics is revolving at present, the backward classes can no longer be ignored as far as the electoral democracy is concerned. In other words, when in the new context of political process in India, national and regional parties have been forced to come to terms with each other, the increasing relevance of the forces representing the Backward classes and Hindu nationalism is unmistakable. This analysis seeks to analyze the mobilization strategy of these groups, their programmes and policies, the political processes generated from their decisive intervention in the democratic politics and their influence on the nature and functioning of the state.

The First chapter briefly deals with the existing literature on the Indian state with respect to its theoretical constructions. While traditional approaches (which were much relevant in the early decades and have, since then, lost some of their validity) have been analyzed very briefly, the emphasis is on the recent contributions to the study of the state in India, and the issues they have raised regarding the changes in the nature and functioning of the state.

The Second chapter analyses the phenomena of the Backward Class politics, sketching its history from the late 1960s (when it became more pronounced) and up to the 1990s, when it decisively intervened to alter the discourse of the state. What were the strategies of Backward Class

mobilization ? How did these classes manage to threaten and ultimately break the upper caste-led structures of power and dominance ? What have been the fallouts of the Backward class politics ? In what ways it has affected the state and its policies and programmes ? How did the state respond to this politics of identity and demand for equality ? What are the social bases of these political actions ? This chapter has made an attempt to address these concerns.

The Third chapter analyzes in detail the emergence and growth of the politics of *Hindutva* or Hindu Nationalism in the last two decades. What facilitated the growth of Hindu nationalism ? How did the BJP manage to enter the electoral process in a decisive way ? How did it cope with the politics of Mandalisation ? The first part of this chapter deals with these issues. The second part focuses on three specific themes to show the impact of the politics of *Hindutva* on the nature and functioning of the state. It has chosen the realms of education, culture, and economy with an analysis of three specific events or policies in order to see the linkages between the *Hindutva* politics and state power, programmes and policies.

The Conclusion seeks to establish the relationship between the two dominant trends mentioned above on the one hand, and the state on the other. It also makes an effort to find any discernible trend that has emerged from the interaction and contestation between the Backward class politics and the politics of Hindutva.

This study is based on secondary sources. It also briefly mentions the new role of the state in the era of Liberalization, although the broader issues of polity and economy involved in this process are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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[1] Ravindra Kumar, 'Democracy: From Consolidation to Fluidity', in H. Karlekar (ed.), Independent India: The First Fifty Years, Delhi, OUP, 1998,**

[2] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Democracy and Social Inequality', in F.Frankel et al. (eds), Transforming India, Delhi, OUP, 2000, p.**

[3] Zoya Hasan, Introduction in Z. Hasan (ed), The Politics and the State in India, Delhi, Sage, forthcoming.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Indian State

Academic analysis of the Indian state are wide-ranging and divergent. The characterization of the Indian state have ranged from a 'liberal-modern state' to an 'autonomous actor' to a 'capitalist state' to a 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial state'. The post-colonial state in India has come a long way since its inception and so have the theories attached to it. Perhaps it would not be too wide off the mark to suggest that, even today, the state remains an enigma of sorts to its theorists. This analysis briefly deals with some of the important theoretical constructions of the state. The emphasis is on the recent analyses and the issues they have raised regarding the nature and functioning of the state.

W.H.Morris-Jones and Rajni Kothari were two important theorists who followed the liberal-modernist approach. Morris-Jones, in his ***Government and Politics of India,*** argued that post colonial India had succeeded in establishing a stable political order and that "vast social and economic changes" were in the offing. He also argued that through a troika of governmental machinery, one dominant-party and parliamentary constitutionalism, India had successfully cultivated an institutional structure and that now the challenge lay in making "swaraj or self-rule genuine rather than formal".[1]

The most comprehensive and innovative effort in the liberal-modernist persuasion came from Rajni Kothari in his classic ***Politics in India***. Kothari's model was designed in terms of a 'top-down' framework as well as 'in an idiom of persuasion'. To Kothari, the state seemed to enjoy autonomy, legitimacy and authority while dealing with the pulls and pressures of representative democracy. Kothari's model of the state revolved around four elements- primacy of the political process in social

transformation, centrality of the institutions in state and nation-building, diffusion of norms and values and, role of key individuals.

Kothari argued that the state had performed creditably "in its encounter with this unprecedented influx of issues and the atmosphere of challenge and unrest that accompanied it",[2] and that the structure had remained intact despite the fact that the nascent Indian political order had to operate in the severely limiting context of massive poverty and underdevelopment.

On the other hand, the Marxist scholars accorded a considerable prominence to the concept of 'state'. Like other capitalist states in Europe, the Indian state is seen by these theorists as a part of the superstructure and, as an embodiment of the social dynamics resulting from the flux in the economic sub-structure. Class analysis (i.e.class formation, class configuration and class action) and location of the state in the social formation is central to such analysis. (Hasan, forthcoming)

The early Marxist analysis, deriving its notion of state from the usual Marxian conception of the state in capitalist society, also visualized the state in India simply as 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'. As such the state here also was seen as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling class. And to analyze the nature of Indian state , they would argue , the task was to identify the ruling classes and their coalition.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) viewed the Indian state as 'a national bourgeois state'. It argued that due to the legacies of the anti-imperialist national movement, the ruling class had some progressive elements within it which is why the state could resist pressure from the big bourgeoisie and landlords to play a progressive role (Yadav, 1990). The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) dubbed the Indian state as "an organ of the rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords led by the big bourgeoisie who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of Identity
The Backward Class Politics and the State

The story of the unfolding of the political process in post-Independence India has been one of contestations, negotiations and compromises. As such, the contours of the state (in the sense that it provides a terrain for a competitive co-existence of dominant groups)[1] have been changing from time to time , depending upon the relative strength of the competing groups with respect to the vital question of " who decides". Political change in India is marked by unforeseen consequences, gaps between intent and reality and , hopes and despair. However, the significant changes that have decisively reshaped the course of state power in India since Independence in general, and since the 1980s in particular , the emergence and growth of the Backward Class politics is of extra-ordinary importance.

The politics and policies of the state in the realm of agriculture , at the turn of the 1960s, had produced far-reaching changes in the countryside. In this respect , the great experiment of universal adult franchise was equally important. The historic decline of the "Congress System", which became manifest clearly in the 1960s , was partly of its own making , but was to a great extent designed by the emergence of a new set of ruling elite from among the rich peasantry. This new group of peasant proprietors, described variously as "bullock capitalists",[2] "agrarian capitalists" or "rich peasantry", set the tone for widespread economic and political changes. Benefiting immensely from the lop-sided, half-hearted measures of structural reform in the agrarian structure , the new group was no more willing to remain content with a secondary role

in the anglicized, urban, upper-caste dominated leadership structure of the Indian National Congress (INC). And as the new entrants began placing their own demands on the ruling political coalition , the chinks in the Congress' armour were exposed. Although the year 1967 is generally seen by the analysts as the watershed in the history of post-Independence Indian politics, the seeds of this development were sown and nurtured in the Nehru era itself.

This chapter focuses on the politics and strategies of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and the intermediate castes (mostly peasant proprietors and dominant castes), who attempted to dislodge the urban, upper castes from their positions of power. What facilitated these changes in the countryside? What were the demands and strategies of the new set of elite who deserted the Congress and changed the course and content of Indian Politics for good ? How did the steady growth of the Backward class/caste politics affect the relationship between the state power and social classes? This analysis will concentrate on the OBC and peasant proprietor politics in north India, but will also compare it with the emergence and growth of the Backward Class politics in the south. The focus of the analysis is on U.P. and Bihar, with a mention of comparable developments in the south.

The Politics of the Backward Classes

The northern and southern parts of the country have followed completely different trajectory in terms of the rise and growth of the backward Class politics. The pre-Independence Backward Class movement in south generated a social churning that helped in giving stability to the post-Independence polity. The creation of a unified bloc of the backward classes against the upper castes provided an early challenge to the latter even before Independence and which enabled the backward classes to decisively enter the political process after Independence. In the south, and

even in the west, the upper castes lost ground early, largely because they were smaller in number. "But the upper castes remained politically dominant in the Hindi belt also because the pattern of land ownership that enabled them, especially the Rajputs, to consolidate their grasp on the countryside as zamindars, jagirdars, or taluqdars under the British and to retain some of their influence in spite of the efforts towards land reform after 1947". [3] On the other hand, by the 1960s, much of south India had gone through a relatively peaceful lower caste revolution. (Varshney 2000).

To the politics of the backward classes in the south, we will return later in this chapter. The OBCs are situated in the middle of the ritual caste hierarchy of Indian society above the Untouchables (later classified as the Scheduled castes) and below the forward castes and the intermediate castes. They form the bulk of the Shudras, whose professional activity is often as field-workers or artisans and who represent about half of the Indian population.

In northern India, the challenges mounted on the upper caste hegemony have followed two kinds of approaches. The first one was designed around creating a consolidated peasant identity, shedding internal differentiations within the largely heterogeneous peasantry of the region, and pitting the countryside against the city-dwellers thus erecting a rural – urban divide as a tool of peasant mobilization. The second strategy concentrated on affirmative action and caste identities demanding caste-based quotas and striving to forge an alliance of the non-elite groups.[4] From the outcomes of these two strategies, rose to prominence the middle caste peasants and the OBCs in northern India.

Affirmative Action and Kalelkar Commission

The Constituent Assembly debates were dominated by a Nehruvian vision of socioeconomic development in which primordial identities such as caste, ethnicity, and religion etc. were seen as antithetical to the

creation of an egalitarian social structure, and as such, caste was not regarded by the progressive leaders as a relevant category for state-sponsored social change. But these leaders recognized the imperative for special measures to ameliorate the conditions of the minorities, backward and tribal areas and depressed and other backward classes. Article 340 of the Constitution stated that :

"The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India...and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties and to improve their condition...".[5]

Article 15 (3&4) provided exceptions to the general principles of non-discrimination enshrined in the Constitution and empowered the state to make special provisions for women and children and for the advancement of 'any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens' or for the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes. Article 16 (4) empowered the state to make special provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any 'backward class of citizens' which in the opinion of the state are not adequately represented in the services under the state.

While the Constitution was categorical in reservations for the SCs and STs, it was ambiguous about the OBCs. This was due to the ambiguity at that time in identifying the beneficiaries, specifying the type of benefits that would accrue to them, as well as implementing this policy of preferential treatment. No effort was made to classify as to who constitute the OBCs.

The first Backward Classes Commission was appointed on January 29, 1953 under the Chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar with the terms :

a) to determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any section of people (in addition to the SCs and the STs) should be treated as

socially and educationally backward classes and in accordance with such criteria to prepare a list of such classes,

b) to investigate the difficulties faced by such backward classes,

c) to investigate as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties or to improve their conditions, and

d) to suggest grants to made.

The Commission formulated different criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes, such as, (i) low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of the Hindu society, (ii) lack of general educational advancement among the major sections of a caste or community, (iii) inadequate or no representation in the government services, and (iv) inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry. It identified 2399 backward castes out of which 837 were classified as most backward. The report was submitted on March 30, 1955. Some of the important recommendations of the Commission were as follows :

1.undertaking caste-wise enumeration of the population in the 1961 census ;

2. relating social backwardness of a class to its low position in the traditional caste hierarchy ;

3. treating all women as a class as 'backward' ;

4. reservation of 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institutions for qualified students of backward classes ;

5.sminimum reservation of vacancies in all government services and local bodies for OBCs on the following scale :

Class I	25 per cent
Class II	33.3 per cent
Class III	40 per cent

The Commission reluctantly made caste the basis of the backwardness. The Chairman himself thought that caste criteria was

repugnant to democracy and inimical to the creation of a casteless and classless society.[6] The report was laid before the Parliament on Sept. 3, 1956. The then Home Minister, G.B. Pant, expressed the governmental disappointment and said that emphasis on caste displayed the 'dangers of separatism'. The Central government decided to 'go slow' with the finalization of the list of backward classes, and in May 1961, the Cabinet decided that there was no need for an all-India list of the OBCs and that, there would be no reservation policy at the Centre. During the final discussion on the report of the Backward Classes Commission in 1965, the government's stand was that caste criteria of backwardness would be dangerous in many ways – administratively unworkable, contrary to the 'first priciples of social justice', unfair to the other people, would perpetuate caste consciousness and would be injurious even to the recipients by creating vested interests and developing a sense of helplessness. Earlier the Centre had also suggested to the States that "it was better to apply economic tests than to go by caste".[7] The union Home Ministry had also issued an order inviting the States to draw up their own lists of Backward Classes and fix their own quota of reservations.. And between and 1978, when the second Backward Classes Commission was appointed, no less than 10 States had set up their own commissions to evolve criteria for determining backwardness and fixing quotas for reservations (See table 1).

Mobilization for Affirmative Action

Although the Kalelkar Commission report was tabled, it was never discussed in the Lok Sabha. A similar fate was meted out to subsequent reports on reservation. Meanwhile, the Socialist leaders stepped up the pressure for affirmative action. Rammanohar Lohia, a prominent socialist, became one of the staunchest supporters of affirmative action for the

backward classes. Arguing that the caste was the most overwhelming factor in Indian life, he stated :

" When everybody has an equal opportunity, castes with the five thousand years of liberal education would be on top. Only the exceptionally gifted from the lower castes would be able to break this tradition...To make this battle a somewhat equal encounter, unequal opportunities would have to be extended, to those who have so far been suppressed".[8]

For Lohia, reservation was a scheme for the political empowerment of the backward classes. He argued that equality and equal opportunity were not synonymous and that in a society characterized by a hierarchical structure based on birth, the principle of equal opportunity could not produce an equal society. Lohia was convinced that the Congress politics was dominated by the upper castes, that its leadership had conveniently turned a blind eye to the linkages between caste, and deprivation, backwardness and inequalities; and hence it was imperative that this hegemony was broken in order to provide the backward classes access to political power, and through it, social and economic status. He denounced the class mobilization as inadequate and incapable of bettering the condition of the backward classes single-handedly, and held that the backward castes should be, through preferential treatment, pushed to positions of power and leadership.

Lohia recognised that the backward classes could provide an important source of support in the struggle to unseat the Congress. In 1959, the national conference of the Socialist party passed a resolution committing the party to secure 60 percent of leadership posts in political parties, government services, business and the armed forces for Shudras, Harijans, STs, religious minorities and women. In April 1961, the party resolved that 60 percent of its candidates in the upcoming general elections should be from among these groups. The first conference of the

Sanyukta Socialist party(SSP) in 1966 reiterated the demand for 60 percent reservations for the backward classes, and extended it to all spheres, not only the administration, but also the education system and the assemblies. The SSP nominated a large number of candidates from non-elite groups, and the socialist had a larger number of OBC Members of Legislative Assemblies(MLAs) elected than other political parties in U.P. and Bihar. In Bihar, in the 1967 elections, the SSP had almost 40 percent of its MLAs coming from the lower castes as against 22 percent on the Congress side.[9]

The mobilization along the lines of backward caste identity under Lohia's leadership transformed castes into interest groups and gave a severe blow to the vertical solidarity enjoyed by the Congress notables in the countryside. The vertical linkages could no more be taken for granted, the backward castes had acquired political consciousness and had now an alternative means and channel outside the Congress for interest articulation and aggregation.

Backward Class/Caste Mobilization in Bihar

At the time of Independence, Bihar represented a society that was dominated by the upper castes in all spheres -- politics, administration, trade, commerce and socio-economic status. During the colonial rule, state power was used to rigidify and reinforce the local dominance of upper caste landlords or zamindars, and to suppress peasant revolts against them. The Indian National Congress played a complimentary political role in diffusing caste and class polarization over economic and social issues. The socialists, who had, through the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha(BPKS), challenged the upper caste-led pattern of Congress leadership, yielded to the national leadership in the late 1930s and cut all ties with the Kisan movement. Due to their internal differentiation and competitive co-existence, the various backward caste associations that had

come up in the late 1890s and 1900s could never co-ordinate their efforts to wage a united struggle. "The very caste ideology of the yadavas and kurmis prevented the political collaboration that would have allowed them to apply concerted pressure on the government. Rather, in their competition for higher relative rank, the Upper Shudra castes tended to dissociate their efforts one from the other."[10] The same caste ideology also prevented any effective collaboration between low caste Hindus and backward Muslims and there was no effort to form a state organization of Hindu and Muslim 'backward' castes that could represent the common social and economic interests of the lower classes across caste and communal lines. The small Bihari middle class, remained the citadel of the upper castes (Hindu and Muslim), while maintaining their links with the landed classes.

The close relationship between Government, the big zamindars and the upper castes created an almost complete overlap between dominance at the level of society and power in the realm of the state. In this milieu, the government service commanded great respect, irrespective of emoluments for it. The caste played a vital role in society. It meant an accepted tradition with a social value just as occupation also meant a particular social standing. The agrarian agitations, spearheaded by the BPKS, and carried on by the poor peasants, were encompassed by demands for higher social status since the economic oppression from which they suffered was much more severe precisely because of their inferior caste status.

The first three general elections (1952, 1957& 1962) were marked by lack of an oppositional alternative caused by extreme fragmentation, low voter's turnout and patron-clientilistic vertical linkages allowed the Congress to win large majorities of seats with 41 to 45 percent of the popular vote. Although the Congress party organization was marked by internal factionalism between Rajputs and Bhumihars, the upper castes were able to close ranks in preventing internal rivalries from resulting in

the rise of a lower caste Chief Minister. The Congress also enjoyed a virtual monopoly over the SC and Muslim vote-banks.

In September 1947, a group of veteran freedom fighters from backward caste communities came together to form the Bihar State Backward Classes Federation. Although it was supposed to function as a political party, on the behest of the Congress, it was converted into a social organization shortly after. The acting President of the Federation, R.L. Chandapuri, through his speeches and stories, made serious efforts to arouse the political consciousness of the backward castes. To erect a mass movement, he began organizing in the countryside and established branches of the federation in all districts of Bihar. Chandapuri called upon all the lower castes to combine in order to wrest social, economic and political power from the upper castes.[11] After 1950, the backward class movement in the state witnessed a downslide when the Congress made frenetic attempts to co-opt the rising groups among the backward classes, and by creating a parallel organization of these classes under its tutelage in order to retain its control over these castes. Chandapuri's effort to establish a political party of backward castes on all-India basis met little success.

The appointment of Kaka Kelkar Commission by the Union Government in 1953 gave a new impetus to the process of backward class mobilization in Bihar. The educated section among these castes had begun to realize the potential of political empowerment and bureaucratic control, which was so far dominated by the upper castes. The recommendations of the Commission for preferential treatment also led to an ideological turning point among the youth belonging to the backward castes. Their orientation shifted from 'Sanskritisation' to secular goals, especially the reservation in jobs and education. They also changed their emphasis from social activities to political mobilization, underlining the need to overcome sub-caste divisions in order to maximize the power of the

'backward' vote. In 1951, the state government had composed two lists of backward classes comprising Hindu and Muslim caste groups that were not harijans or Adivasis, but were identified as socially and educationally backward and in need of special governmental assistance. The two lists came to be known as Annexure I & Annexure II comprising the 'more backward' and 'less backward' castes groups respectively.

Despite the creation of an all-India and state level organizations, and perusal of the reservation issue, the backward class unity in the state remained elusive. The more advanced among the backward castes, yadavas, kurmis, and koeris, conformed to the older pattern and carried out mobilization within their constituencies among their own caste groups. No effort was made to bridge the gap between the more advanced upper shudras and more numerous lower shudra castes, or between the backward classes, and the SCs, STs and Muslims.(Frankel 1990)

The universal adult franchise was gradually reflecting its potential to change the socio-political landscape of the state. Between 1952 and 1967, Upper Shudras accounted for about 22 percent of the members of the ruling Congress legislature Party. During this period, the Yadavas benefited the most both from suffrage and land reforms (however half hearted it may be), and in 1967, they accounted for 15 percent of the total MLAs in Bihar Assembly.[12] In early 1960s, the then Chief minister K.B. Sahay, desperate to retain his hold over the cabinet, reduced the share of forward castes in the cabinet to 40 percent, while increasing that of Upper backwards to 20 percent. The elevation of Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav by Sahay led to the emergence of Yadav leadership in the Congress as an important group in their own right. On the eve of the 1967 elections, the Congress rule was identified with a corruption-tainted regime and its popularity had taken a nosedive. The vulnerability of the Congress led the backward caste leaders to step up the pressure. R.L.S. Yadav made a public demand for 100 places out of 318 on the Congress ticket for

members of the Backward classes. Outside Congress, Lohia had spearheaded an ambitious programme of backward caste mobilization centered around their demand for 60 percent reservation for backward classes in government jobs, educational institutions and state assemblies. The socialist reiterated their pledge to implement reservations during 1967 election campaign. Karpoori Thakur, a socialist leader of the lower shudra *nai* caste, emerged as a popular leader of the backward castes in the state. The Congress suffered the most serious erosion in its support base in Bihar, as its share of popular vote came down by 8 percent (from 41 to 33 percent), while its seats dropped in number from 185 to 128. The Socialist party recorded the biggest gain and emerged as the single largest non-Congress party, increasing its vote from little over 5 percent in 1962 to more than 17 percent, and its seat from 7 to 68.

In the new ruling coalition (Sanyukta Vidhayak Dal, SVD), though the upper caste maintained their hegemony with the strength of 47 percent (while that of upper backwards was 29.5 percent), the Yadavas emerged as the second largest caste group after the Rajputs. Later after toppling the SVD Ministry, and heading the Shoshit Dal-Congress alliance, B.P. Mandal, a Yadav, became the first backward caste Chief Minister of the state. During 1967-71, Bihar experienced nine coalition ministries and three periods of President's Rule. But underneath the murky story of defections and dismissals, there emerged a new bargaining power of the Upper Backwards. The Mandal ministry, even though a short-lived one, represented more than a symbolic breakthrough for the Backward Classes. This period of instability was also marked by a trend toward a Forward Scheduled Castes alignment against the Backward Classes. The Congress forged a coalition of upper castes, SCs, STs and Muslims to keep the backwards at bay. The Mungerilal Commission, which was appointed in 1971 by the then Congress ministry to look into the issue of advancement of the backward classes, submitted its report in 1976 and recommended 26

percent reservation of government posts for the OBCs. Jagannath Mishra, the then Chief Minister, ignored the report and dismissed the reservation issue as a conflict between haves, between persons who are in government service, have landed property and are economically strong, and those who are equally economically strong.[13]

The Janata Phase

The proclamation of Emergency in 1975 by Indira Gandhi's regime led to widespread resentment and mass discontent. The atrocities committed during this period provided an opportunity to the opposition to close its rank behind a common platform and launch a united struggle against the Congress, capitalizing on the mass unrest. The Emergency alienated Upper Backwards, Muslims and SCs to an extent beyond redemption. The 1977 elections were marked by the formation of the Janata Party. The party had made significant inroads into the Congress support base in the northern states of U.P., Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab. And as the Backward Castes were instrumental to a great extent in the Janata's success in these states, they came to acquire an unprecedented importance in the politics of the northern states. Meanwhile the failure of Charan Singh, who had by now emerged as a major force to reckon with, to be selected Prime Minister in the Janata government set the tone for a renewed conflict between the Backward Classes and Forward Castes in Bihar and northern states.

The selection of Karpoori Thakur as the Chief Minister of Bihar by the party high command (at the behest of Charan Singh) ushered in a qualitatively new phase of backward class politics. First, in the new Cabinet, the backward castes gained pre-eminence by capturing 38 percent of the posts, while reducing the share of the upper castes to 29 percent. Secondly, and more importantly, Thakur decided to implement the recommendations of the Mungerilal Commission with respect to

reservations for the OBCs. This decision set the stage for the sharp polarization between the forward and backward castes. After a prolonged discussion, and through a series of compromises both at the state and the national level, there emerged a 'Karpoori formula', which reserved 20 percent of appointments in the state civil services and the professional colleges for the OBCs, and three percent each for the women and 'economically backward'. Finally promulgated in 1978, the reservation policy sparked widespread violence between the upper castes and the backwards. "Through the reservation issue, Karpoori Thakur asserted that the Backwards had displaced the Forwards as the dominant force in Bihar politics, that the old days of dominance in public affairs from village to Vidhan Sabha by the 'twice-born' castes were gone forever, and that his government would be one based on the support of the Backwards."[14] Thus Thakur used the reservation issue as a symbol of backward class identity, and strove to mobilize the entire spectrum of backward castes against the socio, economic and political dominance of the upper castes. Behind Thakus's use of this symbol of Backward Castes mobilization was a growing confidence that the Backward Castes had made steady gains over the last two decades in the sphere of politics and that it was now increasingly becoming clear that Backward Castes had emerged as one of the dominant poles of the electoral discourse in the state -- at the level of state assembly, at the level of ruling parties and at the level of the ministry/cabinet. The caste composition of Bihar amply reflected this trend. (See table 2)

The rise of the Backward Classes in Bihar politics was not evenly poised in terms of individual castes within this internally differentiated spectrum. Between the Backwards, the Upper Backwards, especially Yadavs were consistently over represented. The Yadavs had dominated the political scenario as the second largest caste groups after the Rajputs.

With respect to the hold over the successive ministries, the upper backwards had consistently enhanced their share from 8 percent in 1962 to 38 percent in 1977(Karpoori's Cabinet). The decade of the 1980s (after the restoration of Congress government at the Centre and in Bihar also) witnessed a relative lull in terms of backward class mobilization. The Congress underwent a phase of resurrection in Bihar politics and regained much of the lost ground. "However the resurrected Congress seemed unable to establish any sort of enduring hold among the voters either in terms of parliamentary and assembly constituencies giving it continued support across successive elections, or in terms of socio-economic constituencies furnishing it a base."[15] Beneath this vulnerability of the Congress was the continued importance of the Backward Castes in the political process of the state. The decade saw an alternating pattern of governments formed by Congress and the Opposition, but a fundamental realignment of the political forces in the state and an enduring change in the social base of politics occurred around the end of the 1980s, when Backward Caste politics gained complete dominance in the state. To this phenomena, we will return later in this chapter.

Peasant Politics and Backward Class Mobilization in U.P.

The Agrarian Change

The rural development strategy adopted and implemented in UP contributed directly to the emergence of a class of rich and middle peasants who went on to dominate the institutional structures of governance and power relations in rural areas. The economic empowerment of the peasantry in UP (and in Punjab and Haryana) resulted from two cumulative phenomena. First, the land reform, with all its limitations and loopholes, enabled many erstwhile tenants to become peasant proprietors. Secondly, the Green Revolution served the interests of those among these landowners who had some investment capacity.

The abolition of intermediaries reduced tenancy from 60 to 25 percent as also increased the proportion of owner cultivators from 40 to 75 percent. All over the country, an estimated 20 million tenants acquired ownership while about 14 million acre land was acquired and redistributed.[16] As it turned out, the land reform measures met only partial success, as the states were hamstrung by the dominance of the landed interests over political order. The success was far from satisfactory, largely due to the "...frequent interventions by the judiciary, the covert and overt resistance mounted by the vested interests, the non-involvement of the beneficiaries, the unsatisfactory condition of the land records and the complexity of the laws."[17]

Compared to Bihar, zamindari abolition was relatively successful in UP. But it altered agrarian relations only to the extent of shifting the location of rural power from feudal landlords to cultivating landowners. It eliminated the old system of tax farming and created a new hierarchy of peasant proprietors in place of landlords and tenants. These reforms left most landholders in possession of lands they and their families had always cultivated, they involved very little redistribution of land, and they left a considerable range in the size of land holdings in the countryside and, therefore, considerable inequality among landholders and between the landless and the landholders.[18]

The caste groups that were benefited the most were the Ahirs, Kurmis and Lodhs, even though they occupied a secondary position in the rural and political hierarchy compared to the upper castes. "The enhanced economic status of backward caste cultivators through zamindari abolition encouraged them to aspire for social equality with upper caste landlords. Newly acquired control over land was the key to their social assertion."[19]

The Green Revolution led to a record increase in food production, but it was confined to the western UP. It was a part of new agrarian strategy initiated through IARP in 1965 and was based on modern

technology and inputs, increased investment in agriculture, and food production for self-sufficiency. The Green Revolution, on the other hand, widened the regional and class inequalities by benefiting mostly the well equipped areas and the rich peasantry. The unfolding of the new agrarian strategy in the mid-1960s was also a reflection of the growing political clout of the landed peasantry. With the penetration of commerce and market economy into the countryside, the middle and rich peasants came to play a key role in the economic and political life of UP by the early 1970s.

The failure of Charan Singh to become the Chief Minister of the state in 1967 and his exit from the Congress was an important turning point in the history of political assertion of the intermediate castes and the OBCs. Earlier, the influential Jat leader, had always identified himself with the interests of the peasants. As early as in 1937, he had advocated a 50 percent quota in administration for the sons of the farmers. Singh didn't want to confine himself to the Jats as the latter consisted of a small group of prosperous peasantry, and were often in conflict with the lower castes. "Therefore Charan Singh had good reasons for forging a *kisan* interest group that the Jats would be leading, and for promoting an identity opposing the peasants to the town-dwellers in order to subsume caste divisions into a new group feeling".[20] In 1959, Singh had successfully thwarted the collectivization bid of Nehru at the Nagpur session of the Congress. He ignored the deep social contradictions and class antagonism between landowners, tenants, sharecroppers and labourers, and through his strong advocacy of the interests and politics of the agrarian classes (such as abolition of zamindari, consolidation of land holdings and resistance to land taxation), he promoted the interests of rich and middle farmers, most of whom belonged to the backward castes. In 1967, although the Congress lost only four percent of its vote share compared to the previous elections, it was sufficient to put a non-

Congress government to power after a short-lived tenure of Congress ministry. The formation of the Bhartiya Kranti Dal (BKD) by Charan Singh was important departure. The discontent of the rich and middle peasantry was boosted by Singh's attack on the Nehruvian model of urban-industrial development as well as the former's limited access to positions of power both in public service and in the ruling party.[21] The rise of rich peasantry was an important challenge to the catch-all politics of Congress since the early 1970s, when the former moved to alternative political formations outside the Congress, and started resorting to extra-parliamentary mass agitations to enhance their bargaining power. The BKD voiced the aspirations of this class and emerged in its first election contest in 1969 not only as the strongest non-Congress party in UP in that election, but with the highest popular vote and the largest number of seats ever won by a non-Congress party in any election since Independence. It also maintained its strength in 1974 in the face of the massive interventions of Mrs. Gandhi and her cohorts in state politics in their efforts alternately to absorb and destroy the power of the new party.[22]

OBC Mobilization

Together constituting 42 percent of the total population of the state, the OBCs are a highly differentiated category in terms of land occupancy, social status and economic power. The upper backwards, especially Ahirs, Kurmis and Yadavs are the most influential caste groups within the OBCs. Despite the numerical preponderance of OBCs and the SCs (21 percent), upper castes have, traditionally dominated the society and politics of the state. Thakurs and Brahmins owned 57 percent of the land, while the intermediate castes owned 32 percent, Muslims 11 percent and SCs mere 1 percent. During the early twentieth century, OBCs had begun to mobilize, although separately and through different caste mahasabhas, against the upper caste hegemony. "After Independence, the introduction of universal

suffrage and the promise of reservations in government jobs opened up new possibilities for the OBCs to assert their claim to power in the arena of democratic politics". [23] Jats and Yadavs didn't consider themselves inferior to any other caste. These groups asserted their superior social status vis-à-vis Dalits and, at the same time, made virtue of backwardness in relation to upper castes in order to demand the benefits of reservations. The 1956 conference of the Backward Castes, presided over by Charan Singh, was the first overt expression of OBC politicization after Independence.

The Congress party leadership structure was dominated by the upper castes and this ruling coalition was hardly willing to accommodate the aspirations of the newly politicized OBCs. In a structure overwhelmed by the continued dominance of the upper castes, especially the Brahmins, only about 6 percent of the Congress Legislature Party was drawn from the OBCs in the first three assemblies. More than one-fifth of Congress MLAs were Brahmins, and almost 50 percent belonged to the upper castes, with little noticeable change until 1974. In 1971, 42 of the 70 Congress Presidents were either Brahmins or Thakur. The representation of the OBCs was reduced to 6. The six UP cabinets formed between 1952 and 1974 were also dominated by the upper castes.[24] Even the Congress Committees at the state and district levels were least representative of the OBCs.

As the OBCs gradually realized that their enhanced economic power was not a guarantee to political power and social status, they stepped up the pressure on all fronts -- demanding reservations in government jobs and educational institutions, better representation in politics at the level of party, government and legislature, and economic concessions and modern incentives to boost their surplus in agriculture. One serious handicap to OBC mobilization was its intra-group cleavages which had so far enabled the upper castes to resist the onslaught of the OBC as a

political block. The 1967 elections marked a decisive breakthrough, as the OBCs for the first time overcame their internal differentiation to put a united front against the upper castes-led Congress through alternative political formations.

Through its two fold strategy -- demand for OBC reservations and promotion of Hindi -- the socialists spearheaded the efforts towards OBC mobilization, and by the turn of the 1970s, they had acquired a reasonable following among the Yadavs, Kurmis and Lodhs in the eastern and central UP. The 1967 situation (of Chief Ministership) was capitalized by Charan Singh to bring together Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris into the BKD fold, and place them directly against the Congress. The growing political clout of the OBCs especially the Upper Backwards, was manifest in the Assembly. Kurmis and Ahirs together became the third largest group in the UP Vidhan Sabha, while the lower backwards remained marginal in terms of their representation. Charan Singh was successful in crafting a coalition of surplus producers-cum-OBCs and giving it a distinct political identity by developing it as a strong anti-Congress platform. The numerical preponderance of the OBCs (37 percent) became a massive weapon at the hustings, also helped by the agrarian changes generated in the countryside by zamindari abolition and Green Revolution. The continued apathy of the Congress till early 1970s towards accommodating OBCs' political claim convinced the latter that the capture of state power and its largesse was the guaranteed and most effective source of upward social mobility and political patronage. Thus the OBCs intensified their efforts all levels-panchayats, districts, party structure, legislature and ministry.

By the late 1970s, the Congress had also realized the potential of the OBC and lower caste votes and decided to make amends in many states, especially in the south. But in UP, the Congress still counted on an anti-OBC plank constituted by a coalition of Upper Castes, SCs and Muslims. Internal differences and the lack of oppositional unity helped

the Congress to defy any challenge from the OBC mobilization. But despite all this, the Congress was facing increasing pressures from within to recognize the political claims of the OBCs. Finally, in 1975, the Congress government in the state appointed a Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Cheddi Lal Sathi. But the terms of reservations were confined to the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) only, and backwardness was determined on the basis of economic, social, educational and occupational criteria. It refrained from making explicit caste based reservations, but decided to use caste as the basis for preparing a roster of disadvantaged communities. In the end, it identified backward classes on a caste and class basis The Commission recommended a compartmentalized scheme of reservations of 29.5 percent for the MBCs. After the change of government, the Janata ministry in 1977 decided to implement the recommendations, but only for the 15 percent of the government posts as against 29.5 per cent recommended by the Commission. More importantly, the government extended this benefit to all backward classes, and as a result, the principle beneficiaries came from the upper backward category. After an adverse judgement of the Allahabad High Court, the government's appeal in the Supreme Court was granted a stay on the lower court judgement. The issue of reservation became a bone of contention, not only on the streets of U.P. but also in the government's coalition partners. The issue led to the breakdown of the coalition, thus facilitating the return of the Congress in 1980 elections. At the national level too, the chaos reigned supreme in Janata Party. The dismissal of the claim of Charan Singh for the PM's post rallied the OBCs for a long-term offensive against the Congress, although it couldn't muster any immediate gain.

Throughout the 1980s, the Congress made futile efforts to woo the backwards, Muslims and the SCs, but to no avail. The OBCs were increasingly drawn towards various non-Congress formations and by the

end of the decade, the formation of Janata Dal (JD) brought the OBCs to the centre stage of Indian politics. The majoritarian agenda pursued by the Congress leadership in Punjab, Kashmir and with respect to Ayodhya issue further alienated the Muslims and drew them closer to the OBC-led formations. The exist of VP Singh from the Congress was a major set back for the party which was increasingly being dubbed as a corruption-tainted, anti-minority and excessively centralized personal fiefdom of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. The SCs had, by now, found an effective alternative in the form of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which was actively mobilizing the Dalits. In other words, by the turn of the 1990s, the political process had reached a post-Congress phase in which the terms of political discourse were qualitatively altered.[25]

Backward Class Mobilization in the South

The southern states witnessed a very different trajectory in terms of their social configuration. Their pre-Independence Backward class movement had generated a social churning that helped in giving stability to the post-colonial polity. At the turn of the 1940s, the Backward non-Brahmins in Madras had became a powerful force and by 1944, when the Self respect league was merged with the Justice Party to form Dravida Kazhagam (DK), the foundations of a broad-based political party having its social base among the backward non-Brahmins and the lower middle classes had been laid which gave a strong challenge to the Congress. The numerical preponderance of non-Brahmins and the inability of the upper castes to put any formidable challenge to Backward class assertion due to their minority status (Brahmins formed 3 per cent of the population in erstwhile Madras) was an important factor which distinguished the nature of the Backward class movement in the south and the north. "The non-Brahmin movement provided an impetus for legislative interventions to address issues of social justice and access to power for the backward

communities; it dramatically pruned Brahminical hegemony and dominance in post colonial politics. [26] Unlike north, the southern states saw a pre-Independence process of socio-political reconfiguration when the OBCs, through acquiring wealth and getting education, underwent upward social mobility and successfully challenged Brahminical hegemony by entering administration and political process. The Backward classes, through their preponderance, relatively cohesive political foundations and a strong ideological content, were able to create a broad Dravidian identity – thus rallying all the non-Brahmins and the lower middle classes behind a primordial theme in opposition to the Brahmins and the latter's identification with Aryan invasion.

When the Backward classes found that despite their education and wealth, their upward mobility was blocked by the Brahminical dominance in government jobs, higher education and n odern professions, they launched a powerful Backward class movement through a programme of ideological education and social reform among industrial workers, peasants, students, youth and intellectuals. The north lacked this ideological and progressive contents marked as was by mutual hostility within the Backward class category as well as a stiff resistance put up by the upper castes who were evenly poised in terms of numerical strength.

In the post-Independence phase, the Congress ruled Tamil Nadu through a clientage net work of the elites and by controlling the distribution of the very considerable patronage it commanded in the 1950s. " The problem for the Congress, however, was that it was never able to capture a broad base of popular support nor to extent its appeal beyond the elites. Indeed, its control of the electoral system never gave it the control of the streets".[27]

The emergence of the Forward castes in the early twentieth century from among the ranks of the middle class shudra peasants blurred the

process of caste and class polarization. Besides, economic differentiation within castes elevated only a relatively small elite to whom poorer caste-fellows turned for assistance. Corporate caste entities therefore, remained the most important collectivity for expressing material interests, even when economic differentiation was well underway. [28] The Justice party which was spearheaded by Vellala elites, made demands in the name of all non–Brahmins to a larger proportion of positions in every department of government and at all grades of services, and which was granted as early as in 1921. In fact, the elite non-Brahmins used the Justice party to win concessions from government in order to restore their own competitive status vis-à-vis the Brahmins in the new urban middle classes. However, the claims made by the Justice Party to proportionate representation in the name of all non-Brahmins created a new political category including all low-caste Hindus and minorities. The non- Brahmin movement helped to increase political consciousness among castes of Shudra rank whose social, educational, and economic level did not permit them to take advantage of the reservation schemes. In 1934, the Madras Provincial Backward Classes League made the first distinction between 'forward' non-Brahmin communities, who cornered the major benefits, and the strata above the SCs, who headed to secure separate preferential treatment. The Madras government in 1947 decided to provide separate reservations for the Backward Hindus, which marked the first official recognition of this political category composed of a variety of lower shudra sub castes making a separate claim to their share of privileged rights.

The social mobilization of the 'Backward Hindus' was perhaps the most unintended legacy of the non-Brahmin movement. The self-respect movement let by EVR, was the first blow to the political privilege constructed on the foundations of forward caste status and middle class influence.[29] By the late 1930s, the Backward non-Brahmins in Madras

had become a powerful political force. The formation of DK gave further boost to the movement. At the time of Independence, the Forward non-Brahmins who dominated the Congress and succeeded to power at the state could no longer legitimize their position by sharing in the status of Brahmins. On the other hand, Brahmins migrated from villages to cities and to other parts of the country. The Backward Classes "...entered politics on the basis of localized corporate or caste entities that aspired to share in the privileges of the dominant groups without wanting to displace them..... Such pattern, which later emerged in Andhra Pradesh in the face of even more glaring inequalities, provided the social support for the politics of accommodation...".[30]

By the end of the 1960s, the Congress dominance in Tamil Nadu had been decisively shattered. The Congress was identified in urban areas with Brahmins and forward non-Brahmin middle classes, and couldn't win over the radical lower middle classes despite attempts to Dravidianise its leadership. It also failed to build a powerful party machinery in the countryside based on patronage networks, as there was an absence of state-wide forward non-Brahmin castes on whom to rely in constructing vote-banks. It was the relative weakness of the large landowners as a cohesive social group that allowed the DMK to outflank them in the villages and to mobilize the small farmers, most of whom belonged to the Backward Classes. There was a complete absence of Brahmins in the party structure of the DMK, both at the state and local level, and 43 percent of the DMK local leadership came from the backward non-Brahman castes. Service castes added another 4-5 percent and the SCs accounted for 8 per cent. [31]

In the post-Independence phase, reservations and social welfare measures have helped mobilize the hitherto marginalized sections of the society in southern states. This strategy marked the accomodationist

stance of the DMK in Tamil Nadu and worked well with both the upper backwards and the underprivileged sections. At the same time, upper castes were also placated through various means which helped maintain their economic interests. The departure of the non- Brahmins backwards from the Congress and the increasing political assertions of the former forced the Congress to change its policy towards those groups. In Andhra Pradesh, the Congress government in 1966, sensing its threatened social base, sought to appropriate the Backward class plank by providing reservations for the Backward classes in 25 percent of all degree granting courses and posts in state government. The share of the backward classes and the SCs and Muslims. Reservations in jobs and education were provided to Backward classes in late 1960s. In the 1980s, Tamil Nadu Government had raised the proportion of reserved seats in college admissions and government employment to almost 70 percent. Thus in the southern states reservations were combined with high expenditure and social welfare programmes in order to build a broad-based coalition of the disadvantaged groups.

Non-party farmers Movement in 1980s and 1990s

Although the short-lived Janata experiment fell flat even before it made its presence felt, during this interregnum, agrarian issues were for the first time transposed from the state to the national level. Investment in agriculture was raised which even surpassed that in industry. The Janata government pledged that "... agriculture was to be a source of growth and development in its own right, not as a handmaiden to industry, the two were to complement and supplement each other". [32] The state paid greater attention to agriculture and small-scale industry and emphasized investment to generate additional employment from the labour required for double and triple cropping and for constructing rural public goods. Described as the 'new agrarianism' , this strategy pitted

countryside against the city by influencing or capturing the ideologies and political strategies of all parties. The new agrarianism was addressed to the socio-political reality of the changing landscape of Indian politics. The theatre of political activity was gradually shifting from city to country side, from industry to agriculture and from upper caste- led pattern to a backward caste-dominated scenario. There was increased pressure for providing input subsidies such as power, irrigation facilities etc., and credit and higher commodity prices. It was also a phase when " the agrarian politics of local large landowners and dominant castes that characterized state politics through 1960s (had) been superceded by the politics of 'farmers' and self-employed cultivators"[33].

The 1980s also witnessed interest articulation among the middle castes and rich peasantry outside the party framework. In both northern and southern states, there emerged powerful non-party farmers' organizations. This rural agitational politics was organized by various interest groups (rooted in rich peasantry) and was supported by a wide spectrum of political parties hoping to capitalize on or to control the new force. "The issue of remunerative prices had moved out of party headquarters, secretariats, corridors, and legislative chambers to the unmediated politics of rasta rokos (road blocks), gheraos (sit-ins) and long marches".[34] The Bhartiya Kisan Union in western UP, Punjab, and Haryana; The Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra, the Rajya Ryotwari Sabha in Karnataka, the Khedyut Samaj in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association in Tamil Nadu were important farmers organisations among the powerful middle peasantry.

"The B&U emerged as a critical force in UP society and polity under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Tikait. It received national attention in 1988 when its supporters laid a virtual siege in Meerut in pursuit of higher prices for sugarcane, the cancellation of loans, the

lowering of water and electricity rates and higher rural investment.... The agitation , and demonstration were militant in nature and received widespread support in western UP". [35] The success of BKU and other formations was a testimony to the growing political clout of the surplus producing, market- oriented farmers in north India. These groups demanded greater state intervention with a change in its policy orientation in order to address the industry-agriculture gap. The support extended by the political parties in order to exploit the new assertion helped in generating greater unity and consciousness among farmers and made them more aware of their strength in the countryside. These organisations were dominated by, and rooted in the rich peasantry which distinguished its interests from, and showed little concern for the issues concerning agricultural labourers and marginal farmers, such as minimum wages, employment opportunities, house sites and harassment etc. At the same time, shunning political parties for their 'urban bias' and creating a strong identity around the country side (interestingly these pressure groups were successful in attracting poor peasants too into their fold), the rich peasants had been making a vigorous attempt to influence the politics and programmes of the state with respect to prices, taxation structure and basic approach to economic planning and development. Thus a dual strategy of increasing demands on the state to deliver on the one hand, and mobilizing both rich and poor peasantry against the bureaucracy and the state on the other, was an important feature of the realpolitik and pragmatism of these groups. It provided them an arena to operate autonomously and also allowed them to become effective pressure groups pressing for their demands, and making coalitions whenever necessary. The class differentiation was subscribed in the rhetoric of anti-urban mobilization strategy.

The pragmatic electoral arithmetic of the backward castes and rich peasantry was clearly visible in the 1983 Assembly elections in Karnataka

and Andhra Pradesh. The organized farm lobby was very much instrumental in the defeat of the Congress government in Karnataka, which was replaced by a Janata-led coalition In A.P., these groups helped N.T. Ramarao of TDP rout the Congress in the state assembly. In Bihar and UP, the Congress was still able to exploit the fragmentation in the opposition and through its apparently pro-poor rhetoric, forced a situation in which backward caste candidates, running on rival party tickets, split the backward caste votes among them. The Congress here constructed a Brahmin and Rajput alignment with the SCs to build up a majority coalition to outflank Yadavs and other backward castes.

Until 1989-90, the farmers movement gained new heights and drew support from all parties. But its growing politicization afterwards diminished its influence considerably, with its inclination towards upper castes, its hostility towards Dalits and its opposition to reservations. The movement was overtaken by the growth of Hindutva politics and the communal and anti-Mandal upsurge in the 1990s.[36]

Affirmative Action in the Era of Mandalization

In 1979, the Janata government had appointed the Second Backward Class Commission, popularly known as the Mandal Commission, which submitted its report in 1980. The terms and reference of the Mandal Commission were;

a) to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally Backward classes;

b) To recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of the socially and educationally Backward classes of citizens so identified,

c) To examine the desirability or otherwise of making provision for the reservation of appointment or posts in favour of such backward classes of citizens which are not adequately represented in public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of any state,

d) To present to the |President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.[37]

Based on criteria suggested by a panel of experts and a research committee, the commission produced lists of beneficiary groups who will be eligible to benefit from its recommendations. The proportion of the OBCs thus identified by the Commission was estimated at nearly 52 percent of the total population. But in order to keep the total reservations for all categories within the limit of 50 per cent (as set by the Supreme Court), the Commission recommended 27 per cent reservations for the OBCs, with a proviso to the effect that those states in the south which had already made reservations above the 27 percent limit would not be affected by this recommendation. The Report observed, ".... It may be possible to make out a very plausible case for not accepting caste as criteria for defining social and educational backwardness" but the substitution of caste by economic tests will amount to ignoring the genesis of social backwardness in the Indian society. It went on to say, "if religion was even used as an opium of the masses, it was done in India, when a small priest class, by a subtle process of conditioning the thinking of the vast majority of the people, hypnotized them for ages into accepting a rule of servility with humility.[38] And it concludes," In views of the foregoing, will it be too much to say that in traditional Indian society social backwardness was a direct consequence of caste status and, further, that various other types of backwardness flowed directly from this crippling handicap?[39]

The Report was submitted in 1980, but the restoration of the Congress rule at the Centre put the former into the cold storage. But a new ground had been broken for the consolidation of OBC vote bank. The Backward caste leaders had sensed a massive potential in the Mandal report for building a coalition of the vast social base that the backward classes represented together. It also led several state governments to take the initiative of appointing their own Backward Classes Commissions and announce reservation of seat in educational institutions and government posts for the OBCs.

V.P. Singh's exit from the Rajeev government in 1987 and formation of the Janata Dal (JD) in 1988 had set the tone for another oppositional offensive against the Congress, this time facilitated by the corruption- tainted and discredited regime of Rajeev Gandhi. And with the victory of the JD in 1989 elections and formation of the National Front (NF) government, Indian politics had entered into the 'third electoral system'.[41] It also brought the OBCs to the centre stage and, with them, groups which could use political power to alter the old standards of socio-economic privilege.[42] The JD drew its support from an alignment between Rajputs and the relatively prosperous sections of the backward classes especially Yadavs Jats, Kurmis and other middle castes in north India. The communal card played by the Rajeev regime with respect to the Ayodhya controversy had alienated the Muslims and led them rally behind the JD.

Before the NF government fell apart, VP Singh had announced his government's decision to implement the Mandal commission recommendations. Soon after, the country was engulfed in a nationwide violence with a sharp polarization along caste lines. Later the Narsimha Rao government added another 10 percent of reservation to the 27 percent reservation for backward caste, the criterion for new reservation being

economic. The total percentage of reservation, thus stood at 59.5, which exceeded the maximum of 50 percent, prescribed as the upper limit by the Supreme Court in an earlier judgment.

The question of reservation of job was taken to the Supreme Court, and the latter, in December 1992 pronounced its judgment. In its verdict, the Supreme Court, by a majority upheld the reservation of jobs for the backward castes. The Court put a 50 per cent ceiling for job reservations in government, barred reservation in promotions, and enlarged the concept of reservation to extend its benefits to the backward among non-Hindu religions. The SC struck down the Narsimha Rao government order incorporating economic criteria.

The Court held that the criteria evolved by the Mandal Commission for developing or identifying the OBCs cannot be held irrelevant. At the same time, the Court made it clear that caste alone could not be made the criterion for identifying backwardness. Caste could be used for the purpose of identifying the backward classes provided they constituted a social class which was socially backward as a whole. The Court also held that non-Hindus like Christians and Sikhs who were socially backward were also entitled for reservations under Article 16(4).

Striking down the Rao government order of 25 December 1991, the SC held that no distinction can be made among the backward classes as poor and poorer sections thereof. But the Court ruled that the 'creamy layer' among backward castes could be and must be excluded. The verdict required the government to constitute a permanent body within four months to examine complaints of over-inclusion or under-inclusion in the backward list. The Commission was also expected to exclude the 'creamy layer' from the OBCs.

UP and Bihar in the 1990s

The onset of the 1990s saw a three cornered polarization in UP, and this was represented by the SP, BSP, and BJP, representing the OBCs, Dalits and the Upper castes respectively. The biggest loser was, of course, the Congress which desperately sought to woo the OBCs as well as Dalits. The national importance of reservations generated substantial political support for it as the principal issue in UP politics. It legitimized political mobilization in support of reservations as also opposition to it. "Its powerful attraction for the OBCs set the stage for a process of counter-moves by the upper caste political elite to contain the threat to its monopolistic claim on political and bureaucratic power.[43] The internal differentiations and mutual hostility among the OBCs gave way to a more inclusive and collective group identity. Now the caste mobilisation acquired greater salience. Mulayam Singh Yadav spearheaded the pro-Mandal agitation and campaign, by promulgating an ordinance providing for 15 percent reservations in government service for the OBCs in July 1989 and later enhancing it to 27 percent, as also reservation for non-ashraf Muslims. The OBCs, Dalits and Muslims to counter the BJP's efforts to build up a unified Hindu identity. In a state where the government jobs offered the most visible source of upward social mobility and effective political representation, politicization of social clearages around the issue of reservations led to a bitter social conflict. In other words, "...the storm raised by Mandal was the culminations of the deepening socio-economic crisis facing the state and the lack of political will on the part of ruling parties to tackle the issue of equity and justice except at a populist level".[44]

The rise to power of Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar after 1990 Assembly elections severely jolted the established pattern of state power in Bihar and brought the OBCs to political pre-eminence. The success of

the JD was due to the fact that it drew large measure of support from the numerically strong, poor and deprived sections of society-the OBCs, Dalits, Muslims, illiterates, landless and agricultural labourers. For the first time, the upper castes felt totally marginalized it the state's politics. The Backward castes mobilized and put up a stiff challenge to the anti Mandal agitationists. The Mandal issue led to a consolidation of castes along only two axes, the forwards and the backwards, erasing for the time being, numerous internal differences between the two.[45] Over the years the social composition of Bihar Assembly had changed a great deal. There was a slow and steady decline in the representation of upper castes which had gone down to 17.1 per cent in 1995 as compared to 41.8 per cent in 1967. In 1995, the representation of the backward castes in the state Assembly went up to 45 per cent, and for the first time outnumbered the upper castes.

"The Yadavs benefited more than any other lower-caste groups from the policies followed in UP and Bihar, the two states in which they form the largest component of the OBCs with respectively 8.7 and 11 per cent of the state population... The governments of Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav were more and more identified with the Yadavs so much so that it became obvious that the notion of the OBCs had been used by this caste to its own advantage right from the beginning."[46]

The increasing identification of two Yadav leaders and their parties with a particular caste group has also led to a breakdown of the monolithic OBC vote bank, which was created in the wake of the Mandal controversy and the Ayodhya issue. As a result, the Kurmis in Bihar have deserted Laloo Yadav's RJD and have forged an alliance with the BJP. In UP, while the Lodhs have rallied behind the BJP, Kurmis have divided their votes between the BJP and the BSP. The BSP has emerged as a strong contender for the vote of a substantial section of the OBCs in UP.

In Bihar, the new phase has been marked by a process of de-alignment among the backward castes, with the consolidated backward castes breaking apart and a section of them aligning with the upper-castes to put up a challenge to the dominance of one section of backward castes represented by the Yadavs.[47]

The rise of the BSP in UP politics and the increasing assertion among the Dalits is one of the most significant developments in Indian politics in the last two decades. "In the forefront of Dalit politics are the new professional and administrative elites, a group that is still very small, but quite aware of its prestigious social placement. Politically conscious, better educated and assertive towards the hierarchy of castes and class, members of this group have contributed to strengthening the processes of socio political change. The striking feature of this agenda is the belief that real empowerment in their lives can only come through a discourse that focuses on political power and organisation as the key to their social advancement".[48] Kanshi Ram and Mayawati gave a new idiom to lower caste mobilization with their strong anti-upper caste rhetoric and their call for a unified Bahujan Samaj, involving all the backward castes -- The OBCs as well as the MBCs. With a single agenda of capture of state power in order to be able to change state policy outcomes and the political processes, the BJP shed its earlier social reform agenda and completely concentrated on wresting control of the political and administrative power.

The BSP made impressive gains in the early1990s. "It not only brought a new daring to the Dalits in north India and injected the ideas of and heroes of the anti caste struggles into the northern discourse, but it could also succeed in attracting a significant amount of the non-Dalit support from some sections of the OBCs, Muslims, adivasis and others.[49] The rise of Mayawati as the first Dalit woman CM of UP led to a major

boost up of the morale of the SCs who had the gut feeling of having successfully challenged the established patterns of power and creating a new space for the opposed sections in the political processes. The tie-up with the SP enabled the BSP in 1993 elections to the UP Assembly to win 67 seats ad 11.11 percent of the popular votes. The difficulties countered in coping with the SP politics led the BSP to join hands with the BJP, a step which spoke volumes of the BSP's pursuit of power and its perchance to embrace any political party if it could help the BSP to gain access to the seat of power. The party has avoided championing any economic programme or ideology, seeks to activate the group identity and gives primacy to the politics of symbolism and recognition.

Even in the north, UP and Bihar are marked by differences between themselves. While land reforms were successful to some extent in UP, it was almost a non-starter in Bihar. And together they differ from the south in one more vital aspect. In these states, demand for equality was marked by an exclusive emphasis on affirmative action and unlike the south, welfare measures were completely ignored. And as the contest for control of the state intensified, bitter social conflict became the order of the day.

In the 1990s, both UP and Bihar represent a political process marked by a decisive shift in favour of the backward classes. The changing caste compositions of the legislative assemblies in the two states bear the stamp of backward class assertion. The caste composition in the Bihar Assembly in 1995 reflected the political clout of these classes, as they captured 52.7 per cent of the seats as compared to the upper castes who got 17.1 per cent. In UP, the Backward -Muslim polarization and Dalit upsurge not only remain intact, but appears to have further sharpened.

The South

In the South, since the mid 1980s, there has been a rapid increase in democratic consciousness, leading to differentiation among the under-privileged groups who entered the political processes to challenge the established patterns of dominance. In Tamil Nadu, it has led to two major trends – emergence of the lower backwards who have carved out a non-Brahmin identity separate from the upper backwards, and the rise of a large number of Dalit organisations making efforts to coalesce towards the formation of a political party.[50]

The emergence of the Backward caste politics in the last two decades has accelerated the pace of the process of regionalisation and has ushered in a phase of coalition politics at the Centre. The topsy-turvy terrain of various political formations outside the domain of the Congress and the BJP is the most significant expression of the backward class mobilization. New entrants such as Laloo Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mayawati, Kanshi Ram etc. have written a new script of politics around the theme of 'social justice'. The ascendancy to power has enabled these leaders to consolidate the numerical preponderance and consequent political clouts of the backward classes in order to break the upper caste led vertical solidarity in many states and successfully create their own vote banks. It has also led to the establishment of a distinct party system in several states where backward classes constitute the most important or second most important group in the political process. The new idioms of politics coined by the regional satraps have infused the Backward class politics with strong political contents. And "the emergence of 'social justice' as a rubric to talk about caste equity, political representation of castes and community and issues of communitarian self respect and identity is a distinct achievement of this period" .[51]

With the emergence of the backward classes , one trend is unmistakable. These classes and groups cannot be ignored in the electoral democracy. The fact whether they remain in power is not as important as the reality that without them no political formation can hope to capture power at either state or national level.

On the other hand, the Backward class mobilization has forced the BJP to mandalise itself and woo the former. The party has made amends in its electoral strategy and increased the representation of the backward classes in its rank and file.

Notes

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3. Christophe Jaffrelot, 'The Rise of the Other Backward Classes in the Hindi Belt', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59, no. 1, Feb. 2000, p.86.
4. See Jaffrelot, ibid.. He describes the two approaches as 'Kisan and Quota politics'.
5. *The Constitution of India*, Art. 340.
6. *Report of the First Backward Class Commission*, P XIV, 1955.
7. *Ministry of Home Affairs*, 1962, p.38.
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11. F. Frankel, ibid., pp. 84-5
12. Harry Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward classes in Bihar; *Economic and Political Weekly*, Jan 12, 1980, p.67.
13. F. Frankel, op. cit., p. 105.

14. H. Blair, op cit., p. 68.

15. H. Blar, 'Electoral Support and Party Institutionalization in Bihar: Congress and the Opposition, 1977-85', in R. Sisson & Ramashray Roy (eds.), *Diversity and Dominance in Indian Politics*, Vol. I, Sage, Delhi, 1990, p.157.

16. Rudolph & Rudolph, op.cit., p.315.

17. P.S. Appu, *Land Reform in India*, Delhi,....p.183.

18. Paul R. Brass, 'The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State', in S. Kaviraj (ed), *Politics in India*, Delhi, OUP, 1997, p.203.

19. Zoya Hasan, *Quest for Power; Oppositional Movements and the Post Congress Politics in U.P.*, Delhi, OUP, 1998, p.76.

20. Jaffrelot, op.cit.,p.91.

21. Hasan, op. cit., p.83.

22. Brass, op.cit., p.207

23. Hasan, op. cit., p. 129

24. Ibid., p. 133.

25. Yogendra Yadav attributes this phenomenon to the ' second democratic upsurge', which has brought new players to the electoral game in a forceful way. See his 'Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections 1993-95; in P. Chatterjee (ed), *State and Politics in India*, Delhi., OUP, 1998, pp. 177-207; 'Electoral Politics in the Time of Change : The Third Electoral System, 1989-99', *EPW*, Aug. 21-28, 1999, pp. 2393-99; and 'Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge; trends of bahujana participation in electoral politics in the 1990s', in F. Franked et al. (eds.), *Transforming India : Social & Political Dynamics of Democracy*, Delhi, OUP, 2000, pp. 120-45.

26. Hasan, op. cit., p. 134.

27. D.A.. Washbrook, 'Caste, Class & Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu; Non-Brahminism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism; in Franked & Rao (eds.), op-cit., p. 250.

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29. Ibid., p.234.

30. Ibid., pp. 235-6.

31. Ibid, p. 243.

32. Rudolph & Rudolph, op.cit., p. 329.

33. Ibid., p. 364.

34. Ibid., p.360.

35. Hasan op.cit.,p.91.

36. Ibid.,pp.106-8.

37. Report of Second Backward Classes commission 1980, Vol, pp. VII

38. Ibid., p.16.

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40. Backward classes commissions were constituted by the State Governments of West Bengal (1980), Gujarat (1985), and Karnataka (1987 and 1990).

41. Yogendra Yadav, op. cit., (EPW; Aug 21-28, 1999), p. 2393

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44. Ibid., p.154.

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Table 1: Backward Classes Commissions Appointed by the States (1961-78)

States	Commission/ Committee	Chairman	Year of Report	Criterion
Mysore	Mysore Backward Classes Committee	Dr. R. Nagan Gowda	1961	Caste-cum Communities
Andhra Pradesh	AP Backward Classes Commission, 1968	Manohar Prasad	1970	Caste-cum-occupation
Kerela	Kerela Backward Classes Commission	S.Kumara Pillai	1965	Means-cum-caste/community
Karnataka	Karnataka Backward Classes Commission, 1972	L.G. Havanur	1975	Economic, Residential, Occupational
J&K	J&K Backward Classes Committee, 1967	P.B. Gajendragadkar	1968	Economic, occupational, habitation, literacy, caste
-do-	J&K B.C. Commission, 1976	Dr. A.S. Anand	1977	Occupation, caste
Bihar	Bihar Backward Classes Commission, 1971	Mungeri Lal	1976	Caste
Maharashtra	Maharashtra Backward Classes Committee, 1961	B.D. deshmukh	1964	Caste
Punjab	Backward Classes Committee	----	---	----
U.P.	Most Backward Classes Commission, 1975	Chhedi Sathi	1977	Economic, social, educational, occupational

Source: S.R. Maheshwari, *Mandal Commission Revisited*, Delhi, 1995.

Table 2: Bihar Assembly: Caste Composition (1962-77)

Group	1962	1967	1969	1975	1977	General Population
Brahmin	17.2	13.2	12.3	18.3	7.6	6.0
Bhumihar	12.6	14.8	14.8	14.7	14.8	3.6
Rajput	23.8	22.2	23.5	19.8	21.7	5.3
Kayastha	5.4	4.9	3.3	2.0	4.4	1.6
Forwards	59.0	55.1	53.9	54.8	48.6	16.5
Bania	3.3	5.3	6.2	4.6	3.2	0.8
Yadav	11.7	15.2	18.5	11.7	20.5	13.8
Kurmi	7.1	5.3	3.3	5.6	4.8	4.5
Koeri	6.7	5.8	4.1	5.6	6.4	5.2
Upper	28.8	31.6	32.1	27.5	34.9	24.3
Lower	1.7	2.9	2.5	2.0	3.6	40.3
Total Backwards	30.5	34.5	34.6	29.5	38.5	64.6

Source: Harry W. Blair, EPW, Jan. 12, 1980.

CHAPTER THREE

The Politics of Identity
The BJP, Hindu Identity and the State

The decade of 1980s represented a phase when the Congress system had declined considerably and ideological contents of the Nehruvian model of nation-building and development no more remained an article of faith. And the 1980s and 1990s together ushered in a qualitatively new phase with respect to electoral democracy and party system, the politics of representation, the process of economic development and the principle of secularism. As the crumbling Congress system gave way to a fragmented and polarized polity, the electoral arena was marked by three major tendencies – the continuous decline of the Congress, the rise of the BJP as an alternative to the Congress and, increasing regionalization of national politics. The Congress was no longer the pole against which every political formation was defined. The polity had entered into a post-Congress phase now. [1]

This chapter seeks to examine the new phase, which had begun with the rise of the BJP from political fringes to the centre of Indian politics. Does the rise of BJP mark a fundamental change in the political process? How did the emergence of the BJP as a party of governance and the corresponding growth of the politics of *Hindutva* affect the state? What are its implications for the social classes ? This analysis seeks to focus on three specific issues in the realm of politics, culture and economy — the changing composition of the educational research institutions, the controversy over Deepa Mehta's two films, 'Water' and 'Fire', and the economic policy of the BJP with a focus on the controversy over the 'Sankhya Vahini' project --- and which have had a greater impact on the policies and programmes of the state.

The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism

"The violent partition of the country and the Hindu – Muslim killings which preceded and accompanied it, followed by the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a person considered to be a Hindu fanatic associated with the RSS, discredited for several decades the ideologies of both Hindu nationalism and Muslim separatism and made secularism appear the only basis for the modern Indian state." [2] The neutrality of the state and equal respect for all religions constituted the core of this form of secularism, and minority rights, freedom of religion and equal citizenship expressed its ideals. It was a part of the Nehruvian model of Indian nationalism that became the dominant ideology in post-Independence India and led to the introduction of Liberal democratic institutions. This model was rooted in the belief that industrialization would erode the influence of religion and, with economic development, ethnic and religious loyalties would be replaced by class identification.[3] But the logic of universal adult franchise in a culturally and socially plural society and appeal to religious or primordial loyalties by politicians in their quest for power made the consolidation of religious and caste-based identities inevitable. But the most important achievement of the Nehruvian era was that it succeeded in erecting a vibrant structure of democracy, of which, secularism formed an important norm. Under the one-party dominant rule of the INC, the role of groups and foundations based on religious identities remained, at best peripheral.

Even if the Nehruvian model of Indian nationalism and secularism remained the dominant trend in Indian politics since Independence, the former had been challenged, from time to time, on both theoretical and practical grounds. In fact, it was dismissed by the Hindu nationalists as "a euphemism for irreligious and repudiation of the Hindu ethos", and as an attempt to "remake India in the Western image." [4]

The Hindu nationalists regarded the partition and the creation of Pakistan as the failure of the Nehruvian ideology of Indian nationalism. They also rejected the idea that Indian culture is a composite or synthetic culture. India doesn't need, they argue, the Euro centric notions of secularism and should be guided by its own five thousand years old cultural heritage. In this respect, secularism meant "...guarantee of equality and justice to all citizens irrespective of their faith. No discrimination against or in favour of anyone".[5] Moreover, insistence on the Muslim minority's identification with the history and culture of the majority and the imperative to take pride in their pre-Islamic ancestry was an important component of this view point.

The Hindu nationalists deny that India is a multi-national state and propagate a homogenous national identity for the whole country. According to them, Hinduism has geo-cultural connotations and it signifies a way of life. "For Hindu nationalists the political-cum-territorial concept of nationalism without its Hindu cultural content, as advocated by Nehru and his associates, is incapable of sanctifying the unity of the country. For them the secular concept of Indian national identity based upon an alien ideology of socialism, is limited to the state and lacks those psychic elements which bind the people as a nation" [6]

The Rise of the BJP

By the end of the 1970s, the ruptures in the secular nationalist discourse were manifest when the overarching Indian identity gave way to a myriad of fragmented identities.[7] And it was also a period when India's layered, plural, political self-definition was in serious difficulties and, "...the identities of religion and caste had started to invade the national politics with ferocious energy." [8] This situation was largely the product of the decline of the Congress system and the lack of a coherent alternative

to fill the vacuum created by the crumbling of the Congress monolith. The trend towards personalization and centralization of power that had bogged the INC since the early 1970s continued. Resort to plebiscitary politics coupled with sugar-coated pills of populism had weakened the party structure considerably. It was a period when the society was marred by severe discontent, resentment and polarization, arising from the increased political consciousness among the newly politicized groups on the one hand, and a series of crises ranging from inflation, Emergency, corruption and nepotism, to the Janata fiasco on the other.

In these circumstances, the BJP was born as a new avatar of the Jan Sangh. Since the support base of the Jan Sangh was confined to the high caste, urban middle class of the Hindi-speaking states of north and central India, the BJP embarked upon a new strategy. It sought to distance itself from its predecessor as a deliberate plan in order to broaden its electoral base into hitherto uncharted territories. "..... The party aspired to overcome intra-religious cleavages and build a broadly defined Hindu vote bank by filling a perceived leadership vacuum among the Hindu population." [9] Through its ideological rhetoric, the party attacked the Congress ideology, programmes and policies. In an attempt to stay away from the Hindu chauvinism of the Jan Sangh and present itself in more moderate and humanistic guise, the BJP appropriated Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Gandhian Socialism' as its guiding philosophy. The party president, Atal Behari Vajpayee's call for value-based politics went well along with the tenets of Gandhian socialism which emphasized ethical and moral principles in politics as well as economic distribution. This stand, the party leaders hoped, would also help the party to distance itself from the RSS and its affiliates. [10] Both Marxism and Capitalism were denounced as borrowed ideas, which were incompatible with the specificities of Indian culture and its social fabric, and Gandhian Socialism was projected as the most appropriate blueprint for India's development.

The BJP identified five features which, it argued, distinguished it from the corruption- ridden Congress --- nationalism, national integration, democracy, positive secularism and value-based politics.[11] The party committed itself to these five features and vowed to resurrect a new, vibrant and culturally sound India.

The 1984 General Elections and the Shift in Strategy

After its short–lived alliance with Charan Singh's Lok Dal and its failure to attract other opposition parties to form a united front against the Congress (I), the BJP was left to fend for itself on the eve of 1984 elections. The party performed badly, like other opposition parties, and was able to win only two seats. But unlike other opposition parties, it got 7.4 percent of the popular votes and succeeded in mustering popular support against the Congress by polling 30 percent votes in MP, 23.7 percent in Rajasthan, 23.3 percent in Himachal Pradesh, 18.8 percent in Delhi, and 18.6 percent in Gujarat.[12]

The dismal performance at the hustings led to a rethinking within the BJP. Unable to capitalize on its Janata legacy, the party members were gradually rallying behind the view that the BJP should move closer to its Jan Sangh identity in order to consolidate its traditional vote bank of upper caste, urban, male Hindus. In this respect, the BJP's decision to revive the Jan Sangh's demand for abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was an important indicator. The strategy pursued by the moderate faction within the party had failed to change the electoral fortunes of the party. Vajpayee's moderate ideological line, his efforts to make the party a broad-based organization and the strategic alliance with the non-communist parties didn't get much support from various segments of the party. Even after the formation of a working group and later its endorsement of the party's ideological and organizational strategies, the

demand for a fine-tuned ideological position and the imperative for putting a sustainable alternative to the Congress continued in a much more vigorous way.

The early 1980s were also marked by a spurt in Hindu revivalism. To this end, the Central leadership of the Congress played a catalytic role. The Operation Bluestar in Punjab had given Indira Gandhi a strong constituency among the majority community. The issues like conversion of Scheduled Castes to Islam in Meenakshipuram and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in neighbouring Pakistan and other parts of the world further contributed to Hindu militancy. The Hindu organizations such as the RSS and VHP (which was formed in 1984) had become quite active. To arrest the further growth of mass alienation, Indira Gandhi reoriented her policy towards Hindus and began to court them in order to make up for the shortfall in the Muslim votes. In other words, the polity was headed towards a phase of competitive communalism.

As the Congress (I) began appropriating the traditional Jan Sangh terrain, the BJP rank and file clamored for a shift in the party strategy. And in 1986, Vajpayee was replaced by L.K. Advani who soon adopted a militant attitude and retrieved the original Jan Sangh political discourse. Advani denounced the cow slaughter, destruction of Hindu temples in Kashmir and the Congress' policy of "minority appeasement". He coined a new term, 'positive secularism', which meant "justice for all and discrimination against none". The new President focussed on Hindu resentment against the Muslim assertion and started capitalizing on the growing militancy among the Hindus. He made no bones about his penchant to bridge the gap between the BJP and the RSS. The new strategy was marked by a realization that "...earlier strategy of distancing from the RSS and of political moderation did not endear it to the secularist parties, and they could not make much headway among the Muslims.."[13] Thus the party embarked upon a new extremist strategy to

check Congress in an era when " with the resurgence of ethnic politics and conflict in the 1980s, ethnicity became a highly salient issue, increasingly subject to political manipulation". [14]

The Shah Bono controversy, involving the right of divorced Muslim women to seek alimony, was a godsend opportunity for the BJP and its affiliates. In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of a lower court raising the maintenance allowance of a divorced Muslim Woman. The Court's interpretation of the Holy Koran resulted in a massive agitation. The judgment was denounced as a threat to Islam and to Indian Muslims' distinct religious identity. The Muslim leaders exploited the Shah Bano controversy for whipping up fundamentalist sentiments among the Muslim masses against the government. The Rajeev government, under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists, in 1986 effectively overturned the Supreme Court decision through the Muslim Women Act. The Constitutional Amendment was another proof of the sectarian agenda of the Congress regime. The BJP capitalized on the government's capitulation and projected Shah Bano case as another testimony of the Congress policy of minority appeasement.

The 1989 Elections & The Road to Ayodhya

The fag end of the Rajeev regime was disastrous for the Congress. The exit of V P Singh from the government and the party led to a situation in which Rajeev's popularity and his clean image took a nosedive and the Bofors bombshell sounded the rout of the party. This period also witnessed a massive spurt in the Hindu-Muslim riots. More importantly, the long-standing RamJanmabhoomi-Babri mosque dispute resurfaced in the late 1980s. In January 1986, an agitation was begun by the VHP, with the support of the RSS and the BJP, for the restoration of the site as a place of Hindu worship. The fear of the Hindu backlash led

Rajeev government to allow the Hindus access to the shrine and performance of shilanyas.

The BJP saw the imperative for a united front against the Congress on the eve of the 1989 elections, but unlike 1977, it preferred a strategic alliance for electoral seat adjustment to forming a united single party by the merger of non-communist opposition. The BJP capitalized on this massive resentment against the Congress regime and projected the handling of the issues like the Shah Bano case, banning of the Satanic Verses and recognition of Urdu as the second official language in UP as an attempt to appease and pamper the Muslims. It raised the issue of Ramjanmabhoomi and successfully cultivated a strong constituency among the Hindus, especially the urban middle class. "Advani's aggressive embracing of Hindu Nationalism and his strategy of electoral alliance and seat adjustment proved to be enormously successful. The BJP was able to capture eighty-six seats in the Lok Sabha, a dramatic increase from the two seats which it had won in the 1984 elections". [15] The party emerged after 1989 elections as the third largest party in the Parliament after Congress and the Janata Dal.

Mandal vs. Mandir

The BJP extended an outside support to the NF government, but before the NF government had set its house in order, an altogether new phase of politics had set in. The announcement of VP Singh to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission alarmed the BJP. It appeared to undermine the efforts of the BJP to consolidate the Hindus vote in the country under its own banner, and instead to divide it and make use of intra-religious cleavages in Hinduism and Muslim support to isolate it (BJP). It was in this backdrop that Advani launched his Rath Yatra in 1990 from Somnath to Ayodhya, following a long and

circuitous route and leaving a bitter trail of communal antagonism, riots and deaths. The party's seizure of the Ayodhya issue had succeeded in creating a polarization between Hindus and Muslims, especially in the states of Hindi heartland. "The shilanyas marked a successful and decisive breakthrough in the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, representing the high point of politics as theatre, replete with symbolism and suffused with ritualism".[16] Making Lord Rama a national symbol and projecting Babur as an invader, as well as "...the relaunching of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in the framework of the kar seva offered the right opportunity for action, since it enabled the BJP to distance itself from V.P.Singh on issues other than the Mandal Report itself, which had proved a popular measure among the OBCs".[17] In an open appeal to the Hindu sentiments in 1991 elections, the party's election platform pledged to construct the Shri Ram temple at Ayodhya and to relocate the mosque 'with due respect'. The shooting of the kar sewaks in October 1990 was used to arouse the feeling of Hindu vulnerability, which had by now been transformed into exasperation against the political authorities, who were seen as inexplicably reluctant or at least inefficient in making Muslims see reason.[18] On the other hand, the party also sought the support of the farmers and socially and economically backward castes among Hindus by declaring its support to the Mandal Report with a special mention of the adoption of an economic criterion for the poor upper castes. Though the BJP's appeal remained confined largely to the upper castes and urban middle class, a section of the rising and prosperous backward castes in rural areas also supported the party. While consolidating the Hindu identity, the BJP was equally watchful of the fallouts of the Mandal implementation on its Hindu vote bank. To this end, the party, instead of either opposing or supporting the Mandal decision directly, adopted a two-fold strategy. "...(it) opted to support formally Mandal recommendations at the national level, while undermining them at the

local level, particularly in places where it relied on upper caste support".[19]

The BJP and the Era of Regionalization

In the years following the Babri Masjid demolition, and in the wake of the party's poor performance in the 1993 Assembly elections in UP and MP, the BJP was gradually coming to the realization that the limits of the religious mobilization had been more or less "exhausted" and that it needed to expand its support base beyond the confines of upper caste, urban, male Hindus mainly concentrated in the Hindi heartland. The party also realized the fact that its trajectory, electoral strategies and its future prospects had become crucially dependent on its maneuvering skills and popular appeals under two major constraints – regionalization and the rise of the lower castes.[20] In the new milieu, caste-based identities especially in the northern India proved to be more important than religious identities as exemplified by the success of the SP in UP, and the JD in Bihar, both of which represented the middle and backward castes, and the BSP, which represented the Dalits in UP. The BJP was caught in a dilemna of sorts. The party could not ignore the OBCs which accounted for the 52 per cent of the population and who were especially mobilized in its strongholds of north India. However, to endorse their grievances would have compromised its traditional support among the upper castes and would have implied acceptance of internal divisions in the Hindu identity.[21] The 1993 election results, when the BJP lost both in UP and MP partly because of the OBC and Dalit voters, led the party leaders to promote a large number of lower caste people in the party apparatus.[22]

As the 1996 elections approached, the party evolved a compromise between the need to keep its upper caste vote bank intact on the one hand, and the compulsion to woo the OBCs and Dalits into the party fold

on the other. The party's manifesto put a stress on social harmony, but also admitted that the existing quota in favour of the SCs and the OBCs could not be questioned till they are socially and educationally integrated with the rest of society.[23]

As a tactical move, on the eve of 1996 general elections, the BJP tried to project itself as a 'responsible' national party by distancing itself from militant Hindu organizations and their programme of gaining control over the mosques at Kashi and Mathura. The National Executive Meeting of the party in 1995 identified five issues to be raised in the upcoming elections – the Ayodhya issue, Article 370, infiltration of foreigners, the Uniform Civil Code and, economic nationalism and swadeshi. Thus while cultural nationalism was addressed to the pro-temple, upwardly mobile Hindu upper and middle castes in northern states, economic nationalism was designed to woo those Hindus who believed in national 'self-respect'. As a part of the new imperative to expand its electoral base, the BJP attempted to form alliances with the regional parties like AIADMK, Akali Dal (Badal), BSP, HVM etc. mainly to prevent these grouping from going to the Congress or NF fold. The party also entered into an alliance with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the HVP in Haryana, and the Samata Party in Bihar.

The BJP emerged as the single largest party in the Parliament capturing 161 seats and getting 20.3 per cent of the popular vote. In the six northern states it gained 113 seats compared to 81 in 1991 and 59 in 1989; in the west it got 33 seats over 25 in 1991 and 22 in 1989. It maintained its regional core of support in the Hindi belt, but it failed to expand its electoral case in the south. In terms of its social base, it still remained a party confined mainly to upper caste Hindus in northern and western India.[24]

During the 1998 elections, the party put the Ayodhya issue on the backburner and emphasized stability as its main plank, and sought to capitalize on Vajpayee's appeal and his moderate image with the slogan, "stable government, able PM". The party manifesto still mentioned the issue of construction of the Ram Temple, but it was argued by the party leaders that the BJP would achieve this goal by exploring 'consensual, legal, and constitutional' means. More importantly, Advani argued that the contentious issues on the party's agenda such as Ayodhya, Article 370 and Uniform Civil Code could be dropped if the elections resulted in a coalition government, and that the party's basic programme would rest upon consensus. The party also sought to assuage the feeling of the Muslims by saying that the latter had nothing to fear from the BJP. In other words, the political developments since 1996 elections clearly reflected a further diversification of Hindu Nationalist mobilizational strategies in various states and regions of the country.[25]

The BJP forged alliances with AIADMK and its allies in Tamil Nadu, Lok Shakti in Karnataka, BJD in Orissa and Trinamul Congress in W. Bengal; besides its longer-term ties with Samata in Bihar and UP, HVP in Haryana, Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. "Simultaneously, as a strategy of vote maximization, the doors were thrown open to individuals of different parties. The induction of Aslam Sher Khan (Congress MP from M.P.) and Ayub Khan (Congress MP from Rajasthan) was used to send a positive message to the Muslim community."[26] The BJP completely outsmarted the Congress in forging strategic alliances and, unlike the Congress, it "... didn't balk at being a junior partner to local parties".[27] This strategy was a testimony to the BJP's adaptation to the general trend of regionalization of the politics in India.[28] The 1998 elections also confirmed a new era, where technically, the national party system could now be described as a bi-modal, multi-party system. There emerged two major or national political parties maneuvering within a large vortex of small regional parties.[29]

The BJP again emerged as the single largest party with 178 seats and 25.5 percent of popular votes. It successfully overcame the 'untouchable' factor, broke out of the confines of Hindi heartland and acquired a presence in all the states of the south except Kerala, spread to the East and into the Jammu region and opened its account in the North East. Its demographic expansion was also remarkable. While it got over half the vote of the upper castes, it also emerged as the largest vote getter among the lower castes, although its support among the SCs, STs and Muslims remained low. Significantly, it obtained the largest share of the Hindu votes in both rural (35 per cent) and urban areas (41 per cent), and among Hindus from all education groups.[30] After the 1998 general elections, the BJP effectively ended its 'majestic isolation' by making pre- and post- election alliances with influential regional parties, and the BJP's new allies transformed its largely regional image. Besides, the distinction between the communal forces was further blurred by the willingness of the regional parties, especially ones like the TDP to align with the BJP. The BJP now rivaled the Congress as another major national alternative offering the ever more influential regional parties more choice and greater flexibility. [31]

The 1999 elections were held in the backdrop of the Kargil episode and hence produced a situation favourable to the BJP, the soaring popularity of Vajpayee, being an important factor. Although the vote share of the BJP came down by 1.8 percentage (at 23.7 per cent) point over 1998 and it added only one more seat to its 1998 tally of 181, together the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) got 296 seats. For the first time in the 1990s, a pre-electoral alliance crossed the majority mark. The gains for the BJP and its allies came mainly from rural constituencies this time, and for the first time, they won the majority of the seats reserved for the STs.[32] The BJP benefited from the Kargil episode, the Congress fiasco over government-making and the

dissolution of Parliament, and the Sharad Pawar led split in the Congress.

The New Discourse of the State

The success story of the BJP in the electoral history of Independent India marks the journey of Indian politics from one epoch to another. The crystallization that took place in the early 1980s led to a concrete consolidation in the next two decades, and this process brought the BJP from periphery to the centre stage of Indian politics. The party has made, more since the 1990s, major gains both socially and geographically. It is no longer a party of the urban, upper caste, male Hindus alone. It has acquired a formidable rural base, extending well into the lower OBCs and STs. It has expanded beyond the Hindi heartland and made substantial presence in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and a foothold in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

What caused such an epochal change? How did the state cope with it? Did the state reinforce the changed context in which identities became the new mantra? The changing orientation of the state over the last two decades provides a valuable insight into these otherwise complex questions.

The decade of 1980s was a period in which the state had played both overt and covert roles in the communalization of the political process, and in which there was a perceptible shift in its orientation. [33] More importantly, it was a phase when the state was facing a severe crisis of legitimacy. The forces generated in the late 1970s – increasing centralization of power ultimately leading to the Emergency, state coercion, socio-economic crises, destruction of the institutional structure of the state, and increased political consciousness among social classes

and groups – called for an imaginative leadership, an inclusive socio-economic strategy and revitalized channels of interest articulation and aggregation. There was none available in the early 1980s, and it was a phase marked by crisis of the regime and crisis of the party system.[34] The social base of the Congress was fast eroding as the Muslims and the SCs got alienated, the Backward caste plank was appropriated by various parties and non-party formations, and the discontent among both urban and rural groups was rising. "The government's failure to fulfil its promise and ensure social justice gave rise to social discontent and compounded cynicism among various groups regarding the efficacy of state intervention, or at any rate, about the political capacities of the Congress to effect social transformation. As the government became less able to respond to the groundswell of discontent, social groups tended to turn to other resources in the social realm of redress... All in all, as the politics of social transformation receded, the politics of identity, community and ethnicity began to occupy spaces vacated by it". [35]

Faced with a spurt in religious revivalism, regional movements and overall general discontent, the state now itself started abusing the political space for the activation of the exclusionist interests. The state harped on the 'national unity' theme as a part of its two fold strategy: On the one hand, it sought legitimacy for its continued centralizing drive, and on the other, it embarked upon a majoritarian agenda not only to reap electoral harvest in an era of populism and charisma, but also to prevent all other formations from making roads into its Hindu support base. In a phase of structural crisis of the state, when the Nehruvian model of development was under attack, the breakdown of the secular consensus only aggravated the crisis. As communally oriented groups stepped into the political vacuum created by the institutional decline and rising socio-economic discontent, the state started projecting itself as the sole guardian of the majority community, often at the cost of the minorities. "Successive failures at the hustings brought to the forefront an

alternative strategy of mobilization. This strategy involved direct appeals to the majority community (often against the minorities), thus downplaying broader social issues at the expense of narrow communitarian ones."[36] The Shah Bano controversy and the opening of the gates of Babri Masjid for shilanyas were watershed events of the decade which clearly revealed a desperate attempt on part of the government to save its fast depleting social support among the Hindus on the one hand, and to occupy both communal and secular spaces simultaneously on the other. The government's backtracking on the Shah Bano issue led to a widespread opinion that the Muslims constituted a self-contained and monolithic community, and that they were hostile to any progressive measure. The events leading to the shilanyas were equally expressive of the regime's majoritarian strategy of mobilization. "Majority politics, with a proclivity for extending surreptitious support to Hindu causes, ended up by creating a space for the rightist elements which were willing to speak openly and proudly for Hindu nationalism".[37] With this, the state itself had also opened the floodgates for a new political discourse based on social and religious mobilization and which activated the communal fault lines.

Throughout the phase of state capitulation and vacillation, the BJP, in close association with various Hindu organizations, successfully mobilized the Hindu vote. It was able to give credence to its "positive secularism" by highlighting the dubious stand of the Congress on the issue of secularism. And when the state itself jumped on to the Hindu bandwagon, the BJP got legitimacy for its championing of the Hindu cause. In this arena of competitive communalism, the BJP and other Hindu organizations were seen as rightful heirs to the Hindu legacy, while the Congress government was denounced as opportunist one which 'pampered' minorities and denied the majority community its rightful dominance.

The Mandal decision of the VP Singh government provided another opportunity to the Hindu Nationalists to push forward their majoritarian agenda. The BJP sought to prevent its consolidated Hindu vote bank from getting divided over the Mandal decision and raised a highly emotive issue of Ramjanmabhoomi by unleashing crude anti-Muslim rhetoric. "Lord Rama and his epic, Ramayana , had become political icons. Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) and communalism permeated Indian politics, media, and popular culture".[38] At the same time, especially the 1993 onwards, when the party fared badly in the Assembly elections, "...the BJP has been led to co-opt an increasing number of OBC and SC leaders from other parties, including the SP and the BSP, in order to cope with the need for 'mandalizing' itself and in view of the rise of lower-caste parties". [39]

On the political terrain, the Hindu identity and the OBC politics would appear as two natural adversaries. But as stated above, the BJP has achieved a remarkable success in forging links with the parties representing the Backward castes. The success of the BJP in crafting alliances with a host of regional parties in recent elections is a testimony to the ability of the party to adopt different vantage points on its electoral strategy-spectrum. The compulsion to stay in power has led the BJP to set aside the contentious issues on its agenda. But the party has successfully altered the terms of political discourse in its favour by displacing the Congress from the centrestage of Indian politics.

The ascendancy of the BJP to power has marked a qualitative break from the past in many ways, as far as the political process is concerned. But more than that, the realm of culture, education and economy are also informed by the new discourse of the state and its programmes, policies and politics. Broadly speaking, there are three discernible trends which testify to the growing impact of the BJP and its affiliates on the state. In the realm of politics, the issues such as

secularism, minority rights, India's foreign relations, and review of the Constitution have gained pre-eminence and have generated much heat across the political spectrum. Secondly, with an alternative conception of nationhood and community life advanced by the Hindu nationalists, the domain of culture has become a contested terrain. Finally, the economic policies of the BJP–led government and its strategy towards liberalization of economy have had a major impact on the possible role of the state in the new dispensation and the issues concerning its redistributive commitments to ensure social justice. This part of the present chapter seeks to examine three specific concerns in this regard. First, the attempt on the part of the BJP and its affiliates to control the process and nature of education especially in the wake of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) controversy is analyzed in detail. Secondly, the cultural controversy generated by the two films of Deepa Mehta has been discussed to understand the politics of culture. Finally, the process of economic liberalization, its relationship with an otherwise contradictory 'swadeshi' notion of the BJP and other Hindu organizations, and its implications for the social classes, have been analyzed, with a focus on the 'Sankhya Vahini' project..

The Realm of Education

The controversy over the 'Towards Freedom' project of the ICHR brought the issue of reinterpretation and rewriting of History to the forefront. It goes as far back as the election of B.R. Grover as the Chairman of the ICHR in November 1999. Grover had served as the Director of the ICHR for 12 years and was otherwise associated with the organization for over a decade. Historians of a liberal and secular persuasion were alarmed at the prospect of the nodal agency for sponsorship of historical research passing into the control of a person

(Grover) who had opposed every resolution condemning the demolition of the Babri Masjid. They saw this move as the attempt to pack institutions with people conforming to the Hindutva ideology.[40] And the whole issue acquired the nature of a major controversy, when on Feb.11, 2000, K.N. Panikkar and Sumit Sarkar, two eminent historians associated with the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Delhi University respectively, received identical letters from Oxford University Press (OUP) stating that the two volumes of the Towards Freedom project that they had edited for the ICHR were being withdrawn from the press.

The History of Towards Freedom

The project was commissioned in 1972 by the ICHR. It comprised ten volumes and was intended to document the last ten years of colonial rule to counter the British Government's 'Transfer of Power' series. The objective was to challenge the interpretation of Indian freedom that had been presented in the British compilation and to show that India won its Independence through a struggle rather than as a result of voluntary handover of power by the British. All the ten volumes, covering the period 1937-47, were to have been completed by 1977-78 but thanks to shifting 'equations' within the ICHR it is 20 years behind the original deadline, and has already cost Rs.four crores.[41] The first volume covering the year 1937 was published by Dr. P.N. Chopra in 1985 but it was found to be so 'substandard' that there were few takers for it, though the current conventional wisdom at the ICHR was that it was withdrawn by the Marxist establishment. In 1987, the manuscript of Dr. Chopra's second volume relating to 1938 was returned to him by the then ICHR chairman, Prof. Irfan Habib, who found it wanting on several counts.

The project was streamlined by Prof. Irfan Habib, and Prof. S. Gopal who had left it in 1977, was brought back as the general editor for the remaining nine volumes. The volumes were assigned to Prof. Basudeo Chatterjee (1938), Prof. Mushirul Hasan (1939), Prof. K.N. Panikkar (1940), Prof. Bipan Chandra (1941), Prof. Gyanendra Pandey (1942), Prof. Partha Sarathy Gupta (1943-44), Prof. Bimal Prasad (1945), Prof. Sumit Sarkar (1946), and Dr. Ravinder Kumar (1947). So far, apart from Dr. Chopra's volumes, two other volumes have come out -- one by late Partha Sarathi Gupta and the other by Prof. Basudeo. Chatterjee.

The ICHR's decision to stop the publication of the volumes was communicated to OUP through a letter dated Feb 3, 2000. In January 1999, the ICHR had appointed a three-member committee to have a look at the manuscripts of the two volumes. Oddly enough, to review a detailed historical manuscript, the ICHR in its wisdom decided to have only one historian on the panel.[42] Ostensibly, the decision to withdraw the two volumes in question was taken to facilitate an 'academic' review, the step being necessitated because of doubts raised about the authenticity and quality of the material.[43] In support of its decision, the ICHR advanced both procedural and substantive reasons. A 'fact sheet' put out by the Council of the volumes pertaining to the years 1943-44 and 1938, described them as shoddy compilations premised upon a skewed understanding of the freedom struggle.[44] One of the principal objections to these volumes was that they reduced Gandhi to a "mere footnote". The Council further argued that in this effort to sanitize the role of the Left parties, the volume editors "unscrupulously" deleted vital paragraphs from documents, "in utter disregard of the well-accepted norms of editing". The council claimed that as far back as August 1998, it had decided to subject all volumes pertaining to the project to a review by a committee of the ICHR before forwarding them to the OUP for publication. And that in the case of the volumes by Sarkar and Panikkar

this procedure was not followed. Moreover, Grover denied that the decision was ideological, saying, "Four crore rupees of the taxpayers' money and 26 years have been spent on the project... Yet we discovered that the volumes that had been published were full of errors".[45] He insisted that the volumes were too bulky and had no index and contents pages.

The critics, on the other hand, contested the ICHR version of the controversy. They pointed out that the project, which in its present incarnation was initiated in 1988-89 under the general editorship of S. Gopal, had evolved its own procedures. The scholars were expected to submit their draft texts to both the ICHR and Gopal and the volumes would be sent for publication only after incorporating the necessary changes and suggestions.[46] The editors of the volumes contested that any post facto demand for an additional review was not only violative of contractual understanding, but was also a direct infringement of the academic autonomy and integrity of the concerned scholars. Savyasachi Bhattacharya weighed it with a statement deploring the political exploitation of his academic review of the Gupta volume. He contended, "I learn with surprise and dismay that a review article I wrote two years ago... is being misused by the authorities of the ICHR to defend a questionable administrative action detrimental to academic values".[47] Authoritative confirmation came from S. Settar, who was the chairman in 1998 when the volumes were cleared for publication. He clarified that the suggested review process was only for volumes which till date had not been completed. Since both Sarkar and Panikkar had submitted their respective volumes in 1995 and 1996, they were not to be covered by the new arrangement. Later, P. Bhatia, a professor of History at Delhi University resigned from the membership of the ICHR alleging that B.R. Grover, the chairman, had not only deliberately lied about the Council discussions regarding the project but had gone on to distort the minutes of the meeting. Sarkar countered the charges by saying, "Basically, what

these people want to bring back are old-fashioned, discredited nations of what history is all about, that is, Indian history as divided neatly into Hindu and Muslim periods, defining periods by the religion of the rulers... More and more we are taught to look at the nation as something of a myth, as just a map, a cult or a flag".[48] To which, Panikkar added, "The British were mainly looking at what they themselves did... The British emphasis was mainly on what the thinking of the Viceroy was or of the Secretary of State for India.... Our treatment is sensitive to the complex character of the freedom movement and the participation of various social groups in it, like the peasants, workers, women, students and so on. Such a view is absent in British volumes.... The current attack is not only on Marxist historians but on liberal-secular historiography. This attack is essentially rooted in a fear of history... This is a very real factor – the fear of the real, the fear of the authentic".[49] On March 3, 2000, the HRD minister M.M. Joshi defended the ICHR decision in the Rajya Sabha, but faced much discomfiture due to the clarifications given earlier by S. Settar and P. Bhatia. In a letter to S. Gopal, Settar wrote, "...I'm trying my best to resist interference of outside scholars in this project".[50] The public statement by Bhatia that Towards Freedom was not listed on the agenda of the June 1999 meeting of the council put the HRD ministry into a fix.[51]

Barring the University Grants Commission (UGC), the ICHR is the sole official agency to promote historical research. Equally, more than the miniscule funds and patronage it doles out, it seeks to confer the stamp of legitimacy and authenticity on the output it supports. It is this power of legitimacy, backed by the authority of the Indian state, over the reconstruction of our past and present, that marks the current moves in the ICHR as significant. Even though the volumes of the project are technically under the copyright of the ICHR, and not the Publication Division of the Government of India, they are blessed with an official imprimatur. "There is little doubt that the current leadership of the

ICHR has acted more as a policeman protecting the BJP's ideological interests, in the process not just giving a go-by to minimal considerations of academic propriety but willfully lying and distorting official records... But equally, our intelligentsia should be displaying concern about the manner these 'official' bodies are peopled and managed".[52]

The ICHR controversy revealed a pattern where the state took upon itself the task of the reconstruction of the past and influenced an academic exercise. The intervention by the state in the substantive issues of an institution of higher educational research speaks volumes of the state's penchant to take upon itself a project of redefining the arena of education and to seek legitimacy for a particular ideological viewpoint.

The attempt to reconstitute the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) with the appointment of Prof. M.L. Sondhi, formerly at JNU, also sparked a controversy. The critics argued that Sondhi's appointment had to do with his concern for the 'liberation' of Tibet and friendship with Israel, and that it was a part of the hawkish and anti-China stance of the present regime. Despite the widespread criticism in the academia, the government went ahead with this and other moves. The director of the Indian Institute of Advanced studies (IIAS), Shimla was pressured into submitting his resignation. The board of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was reconstituted with its high-profile academic director, Kapila Vatsyayan, served marching orders. The grants for the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi were stopped.

The attempt to intervene in the school education is another aspect of the state's agenda of rewriting history. Three key institutions involved in the preparation of textbooks and designing the overall framework for school curricula, the NCERT, NIEPA, and the National

Open Schools Authority (NOSA) have got new directors. The appointment of K.G. Rastogi to the search committee for faculty appointments led to widespread condemnation for the former's self-confessed links with the RSS. Later the institute circulated a draft policy document outlining a framework for formulating the curriculum for the 12-year school programme. An over-emphasis on religious education as opposed to education about religions, an overplay of the importance of indigenous education without giving a coherent critique of the perceived dangers of globalization, an overdose of national identity bordering on jingoism, and an attempt to highlight the need to redefine the existing understanding of secularism were some areas which were widely criticized.[53] The document, entitled 'National Curriculum Framework for School Education - A Discussion Document', seeks to redefine the understanding of culture, democracy and secularism, the issues on which there has been a wide consensus over the last five decades. It says, "The compositeness of our culture and unity in diversity which is the main theme of our national unity should be reflected in the content and processes of education at all stages of school education. The process of education should be characterized by efforts to promote culture through education and education through culture.... The main objective should be to promote national pride and cultural identity and to foster national integration and greater understanding amongst different groups of people of India".[54] On the issue of secularism, the document says, "secularism in the present educational parlance has wrongly been misunderstood as rejection of religion. There has now emerged an opinion that the term ought to mean equal understanding of and respect for all religions. This interpretation, also accepted by the Sriprakash Committee (1960) , facilitates the view that religion in its basic form (devoid of myth, dogma and ritual) would draw the younger generation to basic moral and spiritual values".[55] The critics maintain that this over-emphasis on religion might give a fillip to communal agendas, and subvert the

compositeness of Indian culture which it vows to preserve. The attempt to rewrite school textbooks in history in the BJP-ruled states has been widely seen as a calculated strategy to reorient the school education by catching the soft minds young. The HRD ministry's new programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which seeks to bring together all the different schemes for elementary and primary education under one umbrella, has been viewed as an attempt to facilitate and extend bureaucratic control over the education programmes.[56] The recent incidents of violence in the Shibli National Post-Graduate College (SNPC), Ajamagarh, UP, and the Jamia Milia Islamia (JMI), N. Delhi; and the high-handedness of the police in both cases have been criticized for targeting the Muslim minority and communalize the civil society.[57]

The Contest over Culture

The ascendancy to power of the BJP-led government has also marked a bitter contest over definition of Indian culture and the place of women in it. Apart from other issues, the two films, Fire and Water by Deepa Mehta, a Canada-based NRI film-maker, created a major controversy over the portrayal of Indian culture and women in the mass media. A few weeks after its opening across the country in 1998, the film Fire hit the headlines with accounts of attacks by Shiv Sainiks who targeted the cinema halls in Mumbai and Delhi where Fire was being screened. The reasons cited for the attack ranged from its 'vulgarity' and 'lesbianism', to the "five minute long abuse of an Indian national (Javed Jaffrey) by a Chinese".[58] As a result of the attacks, Fire was withdrawn from Delhi and Mumbai. On the other hand, large public protests condemning the attacks on the theatres and withdrawal of the film were also organized in many places.

Deepa Mehta's film depicted a critique of patriarchy. It sought to convey a message that the denial of female sexuality may lead to an assertion of sexual choice through lesbianism. Mehta contended that her film was about loneliness, not lesbianism. She argued, "Lesbianism is just another aspect of the film. It is probably the last thing they resort to when they derive a certain confidence out of the relationship".[59] She further held, "If anything, the film is about choices. Hindu concepts of tolerance, non-judgementalism, compassion. The incredible loneliness of being that's often the lot of women in India.".[60] Shabana Ajmi, an acclaimed actress of art films, stated that "love between individuals belonging to the same sex is only one of the issues raised by Fire. The larger issue is that of empathy". [61]

The protestors argued that Mehta was hell bent on maligning Indian culture, that her sole purpose was to make some bucks by mocking at the family values of the Hindus, that her film was meant for a particular section of the audience who enjoyed every opportunity to mock at the well-knitted and symbiotically organized Hindu joint family. Their contention was that the film might shatter the fabric of the family life and encourage perversionist tendencies. They argued that lesbianism was in no way related to the Indian culture and its value-based family life, and that it was necessary to protect Indian culture from the inroads of alien sexualities. Mehta was criticized for reviling Hinduism with impunity while overlooking the Islamic orthodoxies, and for defaming India and in the process winning plaudits and millions abroad.

The film was sent back to the Censor Board which cleared it without any changes. The government maintained a cryptic silence while its leaders individually spoke in different voices. While the hooligans took the cities to ransom, vandalizing theatres and attacking public properties, the state watched helplessly, or rather connivingly.

The shooting of Deepa Mehta's third film, Water (in the trilogy of Fire, Earth, and Water), in 1999 once again brought the issues of culture and women to the forefront. Mehta was not allowed to shoot the film when she reached Varanasi with her crew. The film was sent to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and despite its nod, Mehta couldn't resume her shooing after the vandalization of the sets of the films earlier.

The argument most vociferously used against the film was that Mehta debased Varanasi and its religious traditions. The film seeks to highlights the plight of young Hindu widows during the 1930s who were forced to prostitution and other evils in the city of Varanasi. The protestors argued that Mehta's film depicted a Varanasi widow's house as a brothel, that she was interesting only in exploiting the unpleasant side of Kashi in order to make money and win international acclaim, and that her film contained undignified scenes as though they were a common feature in Varanasi.[62] Parallels were drawn between Fire and Water, not on the basis of the substantive issues that these films raised, but on the superficial criteria such as the intentions and motives of an NRI who was consistently out to earn millions by depicting the country into bad light and playing to the Western gallery. Mehta was challenged not to revile Hinduism and instead dare to touch the Islamic society if she had any 'genuine' commitment to the cause of women. The VHP claimed that the film was part of a deep rooted conspiracy to defame Hindu culture, and that attempts were being made by some people to project Hinduism in an incorrect and defamatory manner in order to grab foreign funding. [63]

The opinion in Varanasi was divided. An MDRA-Outlook opinion poll showed that 68 percent of those who were interviewed thought that the story and script of the film hurt the sentiments of the people of Varanasi.[64] On the other hand, a large number of students,

academics, common people and even local priests found nothing objectionable with the script of the film and extended their support to Mehta. For instance, V.B. Mishra, the mahant of the Sankat Mochan temple in Varanasi described, "There was no mass sentiment against Deepa Mehta. Just a few dozen people were part of the protest, but they drove her out and managed a successful Varanasi bandh. They whipped up a frenzy by misinforming the public. Had the common people been made aware of the truth, they'd have supported Deepa... I found nothing objectionable in the script. Every thing – our culture, the widows, the Ganga- has been respectably presented". [65] To the contrary, K.N. Govindacharya, a vocal BJP ideologue, countered by saying, "The objection is not to social ills per se being highlighted in any art form but the motivation as well as the method by which this is done... The marketing of social evils, which would in turn lower the image of Indian society as such and hurt the sentiments of the people of Varanasi, was unacceptable".[66]

During the entire course of controversy, the government at the Centre and that of UP both adopted an ambiguous stand, while the various components of the Hindutva combine as well as the leaders in the government spoke in different voices. The UP Chief Minister, Ram Prakash Gupta, defied the directions from the Prime Minister and I&B Minister to allow the shooting. The Centre gave its clearance for Water in December. When the protests began at Varanasi, some Central leaders repeatedly assured the film-maker that the problem would be sorted out. Deepa Mehta got Central clearance for the script twice -- before starting the shooting on January 29 and later on February 2, after protestors had vandalized the set on January 30. In face of contradictions, the Centre expressed helplessness. While no attempt was made to protect the unit's belongings from the rampaging crowds, the order prohibiting the shooting was passed in haste, first on January 29 and later on February 7. The state Home Secretary of UP maintained that hardly any damage was

done to the sets. On the other hand, the Chief Secretary, and the District Magistrate of Varanasi insisted that the shooting would pose a threat to law and order. Sensing the trouble, the Central leadership maintained a stony silence on the issue. [67]

The controversy generated by the two films of Deepa Mehta also represented a desire on part of the state to selectively take up issues for perusal, and ignore when they don't conform to the state's agenda. The inability, helplessness or connivance of the state in choosing to ignore the implementation of rule of law marks an attempt to redefine the arena of culture by intervening directly.

A Liberalized Swadeshi ?

The economic programmes of the BJP have been, over the decades, shaped around anti-Congressism on the one hand and the world-view of its affiliate organizations as well as its social base. Broadly it has been opposed to a state controlled command economy. In its 1980 Economic Policy Statement, the BJP criticized the Congress government's economic policies for a "low rate of economic growth, a high and rising volume of unemployment, the vast and growing number of people below the poverty line, and continuing gross inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth". And it added, "The whole framework of planning and income policy has failed to tackle these problems in the last thirty years".[68] This criticism was based on the party's thinking that borrowed concepts such as socialism and capitalism were unsuited for Indian cultural milieu, which didn't take into account India's own specificities, resource potential and workforce. The party was critical of the licensing and regulatory mechanism of the Congress regime which resulted in an elitist economy, and of the urban bias in the development planning which led to a colossal rural indebtedness.

"By the late 1980s, the BJP came out with an economic programme which sought liberalization of the economy, removal of bureaucratic control over industrial expansion, withdrawal of the state from such commercial activities as running of hotels, utilities, and airlines, and turning over most of the public sector industry to private businesses unless they became profitable".[69] The introduction of economic reforms through a comprehensive liberalization programme by PV Narsimha Rao government in 1991 unintendedly appropriated the BJP's economic programme and created an identity crisis for the latter. Moreover, the close associates of the BJP, the RSS and its several off-shoots were guided by a romantic notion of self-reliance encapsulated in the term 'Swadeshi', which denounced large-scale industries, advocated small and medium-size industrial units and saw the economic liberalization and its attendant domination by the multinational corporations (MNCs) as the loss of economic sovereignty for the nation. Caught in the dilemma to keep its rank and file contented on the one hand, and at the same time keeping its urban, middle class base intact, the BJP in 1992 came out with a new economic policy document entitled 'Humanistic Approach to Economic Development : A Swadeshi Alternative'.[70] The document vowed to work for a new social and economic order which would be non-exploitative, cooperative and harmonious, and which would provide full play to individual initiative and dignity. Apart from reiterating its previous commitments, the statement incorporated the RSS viewpoint and emphasized the development and enlargement of the small-scale industries and their potential of creating export-oriented employment. It recommended further liberalization and removal of governmental control, but at the same time pledged to protect both the private and public sectors of the national economy from the onslaught of global giants. The party leaders declared that the BJP would permit the operation of foreign capital and MNCs only in high-tech, export-oriented, and import-substitution

industries, and that the consumer goods would be kept away from foreign participation.[71] The party's new economic statement was thus, guided by rejection of unabashed consumerism, and an emphasis on Swadeshi or self-reliance. The party leaders denounced the IMF and the World Bank as the agents of neo-colonialism, under whose dominance India was bound to be dragged to "a social structure and cultural life producing a greed-based, degrading and wasteful consumerist culture".[72] The party also advocated full development of agriculture and the rural economy which, it argued, would lead to the maximization of agricultural productivity, freedom from rural indebtedness, promotion of village industries, and the establishment of agro-technical networks by introducing science and technology to small scale industries. The BJP also recommended simplifying the land laws, introducing land reforms, discouraging migration from rural to urban area and maintaining parity of prices between agricultural and industrial products.

In practice, the BJP has been grappling with the two mutually contradictory viewpoints within its rank and file. Hence "its economic programme has made major and frequent somersaults : from opposition to Nehruvian policies, it suddenly switched to an advocacy of a mixed economy based on planning and with a public sector occupying the "commanding heights". It supported the introduction of 'neo-liberal' economic policies in 1991... But before the 1998 elections, it turned a critic of 'neo-liberalism' and adopted a programme of Swadeshi".[73]

The BJP has also sought to accommodate opposing and multiple viewpoints from within by formulating the slogan 'Full liberalization and calibrated globalization'. While the liberalization component of this policy seeks opening up of internal market, deregulation, cuts in some subsidies and dismantling of some of the very large PSUs; through calibrated globalization it seeks to open only selected sectors to foreign capital which are in need of technological upgrading. The party also

wants the agriculture and the food processing sector and other sectors providing consumer products for the domestic market to be reserved for Indian capital.[74]

Recently, the BJP-led government has initiated a number of measures under what has been described as the 'second generation of economic reforms', and which are at cross–purposes with its swadeshi rhetoric. The government announced the privatization of Modern Foods and also initiated steps towards the privatization of Indian Airlines. In the Budget session of the Parliament this year (2000), the government managed to get passed a record 26 bills, most of them related to the disinvestment and privatization process. Important among these were Information Technology (IT) Bill, and Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

Sankhya Vahini Project

A major controversy within and outside the government and the party erupted over the 'Sankhya Vahini' project announced by the government recently on January 19. Conceived with an objective of providing the much needed broadband data communications network for the rapidly growing Information Technology industry and Internet Services, the project is a joint venture between India's Department of Telecom Services (45 percent) and IU Net, a subsidiary of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, which has a 49 percent stake. Other stakeholders include the Minority of IT (2 percent), and the Ministry of HRD (4 per cent). According to ASG-Omni, the project's consultants and investment managers, in the first year of its establishment Sankhya Vahini India Limited (SVIL) will provide 10000 KM of high speed connectivity, with the bandwidth extending between 2.5 gigabits per second and 40 Gbps. Within three years, it will cover the entire country,

providing approximately 25000 km of backbone network.[75] The system will enable data to flow so fast that it would take just a second to transmit thousands of volumes of an encyclopedia or run an entire film on a computer without any additional load on the system. It would also have the capacity for video and voice transmission, which, according to its promoters, will make long distance calls much cheaper. Currently, the country's superhighway is chocked because the existing bandwidth can't cope with the phenomenal increase in Internet traffic. Sankhya Vahini addresses this concern.

The method by which SVIL has been structured has caused concern. The Ministry of IT was among the first to raise questions about the manner in which the SV deal was clinched. To begin with, when on Oct. 16, 1998 the memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed with IUNET, the latter had not even been incorporated or registered in the US. This was done as late as January 8, 1999. The manner in which IN Net has been allowed to have an equity participation of 49 per cent, the credentials of IU Net as a high-speed data network technology provider as well as the alleged 'direct link' of the CMU to the US defense department have added to the controversy. When SV becomes operational, it will become the backbone of the net revolution in India. Considering that it is going to enjoy a virtual monopoly in the future, critics feel that IU Net is being allowed in for a pittance. Since, nothing is known of the shareholding pattern of the IU Net, critics fear that a multinational might enter India through SV.[76] The government says there is nothing to fear, citing the example of Israel which too has gone in for a similar project. Yet, the US network is controlled by the Department of Defence and a clutch of Universities. In China the network has been built by Lucent Technologies but is controlled by the government. Despite opposition from within, from RSS and the party's trade union wing, Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), the government categorically ruled out any review of the programme, countering the criticisms through a

background paper circulated in the Parliament. A government official says, "It's true that the network will benefit educational institutions, public and private corporations, service providers for learning, training and research, but the fact of the matter is that the entire India data base, including security systems, will be at the Americans' direct disposal"[77]. Security officials point out that the US agencies want to see this project quickly implemented in their own national security interests so as to widely facilitate their penetration of India's information infrastructure. In 1995, the Australian Navy ordered a temporary suspension of the use of Microsoft software in the establishment following suspicion that Microsoft was collaborating with DIA for penetration of the Australian navy's information infrastructure. The same year an enquiry ordered by France government conclusively established a similar penetration by the Americans of the French navy. Recently a similar charge has been made by EU countries against the Echelon Project of the US and British intelligence, not just telephone tapping but penetration of the information infrastructure of EU Countries.[78]

In a quantum shift, the government has, of late, taken major initiatives in the realm of liberalization and globalization. The indiscriminate opening up of the economy in order to woo the developed countries, the US in particular, doesn't augur well for the social sector in the country. In the absence of any meaningful initiative (as well as the implementation of existing programmes), the new knowledge based society puts a premium on skill and knowledge, to the detriment of the large sector of unskilled workforce in India. Despite the BJP-RSS tussle on the issue of economic reforms, disinvestment and sale of PSUs, the government has gone ahead with its hectic proposals and programmes, and in the course, landing up with shady deals and questionable decisions. The increasingly clear contradiction between the rhetoric of swadeshi and the 'imperative' for indiscriminate deregulation speaks volumes of the state's receding economic sovereignty on the one hand,

and its drift from the redistributive commitments in a hierarchical and unequal society on the other.

The rise to power of the BJP has brought to the forefront the politics of education, culture and economic development. The state has taken upon itself the task of redefining what constitutes history and culture through its double speaks, fuzziness and connivance as and when the controversies arise from the government's programmes and policies. As it is, when the fight is over cultural space, it's seldom only about culture "... History writing is always a plural venture, with different schools of thought vying for hegemony at a given moment in time".[79] But when the state itself intervenes to reconstruct the past by extending patronage and doling out largesse, a purely academic exercise is reduced to partisan objectives. As it is, the future of 'history' lies in disinvesting the state from it.

The state's doublespeak and its penchant to occupy the cultural spaces in the civil society are fraught with dangers of communalization of the civil society itself. A majoritarian agenda, often at the cost of minorities, in a recipe for disaster in a multi-ethnic society like India. The controversy over Deepa Mehta's films, the attacks on Christian minorities, the attempt to prevent certain artists from performing all in the name of preserving the cultural heritage serves only partisan purposes and boosts majoritarian agenda.

The indiscriminate opening up of the economy without taking into account adequately the concerns for social security is a sign of state capitulation to the major players of the global economy. In a society, which lacks a shared system of social opportunities, the issues of social justice and redistribution of income and wealth acquire more salience when the economy puts a premium on 'knowledge', skills and information.

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CONCLUSION

A retrospective analysis of the unfolding of the political processes in Independent India over the last five decades could lead to multiple inferences. The questions could be many, and answers even more varied. But amidst all this, there is one truism -- Democracy in India is alive and kicking. The interplay of modern democratic institutions with a predominantly traditional and hierarchical social milieu had two-fold consequences. On the one hand, mobilization along traditional solidarity for electoral purposes led to the strengthening and legitimacy of the democratic institutions. Unlike most of the post-colonial societies, India has been successful in maintaining a functional as well as vibrant democracy where political contestation for 'allocation of values' has acquired social approval. With the institutionalization of universal adult franchise and periodic elections, peaceful transfer of regimes has become the hallmark of our polity. One distinctly positive aspect of the elections is that electoral mobilization has led to increasing political consciousness and has brought new social groups and classes into the electoral contest. The other side of the democratic experiment in India suggests that the state has failed to mediate between economic development and social needs to the benefit of the common people.

In the democratic journey of Independent India, the centrality of the state is unmistakable."The state has imprinted itself on the political consciousness of all Indians; and the presence of regular elections has encouraged them to believe that they may be able to exercise some influence on it, to bend its magical powers their way ". [1] This itself is the inference one can draw from our first chapter which seeks to argue that the state and its vast political space in India must be viewed as an

arena, a turf of sorts for the political contestation among different social groups and classes. This is also reflected in the growing realization among theorists of Indian State that instead of labeling the state in terms of simplistic, straight-jacket categories this leviathan must be viewed as comprising numerous actors, processes, contestations and participations; and in the process, being shaped by the relative strengths of the competing groups with respect to the vital question -- 'who decides'? Over the decades, the hold of the 'dominant propertied classes' over the state, to which Pranab Bardhan referred, has been challenged by the newly emerging groups and the struggle for control of the state has become much more vigorous, dynamic and intense.

The emergence of the Backward class politics is one of the most important phenomena in Indian politics which has over the decades, and more since the 1980s, decisively shaped the discourse of the state. The politics of the intermediate castes and the OBCs has come to dominate the regional/state politics and is also making a definite impact on the national level. The unaddressed structural inequalities and the uneven growth of regions facilitated this process and set the tone for regionalization, and as such in the 1990s " the centre of gravity of Indian politics has shifted from center to the states ".[2]

The northern and southern parts of the country have witnessed different course of the growth of backward class politics. In the south, the pre-Independence Backward class movement as well as the numerical preponderance of these castes/classes successfully challenged the upper caste hegemony over the politics and administration at an early stage. In the post-Independence phase, the backward classes were able to decisively shape the agenda of the state by the 1960s. Affirmative action and social welfare measures were the two important components of the backward class mobilization-strategy , which not

only displaced the Congress (and thus the upper castes) from the position of pre-eminence , but also produced a social milieu where a reconciliatory and accomodationist stance towards the threatened hierarchies prevented a violent social conflict. On the other hand, the north India witnessed a different trajectory. It followed the backward class politics not only with a time lag (compared to the south), but also in a qualitatively different way. The pre-Independence Backward class mobilization here remained mired in the internecine hostilities among the upper backwards. Moreover , the upper castes in the north Indian states were able to put up a stiff resistance to the Backward castes in terms of numbers, if not evenly matched. The land reforms measures were far from satisfactory in these states and left the agrarian complexities largely unresolved As such, the post- Independence politics remained dominated by the upper castes, and the representation of the backward classes in the corridors of power remained insignificant and inadequate. The north and south also differed in an important way – the backward class mobilization here was almost solely centered around affirmative action and without any concern for the social welfare. The lack of a vision on the developmental front combined with the intensified struggle for control of the state and its largesse resulted in a sharp polarization and bred violent social conflicts. The older structures of dominance were decisively broken, but the new elite and the social constituencies to which they belonged were equally ruthless and exploitative towards the less privileged among the Backward castes. As such, the poorest sections of society, largely comprising landless agricultural laborers and situated at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, more or less remained where they used to be, or at best, marginally better. The story of the rise of regional satraps in Bihar and UP underlines the extent to which democracy has displaced traditional modes of elite formation and created a parallel avenue for the

acquisition of power. The case of Bihar and UP is a classic one where the political elite knows how to mobilization and capture political power but has no idea how to channelize this vast reservoir of energy into social and economic transformation.

In the changed socio-political milieu of the north Indian states, the demand for equality has been combined with an assertion of identity. The process of Mandalization has converted the traditional disability of low ritual status of Backward castes into an asset for acquiring new means of upward social mobility. [3] The categories of the OBCs, as also of SCs and STs have acquired a strong social and political content. Politics in the era of identify assertion has become a contest for representation among horizontal power groups.[4]

The emergence of the Dalit politics in several parts of the country and particularly in UP, is yet another significant phenomenon. Dalit politics, through new idioms and symbols, has given a new voice to those who had historically suffered from the predicament of deprivation, exploitation and voicelessness . Affirmative action and political consciousness have enabled the lower castes to increasingly stake their claim to the positions of power and patronage. However, the current leadership of Dalit politics have almost single -mindedly followed the objective of pursuit of power, as in their opinion, capture of political power was the sole key to socio-economic transformation. To a great extent, this is true, but unless the political struggle is combined with the larger issues of education, health and social security, political empowerment may at best remain a partial solution to an essentially vexed issue.

The conclusion emerging from our second chapter (on Backward class politics) is that India has decisively entered into an age of

regionalization. The OBCs have come to dominate the regional politics by successfully breaking the upper caste-led pattern of vertical solidarity. The mobilization among the backward classes for electoral contest has raised political consciousness to ever new heights, and therefore, these castes are participating in the political process with a new confidence. The fact that these castes or classes remain in power or not is not so important. What is more significant is that they can no longer be ignored or sidelined as far as the electoral politics is concerned. Today these castes are very much instrumental in the making or unmaking of the government in many states, and at times, at the Centre too. Caste -based mobilization has indeed been successful in the political empowerment of the backward castes. At the same time, the caste clashes within the backward classes, between the dominant upper backwards and Dalits, in both the north and South India have sustained the structures of oppression and exploitation, and have precluded the emergence of a unified 'Bahujan Samaj'. The emergence of the Backward political elite has given voice to these classes as a whole, but the benefits of state's policies have been cornered by the more advanced among these classes. The dominant caste groups among the Backwards are unwilling to extend the upward social mobility and economic well-being to the poorer and weaker sections, and as such, the two are locked in an adversarial relationship. The increased maneuverability of the regional satraps has ushered in an era of ' dominant -caste democracy' in which the dominant castes among the Backwards have maintained an anti-poor stance. This itself precludes a more meaningful downward thrust of democracy and creation of a more egalitarian social and economic order.

The process of democratic deepening and the political empowerment of Backward classes have coincided with the phenomenon of deinstitutionalization of the state. And the contests around identities

have overshadowed the larger social concerns of welfare and development. As such, the ongoing social churning reflects itself in political instability in the form of short-term coalition arrangements in the absence of revitalized intermediary structures.

A very important development in the political discourse is unfolding currently at another level. Precisely when the lower castes , rising confident from the awareness of rights, are fighting the battle for the control of the state and putting new demands on the latter to deliver, the state itself is on the retreat. The increasing withdrawal of the state from its redistributive commitments in the new dispensation of Globalization and Liberalization has created a peculiar paradox for the backward classes. It is a paradox of ' political empowerment and economic exclusion'.[5]

The rise of *Hindutva* politics over the last two decades marks a qualitative change in the political processes in India. The 1980s & 1990s witnessed a continuous downslide of the Congress monolith and alienation of many social groups from it, and the rise of the BJP as an alternative to the Congress. The BJP and its affiliates used both the political and cultural spaces available for the activation of exclusionist interests and identities . In this project, they were helped to a great extent by the majoritarian agenda of the regime and the changing orientations of the state throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Through a systematic effort towards capturing the political space, the BJP has emerged as a party of governance and one of the pivots around which electoral politics is revolving currently. During the 1980s, the BJP, aided by various Hindu organizations, based its strategy around mobilization of the Hindu vote and successfully reactivated the communal fault lines. In the 1990s the party has almost perfected the art

of making alliances after sensing the political exhaustion of the Ayodhya issue. The BJP has been able to attract the regional parties to its fold now in almost all parts of the country, while the Congress is yet to accept the imperatives of coalition politics and alliance –building. [6] In a phase where electoral arithmetic rides roughshod over ideological predilections, the alliances between the BJP and a host of regional parties are merely short term tactical arrangements rooted in the exchange of mutual benefits and compulsions of power.

The compulsions of staying in power have also led the BJP to set aside the contentious issues on its agenda for political survival. The era of competitive communalism catapulted the party to power. Of late, pushed to the hilt , the appeal to a consolidated Hindu identity has lost some of its shine. No doubt the creation of Hindu identity remains one of the important components of the party's programs and objectives, but its sectarian edges have been blunted to some extent by the vagaries of Indian electoral politics. This also is the inference we draw from our third chapter in this work apart from what has been mentioned above.

On a natural terrain of Indian politics, the Backward class mobilization and the politics of Hindu nationalism should appear antagonistic . But the last three General elections in the 1990s have shown that both these currents have not only survived facing each other's onslaught, but to a great extent they have also benefited from mutual alliances and pragmatic compromises. In the process both have suffered too, finding it difficult to keep their social bases intact , and rank and file contented. What is noteworthy is that in the new context, political identities have become the new *mantra*. Because identity creates uniform groups out of disparate people that it performs a cognitive function in a highly stratified and unequal society marked with unattended historical injustices and half -hearted measures for

social transformation. [7] In the present context, where the absence of an inclusive blueprint for socio-economic transformation continues to elude the polity , sectarian mobilization has acquired greater salience. As Khilnani says, " The development of the 1990s as an emergent cultural pattern marks a serious rupture with the idea of layered Indian political identity... each cultural fragment is suspicious and resentful of the other, unwilling or unable to speak the other's language". [8]

The state in India provides the terrain for the political battle among social groups. However the continued deinstitutionalization of the state is a cause for concern. The failure of the state to mediate between social groups and manage assertions of identities is manifest. Of late, the state has often stepped into the arena of civil society and has tried to appropriate even cultural spaces. This trend is fraught with dangers not only for the autonomy of civil society but also for the legitimacy of the state itself. When the state takes upon itself the project of reconstruction of the past or to redefine what constitutes Indian culture, it does not do what it should be doing -- leaving socio-cultural spaces in the realm of civil society for multiple interpretations and contestations by the components of civil society itself.

In the last two decades, the newly mobilized social groups have constantly made new demands on the state 'by using the language of rights and self –representation'. [9] One unintended consequence of all this has been that caste identities have got a fresh lease of life and internal differentiations have prevented a broader social commitment and collective action. In that sense , accommodating interests and identities into a negotiable frame of governance remains a daunting task and the real challenge. [10] On the other hand, the sectarian mobilization by the forces of Hindu Nationalism has infused the civil society with a communal overtone. A multicultural and multireligious country can ill-

afford to equate democratic rule with crude majoritarianism. The sooner the forces behind Hindutva politics realize it, the better.

The nature of the political discourse in India in foreseeable future is likely to continue to be shaped by the forces of the Backward class politics and those of Hindu nationalism. How these two dominant tendencies of the last two decades alter the nature and functioning of the state and its institutions in a more forceful way, remains to be seen. And the discourse of the state will keep reflecting these changes. The electoral dynamics will be dominated by these forces unless some new alignments take place.

NOTES

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