

DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN MEXICO, 1976-2000

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Democratisation Process in Mexico, 1976-2000**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


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CERTIFICATE

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DEDICATED TO

My Parents

TRIUMPH

*Your cool touch,
Melts my heart,
My entire being
Exhilarated thus
Part to part;
Radiates the warmth of
Your pure heart.
The throbs reckon,
High hopes they hold.
Success beckons,
From future's open door.
Come let's keep pace
With pace of our hearts,
Conquering great times
Both new and old.*

– Sangeeta Gogoi (A Rage to Live, 2005: 53)

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ACRONYMS

APEC: Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation

BA: Bureaucratic-Authoritarian

BOP: Balance of Payment

CEB: Ecclesiastical Based Communities

CFE: Federal Electoral Commission

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

ECLAC: Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

FDN: National Democratic Front

IFE: Federal Electoral Institute

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation

GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

LOPPE: *Ley de Organizaciones Politicas y Procesos Electorales*

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NSM: New Social Movement

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PAN: the National Action Party

PRD: the Party of Democratic Revolution

PRI: the Institutional Revolutionary Party

PRONASOL: *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*

PT: Partido del Trabajo

TEPJF: Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation

PREFACE

'Democracy' is one of the most frequently used terms in social sciences. Yet, it is most confusing. There are as many definitions of democracy as many scholars. If one reads dozens of books on democracy, would prefer to keep silence on defining it, however, to some extent, would enlist some elements to conceptualise the term.

The present dissertation too does not endeavour to define democracy, but in the beginning (in the first chapter), enlisting the definitions given by different scholars, tries to come out with a conceptual understanding of democracy as well as democratisation process and attempts to implement them to comprehend the nature of Mexican political system.

Invariably a democratic system is evaluated in terms of the functions, roles and contributions of different political institutions like political parties. Political parties are the formal organisations for representing the aims and interests of different socio-economic forces in the political sphere. They are the organisational means by which candidates for office are recruited and ideologies are propagated. They provide national leadership. Political parties together act as the spinal cord of a democracy. Without active involvement of them a democracy cannot sustain. Therefore, the second chapter of the proposed study attempts to describe and evaluate reforms between 1976 and 1988 at party levels including highlighting the roles and contributions of different political parties in Mexico's political system. The political landscape of Mexico has been monopolised by the PRI for almost seven decades. With whatever limited outcome, the other political parties have produced a political ambience of conflict and participation.

If political parties are veins and arteries of a democracy, dissent is its soul. A principled political opposition to the ruling party or coalition is a must for proper functioning of a democracy. It plays invaluable role to enhance the efficacy of a political regime. Thus, the third chapter of the study examines the role political opposition played in Mexico's politics.

During 1970s, the National Action Party (PAN) was the principal source of constant political opposition in Mexican polity. And the ruling authority, that is, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the government was single and undifferentiated at that time. Consequently, the PRI was able to control the registry and recognition of potential political parties. Due to such circumstances, in 1970s small organisational forces played the limited role of opposition to the government. But they were essentially non-political. The credit of actual political opposition goes to the PAN. However, the PAN, like the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), was constrained significantly by the political giant, the PRI.

From 1970s till the presidential election of 2000, the PAN, the PRD, Labour Party, New Alliance, Green Ecological Party etc, emerged as principal parties to the role of political opposition vis-à-vis the PRI. They have played an active and vigilant role to preserve the democratic ethos.

Similarly, the role of civil society is as important as any other associative aspects of Mexico's political life. The scope of a civil society ranges from economic, cultural, informational, interest-based, developmental, issue-oriented and civic. Therefore, the actual political participation of the people in Mexico cannot be understood without bringing civil society into account. Therefore, the forth chapter of the study focuses on the role of civil society in the democratisation process of Mexico.

A political system may never be democratic if it does not adhere to pluralism and diversity. And a civil society generates the similar kind of value system of pluralism, diversity and tolerance for peaceful co-existence.

The assertion of civil rights and democratic participation by the civil society has proved undifferentiated from the democratisation process of Mexico. While governmental economic policies, political programmes and various acts and legislations functioned to democratise the political mechanism from the above, civil society's active participation into the process helped to democratise from the within. This process occurring from within the society was more significant because it was the citizens'

participation into the political administration for the better access to civil, political and economic opportunities.

The civil society's participation into the Mexican democratisation process is crucial for another reason that one must be aware of. Mexico is a multicultural society and therefore, its civil society is characterised by multiple interests representing various functional groups. Hence, the pluralist and diversified nature of the civil society made a strong and gradual dent into the authoritarianism of the PRI-ruled Mexico. It helped to spread the political culture of tolerance into the polity and society of Mexico.

Finally, the last and the fifth chapter, summarises and tentatively concludes the study.

The study of Mexican political system includes the following objectives:

- i. To show the historical process of political liberalisation of Mexico with context of political hegemony of the PRI and its gradual decline.
- ii. To examine the conditions of emergence of other political parties and their role as political opposition in Mexican polity.
- iii. To assess the contributions of civil society in terms of inculcating the values of plurality, diversity and tolerance and broadening avenues of participation.
- iv. To evaluate the defeat of the PRI in the presidential election of 2000.

The following are the principal hypotheses of the work:

- i. The democratisation process in Mexico started with the political 'opening' in 1970s which was accompanied by economic reforms.
- ii. The political 'opening' provided favourable conditions for the emergence of civil and political forces that ultimately led to the defeat of PRI in the presidential election of 2000.

- iii. The Mexican political system represents dimensions of electoral democracy that restrict citizens' participation. The system still remains elitist and the majority is deprived of political and economic empowerment.

The study makes use of descriptive and analytical methods to understand the political developments in Mexico which are observed to be liberalising the political space for participation.

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Ujjwal Rabidas

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Democracy¹ has become the synonym of modern political system. It is a term of praise, prosperity and political stability. It is an established order of things. The debate over the best form of government seems obsolete. Every country in the world is proclaiming itself to be a democracy, whether it is left, centre or right. Military as well as civilian regimes are equally struggling to secure the legitimacy of political authority in the name of democracy. Politicians with a wide range of convictions and practices strive to appropriate the label and attach it to their actions. Scholars, conversely, hesitate to use it – without adding qualifying adjectives – because of the ambiguity that surrounds it (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). Democracy is not only a contested concept but also a remarkable ambiguous one. Outside the few remaining outposts of strongman rule in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, virtually everyone with a claim to leadership seeks to legitimate that claim in democracy's name (Philip Green (Ed), 1993).

1. Understanding Liberal Democracy

The word 'Democracy' has been used ever since the time of Herodotus to denote that form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested not in any particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole (James Bryce, 1962). Whereas according to the *Encyclopedia Americana* (Vol. 8), 'Democracy is a form of government in which the major decisions of government or the direction of policy behind these decisions rest directly or indirectly on the freely given consent of a majority of the adults governed.' According to Mainwaring, the term "democracy" refers to a political regime that meets three basic procedural criteria. First, governments must be formed through competitive elections: this would include competitive popular elections for the legislature and, in a presidential system, for the presidential as well. Such elections must offer the real possibility of alternation in power, even if no actual alternation has occurred, nor may the outcome be determined by either fraud and/or coercion. Second, citizenship must be extended broadly to the adult population. In recent decades, this has meant early universal adult citizenship, though most democracies exclude those foreigners who reside within their territory. Third, democracies must

protect the rights of minorities and ensure respect for the basic civil liberties, such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, the right to *habeus corpus*, and so forth (Scott Mainwaring, 1995). Benavot writes that social scientists have used the term “political democracy” to denote, among other things, a particular type of electoral process, a regime in which certain political rights and liberties are guaranteed, the stability of a representative form of government, and, more generally, the relative distribution of political power in society. Some scholars conceive of democracy simple dichotomous terms – countries are either democratic or non-democratic – others view it as a continuum, in which nations can be ranked according to various indicators of democratic rule (Aaron Benavot, 1996).

Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and co-operation of their elected representatives. (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). Therefore, democracy can be defined as a set of institutions that permits the entire adult population to act as citizens by choosing their leading decision makers in competitive, fair and regularly scheduled elections which are held in the context of the rule of law, guarantees for political freedom, and limited military prerogatives. This makes democracy essentially a political concept.

Generally, when we talk on democracy, it indicates ‘liberal democracy’ in which the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision-making power is subjected to the rule of law and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasises the protection of the rights and freedoms² of individuals and also places constraints on the leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities. The rights and freedoms protected by the constitutions of liberal democracies may vary but they normally include the following: right to due process, privacy, property and equality before law, freedom of speech, assembly and religion. These rights are known as liberal rights in a liberal democracy. These rights are constitutionally guaranteed or may be created by statutory law which may in turn empower various civil institutions to administer or enforce these rights. Such rights and freedoms are essential

for the functioning of a democracy.

Democracy as a political process is obviously a matter of degree depending on the areas of life within the bounds of political experience and the number and qualifications of those considered adults. Because no ideal democracies exist and because there are always some areas in which the voices or wishes of the multitude can be heard or can make itself felt, the differences between non-democratic and democratic state are sometimes characterised as being merely one of degree. A democracy is distinguishable from that of a non-democracy on the basis of norms and practices that the former adheres to that hold it accountable for the public actions. Democracy with its true spirit can exist only at a theoretical level. Thus, Robert Dahl (1971) has offered minimal conditions that must be met for a modern political democracy or *polyarchy* to exist:

- i. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
- ii. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- iii. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
- iv. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
- v. Citizens have the right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology.
- vi. Citizens have the right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.
- vii. Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent parties and interest groups.

But a society is constituted through values. Hence, each society gradually develops its own 'value system' which encompasses the whole life of its inhabitants. The

interaction between the society and its value system produces a way of life, a culture for the individuals with unique attributes from any other societies of the globe.

In early Europe, there were no great monarchies like Assyria or Egypt or Persia. People were organised in tribes or clans. Sometimes a large group of tribes constituted a nation under a king of ancient lineage whom the chiefs followed in war. Then the power passed to the heads of great families from the king. The arrogance of the great families and their oppression of the poor provoked rebellion that overthrew the oligarchies and vested power in the hands of the well-to-do people. This was the earlier step towards democracy. It did not come from any doctrine that the people have a right to rule, but from the feeling that an end must be put to lawless oppression by a privileged class. Even John Locke, while surrendering the rights of the people to the state, had safeguarded them by stipulating that if the sovereign failed to defend their rights and security they would have the right to depose the sovereign and install another in his place.

The 21st century witnessed various changes and evolution of values unique to its own time. The evolution of a society with inclusive values is one such change which can be termed as historic. Thus, the progress of liberal democracy as a government in the modern world is vital for us and can be referred to four causes (James Bryce, 1962):

- The influence of religious ideas.
- Discontent with royal or oligarchic misgovernment and consequent efforts at reform.
- Social and political conditions favouring equality and,
- Abstract theory.

Religious ideas has contributed significantly for progress of liberal democracy. In Britain, for instance, Puritans viewed all Christians as free and equal, and therefore, entitled to a voice in the affairs of a Christian state as well as of a Christian congregation. The 'liberation theology' of the Church in Latin America brought the people together to fight the undemocratic practices of the authoritarian state. Similarly, certain royal

prerogatives, for instance, claim of the king or authoritarian ruler to levy taxes and issue executive ordinances without the consent of parliament or governing body, deemed to infringe civil liberty. Such prerogatives were resisted by people and therefore, we have great examples of the Glorious Revolution of England (1688), the French Revolution (1789), Indian Freedom Struggle (1947) etc. Hence, discontent with royal or oligarchic misgovernment and consequent efforts at reform was another cause leading to progress of liberal democracy as a popular government.

The upward economic progress, especially of middle classes,³ made it difficult to keep the masses in tutelage. It generated will to root out the abuses of oligarchies and created a more efficient administration. A tendency of the political parties to make political capitals for themselves by proposals to attract the unenfranchised masses spread the belief that they would be better cared for if they receive full civil rights. At philosophical and intellectual level, the abstract principles of equality, natural justice, liberty, citizenship etc. played invaluable role to prepare a large mass to stand for their own rights and thus, progressed the ideals of a popular government.

However, a liberal democracy, with above elements, has been usually sought and valued not as a good thing in itself, but as a means of redressing grievances or securing benefits. It is equally important to keep it without any decline in it after redressing grievances or securing benefits. This is possible only after institutionalisation of the popular participation in decision-making.

2. Understanding Contemporary Democratisation Process

Democratisation process is an amalgamation of democracy at a theoretical level within a society with its unique value system at an empirical level. Democratisation is a historical process of learning new values, attitudes and socio-political behaviour that capacitate groups and individuals to create and sustain a new way of life and new institutions to organise this life-world (Paulo J. Krischke, 2000). Thus, the prospects for democratisation increases when groups compete for resources through institutions and not through informal avenues such as family or clan ties, personal connections, and so on

(Ali R. Abootalebi, 1995). Thus, this process is just a tool to understand how the value system of a society is coming closer to the theoretical concept of democracy. Therefore, it is the bridge between the two. In other words, democratisation is also a process of transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

The democratisation process has been described variously. Samuel P. Huntington described it as 'first wave', 'second wave' and 'third wave' of democratisation. He writes that the current era of democratic transitions constitutes the third wave of democratisation in the history of the modern world. The first 'long' wave of democratisation began in the 1820s, with the widening of the suffrage to a large proportion of the male population in the United States, and continued for almost a century until 1926, bringing into being some 29 democracies. In 1922, however, the coming to power of Mussolini in Italy marked the beginning of a first 'reverse wave' that by 1942 had reduced the number of democratic states in the world to 12. The triumph of the Allies in World War II initiated a second wave of democratisation that reached its zenith in 1962 with 36 countries governed democratically, only to be followed by a second reverse wave (1960-1975) that brought the number of democracies to 30 (Samuel P. Huntington, 1991).

Huntington is careful to directly mentioning the beginning of the third wave and he is also doubtful about the third 'reverse' wave. But he is certain that between 1974 and 1990, at least 30 countries made transitions to democracy, just about doubling the number of democratic governments in the world. The wave of transitions away from autocratic rule that began with Portugal's 'Revolution of the Carnations' in 1974 and seems to have crested with the collapse of communist regimes across Eastern Europe in 1989 has produced a welcome convergence towards a common definition of democracy (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). Huntington indicates that it as a part of continuing and ever-expanding 'global democratic revolution'. He mentions the major factors that have contributed to the occurrence of the third wave transitions to democracy and are likely to promote the process (Samuel P. Huntington, 1991):

- i. The deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes in a world where

democratic values were widely accepted the consequent dependence of these regimes on successful performance, and their inability to maintain 'performance legitimacy' due to economic (and sometimes military) failure.

- ii. The unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries.
- iii. A striking shift in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church, manifested in the Second Vatican Council of 1963-65 and the transformation of national Catholic churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism.
- iv. Changes in the policies of external actors, most notably the European Community, the United States, and the Soviet Union.
- v. 'Snowballing,' or the demonstration effect of transitions earlier in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at democratisation.

Nevertheless, the process of democratisation has started and the countries are rejoicing to be leveled as democracy. Therefore, for some time, the word democracy has been circulating as a debased currency in the political marketplace (Schmitter and Karl, Summer 1991). Therefore, today the most difficult task in any political system is to solve the problem of the legitimacy of political authority. In a democratic politics where the political power is acquired by open competition, the chance of both gaining and losing legitimacy is very high. The locus of political power is not easily identified, and the wielders of power – those who make public policy – are numerous. Normally, however, those who make public policy in this society are privileged to do so because they have won the struggle against others who seek the privilege of making that policy (Krisinsky and Rigby, 1967).

Social homogeneity and political consensus are among basic prerequisites⁴ for a smooth democratisation process without which stability⁵ in the political process cannot be brought about. But a plural⁶ and heterogeneous society often lacks these prerequisites. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve and maintain a politically stable⁷ democratic

government in a plural society is a well-established proposition in political science... (Arend Lijphart, 1977). In Aristotle argued, a state aims at being, as far as it can be, a society composed of equals and peers (Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker, 1958, quoted by Arend Lijphart, 1977: 1).

By the end of 1991, half of the states in the world were at least electoral democracies and it rose to three-fifth by mid-1990s. It was a dramatic expansion of democracy with universal legitimacy. The term democracy had become so much a part of the popular parlance that the US State Department went ahead to identify democracy and human rights as a third universal language along with money and internet.

The remarkable thing is that after Huntington indicated the beginning of the third wave of democratisation, there is no sign of third 'reverse' wave even after more than 25 years, if we exempt military coups in Ghana (1981), Nigeria (1983), Sudan (1989), Thailand (1991), Pakistan (1999) etc.

The democratisation process has moved like a global wave. If the twentieth century was the century of totalitarianism, total war, genocide, and brutality, it was also the century of democracy. As Freedom House notes in its latest annual survey of freedom in the world, there was not a single country in 1900 that would qualify by today's standards as a democracy. By 1950, only 22 of the 80 sovereign political systems in the world (28 per cent) were democratic. When the third wave of global democratisation began in 1974, there were 39 democracies, but the percentage of democracies in the world was about the same (27 per cent). Yet by January 2000, Freedom House counted 120 democracies, the highest number and the greatest percentage (63) in the history of the world (<http://www.hoover.org/publications/digest/freeissue>). The table below gives better clarification.

Table 1.1: Democracy and Liberal Democracy by Region and Cultural Grouping, 1999-2000

Region	Number of Countries	DEMOCRACIES		LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Western Europe and Anglophone States	28	28	100	28	100
Latin America and Caribbean	33	29	88	16	48
South America	12	11	92	4	33
Eastern and Central Europe and Baltic States	15	14	93	9	60
Former Soviet Union (less Baltics)	12	5 4*	42 33*	0	
Asia (East, Southeast, South)	26	12	46	3	12
Pacific Islands	11	10	91	9	82
Africa (sub-Saharan)	28	20 16*	42 33*	5	10
Middle East and North Africa	19	2	11	1	5
Total	192	120 115*	63 60*	71	37
Arab Countries	16	0		0	
<i>Predominately Muslim Countries</i>	41	8 5*	20 12		

Source: 1999 Freedom House Survey; Journal of Democracy, 11, No. 1 (January 2000) and quoted by Diamong, Larry, International Relations: A Report Card on Democracy, Hoover Digest, URL: <http://www.hoover.org/publications/digest/freeissue>.

* Indicates a regime classification of the author that differs from that of Freedom House. Freedom House rates Djibouti, Kyrgyz Republic, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone as electoral democracies. The author considers all five to have levels of coercion and fraud that make the electoral process less than free and fair. Other countries rated as electoral democracies have only dubiously democratic elections, including Russia, Nigeria, and Indonesia.

Western Europe and Anglophone states, Eastern and Central Europe and Baltic states, and Pacific Islands comprise the main areas of democratisation where the level of development has played significant role. The Arab and predominately Muslim countries, on the other hand, indicate the trend towards least democratisation and the rest of the countries can be put in between. The countries are struggling to consolidate their democratic legitimacy through legal, institutional and economic reforms.

The countries across the globe have also been affected by the democratisation process in the adjacent area, as the East European countries were affected by the West European region but the domestic factors were more prominent. Thus, Rita Abrahamsen, in the context of explaining transitions to democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, writes that it is almost uniformly maintained that the real causes were internal, and that international factors were merely supportive (Abrahamsen, 1997). Though, the role of international institutions and significant events like collapse of the Soviet Bloc cannot be denied.

3. Nature of Mexican Political System

Before understanding the nature of the political system of Mexico, it is imperative to briefly describe the government structure of the country.

The Presidency is the paramount institution, not only of the Mexican state, but of the entire Mexican political system. Much of the aura of presidential power derives from the president's direct and unchallenged control over both the state apparatus and the ruling political party. The president is directly elected by a simple majority of registered voters in the thirty-one states and the Federal District. The president holds the formal titles of chief of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Priests and ministers of religious denominations are barred from holding public office. A president can never be re-elected and there is no vice-president. Subject to traditionally routine ratification by the Senate, the president appoints ambassadors, consuls general, magistrates of the Supreme Court and the mayor of the Federal District.

The legislative branch of the Mexican government consists of a bicameral congress (Congress de la Union) divided into an upper chamber, or Senate (Camara de Senadores), and a lower chamber, or Chamber of Deputies (Camara de Diputados). Both chambers are responsible for the discussion and approval of legislation and the ratification of high-level presidential appointments. The Congress holds two ordinary sessions per year. The first session begins on November 1 and continues until no later than December 31. The second session begins on April 15 and may continue till July 15. A Permanent Committee (Comision Permanente), consisting of thirty-seven members (eighteen senators and nineteen deputies), assumes legislative responsibilities during congressional recesses.

Historically, the Senate consisted of sixty-four members, two members for each state and two representing the Federal District elected by direct vote for six-year terms. However, as part of the electoral reforms enacted by the Salinas government in 1993, the Senate was doubled in size to 128 members, with one of each state's four seats going to whichever party comes in second in that state. Since 1986 the Chamber of Deputies has consisted of 500 members, 200 of whom are elected by proportional representation from among large plurinominal districts, and the remainder from single-member districts. Members of the Chamber of Deputies serve three-year terms. All members of the Congress are barred from immediate re-election but may serve consecutive terms.

The powers of the Congress include the right to pass laws, impose taxes, declare war, approve the national budget, approve or reject treaties and conventions made with foreign countries and ratify diplomatic appointments. The Senate addresses all matters concerning foreign policy, approves international agreements and confirms presidential appointments. The Chamber of Deputies addresses all matters pertaining to the government's budget and public expenditure.

The judicial branch of the government is divided into federal and state systems. Mexico's highest court is the Supreme Court of Justice, located in Mexico City. It consists of twenty-one magistrates and five auxiliary judges, all appointed by the

president and confirmed by the Senate or the Permanent Committee. The judges, along with the entire federal judiciary, traditionally submit their resignations at the beginning of each *sexenio*⁸.

The Mexican legal system is based on Spanish civil law⁹ with some influence of the common law tradition. The most powerful juridical instrument is the writ of *amparo*, which can be invoked against acts by any government official, including the president.

Mexico is divided into thirty-one states and a Federal District that encompasses Mexico City and its immediate environs. Each state has its own constitution. They also have executive, legislative and judicial branches. Despite its federal structure, Mexico's political system is highly centralised. State governments depend on Mexico City for much of their revenue, which they, in turn, funnel to municipal governments in a clientelist fashion.

The state executive branch is headed by a governor, who is directly elected by simple majority vote for a six-year terms. State legislatures are unicameral.

The Federal District, which encompasses Mexico City and its southern suburbs, has traditionally fallen under the supervision of the president, who appoints a mayor (*regente*). The mayor also holds cabinet rank as head of the Department of the Federal District.

The basic unit of Mexican government is the municipality (*municipio*), more than 2000 of which were legally in existence in 1996. Municipal governments are responsible for a variety of public services.

Municipal governments, headed by a mayor or municipal president (*regente*) and a municipal council (*ayuntamiento*), are popularly elected for three-year terms. Although they are authorised to collect property taxes, municipalities depend on transfers from higher levels of government for approximately 80 per cent of their revenues.

From the 1930s until the presidential election of 2000, Mexico was ruled by a political party known as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). It ruled Mexico as a political giant and controlled most important political offices in the country. In fact, it wielded the political power which is not second to the 'Hobbesian Leviathan.' PRI had complete grip over any kind of organisation in Mexico whether corporatist, bureaucratic, civic or political. Opposition parties were allowed to play a role at the margin of the political system, especially in municipal government and in the lower house of the legislature. But any kind of political opposition was made ineffective. PRI had all kind of arrangements around the political configuration of Mexico to prevail its political hegemony. Any sort of serious challenges to PRI's hegemony were opposed and made ineffective through an elaborate system of corporatist co-optation, electoral fraud etc. It selectively repressed the opposition.

The environment of political status-quo created by the PRI provided politically stable atmosphere in Mexico. Such political stability encouraged foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio investment in Mexican economy. It promoted huge economic growth in the country. The period of thirty years from 1940 to 1970 witnessed steep rise in the standard of living of the people of Mexico. Therefore, it was rightly known as 'Mexican Miracle.' This material prosperity proved sufficient for the PRI to reinforce its political hegemony and gain political legitimacy. Although economic growth helped maintain regime legitimacy, it also brought a series of remarkable transformations in Mexico. The economic prosperity was coincided with rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, high increase in the rate of literacy etc. The expansion of communication and information technology was another consequence of the rapid economic growth in the country.

With this changed scenario, one-party rule of the PRI became much difficult with similar fashion. In fact, the above changes that took place in Mexico are many a time seen as enabling conditions to prevail democracy in a country. To quote Seymour Martin Lipset here, "The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain

democracy” (quoted by Terry Lynn Karl, 1990). Similarly, in the context of political transition in Latin American region, James M. Malloy and Mitchell A. Seligson in their edited book *Authoritarians and Democrats*, write that a wealthy economy (in Latin America) made possible higher levels of literacy, education, urbanisation, and mass media exposure, or so the logic went, while also providing resources to mitigate the tensions produced by political conflict (quoted by Terry Lynn Karl, 1990).

These changes directly undermined the corporatist instruments of social control of the PRI regime. The economic transformation led to the emergence of new social classes in Mexico which were not linked to the PRI's corporatist apparatus. But the fruits of economic development were cornered by the minor faction of the population. It is needless to mention that severe inequalities in the distribution of material goods tend to produce non-democratic authoritarian regimes (Robert A. Dahl, 1971). The parochial and patrimonial nature of politics in many of the developing countries is associated with the control of politics and vital economic resources by powerful families, clans, and informal groups.

Moreover, development did not percolate to the majority. Hence, a popular discontent prevailed among the people that proved conducive for the emergence as well as consolidation of new political forces around the PRI regime.

By 1980s, Mexico could not uphold the rapid economic growth at the same pace as it was the case during 1930 to 1970 and finally, the economy stagnated.

The economic changes discussed above led to erosion of the PRI's state-enabled corporatism. It also encouraged de-alignment from the PRI on the electoral front. The prevailing discontent expanded among urban middle class, intelligentsia and civil society. Consequently, the PRI's share of vote started declining significantly in the 1960s in the urban middle class, intelligentsia and civil society. They were unhappy with the unbridled corruption and oppressive authoritarianism of the PRI rule.

By the 1980s, increasing political opposition and economic crisis were two main reasons behind the decreasing popularity of the PRI. The opposition challenged the PRI officials' conventional tactics of electoral fraud. Initially, the PRI encouraged economic growth but the nationalist-populist economic model increased corruption in business and the protected private monopoly firms became internationally uncompetitive. Economic rationality was replaced by political benefits. Economic policies, investment schemes and trading principles were primarily oriented to gain political support at the cost of economic prosperity and efficiency. It had no internal checks and the public administration also inculcated the same values of inefficiency and corruption.

These problems were exacerbated by further expansion of the state apparatus during the administration of Luis Echeverria (1970-76), only temporarily deferred by the oil boom of the late 1970s, and exacerbated again by over-borrowing during the Lopez Portillo's administration (1976-82). By the early 1980s, fifty years of corruption, cronyism, patronage, and pork barreling had sabotaged Mexico's economy (Chappel Lawson, 2000). Consequently, the regime could not uphold the subsidies it was affording to various sectors of the country. It had to deal out with policies regarding the welfare of labour, peasants, state employees and federal bureaucracy.

The above condition led to popular discontent among the above segments of the society. It also provoked schism in the PRI. In 1987, leftist-nationalist wing of the PRI defected from the core group, led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (son of former president Lazaro Cardenas). Finally, the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) originated from this leftist-nationalist wing.

The National Action Party (PAN) was the main political opposition force at this time in Mexico vis-à-vis the PRI. It had strong roots among the affluent section of the country. Along with other political parties, PAN got the maximum benefits of political defections in PRI.

In fact, the PRI's conventional practice of electoral fraud was again explicitly shown in the election of 1988 when PRI candidate Carlos Salinas was declared winner over Cuauhtemoc Cardenas amid electoral malpractices. With this, the legitimacy of the PRI regime had collapsed.

Table 1.2: Shows the important events that triggered popular discontent and decline of PRI's political legitimacy:

YEAR	EVENT	CONSEQUENCE
1968	Tlatelolco Massacre	Mass protest
1982	National Bankruptcy	Mass protest and explicit manifestation of economic inefficiency
1985	Mexico City Earthquake	Mass protest against the PRI regime
1988	Electoral Fraud of PRI	Mass protest and social mobilisation against PRI and increasing voice of political opposition

These were the catalytic events that triggered mass protests and increasing social mobilisation against the PRI regime in the 1980s.

Here, the critical impact of economic performance over the prospect of PRI is crucial to understand. Initially, with the good economic performance of Mexican economy, the process of urbanisation, internal migration, spread of literacy etc. took place rapidly. It helped the PRI to gain political legitimacy because the above factors proved conducive to prevailing political stability. It also helped other civic and political forces to stand with their own capacity. On the other hand, economic crisis made difficult for the regime to continue with the welfare and populist policies. Therefore, an 'anomie'¹⁰ became widespread in social, political and economic domains of the country. Consequently, the PRI had to lose its traditional authoritarian base in Mexico.

Still, Carlos Salinas had not given up his hope to reconsolidate the PRI. He did the following to regain the lost credibility:

- He sought an accord with the PAN
- Passed a series of constitutional amendments
- Adopted a policy of market-oriented reform
- Initiated political restructuring
- Selectively recognised electoral victories of opposition

Whether one blames the already lost credibility of the old regime, or accuses the progressiveness of Salinas, or one leaves everything to the existing conditions in the country, these reforms proved antithetical to Salinas' political aspirations. These reforms swept away most core elements of the PRI's doctrine. Further, the economic reforms and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s heralded the demise of the country's nationalist developmental model. While, the accord with the PAN and other political and constitutional reforms initiated entry-path of other political parties and opposition forces, the internal structure of the PRI itself lost the strength. In the early 1990s, the debate was less over the future of the PRI rather who would replace PRI.

Salinas' aim was to build a new social base for the PRI with less authoritarian institutions in a changed situation. His 'Solidarity Programme' (which targeted communities) was also based on this idea. His efforts were not altogether futile. In the mid-term legislative elections of 1991, the PRI gained 61 per cent of the national vote and in the next year it had gone up to 80 per cent. In 1994, the PRI also could manage to secure presidency of the country and Ernesto Zedillo became the president. Actually, the forces or factors that originated due the reforms initiated by Salinas himself and the prevailing factors prior to that had become so powerful and independent that Salinas' efforts to rejuvenate the PRI could not last long. Thus, Lawson mentions that the economic growth remained sluggish, and market-oriented reforms exacerbated already sharp social inequalities. Opposition and civic mobilisation accelerated throughout the country; the mass media became increasingly independent; and the regime - dependent on

foreign capital flows to maintain economic growth - was unable to resort to traditional repressive tactics to forestall these changes. An armed guerrilla movement emerged in Chiapas, and political infighting within the PRI culminated in the assassination of two senior ruling party officials in 1994. Finally, precipitous devaluation of the Mexican peso at the end of 1994 plunged the country into renewed economic and political crisis (Lawson, 2000). Similarly, Judith A. Teichman in "Mexico: Economic Reform and Political Change" opines that traditional corporatism is now neocorporatism, the old sectoral organisations of workers and peasants having lost power and been partially replaced by new forms of clientelistic mediation, particularly the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (PRONASOL)¹¹, a Salinista social-welfare program¹² that matches federal grants with local initiatives (Judith A. Teichman, 1996) (emphasis added).

As soon Zedillo became the president, the ruling elites within the PRI started fighting among themselves. Mass unrest was another problem Zedillo had to deal with. Therefore, he started further sweeping political reforms known as the 'Reforms of the State.' For this he had acquired support of the main opposition parties of the country. After all, these reforms proved more favourable to the opposition parties.

Zedillo enlarged the scope of reforms covering judiciary, bureaucracy and media. For the first time in 1994 eleven Supreme Court judges were selected by the Senate for fifteen years. Zedillo also earned applause from the opposition for appointing an opposition candidate (close to the PAN) as the attorney-general and also for making the electoral authority autonomous, independent of the government (Girish Kumar, Jan 19, 2002). The reforms provided autonomy to the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). All these reforms were oriented to democratise the PRI to regain its old political base. Though, the PRI could not manage to regain its lost credibility, the initiated reforms pushed forward a plural character in the polity and economy of Mexico. The PRI's grip over the power gradually weakened that led to its defeat in the presidential election of 2000.

The result of the July 2000 presidential election was a turning point in the political history of Mexico. It can aptly be termed as the 'Second Revolution' after the

Revolution of 1910. The figure below gives us an easy look of gradual decline of the PRI since its inception that led to democratise and pluralise the party system of Mexico:

Figure 1.1: Evolution of Mexican Party System

Governing Party and
Seats in the House

PRI 80%....Hegemonic Party
1929-1978

PRI 73%....Hegemonic Party
Restricted Pluralism
1978-1988

PRI 56%...Dominant Party
Expanded Pluralism
1988-1997

PRI 48%....Dominant Party
No Majority Pluralism*
1997-2000

PRI 41%....Moderate Pluralism**
(Divided Government)
2000-2003

*The PRI lost its majority in the House but retained in the Senate.

**The PAN, president's party, currently has a majority neither in the House nor in the Senate.

SOURCE: Casillas and Mujica (2003), "Mexico: New Democracy with Old Parties?",
Politics, 23(3): 172-180.

The decisive result of 2000 election is seen as a foundation stone for political transition of the Mexican political system. With the 2000 election, Mexico entered into a multi-party 'electoral' democracy and, perhaps, the decline of the PRI's authoritarian grip over the Mexican polity is invariably credited to herald this political transition.

4. The Democratic Transition

Mexico's Constitution, like those of other Latin American countries, takes its inspiration from the ideas of the French Enlightenment and the United States Founding Fathers. Rousseau's concept of popular sovereignty, Montesquieu's thoughts on the separation and balance of the three powers, and the ideas about checks and balances of state power developed by Madison in *The Federalist Papers* are the theoretical political bases of the Constitution.

In fact, however, governmental structure and political practices are a far cry from these models. They will not help us to understand the actual functioning and full significance of Mexico's government structure. The parties, voting patterns, elections, the "three powers," the "sovereignty of the federal states," and the whole apparatus of traditional democracy generally operate in such a way that actual political decisions are made in way having little or nothing to do with the theoretical models of the Constitution (Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, 1970). For instance, the article 3(I) of the Constitution of Mexico reads:

"It shall be democratic, considering democracy not only as a legal structure and political regimen, but *as a system of life* founded on constant economic, social and cultural betterment of the people" (Blaustein and Flanz (Eds), 1982). (emphasis added)

The above provision was enshrined in the Mexican Constitution which was drafted in 1917. Since then Mexico's single-party political regime constantly violated this very provision of the Constitution. Only the presidential election of 2000 seemed to have received the democratic feature of Mexican Constitution with the much awaited change in political regime.

The presidential election of 2000 has been characterised as a turning point in the political history of Mexico. In fact, it is considered as the second most important historical event only after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. But the process is not one of a sudden spurt. (a) It owes to a number of processes that originated through different sources and centred around Mexico City. And, (b) the process, as has been the norm in Mexico's political history, is driven by the idea of 'revolution by evolution'.

Since the 1970s, Mexico's process of democratisation has traveled a long path with ups and downs. The beginning of the 1970s was characterised with complete political monopoly of the political giant, the Revolutionary Institutional Party. Though, the other political parties, opposition groups, pressure groups etc. existed but a significant, autonomous and viable political opposition was absent. On one hand, the absence of political opposition and the authoritarian rule of the PRI on the other hand, assisted each other to keep their scope of activities narrow. The PRI ruled like a coterie. Corruption was rampant. The political programmes of the government were exclusionary in nature. The system benefited only those who were loyal to the PRI. The PRI had developed a complete hold over the polity, economy and the societal life of the people of Mexico. The voice of any kind of opposition was either co-opted or coerced.

Therefore, the slow transition of the Mexican political system over a long period of time and its full blown reflection in 2000 has been variously elaborated with different vantage points. The transition has been explained as a journey from authoritarianism to democratisation. Simultaneously, a significant debate has also been taken place to understand whether it is really a transition or it is just old wine in a new bottle. Obviously, there are justifying reasons for both the opinions. On one hand, the diversification of political scenario, recognition of various political forces and voices as well as defeat of the ruling PRI in 2000 presidential election are positively explaining the political transition that has taken place. But the existing structural hurdles in the political system of Mexico, on the other hand, have restricted the actual transition. As a matter of

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fact, a number of elaborations have been placed to understand the nature of political transition between 1970s and 2000.

Thus, the process of political transition in Mexico is to be looked at various angles, and the present study is an attempt to enquire into the nature of political transition in Mexico.

Notes

¹ The term democracy is derived from *Demokratia*, the root words of which are *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). The Platonic literatures reveal that in the Greece city state, democracy meant the direct rule of the assembled people. This understanding continued until the French and American revolutions. Thereafter, democracy took shape in the context of modern and industrial society. This time the rich merchants and landed aristocracy headed the idea of liberty and liberal space to pave the way of their own economic fortune. The domain of democracy widened to a large extent, but it remained aristocratic in character. Consequently, the democracy became liberal democracy and aimed at restructuring state power over civil society.

Democracy which is aimed at building institutional arrangement in order to secure a popular mandate for the state is the later development and, this is the actual matter of concern of any kind of political system all over the world.

² There may be a number of limitations on specific rights and freedoms but they are necessary in a liberal democracy for the existence of democracy itself and also for the existence of the rights and freedoms themselves. For example, there may be limit on freedom of speech if it is anti-democratic or may promote hatred in society.

³ In fact, the influential presence of middle classes is seen as one of the preconditions of democracy and is considered not less important than civil society.

⁴ The well-known work by Seymour M. Lipset generated debates over not only the prerequisites for but also the level and stability of democracy (Seymour M. Lipset, 1959).

⁵ Lipset's (1959) hypothesis that "the more well to do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy" has been very influential in contemporary explanation of democracy (Seymour M. Lipset, *Some Social Requisites of Democracy*, 1959: 75, quoted by Ali R. Abootabelbi, 1995).

⁶ A plural society is a society divided by what Harry Eckstein calls 'Segmental Cleavages'. He writes: 'This exists where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society (Harry Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A study of Norway*, 1966, quoted by Arend Lijphart, 1977: 3). Segmental cleavages may be of a religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic nature (Arend Lijphart, 1977: 3-4).

⁷ Political stability is a multidimensional concept combining system maintenance, civil order, legitimacy and effectiveness. The foremost characteristics of a stable democratic regime are that it has a high probability of remaining democratic and that it has a low level of actual and potential civil violence.

⁸ The presidential term of six years is commonly known as the *sexenio*.

⁹ Unlike the United States version of the common law system, under which the judiciary enjoys broad powers of jurisprudence, Spanish civil law is based upon strict adherence to legal codes and minimal jurisprudence.

¹⁰ Normlessness

¹¹ Anti-poverty and public works programme.

¹² Six senators and 70 congressmen that were elected in 1991 (19 per cent of senators and 24 per cent of congressmen for PRI) came from positions as regional administrators of the programme (Bruhn, 1993:300).

Chapter 2: BEGINNING OF THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN MEXICO

In the previous chapter, a brief introduction to liberal democracy and contemporary democratisation process attempts to familiarise the readers with various debates of democracy and democratisation. The chapter also makes aware of the nature of Mexican political system which has been dominated by the single ruling party over the decades.

The second chapter narrates the beginning of democratisation in Mexico highlighting the developments in political parties since early 1970s. It shows how the opposition, keeping aside its loyalty to the ruling party, increasingly challenged the PRI system. The ruling party, in order to consolidate itself, started series of political reforms and the political system of Mexico became gradually inclusive without losing its basic features. The chapter restricts itself between the developments of 1976-1988.

1. Changes in the Party System

The primary role of political parties is to serve as instruments of the competitive struggle for political power. Political parties are the most crucial ingredients of the political culture of any political system. They are political instructors of the citizens. They lay down the very base of political articulation. Political parties, as the representatives of the aspirations and grievances of the people, help them organise themselves. It is one of the aspirations of democracy to bring this struggle as much as possible into the open. It is the great purpose of political parties, the handmaidens of democracy, to bring the struggle under control: to institutionalise it with organisation, to channel it through nominations and elections, to publicise it by means of platforms and appeals, above all to stabilise it in the form of the traditional quadrille in which the Ins and the Outs change places from time to time on a signal from the voters (Cinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America*, 1960, quoted by Krinsky and Rigby, 1967: 113).

In fact, any political party originates on some common grounds that a large number of people share together. While a political party with liberal ideology may

represent the better off section of a society, a party with workers' orientation and socialist ideology may represent the deprived and relatively poor people. A party with conservative ideology may also represent the reactionary and status-quoist forces of a society.

As far as a democratic political system is concerned, a political party not only creates a political culture, but ensures healthy public opinion and mobilises people for active political participation. It acts as a bridging point between the state and citizens. On the one hand, it helps percolate the information of government policies and programmes to the people and also makes the state aware of public opinion and reactions over its policies and programmes. But, the political parties have no functions independent of the primary role, that is, to control and direct the struggle for power, especially in a democracy. They do many other things, such as enlighten and educate, but these are subsidiary to the primary function (Krinsky and Rigby, 1967).

Thus, the political parties – the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) – in Mexico could be seen as struggling primarily for political power between 1976 and 1988.

2. Opposition under PRI Rule

The National Action Party had played the critical role of Opposition Party in the regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. The PAN had been constantly vigilant in opposing authoritarian practices of the PRI regime as well as promoting its own interests to gain political power.

The National Action Party (PAN) was founded in 1939 by those who were concerned about the growing power of the State over the economy and the policies of then president Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), especially his emphasis on 'socialist' education and expropriation of private property. It is a conservative political party with centre-right ideology. The Mexican Roman Catholics, who were main political force

behind the PAN, were looking for a peaceful way to bring about change in the country after the years of violence and instability that followed the Mexican Revolution. They were also aspiring to achieve political representation and share in national decision-making process.

Practically the PAN is a conservative party but theoretically it denies being so. It considers itself to be a follower of a national policy which is able to guide the national economy and polity in a pragmatic fashion without being trapped into ideological conservatism. Thus, it can be seen as advocating free enterprise, privatisation, liberal reform, tax reduction, smaller government. It is a member of Christian Democrat Organisation of America and the PAN's political philosophy has similarities with the Republican Party of the United States of America. Many of its members are advocates of Roman Catholicism. The PAN has unsuccessfully opposed measures to establish civil unions in Mexico City and Coahuila. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Action_Party_%28Mexico%29).

The National Action Party remained outside the elected office for 40 years since its inception in 1939 and won its first gubernatorial election in 1989. Thus, it could not develop a strong national leadership. In fact, the loyal opposition to single-party hegemonic regime as a party ideology was crucial for the survival of the PAN outside elected office. Therefore, Joy Langston argues that because it could not participate in national, state, or local government, it developed as a confederation of state parties with weak national leadership (Joy Langston, 2005). Still two prominent features of the PAN are worth mentioning here. Firstly, it had developed highly decentralised rules of candidate selection which enabled the PAN to widen its scope of activities and support among the people, and secondly, its members (called militants) were loyal to the principles of the party and were ever ready to sacrifice their time and energy. These two features helped the PAN to achieve its central objective which was the most significant factor behind its growing popularity and that was to politically educate the electorate and build a civic culture. Thus, Joy Langston in "Legislative Recruitment in Mexico" further argues that in the early days of the party's existence, it had little or no chance of winning

elections in the PRI-dominated playing field, and as a result, the party leadership's central objective was to 'educate' Mexico's electorate. This was a decision made by one of the founders of the party, Manuel Gomez Morin, who recognised that Mexico's civic culture was underdeveloped due to poverty, poor education, and the caudillo¹ tradition (Joy Langston, 2005). Initially, the PAN developed itself as a mission rather a mere political party for electoral victory.

The PAN's electoral fortunes improved in 1980s and 1990s as more ambitious candidates joined it from north and central parts of Mexico with aspirations of winning the elections and not keeping themselves satisfied with the conventional attitude of losing. Most of them hailed from middle class background. They were strong advocates of market oriented and competitive economy. Why did they join PAN and ignored the other two? Because:

- The Party of the Democratic Revolution was not a choice because of its anti-market ideology.
- They viewed the Institutional Revolutionary Party as corrupt and incompetent.

These *panistas* were concerned with good governance, delivering public goods and services, civil education, gradual change, smaller government, free enterprise, foreign investment and tougher action against crime. Even Vicente Fox as a presidency candidate for 2000 election advocated active state role in economic and social life for Mexico leaving behind any kind of dogmatic approach.

The PAN's biggest achievement came after six decades of dedicated involvement in building a sound political base. It was the electoral victory in 2000 presidential election. It was a big turning point in the political history of Mexico. The PAN's presidential victory finally insured the transition of Mexico from a one-party hegemonic regime to a multi-party non-hegemonic regime. This way the PAN gradually cornered a significant portion of Mexican votes. The figure below explains that:

**Figure 1.2: Vote Share of the PAN in National Congressional Elections
(1991-2000)**

1991:	18 %
1994:	26 %
1997:	27 %
2000:	38 %

Source: Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE (www.ife.org.mx)

Note: Presented selectively from the original source.

Thus, Casillas and Mujica state that the Mexican federal election of 2 July 2000 was one of the most important political events in the country's contemporary history. Viewed in perspective, the election signified the culmination of a long process of transition to democracy and the delimitation of a new field within the Mexican political horizon. The figure above also explains this fact. They further maintains that with the defeat of the ruling party, which governed the nation for more than seven decades, the Mexican political regime has qualified for inclusion in the group of nations considered to be electoral democracies (Casillas and Mujica, 2003).

3. Challenges and Fissures in the PRI Regime in the 1980s

Political conditions were changing rapidly in the early 1980s. Internal fragmentations in the PRI were increasing. The left-leaning group in the PRI was not happy with the authoritarian face of the PRI. The prevailing economic condition in the country was also promoting differences inside the PRI. Ultimately, a fissure erupted and a new political party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) came into existence.

The Party of the Democratic Revolution was established in 1989 by Cardenas. The PRD succeeded the FDN (National Democratic Front) which was a coalition of four

parties and 20 regional organisations. Much of its support comes from the urban middle and working classes from central part of Mexico.

The core group that laid the foundation of the PRD was the leftist-nationalist wing of the PRI led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (son of former president Lazaro Cardenas) which defected from the PRI in 1987. This defection was caused by the inability of the PRI to continue with the welfare policies of peasants, labour, state employees, federal bureaucracy etc.

The PRD rejected the authoritarian and vertical decision-making structure of the PRI. Therefore, allowed sufficient degree of internal democracy within the PRD. It was a healthy tradition that the cadres of the PRD were encouraged to inculcate. Possibly this was the reason behind its limited but significant electoral performance in Mexican elections as displayed below:

**Figure 1.3: Vote Share of the PRD in National Congressional Elections
(1991-2000)**

1991:	8 %
1994:	17 %
1997:	26 %
2000:	19 %

Source: Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE (www.ife.org.mx)

Note: Presented selectively from the original source.

The PRD's first electoral contest was the presidential election of 1994. It got 17 per cent of the national vote. Though it was disappointing for a young political party, internal factions ranging from dedicated socialists to former PRI loyalists was a serious concern for the leadership of the PRD. Owing to the integration efforts of good leadership of Cardenas, the PRD witnessed a surprising victory in the mayoral election of

1997 winning 26 per cent votes and brought Cardenas into the office of mayor of Mexico City. Thus, Langston maintains that after the dismal performance of Cardenas in the 1994 presidential elections, the *Ingeniero* - as he is known by supporters - demonstrated his popularity once again with millions of voters when he vanquished his foes from the PRI and the PAN in the first elections ever held for Head of Government (*jefe de gobierno*) for the Federal District. Not only did Cardenas do well, he was so strong in the national media outlets that his city-level campaign helped elect *peredistas* from all over the country to the Federal Congress (Joy Langston, 2005). Now the PRD was an electorally viable party.

With the relatively good performance in the electoral world, the political ambitions of the *peredistas* had gone surprisingly high. It led to intensify the already existing faction within the PRD. Hence, it could not maintain the ambience of the internal stability. And, as the figure shows, PRD's influence decreased with the changing ideological dimensions in the country. Thus, in the aftermath of the much celebrated presidential election of 2000, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a charismatic *paradista* leader, became the Mayor of Mexico City and Chief of Government of the Federal District (Tina Hilgers, 2005), but the PRD ended up with only 17 per cent votes.

In the electoral world of Mexico, the PRD is a relatively new and young political party. Its electoral performance could not be appreciated much in the presence of the PRI and the PAN. But the most significant contribution of the PRD can be traced with its struggle to be a part of the voice of the voiceless, the poor peasants and the working class of Mexico.

4. Reform Process, 1976-1988

Over the last three decades the electoral system in Mexico has sustained numerous reforms. Only the small opposition parties were extended representation in the early 1960s. The *Ley de Organizaciones Politicas y Procesos Electorales* (LOPPE), a significant electoral reform was introduced in 1977. It was a form of proportional

representation. The reformed institutions provided new opportunities for the opposition parties and enabled them to develop effective strategies. Therefore, it can be presumed, to some extent, that the ruling party (the PRI) itself helped the opposition party to overcome the hindrances in their path. Consequently, it led to increase the level of electoral competition and also forced the ruling party to adopt new electoral strategies. Boylan opines that faced with the knowledge that they are losing power; authoritarian elites are thus inclined to use institutions strategically. They focus their energy on which aspects of the public domain they can hang on to under the new regime (Delia M. Boylan, 2001). For example, electoral rules may also be designed to advantage disproportionately certain partisan interests over others (Barbara Geddes, 1995). By freezing their policy preferences in such institutional structures before they leave office, exiting authoritarian elites attempt to maintain de facto influence – if not control – over certain spheres of policy once they are gone (Delia M. Boylan, 2001). However, the electoral reforms are explained in the light of democratisation process, they can best be understood as fulfilling the need of the ruling party to maintain its hegemony and legitimacy in the political system and controlling state resources. The concentration of economic resources makes it easier for elites to ignore or forestall political reforms that would extend important political rights and liberties to the masses. Such conditions also may precipitate other actions ranging from direct military suppression to more subtle controls such as limiting access to education or the mass media, thereby impeding the emergence and consolidation of democratic institutions (Bollen and Jackman, *Political Democracy and the Size Distribution of Income*, quoted by Benavot, 1996).

The series of electoral reforms that started in 1963 and culminated in 1977 addressed the potential source of degeneration of the political system. It was done by increasing the representation of opposition parties in congress. Definitely, it was not a political strategy of the ruling PRI to promote political transition of the political system to a more transparent and democratic one. The political openings were aimed at consolidating the political hold of the PRI over the system by giving the opposition parties access to political office. Therefore, Teichman writes that if tactics of political control have not changed in fundamental ways, most authors agree that change has occurred in the coalitional basis of the state (Jidith A. Teichman, 1996). In the same

context, Rodrigues and Ward (1991) argue that the democratisation process is likely to proceed only to the extent that the PRI and the government feel confident that they will not lose overall control. However, the political openings gave the system an inclusive form but did not allow the opposition parties to wield substantive political power. This way the ruling party maintained its hegemonic political legitimacy. Even then the opposition parties managed to increase their share of the seat to a total of 51 (21 per cent) of the legislature in 1973 and in 1976 secured 40 seats (18 per cent) of the legislature. Yet, the electoral hurdles were very strong and the Mexico's political system was continued to be dominated by the ruling PRI because (a) the reforms did not address the ruling party's hegemonic control of the state resources. There was no political force to stop the ruling party from using state resources to fulfill its vested political interests, and (b) the initiated reforms offered small share of vote to the opposition parties and that did not make it easier to win plurality of votes. In fact, the party system itself was declining as no effective opposition was posed to the ruling party and the PAN, the only true opposition party, was in dilemma between participating in the fraudulent electoral process and fielding a presidential candidate in the election of 1976.

After the election of 1976, it was widely felt that the reforms already initiated could not produce the desired outcomes. Despite the opposition was granted more seats in the congress, the reforms could not impact the declining political system. Therefore, again aiming at consolidating itself the PRI implemented a more extensive electoral reform in 1977. The reform package included three parts:

- Previously excluded political parties would be allowed to participate in the electoral process for the first time.
- Free access to the media and communication was guaranteed to the opposition parties.²
- A new system was introduced to increase the presence of the opposition in Congress that increased plurality seats to 300 and created 100 new seats to be allowed by proportional representation to minority parties (who won less than 60 plurality seats).

Thus, the reform package of 1977 widened the space of electoral competition by inducting the excluded parties into the electoral arena. It also made the electoral process transparent by allowing media to play its role. Free access to media and communication also helped the opposition parties to reduce the cost of campaign.³ The proportional representation also promoted a process of multi-party system.

This time again the PRI went ahead with the reform process to preserve its dominance but now the reform was more substantial. The reform proved equally benefiting for the opposition parties. Their electoral success got a boost. On the one side, the electoral reform lowered the actual cost of campaigning and it increased the opposition's probability of winning office on the other side. While the effect of the electoral reform on the political system of Mexico did not bring out a dramatic change in its political set up, increasing levels of electoral competition was the obvious outcome (See the table below).

Table 1.3: Distribution of Seats in the Chamber of Deputies by Political Party (%)

	PRI	PAN	PPS	PARM	PDM	PCM-PRD	PST-PFCRN	PRT	PMT	PT	Opp. Total	Opp. Vote
1961	96%	3%	1%	0	--	--	--	--	--	--	4%	
1964	83%	10%	5%	2%	--	--	--	--	--	--	17%	14%
1967	83%	10%	5%	2%	--	--	--	--	--	--	17%	16%
1970	84%	9%	5%	2%	--	--	--	--	--	--	16%	17%
1973	79%	10%	8%	3%	--	--	--	--	--	--	21%	22%
1976	83%	9%	5%	4%	--	--	--	--	--	--	18%	15%
1979	74%	11%	3%	3%	3%	5%	3%	--	--	--	26%	26%
1982	73%	12%	2%	2%	3%	4%	3%	--	--	--	27%	31%
1985	72%	10%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	1.5%	1.5%	--	28%	32%
1988	52%	20%	7%	6%	--	7%	8%	--	--	--	48%	49%

Source: INEGI, quoted by Martinez (1999)

Note: the table has been presented selectively from the original source

The above table clarifies that the vote share of the opposition grew from nearly 14 per cent to 50 per cent. In the first presidential election (after electoral reform) in 1982 opposition crossed 50 per cent in Mexico City. Apart from the electoral reforms, the beginning of the severe economic crisis had contributed to it. The economy faced a serious decline during the 1980s. Inflation soared to more than 100 per cent in 1982 and reached its highest point at 160 per cent in 1987. Real wages fell 40 to 50 per cent between 1983 and 1988, a great decline that the U.S. experienced during the Great Depression (Sarah Martinez, 1999).

Neo-liberal economic reforms created rifts within the ruling party, cut the patronage positions available and increased economic hardship on the poor. A major earthquake that hit Mexico City in 1985 empowered civil society groups that responded quickly and effectively to the crisis while government services proved ineffectual. These and other factors are credited with a substantial role in the liberalisation of Mexico, and they did increase the pressure on the regime to accelerate electoral reform. But it was the reforms made by the regime itself, in a move to increase its support, which introduced enduring change to the political system. The reforms put the opposition in place to take advantage of the public's discontent during this critical period (Sarah Martinez, 1999).

The ruling party of Mexico was also pressurised by the opposition forces to open up its secretive presidential nomination process. Consequently, the President De la Madrid tried to introduce a minute change in the presidential election of 1988 to announce to the public the name of the candidates. This was to give each candidate a chance to disclose his/her political agenda and garner party support. This could not stop the party elites to secretly pass on their opinion to the president. But it was an important trend started by the ruling party.

The selection of party candidates from the local social activists was another trend of the late 1980s. It was largely supported by the ruling party. It helped include new and transparent means in candidate selection. It was also an indication towards close proximity of the political and social movements. The political parties wanted to select

candidates from mass base and use the social movement's network to extend their reach. The candidates coming from among the social activists had immense experience of leadership and organisation. The Cardenas coalition, for instance, drew support from the groups that responded to the 1985, the student movement in Mexico City of 1986, local level religious groups in Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Jalisco, and other areas (Tamaya 1990: 124, quoted by Sarah Martinez, 1999). Various social movements, without proposing their own candidate, had also supported the political candidates.

The ruling party faced its greatest electoral challenge in the presidential election of 1988 when Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (son of former president Lazaro Cardenas and the founder of one of the PRI's previous institutional embodiments) was supported by a coalition of left parties, the National Democratic Front (Frente Democratico Nacional – FDN). Cuauhtemoc Cardenas lost the election due to massive irregularities but the victory of Carlos Salinas (the PRI's presidential candidate) met stiff challenges from the opposition parties. The National Democratic Front and the National Action Party vehemently opposed the electoral fraud and irregularities. Earlier the hegemonic PRI neither allowed for a formal nor a de facto competition for power. The situation seemed to have changed significantly after the election of 1988 owing to the electoral reforms taken out by the PRI itself to maintain its political hegemony. In fact, a myriad of new popular organisations have joined the political arena in the country, especially after the earthquake of 1985 which demonstrated the indifference and incapacity of the state to quickly respond to popular needs. It encouraged Mexicans to organise themselves for collective action.

The series of reforms initiated in ten years between 1976 and 1988, had brought remarkable changes in the political system of Mexico. It lowered down the PRI's control over the system, increased participation of the other political parties, strengthened opposition voices and a trend towards civil society organisations took place. But the reforms were not able to make a dent on the actual control of the ruling party over the system. James D. Cochrane writes in the Book Review of Riordan Roett. Boulder (Ed) (1993), *Political and Economic Liberalisation in Mexico: At a Critical Juncture?*, that,

since the late 1980s, Mexico has been experiencing a profound transformation. That transformation – or liberalisation is most visible in the economic realm, where the country's state-owned sector is largely being privatised, that is, opened to private investors (including foreign investors). That transformation has produced a more dynamic economy. Much of the economic transformation might be termed positive. The benefits of it, however, have not been widely distributed. The poor remain poor. Transformation in the political realm, not *wholly* absent, made less progress in the same period. Indeed, the country's closed political system remained that (James D. Cochrane, 1995). Opposition parties gradually became stronger and, since the spectacular rigging of the 1988 presidential elections, vote-counting has become more honest. Public debate has become increasingly open, and public figures are no longer treated with undue difference. To a visitor, Mexico has the feel of a vigorous new democracy, even to the point of the occasional bout of fisticuffs in the Chamber of Deputies. But there was no clear cut rupture with the past. There was no constitutional convention or major rethink about how Mexican institutions should actually work in a more democratic epoch. (George Philip, 1999). In fact, the reforms initiated between 1976 and 1988, could be explained from the vantage point of the PRI's efforts to consolidate itself and also from the point of creating a liberal space of participation of the opposition parties and civil society.

Notes

¹ A *caudillo* is a strong-arm ruler with dictatorial instinct in the Latin American tradition (The Economist, 2000).

The actual factors of power in Mexico, as in many Latin American countries, have been regional and local *Caudillos* and *Caciques*, the Army, the clergy and the latifundists and national and foreign entrepreneurs. In every case, these institutions have influenced governmental decisions. Their existence as political institutions are foreign to the European and American theory of democracy, and the complete liberal ideology is aimed against them.

A political geography of Mexico during the twenties would have listed every state in the Republic as governed by regional *caudillos* and *caciques* (Casanova, Pablo Gonzalez (1970), "The Factors of Power," Democracy in Mexico, translated by Danielle Salti, Oxford University Press, p. 31-55).

² The links between the media and democracy have been well established. Only a free press, protected by a cadre of laws and clear constitutional rights, is capable of challenging public authority and of holding the different actors in society accountable to popular judgement (Raboy and Landry, 2005).

³ But the access to media and communication was also conditioned. Craig and Cornelius wrote that the ruling party continued to dominate and control the media, especially T.V. and radio. The special T.V. broadcasts allotted to opposition parties are late at night or at inopportune times. (Craig and Cornelius, 1995: 255). Much of the access guaranteed to the Opposition in newspaper, the medium least used by Mexicans. Additionally, newspapers coverage is confusing because the government buys *gacetillas* – its own stories to publish in papers. For example, in hotly contested elections, the ruling PRI will typically buy a *gacetilla* for the space normally reserved for a newspaper's lead story. The headline over the *gacetilla* might say something like "PRI Wins in Landslide!" (Oster 1989: 191).

Chapter 3: OPPOSITION POLITICS AND REFORM PROCESS, 1988-2000

Political opposition is the watchdog of democracy. A democratic political system is unique in the sense that it is the only political system that allows political opposition to be institutionalised. This institutionalised political opposition may take form of political party(s) or of a civil society or some other organised forces concerned with the larger or specific issues.

The evolution and spread of the culture of political opposition in Mexico is the actual story of the process of democratisation of its political system.

Until 1988 the PRI received more than 75 per cent of the turnout at presidential elections. Despite this fact a dilemma it had always faced to retain absolute control and sustain existing levels of support while at the same time showing sufficient interest among the opposition in competitive electoral politics. This has been resolved on the one hand by ensuring support from the grassroots, and on the other, by electoral fraud and intimidation. These were conventional methods used by the PRI for seven decades.

In the late 1980s the only concerted opposition to the PRI had been provided by the right-wing National Action Party (PAN).¹ Although until 1988 it had never won more than 15 per cent of the vote, it regularly won a few electoral districts by majority vote. These sometimes comprised large cities such as Ciudad Juarez. Its strongholds are located primarily in the north of the country and in Merida in the Yucatan.

The opposition clout of the PAN started growing bigger owing to internal factions inside the PRI and its inability to respond to the contemporary pressures and social needs.

At that time electoral politics was the arena of foremost importance for the political opposition for political mobilisation but it was not the only area as the lack of genuine pluralism existed in other sectors also where people looked for alternative structures of representation and mobilisation. Democratic unions, national universities,

peasant organisations, social welfare provisions etc., were the arenas with enough space for constructive political opposition and alternative representation. The local interest groups emerged around these issues. These groups were not in favour of associating themselves with the political parties in the beginning. Nevertheless, they represented significant voice at grassroots level which was emerging against the PRI regime and seeking alternative structures of representation.

1. Electoral Measures and Strengthening Opposition Voices

The process of democratisation in Mexico has never been rapid. As has been the norm of the Mexican society to bring about revolution by evolution, the Mexican polity has also followed the similar norm. Two key sets of questions seem very important while understanding the slow process of democratisation in Mexico. The first set of questions is related to the PRI and its crisis and its efforts to regain lost popularity. How would it be able to balance the contradictory factors of maintaining itself as the dominant party as well as allowing for democratic space for others? Would it be able to sustain its legitimacy? The other set of questions is related to the effective credibility of the opposition parties. Do the opposition groups with left or right-wing ideology have real potential to provide an alternative? How viable they are vis-à-vis the PRI? How the opposition groups have been able to capture power in the presence of PRI and will they be able to sustain it effectively at grassroots level? Finally, what has been the impact of this process on the popular participation in Mexico?

As far as the first set of questions is concerned, the biggest challenge for the PRI was its declining popularity and electoral performance. The PRI's traditional base was not only moving away but moving against it. By the decade of the 1970s, the PRI had caused to be a distinct political party that could be treated analytically as a homogenous ideological group. It was more accurate to call the PRI an organised dominant class, having at its apex an official family or coterie of privileged elites (Kenneth F Johnson, 1978). The PRI had to pay for this. Thus, the PRI followed some measures so that it could hold back its position. Therefore, it adopted certain measures such as seeking

accord with the PAN, passing series of constitutional amendments, adopting a policy of market-oriented reforms, initiating political restructuring, selectively recognising electoral victories of opposition etc. Most of these measures were adopted by Carlos Salinas to regain the lost credibility and to reconsolidate the PRI. Definitely, these steps helped the PRI to do better in the up-coming elections but they led to largely democratise the participatory norms for other opposition groups. Thus, it became difficult for the PRI to retain the dominant position in the electoral arena in the Mexican polity. These measures sharpened the edges of other opposition parties.

These measures could be explained further with positive and far reaching impacts on the Mexican polity. A country having constitutional and legislative provisions does institutionalise any kind of process whether it is political, social, economic or any other important aspect of human life. Thus, creating a vibrant culture of participation² in all spheres of life. It further leads to emergence of ways of doing things with consensus, deliberation and discussion. This is the actual process of democratisation not only in the political but any other sphere of social life. Precisely, this was the process heralded by the tiny but very important measures adopted by the PRI for its self-fulfilling steps. It allowed other political groups to participate in the electoral process.³ It enabled civil society to deliberate and discuss the impacts of policies adopted by the state and judge their possible outcomes. Thus, tightened the hold of the opposition groups also which further led to democratise slowly the political space in Mexico.

As far as the second set of questions is concerned, it was too early to expect real changes and providing alternative structures by the emerging opposition groups as the PRI contested elections with all possible means to grab the opportunities to win the elections at all levels. Yet, with given limitations the left or right-wing parties worked hard to foil the undemocratic means of the PRI at all levels with their real commitments. That is why they had been able to capture political power in certain areas where the PRI was not less significant electorally. Thus, the opinion of Springer and Molina can be included here that the reality of this new political space is reflected in the openness of protest against the establishment and a weakening of political institutions (Gary L

Springer and Jorge L. Molina, 1995). And, if we talk about the impact of their efforts in the popular participation in Mexico, whatever we discussed above about a democratic culture, these opposition groups have played that vital role to spread this culture of democratic participation. The intervention of the opposition groups into the PRI's dominating political structure had also contributed to decentralise the political system which had been a matter of great concern. The highly centralised political system helped the PRI to maintain its hegemony all over the country. As the opposition groups started intervening into the single-party hegemony, a democratic space started cornering around Mexico. It further triggered another process of forming a healthy relationship between the centre and the local authorities. Thus, the intergovernmental relationship became more communicating and participatory. It was important not only to democratise but also to decentralise the power politics. With this Municipal Authority became more autonomous and the centralised forces were significantly weakened.

The above changes in the polity of Mexico are indebted to the proportional representation system as it allows a number of political parties to be present in the parliament thereby, increasing the possibility of multiple views and multiple ways in dealing with political process.

2. Political Liberalisation and Inclusion of Opposition Voices

The electoral measures adopted by the PRI had already initiated an ongoing process of political liberalisation. But the electoral measures themselves do not speak out the whole political liberalisation process. The process of political liberalisation can include everything beginning from a tiny electoral measure to the historic political defeat of the PRI in 2000 presidential election. It also explains the increasing political space for the participation of the Mexican citizens.

Prior to 1970s, Mexico had two prominent features in the political system. Firstly, domination by a single political party, that is, the PRI. And, secondly, only those parties were allowed to compete in elections which never questioned the dominance of the PRI.

Both these features assisted each other to maintain political stability in Mexico. Such political stability continued over the years. It was further helped by some other factors to remain undisturbed. In the words of Rodriguez and Ward (1991), these factors can be considered as follows: First, the destabilising forces associated with regionalism have long since been reduced within a centralised system built around an 'official party'. The influence of the military has also waned; and the influence of the Church, too, was long ago removed from direct interference in politics. Second, the *sexenio*⁴ structure and prohibition on re-election have contributed to stability in allowing a regular and predictable turnover of most government jobs. This allows for a realignment of policy and amelioration of imbalances among interest groups accommodated within the 'political bargain'. Third, as elsewhere, patronage of jobs and resources has enhanced political and social control. Rapid economic growth until the mid-1970s enhanced the opportunities for patronage. Fourth, the illusion of democracy and the sophistication of the Mexican political system has provided the legitimacy through which the PRI has been able to mobilise the vote and appease, manipulate or repress potential troublemakers.

This stability was immensely disturbed during the early 1970s mainly due to trade upheavals and economic stagnation. Thus, Darren Wallis quotes that from the 1970s onwards, however, the regime became subject to a greater degree of contestation from both opposition parties and new social movements of various hues. This reflected a dual dynamic. In the first place, there was a loss of state capacity arising from perennial economic crises, culminating in the debt crisis of the 1980s and the economic collapse of late 1994 (Darren Wallis, 2000). Consequently, the opportunities for patronage declined. It engendered a policy of political liberalisation in Mexico and it allowed for participation of a wide range of political parties within the political structure that was hugely controlled and shaped by the political giant, that is, the PRI.

Therefore, the elections of 1988 was a historic change in the political ground of Mexico as Carlos Salinas achieved a relatively narrow victory over Cuauhtemoc Cardenas who was candidate of *Frente Democratico*. The opposition also made major inroads in the congressional and senate elections. The opposition electoral success

received a further boost in June 1989 when, for the first time, an opposition party, the PAN, wrested from the PRI the governorship of a state (Baja California). Consequently, the opposition began to look forward and was eager to contest the 1991 Federal and the 1994 Presidential elections. Thus, the task before the opposition was to consolidate these gains and further intensify the political struggle against PRI domination. Therefore, it was very necessary for the opposition parties to have a sound political philosophy to provide an alternative against the PRI rule to foster larger political participation.

Nevertheless, with much lesser resources and experiences the opposition had to demonstrate greater success even in the local as well as national government and deliver resources to the local populace than did their PRI counterparts. On the other hand, President Salinas was working hard to modernise the PRI and to democratise its structure to regain the lost ground since the political crisis began to unfold in the 1960s. Yet the efforts of Salinas were not doubtless. Salinas had the reputation of being a technocrat and he had proved to be the best politician since Lazaro Cardenas. But doubts about Salinas' commitment to political reform were raised when several old-guard political leaders known for their opposition to opening the system were appointed by Salinas to key government posts. Based on government appointments of people who are opposed to democratic measures it can be interpreted that they were not inclined to open the system (Suzanne Bilello, <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF1202/APF1202.html>). Thus, opening of system, in whatever ways, was more oriented to consolidate the PRI than to democratise the polity as such.

For the above reasons, the government's move against corrupt leadership in the trades union movement was a necessary pre-requisite to any serious restoration of faith in the PRI on the part of the Mexican public in general or the working classes in particular. Thus, Bilello wrote that the dismantling of union power and corruption is considered essential if Salinas is to realise a modernisation of both the PRI and the Mexican economy. If the PRI is going to modernise it has to get rid of the corrupt union structure (Suzanne Bilello, <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF1202/APF1202.html>). The PRI, too, began to put its own house in order with a major campaign to democratise its internal

selection processes and to purge itself of corrupt and outmoded leadership. In spite of these decisive expressions of reformist intentions, the Salinas administration is widely perceived as following a gradual, incremental approach to political liberalisation (Rodriguez and Ward, 1991).

3. Political Opposition and Formal Institutions

The seven-decade rule of the PRI was run by full of unfair and fraudulent means. It had been using all the possible ways to reserve its right of electoral victory. Thus, it was very much expected from the side of the opposition parties and groups, in the increasing space for political opposition, to take to the street and demand for fair elections. The congressional opposition parties at federal level have successfully insisted on a slight increase in financing for local and state governments, but not nearly enough to alter the overall picture. As a result, localities just do not have the resources to fight deprivation, organised crime or corruption – to which they are also capable of falling victim – or to improve the level of education. (George Philip, 1999).

Whenever the official party won elections by unfair means, the opposition party activists took to the street against the PRI and took their grievances to the election commission and courts. The opposition groups had to negotiate hard to get their space for participation.

The opposition groups had started their hopeful journey of achieving an alternative structure with the hard work at local level elections. It was not unexpected as the higher level places were more strongly controlled by the PRI. Therefore, Todd A. Eisenstadt writes that the PRI-state's electoral stronghold was finally broken due to the patience of opposition parties on the right and the left, and these parties' willingness to challenge the PRI through informal institutions (bargaining tables) instead of or in addition to the formal institutions (electoral commissions and courts) established by the PRI-state to mediate disputes (Todd A. Eisenstadt, 2004). In fact, the replacement of these informal institutions by the formal ones is the progress story of the Mexican polity

to democratisation process and fair and free elections. Though, the formal institutions related to electoral procedure and grievance redressal etc., were controlled by the PRI but its compulsion to go for reforming itself provided autonomy to these formal institutions. With increasingly free hand for the formal institutions, the opposition groups pursued them with more trust and courage.

It is a well-accepted argument among the scholars that the 'trust' of the people and the political parties to the formal institutions established in a country is crucial to the survival of a political system. Again this trust is reinforced by the fair role played by these formal institutions. But this trust was not gifted to the country by the PRI's decade long rule. It was a result of the constant efforts of the opposition groups and the civil society of Mexico. The PRI had tried best at its own capacity to use the formal institutions to maintain its dominance. Thus, Eisenstadt further writes:

...that most of the groundwork for Mexico's watershed 2000 national elections, won by the National Action Party (PAN), country's consistent opposition party since 1939, was laid locally, through a series of postelection power struggles by which the PAN and other opposition party losers contested races at bargaining tables where they extracted concessions from the PRI-state for demobilising quietly. Through most of Mexico's democratic transition (1977-2000), the PAN and the more recent party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) were rarely allowed to win on an electoral playing field skewed by the PRI-state. But these persistent regime opponents did make small inroads – forcing the PRI-state to accept a PRD town council member here, or an interim PAN governor there. The most important manifestations of this democratisation from the regions to the centre were visible at the federal level, where the opposition party-negotiated autonomous electoral institutions allowed increasingly competitive parties (and especially the PAN) to actually be pronounced as winners in elections where they garnered the most votes (Todd A. Eisenstadt, 2004).

The opposition groups in Mexico had always sacrificed lives of their activists in fighting for participation. Therefore, after the results of the 2000 presidential elections, the PRI in a shocking mood tried to air the post-electoral conflicts claiming hundreds of lives. The Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF) first time ratified the victory of Vicente Fox.

When we compare the 2000 elections result with the 1988 elections result, we see a wide ranging space that the opposition parties had acquired. This space was much less during 1988. During 1988 the presidential race was fought with so much controversy that even as the president Carlos Salinas assumed office but the doubts remained whether he had actually won the elections.⁵ The runner-up opposition parties launched massive protests for mobilising support against the electoral fraud of the PRI. Finally, the opposition parties could not secure the presidential position from the grip of the PRI but certainly, it had shaken the official party's age-old tactics of winning electoral games.

Then onwards, the PRI started allowing political opposition inroads selectively and constructing independent electoral institutions. The demands of the PAN and the international critics played significant role in this regard. But these were not really used initially. Nevertheless, the credit should be given to the PAN for actually using the formal institutions to get the political grievances addressed rather going through informal ones. It was a healthy practice and a sound attitude inculcated by the PAN and thus, it reaped finally the harvest in the form of presidential victory in 2000. The Mexican election of July 2000 marked what may be plausibly figured as a quantum leap, because it allowed Mexicans to the power and effectiveness of their vote, testified to a scenario of rotation in political power, and upset the country's electoral map. In addition, new ways and balances of political forces arose in the Congress, and, now, no party enjoys a parliamentary majority, signaling the establishment of divided government (Carlos E Casillas and Alejandro Mujica, 2003).

Mexico's first electoral courts in the early 1990s were on paper and allowed the political parties to fall back on old habits of negotiating post-electoral conflicts. In fact, the informal bargaining had existed for such a long period that even the courts had no pattern and guidelines to follow just after their constitution. Even if the pattern and guidelines evolve in a country, they take their own time to be institutionalised until a critical mass of relevant political actors decide to comply with these institutions. To some extent, even an unconditional consent from the part of the political actors is required for

such institutions. If the consent does not exist, the formal institutions can be easily subverted.

Unlike the PRD, this consent for the formal institutions was visible mostly from the side of the PAN which often used various legal ways to consolidate its position. Thus, Eisenstadt writes that contrary to the pragmatic PAN seeking to maximise elected offices through whatever combination of legal and extralegal tactics appears most effective, the more rural and less educated *PRDistas* tended to mobilise first and ask legal questions later, if at all (Todd A. Eisenstadt, 2004). The PRD also tried to utilise the formal electoral institutions but its attempts and aspirations towards the transition were different from that of the PAN. Eisenstadt further clarifies it that the PRD's post-electoral behaviour varied between "anti-regime" and "transition-seeking" while the PAN's varied between "patronage-seeking" and "transition-seeking" (Todd A. Eisenstadt, 2004). Severe and even lethal post-electoral conflicts were common among the *PRDistas*, yielding few concessions from the authoritarians, while the *PANistas* staged few post-electoral conflicts. Such activities of the *PANistas* were conducted over the major cities only and always directed by national headquarters. The PAN's national leadership traded support to the PRI-state federal legislative initiatives and received interim mayorships and governorships. The PAN's tactics were so pervasive in the early and mid-1990s that it comprised the basic frame of reference for a generation of Mexico's most powerful politicians.

During the period of 1970-2000, the opposition party competitiveness slowly grew in Mexico. The electoral conflicts continued to be resolved in the streets and in the courts simultaneously. Such conflicts even lasted weeks and months. They consumed much official time and money. In most of the violent incidents the PRI maintained upper-hand. Opposition parties could do their best at local levels only.

Nevertheless, the political opposition and the formal institutions have helped each other immensely for their consolidation and gaining ground. It had been a very significant necessity for the democratisation process of Mexican polity.

4. Delayed Transition and Opposition

Earlier studies have not systematically considered the role of the opposition. They have even not focused extensively on self-binding through electoral reforms to enable the soft-liners to control the retrograde hard-liners, who in Mexican case continued to view the commission of electoral fraud in 1990s as their patriotic duty. Prior to mid-1990s, the PRI-state behaved ambivalently toward the new electoral institutions the three constituencies had forced the regime to construct. In fact, Mexico is not the only democracy in Latin America to have difficulties with its Constitution and with the institutionalisation of an effective system of personal rights. ...There is an increasing academic consensus that effective state institutions may need to exist if a country is to enjoy full benefit from free market economics (George Philip, 1999). When possible, the federal executive bypassed electoral institutions, choosing instead to negotiate extralegal resolutions to conflicts at informal bargaining tables, even though exorbitant sums have been spent since the 1990s to give the administrative apparatus the appearance of clean elections. In fact, measured as cost per registered voter, Mexico's 2000 Federal Electoral Commission (CFE) budget—some \$15 per voter—was among the highest in any country of the world. In 2000 and every year since 1991, the federal government has spent more on federal institutions than on entire legislative branch. In election years, electoral institutions receive more than the legislative and judicial branches combined, or well over 1 per cent of the federal government's programmable budget. Why the PRI-state should spend so much on these institutions only to disregard them at critical moments? The answer is that the authoritarians sought to replace the three constituencies by building the institutions but without planning to actually use them.

Constraining notorious and common electoral fraud by the most retrograde elements of the PRI regime was indeed more readily possible if electoral reforms bound everyone's hands within the authoritarian coalition. However, fulfillment of such commitments produced the unintended consequences of dividing ruling party interests and those of the governing bureaucracies in long-reigning electoral authoritarian states such as Mexico during the period of 1929-2000. Such schisms occur because

authoritarian elites loyal to the party continue seeking to maximise electoral victories, while those loyal to the government favour regime stability over party electoral victories, even if they must placate opposition leaders by conceding elections. Such separation between state and party in one party system is a necessary but not sufficient condition of democratisation. In other words, as the interests of the local machine bosses and those of federal technocrats diverge, the discipline of the party-state unravels and the strength of the opposition party increases.

In Mexico, the PRI state officials wished to open electoral competition in a selective and partial manner and this was done also because they wanted to update information about the strength of the opposition group and placate international critics. These were well-intended and calculated steps. The opposition parties demonstrated coalition strength within their limited openings. The opposition had certainly made good performance in the rural areas. Philip writes that there is more electoral competition in poorer parts of Mexico, however, than was once the case. ...The days when the PRI could claim 70 per cent – or 90 per cent, or even 110 per cent – of the vote in rural Mexico are now over” (George, Philip, 1999). They also colluded with the international actors who were supporting for domestic liberalisation in Mexico. Whether opposition forces the party-state to completely and uniformly bind its own hands determines whether electoral liberalisation proceeds to full scale democratisation. Where such credible commitments were not made by the state, the opposition parties continued resorting to extralegal means, that is, using the informal institutions in order to resolve post-electoral conflicts rather than resorting to the institutions created by the authoritarians. This process was much more evident in delayed transitions like Mexico’s than in the sudden transitions that witnessed mostly in Eastern Europe and South America. Delayed political transition like Mexico’s differed in the sense also that the PRI-state did not collapse, but rather withered away slowly and through a series of post-electoral bargainings in which the authoritarians seriously underestimated opposition persistence and resourcefulness.

The opposition forces managed to overcome internal factionalism, resource constraints and problem of collective action to outlast the authoritarians and decompress the incumbents out of office.

If an independent regime opposition exists, its course of action will obviously be constrained by incumbent authoritarian decision-making. But the opposition's actions will also be shaped by its own interests. It cannot allow its interest to be washed away. And while opposition parties do not become relevant actors in regime transitions until authoritarians grant some role to elections, these parties by that time usually consolidated themselves for years or decades. While their identities and fates are inexorably intertwined with the decisions of significant authoritarian elites, the interests of these parties must be considered apart from those of the incumbents, as they are important part of the explanation of regime transition. Transition is not just an insiders' quarrel between the hardliner and the moderates in the authoritarian coalition. There are also hard-line and moderate oppositions and they must be more fully modeled because with them, there is no transition either.

In such delayed transition, non-public arenas of struggle are often sought, but they usually fail, as economic and social conditions are not sufficiently adverse to the populace as to make them stake their lives on democracy, such as through the launching of civil wars or guerrilla movements. The main protagonists in delayed transitions are opposition parties, which tend toward the centre of the political spectrum, where they can more readily turn elections into anti-authoritarian plebiscites. But this fact is often ignored while considering democratisation process as merely a pact between the political elites.

5. Presidential Election of 2000

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) stepped down from the presidency of the Federal Government in a highly contested election among five strong candidates but without any prejudice or controversy regarding the results, which were completely and

formally accepted by all the contenders. It was unexpected. Nobody predicted that the Mexican political system was prepared to give up one of its main features and that the PRI would step down within the framework of legal institutions.

The overwhelming presence of a majority party, called official party, had been the old cornerstone of the Mexican polity. It avoided, for most of the 20th century, the appropriate checks and balances either in the separation of powers principle or in the federal system. However, since 1988, opposition governments had been a common place in Mexico. And that place was not unreasonable. The opposition started gaining ground as the PRI-state started economic and political openings. In 1989, Mexico entered into agreement with multilateral lending institutions to get foreign credits. Further it made the path towards the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to ensure economic growth. But despite widespread praise for Mexico's economic reforms and the renewal of economic growth in 1990, 1991 and 1992, sustained economic recovery has proved elusive (Judith A. Teichman, 1996). But in 1994 this trend began to grow at municipal and State governments and until the year 2000. One of the most prestigious opposition political parties (National Action Party), formed a coalition with another party, the green party (Ecological Green Party of Mexico), and reached the Federal Executive Office for the first time in history. It had never been thought of before. The first consequence of this opposition success in the year 2000 was the transformation of the opposition concept into a relative one in the sense that now the three big parties (PAN, PRI and PRD or Party of Democratic Revolution) and their alliances with other political organisations, are equally 'government' and 'opposition' at the same time on different branches and levels of government. They had come out with political courage.

Before 1988, the PAN had performed a good standing among the cities in Mexico, gathering significant votes from the urban citizens. This party got the first governorship in that year in Baja California. Then in 1977, the PRD won the first election ever in Mexico City, the federal capital of the country with its founder and candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. And now Vicente Fox was the first President after seven decades whose political affiliation was not from the PRI.

Fox and Cardenas (the PRD candidate) had been common candidates from alliances made up of different political parties and organisations that they had been approved by the federal electoral authority (the IFE) 1999. The confrontation against the predominant PRI had to be faced in this fashion; otherwise, any victory would have been very difficult. 'Alliance for the Change', the political machine behind Fox, was a well balanced organisation. It was integrated mostly by the most enduring and successful opposition party, the PAN, that was joined by a socially oriented, although divided, party, the Ecological Green Party of Mexico. In this way, the alliance focused more precisely on its two great constituencies: cities and environment, leaving behind any criticism for being corporative oriented.

In the 2000 presidential election it was evident that one of the striking shortcomings of the electoral system was the long period for campaigning in Mexico, almost seven months, which entails a huge public spending for each political party and candidate. On the other hand, Cardenas' coalition, 'Alliance for Mexico', integrated by the PRD, a highly divided PT (Partido del Trabajo), Convergencia por la Democracia, Partido Sociedad Nacionalista and Alianza Social was targeted fiercely by the PRI machinery...(www.lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/vrp/oropeza.pdf). The reason was that Cardenas had been the ultimate foe to defeat for, due to the fact that his father, Lazaro Cardenas, was still a national symbol. The basis for the PRI criticism and discredit against the PRD candidate had been his performance as Head of the Federal District Government, to which office he was elected in 1997. The public relations and non-confrontational image of his successor as Head of Government, Rosario Robles Berlanga, helped to buttress any attack on his administration in Mexico City and the electorate was not persuaded either by the PRI criticism around Cardenas.

Probably at first, Cardenas had made a service to Fox candidacy because the official propaganda directed and concentrated more on the former than on the latter.

Alliances proved to be productive to gather votes rather than disperse them in a multiparty election like the one in the year 2000. The highly criticised PRI stood alone in

the process facing the Election Day with a weak candidate like Francisco Labastida mirrored from a weakening President, Ernesto Zedillo, whose conviction towards the conduct of fair and clean elections had shattered the structure of the same so called official party. There is no doubt that President Zedillo did not want to use any fraudulent technique to make the PRI candidate win against all odds. He had strong commitments for free and fair elections.

Fox had conducted a marvelous preparation for the campaign well in advance before the electoral process began. The turn out voting was impressive. The results were also surprising. The PAN, the PRI and the PRD stood for first, second and third positions respectively.

In this way, the 2000 election in Mexico, besides its historical effects on the presidential race, it also helped to support the criticism around the proportional representation system standing in Congress that has benefited to the two largest parties and handicapped to the rest of the other parties, including the PRD, which is the third largest political force in the country.

The electoral system in Mexico moved from a monolithic system controlled by the incumbent President through its political branch: the Secretary of State for *Gobernacion*, that guaranteed for these more than 71 past years a permanent success for the PRI at all levels of public offices, to an independent State Agency. The Agency was independent from the Executive Branch, when the Federal Electoral Authority was created. The 1996 reform ended a more than centennial era when Congress and State Assemblies had been the final electoral judges for deciding who will be at any public elected office. It represented the end of the monopoly of the electoral colleges in Mexico. Since 1875, nobody had disputed in the country that the congressional electoral colleges were even beyond the reach of judicial review.

In this sense, the rule of law does not only mean the formal competent authority or whoever acts as an apparent authority following the law, but that the judiciary can

intervene in the electoral processes whenever they do not observe the constitutional and legal dispositions.

According to the adopted electoral reform, the ultimate authority to declare the validity of any presidential election is the Federal Elections Court and the 2000 election was the first one to be declared by this judicial authority. Even though, there were electoral lawsuits raised in all the 31 States and the Federal District during the preparation, campaign and certification process of the results of this last election, only 439 votes were declared null without any impact on the final results of the presidential elections (www.lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/vrp/oropeza.pdf).

For the federal level, the Court system worked out very well in 2000. But the problem that is now in progress, deals with the review power of the State electoral authorities for local elections. The achievements advanced in the organisation and justifiability of elections for federal public offices were in peril by the resistance and petty criticism stemming from the vices and frauds committed by state officials at local elections. In other words, the 2000 elections represent a clean example of competitive elections at federal level, but the federal authorities still have to deal with the problems originated in the States.

For long time Mexicans have lived under a centralised federal system when the resources and constitutional powers have been constructed around the presidential figure. Institutions worked smoothly because the Constitution and legal principles were among friends, but the new democratic model with governments and oppositions from all the three main political parties, has forced to rebuild the constitutional and political building in a more formal way than before. Nevertheless, the least dangerous branch of government has remained as such, without any important participation in the policies of the country until very recently in a very subtle way.

6. Electoral Triumph of Opposition

Mexico entered into 21st century with a democratically elected president, Vicente Fox who was not from the PRI. It was a historic event in the contemporary politics of Mexico. Though, it does not guaranteed the arrival of a matured and successful democracy, it certainly brings hope to the Mexicans. This is, undoubtedly, the democratic triumph of the opposition.

Before the historic event of 2000, each Mexican president used his constitutional power to consolidate the power of the PRI with the help of unconstitutional means for last seven decades. Every possible means had been used to suppress the opposition voices. Despite these practices the government did not face any threat of political collapse since the Revolution. Even the term 'Revolution' has also been used as a rhetoric by the privileged class of people. Carlos Fuentes, a Mexican novelist wrote:

A Revolution is fought by men of flesh and blood, not by saints, and every revolution ends with the creation of a new privileged class...the ruling class in Mexico, alias the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, alias the President of the Republic, equals: the nation, the Revolution, the glories of the past, the Aztecs, everything. So they have to promote a revolutionary rhetoric that strikes deep chords in Mexico, because it is the source of political power. Mexico is not prosperous enough to be governed without a revolutionary rhetoric (quoted by John A. Crow, 1972).

But the credibility of the PRI suffered significantly at domestic and national levels. The monopoly power of the PRI remained unaffected due the clientelistic, authoritarian and repressive means adopted by it. The Mexican Constitution of 1917, the biggest achievement of the Revolution, remained in paper but was not put into practice by the vested interest of the PRI.

The monopoly power of the PRI remained largely unchanged despite the electoral law passed in late 1950s that officially recognised the right of the opposition parties to have representative in the Congress. The administration did not face much opposition

from the organised labour or peasant groups. The opposition came from within the professional classes. The situation remained intact for a long time.

The presidential election of 1988 that made Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94) President of Mexico proved to be most contested since 1929. In this election the other political parties directly challenged the PRI control and monopoly. Fraud was charged and political reform was in the air. The government was obliged to recognise the opposition victories. Between 1988 and 1991 the opposition parties secured 240 of the 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Manuel Chavez and Paloma Bauer, 2003).

Salinas initially promulgated a populist programme called the Economic Solidarity Pact, later named the Pact for Stability and Growth. Thus, Judith Teichman mentions that traditional corporatism is now neocorporatism, the old sectoral organisations of workers and peasants having lost power and been partially replaced by new forms of clientelistic mediation, particularly the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONOSOL), a Salinista social-welfare programme that matches federal grants with local initiatives (Judith A. Teichman, 1996). The pact sought to compensate for the declining wages of most workers. This programme relied on accelerating austerity measures, privatisation and trade liberalisation. The reforms were initiated by the executives and did not result from a national consensus or a national debate. They were imposed by Salinas. These programmes were used to further strengthen the presidential power and the PRI stronghold. Salinas was more considerate on changing Mexico's image in order to promote trade and investment. He tried to promote an image of a recovering economy and an evolving democracy. In fact, the policies introduced by Salinas provoked debate and controversy. Meanwhile, the Chiapas uprising of January 1994 shattered the years of relative peace in Mexico. Moreover, the financial crisis of December 1994 deepened the nation's already widespread economic stagnation.

In 1990, a major electoral reform came into place which proved more fruitful to the opposition. It was the creation of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) (it was proposed by Salinas) as a completely autonomous institution in order to conduct the

entire electoral process in a professional manner. The creation of the Federal Electoral Institute and its importance can be viewed with several angles. The most important aspect is that it largely insured the free and fair elections. Thus, providing more teeth to the voice of the opposition groups. The creation of the Federal Electoral Institute was aimed by the PRI at consolidating itself. But it further helped to spread a democratic will of participation.

One another significant aspect to be added here was the presence of electoral observers, national as well foreign. The national and foreign electoral observers were welcomed since 1993 to both voting preparation and to the electoral process also. Since then the Federal Electoral Institute had proved itself to be capable enough to carry out its electoral duties.

The 2000 presidential election proved to be a great relief for the democratic transition process itself when the non-PRI candidate, Vicente Fox was elected president. Fox a businessman and one-time Coca Cola Company senior executive, had already help political office – as a federal deputy and as governor of the centre state of Guanajuato; within his own party, he belonged to a reformist movement known as *neopanismo* (Carlos E Casillas and Alcjandro Mujica, 2003).

It was a long awaited transition to democracy. It was again important to note that most of the political events happening after 1994 had tacit approval of the President Zedillo. He restrained the PRI militants from trying to use unconstitutional means to maintain hegemonic control of their party at national politics. It was again the President Zedillo's endorsement of the Federal Electoral Institute and of the electoral observers that made it possible to lead a process of political transition. He had high commitments for transparency. His commitments resulted in a historic election that he honoured and respected. His efforts had credence and legitimacy to the democratic politics in Mexico.

Undoubtedly, the election of 2000 was a democratic triumph of the opposition which constantly fought for its democratic rights and political space for representation

into the national politics. Vicente Fox after being elected as the first non-PRI president of the country, promised to respect the constitution and to end the era of presidentialism and authoritarianism. The consolidation of political reform, independent judiciary and legislature and end of manipulation and fraud were his other promises to the Mexican citizens. It was beginning of a new era of political liberty heralded by the political opposition in Mexico.

Notes

¹ Established to combat the left-wing tendencies adopted by President Cardenas, the PAN attracts support from conservative business circles, provincial and large city middle classes, and from the Catholic Church.

² Participation is intimately connected with demands of equality. At the most immediate level, democratic participation requires the sharing and symmetry of basic political rights – to vote, to propagate and to criticise. Actual participation in political movements and public action can make a major difference to the agenda of governments and influence its priorities (Dreze and Sen, 1989).

³ The participation in the electoral process may be helpful to alter the political power, but may not be compulsorily so. Adam Przeworski argues, “New people are recruited into political institutions when the stability of these institutions is already threatened; ... incorporation into the existing institutions is a strategy that serves to keep things as they are; in short ... electoral mobilisation is a process through which electoral institutions preserve their stability (Przeworski, 1975). For Mexico’s ruling elite, electoral participation has provided a channel in which to direct the Mexican masses, an alternative to the path of violent confrontation (Joseph L. Klesner 1997). Therefore, Davis and Coleman suggest that because the electoral process provides institutionalised channels for expressing opposition, it defuses the potential for direct, spontaneous, anti-regime political activity based on coercion (Charles L. Davis and Kenneth M. Coleman, 1982).

⁴ *Sexenio*, in Mexico, is the presidential term of six years.

⁵ The 1988 results were so doubted, strong demands for further electoral reforms rose from across the political spectrum, electoral reforms that would have clear consequences for electoral participation and its role in the Mexican political system (Klesner, Joseph L. (1997).

Chapter 4: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS

The idea of civil society is central, directly or indirectly, to the majority of the narrations of democracy and democratisation. An autonomous civil society is seen as the safety valve against the authoritarian practices of an undemocratic state. Gramsci characterised civil society as having the potential for a dual autonomy from both the state and the economy. He was, therefore, the first to articulate the idea that civil society could actually be resistant to state power as, in his well known phrase, so many 'earthworks and buttresses' (Gramsci, 1971, quoted by Gideon Baker, 1998). In fact, democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society (Robert Putnam, 1993).¹

The term civil society is often traced to Adam Ferguson who saw the development of a 'commercial state' as a way to change the corrupt feudal order and strengthen the liberty of the individual (Adam Ferguson, 1767). Civil society is composed of the totality of voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the force-backed structures of a state (regardless of that state's political system) and commercial institutions. Larry Diamond (1999) defined civil society as the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. He further wrote that democracy – in particular, a healthy liberal democracy – requires a public that is organised for democracy, socialised to its norms and values, and committed not just to its myriad narrow interests but to larger, common, civic ends. Such a civil public is only possible with a vibrant civil society (Diamond, 1999). Wolfe (1989: 20) refers civil society as families, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, voluntarism, spontaneous groups and movements, whereas, for Rueschemeyer (1998: 18), civil society is the ensemble of organised social activities, formal and informal, that are not directly grounded in family and kinship, economic production and exchange, or the state but are politically relevant.

For some theorists, civil society represents autonomous associations that exist independently of the state; associations which curtail the power of the state while simultaneously allowing individuals and groups in society to manage their affairs directly. By this reckoning civil society is another name for voluntary associations of all types, from football associations and theatre groups to trade unions, churches and caste panchayats.² Irrespective of the goals that these associations pursue and without consideration to the way they impact upon the freedom and rights of all citizens, all forms of collectivities are seen as agencies of civil society and weighted positively (Gurpreet Mahajan, 1999).

Centre for Civil Society of the London School of Economics' working definition is illustrative:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics>).

Civil Society, in other words, is instituted by actors like social movements, interest groups, non-governmental organisations, and other non-economic, non-state actors who are quite diverse in their modes of organisation and their goals. As a group, they can be called civil society organisations (Friedman and Hochstetler, 2002).

Robert Putnam's work in recent times, on the political development of Italian regions has helped revive the concept of civil society. Putnam observed that "social capital" understood as features of social organisations such as trust, norms and network rather than socio-economic development was the central explanatory variable. In

Putnam's analysis, the propensity of individuals to join private, voluntary associations contributes to the effectiveness of democracy. (Robert Putnam, 1993).

Thus, in Mexican context, to understand the process of political transition from authoritarianism to democracy, civil society is the most effective tool one can apply.

The developing part of this chapter on civil society starts narrating how civil society emerged in Mexico. The next part discusses the impact of economic and political opening on civil society with their relationship with each-other. Thereafter, with a short description of the periods of eighties and nineties, the chapter highlights the role of civil society in the context of political transition to democracy.

1. Emergence of Civil Society in Mexico

The political hegemony of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) and the emergence of the civil society in Mexico share close proximity.³ Both are like twins. While the political hegemony of the PRI implanted the seeds out of which the civil society grew, the latter axed the political roots of authoritarianism of the PRI. These twin processes are the evidences of the rise of democracy in Mexico.

Mexico witnessed a number of transitions beginning in 1970s. The PRI started loosing its authoritarian control over the political system of the country. The opposition voices became stronger. People were striving for an alternative structure of political representation. The Mexican economy started gaining liberal outlook. The whole country was in an unalterable and a progressive process of a historical transformation. The emergence of the civil society, in such a scenario, added momentum to the ongoing process. President Luis Echeverria's administration (1970-1976) marked the beginning of a new wave of social movements around the country and the emergence of a new tradition of autonomous association (Olvera, www.lasociedadcivil.org/uploads/ciberteca/civil_society_and_political_transition_in_me

[xico_alberto_j.pdf](#)). The emergence of civil society was the emergence of new social actors in Mexican polity who could not be co-opted by traditional means of the PRI.⁴

A number of movements sprang up around Mexico. Workers, urban-dwellers, peasants, students, teachers, entrepreneurs – all started creating autonomous associations. This movement had two distinct factors: a) an accepted tradition of mass mobilisation and; b) scope and influence of local settings. The PRI regime had originated with the tag of a Revolution. Gradually, it adopted an inclusive character but continued to repress social movements. Peter Ward describes the 1970s that periodically social pressures boil over into conflict and protest. There is unrest in many rural areas, and the 1970s saw ‘social movements’⁵ emerge in several Mexican cities, most notably in the north. However, the state has usually managed to contain these pressures through patron-clientelism, co-optation and, if all else fails, repression (Peter Ward, 1986). This was the reason that any kind of social movements in Mexico relied on mobilising the masses without which the PRI politics could not be confronted with.

The scope and influence of the civil society was confined to the local settings due to its lack of contact with the national political parties. Obviously, the political parties like the National Action Party (PAN), the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) etc, in the beginning of political inclusion by the PRI regime, concentrated more on penetrating the PRI structure at national level.

The civil society in Mexico is much indebted to the economic liberalism and electoral democracy for its genesis. Prior to 1970s, the civil society could not emerge in Mexico because the small elites of landowners and merchants controlled the productive sources. It did not create a favourable condition for the emergence of civil society. The oligarchic domination created a subordinating superstructure around the country. It created highly repressive state machinery controlled by the PRI. Mexico paralleled with a *Bureaucratic-Authoritarian* (BA) regime as Guillermo O’Donnell calls it.

This was not unique only to Mexico. The whole of Latin American region seemed to have followed more or less a similar pattern. Abdul Nafey, professor of Latin American Studies, cites two reasons for this. First reason is the socio-economic structures of Latin America, especially the pattern of landholdings have, for centuries, shown extreme rigidities, maintaining to this day sharp economic inequalities and social hierarchies. Also, political elites have changed, so have expanded the electorate and the types of regime but the political pattern of elite domination has remained since the period of independence (Abdul Nafey, 2004).

The second notable reason, as has been explained above, is the role of the state. For most of its history, state in Latin America has remained central and major issues of political inclusion-exclusion and economic growth-distribution have been worked out by and through the medium of the state. The introduction of market-oriented economic policies and reversal of the state position since the 1980s constitute a historic change in the role of the state. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy here is that there can be no evaluation of civil society without discussion the role of the state in Latin America (Abdul Nafey, 2004).

When the democratisation process had started in Mexico in 1970s, civil society had a narrow base. But as the PRI regime started economic and political openings to acquire legitimacy, civil society expanded rapidly. Civil societies could expand rapidly because they were seemingly non-political associations. The other reason was that they remained issue-specific and community-based. They were soup kitchens, neighbourhood community organisations, ecclesiastical based communities, women's organisation, teachers' organisations, environmental organisations. They built popular pressures over the PRI regime.

Civil society in Mexico started as localised movements. These localised movements are clubbed as 'New Social Movements' (NSMs) in Mexico and in other countries of Latin American region. The New Social Movements are differentiated from that of the 'old' social movements which were considered to be building blocks of

socialism. In all cases, new movements may be distinguished from traditional political parties and unions in that they focus on the real of consumption rather than production. But new social movements in Europe mainly represent a response to post-industrial contradictions, and those in Latin America primarily arise in response to clearly material demands (Judith Adler Hellman, 1992). It is difficult to define the New Social Movements. Therefore, again to quote Prof. Abdul Nafey who clearly brings out the characteristics of the New Social Movements for conceptual purpose:

...NSMs include neighbourhood based urban popular movements which organise to fight for housing and public services like electricity, potable water, public transport, and at a more developed stage, schools and clinics. Local self-help organisations, cooperative soup kitchens and the CEBs in which nuns, priests and lay Catholics organise among the poor to combine popular religious practices with the struggle for collective goods are also included in the NSMs. Human rights groups, environmental and indigenous peoples' organisations, women's groups, and popular cultural groups are also part of the NSMs. At the other end of the spectrum, not only 'social' but also class-based and political party-oriented organisations such as urban and rural-based 'independent' trade unions and 'progressive' political parties such as the Workers' Party of Brazil are also covered under NSMs. Cross-border and international solidarity organisations such as advocacy groups, internet-exchange groups, the complex of non-governmental and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs/INGOs), micro-enterprises of every kind, some time the entire informal economy – which outstrips the formal economy in size in many parts of Latin America – are included under the rubric of NSMs. NSMs are therefore very diverse kinds of movements (Abdul Nafey, 2004).

The above quotation aptly clarifies that, in Mexican context, the New Social Movements and Civil Society are same. It also makes clear the deep and widened roots of civil society in Mexico.

2. Political and Economic Liberalisation and Civil Society

Civil society emerged in Mexico in an atmosphere of political and economic liberalisation. It was also the time of political and economic transition in Mexico. The associational space generated this time proved boon for civil society. Civil society emerged with a popular discontent which grew bigger in the 1980s. In Mexico, chronic

economic crisis and economic adjustment policies generated widespread popular discontent in the 1980s. The authoritarian regime tried to channel popular dissatisfaction into the institutionalised political arena through a series of electoral reforms. Thus, economic liberalisation of Mexico was paralleled by a slow and gradual process of liberalisation of the Mexican political system. In the context of these economic and political changes, scholars have observed an awakened civil society in Mexico (Takesh Wada, 2005).

The economic and political liberalisation process has consolidated the capacity of civil society. There has been an expansion of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs)⁶ in Mexico since the mid-1980s, though they have small membership and most of these associations play minor role in policy formulation.⁷

But both the economic and political processes are uneven processes.⁸ They have different and contradictory effects on different sectors of a society. They empower some sectors of society while diminishing others. This is not a different case in Mexico. Therefore, which actors in civil society are rising and which are declining, is as important to know as understanding the democratisation process of Mexico itself. Yet, it can be stated that civil society as such has risen significantly. The number of protest campaigns and events between 1964 and 1994, in the table below, answer this basic query:

Table 1.4: Frequencies of Protest Campaigns and Events, 1964-1994

Unit	Campaigns	Events
1964	10	8
1967	18	46
1970	11	12
1973	31	33
1976	33	42
1979	47	61
1982	72	169
1985	101	156
1988	154	243
1991	80	113
1994	159	254

Source: Wada, Takesh (2005), "Civil Society in Mexico: Popular Protest Amid Economic and Political Liberalization", *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 25(1/2): 87-117.

Table 3 shows that the protest campaigns and events rose significantly between 1964-1994. During 1960s and 1970s the level of protest was low. During presidential election of 1964, only ten protest campaigns took place. During mid-term election of 1967, the country witnessed only eighteen campaigns. After 1979, the number of campaigns increased substantially in the following years. During the peso crisis in 1982, campaigns reached 72 and it went to its peak in 1994 when the Chiapas rebellion took place. This shows a general trend in rising civil society activities in Mexico.

The actors involved in these protest campaigns and events can broadly be divided into three categories:

- Occupational category: It includes workers, peasants, teachers, students and urban popular groups. They were the most active actors.
- Issue-specific group: It includes environmental groups, human rights groups, homosexuals and lesbians, women's groups, intellectual groups, debtors' groups, various professional groups etc.
- Category of foreigners-transnationals: Despite the assertions about global civil society or transnational social movements,⁹ this category as a subject had very limited role comparing the other two categories.

A remarkable point can be discussed here regarding the change of nature of protest. As the marginal actors from the first two categories of the above got involved in the protest activities, the popular protest got diversified. There was a shift in the direction of protests from non-state power-holders to state actors in 1983-1994. Among the state actors, in 1964-1982, federal and state executives were the main targets of protests. But the municipal government executives, the legislative and the judicial branches of government were targeted increasingly in the consequently years. It reveals that the

principal focus of the popular protest shifted from economic to political elites under neoliberalism.

During the early periods of popular protest by civil society, immediate and local economic demands, for example, workers demanding salary increase, peasants asking for agricultural credits and urban merchants or transportation workers calling for government regulation to protect their interests, were the motivating factors. Economic hardships faced by a majority of population amidst the prolonged economic crisis and successive years of implementation of economic liberalisation policies likely would have contributed to growth of protests. Among the frequently asserted claims 'land' and 'redistribution' are figured mostly as they are related to social rights and social justice issues. Demands for education, health, housing, social security, welfare and anti-poverty programmes, material demands for community public services like water system, sewage system, electricity, street pavement, garbage collection, public transportation etc. are included in redistribution category.

Demand for land itself was an important redistributive claim (Wada, 2005). In fact, President Lazaro Cardenas had gone for a massive land reform in the 1930s and implemented collective ownership of landholdings called *ejido* system.¹⁰ Gustavo Diaz Odradz in the 1960s and Luis Echeverria in the 1970s also stand among the row of presidents for whom the 'great land distributionists' would not be wrong words of honour. It also exemplifies the regime's commitment to revolutionary goals and constituted an important source of regime legitimacy in rural Mexico. Therefore, the *ejidos* had never been place of politics without violence. Within the *ejido* the administrative committee arranged and rearranged the distribution of the plots of land to its own advantage, a fact which explains the violence of the struggle for power and the large number of murders perpetrated in the *ejidos* (Jean Meyer, 1986). The progressive tradition of land reform witnessed a drawback in 1992 when President Salinas declared the end of land reform and modified Article 27 of the Constitution. He permitted selling of the *ejido* lands. It led to massive protest by civil society led by peasant organisations to

change their strategic demands from land to inputs for agricultural production and marketing, which are more consistent with the trend of economic liberalisation.

The later periods of protest campaigns saw a shift from economic to civil and political issues that include claims related to protection of individual rights from abuses by other actors including the state, demands for freedom of expression, maintenance of public security and order, intellectual rights etc. The other claims in this category are minority rights or the rights of underrepresented groups like women, indigenous people, homosexuals and religious groups. Protection from repression of various forms such as arrest, imprisonment, kidnapping, police or military harassment, massacres, violence by paramilitary groups, destruction of property etc.

Corruption of every dimension is not new for Mexico. Police, bureaucrats, judges and other government officials are partners to a number of scandals. The involvement of the politicians in corruption cases is a matter of their daily life. Corruption is not a characteristic of the system in Mexico...it is the system (Stephen D. Morris, 1999). The worst victims of the corrupt practices are the Mexican public who are well aware of the impacts of these entirely where payment of a bribe has become a necessary practice. It has fostered distrust and nurtured public cynicism towards the police and politicians. This distrust, in turn, generates a generalised 'culture of corruption' a type of social or common dilemma in which it becomes all too rational to pay little attention to the office and formal rules of conduct when dealing with the government (Stephen D. Morris, 1999). With the increase in Mexico's involvement in drug trade, drug related corruption is gaining deeper and wider roots into law enforcement agencies, the military, state executive houses, the banking system and the presidency itself. Now the political analysts are sadly referring to Mexico as a 'narco-democracy'.

With vast proliferation of civil society and growing competition and professionalisation within the mass media have dramatically increased the society-based collection and dissemination of information. It has helped to expose official wrongdoings

and created stronger society-based pressure on the government to serve interests broader than the personal interests of the bureaucrats.¹¹

The growing pressure of international actors in Mexican politics have played significant role to curb down the rampant rate of corruption. The United Nations with its human rights watchdogs, agencies of US government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and others have begun to pay more attention to Mexican internal dynamics. Amnesty International's influential investigations into the exposure of torture, extrajudicial executions, etc., on Mexico have played pivotal role to curb down corruptions and civil rights violations. The role of these international agencies is praiseworthy in the sense they have done meaningful work to democratise the public sphere in Mexico. This seems a right context to quote Laurence Whitehead as he said that democracy is not just like a virus which happens to spread from one organism to another without intentionality (Laurence Whitehead (Ed), 1996).

As long as the corruption has existed in Mexico, the government has been giving lip service to governmental promises and efforts to combat it in the name of 'anti-corruption campaign'. Though, some political devices have been used. For instance, Luis Echaverría (1970-76) declared corruption a 'cancer of the Revolution' and initiated a series of administrative and political reforms. Jose Lopez Portillo (1976-82) swore a diligent fight for public disclosure of the properties of government officials. Mijuel De la Madrid (1982-88) launched a campaign against corrupted officials and created a cabinet-level Comptroller's Office for corrupt conduct.

Since the 1980s, there has been dramatic increase in the claims for clean and fair elections. Civil society was very much involved in it. It raised the above political and non-political issues against authoritarian practices of the PRI regime.¹² It protested the non-democratic practices in different branches of the government and raised voices against the lack of transparency and accountability in public administration. It raised the corrupt practices in the police departments and widespread favouritism and clientelism of officials.

Civil society in Mexico has used two types of actions. The first is 'moderate-indirect action'. It includes demonstrating, meetings and gatherings. The other is 'radical indirect action'. It contains occupying property, blocking streets, obstructing activities, striking, land invasion etc. Since the moderate-indirect actions were usually scheduled for a limited time and location, they were less disruptive than the radical-direct actions and they invited less repressive reaction on part of the state authorities.

All this striving zeal of civil society paved the way of popular political participation. Thus, Wada, in "Civil Society in Mexico", writes that civil society actors have also been fighting for democratisation. Civil society actors' everyday struggles for democratisation are best captured by the four-fold increase in political participation claims, in particular (Wada, 2005).

3. Civil Society and Economic Crisis of 1980s

During the 1980s, as fallout from the debt crisis imposed hardship throughout Latin America, the rates of poverty and indigence increased, and per capita income fell at an average annual rate of -1.1%. The Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates that, in 1990, 39% of Latin Americans lived in poverty and 18% were indigent (Ann Helwage, 1995). All social actors of Mexico were surprised by the economic crisis of 1980s, starting particularly since 1982.¹³ Before 1982 Mexico had already enjoyed five years of accelerated growth. The rate of inflation was also low. It was the period of oil boom in the economy. Suddenly the dream was over. Inflation grew rapidly. The country had no foreign exchange reserves. It had lost the capacity of repaying the foreign debts. In fact the entire Latin America was suffering from severe economic imbalances, large debts and high inflation levels. Most of the Latin American economies initiated reforms to tackle the serious problems facing their economies. These reforms were designed to set the public finances on a sounder footing, reduce barriers to international trade, increase the role of the exchange rate in managing the BOP (Balance

of Payment), and reduce government intervention in the economy (M. Agarwal and D. Sengupta, 1999).

The developing social movements in Mexico were badly impacted by the economic crisis of 1980s. Most of them were independent and autonomous associations. They were not prepared to face the extended economic crisis. The state faced a momentary loss of internal credibility and legitimacy. Therefore, firms began to lay off workers. Real wages fell freely and it led independent industrial unions to collapse.

At this time at rural level, civil society was growing atomistically and had no local or regional webs of political support. Thus, they could not influence public opinion. Even the peasant organisations were highly unstable because they were largely dependent on government economic support and had poor position in the market. It was not unexpected in a market being increasingly opened and liberalised for the market forces. The consumer associations were also organised around the state distribution system thereby facing a number of restrictions.

Such condition generated by the extended economic crisis led to develop technical, administrative and political capacities among the peasant organisations which can be considered rare among them. They had developed a trade union profile. Most of the developing social organisations had technicians, professional activists. They took over the organisations and dominated most of the daily operations.

In the 1980s, social movements in the urban centres were being consolidated organisationally. Most of them were having a left-leaning ideology. They were able to create an urban clientele as immigration to the cities continued and the problem of urban land ownership became more urgent. The oldest groups opened a second front of action following the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985: "urban reorganisation". At the same time, the upper middle-classes initiated some "self-management" experiments in high income neighborhoods to ensure security services and acceptable state maintenance of urban facilities (Olvera,

www.lasociadacivil.org/uploads/ciberteca/civil_society_and_political_transition_in_mexico_alberto_j.pdf).

But the new social movements could not influence the ongoing process at urban centres. They were in their initial phase of development. The life had become unbearable in the early eighties. Hence, the entrepreneurs and conservative middle class responded in their own way. They turned to electoral politics as a way out. Most of them sided with the National Action Party to show their agitating mood and the state and the extended economic crisis. 'Rule of law' became the basis of justification of such political action of the middle class and civil society. Therefore, reflecting on the role of civil society, Rousseau argues that it puts justice as a rule of conduct in the place of instinct, and gives his actions the moral quality they previously lacked (Rousseau, 1968: 64).

The popular discontent was rising significantly among the peasants, the workers and the middle class. In Olvera's words, in 1983, the government allowed for more or less free local elections in Chihuahua, a northern state, as a kind of experiment. The PAN won all the urban mayorships. These results discouraged further experimentation, and the government re entrenched its normal electoral fraud. This response radicalised sectors of middle classes, and the PAN became an authentic democratic opposition, attracting more and more followers. Participation in the PAN became the way to do politics for the conservative middle classes, and the way to establish relationships with the people. Workers and peasants also voted for the PAN, given the dearth of credible alternatives on left. The very reality of structural fraud seemed a convincing reason to avoid electoral participation, and therefore most popular social movements maintained their anti-political politics.

4. Emergence of a Modern Civil Society in the 1990s

In the 1990s, the Mexican state had almost transformed itself in terms of economic policies and programmes which were superstructured by constitutional revisions and political reforms. Between 1988 and 1994, 54 constitutional amendments and 225

amendments to secondary or regulatory laws were enacted. The amendments to Article 27 allowed privatisation of some of the main public enterprises and part of the banking system. Definitely, all of them severely affected the social movement. Now civil society evolved with new spirit to play a proactive role in rapidly changing socio-political and economic conditions.

Three remarkable changes were of central importance in this period:

- State's turn towards neo-liberalism leading to profound changes in the economy.
- Consolidation of the party system.
- Emergence of a modern civil society struggling for rule of law, political rights and democracy.

Earlier the state had played proactive role in its economy. It had worked with a 'real' human face doing almost everything for the welfare of its people. To describe the proactive social welfare measures of the state of Mexico, Peter Ward (1986) rightly uses the idiom 'papering over the cracks' (attempts to cover up underlying defects) as a metaphor. He states that past approaches to social welfare provision in Mexico have covered structural failings within Mexican society and aptly fit this metaphor. Policies adopted are invariably short-term palliatives in response to specific economic or social pressures, but they sustain a bright and industrious image of a state concerned with the welfare of its less economically advantaged groups (Peter Ward, 1986).

But the changes rapidly took place in the 1990s tell us a different story of the state of Mexico. The state had taken a turn towards neo-liberal policies. In Mexico, neo-liberalism meant opening the doors to three great transformations: the integration of the Mexican economy into the world market (which implied complementary integration into the United States' economy as a subordinate partner); the privatisation of public enterprises and an overall state withdrawal from the economy; and an amendment to the Constitution purging it of its anti-liberal substance, thus lifting limitations on the mobility of capital. All three were completed during President Carlos Salinas's administration,

between 1989 and 1994, and built on the far-reaching economic adjustments already carried through between 1983-1988 (Olvera, www.lasociedadcivil.org/uploads/ciberteca/civil_society_and_political_transition_in_mexico_alberto_j.pdf).

The resources were going into the hands of a small elite class people leaving the majority in deprivation. It was a considerable retreat of the state from its active role in the economy. Moreover, it took help of the Constitution of the country to acquire legitimacy for its liberal policies and therefore, the Constitution was amended to suit the ongoing policies and programmes. The 1994 New Year's celebration in Mexico started with a bang (Wager and Schulz, 1995). The state tried to detach itself from the economy and thereby automatically detaching itself from the society. In less than five years, the Mexican economy had gone from being one of the most protected in the world to one of the most open – with clear, transparent rules of the game and a marked continuity of policy. During that time, Mexico had (1) negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada; (2) become an active participant in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), even to the point of chairing the group that negotiated services; and (3) had become a full-fledged member of such developed-country associations as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the forum for Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Gary L. Springer and Jorge L. Molina, 1995). Undoubtedly, these steps made civil society more anxious and cautious towards the national government led by the PRI.

With this the party system was also being consolidated partly in response to the PRI hegemony and partly because of the political openings. Yet, the most important change taking place was the emergence of a modern civil society struggling for rule of law, political rights and democracy. Now the autonomous social associations had very much political leanings showing a better understanding and collaboration of civil society with political parties and vice versa.

The combination of these factors (the profound changes in the economy, consolidation of the party system and emergence of a modern civil society) in the 1990s created the most favourable conditions for a real political transition.

The emerging modern civil society took a serious account of the political aspects because the political opening was lagging behind in comparison to the economic liberalisation. Even if the political opening was pursued in the political public sphere, any actual practice of same was obstructed. Therefore, the post-electoral conflicts became common phenomena and the use of informal institutions helped only to worsen the situation. The opposition victories were not independent to get recognition. They were dependent upon the will of the federal government. The electoral campaigns were also not equal because the official party (the PRI) controlled all resources to maintain its electoral hegemony. In this condition even if the opposition victories were recognised, they were not without prolonged negotiations.

However, the lack of co-ordination between the political actors and civil society persisted. A nexus between the political society and civil society grew up only when the state welfare agencies tried to establish direct relationship with the autonomous local associations through populist policies. But such clientelistic allurements were not readily acceptable for civil society because it was an obstacle to greater autonomy from political society.¹⁴ Even in the 1990s, civil society had to be cautious. Though, the political openings had made the social movements smooth with declining control of the PRI, the emerging civil society was an antithetical to the modern citizen that the PAN wanted to address.¹⁵ This group of citizens also tried to maintain certain level of distance from civil society because earlier the economic aspects were of prime concern for civil society before it shifted focus to political issues.

Despite all these, civil society had continued the activities leading to encourage popular participation amid political agitation. This vital role played by civil society in Mexico has often been neglected or could not get due recognition. The scholars and political scientists have analysed the political transition of Mexico as an achievement of

'elite bargaining' between different political parties. Moreover, there is a similar view on whole of Latin America. Thus, Robert Wesson writes that much has been written, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, by both Latin Americans and outsiders, concerning the possibly elegant and graceful, basically aristocratic, personal – or family – rather than community-oriented societies of Latin America. While the evidence is subjective, it is broad and corresponds to the intuitive sense of human reactions (Robert Wesson, 1982).

5. Civil Society and the Democratic Transition

The role of civil society is not without contradictions in Mexico and in whole of Latin America. In one country the social movements pressurised the state and demanded rights and freedom but they were easily co-opted by the state in other country. Social movements did play a significant role in building pressure on the authoritarian regimes, and once the civilian governments were installed, they also sought to press the elected governments for some meaningful political freedom and economic rights but soon exhibited willingness to get co-opted or simply got demobilised.¹⁶ In sum, the vast array of activities that come under the heading of new social or grassroots movements presented a full range of mixed and often contradictory possibilities. For instance, the CEBs (ecclesiastical based communities) in Brazil generally organised the poor for civil action; in Nicaragua they legitimated the Sandinista revolutionary movement; but in Columbia, the CEBs have evolved into a tool of the conservative Catholic hierarchy and have exerted a fundamentally conservative influence over the poor people they organise (Abdul Nafey, 2004). Even in Mexico, the role of civil society can be discussed with variety of possibilities. Though, we are more concerned about the positive roles played by civil society to further the democratic transition. Thus, Hellman says that, in the Mexican case do the links between grass-roots movements and a broad progressive/populist electoral front provide the opportunity for new social actors to contribute fresh and radical perspectives on the programme for transformation required in Mexican society (Judith Adler Hellman, 1992).

Civil society in the 1970s remained non-political in Mexico, and in the 1980s engaged in creating autonomous associations with issues of immediate concern. In the 1990s they were urban-cultural directed towards defense of human rights and the promotion of local social and economic development.

There civil society recaptured the public space and defended its autonomy after the authoritarian regime had imposed all kinds of prohibitions. Though, the social movements were localised, issue-specific and non-political but they were invoking the basic issues related to the citizenship rights. For instance, the CEBs provided a chance to assert their voice to demand their collective right to assemble as citizens. Similarly, the struggle of the rural co-operatives for land asserted the political rights and ethnic identity; and also strengthened indigenous movement. Simultaneously, they were creating a pluralist political culture, a culture of tolerance and diversity. They were nurturing the values of trust, co-operation and consensus.

The civil society was struggling for safeguarding and expansion of citizenship rights too. In this process they got projected into the political society. Thus, the civil and political rights activities of civil society, made the task of political society easier to claim political space for their activities. Therefore, the demands of social movements got transformed into more broad-based demands for democratic political change in Mexico.

This co-ordination and co-operation is fruitfully possible only when the government itself is prepared to negotiate. And if the government is not prepared, civil society must be capable of creating a mounting pressure over the government and forcing to negotiate.

But a large number of peasant organisations and labour unions remained tied to the PRI regime, notwithstanding political liberalisation and democratic reforms in Mexico during the 1990s. Even after the presidential election of 2000 in which the PRI faced historic defeat by the opposition party, many popular organisations remain affiliated to the PRI. It was a clear evidence of the paternalistic and clientelistic tradition

of the Mexican society. In Mexico, more tangible political and social factors also shape the behaviour of those who undertake to articulate their interests. Not surprisingly, under an authoritarian regime and in an economically poor society, if an ordinary citizen is even to be heard by government, he must give careful attention to what the elites consider acceptable content and appropriate style of articulation (William S. Tuohy, 1973). Yet, no change is absolute. Every socio-political process has its own exceptions. Once upon a time the PRI was a monolith in Mexico. It controlled the social, political, economic and almost every aspect of Mexican society for not less than seven decades. Therefore, it was not a difficult task for the PRI to tie up a large number of organisations around it.

But if we see the history of struggle of civil society in Mexico, it did play a role in democratising political culture, developing community and self-government and revivifying local politics. The ongoing social movements with their own capacity created the foundations of the new democratic cultures. They enhanced the quality of social life and addressed the problems of economic inequalities and marginalisation. Likewise, Sonia Alvarez raised the possibility that grass-roots movements might “foster a political culture that is supportive of democracy”, pushing or extending “the parameters of democratic politics” and opening the way to the development of effective nonclientelistic links between movement activists and political parties (Sonia Alvarez, 1989b, quoted by Hellman, 1992). The political element of many civil society organisations facilitates better awareness and a more informed citizenry, who make better voting choices, participate in politics, and hold government more accountable as a result (G. Almond and S. Verba, 1989).

The above description shows enough support for the argument that civil society in Mexico has risen at a considerable level. The protest campaigns have significantly increased in the period of economic and political liberalisation. A dramatic increase in the rate of popular protest by the issue-specific associations can be noticed. A major shift also can be noticed in the principal sources of mobilisation, that is, from traditional social networks based on occupational categories to social networks of a more voluntary and associative nature. Protest demonstrations by civil society have shifted from non-state

power-holders to state power-holders, therefore, leading to politicisation of protests. Their everyday struggles have addressed issues of democracy.

Notes

¹ While many of these studies differ on the degree of importance that they attribute to the various forces responsible for the democratisation process, most agree that, at some point in the transition, either before the actual demise of the non-democratic state or afterwards, civil society develops and plays a crucial role in influencing the political system (Kamrava and Mora, 1998).

² Caste *Panchayats* are the caste-based associations. These are peculiar to India's caste-ridden traditional society.

³ Thus, Goldstone (2003) writes, "We usually think of social movements as seeking to influence states, but the reverse is also true – states often act to influence the reception of social movements."

⁴ The emergence of uncooptable leaders, groups, and networks expressed itself in demands for organisational autonomy and independence from the state and the PRI (Cadena-Roa, 2003).

⁵ Social movements are collective, organised, self-conscious, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change or preserve some aspect of their society by acting outside the usual routines and institutions of governance (Goodwin and Jasper (Eds), 2007). A social movement undoubtedly involves collective action as distinct from individual action. However, only when the collective action is somewhat sustained, as distinct from a sporadic occurrence, does it take the form of a movement. This collective action, however, need not be formally organised, but should be able to create an interest and awakening in sufficiently large number of people. Hence, a social movement essentially involves sustained collective mobilisation through either informal or formal organisation (Rao, 2006). Oliver writes that the social movement for democracy is an *analytical category* to describe a broad and diffuse movement that includes organisations from different social groups encompassing the actions of organisations and their members and the actions of non-members in activities that organisations have nothing to do with, and

may even oppose (Oliver, 1989). Empirically, the social movement for democracy comprises several networks of popular, cadre, and religious organisations, networks of leaders, and pockets of aggrieved populations (Cadena-Rao, 2003).

⁶ Wallace (2003) addressed NGOs as ‘Trojan horses for global neoliberalism’ to demonstrate effectiveness of these organisations (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005).

⁷ The Salinas and Zedillo administrations opened the government’s anti-poverty programmes to independent grassroots organisations, *under the condition that* these organisations would act in concert with the state on local-level, “technical problems” directly affecting the poor. This gave incentives for “autonomous” organisations to focus on local community development projects, rather than on national political demands (Paul Lawrence Haber, 1994, cited by Wada, 2005).

⁸ Therefore, economic and social development requires changes in the structure of class relations and the configuration of political power (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005).

⁹ This (20th) century is also leaving the legacy of a smaller world that is busy restructuring its new political order that looks beyond the narrow grooves of national sovereignties. Though wars are not yet banished, civil societies the world over are now rightly assigning a very high priority to the ushering in of an era of peace and cooperation (Gujral, 1999).

¹⁰ *Ejido* is a land tenure system in which Mexican state is the owner of the land and gives the right to use the land to group of peasants called *ejidatarios*. They have right to own the land but are not permitted to sell it.

¹¹ The Mexican Anti-Corruption League, for instance, has operated since the mid-1980s on corruption. The grass-roots organisations have created pressure on the government uncovering the wrongdoings of the government officials. The new generation of newspaper, television and press are more active in reporting and investigating the various types of corruptions.

¹² Therefore, Bikash Chandra Dash (2004) argues that the issue of electoral reforms should be given the form a social movement with the active participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) rather than its traditional confinement to an academic level discussion.

¹³ In 1982, after world prices for oil plummeted, President Lopez Portillo was forced to halt payments on Mexico's foreign debt, and he nationalised Mexican banks. When President Miguel de la Madrid took office in late 1982, he inherited a virtually bankrupt economy, a distrustful private sector, and a newly cautious international banking community. Capital flight grew through the 1970s and 1980s, inflation escalated, and the national currency was progressively devalued (Bennett, 1992).

¹⁴ Civil society remained very conscious in this regard as it could emerge with significant voice in the 1970s because it represented the non-political aspirations which were not viewed with suspicion by the state machinery and therefore, saved itself against state repression.

¹⁵ The PAN represented a conservative middle-class and a business group with liberal economic orientation which opposed only the 'corrupt' political and economic practices of the PRI regime. They advocated for an efficient political regime not because they admired democracy but because they wanted economic prosperity.

¹⁶ Therefore, Charles L. Davis (1976) argues that authoritarian regimes are well equipped to generate support among deprived groups by dispensing psychologically satisfying symbolic reassurances about the regime's commitments to particular goals. In this way, successful authoritarian regimes manage to rule by means other than force alone, and to gain popular consent from politically and economically deprived groups at minimal cost in terms of claims upon scarce resources.

Chapter 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The term 'democracy' is an analytical category. The political system of a country may be categorised as democratic by one set of scholars and the other set of scholars may categorise it as undemocratic. Despite these differences, there are agreements on certain elements/features that qualify a state as democracy. In other words, it is possible to identify certain general principles, values and practices essential to the successful functioning of democracy (Jean Baechler, 1998: viii). Robert Dahl's (1989) *Polyarchy* features such an agreement. But, most of the theories on democracy are abstractions which apply mental construct at analytical level.

Any theory on democracy cannot explain the actualities on which a state gradually democratises itself. Hence, one has to look at democratisation process of a state. Thus, Huntington (1991), Abootalebi (1995), Lijphart (1977), Abrahamsen (1997) etc. emphasise to understand democratisation process and, Krischke (2000) describes it as a historical process of learning new values, attitude and socio-political behaviour.

Democracy as an abstraction and democratisation process as a tool to understand the nature of a state, both are helpful to comprehend how Mexican political system has undergone significant changes. The well documented Constitution of Mexico claims itself to be democratic (Article 27) but the presidentialism of Mexico has surpassed most of the constitutional elements. Therefore, scholars and students face difficulty to distinguish between the presidentship, the ruling party and the government itself during the seven decade rule of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI).

However, in such a political system, which was termed as 'authoritarian', despite regular electoral ceremonies, changes began in the late 1970s which were initiated by the ruling party itself aiming at political consolidation in changing politico-economic conditions.

Till 1988, the reform process adopted by Mexico had brought vital changes in its polity. The opposition parties got significant representation in the congress, the PRI split gave independent existence to its left-wing members as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and consequently, the PRI witnessed almost ten per cent electoral loss, as Cassillas and Mujica (2003) state. By this time, the participation of other political parties increased, opposition got strengthened and civil society started organising itself (Cochrane, 1993). Still, the ruling party maintained a predominant position.

The PRI, due to its long hegemonic presence in Mexican polity, had a tradition to win electoral competition by all kinds of unconstitutional means. The electoral fraud of the PRI was explicitly shown in the election of 1988 when the PRI's Carlos Salinas was declared winner over Cuauhtemoc Cardenas amid electoral malpractices. It witnessed a popular protest from every section of the society. In addition to that, in 1994, Mexico's inclusion into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and devaluation of Mexican peso had created so much opposition to the ruling party that even the 'Solidarity Programme' of Salinas could not rescue the PRI from losing the political hegemony. The PRI was forced to go for further electoral reforms. Consequently, the opposition party, the National Action Party (PAN), got chance to penetrate into the PRI structure.

Civil society, on the other side, had emerged with significant voices. In the 1970s, civil society concentrated on seemingly non-political issues and thus, was not perceived as political threat by the PRI. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PRI put enormous efforts to co-opt certain segments of civil society and curb down their effectiveness. Thus, in the late 1990s, several workers' unions could be seen tied up with the ruling party and supporting government policies.

By this time, civil society in Mexico had grown professionally. Despite economic stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, civil society was able to spread in Mexico. In the same period civil society remained disassociated with political parties but helped them indirectly as it had taken a form of 'new' social movement and fighting for political and non-political issues.

Civil society in Mexico played vital role in democratising political culture, developing autonomous communities and self-government as well as revitalising local politics. Various contributions of civil society enabled the other political parties in reaching the masses.

By the presidential election of 2000, continuous efforts at the level of civil society and different political parties had created enough space to push the PRI aside. Thus, Lucy Conger (2001) argues that the overall social, political and economic conditions had taken such an unfavourable turn till the election of 2000, that progressively mounting vigour of an array of civil organisations and independent activities, the development of a committed political opposition, an emboldened press and the appearance of forceful and determined opposition candidates led to the historic political defeat of the PRI. Finally, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party took presidential office as the first non-PRI candidate in the seven decade political history of Mexico.

Keeping in mind the above description, it would be highly useful to precisely present three interrelated factors which were primarily responsible for the political transition of Mexico from authoritarian single-party regime to multi-party pluralism.

One of the most important factors behind the political transition of Mexico was the 'ideological transformation' of the electorate. The changes in approaches, attitudes and understanding of the electorate with regard to the political-economy of Mexico had played undisputedly explicit role to bring about the current developments. The inability and corruption in the PRI regime as well as the active involvement and engagement of the PAN, the PRD and other political platforms to mobilise and educate the electorate were primarily responsible for such transformations.

'Political liberalisation and electoral reforms' had attracted the attention of most scholars to understand the political developments in Mexico. Increasing political pressure over the PRI regime, because of the ideological transformations, led to initiation of

political liberalisation and electoral reforms thereby providing more space to the opposition because it was in the interest of the PRI to dominate, but without completely excluding the opposition, giving more teeth to the Federal Electoral Institute, ensuring more political representation by other parties. Media was also given more freedom. Civil organisations also came up in a politically more liberalised space. All these favoured free and fair elections and thereby, curbing down the political hegemony of the single-party rule.

‘The progressive fragmentation of the party system’ had been another factor for the above political transition. The 21st century Mexico no longer bears the authoritarian party structure. It has moved towards a pluralistic political culture and a multi-party system. Elections staged over the past two and-a-half decades have witnessed progressive fragmentation of the party system. The parliamentary party system in Mexico is increasingly moving away from the two-party model toward a multi-party model, or moderate pluralism.

The degree of importance of the above three interrelated factors may vary but they show wide variety of implications on the Mexican political system.

Mexico represents one of the most advanced (if not developed) third world economies of the globe. Politically it is advancing but lagging behind its own economic achievements, though, the economic achievements themselves are yet to be allocated justly across the different socio-economic sections of the population. Like most of the third world countries, Mexico too has vast diversities in its socio-cultural set up. Yet, the newness with the ongoing process till 2000 is that it has been able to incorporate the political voices of the marginalised. The locus of the political power has diversified and significantly decentralised.

The other thing is that material prosperity of the majority is still not bright. Small power elite are commanding the national resources even today. The change in political actors has not changed the economic actors. As Guillermo O’Donnell (1973) observed,

certain causes and conditions produced political democracy and modernisation in what may be called the western world in the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth. Economic modernisation may be brought in other areas by somewhat different causes and hence may not imply political democracy in the same way. In 1994, Mexico entering into North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in one hand, and on the other, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) assaulting and capturing four cities in the Los Altos Region of Chiapas, are two contradictory and uneven phenomena. They must show co-ordination to further the process of democratisation.

Yet the victory of the opposition, the National Action Party (PAN), in the Presidential election of 2000 is considered historical and fostering democratic ethos because it put an end to the seven decade single-party rule over the country. Now the system has to address widespread inequality and curb down corruptions at all levels. Political institutions should provide legitimate means of channeling demands and reaching accommodations. Right of equal opportunity has to be provided under equal conditions for persons of any origin to rise to the highest positions.

Mexico is moving into a new technological age calling for new political as well as social institutions to cherish the ideas of freedom, equality, legality and responsibility of the government. The existing conditions in the country are demanding for a modern democracy with the balance of political and economic safeguards for the achievement of democratic ideals, democratic institutions and democratic practices.

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