

CHAPTER-III

**INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE SINCE INDEPENDENCE
BASIC IMPERATIVES AND ISSUES INVOLVED IN GOAL
FIXATION AND PRIORITY DETERMINATION-SOCIAL,
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL**

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INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE SINCE INDEPENDENCE BASIC IMPERATIVES AND ISSUES INVOLVED IN GOAL FIXATION AND PRIORITY DETERMINATION-SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL.

The Achievement of independence was to ideally usher in an age of change and reconstruction, did not involve any sharp discontinuity in the development of political tradition in India. The intimate interaction between Hindu tradition, western political thought, and the ideology of reconstructive nationalism had already led to a process of transformation which, while it did not destroy the foundations of Indian society, charted out a new path, no doubt. The arrival of independence further emphasized the new path and its futuristic orientation. "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny," said Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of independence, "and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge". In reality, however, there was greater continuity. In August, 1947, a transfer of power to an identifiable and legitimized elite took place. The congress, drawing legitimacy from its pioneering role in the nationalist movement turned itself into the ruling political party and formed the Government of the country. The new elite resembled many of the characteristics of the outgoing elite in terms of ideas and experiences. Noteworthy in the change-over was this continuity in personnel, institutions, and ideas, notwithstanding the end of the British epoch in Indian History. The years that immediately followed were greatly influenced by these ideas which were now incorporated into a legal document paving the way for a concrete institutional arrangement.¹

When Nehru advertised India to the rest of the world as a Democracy - the 'world's largest democracy' - he had in mind a country in which suffrage would be universal, in which elections to parliament would be held at least every five years and in which representatives

would be accountable to their electors in and through particular constituencies. Like most members of the constituent Assembly, Nehru's understanding of democracy and government had been shaped by the Raj and Westminster, and by the limited experiments in democracy that were ushered in by the reform proposals of 1909, 1919 and 1935 Government of India Acts respectively. An alternative understanding of what democracy might mean had been promoted by Gandhi and some of his followers, who sought a distinctively 'Indian' form of Government. The alternative was premised upon a view of the centrality of the village in Indian society and in contradistinction to the idea of the modern state, partly because it was seen as a western concept.²

However, Austin notes that not one person complained in the debate on the 'resolution on Aims and objects' that panchayati Government was not on the agenda for discussion: 'members spoke of democracy, socialism and the responsibilities of legislatures but not of the necessity for an "Indian" form of Government.'³

In the end, the inclusion as one of the directive principles of the constitution of a clause about the establishment of village panchayats was admitted only grudgingly by the congress leadership.⁴ As Austin argues: "The Assembly's adoption of a democratic, centralized parliamentary constitution meant that members believed that to achieve the object of social revolution India must become a modern state"⁵ The basic apparatus of governmental administration in independent India was inherited from the colonial period, although there soon took place a substantial increase in its size. It consisted of a small elite cadre belonging to the all India services and a much larger corps of functionaries organized in the provincial services. The crucial unit of the Governmental apparatus was the district administration which, under the charge of the district officer, was primarily responsible as in colonial times for maintaining law and order but was soon to become the agency for developmental work. The basic structure

of civil and criminal law as well as of its administration was also inherited from the colonial period. The working of the high courts and district courts maintained an unbroken legacy from colonial times, continuing the same practices of legal tradition and precedent, save, perhaps, the new issues that arose regarding the relations between parliament and the judiciary. The Indian armed forces too did not sever its colonial inheritances.⁶ As David Washbrook writes, "The events of 1947 finally aborted the 1935 proposals but, problematically those of 1950 brought more than a fair share of them back again as noted before, the authors of the Indian constitution put an extra ordinary degree of faith in the political wisdom of the British and drew heavily on the 1935 Act. By so doing, they thus drew quintessentially 'colonial' forms of political relationship into the core of their emergent national democratic state. That issues concerning the design of provincial states and their relationship to the centre, concerning the uneasy relations between executive and legislature and concerning the provenance of democratic authority should subsequently have bedevilled the history of the Indian nation can not be regarded as wholly surprising. They came as part of a colonial inheritance which was all too readily accepted."⁷ However, the paradox of the Nehru years can be explained in part by reference to the unusual position which Nehru came to occupy in Indian politics in the period from 1946 to 1951. The Indian national congress which Nehru led with Gandhi and Patel was not an obvious vehicle for ushering in a radical social change. The congress published resolutions on the importance of agrarian reform in the 1930s, but Congress Governments in the provinces rarely made this a priority during the British rule. Patel, moreover, had close ties with India's big business class and looked to private capitalists to effect the industrial modernization of India. Gandhiji, on the contrary, looked to village self-Government and rural 'development' as bases for the moral regeneration of India. But Gandhiji was assassinated in January 1948, and moreover, he had in any case opted out of the process of

Government before the time of the transfer of power. When Patel died in December 1950, Nehru was catapulted into an unassailable position in the Government of India and by 1951 he began to call the shots in congress party too.⁸

As Corbridge and Harriss forcefully argue in this respect, “certainly the Nehruvian constructions (both of India as ‘socialist, secular, democratic’, and of the Congress as the guardian of this State) remain a fundamental point of reference in the discourses of Indian politics.”⁹

The foundational principles of the Nation state were enshrined in the constitution adopted in 1950. Major institutions of the modern State-liberal democracy, Universal adult suffrage, democratic decision-making and modern citizen-ship were put in place in the initial years between 1947 and 1950.¹⁰ However, Rajeev Bhargava sensed crisis of liberal institutions stemming directly from the opposition it faced at its birth and went on to argue that democracy came to India as nationalism and therefore, that arguments for nationalism were co-terminus with arguments for democracy. The character of this democracy, in one significant sense, just had to be liberal not only because of its commitment to civil liberties but also because of its vision of equality and social justice and finally, the predominantly cultural character of Nationalism in India and its traditional proclivity for recognizing the importance of collectivities forced the makers of the constitution to move beyond individualist liberalism, in order to wrestle with the tension between constitutive attachments and personal liberty, between group disadvantage, personal merit, and all these factors shaped the character of the emergent secular, democratic state of India.¹¹

In any case, two major objectives dominated the state at independence-construction of a unified nation and social transformation. Presiding over the transition from colonialism, the most

important priority was to knit together a nation state from culturally and linguistically heterogeneous society and economically disparate regions.

In achieving this goal, the political leadership followed the ideology of composite nationalism to integrate people of multi-faceted diversities. The linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 proved to be a master-stroke in shaping the future institutional arrangement. In keeping with the second objective of social transformation, the ruling elite were committed to building a developmental state to put the economy on a faster growth trajectory.¹² In other words, the desire for national unity and consolidation was paralleled by a concern for the country's development and progress in social and economic spheres. With India's problem of National unity and consolidation showing some kind of improvements, the Government initiated comprehensive measures for economic planning. In 1950 - the year the new constitution was adopted, the Government of India set up a planning commission with a mandate for formulating five-year plans, determining economic and social priorities of the nation, enunciating a general model of economic development and recommending ways and means of mobilizing resources for implementing such a model. In a very short span of time, a sophisticated frame work of centralized planning, enquiry and consultations was put in place.¹³

Before we discuss and analyze the journey of a newly independent state called India since 1947, it is imperative to look into the basic document that is supposedly to guide the destiny of this great Nation so far as the aims and objectives are concerned.

The historic objectives resolution of Pandit Nehru which was adopted by the constituent Assembly on January 22, 1947, is also faithfully reflected in the preamble to the constitution, which as amended in 1976, summarizes the aims and objects of the constitution as follows:

“We, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens. Justice, social economic and political, LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity, and to promote among them all; FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, this twenty SIXTH day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.”¹⁴

That this democratic Republic stands for the good of all the people is embodied in the concept of a welfare state which inspires the directive principles of state policy. The ‘economic justice’ assured by the preamble can hardly be achieved if the democracy envisaged by the constitution was confined to a ‘Political Democracy’, Democracy in any sense, can not be established unless certain minimal rights, which are indispensable for a free and civilized existence, are assured to every member of the community. The preamble mentions these essential individual rights as ‘freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship’ and these are guaranteed against all the authorities of the state by part-III of the constitution [vide Arts. 19. 25-28], subject, of course, to the implementation of the directive principles, for the common good (Art. 31c) and the ‘fundamental duties,’ introduced [Art. 51A], by the 42nd amendment, 1976. Guaranteeing of certain rights to each individual would be a misnomer unless inequalities embedded in the social structure is done away with and each individual is assured of equality of status and of opportunity for the best development of his/her personality, by making the means available to them for the enforcement of their rights. This object is secured in the body of the constitution, by making illegal all discriminations by the state between

citizen and citizen, simply on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (Art. 15)¹⁵ In the context of Indian democracy, the quest for social justice could be seen in terms of the strategies adopted to ensure greater freedom and more meaningful equality. The equality that was guaranteed by the Indian constitution in the political realm, could be termed as the 'democratic space' that was provided to initiate measures for achieving social equality and justice. It is in the context that the warning sounded by Ambedkar in his last speech in the constituent Assembly, that the future of Indian democracy would be at stake unless sincere endeavours are made to make sure that the equality guaranteed in the political domain spreads to the social sphere, rings true even today.¹⁶

For a better grasp of the events, programmes and policies of the newly born state in its journey in the garb of a developmental state since the dawn of independence till date, it is convenient to divide the entire period into two broad phases viz, First phase starts with the achievement of independence and continues till the inauguration of New economic policy by the union government in 1991 and obviously, the second phase covers the period from 1991 onwards.

The developmental state and the economic goals: the congress party and Nehru years and the politics of India upto 1990:

The congress and the continuation of the remnants of the British Raj -

Before independence, the congress had run some provincial Governments only briefly and had joined the interim Government at the centre in 1946. After independence, the Congress was in charge of running the central Government as well as most of the state Governments. It soon became obvious that the entire focus of party activity would now be on the performance of its Governmental wing. Jawaharlal Nehru was president of the Congress when he became prime Minister in the interim Government in 1946. Soon after, he decided to resign his party post, J.B. Kripalani, the congress socialist leader, succeeded Nehru but immediately ran into serious disagreements with the ministerial wing over the issue of the relationship between party and Government. But in November 1947, Kripalani resigned as congress president, nevertheless, between 1948 and 1951, the issue of the relationship between party and Government remained at the centre of controversy within the Congress. The underlying political tension arose out of the differences of some sections of congress leaders with the emerging architecture of policies of the Nehru Government. In 1950, the right wing was able to gain ascendancy over their socialist bloc with the election of Purushottam Das Tandon, as President of the Congress Party. But, the death of Vallabhbhai Patel in December 1950, deprived this group of its most powerful figure within the Government and with the first general elections approaching, the tussle over control of the party organization reached a climax. In August 1951, Nehru resigned from the working committee on the ground that there were serious policy differences between him and the party leadership. The parliamentary party expressed its confidence in Nehru's leadership. Within a few weeks, Tandon was forced to resign and the AICC elected Nehru as congress

president. For the time being at least, the ascendancy of the Government wing of the party was established by creating a single unified leadership.¹⁷ Later, on being elected congress president, U.N. Dhebar said quite clearly:

It is a mistake to consider that there is a dual leadership in the country There is only one leader in India today and that is Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru. Whether he carries the mantle of congress president on his shoulders or not, ultimately, the whole country looks to him for support and guidance.¹⁸

As has already been described above, by the 1940s the focus of political struggle had shifted to that of the form of Government of the independent state and, it has been said, by this time 'the congress was becoming the Raj', in the sense that the Congress leadership - drawing partly on the experience of office in the provincial Ministries - interested more and more to taking over the apparatuses of the colonial state. Patel was, particularly, concerned about the institutions of state power - the police, the army and the civil service which he believed, should not be undermined and there ought to be continuity of personnel as well as of institutions and ideas even after the British rule came to an end.¹⁹ David Arnold made a succinct comment about the congress and the police of this period in these languages, "Far from dismantling the repressive apparatus of the Raj, the incoming congress men sought to strengthen and refurbish it to meet the current crisis and to guarantee the political succession".²⁰ All in all, inspite of Nehru's apparent supremacy after 1951, the project of social transformation suffered a serious set-back as it relied heavily on the bureaucracy as the instrument of change which led to a kind of 'goal displacement', no doubt.²¹ Gopal, Nehru's biographer, has also argued that: 'The failure to dismantle the civil services and to replace them with new machinery of administration suited to the objectives of free India set up unnecessary hardles.'²² A Marxist scholar has stated in categorical terms the nexus between bureaucracy and Bourgeoisie in these words:

“Bureaucratic elites at the centre are far less susceptible to the pressure of the agrarian bourgeoisie ... (while) in the states [,] the more localized the bureaucracy, the more subordinated it is to the power of the rural rich. The Industrial bourgeoisie clearly exercises greater authority on the bureaucracy at the centre.”²³

Before 1967, the usual description of the party system in India was ‘one party dominance’, the one party being, obviously, the congress. Sometimes, it was also called by a simple name, ‘the congress system’. In the first three general elections, the congress won around 45 per cent of the votes and 75 per cent of the seats in parliament. The concept of ‘one party dominance’ also implied a similar overwhelming position of the congress in all of the states. Despite some variations in strength, however, the congress was ruling almost every state until 1967. An interesting feature of the single party dominant system during the Nehru years, was the large degree of autonomy that the provincial party units were also to enjoy vis-à-vis the central party leadership.²⁴ Although the formal structure was important during Nehru’s days, more important was an informal structure of factional linkages and relationships from the local to the national stage. Factional conflicts within the congress ultimately culminated in struggles for the control of the state Governments themselves, with most states in the country divided between a ministerial wing, the faction which dominated the Government and sometimes but not always, the Party organization as well and a dissident wing which struggled to gain control of the party organization in order to use it as a springboard to gain control of the Government. So, the congress organization, was in the 1950s and 1960s, a highly factionalized, internally competitive party, ruled by personal opportunism rather than ideology, with factional conflict resolved at the highest levels. Nehru began to exercise complete control over policy and politics from 1950-51 onwards. As a matter of fact, the national leadership of the party in those days was called the High command.”²⁵ However, the task of creating and sustaining the

immensely broad congress coalition in the first phase was, at least in the view of Morris Jones, facilitated by the complexities and ambiguities of Indian society, which prevented polarization (in class terms or any other terms) and the crystallization of contradictions that might fracture such an all encompassing alliance of interests. Myron Weiner opined that the task of building the congress coalition was lubricated by traditional values and roles of conciliation that congressmen astutely took up. Rudolphs' also contended that traditional elements of the caste system facilitated the development of modern, representative politics in India.²⁶ James Manor, argued, "But however much the social background may have helped, and however important congress's role in the winning of independence may have been in placing the party in a dominant position in the first place, the survival of congress dominance depended on the efficient functioning of the party organization of crucial importance was its effectiveness in distributing the resources, which it acquired from its control of state power, among existing and potential clients in exchange for their political support."²⁷

The state was dominated by two major objectives: construction of a unified nation and social transformation. Presiding over the transition from colonialism, the most important priority was to hold together a nation state from a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous society and economically disparate regions. In the pursuit of this goal the political leadership followed the ideology of composite nationalism to integrate all strands of the people. As we have already mentioned that the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 proved to be a master stroke in shaping the future institutional arrangement. This decision proved to be of utmost importance to the expansion and consolidation of federal democracy. In tune with the second objective of social transformation, the ruling elite were committed to building a developmental state to stimulate growth in the economy. Attention was turned to heavy industry, producer goods and social overheads, with a relative de-emphasis on agriculture. The plan document of the second

five years' plan reflected this trend quite prominently. The basic needs of the population were incorporated in the formulae of 'growth with equity'. But this strategy was constrained by historical specificities of 'Indian society'. The central Government was also circumscribed by the constitutional limitations on its power in the rural sector, while state Governments which were assigned the primary responsibility over land reforms and agricultural policies, were thoroughly dominated by the landed elite, who dragged their feet on the issue and eventually scuttled any programme of sweeping changes of the social order by actions from above.²⁸ However, Gopal, Nehru's Biographer, reminded us about Nehru's belated realization that something had to be done about agrarian reform. The scheme of village co operatives and Panchayati Raj, says Gopal, was meant to be a revolutionary step which was 'an active, democratic revolution carried out by the masses themselves'.²⁹ Zoya Hasan assessed the Nehru years very realistically when she said, "Given the prevailing inequalities in income distribution and access to political power, the social base for growth continued to be a relatively narrow one, and the gains from this limited growth were appropriated disproportionately by a relatively small segment of the population. State intervention was not successful in promoting rapid growth, and much less in providing the vast majority with a decent standard of living. Though important achievements can be listed in areas, notably the development of an industrial base, increasing per capita availability of food-grains, the elimination of mass famines, higher education and the creation of a large scientific community, the Nehruvian vision expressed in his widely celebrated speech on India's 'Tryst with destiny', remained largely unfulfilled".³⁰

The most coherent and theoretically considered framework for the planned development of the Indian economy was established during the second five-year plan (1956-1961) under the direction of P.C. Mahalanobis - a physicist who was also a distinguished statistician, who advised the cabinet from 1955, and was a member of the planning

commission from 1959. The plan reflected Mahalanobis's view on the need to build up capital goods production ahead of demand and flowing from this what has generally been understood in terms of an 'import substitution strategy' of industrialization. The key elements of the plan were to build up, along-side private agriculture, modern capital intensive industry in the state sector, leaving the production of consumer goods to a more labour intensive private industrial sector, with both protected by tariff barriers and import controls. Increased public investment was expected to give rise to large profits, including profits in the private sector. But these would be taxed for reinvestment. There is a widely shared argument that this strategy for achieving economic development was not analytically shallow, but it involved two crucial flaws. First, it rested on extremely optimistic assumptions and as such, it provided wholly unjustified arguments about the possibility of bringing about rapid agricultural growth through institutional changes requiring little investment of resources. This optimism was buttressed by the good food grains harvest of 1954-1955. Second, it made extremely simplistic assumption about the political process of planning, reducing the whole exercise of planning to an 'expert domain'.³¹ So, the second plan put emphasis on the development of heavy industry. The linkage effects of the public investment programme were likely to create opportunities for the big capitalists. Apart from this, the growth of the public sector and the imposition of Government Controls expanded considerably the channels of profits from circulations. To the middle class, the plan opened up new vistas in areas of administration, education and white colour employment. The landed gentry knew that the land reform would not pose any serious threat to them: having retained or acquired considerable political power at the local level, they were sure to scuttle even the modest land reform measures which were undertaken. Moreover, the plan also had a mass appeal in creating the impression that, by emphasizing the development of heavy industry first, India was emulating the socialist

path of economic development.³² As Partha Chatterjee writes. "In a framework of partial state capitalism, the real problems were: (1) how to solve the agrarian question in a land scarce economy without hurting the landed gentry; (2) how to sustain accumulation and technical dynamism through the monopoly houses without ever hoping to become competitive in the inter-national market, and (3) how to contain unproductive labour and provide for the urban middle classes at the same time."³³

In India in the 1950s and early 1960s the approach that was adopted was one which aimed to improve agricultural performance 'on the cheap' so to say, through institutional reforms rather than through investment in improved technology and infrastructure, in the context of policies regarding the allocation of public sector investments and perhaps of the inter-sectoral terms of trade which were urban-biased. In fact, the structural problems of the Indian agricultural economy were such as to justify the case for institutional reform, but the principal reforms that were needed, which could have brought about radical change in the structure of land ownership and the organization of agricultural production, though often mooted, were never implemented. In practice, the way land reforms was sought to be implemented and the other institutional innovations which were put into effect—community development programmes, the expansion of agricultural co-operatives, and the establishment of institutions of local Government—tended rather to deepen than to resolve the existing structural problems and reinforced the local power of rich peasants.³⁴ Prof. Sudipto Kaviraj was very candid when he argued, "Federal and other conservative resistance could, in principle, be broken down if the congress encouraged the mobilization of the masses and was willing to use the already achieved mobilizational levels for radical purposes consistent with its own programmes. But one of the central decisions of the Nehru Government was on this question: even though it sometimes did not abrogate its reformistic programmes, it decided to give them a

bureaucratic rather than a mobilizational form. For the congress leadership, clearly, the political task after assuming power was to demobilize its own movement, not to radicalize it further. It also discreetly renounced promises of distributive justice which had come to constitute part of its informal programme in the last stages of national movement.....needs of long-term economic strategy and ideological legitimation in a poor country made an abstractly redistributive programme imperative; but the ends of mobilizing the effective levers of power in the countryside during ordinary times made dependence on rural magnates equally unavoidable,"³⁵

The debate on the need for industrialization was politically resolved by successfully constituting planning as a domain outside 'the squabbles and conflicts of politics'. A developmental ideology was a constituent part of the self-definition of the post-colonial state. The state was linked to the people-nation not simply through the procedural forms of representative Government; it also acquired its representativeness by directing a programme of economic development on behalf of the nation. Therefore, planning was the domain of the rational determination and pursuit of these universal goals. It was a bureaucratic function, to be operated at a level above the particular interests of civil society, and institutionalized as such as a domain of policy - making outside the normal processes of representative politics and of implementation through a developmental administration.

But as a concrete bureaucratic function, it was in planning above all that the post - colonial state could claim its legitimacy as a single will and consciousness - the will of the nation - pursuing a task that was both universal and national - the well being of the people as a whole. It is in its legitimizing role, therefore, that planning, represented as a domain outside politics, was to become a lever of politics.³⁶ The core emphasis of development in India was meant to be placed on accumulation. Accumulation had to be reconciled with legitimation. Accumulation and legitimation - produced two implications for planning

in India. On the one hand, planning had to be 'a way of avoiding the unnecessary rigours of an industrial transition in so far as it impacted the masses resident in India's villages. On the other hand, planning was to become 'a positive instrument for resolving conflict in a large and heterogeneous sub-continent'. Yet accumulation was the Prime task if Industrialization was to take place. Accumulation necessarily implied the use of the powers of the state, whether directly through its legal and administrative institutions, or mediately through the acts of some agents with social power over others, to effect the required degree of dissociation of direct producers from their means of production. There was to be a capital intensive industrial sector under public ownership, a private industrial sector in light consumer goods and a private agricultural sector. The first two were the 'modern' sectors which were to be financed by foreign aid, low interest loans and taxation of private incomes mainly from the second sector. The third sector was seen as being mainly one of petty production, and it was there that a major flaw of this development strategy was to appear.³⁷ As Partha Chatterjee once again argues, "The problem is often posed as one of alternative planning strategies, with the suggestion that if suitable land reforms had been carried out soon after independence, a quite different development path may have been discovered which would have avoided the 'crisis' in which the planning process found itself in the middle of the 1960s. The difficulty with this suggestion, if we are to look at it from a political standpoint, is precisely the confusion it entails regarding the effective relation between the whole and the part, the universal and the particular, in the acts of a state promoting and supervising a programme of planned capitalist development'.³⁸

The state's inability to bring about effective agrarian reforms in the early 1950s was by far the biggest failure because of the unwillingness of Nehru's Government to alienate the rural elites who dominated the party at the provincial and district levels. While the

zamindari or landlord system of rent and revenue collection was abolished and tenants given greater security of tenure, there were too many imperfections in the land-ceiling legislation and its implementation. For all practical purposes the abolition of intermediary interests did not alter the basic contours of the agrarian structure.³⁹ And yet with the failure of land reforms to affect the power of the larger landholders, the other institutional innovations espoused by Nehru such as community development, cooperatives and Panchayati Raj – largely met the same fate as the land-owning community controlled them only to serve their interests and failed to realize significant improvements in agricultural performance. Again, the ‘third way’ – neither socialist nor one which made for efficient capitalist development – which was dictated by the requirement of the political system, served India badly in the longer run.⁴⁰

However, couched in ‘socialist’ terms, India’s macro-economic efforts have by and large followed the liberal model of planning for capitalist development. In 1959, Nehru failed to secure the party’s approval for a blueprint to promote cooperative farming on the Chinese model, the mere suggestion was enough reason for a serious rift in congress’s North Indian agrarian support base. As a matter of fact, Nehruvian socialism was perfectly in tune with indirect state support for private enterprise. So state ownership and national economic planning in the name of socialism promoted private enterprise in the best capitalist tradition. Much the same sort of policy was adopted towards the agrarian sector. Infact, Nehru envisaged a gradual enhancement of the state’s economic power without altering the basic ownership pattern. The policy emphasis in the industrial and to a more limited extent, the agricultural sector was on production and capital accumulation and shelving efforts at redistribution and the redressal of poverty for the future.⁴¹

In 1952, the national development council was set up with a view to giving voice to the chief ministers of the states in the national

planning exercise. With Nehru in the chair, NDC was ended up being a more effective institutional channel for those setting the scope and targets of the plan rather than for those entrusted with the implementation. There was much talk about creating a village level leadership, free of manipulation by political parties and exclusively engaged in extending the development effort through the education and organization of the lower levels of rural society. But the top-heavy character of the national planning organization and the faulty vehicles of implementation at the local levels of society could not cope up with the inherently disparate and decentralized proclivities informing India's expanding political landscape at the level of the varied regional economies. Infact, the three plan documents written and adopted during the Nehru era exposed some of the imperfections embedded in the centralized planning premised on a queer mix of the socialist and capitalist modernization paradigms. During this period, India genuinely intended to transform herself into an industrialized country and a major military power within the shortest possible time, as a result of which the planners paid little attention to the hard realities of resource-constraints, inequities inherent in the social structures of different regional political economies and the bare-bone heads of a swarming population.⁴² Prof. Jalal writes in this context, "while emphasizing the urgent need for reorganizing the rural social structure, the plan perked up investment outlays for agriculture. Rural works programmes received special attention, but did little to transform the agrarian structure. Instead of reaching the lowest strata in rural society, the funneling of greater development resources to the country-side expedited the commercialization of agriculture, a process in which the main beneficiaries were the rural upper class supporters of the congress."⁴³ Moreover, the stigma attached to the centralized planning endeavours during the Nehruvian era, was the institutionalization of corruption which further compounded the political difficulties emanating from unrealized economic objectives and ever - expanding

regional disparities.⁴⁴ The last five or six years of the Nehru period was clearly marked by turbulent situations. In domestic politics, there was a sudden upsurge of linguistic, regional and communal strife; the ruling party organization began to show signs of widespread corruption, inaptitude and factionalism; and of course there was the inglorious episode of the ouster of the communist ministry in Kerala. On the economic front, problems cropped up to cripple the planning process, naturally, a crisis was looming large on the horizon. Internationally too, India was going through a series of crisis-situations including the China war. Nehru seemed to be losing his magic-touch as he was old, tired, disillusioned, and embittered and obviously, no longer in control of things.⁴⁵ It is a truism of sorts that the Nehruvian project was fading before his death in May 1964. The faltering of the planning effort resulted in heightened struggle for the resources and the distribution of patronage on which the political system depended. The accumulation of demands on static resources led to bitter internal acrimony inside the congress party. The role of struggles at the local level over resources controlled by the state might also be one contributing factors for the decline of congress organization. The defeat of the Nagpur resolution, the mobilization of right - wing opposition in the Swatantra party which made it increasingly difficult to accommodate within the ruling consensus and most importantly, the erosion of farmer's support for the congress and subsequent emergence of regional farmers groupings caused a significant dent in the congress organization.⁴⁶

However, the lasting legacy of the Nehruvian state was not its economic achievements, but in the establishment of a viable structure of a relatively autonomous and democratic nation state at the core of society, committed to the idea of building a reformist, politically independent, capitalist society. During this period, the state stabilized, assumed responsibility to direct economic development, set up a constitutional regime, gathered for itself a wide range of powers and responsibilities, starting from the abolition of untouchability,

establishment of places of higher education and culture, to building dams and Nuclear reactors. The combined influence of developmentalism and Democratic mobilization was responsible for rapid penetration of the state into domains of society hitherto unexplored by the state. In any case, we should not overrate the state's capacity to refashion social and economic formations.⁴⁷ Frankel opines in this respect, "Plan policies for agrarian reform and reorganization were at the heart of the economic framework for increasing food grains production, raising the level of savings, and mobilizing surpluses essential to financing large scale industrial development schemes. As concessions to the propertied castes slowed down the tempo of institutional change, the Government's capacity to raise additional rural resources for development programs declined.⁴⁸ Zoya Hasan, another noted political scientist, contends that major inadequacy, severely affecting state's subsequent performance, was the inability to institutionalize ideological preferences, resulting in a system that led to the growing marginalization of millions, widening inequity and discontent. The mass structure of the congress party mediating between state and society, somehow, prevented this disaffection from being translated into mass alienation.⁴⁹ The standard historiography, representing the Nehru period as one in which there was 'a legitimate and moderately stable state that was confident of its ability to lay out India's agenda for socio-economic change and the subsequent phase, dominated (even after her death) by Mrs. Gandhi, as one which saw the erosion of state capacity to bring about change, even whilst it became more authoritarian, is not wrong. However, it is misleading in so far as it seems to overestimate the capacities of Nehru's regime actually to implement the agenda which it set out, and to underestimate the political contradictions to which it gave rise, and which resulted in its own demise. It is also no less important that the congress party was no longer able to accommodate diverse interests in the way that it had

handled before, and it was already plagued by internal bickerings and riven by conflict before Nehru passed away.⁵⁰

The dilapidated 'congress system' and the emergence of authoritarian streak in Indian democracy:-

The dominance of a single party in a fundamentally multi-party system of parliamentary democracy worked reasonably well. The momentum of the nationalist movement, the congress's organizational structure and the identical social background of the top leadership and their shared experiences in the anti-imperialist struggle proved to be highly effective. However, just beneath the surface of an apparently stable single party dominant system, the politics of patronage was facilitating the scope for corruption and the self - interested pursuit of power by privileged social groups both within and outside the state apparatus.⁵¹ So, congress was able to maintain its position as a party occupying most of the space in the political system because there was plurality within the dominant part which made it more representative, provided flexibility, and sustained internal competition. At the same time, it was prepared to absorb groups and movements from outside the party and thus, prevented other parties from gaining strength.⁵² Moreover, the congress succeeded in pursuing a policy of neutralizing some of the more important sources of cleavage and disaffection and the leadership's tendency to preserve democratic forms, to respect the rule of law, to avoid undue strife and to show great sensitivity on the question of respect for minorities were also admirable.⁵³ However, In the absence of any national alternative, congress had little difficulty romping home to victory in the first three general elections, further confirming its dominance at the national and the state levels as well. During the 1952 and 1957 General elections congress managed to capture between 74 and 75 percent of the central parliamentary seats and between 61 and 68 percent of the seats in the state assemblies. But it did so with only 45 to 47.5 per cent of the electoral support. It was indicative of the inability of the opposition parties to fully capitalize

on the advantage being created by Congress's not so encouraging show in the elections in terms of popular support. Moreover, Congress high command's hobnobbing with the non-elected institutions of the state - the civil bureaucracy, the police and the army (when necessary, for example, curbing insurgencies in the North east) must have facilitated the political centre's authority throughout the length and breadth of the country, not the Congress party alone. The growth of public sector enterprises and licensing controls over the private sector created new areas of state patronage, giving the central political leadership ample scope for rewarding loyal and co-operative non-elected officials.⁵⁴ A Pakistani scholar is very candid on this point when she argues, "The singular focus on parties and politics by some scholars and on political culture by others has deflected from the fact that the practice of formal democracy in India, expressed in the holding of elections at regular intervals, has always co-existed with a covert authoritarianism inherent in the state structure. One reason why this has been less conducive to detection and dissection is that the structural authoritarianism of a state made tolerable by a formally democratic political system tends to be more enduring and diffuse than one based on direct military rule".⁵⁵

No doubt, the Congress party possessed something of a federal structure in the first two decades of independence. Nehru made accommodations with Congress party bosses at the state level who were allowed a certain degree of autonomy. Such a policy of the central leadership only worked so long as the rural under-classes remained relatively quiescent and patron-client relations in the states remained substantially intact. With the expanding sphere of democratic politics, the limitations of this policy became evident in the 1967 elections as the Congress party was voted out of power in as many as eight states. So, Nehru's policy paid rich political dividends in terms of a semblance of cohesion to the Congress party and helped consolidate state power. But, by the same token, this policy weakened its representative

capacity and by implication, the Indian state's capacity to carry out redistributive reforms.⁵⁶

The conservative nature of congress party in North India was mainly the product of its Gandhian political culture and of its social profile. From the time of Motilal Nehru to the ascendancy of Jawaharlal in the congress party, the party had a remarkable over-representation of the upper castes in its ranks. Even among the modern professionals, there is no dearth of proponents who championed social conservatism. Moreover, because congress reached out to the notables of the merchant and agrarian milieus, it therefore co-opted many conservative even traditionalist elements into the party's fold. After independence, the party leaders including Nehru recruited even more influential local personalities to serve its electoral interests, developing an interlocking network of 'vote banks' whose incumbents joined the nationalist intelligentsia in the party machine. Thus the congress established the supremacy of the upper castes in the political system of North India. The main upper castes comprising Brahmins, Rajputs and Banyas together, were, literally, in the driver's seat in the congress party in North India.⁵⁷ This is by and large, akin to the coalition of interests described by Bardhan as constituting the 'dominant propertied classes'.⁵⁸ For Bardhan, the monopoly of power exercised by this coalition was not incompatible with a system of representative democracy. Conversely, since the elements in the dominant coalition are diverse in nature and each adequately strong to exert pressures and pulls in different directions, political democracy may have a slightly better chance than elsewhere, taking into consideration the procedural usefulness of democracy as an impersonal rule of negotiation, demand articulation, and bargaining within the coalition, and as a device for one partner to keep the other partner at the bargaining table within some moderate bounds.⁵⁹

However, rivalry between elite groups had not taken a very dangerous turn but the dominant classes mentioned by Bardhan were

surely locked in a conflict. These conflicts were bound to last except if the state resorted to coercive violent means - and the realization that this deadlock might be a long-drawn prompted the three groups to arrive at a compromise that fits nearly with the democratic agenda as put forward by Bardhan.⁶⁰ Jaffrelot captures this fascinating political dynamics in these words, "Instead of fighting each other these elite groups thought of collaboration and pool their resources together. Business-men would find the congress party against the promise of a moderating of state intervention in the economy and ad hoc departures from the 'licence Raj' (which was a major source of corruption). Landowners would rally around the ruling party and allow it to mobilize their local influence at election time in return for a 'soft' implementation of land reform and state control of the grain trade. The congress professional politicians and the bureaucracy could assert their own power with the help of these two support bases. Democracy offered them all a flexible set of bargaining procedures which allowed for the division of the spoils, while resisting popular pressure. This interpretation provides a pragmatic explanation of the continuity of the democratic polity in India. It also offers an explanation for its social defects. The bargaining form of collaboration between elite groups was congenial to political democracy but drastically limited the chances of success of a genuine policy of social distribution. India was bound to have political democracy without social Democracy."⁶¹ With Nehru at the helm of authority, the progressive elements, no doubt, tended to dominate the proceedings within the congress party in Delhi. With the congress apparatus in the states suffering from inertia, it was virtually left with no option for effective inter vention.⁶² As a perceptive observer of the Indian political scene commented that this is a clear case of loss of state autonomy since, in the states, the congress was dependent on local notables delivering vote banks. ⁶³ After initial fillip given by Nehru to the land reform programme, it was deflected from its objectives because its implementation became the exclusive preserve of the state

Governments. However, the centre itself diluted the autonomy of the state by admitting that the congress required the support of local notables.⁶⁴

In any case, the State's inability to institute radical socio-economic reforms had to do with the power of the rich in the countryside and in towns. The efficacy of reforms was diluted through the effective control of the courts and the institutions of the police by the rich. This gave rise to a situation whereby though the congress held power at the centre and in most states since 1947, and the centre provided a major part of the finances for state development programmes, the government, by and large, was incapacitated to implement policies geared to best serve the interests of the country as a whole so, it may be maintained that despite the dominance of Nehru's ideas in 1947, the aspirations of many other groups clashed to create a lopsided pattern of economic modernity.⁶⁵ As Sunil Khilnani wrote that the interests of big industrialists, the hopes of Gandhian miniaturists, the ambitions of Nehruvian intellectuals, and those of a rural landed elite, created an acutely uneven development skewed in favour of certain regions and specific classes at the expense of others.⁶⁶

Finally, congress's limited social bases of support and its reliance on an oligarchical coterie of party Bosses began to backfire seriously by the end of the second decade of independence. Mass exodus from the congress party took place between 1962 and 1966 and around the time of the general elections of 1967. Charan Singh left the congress party to set up a new political outfit called the Bharatiya Kranti Dal which later became the Bharatiya Lok Dal. In West Bengal also congress had a sagging fortune. In Bihar, socialists did well at the congress's expense. In the south the DMK routed congress in Tamilnadu. The electoral verdict of the 1967 elections marked the end of the first phase of congress dominance in India paving the way for a number of regionally - based opposition parties to emerge on India's political Horizon.⁶⁷

Dominant issues of economic development and social change: Perspectives on planning, policies and politics –

Two discontinuities characterized the debates on politics and policies relating to major issues of economic development and social change in India after independence and distorted the effective implementation of most of the policies initiated. One was a discontinuity of discourse between exponent of foreign models for economic development and social change, many of them Marxists, and Adherents of alternative strategies who drew inspiration and legitimacy from Gandhi's writings and speeches. No doubt, the models for economic development were foreign but the motives of the Indian leadership in adopting them were genuinely nationalist, springing from the robust faith that rapid heavy industrialization was need of the hour to ensure Indian's independence in every sense and to attain great power status. The second discontinuity was between levels in the Indian polity, between the objectives set at the planning commission and the practice of policy making business involving the chosen few in the central Government in Delhi, on the one hand, and the realities of regional and local structures of power and decision making in the provincial capitals and in the districts on the other hand which stood in the way of effective implementation of policies formulated at higher levels and in subsequent years, decision making in Delhi itself was influenced by them.⁶⁸

The first major issue was the debate over the relative roles of the public and private sectors in economic development planning. The basic outlines and strategy of Indian economic Development Planning in the post independence era were set during the second five year plan from 1956 to 1961, whose principal architect was P.C Mahalanobis. The central core of that plan was a move toward capital intensive, fast-paced heavy industrialization, led by the public sector which would build the key industries and attain the commanding heights of a new modern industrial economy for India, leaving the private sector a

complementary role to play in the mixed economy. Obviously, It drew upon a model of what a modern Industrial society and a big military power looked like in the twentieth century and upon the methods used in the past by the big industrial military powers to achieve their current status, and drew up the requirements for India to achieve an identical position irrespective of its own resources, social structure and the needs of its people.⁶⁹ Paul R. Brass writes, "The heyday of the strategy was the decade between 1955-1956 and 1965-1966 when India was able to draw vast foreign aid resources from both the capitalist and socialist countries and to build the heavy industrial base in steel, chemicals, machine tools, cement and the like that the country has today. However, a major crisis for the public sector, capital intensive, heavy industrialization strategy arose during the discussions surrounding the formulation of the fourth five years plan as a consequence of a decline in foreign aid, problems of internal resource mobilization, and the heavy dependence of India on the U.S. for food aid occasioned by the neglect of agriculture in the plans. During these discussions, which involved a three years hiatus between the end of the Third and the adoption of the Fourth Plan, the coherence of the planning process itself, achieved by focusing on the public sector heavy industrialization strategy, was lost and the planning process became more and more open to the conflicting pulls of competing strategies and competing demands for resources, and to political manipulation. A further consequence of the loss of momentum in the mid 1960s was an increasingly evident deceleration in the rate of growth of the economy, traceable primarily to a decline in the rate of industrial growth."⁷⁰

A second dominant issue in public discussion of the planning process in India concerns the relative attention paid to and the resource allocation for Industry and agriculture in the plans. The debate on this broad-theme has, over the years, matured into competing alternative models for economic development and alternative growth strategies. The chief exponent of alternative approach to Indian

economic development was former prime minister Charan Singh and other Gandhi inspired political leaders, who believed that capital and land are in short supply, while labour is abundant and under-employed. Therefore, India needs to conserve capital and maximize the use of labour by adopting strategies characterized by labour intensive, employment-generating industries and land improvement and augmenting methods to scale up the production from the land.⁷¹

A third issue concerned the place of agrarian reform and reorganization within the overall economic development strategy. There was a broad consensus among the central leaders that inequalities in the countryside were not consistent with the democratic and socialist goals of the congress and that, therefore, land ceilings should be imposed and that the surplus land being generated consequent upon the imposition of ceiling, should be distributed amongst the poorer farmers and the landless.

The fourth issue concerns the methods to be used to bring about rural change and increased agricultural productivity within the existing allocations for agricultural development. The basic pattern of rural development emphasized in the first two five years plans was extensive and integrated rural development with programmes that were to be spread evenly across the country for the benefit of all and that would include overall improvements in the quality of rural life generally, not simply improvements in agricultural techniques. In the 1960s, however, as a consequence of perceived failures in the earlier approach, the new approach was put in place which was consistent with the overall design of the planning process instituted by Nehru and Mahalanobis as it did not call for drawing significant resources away from the heavy industry strategy. The new Agricultural strategy was to follow up and reinforce the change in policy already introduced in favour of intensive agricultural development with the emphasis on new technologies and the adoption of the new high-yielding varieties rather than on overall rural development. In effect, therefore, the currently

favoured resolution of the issue of extensive versus intensive, Community development versus agriculture-oriented rural programmes went in favour of agriculture-oriented but extensive development designed to reach all farmers who could possibly benefit from new seeds and improved methods.⁷² Paul Brass has very succinctly pointed out , "The efforts to mobilize resources to support an urban-biased, capital-intensive industrialization strategy precipitated a counter-challenge, mostly political, but with some intellectual and ideological support already noted above, in favour of an alternative development strategy that would shift the allocation of resources from industry to agriculture and from the center to the states. The overall political movement in the Indian states generally since the 1960s has been away from centralized planning and urban industrial development to demands for more resources from the center for agriculture and rural development in the states."⁷³

Shastri and the laying of foundation stone of the New Agricultural strategy and the beginning of the Indira years.

Nehru died in 1964 and his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri was a handpicked of the party bosses who derived their power from the dominant landed groups that reorganization would have displaced.⁷⁴ Shastri's brief premiership saw a number of changes which had profound implications for the future. By the time he came into office the Third Five plan was already running into rough weather. Failures in agriculture were leading to price-hike and inflationary pressures; shortages of raw materials and low demand constrained rates of industrial growth; and the limitations on the mobilization of resources domestically, were bringing about both pressures on the balance of payments and increased reliance on indirect financing and especially on foreign aid. This dependency meant that India was increasingly exposed to pressures to change policies from the world Bank and from the united states which India, thus far, was able to avoid.⁷⁵ Apart from the 'external pressures', Shastri seems to have been somewhat

sympathetic with the protagonists for policy changes and the Nehruvian model had already lost its sheen as it became very difficult for the rest of the champions in the planning commission to continue with the fight. Shastri quietly reduced the importance of the planning commission and augmented the powers both of the cabinet and of the ministries, partly by establishing a new secretariat attached to the prime minister's office. L.K. Jha, a senior civil servant with strong inclination towards policy shift, was brought in to head the PMO. The powers of the state chief ministers, through the National development council, to suggest policy were enhanced. Shastri also appointed C. Subramaniam as Minister of Agriculture, and Subramaniam, moving away from the institutional approach to agricultural development strategy of the Nehru years, conceived of New Agricultural Strategy with obvious emphasis on technological change and price incentives to lure farmers to invest much more heavily in modern inputs, chemical fertilizers in particular, even though that meant granting concessions to the private sector. Around this time, new higher-yielding varieties (HYVs) of wheat which required heavier applications of fertilizers, were introduced into the country that finally, led to the beginning of the 'Green revolution'.⁷⁶ Corbridge and Harriss summed up the significance of this major policy shift in these words, "Here we emphasize their significance in making a departure from the Nehruvian model, and from the social goals that had been established in the constituent Assembly, and their implications for the whole planning process. Subramaniam's strategy for agriculture called for the allocation of a greater share of public sector resources, particularly for increasing fertilizer supplies. This brought about a major tussle over plan financing between the finance Ministry and the planning commission, and the ministry of Agriculture - in which the Leverage of the latter was increased by the effects of the disastrous droughts of 1965-1966 and 1966-1967 and this contributed both to the delaying of the start of the fourth five year plan and to the events which led the Government of India, finally, to

give in to pressures for the devaluation of the rupee, in June 1966, and to introduce a more liberal import policy. Aid from the united states was resumed almost immediately."⁷⁷

India passed through a severe political instability following Nehru's death which precipitated a crisis in policy terms and was fraught with the retrograde possibilities of most serious nature. An orchestration of pressures from both internal and external sources led to the surfacing of a situation in which the Nehruvian plan for a reformist capitalism with its policies of public sector, state control over resources, planning, a relatively anti imperialist foreign policy could all be re-negotiated. Indira Gandhi's Government initially gave in to some of these pressures, its most celebrated collapse being the agreeing to devaluation of the rupee. In the fourth general elections, congress suffered a serious set back in electoral terms and as a result, it woke up to a realization that the party needed some drastic measures to refurbish its image in order to wriggle out of the deepening politico-economic crisis.⁷⁸

Disintegration of the congress party and diminishing of its dominance

During this period, a so-called 'syndicate' group of state leaders of the congress, led by Kamaraj from Madras and including also Atulya Ghosh from west Bengal, S. Nijalingapa from Karnataka, Sanjiva Reddy from Andhra and S.K. Patil from Bombay, had secured the appointment of Indira Gandhi as Shastri's successor. They came together to marshall support for Indira Gandhi as prime ministerial candidate succeeding Shastri, on the fond hope that she would abide by the principle of collective leadership and to the decision-making by consensus which had by now become established. The atmosphere was marked by pervasive violence in the country, with the drama of devaluation already unfolding and the congress party was in total disarray, fractured by factional feuds. During the 1967 general election,

devaluation gave a handle to the opposition belonging to both the right and the left - the left clamouring for constitutional changes in order to implement socialist policies and the right rubbing off most of the programme of social transformation underlying the basic principles established under Nehru's leadership. The congress was not in a position to offer anything substantial and as a result, suffered dramatic defeats, mainly to the benefit of Swantantra and the Jana Sangh.⁷⁹ However, tension between the syndicate and Indira Gandhi increased after the 1967 electoral reverses. Gandhi was determined to be free from the tutelage of the 'syndicate' and so, she identified herself with socialist slogans and sought the support of the left wing of congress, the congress forum for socialist Action (CFSA), in particular. In the 1967 elections the congress registered victories in 283 out of 516 seats which is an all time low performance. As Mrs. Gandhi was becoming well-disposed towards CFSA's programme, it lost no time in launching a campaign in favour of land reform and the cooperativisation of Indian agriculture. In May 1967, Indira Gandhi persuaded the congress working committee to adopt a 10 point programme which had been spelt out by the CFSA and included the nationalization of banks and insurance companies, the transfer of important and export monopolies to the state, the setting up of revenue and urban property ceilings, an employment programme for landless labourers and the abolition of the prince's privileges and privy purses. As expected, the syndicate became increasingly critical of Mrs. Gandhi's moves which climaxed during the presidential elections in August leading to the final break up with the syndicate. Indira Gandhi appealed for electing trade unionist V.V. Giri as the president of India whereas the congress bosses campaigned for Sanjiva Reddy. V.V. Giri emerged victorious in the presidential election despite the congress bosses threw their weight behind Sanjiva Reddy. Again, Indira Gandhi sponsored a petition by which AICC (All India Congress Committee) members were required to elect a new president replacing Nijalingappa, a frontline member of syndicate group within

the congress party. Responding to Mrs. Gandhi's Call the party elected a new president which, obviously, formalized the split. Henceforth, congress under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership came to be known as congress (R) for requisition and later for 'ruling' - whereas the syndicate formed the congress (O) for organization.⁸⁰ The 1967 General election signaled the 'end of congress dominance' and the elections were followed by an extraordinary phase of defections and counter-defections as different coalitions competed with each other for power in state Governments. Frequent violations of parliamentary and constitutional norms took place. Between 1967 and 1968, president's rule was imposed in as many as five states. The 'Congress System' of conciliation and accommodation, with a strong centre and strong Governments in the states, was increasingly proving to be a difficult proposition and from this time onwards bifurcation was being developed between national level and state level politics, which was subsequently established institutionally by Indira Gandhi's tactical initiative to delink national and state assembly elections in 1971. Subsequently, bifurcation of this type contributed considerably in augmenting power of state-level political parties, the evidences of which were clearly manifested in the unfolding of National level politics in the 1990s.⁸¹ Rudolphs argued aptly, "congress party leaders (hence forward) confronted a more complex and less manageable political world than that of the Nehru era and the Shastri interregnum, when policy issues and factional struggles at the center and in the states could be settled within the congress fold."⁸² As there was no possibility - for Mrs. Gandhi to return to the old congress politics of accommodation, it might seem that Mrs. Gandhi should have been able to lead the Government and the country emphatically towards the radical social transformation.⁸³ In the years which followed, leading up to the declaration of the Emergency in 1975, in her continuing efforts to secure power, Mrs. Gandhi sought to embark upon a path between the right and the left and in the process, she coined some slogans that

promised radical social change. Notwithstanding her continuing use of populist appeals, she did nothing - rather the reverse - to build a system of Governance which would lubricate those changes. The failures of the planning process, social polarities and intense conflicts provided her with a different social context which jeopardized the development of the nation. As a result, the legitimacy of the exercise of power was called increasingly into question. Simultaneously, the organizational capacities of the ruling party and of the Government were, drastically, reduced. Against the back-drop of these socio-political developments, Indira Gandhi indulgèd in populism which was fraught with dangerous consequences as it jacked up expectations without suggesting any operational strategy to realize them. She, then, resorted to authoritarian techniques for the suppression of popular dissent, which climaxed in the clamping of emergency of 1975-1977, by taking advantage of those powers of the colonial state which were carried forward in the constitution of 1950.⁸⁴

During the 1950s and most of the 1960s India was Governed by a relatively stable dominant party. The elaborate patronage-type networks was the principal pillar of the power of the congress party. These networks facilitated the political incorporation of a large segment of the Indian society as the lower classes were dependent on the upper classes. Dependencies inherent in the social structure had thus been politicized by the requirements of electoral competition into patron-client networks which have obvious manifestations in 'vote banks' and other forms of 'intermediate aggregation'. However, these features of political rule in India have been undermined in the last decade or so. Moreover, populism emerged as a tool of direct political mobilization during Mrs. Gandhi's rule leading to the considerable weakening of party organization. As a result, India's democracy is further, weakened and naturally, the central authorities are even less capable of reformist intervention than before.⁸⁵ She also took a more aggressive line with her own party, and this soon produced what Kochanek has rightly

called 'a new political process' as the prime minister created 'a pyramidal decision - making structure in party and Government'. Although this prevented threats to her personal power, it tended to centralize decision making, weaken institutionalization, and create an overly personalized regime. Moreover, the new political process found it difficult to be federally governed as the tensions and cleavages of a heterogeneous party operating in the context of a heterogeneous society, got accentuated. A major crisis in the system, was looming large.⁸⁶ Kochanek, further, adds that the centralization of power within the party did not, however, make sure that factionalism ceased to be a problem. Instead, partly because centralization reduced the leader's ability to manage conflict, partly because Mrs. Gandhi set leaders and factions at the regional level against one another and partly because she had largely abandoned the use of bargaining, conflict within the organization grew more severe and dysfunctional. All of these reduced the party's ability to cope creatively or even adequately with conflicts that arose from a society facing increasing economic hardship.⁸⁷ Authority structure was greatly influenced by the changes in the social structure. Apart from the ascendancy of a commercialized, land-owning class, the class relations in the countryside have been undergoing changes. Vertical dependencies in the village communities were used to provide an important social mechanism preventing the politicization of class issues local notables of various types were at work for controlling the votes of their dependents so, the electoral competition in the past did not always require direct political appeals to the lower classes. This pattern has undergone a change in the last decade or so.⁸⁸ Atul Kohli writes in this context, "while these changes allow new political ideas to penetrate the lower rural classes, politicization has itself been an independent force weakening traditional vertical ties between land owning notables and the peasantry. The twin forces of commerce and politics have therefore contributed to the emergence of the lower rural classes as a new political factor. While this process is far from

complete, the way the new political forces are eventually accommodated, co-opted, or repressed, will probably be the single most important factor influencing the future of Indian politics.”⁸⁹ Indira Gandhi sought to build her support in the 1970s by going directly to the masses. The popular slogan “*garibi-hatao*” was of course an important component of this mobilization strategy. This mobilization strategy coupled with the endeavour of broadening the arena of legitimate demands, has escalated the expectations of the population concerning the distributional performance of the state. In view of the declining capacities for reform, this situation has been proved to be a surefire recipe for long-term instability.⁹⁰ Indira Gandhi’s failure to reform the congress party was partly responsible for her in-capacity to deliver on the electoral promises. In the 1971 Election, Indira Gandhi’s congress had promised in its manifesto that if voted to power, it would scale down the land ceiling to 10 acres per family for irrigated land and 18 acres per family for land sustaining two crops. These measures were passed but the Government adopted a flexible rules for putting them into action resulting in an inordinate delay and flouting of the norms by resorting to some concessionary clauses contained in the rules. The obstructionist attitude of the state party leaders and the state Governments was largely responsible for jettisoning this reform programme. These handicaps could only have been overcome with a reformed congress party committed to the avowed goals of social transformation.⁹¹ As Kochanek put it, “The congress continued to remain a broadly aggregative electoral coalition, rather than a cohesive, ideologically coherent party.”⁹² The bureaucrats had no reason to be uncomfortable with the statist socialism as propounded by Nehru. The brief Prime Ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri between May 1964 and January, 1966 also saw him embracing the members of the higher Civil service in order to prevent an increasingly un-representative gang of regional bosses from playing the spoilsport. In an attempt to neutralize the party bosses and restore the congress’s sagging political fortunes,

Indira Gandhi also turned to elements within the bureaucracy and indulged in populist slogans. The symbiotic relationship of the ruling party with the civil bureaucracy gave a fresh lease of life to the authoritarian streak that had been inherent in the Indian state structure. Despite the formal separation of the legislature and the executive, rule by ordinance was proliferating enormously. Together with the hugely enhanced scope of bureaucratic discretion, these rules and regulations far from systematizing relations between state and society expanded the scope for patronage, corruption and extraction.⁹³ As Ayesha Jalal writes, "Two decades after independence India possessed a unitary state resting equally on elected and non-elected institutions, neither of which were above twisting and turning the rules to accommodate a personalized style of politics and Government, and a federal ruling party that was becoming increasingly hamstrung by factionalism and a narrowing regional and class basis of support."⁹⁴

Indira Gandhi - 'deinstitutionalization' of politics and the emergency

Mrs. Gandhi's massive success in 1971 election-which was, further, enhanced by victory in the war with Pakistan later in the year that gave birth to the new state of Bangladesh, and by her success in the state legislative Assembly elections of 1972, represented a paradox. The paradox is that electoral success and political power at the centre do not always translate into effective authority to govern, and it remains one of the essential dimensions of Indian politics. Indira Gandhi's triumph was viewed as a personal victory. It had not depended upon the party or its organization. Instead of rebuilding her party organization after 1971, Indira Gandhi sought to establish control by centralizing power into her own hands.⁹⁵ Kochanek, once again, captures the situation beautifully when he writes:

"The Elections of 1971 and 1972 in India marked the restoration of congress dominance at the centre and in the states; a return to

strong central leadership, and the apparent emergence of a more broadly based, ideologically coherent party. On the surface, the 'Indira wave' appeared to have restored the pattern of the party dominance that characterized the Nehru era. Yet a closer analysis reveals a distinctly different pattern of dominance.⁹⁶

The new system entailed, crucially, the abandonment of intra party democracy, a change that has never been reversed. Positions in the congress organization at all levels were filled by appointment from above rather than by election from below.⁹⁷ Mrs. Gandhi's centralizing endeavours operated at cross purposes with the basic logic by which India had been governed under both the crown and Nehru's congress. According to that logic, the influence of people at the apex of national and regional political levels penetrates down through the systems most effectively by means of compromise. Attempts to rule by diktat paradoxically weaken the centralizers, as happened to Mrs. Gandhi.⁹⁸

This situation paved the way for the opposition to consolidate their strengths and by 1974, under Jayaprakash Narayan's leadership, an opposition movement had acquired real substance and momentum. Mrs. Gandhi's answer to the attempts of opposition party to mobilize support from the people against her rule was very harsh. She found herself under growing pressure from within her own party and turned to a small circle of confidants in which her son Sanjoy figured most prominently. He wanted to crush the opposition unity and movements by adopting myriads of techniques like threats, smears and organized violence.⁹⁹ During the mid-1970s, the forces of political opposition adopted an identical strategy of direct mobilization. Thus, Jay-Prakash Narayan (JP) sought to oust Indira Gandhi by promising a "total revolution" that did not entail any attack on the propertied class. The Gandhian style mobilization strategy had struck a favourable chord among the Indian masses because without threatening the propertied class, it offered a ray of hope to all those who had hitherto been by passed by planned Development. JP's pre-eminence was somewhat

unusual among the Indian political elite because he alone could claim to be an heir of sorts to the Gandhian legacy of saintly politicians. Obviously, this put a huge premium on his mobilization success. As his movement to oppose Indira Gandhi gained momentum, and as the seeds of the Janata Party were sown, Mrs. Gandhi's power position was at stake. This political movement led by JP appears to have been the major cause leading up to the declaration of "emergency" which marked the brief authoritarian interlude in the otherwise democratic evolution of Indian politics.¹⁰⁰

Even after the 1969 split, Congress under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, somehow or other, continued to depend on "vote bank" leaders. However, the declaration of the emergency suspended the elective process and therefore conveniently freed Indira Gandhi from her dependence on the Congress notables. No doubt, this had put her on a sound wicket for undertaking more radical reforms as this freed herself from the influence of the Congress notables.¹⁰¹ But, the inability of Indira Gandhi to leverage her authoritarian hold on power for pushing reforms favouring the poor, such as land redistribution, has led some commentators to argue that authoritarianism does not offer a solution to India's developmental problems.¹⁰²

The Emergency rule under Mrs. Indira Gandhi- Political dilemma leads to economic disaster:

Indira Gandhi sought to justify the imposition of National Emergency for realizing the socialist mission of the Congress. Mrs. Gandhi immediately unfolded 20 point programme for social progress. It contained, among other things, the rapid enforcement of land ceilings, housing for landless labourers, the abolition of bonded labour and a moratorium on the debts of the weaker sections of society. The 20-point programme Committees which was empowered to evaluate and correct inequalities, could never function because they lacked the infrastructure to support themselves and the Panchayats which were

controlled by the local Notables did not provide them with any assistance. Some scholars maintained that the achievement of the emergency Government regarding land reform was most disappointing. Economists estimated that by July 1976 only 1.5% of the total area owned by rural households could be considered as surplus and out of that 1.5%, about 16% was, at best, distributed. ¹⁰³

The Emergency regime also proved to be business - friendly in the sense that it declared a wage freeze which certainly reinforced the deflationary trend, a cut from 8 to 4% of the minimum annual bonuses and it also liberalized the 'License Raj'. Private enterprises were allowed to import more freely and to expand their share of the market.¹⁰⁴ Business standard revealed that 'within a month of the proclamation of Emergency and the decision not to have strikes and lock-outs, nearly 20,000 employees have been either retrenched or laid off by various multi-national business houses.¹⁰⁵ Rudlophs cryptically commented that the Emergency regime chose 'to talk left and act Right.'¹⁰⁶

Frank regarded the emergency regime as reflecting the 'Indian bourgeoisie's bid for a "Brazilian model" capital intensive and export oriented sub imperialist solution to its, crisis of capital accumulation'¹⁰⁷ A Marxist scholar is even more categorical when he argued: 'The period of emergency can straight - forwardly be explained as simply the continuation of the reality of the previous system with the pluralistic veneer of parliamentary democracy stripped away, leaving the underlying reality of elite class dominance.'¹⁰⁸

However, Indira Gandhi adopted a populist discourse by arguing that she represented the will of the people, so she could even bypass institutions such as judiciary. Buoyed by her electoral success in 1971, Mrs Gandhi had the constitution altered in order to implement some programmes of her populist agenda. The 24th amendment curbed the powers of the judiciary to control the procedure of constitutional amendments and the 25th amendment did away with compensation for

the victims of nationalization. More importantly, it rendered judiciary incompetent to contest the decisions of the State on these issues. Moreover, Mrs. Gandhi tried to establish a direct personal rapport between herself and 'the people.' In so doing, she dramatically personalized this relation between herself and the people in the garb of a slogan 'Indira Hatao versus Garibi Hatao' campaign in the run up to the elections of 1971 which also saw her consciously short-circuiting the congress 'vote banks'.¹⁰⁹

The rich peasant-kulak class was increasingly becoming restive and defiant and was unwilling to remain under the control of this authoritarian form of rule than it had been under formal democracy. The emergency rule also saw both the profits and the assets of big business going up and they obtained more from the repression of labour than from any real improvements in productivity.¹¹⁰ However, the bureaucratic excesses in North India, urban resettlement programmes and a massive family planning drive associated especially with Mrs. Gandhi's Son Sanjoy might have been contributed quite handsomely to the electoral reverses that Mrs. Gandhi suffered in the rather surprisingly called elections of March, 1977.¹¹¹ Therefore, the Congress under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership, was facing a paradox regarding reconciliation between political democracy and social democracy leading to a dilemma since a decision in favour of one option or the other had to be made.¹¹² As Kohli argues, "without an organizational base it is unlikely that an electoral mandate can be carried out, with centralization and powerlessness becoming simultaneous tendencies."¹¹³

Janata interregnum – politics and policy directions - In the sixth General elections India's electorate had directed their ire against the suspension of democratic processes with a outright rejection of overt authoritarianism. The 1977 elections appeared to have marked the beginning of the end of congress domination in Indian Politics. But, most importantly, congress's Continued claims to the central authority

of the Indian State were under more severe strain from a variety of regionally - based political forces representing both conservative and the populist variety. The expanding arena of Democratic politics and the continued erosion of Congress's organizational and electoral bases of support had benefited the regional political parties immensely and aggravated the problem of concentrating political and economic power in the hands of the central State.¹¹⁴

The years from 1977 to 1984 were marked by animosity among political parties and a time of abrasive conflict. This was also a period underpinned by decay and fragmentation of parties. Two great themes dominated proceedings in the realm of politics during this phase.¹¹⁵ The great mass of India's voters woke up to a heightened consciousness as people at all levels of society became increasingly aware of the logic of electoral politics, of the secrecy of the ballot, and of the notions that parties and leaders should respond to those whom they represented. This awakening was initially germinated among prosperous groups, but it also stirred up the level of awareness of the poor.¹¹⁶ The second great theme characterizing this period was the decay of political institutions. In other words, a decline in the capacity of institutions rendered them incapable of responding rationally, creatively, or even adequately to pressures from society.¹¹⁷

The awakening of the electorate and the decay of institutions combined together also brought about five further changes as by-products of the political dynamics of that period. The first of these was a change in the way that elections were won and lost. It was clearly distinguished from the days before 1972, when incumbent Governments at the State and national levels usually won re-election, to a period in which they usually lost. The second change was an obvious decline in confidence in the State as an agency capable of creative social action as opposed to an agency with the coercive power to maintain order. The third change was the tendency for society and politics to diverge. With the political institutions, especially parties,

becoming less capable to respond rationally to appeals that arose from society, social groups tended to give up on politics and politicians and to turn inwards, battenning on parochial sentiments and whatever internal resources they had under their disposal. A fourth change involved the process of blurring the lines between many parties and their social bases. This was a destabilizing, and potentially destructive, trend, especially as the awakening of the electorate made it more important than ever that parties develop solid, clearly perceived ties to social bases of manageable size. A growing divergence between the logic of politics at the national level and the political logic in various state level arenas was the last of the five changes: A clear manifestation of this trend was visible when in the early 1980s several states saw the emergence of regional parties.¹¹⁸

The Janta interregnum and its impact on Indian politics:

The Janata Party swept into power in March 1977. Though initially, it commanded respect born out of its anti-authoritarian stance, leadership disunity soon produced dissatisfaction. Even if popular support was not totally undermined, the incapacity of the leadership to act in unison led to governmental collapse. The same disunity further prevented the short-lived rulers from putting up even a respectable showing in the next elections. The Janata interlude may thus be remembered primarily for its successful dismantling of the emerging authoritarian rule.¹¹⁹

In 1977 the Janata Party Election manifesto promised a 'policy of special treatment' and even a 'New Deal' for weaker sections. If mandated to power, it would 'reserve between 25% and 33% of all appointments to Government service for the backward classes in keeping with the recommendations of the Kalelkar Commission. Promises in the manifesto, were, mostly directed to the kisans. One of the solemn resolve of the party's objectives was to narrow down the 'rural-urban disparities' by according priority to farmers. The Janata

Party's 'agrarian reform' agenda included tenurial relationships, ownerships and consolidation of holdings and abolition of landlordism. However, the Janata Party did not speak about land reform.¹²⁰ Raj Krishna, a prominent member of the planning commission, pointed out, "The central cabinet is not very keen on land reforms and redistribution. Neither Morarji (Desai) nor Charan Singh are interested."¹²¹

Janata was composed of two major political groups - the former congress(O) of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and the Hindu Nationalist Jana Sangh who were reluctant to cede ground to Charan Singh.¹²² Charan Singh was expelled from the Government for charging cabinet of soft-pedaling issues relating to Indira Gandhi and more importantly his attempt at destabilizing Desai by bringing forth an allegation of corruption against his son, Kanti Desai. In response, Charan Singh organized a huge 'kisan rally' attended by 5 million farmers in Delhi in December 1978, which, perhaps, paved the path for his re-induction in the Government as deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance soon after.¹²³ His 'Kulak budget' of 1979, to use the media's catchy phrase, reduced indirect taxes on mechanical tillers, diesel for electric water pumps and chemical fertilizers by 50% in some cases, it slashed interest rates for rural loans: enhanced subsidies for small scale irrigation; and earmarked funds for rural electrification and grain storage facilities,¹²⁴ Atul Kohli writes in this connection, "This budget, more than anything else in the recent past, highlighted the emerging alliance of agrarian and industrial capitalism within India. The agrarian sector received a big boost in Charan Singh's budget

These measures were aimed at boosting agricultural production. With regard to their distributional consequences, however, it is clear that the benefits would accrue primarily to the landed, the benefits being proportional to the size of agricultural holding. This is not to deny that, if sustained, these investments could also have some beneficial impact on the rural poor. However one would have to be a diehard believer in

the “trickle down” or “urban bias as the root of all poverty”, hypothesis to conceive of Charan Singh’s agrarian tilt as a redistributive measure. This is especially true if one keeps in mind that production subsidies and price supports probably hurt more than help the rural poor because they, on the average, are net consumers rather than producers of agricultural products.”¹²⁵ However, perhaps, the Janata was able to agree on policy directions - described as ‘the path of Gandhian socialism based on political and economic decentralization’ - and it has been argued that its policy performance was quite satisfactory, even though it was not in power long enough to go ahead with implementation.¹²⁶

But, it is also pointed out that rhetoric of decentralization aside, the absence of organizational development provides a strong indication that Janata leaders had little interest in facilitating state intervention aimed at the mitigation of rural poverty. The various factions within the Janata were the old Jan Sangh (presently, Bhartiya Janta Party), the Congress (O), or the Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD) who were suspicious of each other. Besides, the ideology, leadership and social support of these factions were anything but pro-rural Poor. As coalitional partners in power, they collectively tried to depict a progressive picture. But, their actions brought to light a different set of priorities. Not only was there a coherent leadership or ideology around which an organization could be built up, but each faction was more concerned about the other Group’s move to steal a march over them in terms of consolidation of political power. Thus, without a coherent leadership, ideology, or organizational structure, the Janata Party was unable to make a net political contribution to the developmental process.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, a scholar has tried to capture the essence of Janata interlude in Indian Politics when he argues that, “a rapid reversal of the Emergency regime, the reinstatement of the rule of law, and the swift dismantling of the structures of authoritarian control established by the congress party

were probably the most impressive accomplishments of the Janata Party and its allies."¹²⁸

However, it needs to be emphasized that the Janata government was the beneficiary rather than the cause of the return of democracy in India. It was almost identical in most respects like the Congress Government before 1975. The second oil-shock and inept handling of the economy led to unprecedented inflation towards the end of its regime. The management of the polity was not even up to the mark as the coalition failed to achieve a modicum of success on the governance front. The price-spiraling and the intra-party squabble among the political leaders of the Janata regime were the two causes of disillusionment which cleared the deck for Mrs. Gandhi to stage a comeback to power in 1980 defeating the Janata Party quite handsomely.¹²⁹

Indira's short lived return to power and Rajiv's ascendancy to Authority (1980-1990)

This period, the 1980s was in a sense more of the same but not quite. The compulsions of political Democracy was largely responsible for shaping economic policies as well as charting out path of economic Development. Populism in both economics and politics became the hallmark of this period.¹³⁰ Mrs. Gandhi was remarkably rapid to emerge from the electoral drubbing by the Janata in March 1977, by launching into an offensive to regain the support of the minorities and the poor.¹³¹ J.R. wood writes in this connection, "This became clear in October 1977 when Mrs. Gandhi, emerging triumphantly from the Janata government's first attempt to Jail her, made a tour of south Gujrat and devoted her attention almost exclusively to the scheduled castes and Tribes. Decrying Janata's "anti poor" policies, she lunched with Harijan families[and]..... spoke everywhere to large crowds".¹³² Subsequently the Janata was divided into three: the Jana Sangh, which soon after-wards (in April 1980) became the Bharatiya Janata

Party, Charan Singh's Lok Dal and the remaining part of the Janata led by Chandrasekhar. After the 1980 elections, the opposition was in a shambles that presented a picture of warring factions.¹³³ Throughout the early 1980s, during Mrs. Gandhi's tenure, the BJP remained the strongest non-communist opposition party and no opposition was in a position to dislodge Indira Gandhi without seeking support from the BJP. The opposition alliances that was, finally, firmed up in 1983 were not very solid and stable as fresh general elections was to take place towards the end of 1984.¹³⁴ The Congress had relied in the Nehru era, on the votes of the Hindi heart-land of the North, which accounted for 42 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha, and within the heart-land, it used to have greater purchase from the disadvantaged minorities: Muslims, tribals and members of the Scheduled Castes. But these bases of support began to erode from the 1962 general elections onwards, and this trend of decline was only partially arrested in 1971 and again in 1980. From the 1970s, the south and the west provided the most reliable regional bases of support to Congress. However, Congress's special electoral relationship with its reserved constituencies was broken after 1977.¹³⁵ The voting behavior of the 'lower castes, who generally made up about one third of the population, were primarily responsible for deciding the electoral outcomes in the early 1980s. By the 1960s it was very often these 'lower castes' who were most excluded, and that therefore political trends in the states were shaped mostly by the ways in which these groups became mobilized politically. The lower castes played a very important part in establishing a bastion for Congress in Maharashtra and Karnataka in the election of 1977. The KHAM strategy which was a deliberate attempt to bring together low ranking Kshatriyas, harijans, adivasis (tribals) and Muslims spread over different parts of Gujrat, paid huge dividends to Congress (I) in electoral terms. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress and the BKD/Lok Dal have been fairly evenly divided in the struggle among the landed castes. Thus, the low castes had the

capacity to tip the balance electorally. In Bihar the Lower castes were still being excluded. But in west Bengal and Kerala, the Lower Castes left Congress and found a new ally in CPI(M).¹³⁶

The particular patterns of castes and classes in various States gave birth increasingly to definite patterns of politics. The differentiated character of both National and regional politics became evident - from the time of the 1967 elections and the congress share of vote dropped significantly in the 'delinked' state Assembly elections which took place after the 1980 and 1984 elections. The vote share of the Janata Party had also declined after the election of 1977. The regional parties such as the Akali Dal in Punjab, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, were shot into prominence. The CPI(M) which behaved in many ways just like a regional party in west Bengal, also started hogging the limelight.¹³⁷ By the time Mrs. Gandhi assumed power in 1980, her faith in the state as an agency for creative action in society, had been forfeited. Therefore, no serious attempt was made by the authorities during her last premiership to evolve responses to poverty and destitution through carefully-crafted social programmes. The only major claim for achievement that was referred to in the election Manifesto after 1980 was the 'progress' made on the economic front, but, the credit was attributed to market forces and not to the Government.¹³⁸ The New Government under Mrs. Gandhi relied heavily on personal loyalty to her and to her son Sanjay who formed a coterie comprising of some persons of dubious characters. The criminalization of Indian Politics, certainly in the particular sense of the election to parliament of a significant number of men, and some women with criminal records, gathered momentum around this time.¹³⁹ The Government had sought, in the period after 1980, to turn the spotlight of popular attention to a number of major 'spectaculars' like the Asian games, the Commonwealth heads of government conference, Antarctic explorations etc. But, the congress (I) leaders were quick enough to understand that these were not election winners. They also felt that

highly unreliable party organization and the absence of any major legislative breakthrough would not help Mrs. Gandhi to obtain a majority in the election. So, they decided to focus on the stability plank highlighting Mrs. Gandhi's capability to provide that, and embarked upon a strategy of appealing to Hindu chauvinism and 'India-in-danger' message to raise alarms and to put the opposition in a bad light by branding them as dangerous, anti-national destabilizers.¹⁴⁰

However, some scholars have identified populism as *raison de être* of this period as it was reflected in both economics and politics. In the realm of economics, some important changes in policies took place. First, Food, Fertilizers and exports were heavily subsidized. Public utilities like irrigation, electricity and road transport were under-priced. Goods produced by public sector such as steel and coal were also under-priced. The rich peasantry stood to gain a lot from these implicit and explicit subsidies. The Industrial capitalist class were provided with cheap inputs produced in these public sector undertakings, as a consequence, which were to suffer from recurring losses. Second, this period was also characterized by a rapid increase in public consumption expenditure without a corresponding expansion in public investment expenditure. True, part of this public consumption expenditure contributed to the process of an inclusion of the poor. But, a substantial part of it supported increases in private consumption, thus, constraining an increase in output in response to aggregate demand. Third, there was a massive expansion of poverty alleviation programmes such as, the National Rural employment programme, Rural land less employment guarantee programme. The integrated Rural Development programme provided assets or training to the poor as a sustainable source of income through self-employment. This attempt towards the inclusion of the poor was far more extensive and substantive than it had been in the 1970s. Nevertheless, economic development did not create social opportunities for the people at large. These transfer payments were aimed at sustaining minimum levels of

consumption. But, the allocation against the public provisioning of basic education, health care and social security was abysmally low. ¹⁴¹

There were also two noticeable changes in the sphere of politics. Firstly, political parties and Political leaders sought to woo the people with sops which led to a competitive politics of populism. Secondly, a state that was increasingly unable to intervene effectively between conflicting interests and competing demands found the escape route through the politics of patronage. This patronage was essentially designed to be a formulae for sharing the spoils among the constituents of the ruling elite. These changes entailed some visible, as also some invisible, economic and political repercussions. The rapid growth, moderate inflation and the introduction of anti-poverty programmes were responsible for substantial reduction in the incidence of poverty. But the seeds of the fiscal crisis and the debt crisis were also sown during this period. As for the Political consequences, elections could no longer be won by slogan alone. This period represented a concerted attempt at reconciling the distribution of gains from economic growth in the context of a political Democracy.¹⁴²

The theatre of conflict shifted from the rich versus the poor to the centre versus the States: Dissent in democracy spawned into regional movements which eventually degenerated into militancy and terrorism in Punjab, Assam and Kashmir. There was also an invisible political consequence in terms of consolidation of the strength of the subaltern classes who demanded for a stronger political role on the basis of their political identity.¹⁴³ As one scholar has very aptly described the development of this period : Not surprisingly, dominant groups have tried to resist, redirect and exploit this potential shift in political power. This is evident in new levels of violence and corruption, in populist appeals to 'the poor', in calls for law and order, in the emergence of regionalism, in struggles over reservation for the 'backward classes', and in the efforts of political parties to recruit representatives from the lower castes.¹⁴⁴

Since the '70s, rural areas especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and also in other large states such as Andhra Pradesh saw a steady rise in feudal oppression which led to conflict between the forward castes, (in Bihar, for example, they are the Brahmins, Rajputs, Thakurs, and Bhumihars), on the one hand, and on the other, the other castes comprising Yadavs and other backward castes, scheduled castes/Dalits and Adivasis.¹⁴⁵ A Radical commentator has argued that in the post emergency era, the oppressed castes often with the support of radical political organizations have, in a numbers of states, offered resistance and struggled against such repression. Thus, caste violence has been exacerbated against them with the forward Castes retaliating with a renewed vigour.¹⁴⁶ Congress (I)'s support base among the Muslims and Harijans had been severely eroded during the years leading upto the emergency and in the years thereafter. The Janata government, for its part, seized the initiative to appoint a commission headed by B.P. Mondal (a member of Lok Sabha) to recommend ways and means for ensuring social and economic justice to the disadvantaged groups like scheduled caste and Backward caste. During the 80s, Congress (I) rule was largely responsible for aggravation of communal hiatus and caste-based tensions and conflicts. In Punjab, the Government's inept handling, led to the unfortunate 'operation blue-star' campaign which earned them a communal tag atleast by default if not with deliberate intent.¹⁴⁷ As a perceptive observer of Indian political scene wrote, "paradoxically, the centralizing and autocratic approach adopted by the Indian Government to centre state relations and to such regionally based opposition to the centre as the Assam students movement, is exemplified in a repeated resort to president's rule in the offending states, had the effect of exposing the limitations of deploying the main force in the form of an unbridled use of the coercive power of the State apparatus in order to stifle democratic dissent. At the same time, not only was the Congress severely defeated in a series of state legislative assembly elections

during the period 1982-1984, but also essentially democratically organized opposition to the centre in such states as the Punjab, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir. Quickly acquired an overlay of communalism and 'extremist violence'. 'Operation blue-star' and the eventual assassination of the Prime Minister thus appeared as the obverse and reverse of the same coin".¹⁴⁸ The elections that had already been slated for December, 1984 went ahead with Rajiv Gandhi emerging victorious with a dictatorial Majority. The massive victory was regarded as the largest victory that the Congress had ever achieved. Two factors went in Rajiv's favour e.g. First, a disunited opposition and second, a huge sympathy vote following the unfortunate killing of Mrs. Gandhi. But, Rajiv Gandhi also campaigned quite effectively on a 'national unity' Platform and presented himself as a capable leader who can steer India out of the messy politics.¹⁴⁹ No doubt, the opposition parties possessed greater promise and substance than what 1980 and 1984 election results had finally indicated. These parties enjoyed either the support of important groups or ideological resources and respectable organization or both.¹⁵⁰ An expert on India's party system has identified four major tendencies in Indian politics that unite specific elements in society around certain sets of Ideas. These are a communist tendencies, a socialist tendency, a non-confessional rightist tendency, and confessional rightist tendency. At times, all these shades of political ideas were represented by non Congress political parties, At times, congress has associated itself and borrowed some ideas from the communist repertoire. It has also at times moved into the territory on the political spectrum normally associated with the other three tendencies. In so doing, it has drawn support away from opposition parties there. In recent times, the socialist tendency is, evidently, in decline both within congress and in the opposition. The main Party of the non-confessional right, the swatantra, has already been disappeared from the Indian political landscape. But, the Congress under Indira Gandhi and especially under her son Rajiv, has begun to

espouse the views associated with that broad tendencies in Indian Politics.¹⁵¹

Rajiv's Regime:

Rajiv did have a wonderful opportunity in 1985 to usher in positive changes and he also started off quite energetically by making his intention clear on reforming the economy, of bringing about peaceful settlements in Punjab and Assam and of rejuvenating the Congress party which was almost bereft of its strengths, organizationally speaking.¹⁵² Rajiv Gandhi's Primary interest during his first year in office has been a reordering within the formal institutions of State. This also called for a reordering of affairs within the Congress Party. But, it was shelved until the last week of 1985.¹⁵³ The hundredth anniversary of the Indian National Congress which was held in Bombay at the fag end of December of 1985, provided Rajiv Gandhi with an opportunity to mount an attack on the party which never had to be at the receiving end of such a scathing criticism by its leader. He mentioned of 'cliquesenmeshing the living body of the Congress in their net of avarice'. He complained of Congress operatives' 'self-aggrandizement, their corrupt ways, their linkages with vested interestsand their sanctimonious posturing And he added that corruption is not only toleratedbut even regarded as a hallmark of leadership'.¹⁵⁴ James Manor writes in this context, "The decay within the Congress (I) also made it impossible for the party to conduct itself with enough efficiency to manage within itself, as it once had, most of the major conflicts in Indian public life, to interpret the logic of politics at one level to the levels above and below, or to play the central role in integrating India's many and varied regions, subcultures and social groups."¹⁵⁵ Instead of arranging accommodations between social groups, subcultures and regions, Congress, in a major overhaul of its earlier policy, sought to set them against one another since 1982. This has certainly helped the ruling party to absorb within itself disgruntled elements who saw it as the only party capable of ensuring

stability amid chaos which the Congress-I had itself cheerfully helped to generate. But these actions and reactions may ultimately end up as being a potential source of problems for both the congress party and the political system as a whole as they find it difficult to cope up with and eventually, this may even present opportunities for rival parties on the extremes of the party system.¹⁵⁶

A good number of contradictions on the basis of caste, class, communal, regional and issue-specificity had been cropped up in Indian society in the early 1980s. Most of these contradictions were conspicuous by their absence in the 1960s. Some of them had not fully crystallized even in 1984. But, acquiring enough substance and collective self-consciousness amid the general political awakening, it was capable of producing conflict that could no longer be neutralized by bargaining and co-optation. Another feature, though not the central one, of the 'market' polity to which Morris-Jones drew attention was an increase in defections. Such defections represent rational responses from social or sub-regional groups to parties' misdeeds or omissions, and they serve to remind parties of the need to maintain consensus. But, many defections appear to have been undertaken by individual legislators to strengthen their position in terms of power, money or both. In any case, defections became such a striking feature of Indian politics in the 1980s that it tended overwhelmingly to be responses to large cash payment by the Congress (I) which, as the ruling party could alone mop-up such vast financial resources.¹⁵⁷

Rajiv's inability to reform the party ultimately made it impossible for him to deliver the other parts of his programme. The dwindling support base of Congress was already in evident in the state elections of 1985 which led to some ventilation of dissatisfaction by party functionaries. Again, in December, 1985, after the party's electoral setback in Assam, a section of the Congress(I) became circumspect about the efficacy of new PM's clear-cut modern management style of functioning which, according to them, proved to be hurdle in winning

over the larger segments of the electorate. Rajiv's confidence in his ability to use power in order to effect a turn-around strategy in reviving the sagging image of the party organization also began to show crack as he shelved his plan to implement organizational revamping in 1986. He also dropped ambitious plan to train party workers so as to imbibe the party ideology in them in a bid to enhance commitment. He also drove senior leaders away from the party. In 1987, corruption charges were levelled against him. V.P Singh, an important Minister in his cabinet, resigned in 1987 protesting against corruption in the Congress (I), began to occupy the high moral ground by his upright and 'saintly' image. The loss of the state Assembly elections in Haryana in June shattered finally his plan for the reorganization of the party. During the last two years of his premiership, Rajiv's style of political management was 'more Indira than Indira's.' Raids were carried out on the offices of the English language daily, the Indian express, after that paper's exposure of the Government over the Bofors deal. Freedom of the press was in jeopardy when efforts were made to pass the Defamation bill through parliament in September 1988.¹⁵⁸ Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss wrote in this context, "That State power was used as far as possible to suppress dissent was an eloquent testimony to the failure of Rajiv's initiatives in the face of familiar political pressures".¹⁵⁹ The policy process initiated to find a solution to the Punjab Imbroglio followed a similar trajectory. Encouraged by the popular mandate behind him, Rajiv made huge concessions to the Akalis. The introduction of the open political Process generated broad support which led to the decline of militancy and terrorism. But very soon, it was realized that the agreements reached on paper were difficult to implement. Party's electoral interests especially in Haryana, were promoted at the expense of the transfer of Chandigarh and the settlement of disputes over river waters. Rajiv's apathy to bring those to book who were behind the anti-Sikh rioting and the carnage following Indira's assassination also did not help. The failure to implement the

accord delegitimized the Akalis which provided a shot in the arm of terrorism.¹⁶⁰ During the first Six months of Rajiv Gandhi's term in power, there was a genuine attempt at a new beginning. He pioneered a decisive shift from the state-controlled import substitution model to a liberal model of Development. As that initiative ran into rough weather, the pace of change was slowed down. The next two years were marked by utter indecisiveness vis-à-vis the defined agenda. With Rajiv's political popularity started waning, the third phase began with the electoral reversal in Haryana in May 1987. The Third phase entailed a return to India's muddle through model of economic policy – making with little changes in actual policy though policy makers remained loyal to economic liberalization. So, the euphoria about a new economic beginning in India was quickly evaporated.¹⁶¹

Reservation, Mandal Commission recommendation and V.P. Singh:

Meanwhile, V.P. Singh emerged as a symbol of public probity in Indian politics and took over Rajiv's mantle as 'Mr. clean'. He, then, went on to launch his Jan Morcha (Peoples' platform) movement in October, 1987.¹⁶² The small party he founded along with a few Congress dissidents became the rallying point of other opposition parties with which it constituted the national front, the most important of them being the Janata, Lok Dal and Jan Morcha. ¹⁶³ During this time, V.P. Singh also mentioned that the left was his 'natural ally' and he kept referring very frequently, to the proponents of Indian socialism.¹⁶⁴

In 1989, notwithstanding Chandrasekhar's hostility towards V.P. Singh's leadership, the Janata Dal (JD) backed V.P Singh whole heartedly and the JD and BJP were able to strike a deal on seat-sharing in a large number of constituencies. Thus, the Janata Dal was finally capable of forming a minority Government with the out-side support of the BJP and of the communist parties. This marked the beginning of a new phase in parliamentary politics.¹⁶⁵

The Janata Dal turned its attention less on class and moved towards positive discrimination as its main social remedy.¹⁶⁶ The only promise which had a direct bearing on agricultural labourers was about land reform, though once in power the JD readily forgot it. On the contrary, Devilal with agriculture portfolio and second only to V.P Singh and Sharad Joshi as one of his advisors, managed to write off all agricultural loans under central jurisdiction upto Rs. 10,000.¹⁶⁷

Christophe Jaffrelot makes a very succinct point here when she says. "yet, Kisan politics was not pursued as resolutely by the V.P Singh government as 'Quota Politics', for two reasons. From a pragmatic point of view, V.P. Singh was more eager to cater to the needs of the lower castes, especially the OBCs, than those of the middle peasants (who were more numerous among intermediate castes such as the Jats) because this constituency had already been won over by Ajit Singh and Devi Lal. From an ideological point of view, like most socialist leaders of the JD, V.P. Singh believed less in economic and financial support than in the reform of society's power structure".¹⁶⁸ Essentially, V.P. Singh's policy was not in tune with the wishes of Devilal. As a matter of fact, the social potential of V.P. Singh's reform was regarded as detrimental to the Kisans' interests in so far as it might in-centivise the assertiveness of tenants and agricultural labourers from the lower castes.¹⁶⁹ In any case, V.P. Singh announced his Government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations in both houses of parliament on 7th August, 1990, and he justified it in his independence day address on 15 August on the ground of giving a share to the poor in running the Government.¹⁷⁰ The criticism surrounding V.P. Singh Government's decision on implementation of Mandal report for backward castes suggesting he should have been more cautious and circumspect was utterly baseless. Because the fact of the matter was that as many as 11 years had been elapsed since the submission of the Mondal report and two successive long-serving Governments in power simply wasted the opportunity to

implement it. A policy aimed at providing social justice to the poor and deprived segments of society can only be implemented with a lot of courage and firm resolve. And what the prime Minister had done on 7th August 1990 was a step in the right direction.¹⁷¹ However, the principal achievement of V.P. Singh was to cobble together a broad coalition of castes by promoting the OBCs to be included in the Reservation list and thus, to rival the elite groups' domination more successfully than ever before. The 'OBCs' had become a relevant category for the lower castes as they had a material stakes in it, thanks to the Quotas promised by the Mandal Commission report. These lower castes people had been accustomed to this administrative definition of their identity in the early 1990s on the simple belief that some benefits could accrue from it.¹⁷² This development coupled with that of the increased level of electoral participation of the low castes prompted one social scientist to comment that India has experienced in the 1990s a 'second democratic upsurge'.¹⁷³ However, reservations remain a source of conflict between those who are included and those who are excluded. Any proposal to extend reservation to new groups - given the decision of the High Court that no more than 49 percent of Jobs and educational places can be reserved automatically reduces the benefits of reservation for existing beneficiaries. To exclude the children of well educated members of the lower castes from the purview of reservation is still another contested proposal and is charged with the ill-motive of destroying their caste solidarities. Conflicts are likely to be erupted among the beneficiaries as well. Among the hundreds of scheduled castes and OBCs there are differences as to how well they could position themselves in order to reap benefits accrued from the system of reservation. The competition and tension between the castes is quite discernable as the political leaders of each caste is very meticulous and sensitive about their respective 'quotas' in Jobs and political offices. No doubt, India's democratic system has proven resilient in its capacity to incorporate hitherto excluded groups, and that the lower castes have indeed moved

into positions of power in the administrative services, in parliament and in executive positions. But the material benefits to the lower castes have largely gone to their advanced sections while the majority of them have to be content only with a pittance.¹⁷⁴ Myron Weiner points out in this regard, "The system of reservation simply provides a window within which a small section of the lower castes can enter into the middle class; in this fashion, the old Varna system provides some flexibility but persists in maintaining the fundamental distinction between those who have access to knowledge and those who do not, between those who use their minds and those who work with their hands."¹⁷⁵

Regionalism, the future of federalism and the advent of the coalition era in Indian politics:-

The Congress party in the 1950s, under Nehru, was mostly prepared in practice to allow a measure of political and fiscal independence to the states and worked sincerely through informal channels for the resolution of day-to-day conflicts.¹⁷⁶ Paul Brass contended that Nehru sought to manage Centre-State relations by following four rules : that central government would not recognize groups making secessionist demands, that central government would not accommodate regional demands based upon religious differences; that demands for the creation of separate linguistic states would not be conceded capriciously; and that central Government would not agree to the reorganization of a province if the demand was made by only one of the important language groups within the State concerned.¹⁷⁷

However, democracy and expanding participation in the Indian social and cultural context, led to a 'Democracy of castes' and caste and communal competition and conflict, has put the majority-minority Frame work at stake, and also intensified the fundamental tension between a strong government and decentralizing proclivities.¹⁷⁸

Again, a Marxist Scholar looked at this centre-state conflicts and inter-state tensions as arising out of economic and political sources

rather than originating from cultural context. He identified class force as the single most important factor for precipitating this conflict involving the agrarian bourgeoisie, supported by rural petty bourgeoisie of the concerned states.¹⁷⁹ But the Conflicts were exacerbated when the emerging tensions between the 'inherent pluralism of India and the centralizing structures of Government' found themselves at odd with the expanding sphere of democratic politics and the withering away of the Congress's organizational and electoral bases of support. The only route for resolving the conflicts may be attained by effecting a better balance of political and economic power between the centre and the states.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, in the 1970s and 1980s the relative weakness of the Congress party encouraged its leaders notably Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to adopt strategies characterised by cooptation, deceit, division and straight-forward repression for Governing the country. Thus, the Congress Party undermined the democratic foundations of modern India by trying to protect one version of 'Federalism' and in the process, resurrected dormant authoritarianism.¹⁸¹

As a matter of fact, the primary impact of the decline of the congress in all the states of India, has been the continued regionalization of their party system. In the summer of 1998, there were only two states (e.g. Madhya Pradesh and Orissa) where congress was able to form their governments. The BJP, on its own, was in power in Rajasthan and Gujrat only. But they were also running Governments in league with other parties in U.P., Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Maharastra. Various splinter groups of Janata Dal ruled in Karnataka and Bihar. CPI (M) led left-Front were at the helm of authority in Kerala and West Bengal. Regional parties were controlling their respective state Governments in Kashmir, Andhra, Tamilnadu and Assam.¹⁸²

As indicated earlier, the dynamics of centre state relations in India underwent a sea change in the post Nehru era. In the period from 1967 to 1991, president's rule was imposed on 78 occasions and the

average tenure of chief Minister was cut down from 3.9 years in the period from 1950 to 1967 to 2.6 years for a Congress politician. Contrarily, tenure of chief minister rose from 2.0 to 2.6 years for non-Congress politicians. It is true that the central Government was making larger per capita plan-outlays available to the less developed states, but the Governments of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi manipulated the grants in aid fund to augment their political interest in the regions. In west Bengal, the CPI(M) has intensified a campaign charging New Delhi of a 'step-motherly attitude' against states which were responsible for sharpening hostility towards Congress. The map of Fiscal federalism was distorted beyond doubt as the successive governments in Bihar including some Congress Governments were to apportion blame on new Delhi for the sorry state of economic affairs in the state.¹⁸³ It is a well-known fact that strong centripetal forces were at work in the formative years of independent India. This resulted in a highly centralised Federal structure which prompted experts to interrogate whether India is a federal or Quasi-federal country. The high level of centralisation manifests through the vesting of overwhelming constitutional powers, of the Union Government vis-à-vis the Constituent units. The system of administration and even the judiciary have had its share of centralizing instincts. The vertical structural imbalance between centralisation of revenue raising and borrowing powers and the assignment of relatively greater expenditure responsibilities to lower level Governments is seen as part and parcel of the centripetal features of Indian federalism. So, given this vertical imbalance, transfers have an important role to play in achieving the goal of horizontal equity across states. However, multiple transfer channels, and the political economic factors influencing these channels have stood in the way of the transfer system promoting horizontal equity across states. The overlapping jurisdiction of and limited assignment of powers to local Governments can also be attributed to the same centripetal political economic forces which has only begun to change recently following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional

amendments. However, it is pointed out that despite Panchayati Raj being a cherished idea in India, the assignment of powers to local Governments in actual practice has been extremely limited. No doubt, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments are important legislative landmarks in empowering local governments. But to give any real teeth in the legislation, several reforms are to be implemented in terms of reallocation of revenue and expenditure responsibilities and institutional arrangements, in particular.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the policies of cooptation and divide and rule pursued by the Congress party had their debilitating effects as in Jharkhand or even Assam. The centralizing instincts of the Congress party was responsible for paving the way for an equal and opposite politics of reaction and decentralization in many States of South India and in West Bengal. The Congress Party has been dislodged from power there and is hard-pressed to regain their lost grounds. The Punjab and Kashmir are the classic cases where the Congress Party worked to scuttle the dream of consensual national unity to which it claimed to be wedded to. They also rode roughshod over regional and religious traditions that threw up a challenge to the mighty central authority in modern India.¹⁸⁵ An American scholar has attributed Four factors contributing to this weakening of power sharing after the late 1960s.

First, The Congress Party was transformed from an internally democratic, federal and consensual organization to a centralized and hierarchical Party under the leadership of Indira Gandhi.

Second, the Federal system which was never very decentralized made liberal use of the instrument of President's rule for partisan purposes.

The third force of weakness is that the pressures from below have specifically targeted crucial consociational rules put in place by power-sharing arrangements like separate personal laws, minority educational autonomy and Kashmir's constitutionally-mandated autonomous

status. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was the greatest beneficiary of the Government's alleged pandering to minorities. The BJP as a Hindu Nationalist Party is manifestly anti-consociational and its growing might poses a serious threat to power sharing in India. The fourth and final source of weakness stems from a combination of the inherent tensions of power-sharing and the typical Indian form of grand coalition, based on the preponderance of a broadly representative party. All the pressures from below make the matter difficult to retain broad support for a party which is openly committed to power sharing and minority Rights. The Congress Party has never won a majority of the popular vote and in 1967, its popularity waned to only marginally more than 40 percent. It was on the losing side both in 1977 and 1989 elections. It could somehow manage to form a minority cabinet in the election of 1991. The verdicts of 1989 and 1991 elections unfailingly proved that Indian's transition from a dominant one party system to a multi party system has completed a full circle.¹⁸⁶ A succession of minority or coalition Governments through the Nineties reflected the intense democratic churning in the States. But they failed to generate confidence in their governance capabilities. Both the National Front (1989-1991) and the united front (1996-1998) were minority Governments. They were precarious from the start and both of them were very short-lived.¹⁸⁷

The electoral strategies and Governance policies of the congress Party over the past two decades were, precisely, responsible for providing the context which shaped and determined the contours and contents of coalition politics in India. The Congress has failed to obtain a convincing majority since the 1980 Lok Sabha elections. Voter preferences were certainly influenced in favour of Congress Party in the 1984 Lok Sabha election following the dastardly killing of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and again, in the second round of the 1991 elections, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by the Sri Lanka-based Tamil Militants. The Congress was still sticking to its policy of combating regional

parties and identified them as the main impediment to obtaining a single party majority.¹⁸⁸ V.N. Gadgil, an ideologue from the Congress, advanced three main arguments against Congress's participation in any coalition Government. The first was a principled objection based on the immorality of entering into a 'dishonest' arrangement. The second argument against coalition was the negative impact on Governance, especially on the principle of collective responsibility and on the powers of the office of prime minister. The Third and most important reason cited was the impact on Party prospects in future elections and on the morale of state party cadres.¹⁸⁹ It is to be noted here that the BJP and the Congress drew diametrically opposite inferences from the results of the April 1996 General Election. While BJP was frantically searching for allies and coalitions, the Congress Party under president Sitaram Keshri adopted a totally different strategy.¹⁹⁰ However, Party president Sonia Gandhi responded rather reluctantly to the 'hot topic' of coalitional strategy at Panchmarhi in the November of 1998. She said, "Friends, there has been much talk about the Congress's attitude towards a coalition Government. The fact that we are going through a coalitional phase at national level politics reflects in many ways the decline of the congress. This is a passing phase and we will come back again with full force and on our own steam. But, in the interim, Coalitions may well be needed".¹⁹¹ By contrast, the BJP appeared to have embraced the reality of coalition politics whole heartedly and the confirmation of which came from the party's executive meet at Bangalore in January, 1999 when they declared, "India's interests can be served best by involving regional parties in the process of Governance."¹⁹² A perceptive observer of the scene argued forcefully in this context, "Few things are inevitable in politics. Nevertheless, in the Context of India's diversity, coalitions may well be one of them. To hold that coalition politics is not only here to stay but can also become a viable alternative to earlier arrangements is not merely the triumph of hope over experience. It is based on an understanding that democratic

accountability is best achieved in plural societies through parliamentary federalism. Those who bemoan the costs of coalition Governance ignore similar deals cloaked in the secrecy of dominant party discipline. The multiplicity of partners and sub-agendas obviously brings about greater transparency, but the policy out-comes are not necessarily different or even inferior to those emerging from single-party dispensations.”¹⁹³

The Politics of polemics around religion- secularism at stake:

It would have been difficult to imagine in 1980 that the BJP could position itself as the leading opposition party and ‘the party of the future’ in India, by the end of the decade. At the beginning of the 1980s the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), too had lost a lot of its dynamism, notwithstanding the fact that it still had a very strong cadre base across North India. But, the ‘family’ of organizations around the RSS includes the BJP and most importantly, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, the world Hindu Council) which was instrumental in bringing about huge changes of the 1980s.¹⁹⁴ As T.B. Hansen argued that what was new in the 1980s was not so much the employment of the idiom of communalism per se, but rather the ingenuity and the scale with which this idiom was differentiated and disseminated through an array of new technologies of mass mobilization.¹⁹⁵ Its objectives were to mobilize Hindus against the perceived threat being posed to them by Christianity, Islam and Communism. This defensiveness got transformed in the 1980s into an aggressive, anti-Muslim cultural nationalism. This position contradicted the principles of secularism as espoused by the constitution, because going by the VHP’s definition, Muslims and Christians are not part of the Hindu Nation. With this stated position and the growing influence and strength of VHP in the 1980s, one of the fundamental pillars of constitutional Democracy in India-Secularism was at stake.¹⁹⁶

However, it really took off as an organization following the much-publicized event of the proselytization of lower caste Hindus to Islam at Meenakshipuram in Tamilnadu in 1981. Many of these untouchables were, in fact, Christians. VHP was capable of responding to the sense of Hindu vulnerability that it was partially instrumental in arousing a response to the conversions, and subsequently, spearheaded a campaign for 'the defense of Hinduism' which rapidly gathered momentum.¹⁹⁷ In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi's Government decided to give support to Muslim personal law by passing a Muslim women [Protection of Rights] Act, which raised a political storm. Hindu Nationalist forces led by BJP lost no time in grabbing the opportunity and asserted that minorities were being pampered and privileged, at the cost of the majority community'.¹⁹⁸ Rudolph and Rudolph, writes in this context, "The BJP's post-Shah Bano advocacy of a uniform civil code had placed the contest between legal uniformity and legal pluralism at the centre of Indian Political debate. It was a contest which fanned the flames of Hindu nationalism that leaped ever higher between 1985 and 1992. On December 6, 1992 thousands of Hindu nationalist youths wearing saffron head bands and wielding pick-axes destroyed the sixteenth century Babri Masjid (mosque built by the Mughal Emperor, Babar), while the prime minister of India stood helplessly by. They did so on the ground that it desecrated the site on which a temple to Lord Ram had stood. The internationally televised event became the symbol of monumental crisis in India's self-definition as a secular state."¹⁹⁹ The growing powerlessness of the congress in the 1980s made it unsure as to what position it should take vis-à-vis the politics of communalism or religious nationalism. Sometimes, it played the secular card to keep intact its traditional support bases among the rural and urban elites and among the scheduled communities. At other times, as in Assam, it sought to accommodate the Hindu sentiment by moving against 'alien Muslims'²⁰⁰

This is also apparent from the short-term strategies evolved by congress leaders to make sure that they get the maximum share from the so-called Hindu Vote, and simultaneously, tried to curry favour with Muslims and scheduled castes with whom congress's honeymoon was already over. So, in 1986, the Congress Government led by Rajiv Gandhi slammed through a bill which denied Muslim women a right to access civil law in matters of marriage and divorce, only to placate leaders of Muslim community. These policies, no doubt, contributed in a big way to the process of hollowing out of the constitutional principles of secularism. It is to be noted that the unleashing of increasing pressures by Hindu nationalism on the political structures of the State coincided with the politics of this period.²⁰¹

Again, the 'Family' of organizations around RSS including BJP and VHP received a shot in their arms when the central Government decided to allow Hindu worship inside the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya and this provided them with an opportunity to spearhead a movement through massive mobilization in an effort to change the political discourse and steering the state in the name of Hindutva.²⁰² Corbridge and Harriss opined in this context, "The bankrupting of the Congress party went hand in glove with a weakening of the (State) secular principle in India. In so far as any political party offered a coherent vision for India at the start of the 1990s, it was not Congress; it was, rather, the BJP with its ideology of Hindutva, or the claim that the unity of India is to be found in the Hindu culture which defines it and gives it meaning".²⁰³

In November, 1990, V.P. Singh led Government failed to win in a parliamentary vote of confidence as the BJP decided to withdraw support. This resulted in one of the more curious twists in India's democratic politics as Chandra Sekhar, an erstwhile young turk of Mrs. Gandhi's populist days, somehow, managed to form the government with Congress backing. Predictably, the Government did not last long and a fresh elections were to take place in the months of may and June

1991. Amid tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress managed to emerge as the single largest Party in parliament by remaining marginally ahead of a loose alliance of the National front led by the Janata Dal and the left front led by CPI-M as well as the BJP. However, Congress was literally wiped out from North Indian States. The BJP captured not only the Majority of seats from Uttar Pradesh but also formed the state Government there. It also emerged victorious in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh while Bihar went with the Janata Dal. Eventually, Congress led by P.V. Narashima Rao, managed to constitute a Government at the centre despite being dwarfed in terms of electoral politics in the Hindi-speaking heart-land which is, indeed, unique in India's post independent political History. The Economic reform introduced by the congress minority Government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao marked a break with the Statist socialist principles of the past. The failure to prevent the destruction of the Babri Mosque in December 1992 along with the allegations of close links between corruption scandals in the Bombay stock market and the Prime Minister's office damaged the image of the congress Party Considerably. Thus, an immensely discredited Congress regime had to preside over a new and dangerous conjuncture in the overlapping dialectics of nationalism and communalism as well as centralism and regionalism in the 1990s.²⁰⁴ Zoya Hasan, an eminent political scientist of our times, captured the emerging trajectory of political process of this period in these languages, "By the mid-1990s the Indian political process had evolved considerably. At the centre of transition was the democratic process which had given a voice to the marginalized. Among the leading changes were the electoral upsurge of the disadvantaged groups, the political organization of lower castes and dalits in opposition to the upper castes, fragmentation of political parties and the emergence of Hindutva as the most important challenge in the constitutional vision of the liberal democratic state. It is debatable whether such outcomes were all inherent in the diversity and

heterogeneity of Indian society, or if pre-existing divisions were being deliberately manipulated by politicians to widen social conflicts in order to advance their own power and economic gain.”²⁰⁵

Social Transformation and the politics of the 1990s and beyond:-

This decade-known and remembered both in popular and academic literature for its Governmental instability, rise of coalition politics, decline of the congress and advent of the BJP in a big way, and inauguration of the era of economic liberalization has witnessed a fundamental though silent transformation, aptly described as the ‘second democratic upsurge’.²⁰⁶ The political assertions of the historically-disadvantaged castes in the 1990s have, at least partly, been attributed to the implementation of the Mandal commission report by the V.P. Singh Government, guaranteeing reserved quotas for members of these castes. Constitution had already provided for reservation in parliament as well as the State legislatures, public employment, and education for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes roughly in keeping with their proportion in the population. But, with the acceptance of the Mandal Commission’s recommendations, India witnessed the emergence of a political alliance of the dalit – bahunjan castes, often intending to encompass the Muslim minority in its fold. The political parties representing these social groups were the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Samajwadi Party, and sections of the Janata Dal.²⁰⁷ There is a participatory upsurge among the socially underprivileged cutting across caste hierarchy, economic class, gender distinction or the rural-urban divide. They do not lag behind the socially privileged as they did in the past, in some respects, they even surpassed the former by their active participation in politics. This is, indeed, a unique development when compared with India’s own past. Even one can hardly find a parallel in the existing Democracies. It also does not square with the dominant ways of making sense of Indian politics.²⁰⁸ However, the parties representing these social groups have been somewhat limited in terms of their ideological Programme. BSP,

for example, has been essentially devoid of an economic or even larger political programme. So, it failed to articulate a comprehensive programme of long term social change. Democratizing Indian society and polity would, crucially, depend upon its ability to forge not just political coalition but also ideological alliances with social majorities of oppressed groups sharing a more common vision for the future. The idea of 'social justice' in dalit-bahujan political Discourse does not seek to transform the entire social order, or even to impart a more equitable meaning to the universalist idea of citizenship. Instead, it tries to create special categories of citizenship in relation to certain social goods like education and public employment. It also looks forward to capturing political power as the first essential step to the transformation of Hindu society.²⁰⁹

The growth of new forms of representation is a direct consequence of this upsurge from below. The early congress system, despite being an inclusive coalition of interests, provided representation in the legislature and in the Government to only a 'tiny elite' segment. Thus, it amounted to recognizing the basic inequality between the status of voters. New parties and organizations have sought to correct the imbalance in representation, but, in so doing, they have divided and fragmented the political space into castes and sub-castes and communities and sub-communities. This social churning process has contributed immensely to the increase in lower caste representation in Government especially at the local and regional levels. The scale of transfer of power varied from region to region with social constellations of these groups giving rise to these shifts. But, unmistakably, the decline of the early congress system led to the displacement of upper castes from positions of power and responsible for catapulting backward and lower castes into positions of power and authority. This development has been dubbed as a 'quiet social revolution' in Indian politics.²¹⁰ India is, perhaps, the only large democracy in the world today where the turnout of the lower orders of society far exceeded that

of the most privileged groups. It also stands to reason that it is not merely an upsurge in turnout, but in political participation, in general.²¹¹ However, as one scholar has reminded us that even as we take cognizance of the fact that previously marginalized groups entering the political arena in large numbers than ever before, we need also to remember the terms on which they are being inducted.²¹²

It is a truism of sorts that much of the political space vacated by the congress has so far been filled by three different sets of political forces. The first force is represented by Hindu Nationalism. The second one may be equated with the emergence of regionalism, and the third force encompasses a wide array of political parties and organizations that embrace groups normally classified under the umbrella category of "lower castes" (i.e. the so called scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and the other back ward classes. (OBCs).²¹³

In the 1950s, India's national politics was dominated by English-speaking, urban politicians mostly trained in law. Most of them, invariably, belonged to the upper castes. An agrarian and "vernacular" elite dominated the proceedings at local and State level politics. In North India, lower level political leadership tended to come from the upper castes.²¹⁴ As Ashutosh Varshney writes, "weighed down by tradition, lower castes do not give up their caste identities; rather, they "deconstruct" and 're-invent' caste history, deploy in politics a readily available and easily mobilized social category (lower caste), use their numbers to electoral advantage, and fight prejudice and domination politically. It is the upper castes beneficiaries of the caste system for centuries that typically wish caste did not exist when a lower caste challenge appears from below".²¹⁵ Dalits in India are in a new era of defining their positive identity and aspire to rebuild their identity. One important way is the process of symbolic influence that symbols and myths generate in the actual world of social relations and group interactions. Dalit and their leaders are increasingly concentrating on conventional symbols of domination. Not only do they challenge the

meaning of impurity and inferiority that some non-dalits have so far attributed to them, but also actively reverse their meaning transforming them into symbols of self respect. By and large, they are eager to develop them as their art form to communicate freedom and liberation.²¹⁶

By the 1960s much of south India had passed through a relatively peaceful lower caste revolution.²¹⁷ In the 1980s and 1990s a southern style plebeian politics has swept across North India which brought into limelight “vernacular” politicians like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Yadv, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. Unity among them is elusive because, substantial obstacles to unity, both vertical and Horizontal, remain to be removed. However, the power of the new plebeian political elite went beyond the precinct of the States as the center has also been socially recon-figured. Delhi has twice had primarily lower-caste coalitions in power between 1989 and 1991 and between 1996 and 1998.²¹⁸ The BSP’s (Bahujan Samaj Party) influence has spread across almost all north Indian states quite substantially. By 1996, the BSP had started receiving a whopping 20 percent of UP’s vote, clipping the wings of once mighty congress in its own citadel. In the 1996, 1998, and 1999 national elections, the congress Party’s vote in UP was considerably reduced compared to that of the BSP.²¹⁹ Combined with job reservation, increasing literacy among UP Dalits led to the emergence of a small middle class ‘priviligentsia’ among dalits in U.P. (Uttar Pradesh), especially the Jatavs, who constituted the vanguard of the new Dalit assertiveness in the 1980s and 1990s.²²⁰ Chandra makes an interesting point here by arguing that the BSP’s success in replacing congress in UP is built upon two factors. First, affirmative actions for the scheduled castes has led to the emergence of a middle class constituting almost entirely of Government officers and clerks. Second, the scheduled castes within the congress had to experience what Chandra calls a “representational blockage”. Therefore, since the early 1990s, the congress clientelism did not work as this

newly mobile scheduled castes segments of the populations were increasingly interrogating this tokenism.²²¹ Another commentator argues that both affirmative action and democracy have opened up new vistas to the tribes. These opportunities have contributed substantially towards material advancement for many, and led to a new awakening of politics and power for the whole group.²²² Ideally, the BSP as an 'Ambedkarite' party would establish 'real' and 'substantial' democracy upon attaining power. The BSP sees no difference between the philosophy of Ambedkar, the emancipation of the untouchables, and the ideals enshrined in the constitution. It believes that socialism can transform Indian society, but major impediments exist such as caste, and the plurality of languages, religions, and customs which have destroyed the unity of the working class. The new social order that they intend to build up, would be informed by great ideals like social justice, brotherhood, equality, and humanitarianism.²²³

Notwithstanding BSP's 'anti-Manuwadi' stance, its political strategy has always been accommodative of other castes (Bahujan), not anti-caste. As a matter of fact, the BSP makes best use of this caste instrumentality and does a better job than other political parties. The BSP's electoral strategy, especially its formula of seat distribution in successive elections to the Lok Sabha and the assembly, proves the point. In the Assembly elections of 2002 in U.P., the BSP followed the principle of allocating seats to communities corresponding to their proportion in the population and its leader Mayawati claimed to have truck only with all castes and communities but not with political parties. Such a democratic strategy of representation in keeping with proportion of population proved quite effective for BSP as it emerged as the Number two player in UP politics in 2002.²²⁴ However, Zoya Hasan points out, "The BSP faces a strategic predicament: its autonomous politics has raised the political profile of dalits at the local level, which requires the Government to support local resistance. But tackling local problems entails a class approach to pressurize the Government for

implementation of economic redistribution, which a caste based following can not achieve and which the party wants to avoid. Far from generating social and political dynamism, caste mobilization and sectional governance tend to block much needed structural change."²²⁵ In any case, 'elitist' background of the movement's leaders and the fact that the BSP is not an out-come of struggle and contestation at the grassroots, the ideology of BSP is moderate. Indeed, compared to the radical Dalit panthers of Maharashtra, the BSP seems statist and conservative, eager only in grabbing political power, not in transforming the abject poverty and backwardness in which majority of Dalits live today.²²⁶

The political transformation brought about by Dalit assertion has no doubt, contributed significantly to make India a more inclusive polity and a participatory too. So Yadav's Characterization that India is going through a "second democratic upsurge" has considerable purchase. However, whatever may be the tussle between the votaries of the liberating potential of democracy and those of reducing inequalities, it is a certainty that India is still well short of becoming a 'democracy from below', but democratic power is increasingly moving downward. As a result, Democracy in India is, no longer, a Gift from above.²²⁷

Democracy, BJP and the politics of India since the 1990s

There are, precisely, two opposing schools as to the implications of Hindu Nationalism as represented by BJP for Democracy in India. Some believe that as the most disciplined political party, it could provide the greatest hope for political stability in this era of short lived minority Governments. In addition to it, dynamics of electoral competition and the imperatives of governance have considerably contributed to the moderation of BJP's militancy. Other commentators veer around the opinion that in connossance with the philosophical commitments of its leadership, the BJP will, each time, return to power with a more militant Hindu Nationalist posture. This stance of BJP

poses a serious threat to secularism, cultural pluralism and minority rights.²²⁸

As indicated earlier, Janata Dal Prime Minister V.P. Singh made up his mind in mid-1990 to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report which was largely symbolic in nature and also invariably dictated by Singh's partisan electoral calculations. But, predictably, a violent anti-Mandal agitation was launched by upper caste youth and students among the middle and lower middle classes of urbanized north India.

For BJP, outright rejection of the Mandal commission's recommendations would mean alienating a huge number of 'Hindu' voters, what they cannot afford to lose going by political arithmetic. So, the party tried to resolve this dilemma by resuscitating the symbol of Hindu/ national 'unity', 'Pride' and 'honour', the demand that a temple be constructed on the site of the Babri Mosque. The other important development was the popular uprising against Indian rule in Kashmir valley at the beginning of 1990. The BJP was very consistent in its emphasis on the Kashmir issue and accordingly, it became a core issue in its programme and strategy. BJP's ultra-hawkish stand on Kashmir and the just charges levelled against congress for poor handling of the Kashmir issue, particularly, in the face of a covert war against India's territorial integrity being waged there by Pakistan, found a huge purchase among many Indians, Vastly expanded urbanized lower middle and middle classes, in particular.²²⁹ As Corbridge and Harriss write "By the 1990s the Congress had lost this mantle because of its perceived corruption and inefficiency, and its factionalism. It was for this reason-amongst others, perhaps - that the BJP also began to win support not only from its traditional base in the trading castes but also from prominent executives, ex-servicemen and former top administrators. The National Front/Janata Dal, meanwhile, lost support amongst the middle classes, who are predominantly from higher and middle ranking castes, both because of its advocacy of the

policy of reservations for members of the other Backward classes, and because of the mayhem which was brought about in 1990 by that policy.”²³⁰

A correlation between the crisis of Hegemony of the Congress party and the rise of BJP may easily be established. The BJP stood to gain most in northern, central and western India where the Congress base had been steadily eroded over the years. Conversely, the Hindutva forces faced an uphill task to make decisive inroads in those provinces and regions where the decline in congress hegemony has witnessed the ascendancy of a relatively coherent and resilient alternative political formation to substitute congress. They are Tamil Nationalist parties in Tamil Nadu, Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, CPI(M) led leftist groupings in west Bengal and Kerala and even in Uttar Pradesh (U.P) and Bihar, Mulayam Singh Yadv and Laloo Yadav, respectively, were capable of weaving together coalitions involving intermediate castes, Harijan and Muslim Population.²³¹

The electoral successes of BJP in the February 1990 legislative elections brought to the fore the fact that the BJP was pursuing a party-based approach that involved taking part in coalitions and electoral arrangements as well as a movement-based approach which entailed its close collaboration with the VHP. In the Assembly election of 1991 in U.P., BJP was voted to power and this, further, complicated BJP's position because it could not afford to antagonize either its movement or electoral constituencies.²³²

However, L.K. Advani Launched his Rath Yatra ('chariot procession') which covered 10,000 kilometers across eight states and was scheduled to reach Ayodhya on 30th October 1990 to inaugurate the Kar Seva ('the building of the temple'). With congress compromising on the issue, V.P. Singh was in a mood to go ahead and finally, authorized Laloo Prasad Yadav, Janata Dal chief Minister of Bihar, to arrest Advani on 23rd October. Predictably, BJP withdrew

support for the Singh government. V.P. Singh was, further, weakened by a split in his party which saw Chandra Sekhar leading a Minority Government with Congress backing only for the few months upto March 1991.

The debate over Mandal and Mandir remained unresolved. The political atmosphere was marked by communal violence and continued through the early months of 1991. The BJP tried to capitalize on the Ayodhya issue as much as it could in the run up to the elections.²³³

Nevertheless, the BJP has to make a difficult choice at this stage as Amrita Basu writes, "As the 1991 elections approached, the BJP was anxious to broaden its reputation from being a single issue campaign. Thus the party changed its rallying cry from "Ram" to Ram aur Roti" (Ram and Bread) and for good measure added swadeshi (Economic nationalism) to its plat-form."²³⁴

The fear of a fresh elections and the concern of other parties to keep the BJP out of power had cleared the deck for Minority Congress Government led by Narasimha Rao to be installed at the centre. And this shifted the focus of political Debate on economic reform for the time being at least.²³⁵

It seemed that the BJP did try to steer a middle course by pursuing its demand for the construction of a temple in Ayodhya through negotiation rather than agitation. However, in July 1992, the VHP undertook pilgrimage to Ayodhya in order to construct a platform within the Mosque complex. On December 6, 1992, crossing the police cordon, the Hindu activists descended on the Mosque and razed it to the ground quite methodically.²³⁶

The destruction of the Babri Mosque was followed by appalling communal carnage, especially in Bombay. Surat, Bhopal also witnessed communal violence on an unprecedented scale. In fact, this event itself fundamentally changed relationships between Hindus and Muslims throughout India. As a result, the Hindu nationalist movement gained

from the destruction of the Babri Masjid in the immediate terms.²³⁷ But, as Jeffrelot argues; “while the demolition was in one sense the logical culmination of the Ayodhya movement, it deprived the RSS-VHP-BJP combination of a powerful symbol. As the results of the 1993 (State) electionsshow, it was easier to mobilize Hindus against the Babri Masjid than for anything else.”²³⁸

The tentative taming of BJP and the strength of India's Democracy:

Moreover, the 1993 and the 1995 election results confirmed that BJP's militant social movement tactics has lost its sheen. The BJP's backtracking from militant social movement tactics may well have been the cost of its expansion. Again, BJP may have adopted a moderate party-based approach in order to increase its support among the lower castes.²³⁹ Evidently, BJP was pursuing a more cautious line with obvious interest in OBC (Other Backward Castes) vote. Uma Bharati a leading woman leader from BJP, admitted frankly that Kashi Ram has woken them up with the populist-nationalism of its economic policy and attacks on the economic reforms.²⁴⁰

Congress was able to obtain Parliamentary majority in 1994-95 and recovered some grounds in terms of popularity among the middle classes for its economic reform policies. Notwithstanding the fact, the decline of the Congress seemed inexorable. On the other hand, BJP's rise was also tentative and its influence was confined to the Hindi-speaking areas. The social constituency for a 'third force' had, indeed, expanded, but it remained fractured and divided between varied regional and sectional parties, which, otherwise, could have been an alternative to both.²⁴¹ BJP emerged for the first time as the largest single party in the 1996 General elections. Nevertheless, it could not help to significantly expand the basis of its support numerically, socially or geographically, over 1991. A Government was formed under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee which lasted for thirteen days.

The Vajpayee led-Government was replaced by a thirteen party 'United Front' Government, combining the left and the National Front. The U.F. experiment was kept going under two Prime Ministers – First H.D. Deve Gowda, and later I.K. Gujral. It survived for eighteen months with the outside support of the Congress.²⁴²

In June 1993, at its national council meeting in Bangalore, BJP projected itself as a responsible alternative to the Congress Party and vowed to opening up the economy and ending corruption. It reaffirmed its faith in a secular state and downplayed the possibility of constructing a temple in Ayodhya. Two years later, at Goa conclave, the BJP tried hard to shed off its anti-Muslim posture. Party President, L.K. Advani asked the party members to remove apprehensions about BJP from the minds of the Muslim. The BJP also realized that occupying office at the state level and in attaining power at the centre, it has to take part in Governments. So, embracing regional parties and championing a cause so close to their hearts like effecting a devolution of power from the centre to the States, became an important pillar of its poll strategy. BJP, even, threatened to start an agitation if the centre failed to implement the Sarkaria Commission recommendations to reshape centre-state relations by the end of 1997. This marked the triumph of electoral compulsions which significantly influenced BJP's agenda from its militant stand of the early 1990s to a moderate position.²⁴³ Commenting on the BJP's apparent softening of militant stance, Ashutosh Varshney said that it too has increasingly become a centrist Party.²⁴⁴

Thus, the BJP made somewhat more progress than in 1996 in the Twelfth Lok Sabha elections of February-March 1998. It was able to capture as many as 179 seats and more significantly, a larger share of the popular vote went in favour of BJP despite electoral defeats in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. So, the BJP's rise during the 1998 elections was indeed an important development. But, the electoral gains were modest and most importantly, it was wholly dependent upon regional

allies. Of them, the most unpredictable was, indeed, Jayalalitha's All India Anna DMK which withdrew support causing the downfall of Vajpayee's second longer-lived BJP Government in April, 1999 for obvious self-interested reasons.²⁴⁵

In a Democracy, Coalition-building is an integral part of the process of attaining State power. Politics and the quest for power in the context of a diverse and fragmented society like India required that the BJP as a Political Party ought to be inclusionary and had to seek coalitions, under compulsions, with other political groups.²⁴⁶ As a leading scholar has argued, "In brief, India's institutionalized political structure dictates that power can be acquired only through the Democratic process. That process, particularly as reinforced by India's social diversity, further dictates that political groups engage in coalition building. In turn, coalition building requires compromise among narrowlybased political groups and the moderation of their narrow and extreme political positions toward a centrist stance. The BJP cannot be and is not immune to that process, at least over the longer run."²⁴⁷

However, the movement dimensions of Hindu nationalism as represented mainly by the VHP and RSS became active around cultural issues creating a chasm between the priorities of the BJP in power and the unelected Sangh Parivar even during the largely moderate phase. They resorted to violence in silencing creative works as they did by launching an attack on Deepa Mehta's film 'Fire'. Again, VHP and RSS workers objected vehemently to the same director's film 'Earth' on the ground that the film portrayed widows who were forced into prostitution in the 1930s in such a way that amounted to denigrating Indian culture.

Identically, the Bajrangdal went on a rampage against young boys and girls for their celebration of valentine's day in Kanpur. This was done, as they claimed, to prevent younger generations from falling prey to decadent western ways of expressing love.

In February 2000, the UP legislature passed a bill prohibiting the construction of religious sites. This led VHP President Ashok Singhal to publicly declare that construction work on the Ram temple at Ayodhya would start within four to six months. Singhal further said that the VHP's stand on the temple issue had not changed which was in gross violation of BJP's official stance that the temple was, no longer, a part of the Government's agenda.²⁴⁸

Another uncomfortable situation arose between movement and party loyalists over the BJP's economic philosophy on the one hand, RSS was deeply committed to Swadeshi, on the other, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) led by BJP was an ardent supporter of economic liberalization. BJP's stance on economic policy moved from Swadeshi to favouring acceleration of reforms in insurance, banking and that areas of the financial sector, rationalization of subsidies, and cutting down Government-expenditure to help restore fiscal discipline.²⁴⁹ The budget of 1999 had all the praise from the big business in India and outside. It also confirmed the orientation of the BJP towards finance capital. This was, further, corroborated by the fact that the new BJP-led Government while taking over following the 1999 General elections, declared its commitment to a 'second round' of economic reforms.²⁵⁰

In 2001, the budget speech of the Union Finance Minister suggested drastic changes in existing labour laws favouring the Factory owners. On the other hand, the formal sector faced further shrinkages with the unrestricted outsourcing of production in all sectors of Employment. The budget of 2002 was, particularly, anti-poor, even anti-middle class in terms of fiscal and pricing policies, which the BJP also subsequently acknowledged as a major factor in electoral reverses in a number of states and municipalities.²⁵¹

However, the BJP can not afford to snap ties with the Sangh Parivar. Because it hoped to extend its political influence riding

piggyback on the mobilizing skills of the 4,000 RSS full-timers and the 40,000 Shakhas (branches). So, incurring the wrath of the RSS may have a direct bearing on its electoral prospects.²⁵²

Sudipta Kaviraj warned in no unambiguous terms when he suggested that the main enemies of Democracy in India are those who would like to merge democracy and 'majoritarianism', as if both things would mean the same. They do not oppose democracy openly; on the contrary, they are in fact the greatest supporters of majority rule. But they do not want democratic Government to be a complex arrangement in which majority rule is counter-balanced by a system of secure enjoyment of minority Rights.²⁵³

In any case, the BJP emerged victorious in the multiple attempts to reconstruct India politically following the decline of the 'Congress system' and failure of the Nehruvian master-frame to live up to the expectations of the people at large. The parties of the left seemed, until the 2004 elections, to be moribund. On the contrary, the satellite organizations of the BJP – the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and RSS – now appeared vibrant and in a buoyant mood. The fractured political space of the seventies and eighties, underpinned as it was by de-institutionalization, has been substituted by a new institutionalization, with twin ideologies of market and Hindu nationalism holding the sway over the political landscape.²⁵⁴ But an observer's assessment provides some glimmer of hope in India's democratic pathway when he argues, "Yet India's massively complex and diverse social-structural formation still represents a serious obstacle to the taking of state power by the Hindutva movement. The 'Hindu nationalist' world-view, deeply rooted in the outlook of its core base, the banias and upper-caste Hindi-speaking Hindus of north India (and to some extent Maratha Brahmins, the founders of RSS), continues to have rather little resonance with numerous caste, ethnic, linguistic and regional groups throughout India, even in the present situation of anomic and confusions in civil society. The Hindutva movement's war of position will doubtless

continue, yet it remains uncertain that this mobilizational effort, beset with internal contradictions and external challenges, will be able to translate the movement's agenda into reality. Ironically, but appropriately, it is the enormous heterogeneity of a country which is in its essence a panorama of minorities that stands as the most formidable barrier to the triumphant consummation of the majoritarian myth."²⁵⁵

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