Electoral Politics in Highly Segmented Societies:

An Interpretation of Indian Experiences

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Abstract:

Using post-colonial political history in India as a case study, the author presents an argument about the relationship between high degrees of social segmentation in a society of low levels of consumption and the emergence of highly personalised, context-sensitive state and national politics. The author argues that the case of India shows that the introduction of elections is not a quick and sure solution to the end of violence or corruption in politics. She argues that accommodation to elections in India has seen the multiplicity of parties of cultural nationalism. However, universal franchise has existed in India for a relatively short time and the process of accommodation is a dynamic one. There are signs from recent elections that an emphasis on development competes successfully with culturally nationalist appeals.

Key words: elections, politicians, political parties, India, social segmentation, political culture

Note of acknowledgements. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg; the Center for Development and Environment, University of Oslo; a joint seminar of the departments of history and political science, University of Hyderabad; Global Theme SAT Futures, ICRISAT, Patancheru, Andhra Pradesh; and the Oslo South Asia Symposium. I thank the participants for their comments. Also thanks to Arild

Engelsen Ruud for generous suggestions. Others who read and commented on earlier drafts are David Gilmartin, Paul Brass, and Walter Andersen. I assume responsibility for the contents. Work on this article was partially funded by the Norwegian Research Council.

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Introduction

What happens when provincial and national elections are introduced to societies which are highly segmented according to lineage, clan, caste and/or tribe? Scholars of electoral politics appear not to have treated this question systematically. It becomes increasingly important to investigate this issue when governments consider going to war with the intention of introducing electoral processes in areas with highly segmented communities, and the often accompanying traditions of patrimonial rule To what extent are Western policy-makers aware of the possibilities for further or even increased instability occurring with the onset of elections in many parts of the world? Electoral politics are not a quick and easy solution to problems of political violence or widespread corruption. In the discussion below I outline briefly political phenomena which increased in incidence, intensity and extent with the breakdown of locality vote banks and the expansion of the electorate in India after Independence in 1947. The argument here is that elements in the political culture of highly segmented rural localities contributed to the production of these phenomena. I do not mean to suggest that a cultural straight-jacket prevents alternative outcomes in the future. My current research in rural Andhra points to new possibilities in political behavior in that state.

Political values in segment domains

Societies which are organised in highly segmented structures feature institutionalised and strongly articulated lineages, clans, castes and/or tribes among their formations. These systems are segmented in the sense that they are made up of units of kin, segments, which share common structures of organisation with other units in the wider entities of which they are a part. These micro-units contain hierarchies founded on, among other criteria, age, generation and gender.

Scholarly literature often refers to these segmented structures as *social*. If we think of the micro-units as *political* as well, in the administration of their internal relations and in their goals, we gain a better understanding of their wider impact and their success in reproducing themselves over long periods of time. Institutions which aid in the reproduction of segmentation include land tenure regimes, religious practices, and structures of local and regional governance.

The political ideologies of segmented micro-units have received relatively little consistent scholarly attention, with the general exception of West Asia, Afghanistan and northern Pakistan (recent work includes Lindholm 1982 and Edwards 1996). It appears that ideologies of honour and relations of respect, incorporating notions of lordship in a domain, predominate in giving form and content to interpersonal relations in the micro-units of highly segmented societies (see Tapper 1987 and Price forthcominga) . We can speak of these units as *micro-domains* which are part of the wider domains of lineage, clan, caste, and tribe. Showing respect and being obedient in a hierarchy of micro-domain ranking discipline members of the domain into acting as a political unit.

The existence of disciplines of honor and respect does not preclude competition or even violence among kin. In South Asia male cousins of various degrees, can be each other's worse enemies, at the same time as they hope to count on each other's support in competition with, say, other lineages and clans. Conflict over material resources, such as land or other forms of

inheritance, and rivalry over status and influence are often expressed in terms of honour, in that a kinsman claims that s/he is not being shown proper respect or that s/he has been humiliated.

The aspect of honour ideologies which is important to focus on in this context is the notion of lordship in a domain. The authority of the lord is personal and the lord manages domain conflicts according to particularistic criteria. The rule of the lord is patrimonial, in that she or (usually) he is supposed to protect, support and nurture members of the domain. Members show the lord honour and respect in return. He represents the domain in his person and an insult to him is an insult to the collectivity of the domain. We may think of segmentary structures as constituting micro-regimes of a patrimonial nature.

Major trends in post-colonial Indian politics

The nature of political leadership and party organization changed in India as politics became more democratic (in the sense that increasing shares since Independence have exercised their right to take part in electoral processes outside of locality vote banks, [see Robinson 1988]). While some writers have commented on this coincidence, none to our knowledge has attempted to outline systematically the implications which mass mobilisation has had for political processes. It is widely agreed that electoral appeals have become increasingly particularistic (focusing on group identities of various sorts), that there has been increasing focus on the person of the leader, as opposed to his/her policies, that most political parties have undergone deinstitutionalisation in their structure and administration and that they have emerged organised around the political needs and desires of specific figures. Writers have also commented on increased political violence and on what is perceived to be increased corruption in both state administration and political party practice since the 1970s.

These developments do not constitute a radical break with earlier practices, despite the nostalgia one occasionally finds for the Prime Ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Still, there

appears to be wide agreement that the characteristics outlined above have become increasingly prominent since the late 1960s. The most comprehensive discussion of these phenomena thus far is the book-length study by Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, published in 1990.

My approach to these phenomena is taken from the field of cultural history. I realise, however, that comprehensive analysis of the trends listed above requires the consideration of a wide range of variables, including rates and distribution of economic growth, demographic development, relative levels of consumption, and patterns of agricultural and industrial production. These variables are important because changes in popular consciousness tend to be associated with changes in economic bases (as illustrated in Eaton 1993). However, economic developments in themselves do not necessarily explain the nature of changes in popular consciousness. Political values in segmented domains in rural areas, in particular, have greatly influenced political structures and styles under the expansion of electoral politics in India since the 1960s.

A recent periodisation of electoral politics in India

Liberal democratic institutions in India have their origin in the introduction of elections to district and town boards in the 1880s under the government of the Viceroy, Lord Ripon. The franchise was limited by criteria based on levels of education and ownership of property. The development which would most effect the style and direction of electoral politics in post-colonial India was the transformation of the Indian National Congress into a mass organisation after M.K. Gandhi assumed leadership in 1920.

Several characteristics of the Indian National Congress (INC) explain important aspects of the leadership and structure of the Congress Party in the decades immediately following Independence. First, INC movement leadership emphasised consensus in the face of British

might. Unity was a major priority, leading to a highly inclusive freedom movement which had little ideological consistency and held many (sometimes contradictory) points of view. Secondly, as part of this policy of inclusiveness, the leadership formally followed a policy of secularism in religion in the sense that the state should not profess a specific faith. Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru firmly believed in a secular India; however, in north India in particular, some of the Congress organisers were consciously Hindu nationalist, while others used religious references to enhance mobilisational results. We need to keep in mind that that master of tolerance, M.K. Gandhi, presented himself as a Hindu holy man and talked about *Ramrajya* (rule of the popular god Rama), which would follow the British raj. Thirdly, political integration in agrarian society in India was through patron-client ties, with caste and class identities generally subsumed in each other and tight patron control of local polities. This control would translate into vote banks with the introduction of universal franchise after Independence.

A widened franchise voted in the elections under the Government of India Act of 1935. Congress was variously opposed, but generally did well. At Independence Congress stood forth convincingly as the main party of national interests. The Congress Party was identified with the nation in a way that no other party could hope to match.

In a recent article, political analyst Yogendra Yadav outlined a periodisation of the pattern of party competition in post-Independence India (Yadav 1997). The first phase was of single party (Congress) dominance and lasted from 1947 to 1967. This was the period of what political scientists called the 'Congress system'. During these two decades the party, for the most part, maintained ideological and social inclusiveness and received support from a wide cross section of the society, in particular, Brahmins, substantial farmers, ex-untouchables and Muslims.

The second phase lasted from 1967 to 1993-1995 and was what Yadav calls the 'Congress-Opposition system'. During this time there was one-party salience, while the Congress

was not able to maintain its old dominance. New parties emerged to challenge Congress, particularly at the state level. This phase also saw the emergence of a plebiscitary mode of electoral politics in which political leaders campaigned on single issues, the most famous being Indira Gandhi's pledge to 'abolish poverty' in her successful national campaign of 1971. During this period the Congress (here, Indira Gandhi's section of the old party) remained the center focus in the pattern of party competition. In various states there was bi-polar consolidation, but there was not bi-polar consolidation at the national level. Yadav speaks of a system of 'multiple bipolarities'.

In the third phase there has been movement to a competitive multi-party system in which Congress is no longer consistently a center point in either state or national politics**.** It was replaced by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the largest party of the government between 1997 and 2003. Congress is currently back at the center, leading a coalition government in an era that appears increasingly federalist. The regionally based parties are strong and constitute a major element in national coalition governments. In addition to parties that represent regional interests, the development has also been in the direction of more distinct regional political styles. In the absence of dominant parties, competition has increased.

Processes of decay?

In the early 1980s James Manor wrote about deinstitutionalszation in Indian politics under the rubric of 'decay', as in the decay of political institutions (Manor 1983). Such an answer, as philosophers say, only begs the question. We have to analyse the dynamics that led to political decay at the same time as we leave open the possibility that Indian politics has not been decaying so much as going through a long period of adjustment to the use of political institutions that were, in their ontology, European, not the result of indigenous historical development.

Political scientists have had a tendency to point to Indira Gandhi's authoritarian leadership of the Congress (R), and later Congress (I), as the beginning of deinstitutionalisation in Indian politics and governance and the attendant focus on the personality of the leader. These trends were underway in some parts of the country before the 1970s, as recent research on the Dravidian mobilisation in Tamil Nadu shows (Price 1999). Historians, after long and sad historiographical experiences, shy away from explanations of major phenomena which focus on the behavior of a single person. Indira Gandhi is not acceptable as the Big Woman who transformed Indian politics. On the contrary, characteristics of deinstitutionalisation in political parties show us where to look for at least one explanation. It is striking that general processes of deinstitutionalization have taken place simultaneously with the influx of new social groups—many rural in background—into active participation in electoral politics. We need to put this observation together with the fact that important characteristics of political practice in deinstitutionalised political parties resemble those writ large of interaction and exchange in rural India, in particular.[1]

The democratisation of Indian politics—in terms of the proportion of people mobilised to vote, as well as the larger numbers of people standing as candidates for election—has seen the

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[1] I base this assertion on literature on rural society ranging from earlier work in political anthropology by Frederick G. Bailey, *Tribe, Caste and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960) and Marvin Davis, *Rank and Rivalry: the Politics of Inequality in Rural West Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) to that of the new field of the anthropology of the state represented by the essays in C. J. Fuller and V. Bénéï , *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2000)

incorporation of popular values and ideals into political processes. As observers of Indian politics—journalists in English-language publications, as well as scholars—have noted, the great mass of voters has tended not to be much affected by the western, liberal ideas and institutions which so touched the imaginations of leaders of the Indian National Congress and, thus, the first generation of rulers under the Congress regime. The political scientist Sudipta Kaviraj observed in 1991:

> The paradox…is that if Indian politics become genuinely democratic in the sense of coming into line with what the majority of ordinary Indians would consider reasonable, it will become less democratic in the sense of conforming to the principles of a secular, democratic state acceptable to the early nationalist elite (Kaviraj 1991: 93-94).

Writing after the assembly elections of 1995, Yogendra Yadav noted that those political parties which are made up of marginal social and economic groups are for the most part undemocratic in their organisational outline and structure, as well as in their functioning (Yadav 1997). These groups are products of local political systems of competition and integration which are deeply influenced by deeply hierarchical social and political cosmologies (see Tapper 1987 and Raheja 1988). Authority is highly personal. Notions of advancement in local societies are not clearly tied to abstract criteria of merit, but very much to connections of kin and caste. Rules are not absolute, but context-sensitive.[2]. Confidence in the overall benefits to be derived from attention to due process is limited.

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[2] The most famous statement of this position is A.K. Ramanujan, 'Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay' in *Contributions to Indian Sociology (N.S.)*, Vol. 23. No. 1, 1989, pp. 41-58.

By the late 1960s people at all levels of society had become increasingly aware of the basic logic of electoral politics. Wider processes of change were leading to the softening of the local control which had produced vote banks. Many found the protection which could lie in the secrecy of the ballot and accepted the notion that parties and leaders should respond to the declared needs of those who elected them. Increasingly constituency groups wanted the resources of the state to flow their way when 'their man/woman' succeeded in being elected to the state or national legislative assemblies. The many new groups which emerged from the late sixties entered into conflict over division of the spoils of office, as more and more contenders sought a fixed number of seats. Yadav presents figures which suggest the direction of change. In state assembly elections in 1984-5, there was an average of 8.6 contestants per assembly seat, while in 1993-5, there was an average of 14.7 contestants nationwide (Yadav 1997: 185).

Yadav uses his numbers to make the point that it is not 'backwardness' per se which has led to electoral mobilization, but the increasing 'politisation' of low caste, low status and/or poor groups. However, the changes have not been universal. There are differential rates of voter turnout and of the average number of candidates standing for office in different states in India. In Arunachal Pradesh, where there was one-party dominance in 1993-95, there was no increase in numbers standing for election from 1984-85. States which were close to two-party dominance or had reached it, occupied a middle ground with an average of a little over ten candidates per seat. States which had seen a relatively high incidence of party splits or the rise of so-called backward castes to the center stage of politics witnessed a rise in the number of candidates: Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, both noted for their violent politics, saw a quick increase in the number of candidates, with, respectively, 23 and about 25 candidates per constituency (Yadav 1997:185-186).

It is useful at this point to think of various meanings which many people attach to voting and party politics. *Dharma*, a major element in the everyday cosmologies of ordinary people, is

usually translated as 'duty'. However, each person's dharma encompasses his or her domain of personal authority and responsibility, no matter how small in size and scale. The concept would thus seem to contain elements of entitlement that have contributed ordinary peoples' attachment to the act of voting .

Elections in India—more than in many places in the world—tend to be festivals of color, music, speeches and bigger than life personalities. Towns and cities are plastered with posters and one finds in many places giant cut-outs of chief politicians. The public competition of elections is exciting for many people, presenting occasions for both victory and humiliation in a country where honour is all. Theories of conspiracy abound and massive rumor mills run in a country where gossip is a major (and cheap) form of entertainment (Ruud 2003). Fueling the gossip is the circumstance that elections for many reasons involve transactions in big money, deals galore (or reports of such). For those who succeed in becoming a candidate for office, there is the chance of making a major difference in their financial position and that of their family and associates should they win. Getting elected to an assembly seat, as well as to Parliament, is popularly considered a ticket to riches, to the spoils of office, to bribes, to big deals with contractors. For most people in India, poor or middle class, politics is about corruption, among other things, and for many poor people a man who does not become rich from political office is considered either a saint (rarely) or stupid or foolish.

Political parties are the main hinge between state and society in India (Chhibber 1999). As new groups have been mobilised to take part in elections and in party formation, the importance of elections in political dynamics in India has increased. Important aspirations and demands and competing claims to power are mediated through the mechanism of elections. However, greater participation and involvement in electoral processes have not necessarily

implied citizens' trust in the political order. Political parties have expanded their reach in terms of numbers, but by the end of the 20th century their legitimacy had declined.

One reason for disillusionment with party politics has been its association with the use of force and intimidation, against candidates and party workers and in polling places. There may be a link between the expansion in numbers of parties and candidates, intense competition for the spoils of office and increased violence in politics. We can consider as well that the use of force has long been a part of political practice in rural India and that the strong arm tactics of Big Men have come to be used in the wider arena of state politics and elections to the Parliament.

The taint of corruption compounded with the incidence of violence in politics contributes to undermine the legitimacy of party rule. Also relevant in this context is the deinstitutionalisation of political parties and parts of the state administrative, which undermines the capacity of the state to solve major economic and social problems (Manor 1997). Disillusionment with politicians has meant that the reasonably sophisticated electorate does not re-elect men and women who have not performed according to the wishes or needs of constituents. Yet participation in elections has increased. It is fruitful to understand political participation in India as an inherent paradox, where disillusionment does not necessarily create non-engagement, but an increased need to take part in the competition for scarce resources (Ruud 2000).

What dynamics contribute to expansion in the number of political parties and candidates standing for election?

Deinstitutionalisation and identity politics

In the competition for votes, ambitious politicians have sought to encourage the development of new constituencies with culturally nationalist appeals, often referred to identity politics (Brass 1974). The formation of new political parties has been one result. The expansion

of identity politics has coincided with processes of deinstitutionalisation. (Parties on the extreme right and extreme left have tended to avoid deinstitutionalisation, though not culturally nationalist appeals.) There are mutually reinforcing developments in this context which contribute to the decline of formal party organisation. One finds important focus on the personal authority of leaders, as opposed to the authority of institutions. Decisions tend to be taken in the context of face-to-face relations, rather than with reference to formal rules and processes, to due process within the party. Elections to party office are often delayed and there are common complaints that active service to the party is not rewarded with formal authority in the organization. In the construction of successful careers in political parties, there has been dependence on personal acts of generosity, as in the division of spoils, and of political and administrative protection.

As noted above, one outcome of party deinstitutionalisation has been the diminishing of state capacity in many areas of governance and development, including the capacity to manage the new social cleavages which have emerged. As parts of the electorate lose faith in the capacity of the state to work effectively for the betterment of livelihoods, they appear to lose confidence in universal abstractions such as secularism and socialism. Failures of administrative implementation and conflict management facilitate the success of politicians in appealing to community identities, when voters chose to function politically as a group to achieve their goals, rather than to rely on the state.

In the meantime, politicians have helped to articulate and redefine community identities. The leader becomes the great patron-boss who is, in his/her person, the representative of the status, honor and actual or potential success of the group in question. The group may be a caste or cluster of castes. It may be religiously defined or defined by its geographical location. It may represent a region or a language. Since the late 1970s one can find political parties which exist mainly as expressions of the leadership and ambition of one person, with the focus being on

him/her and his representation of a particular group and its status. As the leader is honoured and respected, so is (in this collective perception) the group.

A recent study of the emergence in Uttar Pradesh of the party of ex-untouchable interests, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), includes examination of a range of variables that could explain why Dalits have supported the party since it was formed in 1984. The author summarises her approach:

> …I argue that voters may choose to support a party for four distinct reasons: because they agree with the political programme of the party, because they believe that the party will implement policies that benefit the group they belong to, because they believe that is is important to follow the voting norm within their group, because they expect to receive access to patronage if the party gains power. These explanations are tested with the use of voter surveys, government statistics, and interviews with politicians… The empirical analysis shows that the rise of the BSP is primarily explained by an increased tendency of Scheduled Castes to vote in accordance with Dalit group interests (Inkinen 2003: summary page)

Inkinen explains that that the notion 'group interests' is not necessarily a reference to class belonging nor does it refer only or even primarily to economic welfare. Motivational in the first instance has been the desire for social recognition and political power:

> In contrast to Congress, the BSP has focused on attacking the caste system and demanding self-respect and political representation. When in power, moreover, the party has put much weight on giving Scheduled Castes a sense of social recognition by constructing monuments in the memory of prominent Dalit leaders (Inkinen 2003:194).

To the observer of contemporary Indian politics, names such as Mayawati (BSP leader from Uttar Pradesh, north India), Jayalalitha (from Tamil Nadu, south India), Mamata Banerjee

(from W. Bengal, east India), Mulayam Singh (Uttar Pradesh) or Laloo Prasad (Bihar, north India) conjure up images of a mode of politics in which 'due process' does not figure prominently. Large scale corruption and embezzlement are often associated with these names. Laloo Prasad's role in the 'multi-crore fodder scam' and Jayalalitha and her friends' fabulous wealth are notorious. These individual political leaders are the more well known representatives of the trend towards political 'decay'. While the development is deplored in English-language media and scholarship, few have attempted to interpret it as part of what can be a long process of accommodation to electoral politics in highly segmented societies.

As indicated above, cultural nationalism in India includes a relatively wide range of identities, covering a variety of political movements. The Hindu nationalist rhetoric of the BJP appeals to many in northern and western India, and even to some extent in the south and east. The BJP's appeal ignores linguistic and to a considerable extent ritual and class divisions. The Akali Dal's Sikh religio-nationalist appeal falls into the same category. However, the BJP and the Akali Dal are very different from other movements grouped under the 'identity politics' label. The Dravidian nationalism of the Tamil parties and the Telugu nationalism of the Telugu Desam are linguistically based, looking toward regional pride, and formally non-religious. Yet another very different trend, although still often covered by the same term, is the appeal of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh and the (Rashtriya) Janata Dal in Bihar. These are caste based or based in well known coalitions of castes or groups in opposition to other groups. Both the SP and Bihar's Janata Dal have drawn their main support from middle ranging land owning castes plus Muslim agriculturalists, while the BSP draws its support from the lower castes—confining the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to the upper castes and Congress to the margins.

Similarly, the term 'deinstitutionalisation' is a term that easily obscures more than it reveals. The BSP leader, Mayawati, while in her third term as Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh,

may have represented deinstitutionalisation when she undermined the state administration—ordering the highest number ever of transfers of officials, or using state funds for her birthday celebrations. At the same time part she is part of the building of a political movement with a powerful appeal to lower caste voters. This movement differs considerably from the deinstitutionalisation represented by the machinations of a large number of middle range politicians and the 'floor crossing' that has created and disintegrated political parties at a rapid rate. These middlemen or 'political zamindars' as they have been called, have mostly unclear political agendas beyond securing positions of influence.

One trait common to most of these movements and parties is the importance in the individual leader's person, as political parties become identified with these personnages. Even large and enduring political movements tend to rely on individual leaders. In some cases this happens to such an extent as to reverse the equation, and the party becomes the appendix of the leader. This is the case of the very personal movement that Laloo Prasad Yadav has created in Bihar. His strong and unique position enabled him to exercise 'indirect rule', with his wife, Rabri Devi, as Chief Minister. Laloo Prasad's movement is special in the sense that it is highly personal yet has a particular class basis as well as identity appeal. Its only parallel is Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

The increased role of personal sentiments is a prominent aspect of the personalisation of electoral politics, in particular sentiments related to honour and humiliation. One example is the highly personal rivalry and enmity between Uttar Pradesh' two most prominent leaders, Mulayam Singh and Mayawati. The saga of their rivalry includes alledged physical molestation, questioning the opponent's moral standards, targetting family members and much more in what the newspapers term 'political vendettas'. Parallel rivalries are found between the two most prominent leaders in Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi and, in Karnataka, between the

recently deceased Ramakrishna Hegde and Deva Gowda. Personal dislikes and issues of honour and humilition become highlighted and accepted as legitimate reasons for reaction in public (Price forthcominga). The intensity of such dislike and rivalry assumes political importance when the full state machinery is employed to investigate the outgoing Chief Minister and his or her family and friends on charges of corruption, embezzlement and even murder.

This intense rivalry may lead to beneficial consequences. The previous code of conduct among India's politicians was that one would allege corruption and embezzlement, but not actually set the police to conduct a serious investigation. In the case of Jayalalitha vs. Karnunanidhi this code was broken, setting perhaps a precedent for the country as a whole.

Larger political issues are often re-presented in the focus on persons rather than larger entities. A case in point is the celebrations of events that are otherwise understood to be of a more personal nature. Jayalalitha's birthday celebrations or the magnificent wedding celebration of her adopted son are examples of this. More recently Mayawati celebrated her 47th birthday at the cost of Rs 1,14 crore, with some 25,000 guests, entertained at state expenses. These events are more than occasions for personal adoration; they have been made into political rallys and manifestations. Mayawati's birthday celebration was termed *swabhiman diwas*, or 'self-respect day', in a clear reference to the newly won respect the lower castes could now enjoy, as their leader had become the Chief Minister.

It would be foolish and perhaps even a bit arrogant to regard this extravagent, personal style of politics as merely erratic or examples of decay. Surely it is more than aberration on a readymade framework of electoral politics. The examples used here are among the more striking eruptions of a style of politics that has come to characterise a number of Indian states. But these politics are not devoid of meaning or their own internal logic. They are examples of symbolic

gestures that help define issues and groups, to mobilise and strengthen group sense of entitlement and community value.

Widening the context of discussion

Pre-colonial states in South Asia were highly marked by patrimonial rule. With the onset of colonial rule and with the further expansion of the scope of the state after independence, localities which earlier tended to be politically isolated became integrated into wider polities. However, in the absence of complete reorganisation of, for example, local economies and technologies, and with the only partial absorption of ideologies of political and intellectual modernisation, notions of personal lordship in governance did not disintegrated. People in local communities have tended to transpose notions of the appropriate use of ruling authority in segmental domains on to the leaders of the wider polities of which they have become a part, whether these leaders are heads of political parties or governors of districts, provinces or states. Similarly their notions of the salient domains of their lives has expanded. (This process is subsumed in wider processes of ethnic or state nationalism.) Patrimonialism continues to express itself in many ways in the styles of leadership in contemporary polities. The styles and degrees of patrimonialism differ from area to area and within the same territories.

The onset of electoral regimes appears to have, at least in the short term, marked effects on political society. (At the beginning of the 21st century, we are still seeing the short term. Fifty years is a short time for an historian.) Styles of electoral campaigning and of transacting politically are shaped by the conditions of segmentation, at the same time as segmentation is altered in the context of formal and informal competitive processes in electoral politics.

Depending in part on the nature of economic and technical development in the societies in question and the rate of electoral mobilisation, the nature of domain formation undergoes alteration under these competitive pressures. Electoral processes—including including

campaigning—have often resuled in politicians and would-be leaders seeking to create constituencies through patrimonial appeals. Part of the appeal process has involved the rhetorical outlining of existing, imagined and/or invented domains. With reference to these domain constituencies—be they, among others, of caste, tribe, language, religion, or nation—the would-be leader may become a patrimonial figure who represents the group in his or her person. Like the lords of kinship domains, the authority of these politicians is personal and their judgments are often particularistic.

It is partly because of the highly personal nature of leadership in electoral regimes that political transactions often become intensely emotional and revolve around issues of the honour of the politician and the respect shown to him (or her) by other politicians, government officials, and important community figures. The game of politics becomes in part the play of attempts at humiliation to undermine the prestige of the politician, at the same time as s/he will attempt to suggest that it is the constituency which is being dishonoured. Outcomes can be violent.

Political cultures in perspective

Reading newspapers and watching the news regularly on television, one learns quickly that identity politics are not confined to societies of high segmentation. One can think, for example, of European and North American political parties of varying professions of Christian faith. Attachment to the person of the politician, as opposed to emphasis on his or her policies, is also common around the world. Those paying attention to news of corporate dealings in the United States recently will easily affirm that corruption in high places is by no means confined to societies with low levels of consumption. What is of concern to a student of political culture is incidence, extent and intensity. It is worth taking into consideration, as well, when thinking about the history of the emergence of electoral processes generally in the world, that the transition has

been long and often violent. There is no reason to expect that India can or should 'learn' from the 'mistakes' of other parts of the world.

One task of the historian of political culture is to discuss political styles and in this connection we have suggested that styles in the democratic transition in India are deeply affected by the structure and values of social and political relations in rural communities.[3] Seventy percent of the Indian population lives in villages. However, considering future developments in the transition, we note the possible long-term impacts on local societies from the capitalization of agriculture and the expansion of access to media, among other impulses. Recent research in rural areas suggests that both, in related but different ways, have long-term effects of undermining ideologies and relations of patrimonial domination (Ruud 1999, Ruud 2003 and Price forthcomingb). There are indications of new trends emerging in political behavior. Discourses of 'development', to a great extent, edged out culturally nationalist appeals in the campaigns for assembly elections in the fall of 2003 and in the General Election of 2004. Constituents wanted to hear about water, electricity and roads, among other livelihood issues. As jounalist Sukumar Muralidharan commented:

> More than at any time in the recent past, the electorate today is inclined to go by real issues of accountability and quality of governance in making its choices. The power of polarising symbols and identity politics is now at a relatively low ebb (Muralidharan 2003:4-5).

[3] Included here are recent migrants to urban areas. See Dipesh Chakrabarthy's study of jute workers in mills in Calcutta, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

In the meantime we can consider that personal orientation, face-to-face transactions, and context sensitivity are important in political transactions beyond societies of high segmentation. These are to be found in agricultural societies all over the world and as close to home as university politics in metropolitan centers. What is important to consider, again, are the issues of incidence, extent, and intensity.

Students of segmented societies have generally failed us. We need to think of the segments as micro-units of political administration, buttressed by ideologies of appropriate behavior which support authoritarian, personal lordship. In the face of low productivity, low levels of education and relative isolation from alternative models of political interaction, ordinary people often project onto a wider political screen those images of the nature and appropriate use of authority which they have learned in the functioning of the domains of their daily existence.

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