Chapter-IV

Media in Decade of Dominance to Decline (1980-1990)
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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The decade of 1980s had begun with the note of the revival of single party dominance, however, it ended very surprisingly with a different note of the decline of the same, and emergence of a new phenomenon in national politics which even after passing of more than two decades is persisting without any visible end in near future. This phenomenal change in national politics has its lasting effect and consequently, the structure, nature and content of politics have changed forever. The fall of the Janata regime was the most surprising as well as shocking political development in 1979 which finally paved the way for the same regime which was rejected by the people two and half years back for imposing emergency. Unfortunately, Mrs. Indira Gandhi who made a historic come back to power within a very short span of time, could not complete her five years term and was assassinated on 31st October 1984 by none other than her own bodyguards as part of a larger sectarian goal of revenge for the governmental decision of ‘Operation Blue Star’in June, 1984 to flush out Bhindrawala and his armed supporters, who were waging a war against the state and challenging the sovereignty of India, from the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The political assassination of Mrs. Gandhi brought a political earthquake in the country, and as a reaction to it, some section of the people in general, provoked by some political leaders of the then ruling party, and with the passive support of the state machinery, converted national capital for three days in a state of the Hobbesian statelessness. The reaction against the Sikh community and the subsequent riots, arson, looting and mass killing or genocide were the product of political polarization of the majority Hindu community which later took the shape of the unprecedented electoral victory of the Congress party in 1984-85’s 8th Lok Sabha elections. The eldest son of late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, who was being groomed as the political successor after the untimely death of younger
son, Sanjay Gandhi, took reign of power as the prime minister of India. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi’s regime apart from many of its controversial and debatable political decisions was discredited with the serious allegations of corruption in Bofors guns purchased from a Swedish Company for the Indian Army. Though the deal was unearthed by one of the senior ministers of his cabinet, Mr. V. P. Singh, the mass media, especially the print media, took very active part in exposing the deal and the alleged commission of Rs. 64 crores as commission for finalizing the deal that was involved in it, that ultimately led to the defeat of Rajiv’s Congress party in 1989’s 9th Lok Sabha elections. From Rajiv Gandhi’s unprecedented victory in the 8th Lok Sabha to the disastrous defeat of his party in the 9th Lok Sabha elections were very interesting political developments in which allegations of corruption in politics, and print media’s role in exposing it, were the crucial political factors. Since then the Congress party could not regain its previous political and electoral strength in national politics including absolute majority in the Lok Sabha elections up to now. Hence, this was the formal beginning of a coalition era in national politics of India.

This chapter attempts first, to understand the phenomenal expansion of the state controlled electronic media and its increasing socio-political importance in public life, and its consequential impact on democratic process; second, to examine the role of corruption in deciding the political results; and finally, to assess and evaluate the role of the print media as a watchdog in exposing the practices of corruption in political and public life.

4.2 CHANGING NATURE OF POLITICS IN 1980s

The Congress party ruled India single handedly since independence up to the beginning of 1977 at the national level. Political analysts have classified this characteristics of the Indian party system as the single party dominant party system. Long back Prof Rajni Kothari has called it a Congress System (Kothari, 1964) at least that lasted up to the beginning of the 70s or before the rise of Mrs. Gandhi’s politics of populism. However, in 1977 the country witnessed the defeat of Congress
party at the national level and the newly formed Janata party won the elections and formed first non-Congress Union government. The defeat of the Congress party under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Gandhi was generally considered as an end to the dominance of the single party in national politics, however, many political pundits failed in their assessment when they saw Mrs. Gandhi’s reemergence and her coming back to power with a massive majority in 1980. E. Sridharan writes: “In 1980, another Congress restoration took place following the disintegration of the JP, again a near two-third majority of 353 seats (out of 542) on the basis of a plurality of 42.7 per cent” (Sridharan, 2010:119). Once again political scientists corrected their myopic perception and superficial understanding, and realized the revival of the dominance of the Congress party. The unprecedented victory of Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress party in post-Indira period approved the theory of dominance of the Congress party in national politics. E. Sridharan observes: “The 1984 elections, another ‘exceptional’ election following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, saw the highest – ever Congress vote share (48.1 per cent) and 415 seats, or a three quarters majority” (Sridharan, 2010:120). The unprecedented victory had another dimension too, and that was the massive polarization of Hindu votes in the name national unity. Paul Brass observes that there is also presumed to exist a Hindu “vote” in India which can be mobilized for the sake of national unity against the secessionist or otherwise excessive demands of minorities such as Sikhs and Muslims. It has been noted that in the 1984 parliamentary elections, held in the aftermath of the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards, the issue of national unity was communalized and made into the central issue in Rajiv Gandhi’s landslide victory (Brass, 1985:214). However, this dominance could not sustain for a longer period and in the next general elections Congress party suffered a clear cut defeat in 1989’s Lok Sabha elections leading to the formation of a coalition government, named National Front government under the Prime Ministership of an ex-Congress man and former minister of the Rajiv Gandhi’s Union cabinet, and a leading anti-corruption movement leader against the Rajiv Gandhi’s government,
Mr. Vishwanath Pratap Singh supported from outside by the left parties including the Communist party (Maxist), and the rightist party like Bhartiya Janata party. Explaining the defeat of the Congress party, E. Sridharan writes: “The 1989 elections marked another tuning point, with the Congress crashing to 39.5 per cent and 197 seats against an opposition electoral alliance consisting of seat adjustments, of the National Front coalition (of JD and regional and minor parties) supported by the BJP and the Left parties, which resulted in a large number of one-on-one contests with the Congress” (Sridharan, 2010:122). The Janata Dal victory was the result of a horizontal cooperation among disadvantaged and backward castes, rather than a vertical mobilization by the higher castes. The coalition of Muslims, backward castes like Ahirs, jats, Gujars, and Yadavas- comprising the better off among the backward and middle castes-the Rajputs put up a formidable opposition to the Congress (Mukherji, 2010:486). Apart from the social dynamics of the decline of the Congress party, print media’s investigative journalism and its consistent crusade against Rajiv Gandhi government’s corruption allegations played very crucial role in his party’s defeat. In the post-Emergency era, observed Sunanda Datta K. Ray (2000), the media took active interest in unseating Rajiv Gandhi who had then fallen out with his finance minister, Mr. Vishwanath Pratap Singh who was the darling of the media, especially of the Indian Express. Rajiv Gandhi’s defeat was victory for the press. But it could also have been political manipulations or a mix of all the three (Ray, 2000:59).

Though V. P. Singh’s coalition government met the same fate like the first non-Congress government of the Janata party and could not last long and collapsed even in a shorter period of just eleven months because of the split of the of Janata Dal, the major ruling partner of the National Front government in 1990. A minority government under the Prime Ministership of a Youngturk of the pre-Emergency politics and once the president of the Janata party, Mr. Chandrashekhar was formed after the split of the Janata Dal with the outside support of the Congress party in the similar fashion like Charan Singh’s government after the split of the Janata party in
1979 with the outside support of the Indira’s Congress party, as if history has repeated itself in National politics. The very significant political developments during the decade were the emergence of backward castes politics known as Mandalization of the Indian politics at the national level and also in sharp reaction to that the emergence of the Hinduaization of the Indian Politics known as Camandalization of the Indian Politics which actually brought the phenomenal change in the nature and content of politics in the coming days, and finally led to politics of confrontation unlike the Nehruvian politics of consensus. Rahul Mukherji writes: “India’s modernization promoted literacy, mass communications, and urbanization in the context of political democracy. This mobilized the people to participate in political protests and voting. The relative decline of the Congress party since mid-1980s and the rise of regional, backward caste, and minority group based parties has been due largely to the Congress’ institutional incapacity to articulate and respond to the demands of an increasingly mobilized society” (Mukherji 2010:486).

While analyzing the role and influence of charismatic leaders in shaping Indian electoral politics since independence, C. P. Bhambhri observes that with the death of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984 that era of the tallest leaders ended and since then average leaders took the centre stage. He says: “The era of tall leadership came to an end and the post-1984 democratic political electoral process brought average leaders on the scene and the theorist who had proclaimed that Indian democracy solely depended on leadership of ‘charismatic personalities’ had to eaten humble pie because none of the Prime Ministers after Nehru and Indira could be described as ‘the tallest leader’ of India’” (Bhambhri, 2007:69). He further observes that the era of one party, with a clear majority of its own, in the Lok sabha has come to an end (C.P. Bhambhri, 2007:70).

4.3 TRANSFORMING DOORDARSHAN

After Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s electoral comeback in 1980, she had maximum of next five years to ensure her re-election. Therefore, preparations had to be made in
context of the increasing political opposition, both within and outside the Congress party, and the increasing awareness of Congress’ inability to promote significant economic development. At this time, it was also clear that coercive practices used during the Emergency would not be tolerated second time. Finally, by this time the Congress was no longer capable of serving as the network of communication between elite and grassroots levels the way it served before the Emergency, and particularly during the freedom struggle. Facing these difficulties, Mrs. Gandhi had to find out new methods for garnering votes. The surprising success of televising in the 1982 Asian Games sparked inspiration, and she turned to the persuasive potential of the television. By the time of the Asian Games, there were approximately forty transmitters in the Doordarshan network. Most of the relay stations did not have adequate production facilities. Moreover, there were more relatively low-power (100 watt) transmitters in remote, mountainous or border areas, including Imphal, Shillong, Jammu, and Shimla. Significant expansion, creating a nearly pan-Indian infrastructure, occurred only after the Asiad.

The major impetus for the growth of Doordarshan was a political decision: realizing the enormous potential influence of television, the Indira Gandhi government decided to embark on a major expansion of television in time for the next scheduled Lok Sabha elections, due in 1985. S. S. Gill, an officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) who had overseen the creation of stadium, roads and other infrastructure for the Asian Games, was appointed the Secretary of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting with responsibility for creating a near pan-Indian network within a very short time span. Importation laws were changed to allow purchase of components necessary for the indigenous production of more viewing sets for the exponentially growing audience, and educational schemes were launched to train teams of engineers and technicians. Beginning in July 1983, an 18-month project to expand the network was sanctioned by the government, with a budget allocation of Rs. 680 million (Chatterji, 1991: 31).
In early 1983, only about one-quarter of India’s population was within signal range of a Doordarshan transmitter. While the oft-repeated claim that a new transmitter was raised almost daily in 1984 does not tally with published Doordarshan statistics, most sources agree that coverage was extended to more than half of the population by mid-1985, and to three-quarters by 1990. During the period of Doordarshan’s airwave monopoly, through the early 1990s, available statistical data on Doordarshan was often scanty or conflicting; compilations were then best available through Doordarshan (Annual Publication of Doordarshan’s Audience Research Unit), specific government publications such as Television in India (1989, 1990), and Mass Media in India (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting periodical). During this period, precise statistics had not yet become commercially crucial enough to promote significant private investment in statistical analysis; the expansion of the television network was only then underway, and there was no television alternative to Doordarshan.

The expansion of Doordarshan’s reach and programming in the early 1980s was aided through the advent of commercial sponsorship, created a nexus linking state control of television for electoral ends with commercial pursuit of profit through advertising. The logical goal of both electioneering and advertising, however, is to reach the largest number of people possible and in a country as diverse and as raven with potential cleavages as India, this logic is fraught with possibilities for unintended outcomes. Throughout the 1980s, Doordarshan came to be used as a tool for promoting a national identity through the projection of an “Indian” national character, closely identified with the ruling party. The implications of this process for news programming became perhaps most severe by the time of Rajiv Gandhi’s Prime Minister ship, but there were also significant implications for non-news programming. Throughout the 1980s, the percentage of programming devoted to glitzy, urbanized depictions increased, and the contradictions between dreadfully inadequate developmental programming and advertising-driven consumer fare made a farce of development as the rhetorical justification for continued centralized state
control of television. At the same time, the concept of “development programming” became codified and ossified (and sometimes ludicrous) in the “fixed-chart system” through which various groups in need of development were identified and then provided with an allotted number of programming minutes: fifteen minutes for women and ten minutes for farmers, for example, often shown at times of the day when these groups would be least likely to watch. Though only time will tell, from the perspective of the early twenty-first century the most damaging aspect of centralized media policy seems to be the impossibility of any state sponsored depiction of the “nation” to be fully devoid of polarizing religious, ethnic, linguistic, or communal overtones. This was particularly problematic in India in the implication of state-sponsored serialization of the Ramayana and other epics in the general rise of a virulent Hindutva (Shah 1997:23). Though such charges can never be conclusively proven, the hierarchical control of television from Delhi also meant that the government could never fully clear itself from such accusations, and so the secular credentials of the state were brought into question (Justice 1995: 231).

Serialization of the Ramayana, followed by the Mahabharata, aired for over three years beginning in early 1987. One consequence of this programming decision was the inadvertent implication of Doordarshan, and therefore of the state and the ruling party, in widening schisms between the majoritarian “nation” as presented on Doordarshan and those outside this homogenized conception. Programming during the 1980s projected an India that was overwhelmingly north Indian, Hindi speaking, middle class, and Hindu. The serialization of the Ramayana, and particularly its treatment as a Hindu, rather than an Indian, saga, constructed a symbolic lexicon that aided communalist mobilizations and formed the basis of the imagery used by L. K. Advani in his rath yatras. By the end of the 1980s, Advani and the BJP had emerged as perhaps the most media-savvy manipulators of Ram-related imagery, which had been given pan-Indian exposure by Doordarshan, to forge a sense of Hindu resurgence and unity that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. Charges linking communal praxis and media messages can never be
conclusively proven. However, the very insolubility of the causality puzzle linking mass media images and political mobilization turned Doordarshan into a resilient scapegoat. Role of media either print or electronic in mass mobilization is always impressive and effective, however, the very purpose and objective of that mobilization might be different. A comparison between the Gandhi’s Dandi March during the freedom struggle in 1930, and BJP leader L. K. Advani’Rath Yatra that started from Somnath Temple in Gujrat for the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya is interesting to observe. “When Mohandas Gandhi mobilized nationalist opposition to British rule by leading the salt March in 1930 to protest the colonial salt tax, the effectiveness of this symbolic statement was enhanced because ‘press’reported the daily progress of the march (Kulke and Rothermund, 1990:290). Ludden observes, “The press served the similar role in Hindu fundamentalist mobilization (Ludden, 1996:108). Given subsequent vicious communal rioting, the legitimacy of the state’s vision of the “nation” came to be suspect, severely undermining conceptions of Doordarshan as an impartial provider of information.

4.4 ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN A NEW ROLE

Three televised international events were held in New Delhi in 1982-1983, adding prestige to the ruling party: most important of these was the ASIAD (the Asian Games) in November – December 1982. India also hosted the seventh conference of the Non-Aligned Nations Movement, and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Indira Gandhi chaired the Non-Aligned Nations Movement, and India was a prominent member of the Commonwealth. The government had placed high priority on these events to showcase India’s technological and organizational abilities and gain prestige in the international community. Apparently, the government’s switch to colour transmission came from certain political considerations. The prime minister’s son, Rajiv Gandhi, was appointed to chair the ASIAD Committee and was given a complete organizational responsibility for the event. Along with building the government’s image internationally, these significant
political events could also boost its image at the domestic front. Successful execution of an event such as the ASIAD would enhance Congress party’s image as well as that of Rajiv Gandhi, who was being groomed for the position of Prime Minister (Pendakur, 1991: 234).

In the meantime, Indira Gandhi realized that ‘her kind of socialism’ didn’t work. Her support based among the influential business communities got very much weakened and she then shifted the emphasis of her politics from socialism towards supporting the commercial groups of the middle class. The shift became directly visible on Doordarshan, staging of the middle-class family as the protagonist of the first long-running serial Hum Log (We people; 1984-85). This way of ‘integration’ prevented further independent regional telecast (Singhal and Rogers, 1989:156). At the same time, this rhetoric of integration served as well to ‘integrating’ more and more commercials and middle-class-oriented programmes (Raghavan, 1984:331).

4.5 PRESS AND POLITICS DURING THE 1984 ELECTION

During the second phase (1980-1984) of Indira Gandhi’s government, first Assam and then Punjab dominated the press coverage. Killing of innocent citizens by the extremists, Operation Bluestar, and finally, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, all dominated the political scenario for two years preceding the 1984 parliamentary elections. It was a period of political unrest, communal eruptions and administrative problem in the north-east and north-west states. The advertising and the campaign experts miniaturized the issue suitably as winning election strategy. During her second phase in power, Indira Gandhi was sensitive to press comment, exhibiting a lack of robustness in this respect was remarkable for a leader of her experience.

In the General Election in 1984, Indira Gandhi’s image and her “sacrifice for the unity of India” was the focal point of the Congress campaign. Of the 30 million posters ordered by the AICC to be distributed centrally, 20 million had only photo of Indira Gandhi on them. Apart from the publicity campaign launched by the ruling party through its own sources, the available channels of government-controlled
electronic media were also employed to put across the Congress massage. Even the Times of India had to admit that “the national (television) network was of a more devious in telecasting a host of seeming neutral programmes which in effect blew the trumpet of the ruling party…. no more and no less than what the Congress party video campaign was saying. ” It was the first time in India’s electoral process that the electronic media played a significant role in electioneering, and the obvious beneficiary was the ruling party. Some organ of the national media too, took up the issue with the ruling party on this score. The Indian Express, Hindu, etc devoted an entire editorial to the subject, calling it “Unfair Electioneering” and The Telegraph observed that the ruling party’s getting an open field for using television for electoral propaganda had been “grossly unfair” and pointed out that the country-wide expansion of Doordarshan had been carried out for this specific purpose (Grover & Arora (ed.) 1995:217).

4.6 REVIVAL OF ARMS TWISTING BUT ASSERTIVE RESPONSE OF MEDIA

Media, particularly a section of the print media having a history of adversarial role always develops a sour relationship with the ruling party. As a matter of fact, whenever media becomes critical to the ruling party and its government’s policies, people sitting in power come in retaliation mode and start finding out legal wage and means to either harass or suppress the critical media. The government of Rajiv Gandhi which was facing allegations of corruption and a section of print media had consistently been publishing related news and articles, decided to bring such bill against the media which could restrain them from publishing such matter. The proposed Defamation Bill was seen in that direction and fully opposed by the Media throughout the country and decided to protest against the attack on their freedom till it was withdrawn.
“It is noteworthy that perhaps due to the chastening effect of March 1977 electoral verdict following the period of emergency and censors the press was left free of legislative intervention for more than eight years from January 1980 when Indira Gandhi returned to power. There was once again a confrontation when the Rajiv Gandhi Government introduced in parliament in August 1988 a Defamation Bill" (Raghavan, 1994:163). The bill put the onus of proving the truth of the statement and to establish also that the statement was made for the public good on the person accused of having made a defamation statement.

Eye brows were raised and the motive of the Government was suspected as the Defamation Bill was brought forward after disclosures and allegations in the Press about Kick-backs received by or on behalf of The Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress from Nobel Industries of Sweden in a contract for the purchase of the Bofors Gun for the Indian Army. The Defamation Bill was hurriedly introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in the Lok Sabha on August 29, 1988 and was passed the next day. In a remarkable display of unity, newspaper employees, who had been looking to the Government for securing improved wages and working conditions, joined hands with their employers in demonstrations all over the country against the Defamation Bill as an attack on press freedom. The rallies were climaxed by a march in the capital along Rajpath to Parliament House in which newspaper publishers marched alongside representatives of All India Newspaper Employees Federation, the Indian Federation of working journalists, National Union of journalists and the Editors Guild. N. Ram recalling the strong reaction of the media world against the Defamation Bill writes : “The inspiring protest movement that sprang up round the country virtually overnight gave the short shrift, The government of the day might have been surprised, but not anyone with a basic awareness of the history of Indian Journalism. The episode sent out a strong signal that the press as an institution was determined to guard its historical estate” (N. Ram, 2000: 243). Doubtless, recalling the ruling party's experience in 1977 when the voters’ verdict was in part against the emergency regime of Press censorship. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi thought it wise
to drop the Defamation Bill. It was not proceeded with the Rajya Sabh. (Raghavan, 1994:166) During the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi, another bill seeking to amend the Press and Registration of Books Act was introduced in Parliament in December 1988. The bill sought to arm district magistrates with powers to carry out inspection checks of newspapers establishments to verify circulation claims and to raise the amount of fine that could be levied on newspapers for violation of the Act from Rs. 500 to 5000. The amending legislation had also empowered the appropriate authority to cancel the concessional rate of postage for newspapers if they consisted mainly of advertisements. This bill was also abandoned.

This scandal was to cost Rajiv Gandhi dearly: as leader of the Congress he could secure for his party less than 40 per cent of the popular vote in the elections held for the Lok Sabha in November 1989 as against the unprecedented share of about half of the votes that the party received when he led it in the December 1984 elections within weeks of his succeeding his assassinated mother as Prime Minister. The difference was due to absence of the sympathy factor that had been at work in 1984 as well as to the adverse impression created by the Bofors Scandal. Emphasizing media power in exposing the Bofors payoffs Praveen Swami observes: Since 1989-when an investigation of defense payoffs by the journalists Narasimhan Ram and Chitra Subramaniam helped to ensure the electoral defeat of the government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi- politicians and public alike have become increasingly aware of the power of the media (The Hindu, 2003:13 September).

At the same time the Government of Karnataka, Under the Chief Minister ship of R. K. Hagde, sought to introduce two apparently well-intentioned measures which had direct bearing on the functioning of the print media. These were: Karnataka Freedom of the Press Bill 1988 and Karnataka Legislative (Powers, Privileges and Immunities) Bill 1988. The Freedom of the Press Bill sought to ensure free functioning of the press and laid down three basic provisions. These were: (a) Immunity from disclosure of source of information: (b) right of access to public
documents and (c) penalty for causing hurt etc. With the intention of preventing any journalist from performing his duties. The Karnataka Legislative bill sought to codify the privileges enjoyed by the Karnataka Legislators and inter alia sought to lay down punitive punishments for contempt thereof by the Press vis-a-vis the inherent freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 (2). But as the bills came under fire from almost all sections of the Press and various other quarters, the Karnataka Government referred these two bills to the Press Council of India for in-depth examination. The council welcomed both the bills as steps in the right direction and felt that it would be "eminently desirable" if the Parliament adopted the two measures. However, the matter ended there.

There was a hue and cry over the Jammu and Kashmir special powers (Press) Bill 1989 which also the J & K Government introduced in the State Assembly in August 1989 with the intention to regulate the Press in the State.

The Bill provided for "regulation and control of printing or publication of certain matters in the interest of public orders and security of state. It also "provided for regulatory action for the purpose of preventing or combating any activity prejudicial to the maintenance of public order: for prevention of activities prejudicial to the smooth and peaceful running of business establishments, or for prevention of activities prejudicial to the smooth and peaceful running of employment in essential services". The Bill caused a storm of protest all over the country because of sweeping powers of pre-censorship vested in the administration. The State Government referred the matter to the press council. After hearing the state Government in October 1989 the council took the view that the state Government "has sufficient powers in its armory in the form of existing legislation, state and central, which can be used to deal with gross misconduct by the Press over the entire ground in respect of which fresh powers are sought under this Bill". It further held that pre-censorship was inherently inimical to the freedom of the Press and therefore advised withdrawal of the 'superfluous'bill and the formation of a Press advisory
council in the State to promote dialogue. However, the J&K Government withdrew the legislation.

4.7 RAJIV DARSHAN AND END OF MONOPOLY

Although creation of a national network was initiated largely for electoral ends, Mrs. Gandhi was unable to reap the fruits of her investment in television. After her assassination in the period leading up to the elections, the sympathy vote for Rajiv Gandhi overwhelmed the salience of television in the election process. Though the effect (particularly in Delhi) of Doordarshan’s depiction of mourning masses deserves greater study, television was not used in the subsequent elections at the end of 1984, as it was in 1989, as an extended election strategy. The 1989 elections then emerged as an important test case of the role Doordarshan could play in the electoral process. A major consequence of Doordarshan programming in the 1980s was the erosion of the credibility of its news programming through blatant use of the medium for publicizing Congress Party leaders and initiatives. This became particularly severe in the period preceding the 1989 elections, when the conspicuous use of news broadcasts for electioneering earned for Doordarshan the new noun as “Rajiv Darshan.” This attempt to manipulate the media did less to garner electoral support than it did to hamper democratic processes. By 1987, the political climate had become more threatening to the Prime Minister, as the print media, and particularly Indian Express, began to focus on issues such as Bofors and disagreement among Congress leaders. In response, Rajiv Gandhi and his advisors decided to focus on the electronic media as an alternative mode of political communication, circumventing what was seen as a “hostile” press. The hope was that darshan from afar, or door darshan, could carry the Congress message directly to the electorate. Manipulation of television was not limited to the news. A directive reportedly was issued to Doordarshan to develop programming on India’s achievements to bolster Rajiv Gandhi’s image before the elections (Times of India, April 15, 1989).
Many documentaries in conjunction with the Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary followed. These documentaries were so numerous, redundant, and often so fawningly laudatory that even some of their creators began to feel that Nehru himself would not have approved of the overexposure. Two “development” schemes, Panchayati Raj and Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, were announced in time to capitalize on the upcoming elections and figured prominently during news broadcasts and prime time documentaries. There were numerous documentaries on achievements of industrialization, on national integration, and on historical figures of national importance. These themes also figured in short spots that were part of the national advertising campaign somewhat enigmatically named “Mera Bharat Mahan” (My India is Great); and in the telecast of sporting events such as “Bharatiyam,” which brought 40,000 children to Nehru stadium for “mass gymnastics” under the motto “India Fit and Young,” in commemoration of the Nehru Centenary. All of these programs conflated a number of images and personalities: Mahatma Gandhi, spinning wheels, Jawaharlal Nehru, industrial plants, physical fitness, Indira Gandhi, children saluting the tri-color flag, patriotic songs such as “Jana Gana Mana” and “Sare Jahan se Acha”, Congress leaders, peasants tilling the fields, rockets taking off, montages of photos of various ethnic groups and religious places, and Rajiv Gandhi. The effect was that of a months-long campaign advertisement, and the none-too-subtly implied message was that the continuation of all these good things required the continuation of Congress at the Centre. Doordarshan became a prominent electoral issue in the 1989 Lok Sabha election, as the Congress Party attempted to use the electronic media to garner votes through what was termed “legitimate use of official media.” In response, a broad spectrum of the print media decried alleged “misuse of the electronic media,” and the party manifestos of most of the national opposition parties called for restructuring Doordarshan. One of the first actions taken by the victorious National Front government was introduction of legislation to grant autonomy to Doordarshan and All India Radio (Akashvani), under a public corporation to be called Prasar Bharati. Nonetheless, methods of
arbitration of disputes regarding television and the electoral process were not fully resolved during the 1989 elections. While in 1989 (as in 1977) many hoped that a change in ruling party would lead to changes in Doordarshan, the National Front was unable to enact the Prasar Bharati Bill before the collapse of the coalition. Still, the perceived salience of television to candidates, and particularly younger candidates, increased after the 1989 elections (Sharada 1998:202). Although since then the existence of Prasar Bharati Board has become the norm, the constitution of the Board became heavily politicized, particularly under the Prime Ministership of the BJP’s Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Indeed, the passage by ordinance of Prasar Bharati, rather than its enactment through the Lok Sabha, was done largely to remove or prevent the appointment of secular, anti-communalist individuals to the Prasar Bharati Board; these have included eminent historian Romila Thapar and S. S. Gill, who had overseen the expansion of television in the mid-1980s. The Rajiv Darshan period was dark indeed for those seeking institutionalization of media freedoms and autonomy from the ruling party, and a number of informants at that time told that they felt this period was even more frightening than the Emergency, since the manipulation was more insidious. In retrospect, however, this period appears more one of corruption that must be rooted out, of a demonstration of institutional structures that need to be built, than did the Emergency, during which the collapse of India’s democracy seemed terrifyingly possible. As Attorney General Soli Sorabjee noted, at least during the late 1980s, there was widespread and public criticism of media manipulation through the press and seminars. These strategies were not so readily available during the Emergency. By the end of the 1980s, legacies of the development communications paradigm had rationalized a governmental television monopoly that was politicized, centralized, and hierarchical, creating a widening gap between government rhetoric and programming realities. The result has been a series of lost opportunities, in which Doordarshan undermines its greatest strengths: its wide reach, greater than that of any transnational broadcaster; its public, rather than commercial, rationale; and its extensive infrastructure that, unlike any satellite
channel, could contextualize programming for local and regional informational, educational, and language needs.

4.8 THE VERGHESE COMMITTEE REPORT CONVERTED INTO PRASAR BHARTI BILL

The Government of India appointed a working Group, under the Chairmanship of Mr. B.G. Verghese, to examine the functioning of AIR and Doordarshan, and to make recommendations regarding their future set-up. The 504-page report (II-volume) of the working Group was presented to parliament on 9 March 1978. A summary of some of the important major recommendations are:-

The Group has recommended that all the national Broadcasting Services should be vested exclusively in an independent, impartial and autonomous organisation – National Broadcast Trust, named ‘Akash Bharati’. It should be established by an Act of parliament to act as a trustee for the national interest. The autonomy of the Corporation and its independence from government control should be entrenched in the Constitution itself. The Group did not favour two separate corporations for Akashvani and Doordarshan. With the change in the government in 1980 and the congress party coming into power, no action was taken on this report (Mehta. 1997: 41).

The Verghese group recommended that priority should be given to the densification of radio listening before the expansion of television. This was in the light of the resource constraint and the need to democratize communication within the country at the least cost. But in fact the television network is being expanded for the benefit of the upper crust of Indian society even while radio remains beyond the common man’s hearing.

Since his mother’s assassination in 1984, the new prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, talked of “racing” India into the twenty-first century by way of a computer-based revolution, a theme it is correct that finds resonance in the urban/rural middle and upper classes. It is precisely the demands of these classes for better goods and
services that his policies were designed to meet. Obviously during his tenure – 1985-89, Rajiv Gandhi placed enormous emphasis on the spread of the television network, but it remained firmly in the hands of the government, which critics saw as a crude attempt to retain political control. It appears that the current policy shift toward a city-based, Delhi-centered television system dominated by entertainment programmes is the part of that package. Such a policy finds allies in the booming corporate sector, including the advertising industry, which is central to the creation of a consumer culture. The television set manufacturers had also been presserising the government to reorient is programming policy toward more entertainment in order to sell more sets. In a short time, Doordarshan changed dramatically, not only in its appearance but also in its function. It went from buyer’s market in 1982 to a seller’s market within five years.

The misuse of electronic media by the ruling party for political purposes became a major issue in the General Elections in 1989. All political parties, except the congress, pledged to liberate the electronic media from governmental stranglehold and convert them into autonomous.

With the advancement of the Janata Dal Government in December 1989 duly supported by the BJP and the Communist parties, a Bill was introduced in parliament to convert All India Radio and Doordarshan into autonomous corporations. The reckless exploitation of AIR and Doordarshan for Congress party propaganda during the 1989 elections by Rajiv Gandhi provoked a revival of Prasar Bharati. It was the Janta Dal and its leader, V. P. Singh, who won that election, proving that Congress party’s propaganda had been less than effective. The Janata Dal was the first to let the Bill be passed by the parliament. The Bill named as ‘Prasar Bharti Bill’1989, provides for the establishment of Broadcasting Corporation for India to be known as Prasar Bharti. It defines its composition, functions and powers. The Bill lays down the objectives which should guide the corporation. These include, upholding unity and integrity of the country and democratic and social values enshrined in the
Constitution, safeguarding the citizens’ rights to be informed freely, truthfully and objectively on the diverse cultures and languages of the various regions. According to the Bill, the management of the corporation would vast in board of governments. The chairman and the governors would be appointed by the president of India on the recommendation of a committee comprising Chairman of the Council of State, Chairman of the Press Council of India and one nominee of the president of India (Mehta. 1997: 42). The president signed it in 1990, but the V. P. Singh government fell soon after, mid-term elections followed and a new Congress party government headed by the P. V. Narismha Rao was installed. Both the National Front Government (NFG) and subsequently the Congress party government of P. V. Narasimha Rao maintained a studied silence regarding the implementation of the Prasar Bharati Act, as well as on other similarly policy matters. Parliamentarians continued to demand the establishment of the Prasar Bharati Corporation. However, this did not occur as a result of conscious policy decision, but rather the policy consisted of a set of ad hoc responses to the unstoppable advances of new television delivery mechanisms and of globalization. During the first year and a half Rajiv Gandhi did appear to be doing everything right. One of the important laws passed during his tenure permitted the statutory limits on election expenses and allowed businessmen and business houses to make “open” donations to political parties. This was a salutary move, because the growing cost of electioneering had forced all parties, including Congress, to elicit secret donations from business houses. This practice had added another dimension to rampant political corruption: corporations that made huge under the table cash donations to political parties expected favors in return, such as higher quotas of scarce materials (Vohra, 2000: 56).

A Party in power was also expected to overlook the corporations undeclared incomes; illegal contributions could, after all, be made only from illegal sources. As a result, the amount of black money circulating in the country had begun to undercut national revenues and create an underground black economy. The economic reforms by Indira Gandhi following her return to office in 1980 were taken further by Rajiv
Gandhi from 1985 onwards with his New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was designed to jump – start the stagnant industrial economy and stimulate domestic consumption, through tax concessions to high income groups and to corporations, new government jobs and substantial salary increases at the upper echelons of the public sector 18 (Rajagopal, 2001:222). Rajiv Gandhi always inclined to rely on old school friends and whiz- kid technocrats or managers, and disparaging of the Lok Sabha. He retreated in the last two years of his premiership into a style of political management which was more Indira than Indira’s (Corbridge and Harriss 2001:85). Rajiv Gandhi’s close association with the Congress combined with his political inexperience allowed him to open the party to new forces, through publicity and a new level of attentiveness to the public, in the attempt to extends its lease of life. The Congress eventually proved unable to withstand these forces of change, or was too advanced in its life cycle to be resuscitated by them (Tharoor, 1977:38). The Bharatiya Janata Party was able to capitalize on these emergent tendencies, its distinctive combination of political and cultural mobilization allowing it to take advantage of the crisis of the ruling party and of the energies released with liberalization.

4.9 MASS MEDIA ATTITUDE IN ELECTION

In the Lok Sabha elections of 1984, the Congress party returned to power and Rajiv Gandhi assumed premiership. At home he was called “Mr. Clean” as a tribute to his dynamic leadership and incorruptibility. For the first eighteen months after this election triumph, Rajiv Gandhi seemed to be able to put a foot wrong. He had superb press, and even the Opposition found it difficult to criticize his actions and was instead reduced to criticizing his style. Rajiv Gandhi quickly won the admiration of the press and of urban middle classes with his promise of consumption-led growth and his criticism of the public sector. But from the start of the third year of his regime, Rajiv Gandhi’s high ranking popularity took a nose dive and by early 1987 an unprecedented high velocity attack was mounted against him by the print media.
Rajiv Gandhi became the victim of vicious press attacks and calumny when his name was dragged in the controversy over corruption in the Bofors gun deal by ‘exposures’ made by N. Ram and Chitra Subramanyam of The Hindu who published in their paper secret documents which clearly proved that kickbacks had been paid to Indian agents or middleman and some names were mentioned. Two newspapers in the forefront of the exposure of alleged corrupt deals by the government were the Indian Express and The Hindu. The Statesman joined them later. Day after day, these papers unearthed new material relating to the deals and put the government and the prime minister in an embarrassing position.

Despite unprecedented economic growth (during 1985-1989), averaging 5.5 per cent annum, the highest expenditure ever on anti-poverty programmes, an almost flawless handling of the drought of 1987, significant foreign policy achievements, the have or wind blew in the opposite direction. V. P. Singh’s single-minded crusade against corruption which he had carried on unremittingly since his expulsion from the Congress in 1987, had touched a sensitive chord. V. P. Singh, who had been the leader of the Janata Dal, alleged that under Rajiv Gandhi the government became party to all kinds of corrupt practices in negotiating government purchases of arms and other material from foreign suppliers, Most members of the new Janata Dal under V. P. Singh’s leadership prepared the way for the replay between Congress and Janata Party in 1989 polls. Apart from choosing an emotive issue, V. P. Singh also fashioned a consummate political strategy for isolating Rajiv Gandhi and Congress party. V. P. Singh first joined together with all those Congressmen who had become estranged with Rajiv Gandhi for one reason or another. He placated the left parties by calling them his natural allies and issuing statements against communalism, but made sure he had the BJP on his side by speaking from their platform and maintaining close links with A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani. However more than V. P. Singh’s strategy, it was the inherent anti-Congressism of the left and the BJP that brought them to support V. P. Singh The feeling among the left and V. P. Singh was that, as in 1977-79, BJP would not be able to gain much as it did not
have any independent strength, The association with the left and secular forces gave it (BJP) the credibility it lacked by removing the stigma of communalism that had ensured it remained on the fringes of Indian politics a stigma that had been attached to it by the efforts of secular nationalists since the days of the freedom struggle. The strategy for Opposition unity was conceived as a three-stage process. The first stage state was the unity of centrist non-Congress secular national parties, the second the formation of a National Front of all non left secular parties regional and national and the third, the seat adjustments with left parties and BJP.

By its very nature the combined opposition campaign was still not uniform. There were certain common themes, a way they shaped up the opposition alliance, as a result of the exit of V. P. Singh from the Cabinet of Rajiv Gandhi, but catalyst of the opposition unity was the Bofors issue, that had tremendous news value, ever since The Hindu began its investigative reporting. Again, while the official media blacked out the opposition statements, the newspapers reported them extensively. In fact, some newspapers fed the opposition by the way of journalism. According to an eminent jurist, 23 “The results of the coming general election will be largely determined by the negative vote of the people. They have to choose between the ruling Congress (I) which has no internal democracy and the Opposition led V. P. Singh, which has no internal unity.” The present political void in which the majority of the voters cannot make a positive choice in favour of any party brought out the failure of the party system as a whole in India.

The Second Press Commission (1982) said in its report: “Many foreign observers have commented on the preoccupation of the Indian press with politics and politicians. There would be nothing wrong if it were preoccupation with politics in the large Aristotelian sense of concern with the building of the society which shall make the good life possible. The preoccupation, however, is largely with the petty politics of conflict between and within political parties and with the sayings and doings of ministers and other prominent politicians.” In the post emergency era,
observed by Sunanda Data K Ray (2000), the media took active interest in unseating Rajiv Gandhi who had then fallen out with his Finance Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh who was the darling of the media, especially of the Indian Express. Rajiv’s defeat in 1989 was a victory for the press. But it could also have been political manipulations or collusion, or a mix of all three (Ray, 2000:59). Especially, it was a worst time for The Hindu, a South based leading national daily as N. Ram started reporting with Chitra Subrahmanyam in Geneva on the Bofors case against Rajiv, a fact that did not go down well the throat of Kasturi, the founder owner of The Hindu. He apparently found something fishy in the concerted campaign against Rajiv by the Indian Express and the political parties. When he declined to print the story against Rajiv, N. Ram came out of The Hindu and published his continued investigative stories on Bofors scandal against Rajiv unraveling one by one who was behind the scenes and who was the actual beneficiary of Bofors kickbacks amply implying in several ways that Rajiv himself was at the center of the scandal and the major beneficiary, besides Ottavio Quotrochi, an Italian business man close to the wife of Rajiv Gandhi and the Hinduja brothers (Rangaswami 1997: 276). When V. P. Singh became Prime Minister, after the defeat of Rajiv in 1989 general elections, many editors and journalists were given plum positions in his government. Eminent journalist Kuldeep Nayar was sent as High Commissioner to London. It marked the beginning of media pundits openly aligning themselves with the different schools of political ideology. After VP Singh government’s decline, and when Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister, Arun Shourie joined his cabinet as a Union Minister.

4.10 WHAT WAS THE BOFORS SCAM?

Pay-off for India’s gun purchase deal with Sweden — broke out in 1987. A third of the Indians living today were not yet born then; and a fourth of the Indians living then are no more alive today. So some history needs to be recalled here. First, the Bofors payoff was exposed by the media and the Rajiv government went all out to
suppress the exposure. Including the payoff of $36.5 million to Ottavio Quotrochi, the Bofors deal contemplated three streams of payoff totalling $250 million. Persistent investigations by the media and the CBI brought out the involvement of Ottavio Quotrochi in the gun deal. The media found that some $7.3 million from Bofors AB had found its way into Ottavio Quotrochi’s secret bank accounts. Facts began to tumble out testifying that it was fee to Ottavio Quotrochi for swinging the $1.2 billion gun deal for the Swedish gun maker. The Rajiv Gandhi government could not decide for a long time what gun to buy the British, Austrian or Swedish. The two brokers engaged by Bofors could not expedite the deal. Suddenly, in the second half of 1985, AE Services (AES), a shell company, entered the deal with this offer to Bofors: “Look, If we get you the deal by March 31, 1986, give us a fee of three per cent. If not, don’t pay.” Bofors accepted the offer and signed up with the AES shell on October 15, 1985. Unless Bofors knew that the man behind AES had had the clout to get it done from the Rajiv government, it would never have signed with a shell company. And AES shell did get the Rajiv government to sign the contract with Bofors on March 22, 1986 — seven days ahead of the target date of March 31, 1986. Within six months, AES got the first tranche of its fee of $7.3 million. Proof emerged slowly that this money finally went to Ottavio Quotrochi, showing that he was the man behind the shell.

- Bofors remitted on September 3, 1986, $7.3 million into AES account number 18051-53 in Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich.

- This equaled 20 per cent of the three per cent bribe of $36.5 millions due to AES. Two weeks later (on September 16, 1986), AES delivered $7 million into account number 254.561.60W in the same bank in the name of Colbar Investments — April 1987, the Swedish Radio broke the news of bribes in Bofors deal with India. Later, in June 1988, the media published authoritative documents seized by the Swedish police which established the payoff. By the Bofors scam had become a huge national issue.
4.11 THE NINTH GENERAL ELECTION 1989

The controversy over the misuse of electronic media by the political party in the power much more initiated during the ninth general Election (1989) leading to a lot of mud slinging and acrimony amongst the political parties. The main issues raised were: (a) a much greater proportion of time given to the ruling party to propagate its achievements and exposure of its political leaders amongst the massed, particularly to the rural folks as against the statement and points of views of parties in opposition, (b) pre-censor of the scripts by the authorities of the air and DD and not allowing them to be broadcast/telecast unless some so-called ‘objectionable matter’ has been deleted, and (c) granting of autonomy to the electronic media. (Grover & Arora, 1995: 218).

4.12 MAJOR ISSUES DURING THE 1989 ELECTION

As a potential turning point in the history of a nation election deserves a full study. As a contemporary event, it provides an opportunity to observe the politicians and their party organizations at a full stretch. The National political parties, contesting the Ninth General Elections had a fairly wide comprehensive idea of the special social groups, which attracted every party's attention, and every party has its own remedy. Some of the identified target groups were:

(a) The Backward Classes or the Dalits;
(b) Schedule Castes and tribes;
(c) Women in particular the rural women:
(d) The New Electorate i.e. individuals between the age of 18 years and 21 years;
(e) Special Groups like the citizens, the Ex-Army and other Service men etc.

Examining the influences of media of communication, particularly the independent press, and to assess the extent of involvement of the ordinary citizen, reveals a pattern of explaining away the past and looking towards the future. At one level politicians are engaged in a continuous struggle for building electoral support; and at the other extreme, each citizen possesses a vote to give or withhold, giving substance both to the behaviour of the leaders and those led.
In the ninth general elections there were three contenders for power: The National Front, the Congress (I), and the BJP. The elections were held in a atmosphere of uncertainty and tension. The principal issues that were raised in the campaign were:
(a) Political Corruption and inefficiency; (b) Political stability; (c) Criminalization and communalisation of politics and the need for value based politics; (d) Price rise; (e) Right to work and employment; (f) Autonomy of the Press; (g) Right to Information; (h) Autonomous status for Akashwani and Doordarshan; (i) Ram Bhoomi and the Babri Masjid; and (U) Mandal Commission and the Amelioration of the Backward Classes. There was however on voice of the opposition when it asked the electorate to defeat Congress (I) and oust Rajiv Gandhi. The nation they said needed a healing touch, they wished the nation to believe that given the opportunity they had the ability, will and determination to deliver the goods. When V. P. Singh quit the Rajiv Gandhi cabinet, few people recognized his capacity to weld the Opposition into a force. He seemed too wishy-washy, too vague and vacillating in his ways, and the manner in which he supported his badge of honesty annoyed all who believed that politics is not exactly the place for self-righteous. But he persisted with his look of injured innocence on his face and won the day. Corruption has managed to elbow out all the others - and truly much more important - election issues to become central to the battle for parliament. Bofors is the buzzword. Not inflation. Not communalism. Not even unemployment, which directly touches the lives of millions all over. V. P. Singh was fighting on two fronts and in both he could not loose: Rajiv Gandhi would have been easier for the man who marketed himself as Mr. Clean. Despite Doordarshan's dogged disinformation, voters were convinced that Raja's integrity was beyond reproach. And the candidates knew it. A tragic condition amongst the Congress candidates was the fact that they did not display the 100,000 posters and 15,000 banners allotted to them by the High Command, as they feared a beaming face of Rajiv Gandhi seen next to theirs would jeopardize their already thin chances.
Secondly, the opposition has several ambitious, cunning and ruthless leaders. For instance, Devi Lal, openly flaunted his ambition and aspirations by contesting from three parliamentary constituencies. These leaders accepted him initially, in view of his crowd pulling. They hoped that once his charisma browned off at the edges and Rajiv's reputation was tattered, they would tactically corner him. He knew this, and openly declared that he did not want to become the next Prime minister, hoping that it would postpone the hostilities till the polls were over and the opposition had won.

The situation is best summarised by V. M. Tarkunde: "The democratic processes and institutions in the country are going down because of rampant corruption. So I would like to choose a government that is clean. I will vote corrupt free government. I know that the opposition will not be totally free of corruption, but it will be a case of choosing the lesser of the two evils." And yet the people participated in the elections, even if it meant spitting against the wind, in the hope that some day they might sow the seeds of change. Even though essentially they believed "there is no difference between the Congress (I), Janata Dal and other assortment of parties. All the political parties, to honest, belong to the same class and their leaders share the same mentality. It is not going to make any difference majority of the people which party or coalition of parties is going to form the next government. There plight will be the same and they will continue to lead the same kind of lives. There will be no qualitative change." Never before have the people been so depoliticised as they are now. In every election there were economic and political issues however this time corruption is the main issue, but it should not have an exclusive issue.

Democracy, secularism and federalism are the most important issue - three corner stones of the poll system. Rajiv Gandhi retreated in the last two years of his prim-Ministership into a style of political management which was ‘more Indira than Indira’s. it was summed up in raids which were made in 1987 on the offices of the English language daily the Indian Express, after that paper’s exposure of the government over the Bofors affair, and then in the efforts which were made to pass
the Defamation Bill through the parliament in September 1988, which threatened the freedom of the press. It has been stated then the purpose was to protect the individual from defamatory writings, speeches and actions. It was an attempt; Rajiv Gandhi reiterated that – ‘to reconcile the rights of the individual with the freedoms of the press’. What angered the press most about Rajiv Gandhi’s ‘Defamation Bill’ was that it put the onus of disproving a defamation charge on the publication against whom the action was brought? Several editors of newspapers and magazines were also annoyed that they had not been consulted before the government introduced its controversial proposals, which considerably tightened existing rules on defamation. The Defamation Bill sailed easily through the Lok Sabha, but was withdrawn before it came before the Rajya Sabha after an outcry from the press, who held strikes and demonstrations to get across their staunch opposition to the Bill.

When elections were held for the ninth Lok Sabha in November 1989, the Bofors deal and Rajiv Gandhi’s involvement in it became the main weapon for combined against the Congress party. Election analysts have not agreed on the degree of impact it had on the electorate which while totally rejecting Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress party in the Hindi states of the north and in Orissa and West Bengal, returned the party with substantial majority in the four southern states. The new Prime Minister, V. P. Singh, received a cordial reception from the press and media projected him as the new “Mr. clean”. The new National Front government, as noted earlier was composed of a coalition of parties, including the BJP, a group that exhibited strong Hindu fundamentalist tendencies. For the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the National Front worked out a coordinated election strategy with the BJP and the Left Front. Infact, the most dramatic gain, no doubt, was made by BJP, which won 85 Lok Sabha seats (Rajagopal, 2001: 45). As commented that it happened because the BJP through its Hindi print media succeeded in mobilizing not only the traditional Hindu nationalist base of middle classes from small towns, but also professionals and the intelligentsia, on the one hand, and large numbers of backward caste youth on the other Issue-wise the Ninth Lok Sabha election was as good as a routine election in
the sense that almost all its nuances were derived from the days of Mrs. Gandhi. When Rajiv came to power with such an overwhelming majority in 1984, it was not just because of the sympathy factor. The factor may have helped but the reason why people voted Rajiv power was simple. They were fed up with the dirty, devious politics of Indira Gandhi and the way she tried to deliberately subvert every single institution just to cope with the demons of her own mind. He had just the right amount of reluctance to accept office. He spoke haltingly and appeared to be clean and decent. His style was apolitical; his approach to the most issues seemed quite straightforward and sensible. So he emerged as a nice guy, the one they thought would usher in a new era of politics. Caste was chucked overboard. The loyalists were cornered. But 1989 changed it all, old catchwords like socialism and self-reliance were quickly forgotten. "He goes to the elections checklist of accomplishments the common man has already ceased to notice. Some of them like the Longowal and Assam Accords have already been relegated to the dustbin of history. Public memory is proverbially short, and people tend to remember failures (Nandi, 1989:13). His credibility is at an all time low. His maneuverability within the party has diminished with the return of the old guard". The abuse that he had drawn from the Opposition and certain sections of the press is so sharp that it had reduced his stature dramatically" (Nandi, 1989:13). It sent a clear signal to the opposition that Rajiv Gandhi was inadequately equipped to face the hustling of 1989. Similarly when Rajini Kothari said that: "The prominent leaders of the Congress party with sizeable followings in various regions are not necessarily with Rajiv, nor are the Indira Gandhi loyalist. Politically, many of the Congress bosses have more in common with the Janata Dal than with Rajiv Gandhi. Even if the Congress were to win the elections it is not certain that Rajiv Gandhi will be elected its leader" (Ghosh, 1998: 308).

Print medium interpretations played a crucial role, especially, when the ruling party monopolized the television, Doordarshan, and Radio. K.K. Tewari, a trusted minister of Information and Broadcasting converted the Doordarshan to a Rajiv Darshan.
According to Soli Sorabjee, “I think that all this propaganda on the television, which K. K. Tewari thinks is helping the government backfiring. The people are getting fed up with his continuous projection of the Prime Minister” (Sorabjee, 1977: 78). Thus the print medium was left to ensure fair and free coverage during the elections, and its analysis served as the vital force for the propagation of the democratic ideals of the society. And yet the opposition had a disadvantage. The Congress (I) had one star campaigner - Rajiv Gandhi, whose party claimed it to be the sole inheritor of the nation's sovereignty and integrity. The opposition was depicted as the villain of the piece. But the opposition had succeeded many times in carrying out the strategy of making out Rajiv Gandhi its prime target. The attractiveness of V. P. Singh's campaign in the 139 constituencies of UP and Bihar, comprising of one fourth of the total Lok Sabha membership, is his uncanny ability to convert national issues into local ones with idiomatic sledgehammer. According to V.R. Krishna Iyer, an Ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, as quoted in the Illustrated Weekly: "Today what we have is not any form of democracy, but what I have been repeatedly calling Doonacracy. In the sense that a set of Doon school boys somehow managed to come to power and have been using all the institutions of national life to distort democracy, seize power and manipulate methods of exercising power. " The prevailing wisdom of the Rajiv coterie was that the Bofors and the misuse of Doordarshan were of no interest to the illiterate masses. Through V.P. Singh's rhetoric waves of voters even in the Hindi heartland had begun to identify Rajiv with corruption and cover-up. On the other hand, Rajiv Gandhi's "Screaming Panchayati Raj and comparing the Anandpur Sahib resolutions to the opposition manifesto, appears to be a boring and abstruse exercise that confuses Rajiv’s audiences” (India Today November 30, 1989:23).

4.13 1989 ELECTION RESULTS

The political scenario in the country underwent swift changes since the defeat of the Congress in 1989 Lok Sabha poll. Viswanath Pratap Singh was sworn in as the Prime
Minister of the National Front Government on December 2, 1989. But this Government lasted only for a little more than eleven months. 'It was not unexpected. In fact, the death knell of the Government tolled on December 1, 1989. Chandra Sekhar the founder-President of the Janata Party was an aspirant for the chair of the Prime Minister. But he did not have the support of other party leaders who chose to plump for Viswanath Pratap Singh. After the judging the situation Chandra Sekhar himself proposed the name of Devilal as the Leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party. This he obviously did to anticipate Viswanath Pratap. But to his utter surprise and dismay, Devilal let him down by proposing the name of Viswanath Pratap for the office. The proposal was promptly supported by others. Chandra Sekhar saw in this whole game a "conspiracy", felt humiliated and openly vowed to "retaliate". He lay low waiting for the opportune moment to strike back. Soon Devilal, the Deputy Prime Minister, fell out with Viswanath Pratap on the issue of his son Omprakash Chauthala who had managed to become the Chief Minister of Haryana through the back-door. The Government was thrown into a crisis when the Prime Minister sacked his deputy (Devilal) rather unceremoniously. The Jat leader organised a massive "Kisan rally" in Delhi to show his political might. As a counter-move'Viswanath Pratap played the "Mandal" card (27 per cent job reservation in Central Government Services for backward Classes) which stoked the fire of caste conflict all over the country. Meanwhile, the difference between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the National Front over Ayodhya "Ram Temple" issue snowballed in to yet another serious crisis when the BJP leader L. K. Advani, who was driving round the country in his "Ram Rath", was arrested at Samastipur in Bihar by the police of Laloo Prasad Yadav's Government,. In protest, BJP withdrew its support reducing the National Front Ministry into a minority, Earlier. Devilal also joined hands with Chandra Sekhar to split the party. Eventually, The Government fell having lost the trial of strength in the Lok Sabha on November 7, 1990 (Ghosh, 1998:305).

The 1989 General elections presented an altogether bizarre predicament. For, according to Dalip Padgaonkar, Editor of the Times of India, the first time in twenty years we face a "normal" election in the sense that the campaign will not have been
proceeded by a traumatic experience. Earlier polls came in the wake of the end of the emergency regime, the collapse of the Janata regime and Indira Gandhi’s assassination. During the Ninth General election, however, no single issues stirred volatile passions. Congress (I) strategy seems to be based upon the assumption that since public memory is proverbially short, issues related to kickbacks in defence deals will be non-issues for practical purposes. The Congress (I), notwithstanding the fact that it has deep roots in India's history, a solid base of workers, capable leaders and enormous financial clout, is increasingly looking like a party without a leader and without a slogan. All the key elements of the Congress (I) campaign: communalism card, election manifesto, advertising and slogans, selection of candidates, seem to boomerang. Never has its leader looked so lonely. His very political survival is at stake, as he dashes from one state to another. His desperate attempts to convey that the opposition is a worthless agglomeration of opportunists responsible for voting down key welfare measures such as the Panchayati Bill. Take for instance the comments of Nikhil Chakravarty, a leading political commentator and Editor of mainstream, when he said that, "The Visage of the Congress party of which Rajiv is the boss, is hardly the one that attract the voter. Gone are the dedicated cadres of the days of the freedom struggle, gone too are the formidable bosses of the party machine which kept the election machine going, gone too is the party leader who could fetch votes millions as Indira could do. ". When Rajiv Gandhi, amended the Constitution to disqualify persons who defected from one party to another, (The Fifty-second amendment, 1985, provided that any member of Parliament or State Legislature, who defects or is expelled form the party that set him up as a candidate in the election, or if an independent member of the House joins a political party after the expiry of six months from the date on which he takes seat in the House, shall be disqualified to remain a member of the House. The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, on November 12, 1991, upheld the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, Anti-Defection Law, which excluded judicial review. In February 1991, the Anti-Defection Law was invoked on two occasions: when the
Chief Minister of Goa, Ravi Naik, was disqualified from the State Assembly. His splinter group accounted for less than 33 per cent of the Maharashtra Gomantak Party; and when Five Union Ministers V. C. Shukla, Shakeel-ul-Rehman, Bhagey Gobardhan, Sarwar Hussain and Basavraj Patil of the Chandra Shekhar Cabinet resigned in 1990, following the invocation of the Anti Defection Law.

The National Front Government, which assumed power with V. P. Singh as the Prime Minister in 1989, had committed itself to full freedom of the media, autonomous corporations for television and radio, and elimination of practices that lead to direct and indirect arm-twisting of the press. Although it was successful in the passage of Prasar Bharti Bill in 1990, paving the way for establishment of an autonomous board to regulate and guarantee freedom of operation to the electronic media, yet it failed to constitute these corporations. “In a way there has been no substantial progress in the so-called ‘autonomy’ of the electronic media despite the efforts of the opposition parties in their one-and-half years of rule or misrule”.

4.14 THE RISE OF BJP

The situation in 1989 was much the same as Indira Gandhi had faced in 1977, and results of the elections were also similar. (Hansen and Jaffrelot (ed.), 2001: 265). The ninth Lok Sabha election result were a blow to Congress even if it was still the single largest party with 197 seats and 39.5 per cent vote share. Rajiv Gandhi made it clear that Congress was not interested in trying to form a government. With the left parties and the BJP quickly declaring that they would support a National Front government from the outside the stage was set for the second non Congress government in post independent India to take office. The National front had won 146 seats and was supported by the BJP with 86 and the left parties with 52 seats. The most dramatic gain no doubt, was made by BJP which had raised its representation from the 2 seats it had. As a result, the people of India had rejected a corrupt and unjust government. The beginnings were not smooth, however, with Chandra Sekhar (leader at Utter Pradesh state) was totally opposed to the idea of
V. P. Singh as the prime minister and Devi Lal insisting he be made deputy prime minister at least. With elections over, all the differences caused by clashing ambitions oversized egos, ideological preferences, came to the fore and it was with some difficulty that V. P. Singh took oath as prime minister on 2 December 1989 accompanied only by Devi Lal as deputy Prime Minister. V. P. Singh had to face with the same problem that Morarji Desai had already faced in 1977, and Singh’s government could not even last as long as that of Morarji Desai’s – It fell in November 1990 when the BJP withdrew its support. History appeared to repeat itself when Chandra Shekhar, with the support of 58 Lok Sabha members became prime minister in 1979. Chandra Shekhar, in order to prove pliant to Congress, staged a walkout from Parliament to Protest the illegal surveillance of Rajiv Gandhi, Chandra Shekhar resigned; his government lasted only for four months. The President of India called for fresh election in May 1992 (Tharoor, 1997:54)

4.15 IMAGE BUILDING OF BJP BY THE MEDIA AND THE BOOST IN NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

The attainment to the status of main Opposition party after the tenth Lok sabha election was due to image-engineering strategy of the BJP through the media; it is not without precedent in Indian politics. Indira Gandhi’s anti-poverty slogan, garibi hatao (abolish poverty), was devised and tested on sample audiences by advertising consultants against Indira Gandhi’s own initial skepticism. Rajiv Gandhi’s government too saw extensive on television (Mitra, 1993:26).

The BJP’s claim to be a disciplined party, and a political alternative to the Congress, presumably made it attractive to those making such calculations. Image management in the BJP was at this time not simply the building of a personality cult, although some leaders such as L. K. Advani and A. B. Vajpayee clearly enjoyed favourable coverage.

The increased circulations of stories on Ayodhya helped full newspaper sales and enrich newspaper owners, and showed them the advantages of pursuing the line they
did. These were periods when the Mandal anti-reservation stir and the temple movement were at their height. News was clearly perceived to be a weapon of war for many Hindi language newspapers. The press also played a role in transforming upper-caste youth who were pro-V. P. Singh in the anti-Congress wave of the 1989 elections into BJP supporters in the post-Mandal period (Hansen and Jaffrelot (eds), 2001:261). Hindi newspapers at this time were for the most part dominated by owners-editors who maintained little institutional buffer between their economic interest and day-to-day operation of the papers, and granted little security or professional autonomy to reporters.

Although the business-owned press could at times be adversial to the government, the degree of convergence between their views and interests was greater than any differences that separated them. The leading Hindi dailies tended to share in this consensus, since these papers tended to be “satellites” of the national English language newspapers rather than “independents”, to use the distinction attributed to Rahul sankrirtyayan (Vachrami, 1999:59). His distinction between satellites and independents pertains to the Hindi press pointing to the dependent status of the former, viz., Hindi papers run by the large publishing houses as ancillaries to their English language papers. The usual gulf between metropolitan and provincial papers is thus heightened in the case of Hindi since the “quality” papers is thus heightened in the case of Hindi since the “quality” papers to a considerable extent lack a personality of their own, and are imitative of their English language partners.

Collapse of V. P. Singh Government due to Anti-Mandal stir and Installation of Rao as Prime Minister. The Narasimha Rao government opened its innings with an economic Liberalisation programme. The economic reforms in 1991 led to an emphasis on more-oriented policies, one consequence of which has been the growth of capital markets. Interest in the performance of markets and the corporate sector, in general, had led to an increasing interest in business and economic journalism as evident in topic-specific dailies and periodicals such as The Economic Times, The
Financial Express, Business Standard, Business India, and Business World (Gunarathi, 2001:142), reported that the number of financial dailies had grown by 192 per cent between 1991 and 1995 compared to a growth rate of 15 per cent in English-language general-interest dailies. The sudden boom of economic newspaper and journals was also due to revision in newsprint allocation policy announced in the middle of 1991. Till the end of 1990, all the transactions pertaining to newsprint were usually handled through the State Trading Corporation (STC). But the subject to requirements to buy quotas of Indian newsprint (Jeffrey, 2000:174). Among the economic newspapers the Economic Times of the Bennett and Coleman Ltd continued to lead with 70 per cent share of the total readership. The Financial Express of the Indian Express group revamped its format and contents by following its track. New entrants in the field were the Business Standard of the Anand Bazar Patrika group, Calcutta and Business Line, published by the owners of The Hindu, Madras. An upcoming fortnightly journal was Business Today published by the India Today group, New Delhi.

The then BJP President, L. K. Advani shifted national attention away from the Mandal report to Hindutva (polity based on Hindu ethos) by launching a That Rath Yatra from Gujarat, planned to cover North Indian states and ending in Ayodhya in Utter Pradesh which had been in the centre of the storm surrounding the Ramjanma Bhoomi – Babri Masjid controversy. The 6000, mile long Rath Yatra (between September and October 1990) highlighted the onecess of the Hindu religion and the sacred land, which was unified by hundreds of Hindu holy places that dotted the entire country. Advani received tumultuous reception in his campaign which also produced commmunal tension. All efforts of the V. P Singh government to persuade Advani to drop the Rath Yatra failed and it reached the climax when the Bihar government arrested Advani when he entered the State in the course of the Rath Yatra. This was the signal for the BJP to announce withdrawal of its support to the V.P. Singh government.
The Rath Yatra’s success was declared proof that Hindutva had the power to overcome caste difference and forge a unified Hindu community, which was of course tantamount to a national community in this view. The Ayodhya issue gave the BJP an opportunity to replace the failing Congress party’s attempt to establish a national secular cultural identity based on the Nehruvian interpretation of India’s past with the idea that only the Hindu ethos – Hindutva could provide a unifying basis for the Indian nation. The entire (Rath Yatra) strategy had hinged on a delicate negotiation between religious and political appeals, knowing that those liable to be moved by the former might be alienated by the latter and vice versa (Rajagopal, 2001: 231).

4.16 CONCLUSION

The has study examined the period of 1980s in the life of the Indian democracy and found that India in many senses was a mature functioning democracy though there were numerous challenges that it was facing. The print media became more aggressive in exposing the ills and corruption of the government and assertive in defending any attack on its freedom. However, the broadcast and telecast media remained under the control of the government and its use as the government’s propaganda instrument remained as usual. The important thing during the period was the phenomenal expansion of the government monopolized broadcast media because a highly centralized control over broadcasting has been accepted as a prerequisite for political power. In the process, political propaganda potential becomes the deciding factor in programming news presentation and commentary. In India’s case, it was fairly obvious in the elections during 1984, and the elections of 1989 when Doordarshan was nicknamed as ‘Rajiv Darshan’ (Rajiv Vision). More development programmes were increasingly shown because they somehow projected the ruling party and its leaders. Features on the 20- point programmes or DD coverage of mass loan melas during 1984, the DD coverage of Rajiv Gandhi’s tour of the country, emphasizing the party’s stand on the aborted attempt to get the 64th and 65th
constitutional Amendment Bill passed, the so-called power to people or V.P. Singh’s speeches on the Mandal Commission and Ram Bilas Paswan’s outbursts exhorting the down-trodden to revolt against the so-called privileged community as a new resurgence during the late 1990 are examples of the cases of centralized control over broadcasting. The laying down of foundation stones of a vast number of economic, educational, social and community institutions by the party leaders have become a brazenly political affair with the party leaders not only cutting the tapes but also making political speeches. Radio and TV in such circumstances become as good as exclusive channels for the use of the purpose of the political propaganda by the party in power.

Along with the extension of broadcasting and telecasting facilities for political purposes at regular intervals before, during and after election, there is a definite need for the constitution of an apex high-powered monitoring independent body consisting of eminent political/administrative/legal and academic personalities with proven integrity to act as a watch-dog on the continuing pronouncements of political parties and groups and their leaders on the electronic media. There is some substance in the argument that during the election, this institution should have the quasi-judicial powers not only to control and regulate political broadcasting but also to prevent its misuse and manipulation by the ruling party or its leader.
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