CHAPTER-III

POLITICAL PARTIES AND URBANISATION: SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS

The Indian party system is indeed complex, and an important reason for the complexity is the social heterogeneity that has made it impossible for a single set of parties to emerge across the country. This is reflected in the variegated character of Indian political parties. The Congress, established in 1985, continues to occupy a place in the national political arena. The 1980s witnessed the emergency of Hindu nationalism and the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) around which the ruling coalition currently revolves, and these coexist with the world’s longest surviving democratically elected Communist government at the state level.

As system, the Indian Political system is distinctive. Certainly, it does not correspond to its European and American counterparts. Writing about it, Paul Brass noted the difference: 'party politics in India display numerous paradoxical features, which reveal the blending of Western and modern forms of bureaucratic organization and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions, India’s leading political party, the Indian National Congress, is one of the oldest in the world, yet it has not succeeded in providing the nucleus for an institutionalized party system which can be fitted easily into any one of the conventional categories of party systems known in the West.'
Political parties are complex, multi-faceted organizations with multiple linkages to organizations in civil society and the institutions of the state, typically spanning both. This is because parties arise in civil society or are rooted in civil society even if they may have originated in the legislature as legislative factions as in 18th and 19th century Britain and the United States. However, they are not purely civil society organizations. They overlap the institutions of the state or at least its legislative branch if they are represented in the national, regional (in a federal polity) or local legislatures, and also overlap the executive branch of the state if they are in power at the nation, regional or local level. They are variously, and at times overlapping, organizations embodying ideologies and programmatic visions, organizations that are at the same time social movements, organizations representing the interests of sections of civil society, whether secular/economic or in parts of its as organizations holding power in the institutions of the state, or in parts of it as in a federal state, and lastly, organizations with their own corporate interests, organizational structure and functioning which have consequences for political outcomes. They can be organizationally 'thin' or 'thick', deeply rooted and penetrative in civil society or superstructure, highly ideological or purely elector list, strongly linked to particular sections of society is character.

There has been a plethora of typologies of political parties in the political science literature. Parties have been classified according to varied criteria or combinations of criteria. However, before we attempt a classification, let us list the
various functions of political parties. A non-exhaustive list of the core functions of political parties would consist of the following. The most important functions is the recruitment of political leadership, which consists of candidate nomination and electoral mobilization to win elections for their candidates and for capturing power. Closely related to this is the function of issues structuration or the framing of what become issues and determining how these issues are viewed and debated in the public sphere. This is particularly the case during election campaigns, but is not limited to them since such agenda setting takes place between elections as well as is an aspect of the normal activity of politics. Also closely linked is the function of forming and sustaining governments in office. Three broader non electoral functions continuously performed by parties in civil society, in which the actions of parties overlap with the action of civil society, in which the action of parties overlap with the actions of civil society, are the functions of societal representation or representing the interests of various social groups in the political sphere; interest aggregation, in which the diverse interests of different groups are aggregated into broader political programmes and policy platforms; and social integration, in which parties enable citizens to participate effectively in politics so that citizens develop a sense of the efficacy of participation in the political process.

Gunter and Diamond (2001:3-39), in a state of the art survey and update of the literature on political party typologies, develop the following multiple criterion typology of parties. Instead of classifying parties by employing only one of a variety of possible criteria, for example, functionalist or organizational or sociological criteria and associated typologies, they develop a much richer yet fairly parsimonious
typology using a combination of criteria. It does not necessarily fit every country but is best suited for our purpose. Gunther and Diamond (2001) divide political parties into 15 types or species clustered into five broader geniuses’ elite parties, mass based parties, ethnicity based parties, elector list parties and movement parties.

The first genus of the (traditional) elite parties consists of parties of local notables or clientelistic parties based on notables. These are weakly organized and mobilize support through personal resources of the notables or through vertical patron client networks. They make election nominations on the basis of loyalty. Such parties were present in early democratizing rural polities and typified parties in the 18th and 19th centuries. They can also be seen in some developing countries with fledgling democracies.

The second genus of the mass based parties, or mass party (see Duverger 1963; Michels 1915) refers to a party created outside the legislature, such as an industrial working class party, a peasant party, a religious party or, in some circumstances, a nationalistic party. These parties are well organized and have a mass membership. They are grouped into six species or three pairs of parties, namely, the socialist ideological parties, the nationalist ideological parties and the religious ideological parties. Each of these pairs consists of an organizationally thin, pluralist type of party and an organizationally thick ‘proto hegemonic’ or authoritarian type of party. Thus there are class mass, socialist, social democratic and labour parties, and there are Leninist revolutionary communist parties, both mass parties of the working class. There are broad based nationalist mass parties and ultra nationalist or fascist
parties. There are Christian Democrat type religious mass parties and religious fundamentalist parties. This genus of party is controlled by its professional bureaucracy. It has a variety of mass organizations that it uses for resource mobilization. The highest level of the party bureaucracy controls the nominations for elections.

The third genus of the ethnicity based parties can be either mono ethnic parties that follow an ethnically exclusivist or even polarizing strategy, or broad, multi-ethnic coalitional or Congress parties. Parties of the first type may be well organized or weakly organized but they are typically not internally democratic. They tend to be controlled either by organized religious hierarchies or charismatic leaders. Nominal tins for elections are made at the top levels. Examples of the second type are the Indian National Congress up to the mid-1960s, the Malaysian Barisan National and the Tanzania African National Union, which are multi ethnic parties following national integration ideologies combined with particularistic benefits. Nominations tend to be decentralized and a part of power sharing in multiethnic societies.

The fourth genus is the electoralist parties. These may be personalistic programmatic or catch all parties. Personalistic parties are merely vehicles for the ambitions of their leaders and are purely election oriented, for example, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia or Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. In India, the various minor parties that have arisen at various times and are often suffixed with the names of their leaders like Congress (Tiwari), Akali Dal (Mann) or Telugu Desam (Lakshmi Parvathi) are instances of personalistic parties, Programmatic parties are
also election oriented and thinly organized, but are more ideologically or programmatically coherent than any pure catch all party, for example, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party in Britain or the post 1980 Republican Party in the USA. The catch all party is not a class party but essentially a machine oriented to winning elections (Kirchheimer 1996:177-200). Winning ability is its criterion for election nominations, electoral strategies and even policy stances. It tends to cut across class and other cleavages and make direct appeals to voters through the mass media.

Lastly, the fifth genus is the movement party, which consists of parties that have evolved from contemporary social movements such as the Green Party in Germany or the various anti immigrants extreme right parties in Europe such as the Austrian Freedom Movement or Jean Marie Le Pen’s Front National. They tend to straddle parties and movements and have a distinct, often issue based programme.

The term political party, in view of the recent studies, has assumed its own meaning making it different from every other organisation whether it is a group, faction, club, association etc. even if the objective of any such gathering may be the ‘seizure of power’. A plausible definition of political party is thus furnished: “However, when we speak of political parties in this essay, we do not mean a loosely knit group of notables with limited and intermittent relationships to local counterparts. Our definition requires instead, (1) continuity in organisation that is organization whose expected life span is not dependent upon the life span of current leaders; (2) manifest and presumably permanent organisation at the local level, with regularized
communications and other relationships between local and national units; (3) self-conscious determination of leaders at both national and local levels to capture and to hold decision making power alone or in coalition with others, not simply to influence the exercise of power; and (4) the concern on the part of the organisation for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support.²

Modern form of representative democracy has brought forth party system as an indispensable factor in every political society to lay down the rule that political party, in one form or another, "is omnipresent." This phenomena lays stress on the maximization of political participation in the sense that it enjoins upon the members of a political elite to take the people at large in confidence either for the sake of observing the myth that 'voice of the people is the voice of God', or to justify the very legitimacy of their leadership and authority. This phenomena also indicates a mark of political modernization in the sense that it calls for the involvement of more and more people into the process of what Easton says, 'authoritative allocation of values'. Whether it is the rule of a single person (monarch or dictator), or of the few (assembly or elite), or even of the many, the norms of stasiology demand attachment of sanctity to the norm that the masses must participate in the political affairs of the country as much as possible.

Meaning of Political party: Viewed in this context, the term political party has a comprehensive connotation. The classical explanation of Edmund Burke that political party is a body of men united for promoting the national interest on some particular principles in which they are all agreed³ needs revision in the light of
recent developments. While highlighting recent trends of political behaviour, Dean and Schuman argue that political parties have become essentially political institution “to implement the objectives of interest groups.” If so, a specific interest constitutes the foundation of a political party and as ‘specific’ interests differ from one another, there are corresponding difference between political parties. As Neumann suggests: “A definition of party might as well begin with its simple word derivation. To become a party to something always means identification with one group and differentiation from another. Every party in its very essence signifies ‘partnership’ in a particular organisation and ‘separation’ from others by a specific programme”.

In order to make the point more clear, it may be pointed out that a political party has a comprehensive connotation to include five determining features. First, a political party is not a loosely knit organisation of some persons. It is required that the members of a political party must be organised on some specific principles (interests) in a tight manner so that the party may be distinguished from some other ‘oligarchical’ entity or entities. Second, there must be close and intimate relationship among all the members of a party. An intermittent relationship between the ‘Lords’ and their ‘vassals’ does not constitute a party in this sense. Third, there must be a clear line of distention between the ‘principles’ and ‘personalities’. Despite the weighty influence of the personalities of a few leaders, the life of the party must not depend upon the life of its leaders. That is, a party is not a firm or partnership which dissolve with the death or going away of its members. Fourth, the leaders of a party must Endeavour and struggle for maximizing their base of popular support and minimizing their circle of decision makers. Finally, the party must observe peaceful
and democratic means, as far as possible, to gain power and to implement its programmes for the protection and promotion of their ‘specific’ interests.

Therefore an elucidation of party politics in India should begin with an understanding of the role of political parties in democratic systems generally. Parties are undoubtedly essential to the functioning of democracy; they perform varied functions within and outside the realm of politics. Their leadership and policies, internal practices, and the patterns of interaction with other parties and institutions can have profound consequences for the system of governance. As a keystone political institution in representative regime, the modern political party regularly fulfils three critical functions: nominating candidates for public offices; formulating and setting the agenda for public; and mobilizing support for candidates and policies in an election. Other institutions perform some of these functions too. What, however, distinguishes parties is their emphasis on linkage. Parties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy makers. Their raison d’être is to create a substantive connection between the ruler and ruled.

Blondel, in this regard, observes that political parties “are groupings, but groupings of a particular kind. Clearly it is not sufficient to say that they are ‘Political’ while other groups are not: polities being a procedure, a body are political only to the extent that it participates in the procedure of solution of conflicts.” He further observes: “It is because aims are general and membership open that the parties want to take power and are highly politicized. They do not confine themselves
to a limited number of issues; they are interested in all national decisions. They cannot, therefore, be confined to intermittent influence, but are concerned with overall influence.\textsuperscript{6}

Political parties and Pressure Groups: A Political party “is notoriously difficult to define accurately”.\textsuperscript{7} Because it “is not always easy to differentiate it from a faction, an interest group, a parliamentary group which may have a life of its own independent of electoral opinion as in France, or from a political movement which may temporarily transcend a number of parties or groups as did the RPF in France, the Resssemblment Democratique Africaine, the National Union of Popular Forces in Morocco, the national Front in a number of systems. As a matter of fact, the meaning of political party is so flexible that it may mean any groups or organisation from one having a smaller number of members and committed to the protection and promotion of a specific interest to that having a wider base and, as Frank Sorauf in his work political Parties in the American System says, organised on the basis of any incentive like patronage, obtaining special treatment by the government, carrier opportunists, economic benefit, personal rewards, ability to wield influence, or ideological gratification. Keeping all such essential points in view, Curtis goes to the extent of saying “Essentially Party signifies a group of people who hold certain political beliefs in common or who are prepared to support the party candidates, work together for electoral victory, attain and maintain political power.”

One thing is clear from what we have said above. We should not be led a way by what Burke said about two hundred years ago; we should also take into
consideration that political parties are "specialised associations whose purpose is to secure power within a corporate group for their leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages. They may spring up within trade unions, corporations, universities, parliaments or the state itself in which latter case they are political parties. Parties are thus specialised associations and become more complex, organised and bureaucratic as a society approaches the modern type. The central object of a political organisation is to capture power either single or in collaboration with others. Thus the first and foremost aim of a political party "is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it. It is this goal of attaining political power that distinguishes political parties from other groups in the political system, although the distention is rather blurred at time, especially in regard to pressure groups.

It is, therefore, a tedious job to differentiate between a political party and a pressure group. There occur several borderline cases where we find the two being analogous to each other. For example, the Irish Nationalists in the House of Commons before 1918, or the poorly represented Welsh and Scottish nationalist groups today display many of the characteristics of both political parties and pressure groups. The weaknesses of the party systems in most of the under developed countries of the world add to our difficulty in this regarded. One may say that Ann DMK in Tamil Nadu or Shiva Sena in Maharashtra is not a political party but a pressure group, or may call them political parties in view of their 'open political commitments and activities.
The difference between a political party and a pressure groups may, however, be made on a conceptual plane. It may be said that a political party is an organisation of numerous people who are openly committed on broad questions of policy and they want to assume direct responsibility for their policies by seeking to monopolize or share with other parties in a position of political power. Contrary to this, a pressure group does the work of 'interest aggregation' and strives to protect and promote its specific interest without being ready to assume direct responsibility for the same. It plays the game of hide and seek in politics. The difference between the two is thus borne out by Neumann: "Fundamentally pressure groups are the representation of homogeneous interests seeking influence. The interest group is strong and effective when it has a direct specific purpose. Political parties, on the other hand, seeking office and directed towards policy decisions, combine heterogeneous groups. In fact, it is one of their major themes to reconcile the diverse forces within political society. Theirs is an integrative function which is not the domain of the interest groups.

Determinants of Party Structures are Manifold in structure. They vary from religious and social to economic and political factors. There may be parties like a confederation of various socio economic groups or various regional organizations like the Mapi of Israel and the Liberal Party of Australia. Though the determinants of party structure may be different, they may be reduced to three main factors historical, socio economic and ideological. In the first place, historical factors are of great importance in the determination of party structures. Parties are the conditions of modern political processes and their emergence presupposes a necessary degree of urbanization and development of mass communications. It is the extension of
franchise that leads to the creation of political parties. Thus as the process of suffrage grows, the organisation of political parties has a wider and still wider base. The National Union of England, for example, came into being as a result of the conditions after the implementation of the First Reform Act of 1832. Thus political parties “arise when historical changes occur and these are not subject to scientific laws. Therefore, the development of parties is more haphazard and uneven than general classifications make apparent. Certainly particular changes are necessary such as the need for the dominant political elites to seek wider political support, and for a significant change in the political attitudes.”

Second, the socio-economic factor has a significance of its own. The level of economic development influences the nature of party competition. We may find that there is a different response to urban and rural societies and to those in which class conflict is a significant aspect of the political process. In a liberal democratic state parties with a totalitarian structure may hardly find a congenial place to live in and act since there is open electoral competition that allays possibilities of all such developments. Nationalism and religious divisions may be more important than class in forming the basis of some political parties. Of course, the attitudes and values prevalent in society and political culture, may be of vital significance in determining the types of political parties that emerge in any society.

Last, there is the factor of ideology. This factor has its application in some special cases. Socialist and Communist parties are organised on the basis of a particular ideology. There parties are called ‘leftist’ inasmuch as they struggle to
change the status quo what they call 'the era of injustice' perpetrated by the class of 'bourgeois' exploiters and oppressors over the 'proletarian' class of the workers and toilers. There may be parties based on the 'rightist' ideology as Fascists in Italy, Nazis and Germany and Bharatiya Jana Sangha in India. Such parties stand for the maintenance of the status quo that goes to the ultimate advantage of the existing rulers hailing from the 'has' class of the society. It is not necessary that every political party is committed to some ideology. The political parties of the United States have nothing like ideological commitment for which reason the Democrats and the Republicans have been described by Lord James Bryce 'as two bottles of wine, liquor being the same but different labels'. Hence it is said that American political parties "are primarily electoral machines, decentralised, laying little emphasis on ideological differences, exercising little disciplinary control over their members, and recruiting many of their presidential and congressional representatives from outside the party structure. Political Parties perform several essential functions in modern political systems that may be enumerated as under:

1. The parties unite, simplify and stabilize the political process. They bring together sectional interests, over come geographical distances and provide coherence to sometimes divisive government structures. The American Democratic Party provides a bridge to bring together the southern conservatives and northern liberals; the German Democratic Party bridges the gulf between the Protestants and the Catholics in West Germany. In Federal systems all political parties emphasize the uniting of different government
structures, the extreme case being that of the USSR. In this way, political parties tend to provide the highest common denominator.

2. Political parties struggle for power and they strive to form order out of chaos. They seek to widen the interests they represent and harmonize these interests with each other. Though interest aggregation function is performed by the pressure groups, the requirement of the interest articulation is fulfilled by the parties. For instance, the Conservative Party of Britain, in spite of the nature of its internal organization and distribution of power, depends upon the support of diverse economic social and geographical sections in English politics. It may be said that all parties strive to extend the area of their support whether it is a bi-party system or a multi-party system of competitive electoral politics, or it is a single dominant party system where political process live under the dominance of a single party and, in doing so, other parties not only reflect divisions in society, they tend to mitigate them.

3. Political parties provide a link between the government and its people. They seek to educate, instruct and activate the electorate. That is, they perform the job of political mobilization, secularization and recruitment. In liberal democratic systems, the parties use means of mass media to give political education to the people. The parties may organize and control some unions or organizations for the purpose of, what S.Hening and J.Pindar call, 'occupational and social implantation'. The Communist party of France may be said to be its best example. In a totalitarian system, the party in power works for the mobilization of support by activating the population by means of
rallies, uniforms, flags and other displays of unity to emphasize the identification of the individual and the political party.

4. While increasing the scope of political activity and widening popular participation, political parties perform the important function of recruiting political leaders. Men in authority are recruited by some channel. In political systems having no party system or very weak political parties, power remains in the hands of the elites that are recruited from the traditional groups like hereditary ruling families or military organizations. In totalitarian countries where only one party is in absolute power, political recruitment is made from the ranks of the same party. It is only in countries having a liberal democratic order that competitive party system prevails and political recruitment is made from different political parties.

5. Political parties present issues; they set value goals for the society. All parties have philosophical bases, no matter how blurred and no matter how divorced from the actual political behavior of the party they are. Though American political parties have, what Robert Dahl says, ideological similarity and issue conflict’, they agree on the fundamental goals of the society. The two parties of Ireland (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael) are instances of the two parties of the United States in respect of ‘ideological similarity and issue conflict’ nature. Single political parties in totalitarian systems set more rigid ideological goals for society. For instance, the Nazi Party of Germany emphasized racial purity and the communist Parties proclaim socio economic equality of the workers after establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.
6. Political parties serve as the 'broker of ideas' by selecting a certain number of the countless issues confronting a society in some order of priority and focusing attention on them in campaign and elections, thus fixing a battleground for the political troops. In democratic system revolutionary parties (or those hostile to the established order as such) act not as conciliatory elements in aggregating the largest number of common interests but as focal points of discontent and organised opposition. A compromise needed in a democratic political behaviour is never acceptable to them. These parties may adhere to the political left, as the Communist Parties do, to the right as done by the Fascist and Nazi parties (respectively in Italy and Germany) or the Pluralists in France, or to revolutionary nationalism as with the Aprista in Peru, Revolutionary Nationalist Movement in Bolivia, or the Action Democratic in Venezuela. In a Non democratic system, revolutionary parties may not simply be the mechanism through which the political system operates, but the real core of the system itself, with power being exercised by party leaders rather than governmental officials.

7. In the newer and developing nations of the world where political habits and traditions are yet to grow up, the political party or parties do the job of political modernization. That is they strive to shape the government, provide the main link among the different social and economic groups, constitute the chief agency for political education and socialization, break down traditional behaviour and act as the binding force in communities divided by groups based on tribal affiliation, religious denomination or national origin. The role
of the Congress party in India may be said to be the best example of this fact where the great leaders played their monumental part in the framing of the constitution and running the government on the lines of parliamentary democracy.

8. Political parties also perform social welfare functions that may be termed their 'non-political activities. The parties work for the alleviation of the sufferings of the people during days of famine, drought, epidemic, wars, etc. they also work for the eradication of social evils like illiteracy, untouchability, ignorance, disease, etc. in Australia citizens may lead their lives from cradle to grave within the frame of organizations linked to a party which include not only trade union and welfare groups but also stamp collecting societies pigeon clubs and weight lifting associations. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Congress party of India have often engaged themselves in massive activities of social welfare.

While dealing with the functional aspect of the political parties, their 'dysfunctional' dimension cannot be ignored. One should also look at the distorting features of the functions of political parties. They 'may polarize opinions in ways dangerous to the stability of the political system. The French Fourth Republic reached a stage of near collapse in 1951 owing to the upper hand of the Communist and the Gaullists as both were hostile to the constitutional framework of the country. The doom of Italy and Germany during the second World War should be attributed to the 'dysfunctional' services of the Fascist and Nazi parties respectively.
Viewing Indian parties through the prism of this typology and attempting to fit them into the categories of this most contemporary typology is a useful classificatory exercise yielding a useful mapping of the spectrum of Indian parties. To begin with, the Indian National Congress, henceforth the Congress party or just the Congress, began and grew as a broad, encompassing coalition of the representatives of the Indian people during the last six-odd decades of the British Raj. It included even the Muslim minority that later became increasingly attracted to the separatist Muslim League. After independence, it became, a broad multi regional, multi lingual, multi religious, and multi caste, in short, a multi ethnic party. Sometime for the late 1960s onwards, it evolved into an electoralist catch all party.

Katz and Mair (1995) argue that the (Duverger’s) mass party, which is often taken as the benchmark of mass parties, is a product of industrial working class societies and is only a stage in the continuing processes of political evolution. Parties evolve by adaptation to social and economic change. The mass party led to the development of Kirchheimer’s (1996: 177-200) catch all party in what was essentially a reaction of older, less organized, conservative or liberal parties or even clientelistic parties of notables, focusing on broad appeals and cutting across class barriers, to counter traditional class based mass parties. The catch all party, as a type, made its appearance and grew along with the growth of the middle class and the relative decline of the old industrial working class in the post World War II boom era. In an era of the spread of television and the rise of a professional political class, the catch all party or the electoral professional party tended to pitch its appeal wide with a focus
on electoral inability, concentrating on electoral mobilization through the media rather than by grassroots organizations (Panesbianco 1998). In the electoral professional party, the party in government also tended to become stronger than the extra parliamentary organization, unlike the older mass party.

While it is generally agreed that parties in Europe have become more decentralized and transparent, there is no agreement on whether the recent reforms in several parties towards party primaries for nominations and leadership selection have significantly reduced the control of party leaderships and empowered the party membership base. One view is that party primaries will make parties, particularly the Canadian and British parties, more like the American parties; they will become candidate centered and less cohesive, and party leaderships will lose control over candidate nomination. Another view, based on the experience of the Swedish, Danish, British and Spanish parties is that introducing party primaries will not have a strong effect on the control of party leaderships over the party’s ideology, policy or even nominations because the party primaries are not state regulated, as they are in the United States, but are subject to the party’s internal regulations. They are open only to party members and not to voters who register themselves as party supporters as in the United States (Hopkin 2001: Katz 2001). The effect of party members based primaries is that even while widening the electorate for nominations, party leaderships can centralized control in practice, since ‘an inclusive but unorganized electorate may give the appearance of democracy without the substance. This is because such democratization concerns ‘mainly ‘ordinary’ members, who are more docile and prepared to follow party leadership than the middle level elite and the activists.
How well does the evolution of parties in India fit this pattern derived from the European experience? Have the existing and new parties evolved their structure and functioning and their relationship to civil society and the state in a similar pattern? Have they continually reinvented themselves? Let us consider these questions along with five aspects of the political party as a political organization, namely: 1) party as ideology; 2) party as movement; 3) party as societal group interest; 4) party as government; and 5) party as purely as organization and, derived from this, the political consequences of these organizational forms.

Viewing Indian parties as each of these, and classifying them in these terms, we get the following picture of Indian parties and their revolution. The classic examples for parties as ideology are the communist parties. These parties are primarily about ideology. Their origins lie in the Marxist Leninist ideology and the international effect of the Russian Revolution of 1917. However, these parties are also, in defining ways, parties as movements, specifically the labour movement and the peasant movements, they are also parties of societal interest group representation, again of the working class and the poor peasantry. They are parties as government in the three states in which they have formed governments, either in their own or as a part of a coalition, viz., West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. They also share the character of party as government form their presence in Parliament and in the state assemblies. They have a presence in the institutions of government, albeit in the opposition in the legislatures. Lastly, they are organized in a particular way, characterized in principle by ‘democratic centralism and a hierarchical and secretive cadre based structure of cells, borrowed from the Soviet model. But above all, they
are parties as ideology since their other features derive ultimately from their character as parties originating in and promoting a particular well defined and elaborate ideology.

The BJP and the Shiv Sena are also parties of an elaborate and structured ideology for nationalism of a particular brand Hindutva, or Hindu ness or Hindu nationalism. However, all aspects of their existence are not directly derived from their ideology. Their social base and the groups they represent are more flexibly defined and in a state of flux. Their organizational form if not directly derived from their ideology but from historical circumstances.

The best example of parties as movements would be the Congress Party before 1947 when it embodied the broad, umbrella movement of the Indian people struggling for Independence. Other movement parties, that is, parties certain goals, are regional nationalist and autonomist movements like the growth of the All Assam Students Union’s movement in the early 1980s against illegal immigration of Bangladeshis to Assam, and the original Jharkhand Party and its offshoots which was a movement of the tribal peoples of Jharkhand for greater autonomy and political identity. However, several parties including the BJP and particularly some of its offshoots like the VHP and its Ramjanmabhoomi movement show some of the characteristics of movements.

All parties represent societal group interests to some extent. The question is whether this is their dominant characteristic and whether they represent narrowly and
sharply defined groups. Ethnicity based parties, including regional, linguistic, caste and religious based parties, are particularly characterized by this aspect of political parties. Thus the BSP definitely represents the Scheduled Caste in particular, the Akali Dal represents the Sikhs, the National Conference represents the Kashmiri Muslims. The AGP represents the case Hindu Assamese, the DMK and the AIADMK represent the non Brahmin Tamilians and the Shiv Sena represents the Maharashtrians in Mumbai (or did so at significant periods in time). An important caveat must be added here. Even ethnic exclusivist parties are not the sole representatives of the group they claim to represent or in whose name they speak; no groups vote is overwhelmingly monopolized by any party even through a large majority of the group may happen to vote for that party at a particular time or even regularly.

Almost all parties, and certainly all major parties that have been in power at least in one state, share aspects of the party as government. As mentioned earlier, the leadership of the parties in power occupies positions in the executive branch of government and at various levels of government. Even the members of the parties not in power occupy position in the legislative branch of government including in legislative committees, as Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly or members of bodies in the third tier of government. This affects the character of the since party leaders wear two hats, those of government leaders and of party leaders. It also benefits the party as it has the formal and informal resources of the government, at least partially, at its command, to be used to benefit its political programme to the greatest extent possible.
Lastly, all parties are also organizations. They can assume a variety of organizational forms, sometimes ideology driven, sometimes leadership preference driven but most often path dependent because the organizational form is a legacy of the organizational form adopted, at its inception, by the party or a movement that became apart, combined with leadership preferences, the nature of its interaction with civil society and its specific social base. Most parties of the extremes, like the communist parties and the BJP have tightly organized, cadre based, centralized, hierarchical and secretive organizations that have emerged against a background of conflict with the state due to their ideological opposition to the constitutional philosophy of liberal democracy and a history of encouraging violence of either an insurrectionary or a communal kind. They may conduct internal elections and have processes for feedback from lower levels, but these are essentially stage managed in a top down fashion. Most parties of the broad centre, particularly personalist and catch all electoralist parties, and broad ethnic or movement parties, have relatively loose and weak organization that wax and wane with elections. However, in India, all parties across the spectrum are characterized by a relative absence of formal internal democratic procedures for taking crucial political decisions like an electoral platform and strategy, alliances if any, nominations of candidates and fund raising and distribution. In all these matters, they are more top down than most European parties and sharply contrast with the two American parties which conduct their nomination processes in a bottom up manner through primaries and in which candidates do their own fund raising. The broad political consequences of this top down organizational style, whatever the formal structure of the party organization may be, is that vertical splits are common as the Hirschmanian logic of exit, voice and loyalty plays itself
out, as seen when disgruntled leaders or factions secede from the parent party to float new parties or merge with other parties. In such cases, the primacy of the political leadership over the organizational structure, is also demonstrated.

Coming to the evolution of India parties, there has been some evolution of the Congress Party, the Communist parties and the BJP. After 1947, the Congress Party evolved from a broad national umbrella movement for independence to a political party that mobilized for elections in a democracy with universal franchise and in which it formed, most crucially, the government at the Centre for 47 years from independence to the present day. The impact of elections, and of being in government, transformed the party from a grand coalitional high command led movement into a factionalized party and, after the 1969 split and the centralization under Indira Gandhi, into a top down though still broad encompassing party used to being in power but having to compete in election against an increasingly powerful multi polar opposition.

The communist parties have evolved into parliamentary, social democratic type parties, tempered by their being in power for a nearly three decades in West Bengal and intermittently, for decades in Kerala and Tripura. The BJP has alternately moderated and hardened its Hindu nationalist platform. It has been alternately open and closed to electoral alliances and governmental coalitions, and more or less acceptable as an electoral ally and coalition partner to other members of the non Congress political spectrum.
One would expect Indian parties to evolve toward greater internal democracy, transparency, and accountability in their functioning as they evolve against a socio-economic backdrop of economic growth rates of over 5 per cent per annum in the 1980s and 1990s, higher income and educational levels, greater media penetration, greater voters and the grassroots party workers. However, what is striking, in its contrast to the evolution of the parties in Europe outlined earlier, is that there has been no trend toward internal democratization and transparency in Indian parties, which remain across the spectrum, remarkably top down and centralized in their functioning, particularly with respect to election nominations, funds and basic stance and strategy. Vigorous competition between parties since 1989 and the considerable flux in alliance formation have not split over into parties in the form of open democratic competitive procedures and transparency and accountability of the leadership to the rank and file.

The foregoing section has given us a synoptic account of the topography of political parties, introducing us to the different ways by which they can be classified, to the various forms they can take, and to the processes of their evolution. It has sought to situate the discussion on Indian political parties within the larger global discourse on parties and to then place it within the even more extensive discourse on democracy. In this section, we shall briefly set out the logic of section of articles for this reader, spelling out our reasons why some have found a place and some have not. We begin, quite obviously, with the recognition that since a reader can include only a limited number of articles of those that are available, this selection has therefore, had to adopt multiple principles of inclusion.
The first principle is by way of a reminder of a discussion, and a time, in the making of independent India, when it was seriously argued that parties are antithetical to democracy. These arguments, made in the Gandhian spirit, stated that it was better for India to adopt party less polity if it waned to build a true democracy that would be uncorrupted by the processes of party politics. Although this line of argument comes as a surprise today, since it goes against the established wisdom where parties are seen as a constitutive feature of democracy, it has a lineage not just in the political philosophy of Gandhi but also in the European writings of Erich From, Herber Marcuse and E.F. Schumacher where small is beautiful. Such argument for a party less democracy need to be considered today, even if they seem somewhat heretical, since they represent a worldview which has long been neglected but which, at a certain time, was the core vision of our freedom struggle.

Political change from the 1967 to the 1977 elections increased party competition. Opposition parties formed coalition governments in several states. Both elections created conditions in which a group of state leaders, popularly known as the Syndicate, comprising K. Kamaraja, Sanjiva Reddy, S. Nijilingappa, S.I. Patil, and Atulya Ghosh, assumed an important role in national politics. The split in 1969 ushered in significant change in the party system. In the 1971 elections Indira Gandhi’s Congress faced a united opposition, and this gave rise to a polarization in which two contending blocs disputed fundamental issues about the nature of the political order. After considerable unrest, Indira Gandhi imposed a national Emergency. The Emergency threatened liberal institutions and affirmed the perception that a crisis of regime had indeed occurred. However, the 1977 elections
were the harbinger of a new era in the party system, creating new openings for the opposition parties. This period witnessed an intensification of conflict and competition between political parties.

Not being tied to any particular group or region, the Congress enjoyed a distinct advantage over sectional and regional parties. It is still the party that manages to garner the largest amount of support from the underprivileged. This support, however, comes to the Congress by default and is not the outcome of a systematic effort to create a counter bloc of the underprivileged, or to build a social coalition based on social democratic politics. Moreover, the advantage has been greatly reduced by the salience of the state level as the substantive arena of electoral choice over the past decade. In many a local or regional contest, community or caste based mobilization tactics may be more effective in garnering support than a catch-all strategy. Besides the Congress does not any longer pull in the lower castes and classes in sufficient numbers, into its ambit, having to count with left and left of centre parties that possess greater influence among these groups. Yet, the Congress is still quite capable of winning elections: the results of the 1998 assembly elections and its success in the Karnataka assembly elections in 1999 testify to that. Nonetheless, it has been indisputably dislodged from its position of preeminence at the Centre.

The Congress’s decline has complex causes. Most striking is the inability of the party to maintain the political bases of its coalition, especially the loyalty of the socially disadvantaged groups. It is true that the Congress party continues to secure support across the social spectrum. From the late 1980s however, the party has found
itself hard pressed to command support for its broad centrist and secular appeal in the
face of a serious challenge from political formations with sectarian appeals and social
bases, such as the BJP, Samajwadi Party (SP), and BSP. New parties, representing the
backward and scheduled castes, are regionally concentrated and have strengthened
their position at the expense of the Congress. To contend with this challenge, the
Congress has needed to revitalize its electoral base, built over the years by
representing the needs of different constituencies and groups. Unfortunately, its'
dependence on charismatic leadership as means of winning elections has distracted
the party from the task of reconstructing its organization. Furthermore, the inadequacy
of the Congress practice of socialism and secularism discredited its traditional
ideological plank. Once embracing a broad spectrum of ideological, caste, and
regional interests, the Congress has lost its authority over the past two decades. Since
the late 1980s, it has failed to generate a popular leadership capable of
accommodating varied interests and blunting the counterattack of its rivals.

Some of these trends were in evidence as far back as the 1970s but leaders like
Indira and Rajiv Gandhi were able to contain them by building coalitions around their
own personalities. They reinvented the Congress, but on a different basis from the
organizational or ideological configuration of the party in the 1950s and 1960s. In the
process, the Congress became a leader dependent force that adhered to the charismatic
appeal of the Nehru Gandhi family. This worked so long as the other ingredients of
success were in place: its social base in the countryside, its mobilization through
populist slogans, and well-oiled party machine.
With the BJP’s emergence as the dominant party, though it is not yet an all India party, scholarly interest in Hindu nationalism has increased, generating considerable debate about the character of the BJP. Scholars are asking whether the ideology it represents is part of wider struggle to reconstitute India in accordance with Hindu consciousness and identity. They are concerned about its assertion of Hindu power over other communities. Most accounts concentrate on the implications of the BJP’s rise to national power on the political system. They have commented on its interpretation of secularism, minority rights, democracy, and the proposal to establish a presidential form of government. Scholarship on the BJP can be divided into two broad groups. The first group comprises those who believe the BJP is a right wing party underpinned by an aggressive, homogenizing Hindu nationalism committed to rewriting history by distorting the principal plank of the post Independence project of secularism, nationalism and democracy. Scholars in the second group believe that the BJP cannot pursue this agenda and it will have to adjust to the pluralism of Indian society; a pluralism that compels parties to move towards the centre.

Clearly, there are tremendous pressures for moderation that all extremist parties confront once they come to power. The BJP is not exempt from such powerful pressures. In the short run, moderation is necessitated by electoral calculations and the compulsions of coalition politics. In electoral terms, its militant strategy of ethno religious mobilization of the 1980s paid rich dividends to the party. However, after the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992, the BJP’s vote share did not increase substantially. Its core support, accounting for 85 per cent of its total Lok Sabha seats, came from the three Hindi hearland states of Uttar Pradesh,
Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh plus the three western states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. In these states the pro-Hindu rhetoric has huge appeal. This rhetoric, however, has few takers in the south and the east, which the BJP has to penetrate in order to be a serious contender as the ruling party in New Delhi. Therefore, in the 1998 and 1999 elections, the BJP moderated its stance and was then able to broaden its electoral base, both spatially and ethnically, by aligning with regional parties. This moderation was manifest in the National Agenda of Governance, which dropped four controversial issues: building a temple at Ayodhya; enacting a uniform civil code; abolishing the National Minorities Commission; and abrogating Article 370 of the constitution, which allows greater autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir. Most of the BJP’s allies in the 1999 election were regional parties, of which only the Shiv Sena could be described as a like minded right wing party. Initially, the BJP was not comfortable with the idea of coalitions, but it has rapidly demonstrated its willingness to enter into power sharing arrangements with regional parties at the national level.

Since 1998, most regional parties at the national level. Since 1998, most regional leaders have backed the government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In 1996, by contrast, nearly all the major regional parties had joined hands to keep the BJP out of power. Alliances have helped the geographical expansion of the BJP, to the extent that by the end of the 1999 elections it had an electoral presence in most states, Kerala being one of the exceptions.

Socially too the BJP has come a long way from being a Brahmin Bania party. In its rise to power, it has created a new social bloc, a coalition of various groups, whose claim to power is based on ‘a new kind of majoritarianism,’ which is not
simply Hindu majoritarianism. However, this social bloc has supported the NDA coalition, which includes regional parties that have regularly reaped low caste support, and not the BJP as such. The BJP's own social support is much more elite dominated both in terms of the caste and class hierarchy. Besides, Muslims are not yet part of the BJP's social constituency though the party is trying to woo them. The election of Bangaru Laxman, a Dalit from Andhra Pradesh, as the party president in August 2000 who was subsequently replaced by Jana Krishnamurthy after the Tehelka scam, is evidently designed to widen its support among the Dalits. This might not however be all that easy; its efforts to win over OBCs, Muslims, and Dalits will alienate its upper caste base, the mainstay of the party. This strategy, which was epitomized by the appointment of the OBC leader Kalyan Singh as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1991 and again in 1997, resulted in the consolidation of the upper caste lobby and damaged the further expansion of the party in Uttar Pradesh. Nonetheless, religion is not the principal axis in the construction of the new bloc. A convergence of caste community and class distinctions, and an overlap of social and economic privileges have formed the new social bloc. This convergence is reflected in its support base in the last two elections. The BJP obtained more votes from the privileged sections of society: upper caste rather than lower caste, rich rather than poor, men rather than women, more educated rather than less educated. Its support among the lower castes and minorities is more limited.

While there is no real dilution of the BJP's social agenda, its policy of economic nationalism has been completely reversed. The renunciation of swadeshi or economic nationalism constitutes the biggest shift in BJP policy. Wedded to swadeshi
for the past five decades, the BJP led NDA government, after just two years in office, has proved to be the most enthusiastic about liberalization and globalization of the economy, and the process has sought to appease foreign investors, rather than the party's swadeshi lobby. Equally significantly, the nuclear policy has been pursued vigorously. The 1998 manifesto promised that it would resume nuclear testing begun by Indira Gandhi in 1974. the BJP government, after less than three months in office, ordered the Pokhran tests on 11 May 1998. it went ahead with the bomb in order to build its political constituency. None of this indicates that the BJP is obliged to stay moderate in power. Similarly controversial issues could force themselves back to their agenda when the party needs to consolidate its support.

In the longer run, therefore, the deeper issue is how moderate should we expect the BJP to remain if it wins a majority in Parliament and can form a government on its own? Is it possible for the BJP to transform itself into a liberal right of centre party, yet at the same time be linked to the RSS fraternity This is the central issue of Indian politics today. An answer to this question must take into account the uniqueness of the BJP. Among political parties, the BJP is atypical. It has enduring ties with a range of allied organizations, chief among them being the RSS and the VHP. It functions as a party a movement, and government at the state and nation level. Neither the RSS nor the VHP have given up the Hindutva agenda; indeed they regularly reiterate their commitment to it, but they have not mounted pressure on the government for its fulfillment. That Vajpayee managed to distance his government from the Sangh's clutches during his second term in office was largely due to his popular appeal. This does not however mean that the BJP has liberated itself from the
RSS. The three most important leaders of the BJP, which include Prime Minister Vajpayee, Home Minister Advani, and Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Josh, are close to the RSS. Moreover, the RSS knows that its electoral success and its ability to forge strategic alliances are due to Vajpayee’s leadership. Furthermore, the RSS has accepted the compulsions of coalition politics and the attendant moderation in the BJP in view of the political protection offered by the BJP government to its activities. This helped the RSS to exert and extend its influence within state and society as it has been doing over the last few years.

There have been major debates among scholars about the significance of language, region, class, caste, community, and ethnic conflicts in Indian society and politics. Conventionally, political discourse on ethnic categories had focused on language and region. After Independence, linguistic identities, culminating in the reorganization of the states, occupied centre stage. Many of the Congress leaders feared that the linguistic division of states would lead to secession from the Union, and the nation would thus disintegrate. That fear has largely proved to be groundless, but the formation of linguistic states has nonetheless reinforced the cohesion of regional identities. These are expressed by the formation of parties such as the DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the Akali Dali in Punjab, the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

Numerous interpretations of Indian politics have argued that social differences associated with the process of economic and political development have provided political parties with either the organizational or numerical support to win majorities
in elections. More specifically, it is assumed that the nature of the party system typically mirrors the complexity of social cleavages along lines of religion, caste, language, and region to produce a multi-party system. Social cleavage theory has had a significant influence on the perception of links between the social structure and party politics in India. One major weakness of this theory, however, is that it disregards the role of human agency. It simply derives divergence of interests from existing social divisions, without asking why particular differences are important or become influential only in some regions or why specific cleavages should be politicized in certain situations and what role political actors play in this process. This aspect is singularly important as India's diversity yields a variety of social differences, and these differences can form the basis of very different kinds of parties and distinct party systems at the national and state levels, depending upon the patterns of political mobilization and organization. Social difference that emerge in the course of economic development and state formation become cleavages as a result of political and electoral mobilization. Parties perform an extremely important role in forging links between social classes, caste groups, and party systems.

The contrasting trajectory of the communist parties that came to power in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura stresses the significance of political organization and mobilization in determining the relative salience of social cleavages on patterns of voting and party strategies. The CPI(M) has established an impressive support base in these three states by focusing on distributive policies and radical reforms, rather than the politicization of caste differences. Sustained land reform measures and democratically elected Panchayats have tilted the balance of power in favour of the
rural poor in West Bengal, and this has helped the CPI(M) to build a wide circle of social and political support. This has enabled the regime to remain in power for twenty-five years. As in most other states, the propertied classes remain dominant in the sphere of production, but unlike other states, they do not control political power. The case of the Left parties is important because it illustrates the very different party played by parties in political, and pluralist, mobilization.

By contrast, in north and north-western India party strategies politicized caste differences and newly politicized groups made their presence felt through such parties. Particularly significant has been the role of middle and rich peasants and lower and backward castes, traditionally ignored by the Congress, who have in recent years thrown their weight behind the opposition parties. Leaders of lower castes, starting with Charan Singh's Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) in the mid 1960s, later began to organize their own parties to gain greater representation and power for their caste groups. Among these parties, the BSP has attracted considerable academic attention. The party commands strong support among the scheduled castes and rural and urban poor in several states of north India. Significantly its support structure is the direct opposite of the BJP's. Several recent studies focus on ethnic identification, ethnic mobilization, or caste conflict to explain the BSP phenomenon. In South India, pro backward case parties, such as the TDP, DMK, and AIADMK, have held sway in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu for a much longer period.

This critique of parties finds echo in the writing of M.N.Roy, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India, from which he later distanced himself to
found the Radical Humanists. In a vein similar to JP, he writes that 'political practice cannot be truly democratized unless people can nominate as well as vote for a candidate. It is easy to see that parties will have no place in the latter form of political practice which provides for sustained actual participation of the entire community. He disbanded the Radical Democrats and Humanist party in December 1949 in the belief that they should no longer participate in a pattern of political practice which has done more harm than good, has soiled the fair name of democracy. This position on party less democracy needs to be engaged with today on two counts: (i) to see the larger frame within which these arguments of a participatory decentralized democracy, based on a politics from below, is made, and to evaluate its continued relevance in today's globalized political order and (ii) to assess whether the failures that been have listed by JP and M.N. Roy are endemic to the party politics of today, as claimed by them, and therefore ones that will have to be both lived with and struggled against, or whether they are, in fact, transient distortion is that can be overcome.

This collection begins with two chapters introducing us to this issue of a party less democracy. The chapter by JP is a brief extract from his longer essay on 'A plea for the Reconstruction of the Ndina Polity where he presents us with a larger body of arguments for a democratic society within which his comments on parties are located. The chapter by M.N. Roy is a short, perceptive piece that, although written about six decades ago, appears very contemporarycy along the lines of decentralized democracy. The caution, made by realists, against both JPs and M.N.Roy's arguments is that they do not foresee what Paul Bass (1990), in his critique of Arend Lijphart’s theory of consociationalism, foresaw that in the absence of political parties
offering a programme that cuts across inscriptive categories, mobilization along such lines as communal, caste and other ethnic mobilization, would take place, gravely undermining democracy. But since such mobilization has taken place even in party based democratic polities we here invite scholars of parties to revisits these arguments.

From what some may consider a fleeting indulgence with utopia, but which we consider a necessary reminder of a democratic possibility, the collection returns to the beaten track of treating party politics as a given of democracy. The second principle of selection seeks to introduce the reader to: (i) the idea of a party system i.e., an arrangement of parties that are locked in a certain relationship with each other within the democratic polity, and (ii) the evolving character of this system, over time, in the increasingly assertive federal policy of India. The chapter by Rajni Kothari, and that by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, work very well in tandem and almost seamlessly take the reader from the first three decades of Indian party politics 1947-77 to the period up to 2004. Kothari’s classic in addition to outlining the features of the one party dominance system, the party of consensus and the parties of pressure, also introduces the idea, in opposition to JP’s and M.N.Roy’s, that the Congress is internally democratic, that there was a growth of inner party democracy which subsequently declined, that factional politics were significant and that these were decades of the maturing of the political system. His typology of the party system in India as a one party dominant system, in addition to providing a better description than the one party, two party, multi party typologies on offer, also introduces, for consideration, the idea that intra party democracy, as a factional politics, is as
important as inter party democracy, and that the latter alone is not a sufficient measure of a democratic party system.

This set of arguments is then extended, and modified, in their discussion of the subsequent three decades by Yadav and Palshikar. In a wide ranging study, both authors not only map the changing stages in the party system at the national level, from the one dominant party system, to the one salient party system, to the current phase of coalitional politics, but also trace the party system, to the current phase of coalitional politics, but also trace the evolution of the party system at the state level, and the various forms these take in each state, where at least four models are at work: one party dominance, two party bi polar competition, two party plus competition and multi party competition. Yadav and Palshikar see the decline of the Congress and the rise of the smaller parties, both regional and ethnic, as the inability of the catch all party to accommodate divergent and increasingly assertive interests, and as the deepening of the democratic processes, where new leaders emerge who have ambitions and aspirations and seek to consolidate their voter base and thereby increase their bargaining power. They suggest that such a reconfiguration can be mapped along two axes, an increasing voter choice on the one side and an increasing party competition on the other. While they offer several ideal types of the party system in the states they do not indicate the causal processes by which one ideal type declines and gives rise to another. This is a seminal article because it makes a contribution to our understanding of party politics at many levels, from delineating the structure of party competition at the centre and the states, to the identification of the different drivers of politics, to the role of important events and processes, such as Mandir, Mandal and Market, on party
politics. The details of party politics which it provides is supplemented by the sixth chapter of the set, by Myron Weiner, who is classical scholarly fashion takes us through the historical emergence of the arty system from the national movement, through the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, to the period up to 1984.

The third principle of selection is to shift the discussion from the party system to parties seen in terms of their different personalities; as ideology, movement, societal group interests, government, and finally purely as organization. In the political science literature, parties have been discussed in these various ways and our selection attempts to provide the reader with examples of such readings. We have done so by an intensive discussion of national parties, the Congress, BJP, and the Communist parties, and also of some regional parties such as the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra and the Telgu Desam Party of Andhra Pradesh. We had wanted to include more regional parties, from the thirty-odd listed, particularly the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), and the Dravida parties, since each would allow us to engage with a different issue of interest in the study of parties, such as the strategies of mobilization of the social base by the BSP, the complex intertwining of religion, politics and region in the SAD, and the cultural politics of the Dravida parties, but had to settle for the shorter list because of space constraints.

Myron Weiner's chapter gives an overview of party politics till 1984 and in doing so describes the different functions that the Congress Party performed in those decades of mobilization local support, accommodating local factions, providing opportunities for competing political elites, transmitting information, and managing
conflict. He discusses the role of the party system in addressing insurgent challenges to the nation state through cooption, e.g., in the North East, to providing access to state patronage, e.g., in the Punjab. These strategies, by which dissenting elites are co-opted, are of importance, and must be discussed more extensively, since they take the analysis to an examination of the dialectics between the nation state and democracy. In this dialectics democracy is both pitted against the nation-state and is the solution to the emergent conflict.

In the same scholarly tradition, the chapter by Bruce D.Graham's offers a historically grounded view of the BJP its origins, doctrines and policies, and its strategy and electoral record, from the vantage point of 1987, the year before the BJP began its meteoric rise based on a sharp rightward shift in its policies and strategy. Graham takes us back to the key texts from which the BJP draws its ideology and in particular the five principles of nationalism and national integration, democracy and fundamental rights, positive secularism, Gandhian socialism, and value based politics. While Graham's discussion does not critically engage with the relationship (some would say gap) between precept and practice, Achin Vanaik's chapter, an extract from his book (1997) is a detailed discussion of the BJP's attempt to fill in the space provided by the decline of the Congress by taking the polity to the communal right. His characterization of the BJP and its affiliates as practicing a fascist politics, of using a mobilization strategy of indenting an 'enemy within the Muslim minority, highlights the dangers of he politics of hate to the polity. It raises some fundamental issues of the normative and legal 'limits', which a democratic polity must regularly consider to constrain competitive party politics when a section of its citizens, as a
result, has to live in a climate of fear. While competitive politics is often the best
decider of the success of failure of exclusivist agendas such politics cannot e sans
rules. It must take place within a certain competitive system of constraining rulers.
We need to ask ourselves whether ‘hate politics’ should be proscribed by these rules
as has been the case in several democracies.

If Vanaik presents scathing critique of the ideological politics of the BJP,
Valerian Rodrigues presents a more sympathetic assessment of the ideological politics
of the Communist movement and parties. In an essay written specially for this
volume, he offers a wide ranging account of India’s two Communist parties, taking us
through their historical evolution, ideological splits, organizational structure,
engagement with civil society, characterization of the Indian state, and experience of
participation in bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Because this in our opinion is
one of the most comprehensive treatments of the communist movement and parties in
India, it compels us to examine the issue of the contemporarily of the arguments held
by the movement particularly with respect to their characterizations of the Indian state
and the nature of parliamentary democracy. When Communist parties in many regions
of the world have reinvented themselves as social democratic parties, the Indian
Communist parties by retaining the label of communism, exhibit as stubbornness of
ideology which makes one sometimes feel that they have not quite assimilated the
lessons of current history beginning with the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989.

This analysis of parties in terms of their ideology, social class and practice of
government, is once again illustrated in the two chapters on regional parties. Suhas
Palshikar presents a detailed historical analysis of the origins, growth and transformation of the Shiv Sena in the context of the evolution of Maharashtrian politics, from a Maharashtrian Nationalist party to a 'semifascist', Hindu Nationalist Party. His discussion of the place of the plebiscitary leader in party politics introduce a new issue for consideration as also the well crafted strategy of violence that the Shiv Sena employs and through which it increases its social base that has a significant component of unemployed youth in urban Maharashtra. K.C. Suri’s analysis of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) also covers new ground. In addition to locating the rise of the TDP in the standard causes, the decline of the Congress, the changing caste coalitions, the shift in policy emphasis, etc., he also analyses the role of the towering regional leader, N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) in party formation. Many of the regional parties are leader dependent, family controlled, undemocratic organizations that effectively manipulate the politics of identity and hence are able to capture power at the level of the state. Suri’s study together with Palshikar’s compels us to look at regional parties as warlord parties that also decline after the decline of the warlord. These six chapters covers most of the familiar approaches to the study of political parties in India, with respect to their ideological moorings, changing social base, electoral successes or failures, organizational forms, role in government, and leadership structures. From the viewpoint of a reader, the eight chapters discussed above constitute a fairly complete list of issues on party politics in India. They however, cover the same old terrain of party politics without venturing to engage with some of the important and new issues that need to be fore grounded. While this is valuable in itself a reader should also introduce the student to other related issues. This is what the fourth major principle of selection seeks to do.
Political parties in India enjoy a very low level of trust. In a cross sectional survey of people's political attitudes, done by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in late 2004, the question was asked: I am going to name a number of institutions. For each one could you tell me how much trust you have in them. Is it a great deal of trust, some trust, not very much trust, or none at all? Of the ten institutions polled the scores on a 100 point scale are: national government (79.4), state government (73.5), local government (72.5) civil service (57), police (48.8) army (85.5), courts (72.3), Parliament (67.1) political parties (45.8) and Election Commission (79), political parties got the lowest rank. Even the police fared better. This bodes ill for Indian democracy. Parties need to increase the level of the trust the public can place in them. This raises a number of issues for reform. However, before one can make any recommendations, considerable research is needed on why the survey threw up such responses.

In this context, this final section does what all final sections do, that is, sets out a limited agenda for future work. There are at least five issues on which detailed studies would add value to our discussion of political parties in India. The first is with respect to the relationship between party organizations and the party in government. While we have looked at strategies for winning elections or for forming governments, we need to look at this relationship when parties are in power.

The second issue to be explored is related to this. We need to return to examining the inevitability of Roberto Michel's iron law of oligarchy and see how, in all parties, democratic procedures (if any) get subverted. The result of this subversion
is that a small oligarchy always remains in full control. Perhaps JP’s and M.N.Roy’s critique that small oligarchies rule in the name of the people was not altogether utopian. The potential of, and constraints to, inner party democracy needs more scholarly attention. The role of the leader’s family in the control of parties is a part of this. Many parties have become family fiefdoms. For example, Laloo Prasad Yadav appointing his wife to the Chief Minister’s position when he was compelled to relinquish office after a court verdict, remains the lasting image of the family takeover of political parties. The BJP and the Communist parties too do not seem immune to such processes.

The third issue is the impact of party politics on caste, or as D.L.Sheth has suggested, the increasing politicization of caste:

Put simply, competitive politics required that a political party seeking wider electoral bases must view castes neither as a pure category of interest nor as one of identity. The involvement of castes in politics fused interest and identity in such a manner that a number of castes could share common interests and identity in the form of larger socio political conglomerates. The process was one of politicization of castes which, by incorporating castes in competitive politics, reorganized and recast the elements of both hierarchy and separation among castes in larger collectivities. These new collectivities did not resemble the varna categories or anything like a polarized class structure in politics. The emergence of these socio political entities in Indian politics defied the conventional categories of political analysis, which is class analysis versus caste analysis. The singular impact of competitive democratic politics on the
caste system thus was that it delegitimized the old hierarchical relations among castes, facilitating new horizontal power relations among them.

This issue of what competitive party politics is doing to caste, must be documented in all the regions of India to give us an understanding of the background conditions, particularly because of democracy's promise of bringing about political equality.

The fourth issue that calls for scholarly attention is the relationship between parties and other civil society organizations. This is a fairly broad agenda and would include the relationships with corporate, chambers of commerce, trade unions, new social movements, etc., and in turn, how these organizations mediate between the party and the voters and donors.

The fifth and final issue that would be profitable to study is the dynamics of party strategies for coalition building in a federal, multi party system consisting of a variety of state party systems. A great deal needs to be done to relate political parties to each other, to competition for, or coalition with, each other's social bases, and hence, to the evolution of the party system as a whole, in order to understand contemporary party dynamics.

A thorough exploration of this research agenda is needed to understand the problem of low public trust in political parties and hence in order to be in a position to devise methods of improving this deficit for the growth and consolidation of a
healthy, well functioning, internally democratic, transparent and responsive political party system.

**Politics without Party**

Having come to the conclusion, empirically as well as theoretically, that the system of several parties engaged in the struggle for power, to be captured either constitutionally or through armed insurrection, had debased democracy to demagogy, Radical Democrats and Humanists could no longer function as a political party. They were guided by the time honoured dictum that charity begins at home, or that example is better than precept, and consequently dissolved their party in so far as it had been organized with the object of participating in the fight for power.

But they never accepted either the anarchist view that politics is an evil, nor the Marxist utopia of stateless society. They had defined politics as the theory and practice of public administration, and the state as the political organization of society. The corollary to the definition is that membership of civil society implies the responsibility of doing whatever is necessary to guarantee an orderly, equitable and just administration of public affairs; only the recluse can disown this responsibility. By resolving to dissolve their party, the Radical Democrats did not propose to retire into reclassifies. The resolution simply was no longer to participate in pattern of political practice which has done more harm than good, has soiled the fair name of democracy. It was to initiate other forms of public activities which would raise politics to a higher level.
One of the many bad features of the party system is that it restricts the number of citizens participating in political activity. The membership even of the largest mass party cannot embrace more than a small fraction of the people. The restriction logically results from the very term party. Indian terms, such as Congres, Sangh, Sabha, or Dal, do not alter the situation, because of the identity of purpose, namely to capture political power. No matter what ever may be the name, a political party is formed with the sole object of capturing control of the state, sooner or later. The object is justified with argument that only in office a party can put its programme into practice. Therefore, by adopting one of the Indian terms for its name, a political organization does not cease to be a party, that is to say, only a part of the people or the class or the community it claims to represent. Otherwise, there would be no sense in the idea of representation. Since by its very nature, a party is bound to be exclusive, a minority organization, party politics cannot be democratic politics in the true sense of the term. Political practice is monopolized by a minority of professional politicians; and the bulk of the community is given no place in the practice; they are to follow one party or the other. Democracy therefore can never be practiced through the intermediary of party politics, which by its very nature, reduces the demos to the status of camp followers.

Obviously, the rejection of party politics means a resolution to practice politics on a much wider field, so that the entire people may actively participate in it. Under the party system, the people can do no more than vote for this or that candidate who is nominated by respective parties. Political practice cannot be truly democratized unless the people can nominate as well as vote for a candidate. It is easy to see that parties
will have no place in the latter form of political practice, which provides for sustained actual participation of the entire community. While not compelling them to do so, it allows all citizens to play an active and significant role in the State.

It goes without saying that this change over cannot take place from today or tomorrow; nor will an entire country discard the old practice and adopt the new one all at once. It will be process, and the process itself will be uneven. The change over from party politics to democratic politics will be brought about gradually by raising the intellectual level of the people, by quickening their sense of self respect and self reliance. Therefore, democracy is not possible without education.

Those who will apply themselves to the initial task of laying down the foundation of a democratic social order cannot in the meantime be indifferent to the political conditions in which they will have to operate for quite a long time. These conditions may influence their work, for better or worse. In the transition period, parliamentary democracy, with all its manifest failures and inadequacies, will be obviously preferable to a dictatorship. Civil liberties will have a greater chance of survival so long as various parties alternate in power or contend for power, than under one party rule.

The control of the state by one party claiming to be the sole custodian of popular interest is antagonistic to democracy. Paternalism, even with the very best of motives, kills self reliance in the people and fosters in them an authoritarian mentality, a predisposition to accept authority as the natural order of things. In
backward countries, an undemocratic one party rule is fortified by the traditional credulity and lack of self confidence on the part of the people, political backwardness and general ignorance. It will be reinforced by the illiteracy of an overwhelming majority of the enlarged electorate under the new Constitutions. Therefore, no realistic democrat can entertain the illusion that in India, for instance, the Congress could be dislodged from power in the near future. The object should be to encourage maximum possible resistance to its totalitarian ambitions, so that at least a semblance of parliamentary democracy and a modicum of civil liberties may be preserved while sustained efforts will be made to build up a democratic order from below.

For these realistic considerations, Radical Democrats should have no objection to supporting parties which would challenge the system of one party rule and the totalitarian claim of the Congress. This attitude will be consistent with the rejection of party politics and scramble for power, because of the difference between voting and soliciting votes. Radicals should support, and ask others also to support, the most promising opposition party, not with the illusion that the situation would materially change if it replaced the Congress in power, but only to shake the foundation of one party rule, and provided that the opposition candidates are better even of provided integrity. The sincerity of the resolution to stand outside party politics will be demonstrated by refusing to be members of the party or to become their candidates for election.

Cooperation with opposition parties at the time of election, however, does not exhaust the possibilities of the political practice of Radical Democracy. The most
fundamental task is to educate the people. Election campaigns can be utilized for this task. Democracy will not be successful so long as the masses can be swayed by demagogy or appeal to emotions. On the eve of an election, when various parties will make big promises to catch votes, the electorate should be advised and helped to examine the promises and vote intelligently. That will mean political education.

On the same occasion, the people should be told that they are not obliged to vote for this or that party; that they can just as well vote for a locally nominated candidate who will be their man, known to them, and therefore can be controlled more easily. The initial propagandas for the nomination of local candidates, instead of party men, will lead to the formation of People’s Committees. The people will replace the party, and a long step towards real democracy will be taken. That will be political activity of fundamental importance, and active participation in the current politics of the country without engaging in the scramble for power. There are many other forms of non-party political activity designed to spread a spirit of independence and self-help in all day-to-day public affairs of a community.

Those who conceived the idea of organized democracy must now put it into practice. People’s Committees are to be the basic units of an organized democracy; and it is easily imagined how the rise of People’s Committees will mean the beginning of the end of party politics. The experience of individuals working accordingly to this plan in selected place should be a source of general inspiration. Even existing Village Panchayats set up in some parts of the country can be built up as units of organized democracy, defying party control, even of the party in power. To
transform the growing dissatisfaction into an informed and constructively directed opposition to one party rule can become an integral part in a larger scheme of political activity which will transcend the narrow limits of interested party politics. In the prevailing authoritarian atmosphere, one party rule is generally taken for granted. This is a dangerous tendency, which must be combated. Otherwise, a dictatorship with 'democratic' sanction may destroy all hopes of political freedom and social liberation. The cultural tradition of the backward countries being the breeding ground of the danger, it must be, in the first place, fought on the cultural front. Enlightenment, civic education, and spread of knowledge are the weapons. Experience also has a great educative value. Elections are part of that and they will show that in an atmosphere of political illiteracy of the bulk of the electorate and authoritarian mentality of the middle class, even formal parliamentary democracy is not possible. Many even in the ranks of the parties, today, deluded with the hope of coming to power at some time or other, may be expected to learn form the experience the lesson that democracy must be built up from below and, abandoning party politics, will turn to democratic politics. Meanwhile, the pioneers must show that politics without party is possible

The last Conference of the Radical Democratic Party marked the opening of a new chapter in contemporary political history with the decision to transform a political party into to broad and comprehensive social movement for the spread of education for democracy and the promotion of the ideal of freedom. The decision is probably unprecedented in the history of political institutions. Instance of political organizations having atrophied, decayed or decomposed may not be wanting, nor case of organizations having dissolved their separate entity with a view to merging into
another. But several hundred delegates possessed of political convection and
enthusiasm deciding after prolonged deliberations to transform a political
organization of their own creation, is perhaps unique. It amounts at once to an
assertion of man’s sovereignty and creativity.

The decision of the Conference at Calcutta was a logical deduction of the
philosophy of New Humanism formulated by the Radical Democrats two years
earlier. As a result, the Radical Democratic Party already had been engaged in
developing a comprehensive social movement. Having abjured the aim of power, it
had placed itself outside the scramble for it, the only sense in which politics seems to
be understood in our times. The activities carried on by the party could not lend
themselves to be measured by the standards generally applied to a traditional political
party. A certain anomalous position had thus arisen between those activities and the
designation of a party, which on occasions created confusion even in the minds of
those who otherwise sympathized with and supported the cause of Radical
Democracy. The Calcutta decision ends that anomaly and thus removes what
constituted, in a way, a limitation on those activities.

The Radical Democratic Party had the tradition of freedom and rationality in
its own ranks. That enabled the Party to take such a decision. Throughout the period
of its existence, it functioned as a school for the education of its members to develop
into better human beings, and never as a collectivity with a transcendental
significance, demanding the sacrifice of their individuality from its constituents. It
had no existence of its own, over and above and independent of its constituents which
could enchain its creators and reduce it to the position of subordination. It was an expression of the cooperative activity of Radical Democrats, inspired by a common ideal, as such, it was free from the organizational characteristics of political parties, many of which are necessary corollaries of their being engaged in coming to power. The discipline in its ranks was an expression of organizational ethics and never meant to be a code of conduct enforced with a whip. Responsibilities were voluntarily accepted and authority had mostly suggestive and directive significance.

Built up in this manner, the Party never claimed a strong mechanical apparatus with huge mass membership which could be no more than a blind following in the prevailing atmosphere of cultural backwardness. But it did surpass any other group in the country in respect of its intellectual integrity and spiritual strength. These were often proved beyond doubt during the short period of its existence, when the Party had to struggle against overwhelming odds, and were recognized even by those who disagreed with it. In the successive waves of nationalist mass hysteria, Radical Democrats alone stood firm, reminding the people that so long as politics was based on emotion and prejudice, it could not bring them freedom. They went against the popular current because to them intellectual and moral integrity always counted for more than immediate and temporary success.

Though the Radical Democratic Party was a comparatively small political party, its traditions and functioning gave it a cohesion that is rarely seen in any political groups. The decision of the Radical Democrats to cease functioning as a
political party is an expression of that spirit struggling to expand beyond the limits of a closed group.

Inspired by a democratic ideal and aiming at the construction of a political apparatus in which power would be effectively vested in the people as a whole, it could not and did not endeavor to function as an intermediary between the people and the state. The task it had formulated for itself was the diffusion of power, and meant to remove the gulf between the ruler and the ruled, which has so often proved to be destructive of democracy, even within the framework of formal representative institutions. The party could not therefore achieve its task through the capture of power, not even by the aid of the ballot box, much less through insurrectionary means. It was thus neither a constitutional nor revolutionary party in the traditional sense. Sharing a common ideal, the Radical Democrats were united in an organization which worked for the diffusion of knowledge as the essential precondition for the diffusion of power and the building up of the institutions for a free and democratic society. Given this nature of their task and the activity which followed from it, it was difficult to see why they should remain a political party. The decision to cease doing so simply signifies recognition of that difficulty and an endeavor to remove it.

This difficulty was to one of their creation, but one which Radical Democrats had to face in the process of the development of their activities. Having abjured the aim of power and thus placed themselves by their own choice outside the game of power politics, there is no reason why they should have exposed their cooperative effort to be judged by rules and standards relevant to that game. Having been an
entirely different kind of political party, there is no reason why they should have tied themselves to a name denitrified by a form of organization which they rejected as undemocratic. Engaged in activities to promote the freedom and well being of all, they were stultified by an organizational form which by its very nature is sectarian, and erects barriers against non-members. After all, the term 'party' has a meaning; it signifies a part of the people, sharing a particular ideal, and engaged in activities with the purpose of achieving it, which invariably imply its dominating the whole as an indispensable stage.

Education of the citizens and gradual building up of a new political structure from below are the only guarantees against these dangers of the party system. Education will make people consistently self reliant, rational, discriminating and hence capable of protecting themselves from being easy victims to mass hypnosis of one kind or the other, and only room among such people can a new institutional framework crystallize which will provide the guarantee against an individual or group of individuals dominating and exploiting them. The institutional framework of parliamentary democracy with its inherent concentration of power in the hands of few through the political parties can hardly be expected to fulfill this need. It is not in the nature of political parties to function in this role. Leaving aside the obviously monolithic parties frankly aiming at the establishment of a dictatorial rule, even a constitutional party seeking to obtain the support of a majority through the ballot box in order to control the political state apparatus cannot make it its primary task to educate the people. Being involved in the game of power, it has to play it according to the rules, and objective political education of the people might be a means to defeat
the end of coming to power. That a party comes to power backed by a majority is no proof and guarantee that it is democratic. And education of the people may also militate against its next objective of remaining in power.

To have discarded the organizational form of a party does not in any way, even remotely imply that Radical Democrats will eschew politics. Those who cannot conceive of politics without the incentive of power, and therefore without a party, are not the best doctors for the maladies of our time. They themselves need to be cured. Political parties have been instruments devised mainly for the smooth functioning of the political apparatus of parliamentary democracy, which seldom went further than paying lip service to the sovereignty of the human being. In the contemporary context it does not the sovereignty of the human being. In the contemporary context it does not guarantee even the continuation of that formality. The problem of democracy can therefore no longer be solved by political parties. It is a deeper and more comprehensive problem than one of institutional adjustment. It can be solved only by a comprehensive social movement, developed on the basis of the realization of the ultimate identity of political, economic and moral problems and inspired by a philosophy capable of suggesting solutions to them all. “New Humanism”, of which Radical Democracy is the political expression, is such a philosophy. Guided by this philosophy, Radical Democrats will now endeavor to develop a Radical Humanist Movement, and in consequence discard a form of organization which had become irrelevant to their task.
The challenge of theorizing the party system in India at the state level has never been felt as acutely as it has been in the last decade or so. One reason for this is too obvious to miss. The 1990s have witnessed a sea change in the political arena in India. The map of Indian politics today appears strikingly different from what it was in the late 1980s. Professional students of politics have begun to see this change from the late 1980s to the 1990s as signifying a reconfiguration of Indian politics: it is not just that the game has started yielding different and surprising results; in some way the rules of the game itself have changed.

The 1990s have unleashed several independent yet simultaneous trajectories. The intensity of electoral competition has increased with the rise in electoral volatility. This has been accompanied by something of a participatory upsurge. The level of political has shifted from the all India level to the states. The national electoral verdict appears no more than an aggregation of state level verdicts. These changes have been accompanied by a change in the idiom of politics. All this adds up to quite a messy picture. Messy, not only because many of these dimensions are intertwined, but also because we do not understand many of these very well and lack a frame to see their interconnection.

A word about the perspective that informs this reading of the party system may not be out of place here. We are interested in the party system because we are interested in the possibilities of social transformation in and through democratic
politics. We are interested in mechanisms through which competitive politics opens or closes possibilities of expanding meaningfully the available range of options or the probability of the more effective options being taken up. The party system is critical mediating factor in this possible relationship between democratic politics and social transformation. The party system defines the structure of political competition that shapes and constrains the political choices that a citizen can exercise. The party system thus form the menu of choices that determine the possibility of social transformation through democratic means. To believe in this is to share the conviction that democratic politics opens the possibility of electoral choice being turned into a radical instrument of social change, of rearranging the composition of the power elite, of renegotiating the political agendas, of redefining the relations of power in society. At the same time this reading is tempered by the knowledge that the operation of structures of social and economic inequality works systematically against the realization of this possibility.

Emergence of State Politics as a Frontier Discipline

One of the significant development both in real politics and in the academic enterprise of making sense of politics has been the emergence of state politics as the centre of attention. Once upon a time, the study of Indian politics involved ‘national’ level politics alone. State politics was seen as a mater of detail and would be referred to only as an unavoidable appendage of all India politics. Delhi, Nehru and the national level political competition used to constitute the fact of Indian politics and the subject matter of the study of Indian politics. Two unstated assumptions informed
this observation: one, that state politics was different from national politics and two, that state politics from the perspective of state was a matter of interesting detail, but just that. For an earlier generation of theorists of Indian politics, this was perhaps a natural reaction in view of the background of the national movement and the task of 'nation building' in which the national level political class was presumably engaged. In contrast, politics at the state level was about power, personal aggrandizement, parochial interests and their protection through lobbying, etc. also, in the 1950s and the 1960s one could understand a good deal of politics, by looking exclusively at the national level politics, national level leadership, policymaking and so on. Reference to states could be relegated to the margins of political analysis. Given the monotonous dominance of the Congress everywhere, state politics must have appeared a poor copy of national level politics. As political developments unfolded through the 1960s, the discipline of state politics emerged gradually. The inadequacy of analyses of Indian politics focusing exclusively on the national level became apparent as states actually started playing a crucial role in shaping the so called national level politics. Thus, studies on individual states started taking place.

In fact many studies of state politics were a response to the felt unintelligibility of national politics in the absence of state level analysis. The framework of national politics was supposed to be a given and whenever that given was not strictly followed, scholars turned to the study of state politics to find out what was wrong with Indian politics and how it was likely to restore the natural framework. As Indira Gandhi came to power and sought to redefine some aspects of the political game in India, observers were inclined to believe that it was the end of the given...
framework. This gave rise to the language of crises, deinstitutionalization and restoration observers to mean that it was the state of equilibrium necessary for democracy to survive in India.

The developments in the 1990s and scholarly response to them have contributed to the emergence of state politics as the frontier discipline essential for a nuanced understanding of India politics. However, this realization is yet to change the face of the discipline. Many of the studies of state politics rarely adopt a comparative perspective or ask questions that would lead to the theorization of Indian politics (Chhibber & Nooruddin 1999; Church 1984; Dreze and Sen 1998; Frankel and Rao 1989, 1990; Kothari 1970; Roy and Wallace 1999; Wallace and Roy 2003; Weiner 1968; Wood 1984). The usual practice is to review the politics of different states and stop there. Yet there are sings of a fresh beginning being made in the 1990s in the direction of a truly comparative study of state politics that could lead to a reappraisal of Indian politics. The growing literature includes three kinds of works. First, there are some studies that focus on a single state, but use it to develop a larger argument about Indian Politics. These include Jaffrelot (1993) on Madhya Pradesh, Narendra Subramanian (1990) on Tamil Nadu, Zoya Hasan (1998) on Uttar Pradesh, D.L. Sheth (2002) and Ghanshyam Shah (2002) on Gujarat, Peter de Souza (1999) on Goa and some article in the Economic and Political Weekly collection on electoral politics. Second, there are some studies that offer direct comparison of politics in more than one state. Third, some analysts have attempted to offer an overview of the trends and patterns of party politics across a number of states (Jaffrelot 1993; Kumar 2000; Sridharan 2002; Yadav 1996, 1999). While Sridharan's detailed analysis ends by
emphasizing the structural more than the social aspect of political competition, Jaffrelot’s (1993) study focuses on the strategic alternatives available to the Congress after its decline had already begun. For instance, Sridharan argues that systemic properties explain most satisfactorily the changes in India’s party system. A more ambitious and comprehensive framework for the study of state level party politics is offered by Harriss (1999). He pleads for differentiating state level party systems on the basis of the caste and class balance in the respective states. Our attempt here is to draw upon this growing literature and to contributed to it by looking back at the last 50 years of Indian politics, from the vantage point of the present movement in order to link the change in the party system and electoral politics to the developments in the field of states politics. While there is a considerable amount of literature on state level electoral politics, this has not produced any new thinking on the party system in India. As a matter of fact, analyses of changes in India’s party system often stop at declaring the decline of the Congress and the arrival of the post Congress polity. That these developments were taking place at the state level and not just at the all India level is somewhat ignored. It may also be said that analyses of Indian politics do not take into consideration the issues of social change seriously. The party system and social change are seldom seen as interrelated.

**Congress System Revisited**

Any attempt to understand the changes in the party system in contemporary India must begin by asking one elementary question: what is that original point with reference to which we seek to measure the change? An answer to this enables us to
take the next logical step and ask: what has changed with respect to the party system
Implicit in the current readings of Indian politics, there often exists a map of Indian politics, which existed in the era prior to the contemporary cataclysmic changes. This map or picture informs the contrast that is often drawn. The party system is now said to be moving from a one party dominance system to a multi party competition, from social cohesion to fragmentation, from a stable pattern to fluidity, from order to chaos as the principle of party competition. In order to rethink the dominant picture of the party system as it exists today, it is necessary to revisit that point of departure itself.

Since the 1960s a commonsense had evolved about the nature of party political competition through the first decade and a half of India’s democratic experience. The most powerful formulation of this commonsense was, of course, captured by the term, ‘congress system’. Developed in the mid 1960s, this formulation served to summarize India’s competitive politics through the 1970s. It was a bold attempt to theorize the unique party system that India had developed that did not fit the straightjacket of the one party system or multi party competition. Kothari (1989) himself ‘revisited’ the idea of the Congress system in the mid-1970s and concluded that though some modification needed to be made to the original formulation, the basic idea could be deployed for understanding the structure of party political competition in the 1970s and perhaps beyond.

The Congress system formulation contained the argument that in spite of an apparent one party dominance, inter party and intra party competition did take place. This competition often took place within the confines of a consensus because the
Congress Party was occupying the ‘centre’; opposition was allowed both within the margins of this centre, inside the Congress Party, and outside it. Apart from the structural features, Kothari’s formulation involved an ideological component. The Congress system was a system of legitimacy. The issue was establishment of a democratic authority. This was achieved in India on the basis of a historical consensus that was converted by the party system into present consensus. This was possible because the congress system encompassed all major sections and interests of society. Kothari believed that the Congress system combined the efforts to gain legitimacy and the efforts towards social transformation. The system did so by inducting, perhaps neutralizing, all potential sources of disaffection. The Congress Party’s democratic background and the policies adopted by the Congress government were instrumental in achieving this objective. This model emphasized the role of the government in social change. Also, in Kothari’s initial formulation, Nehru’s leadership layed a very important part in shaping this aspect of the congress system.

The mid-1970s witnessed the initial challenge to the Congress system. In the 1980s the Congress Party managed to return to power, though the Congress system was considerably weakened. Cataclysmic events since the late 1980s changed both the discourse and the framework of Indian politics. Yet, it is worth noting that analyses of these changes were often anchored to the framework of the Congress system. This point to the obvious strength of the idea of the Congress system argument. Instead of trying to fit India into the received images or models of party competition from the West, Kothari’s formulation sought to capture the specificity of Indian politics. It recognized the fact of one party dominance without accepting the image of the
authoritarian nature of politics associated with it. Refuting the implication that there was a closure in this form of political competition, the formulation drew attention to the oppositional role of the factions within the Congress, a feature that gave a competitive character to both inter and intra party politics.

These merits and strengths of the Congress system argument, or at least its popular versions, may have overlooked or underemphasized some aspects of the party system as it prevailed through the 1960s. In revisiting the Congress system, we need to have a quick look at these aspects. First of all, the formulation drew our attention away from the simple fact that anything between a quarter to a half of India was never conversed by the Congress system. West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab are examples of states where the Congress system met with opposition early on or simply did not dominate. Besides, states like Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Assam were states where the Congress continued in power but was far from exercising dominance. Kothari himself points out that in the ex princely states the Congress system was weak. But viewed in a totality, these exceptions are just too many and too significant to ignore. The only conclusion we can draw from these exceptions is that the Congress system was perhaps a description of the party system existing at the national level more than the description of Indian party system.

Second, in Kothari’s formulation, the Congress system was presented as a natural outcome of an unequal and de centered society where a political centre was instituted. This invited the reader to think that they system had greater enduring capacity than it really did. Thanks to this formulation, the Congress system appeared as
a regular and long term phenomenon whose absence or erosion required explanation. In retrospect, it appears that Kothari may have read too much into what was a temporary political form of the first phase of competitive political mobilization. At a time when mobilization was rather limited, political competition could be conducted only in a circumscribed manner. In the Indian context, the existence of Congress as a movement, as a party, and as an instrument of government, combined with a towering and popular leader produced a particular structure of competition. There was nothing in this situation that ensured the continuation of the Congress system once the terms of popular mobilization changed.

Third, the Congress system argument underline the ‘catch-all’ and consensual nature of politics. This description was factually correct However, it does not probe the inner logic of this consensus. Nor does the argument take notice of the play of dominant interests. The ‘catch-all’ character and the facade of consensus helped the Congress system in two respects. In the first place, the Congress system sought to make compromises with upper castes and allowed their domination in the political realm. A consensus about procedural democracy coupled with welfare oriented developmentalism helped in de emphasizing the claims of the lower castes. On the other hand, the catch all character of the Congress Party won elections for it, without forcing any change in its policies or leadership pattern. The Congress Party was supported by the masses, which belonged to various social backgrounds. This gave the party the famous tag of a ‘catch-all’ party. At the same time, the party and the Congress system worked to keep the Dalits, advises, peasants and workers, at a distance for positions of power. The Congress system was based on a trade off: the
Congress party would symbolically incorporate the various social sections, but the party's upper class upper caste leadership should be recognized as legitimate and as representative of the masses. In other words, the Congress system was not really as open as its theorists thought it was: it was as much about exclusion as it was about inclusion. Under the cloak of consensus, a distance was always maintained between the supporters and the beneficiaries of the Congress system. Perhaps, this was possible because, as Kothari himself points out, the political class as a whole came from a common social background and was not sensitive to these sociological dimensions of democracy. This consensual nature of the political elite and their common perception of the nation and development were the core of the consensus, rather than any socially agreed vision or consensus in the true sense of the term.

There is also a tendency in Kothari's argument to underplay the plebiscitary nature of politics right from the beginning of India's democratic politics in the post independence period. With hindsight, we can say that Kothari may have overstated the system dimension of party competition. The Congress, in spite of being a well knit organization, depended quite happily on the charisma of Nehru for winning election. It was a combination of state level organization and Nehru's plebiscitary leadership that ensured the dominance of the Congress. The organization alone could not have brought the success which the Congress enjoyed for a long time. In fact, Indian politics in general and the Congress movement in particular, always had this plebiscitary character even in the pre independence period. In the post independence period, successive elections were turned into plebiscites. Just as the organizational dimension helped the Congress marginalize the opposition parties, the plebiscitary
leadership style ensured that issues would be framed in a fuzzy manner, that the focus would be more on personal charisma than on concrete programmers or performances. As we know, this characteristic continued and played an important part in politics in the 1970s.

This critique of the Congress system does not render the formulation obsolete. In fact, the label the Congress system needs to be retained since it reminds us of the principal character of Indian politics in a particular era. Our purpose in developing this critique is two fold. First, we which to underline the point that the Congress system was necessarily a short term response to the early phase of democratic mobilization following the opening up of the floodgates of universal franchise. This puts in perspective the of expressed nostalgia for the return of the Congress system: this no stagehands a desire to go back to a stage of democracy when the masses were not politicized, when politics was still the game of the few. Second, the critique serves to remind us that the consensus of the Congress system was a hegemonic construct: it did allow for incubation of democratic politics and for a safe experiment with social change, yet it could not have been the political form for a full fledged engagement of competitive politics with social transformation. Very early in its long life, the Congress system had become a constraint on the possibility of transformative politics.

A model for Party System

It is very common to invoke the term ‘party system’ in any discussion of Indian politics. But more often than not a discussion of the party system tends to be a
loose and generalized way of discussing shred attributes of parties in a given political system. Or else, it is a simple numeric description of the number of relevant parties in a given polity: one party systems, two party or bipolar systems and multi party systems. Both these prevalent ways of discussing the party system lose sight of the basic point behind the idea of a party system: that it is a ‘system’ that conditions and constrains all the parties that operate within it, that it is more than the sum of the parts. Therefore, we need to distinguish between changing fortunes of parties and changes in the party system. For instance, what we are looking for in this chapter is not so much an explanation for why the Congress came to lose power, but how and why it found itself facing a radically different pattern of political competition, and its implication of the existing parties and for popular mobilizations. Thus, the basic idea is to grasp that the configuration in which parties find themselves locked happens to be an independent factor that constrains what individual parties and voters can do. In this sense, this configuration provides a framework within which party competition and popular mobilization take place. The nature and structure of the competition determine how open or closed a party system is in processing societal claims, in allowing new entrants, in admitting unattended issues, etc.

At an epistemic plane, the conventional thinking about party systems tends to be passive in that it is assumed that there is a correct classification of the party system that cuts across time and space. In that understanding the task of a political analyst is to identify the right classification and place the polity under examination in the appropriate slot in a given typology. Epistemic commonsense and political wisdom requires us to more away from such a passive stance vis-à-vis the received
classifications. For classifications and typologies are not out there these are analytical constructs meant to put cognitive order on the material we seek to examine. Typologies are thus, not right or wrong they are more or less helpful depending on how well they allow us to order the experience that we seek to categorize and in answering the questions that led us to this typology. On this understanding, the exercise of classification is dependent on our vantage point, our location, and our objectives. Therefore, this attempt to understand the role of the party system in democratic politics of social transformation cannot take up and simply deploy the received typologies of party system. We most interrogate the received classifications from our vantage point: the experience of competitive politics in India in the second half of the 20th century and the search for democratic politics for social transformation.

Once we foreground these concerns, it is clear that there has been something of a regress in thinking about the specificity of the party system in India after the decline of the Congress. Notwithstanding the limitations in the theorization of the Congress system, no one can deny that a lot of thought went into the understanding of the party system that operated in the first phase of democratic politics in India. The uniqueness of the political situation forced Indian political scientists to look beyond mechanical replication of the party system models received from the West. The decline of the Congress has removed that constraint and has produced a surface resemblance between the party system in India and its counterparts all over the world. This has led to a tendency to slip into the traditional classifications of the party system produced by old style comparative politics.
Nature of Political Choices

This condition obtains when the different parties offer radically different policy packages that have perceived consequences for the lives of ordinary citizens. This often comes about at the time of the rise of a new political formation that challenges the existing political spectrum on issues of policy and practice (e.g., the rise of the Left Front to power in West Bengal through the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of DMK in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s) or in conditions of deep social upheaval and ethnic strife (UP and Bihar in the 1990s, Punjab in the 1980s Assam during 1980-85) or both (Kerala in the 1950). The voters choose between very different options with long term consequences. This tends to be a short lived phase, for periods of wide options are soon followed by a narrowing range of options. Either the original challenger dilutes its agenda. Eg., AGP in Assam or the rivals adopt the new agenda (e.g., rise of AIADMK as a rival to DMK in Tamil Nadu) or there is a mix of the two (e.g., West Bengal since the establishment of the Left Front dominance).

This is the nodal category of bourgeois democracy often celebrated as the basis of moderation and stability and derided by its radical critics as offering factious choices. There are choices but within defined limits. The main parties do not offer anything that is substantially different except a certain brand image. Usually political competition takes place around rival claims of doing the same thin better than the other. Sharp ideological differences are avoided by the principal political parties. Much of the differences revolve around one or two highly publicized issues of symbolic significances or around major personalities. Rajni Kothari had pointed out
that the Congress system, despite being dominated by one party, offered a moderate choice as a result of factional disputes and contestations within the ruling party. In contemporary times, the choice available in states dominated by the Congress BJP contestation (Rajasthan, MP, Delhi, HP, Gujarat) offer a classic instance of this category. Both parties do not even pretend to offer any different economic or social policy. Even on the question of communalism, that ostensibly divides them, both parties make sure that they are not at a great distance from the operational position of the other. The same is true of Congress TDP competition in Andhra Pradesh or Congress Janata DAI contest in Karnataka. This category also includes instances of states where politics of radical choices in on the retreat. The difference between the UDF and the LDF in Kerala today or the choice available in West Bengal. Uttar Pradesh or Bihar can only be described as a moderate choice.

This category includes two very different types of cases. On the one hand there are instances where political choices were forcibly denied by use of undemocratic means (e.g., J and K and Nagaland) and imposition of regimes that lacked political legitimacy. On the other hand, there are cases where the absence of party structures means that there is virtually no systematic choice that the voters get to evaluate. Choice, if any, is available at the local and personal level, and not at the party political level. Democratic theory would have us believe that such instance is exceptions that will be eliminated once competitive mobilization passes initial stages. But the Indian experience shows that such maladies can get institutionalized.
Having discussed the two dimensions separately, we can now discuss their interaction and the cumulative effect on the party system. Summarizes the interaction of the two dimensions and spells out the seven party system types that result from this.

Structure of Political Competition and Nature of Political Power in Indian States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitive Format</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of Choices</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shallow and/or no choice</td>
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The interaction of three categories on each dimension (the two-plus category of competitive format has been merged with ‘bipolar’ for reasons of convenience here) would yield nine cells in all. But the merging of two possible cells with their neighbors has reduced the number to seven. Each of these seven cells represents a certain combination of competitive form and the range of choice available within that system. Each cell mentions the dominant characteristic of the nature of political power in that category. The cell also contains some illustrations that capture the characteristics of that system.

Of the seven party system types that this classification yields, four can be said to belong to the regular types of party systems that are prevalent in post independence India. These are:

1. System of unipolar hegemony
2. System of bipolar convergence
3. System of multipolar convergence
4. System of competitive divergence

Besides these, there are three irregular system types, each of which is the product of special and unusual circumstances. These are:

1. System of one party domination
2. Closed one party system
3. System less competition
It cannot be overemphasized that each of these is an ideal type, illustrated by a few states and that too in a specific period of history. It is not necessary that each state must fit one of these categories neatly all the time. At any given time, a state may combine elements from different systems. A detailed analysis of these seven categories may help us appreciate this point better.

The discussion of the Congress system in the previous section captured the structural attributes of the system of unipolar hegemony specific to India. It was a unipolar system in that political competition revolved around and was defined with reference to the one dominant actor. The hegemony of the Congress was sustained through its catch all character, through its capacity to forge a rainbow coalition of all kinds of social groups. The system depended on not allowing deep social or ideological cleavages to be politically activated. It is important to emphasize that unipolar hegemony of this kind does not depend on legal or actual elimination of rival political parties from the field of political competition. In that sense it is different from one party systems that came up in many third World countries. More importantly, it differs from these one party regimes in that the Congress system allowed external critique and internal dissent. The various factions within the congress performed the function of opposition. The options available to the citizen were no doubt severely limited, but the range was not much narrower than the one offered by moderate two party systems in the advanced industrial countries. This category is so much intertwined with the Congress system that operated in India it is hardly surprising that most of the classical illustrations should come from it.
Two Lives of the Congress System

After this long but necessary detour, we can now resume our journey of the evolution of the party system in the Indian states and evaluate the usefulness of the revised typology of the party system offered above. We have already noted that the Congress system was a product of the specific context in which democratic politics unfolded and became institutionalized in post independence India. In order to appreciate this point, one needs to be sensitive to the historical contrast between the path of bourgeois democracy in the West and the trajectory of democratic politics in post colonial societies. In the West, enfranchisement was a gradual process. As this process was in progress, social divisions were also taking shape. Thus, the final movement of enfranchisement was also the moment of freezing of party political divisions. This happened because mobilization along various social divisions and evolution of political organizations around these divisions had already taken place. Broadly, the national revolution and the industrial revolution created structures of cleavages that formed political divisions.

In India, the anti colonial struggle that provided a platform for powerful and mass mobilization also foreclosed the entry of many social cleavages into competitive politics. Thus, the introduction of universal adult franchise took place in a situation where structure of cleavages had not evolved and thus, a large part of society was yet to be mobilized. This provided an extraordinary autonomy to politics in 20th century India, for it could activate, institute or mask various kinds of potential cleavages. The national movement played a crucial role in this regard. It was not that various
competing cleavages dictated terms to this political movement; it was rather the national movement that played a decisive role in upholding certain cleavages and pushing some other to the background.

At the moment of independence, quite a few social divisions were available for political mobilization. Even a cursory look at these would invite a question as to why many of these were never actualized in politics. At the micro level, the village community, the jati, locality, were the possible platforms of mobilization. At the macro level, caste blocs, communal divisions, regional divisions within and among states, could become some of the political cleavages. Also, the division between rural and urban interests, division between the agricultural and modern economic sector could have become the bases of political contestations. Or, ideological divisions on the basis of modern vs traditional and Left vs Right were also potential platforms for political mobilization. Mobilization could also take place along issue based or class based divisions.

These potential cleavages were mediated by the imperatives of the design of modern democracy. The institutional arrangements adopted by modern democracy coupled with the background of the nationalist movement made it necessary to mobilize people on a macro scale. Political competition too, came to be conducted on the all India basis. This meant that localized, micro level divisions would not gain relevance. The aggregative compulsions of a first past the post electoral system did not encourage the formation of cleavage based politics. Some social categories were recognized constitutionally thus provide space for mobilization on these groups (SCs,
STs, OBCs) which some others though not recognized, already existed (Muslims, for instance). The system of reserved seats in joint or single electorates, however, limited the potential of these categories for exclusivist mobilization.

Partition of the country foreclosed the possibility of mobilization on the basis of minority status (particularly in the case of the Muslim community). The minority category was accommodated by including minority rights in the constitution and postponing the issue of reform in personal laws of the minorities. Ironically, these very features were to later become the basis of mobilization both among the majority community and the Muslim minority. In the course of the freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi, two other social divisions were accepted as more or less authentic. One was the rural urban divide. The other was regional identity based on linguistic states. In the post independence period, the rural urban divide could not develop as a basis of political mobilization, for the Congress began with a support base that cut across this divide. Language did become a platform for mobilization but once again the Congress was well placed to tackle it. By accepting the demand for the reorganization of states on linguistic basis, the Congress rendered the language divide politically harmless.

In the period immediately following independence, political parties attempted to cultivate social support by appropriating the different potential divisions. The map of the party system of this period reflected the different spaces available for mobilization during that period. It also reflected the map of political movements of the first half of the 20th century. The depth of support enjoyed by different parties
corresponded to the way in which the Congress in the pre independence period related to the various divisions in the Indian society. Thus, during the first decade of independence, Congress was quite strong in parts of north India where it had accommodated the upper caste landed interests within the scope of its nationalist rhetoric. It was also strong in the areas where, as in Maharashtra, it had amalgamated the middle peasantry castes with a moderate reformist appeal. In other words, the Congress cultivated different social sections in different parts of the country and put them together on the basis of the nationalist ideology. Hence, the nationalist ideology performed an aggregative function.

The Congress sought to mobilize the people on the basis of the pre independence dichotomization based on the idea of the 'nation'. This master cleavage put other more specific cleavage based mobilizations in a position of disadvantage. The socialists were looking forward to an ideology based political division and sought to take advantage of the legacy of the 1942 Quit India movement. The communist were quite strong in West Bengal and the Telangana region as also in Kerala. They pushed the class divisions to the forefront particularly in the context of landlordism. The legacy of the self respect movement and land reform movement along with trade unions industrial centers formed the bases of the communist mobilizations. The Swatantra party made initial inroads in the ex-princely states while the Bharatiy Jan Sangh (BJS), an offshoot of the RSS, sought to construct a Hindu constituency by capitalizing on the anti Musli sentiment among the upper castes. The social justice movement formed the basis of the Dravida Kazhagan (DM) in South India, while the Akali movement gave birth to the Akali party in the Punjab. This brief summary is
indicative of the nature of most of the non Congress parties that operated in the period immediately following independence. While these parties corresponded to the different potential divisions in the society, they stood in contrast to the aggregative character of the Congress Party. Also, the support base of these parties depended upon the extent to which these divisions were actually explored for mobilization in the course of the nationalist movement. Mobilizations which were either explored by the Congress itself, or which evolved in spite of the Congress (as in the case of the Social Justice movement) or, had sympathizers within the Congress (as in case of the supporters of Hindu nationalism) stood some chance of being relevant in the post independence period as independent political formations or as viable political issues within the Congress party.

'Congress system' was the inevitable product of this period and this torical backdrop. The central cleavage instituted by the nationalist movement (colonial rule vs the Indian nation) was aggregative in nature and strong enough to override almost all other divisions. The Congress project was the creation of a national political community that cut across all divisions. This engagement with the imaginary institution of India continued after independence. The Congress became a rainbow coalition precluding other cleavages from any significant space in the political arena. It must be noted however, that other cleavages were not, at least on the whole, denied legitimate existence; they were instead accommodated. We have already noted the accommodation of regional, linguistic cleavages. By a series of micro designs and localized coalitions, the Congress managed to hold together the macro design called the national political community. This gave the Congress a catch all character
constituting cross cutting cleavages. To go back to our typology, the Congress system had the political form of a one hegemonic party that allowed competition, dissent and opposition. Its hegemony never allowed political divisions to be intense, either in terms of exclusiveness of the party structure or in terms of ideological persuasions.

The Moment of Reconfiguration and Differentiation

The second life of the Congress system came to an abrupt end, an abruptness that could only be seen retrospectively. The last years of Rajiv Gandhi’s regime provided ample signs that the Congress system was increasingly becoming a closed system, devoid of any meaningful choices. The huge majorities enjoyed by the Congress in most of the states of north and west India in the wake of Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination became a stone around its neck. By insulating the party against any pressure from within or outside, these massive majorities served to block the few remaining avenues of political system of one party hegemony, the reality was somewhat different.

The Congress system was developing elements of both the other possibilities inherent in situation of one party dominance: that of exclusion and closure. The legacy of the last phase of Mrs Gandhi’s regime had turned it into a system of domination over the various minorities and ethnic nationalities. Rajiv Gandhi’s regime had the effect of making the regime appear as a closed one party system, that left little for citizens to choose from. Towards the end of its second life, the Congress system desperately needed an overhaul; it needed nothing short of a third attempt to
reinvent a national political community and in the process reinvent the Congress the way Mrs Gandhi did. Rajiv Gandhi was simply not up to this historic task.

The hold of Rajiv Gandhi over the imagination of India’s middle classes began to slip after the Bofors’ exposure of 1987-88. The run up the 1989 Lok Sabha elections indicated a stiff challenge to the Congress; the result was worse than the Congress feared. But even the defeat of the Congress in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections did not suggest a collapse of the Congress system. On the face of it, the election results of 1989 seemed to be the repetition of the familiar pattern of 1977: opposition unity, popular wave in north India against Congress Party, a repetition of the Lok Sabha results in the round of assembly elections held in 1990, disintegration of JD-BJP alliance reminiscent of the break up of Janata party, formation of minority government by Chandrashekhar on the lines of the Charan Singh regime. All the details seemed to fit in the model of 1977-79. It was therefore, natural to expect the return of the Congress in the 1991 elections to the Lok Sabha. That did not happen, not even with the support of a sympathy swing after Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination during the campaign. This, perhaps, was the moment of the demise of the Congress system. Ironically, the first government to be formed in the post Congress polity was a Congress government. But the rules of the game had now changed. This was demonstrated by a string of Congress defeats in the series of Assembly election between 1993 and 1995.

Transition from the Congress system to the post Congress polity was neither gradual nor smooth. It was a product of a systemic shock, a cataclysmic
transformation. It was not merely the change in the ruling party or a change in the political actors engaged in competition for power. The terms of political competition and the issues involved in this competition changed dramatically around this time. This period was marked by a fundamental reconfiguration of the party political space. While the decline of the Congress seemed like a crisis initially, it was also an opportunity to revitalize the democratic political competition and trade greater substance in this.

This reconfiguration of the structure of political competition was marked by the arrival of the three ‘Ms’ on to the national political stage: Mandir, Mandal and Market. This movement of sudden transformation deserves careful recall and scrutiny, if only to understand better the momentous consequences of some of the changes that happened almost overnight. The controversy over the disputed site at Ayodhya was revived by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and latter picked up by the RSS and the BJP. This resulted in the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, which witnessed high emotional mobilization among the Hindus and attempts at constructing a homogenized Hindu constituency across caste and region. However, the political of Mandir brought into sharp focus questions about the plural character of Indian society and the resilience of the democratic political process. The Mandir controversy was associated with division of the society between majority and minority religious communities, series of episodes of communal violence and challenges to the institutional set up. With Advani and Govindacharya as the chief architects, the Mandir issue sought to shift the terms of political discourse from plural democracy to majoritarian politics. What began in the 1980s as an agitation by a small section of
fanatics, turned into a major framework for conducting politics during the 1990s. Even before the actual demolition of the Babari Masjid in December 1992, the Politics of Mandir had already occupied a central position in national politics. The BJP was catapulted to the centre state by the events of 1989-91. First, the BJP propped up the V.P. Singh government so long as it suited the interests of the BJP. Then the BJP came to power in the most crucial states, Uttar Pradesh. This was followed by the party’s spectacular performance in the Lok Sabha elections of 1991, that saw the BJP emerge as the main opposition party at the national level.

But alongside these developments, this period also witnessed the unfolding of another process, the rise of Dalits and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Indian Politics. Politics of the backward classes has a long history. In the state of south India, the rise of the backward classes had taken place in the 1960s. But both in north India and at the national level, the entry of the backward classes was stoutly resisted. The failure of the Congress to adapt to the ambitions of these sections in most parts of the country and especially in north India had cost it dearly in 1977-78. Yet, the party chose to ignore the recommendations of the Mandal Commission and let the report of the Mandal Commission become the symbol around which politics of the Other Backward Classes was built in north India. When the recommendations were actually accepted by the V.P. Singh government, clashes between the forward castes and the backward castes took place in north India. Both the Congress and the BJP sought to ride piggyback on this upper caste backlash. The politics of OBCs was already inaugurated. Sweeping the states of U.P. and Bihar, the Mandal issues brought into
focus questions about not only the reservations and backwardness of the 'lower' castes, but also the question of share in political power.

The Mandal factor instituted caste cleavage at the heart of north Indian politics. It set the tone for the discussions of social justice and symbolized the upsurge of the subalterns. The upsurge was not limited to the BOCs. The BSP, under Kanshi Ram's leadership had shifted its emphasis from Punjab and Haryana to Uttar Pradesh and started scoring upsets quietly under the din of Mandir and Mandal. The BSP was to make deft use of the sudden opening in UP Politics and surprise everyone by striking an alliance with the SP and winning the 1993 assembly elections in the state. Up has never been the same again. Although V.P. Singh may be seen as the chief architect of Mandal strategy, the Mandalization of Politics of north India could not have happened without Kanshi Ram, Mayawati, Laloo Prasad and Mulayam Singh. Soon, no party could afford to take this issue lightly.

If Mandir and Mandal had their rise in the late 1980s, the third ‘M’ surfaced as the new decade unfolded. Yet, it may be noted that the beginnings had been made in the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, the Indian state was following somewhat, surreptitiously, the programme of restructuring the following, somewhat surreptitiously, and the programme of restructuring the economy. However, it was only in 1991-92 that bold justifications of the ‘market economy’ started emanating from the official discourse of the Indian state. Narsimha Rao and Manmohan Singh were its architects. Once it emerged, it went almost unchallenged by the political establishment amid the din over Mandir and Mandal. In any case, V.P. Singh was the
finance minister in 1985-86 when Rajiv Gandhi took bold initiatives in this direction and the BJP said that the new initiatives were what it always wanted. Thus, there was little political resistance to the adoption of a new ideological position on the economic policy. But more than a state ideology, ‘Market’ ascended to become the ideology of the intelligentsia, the bureaucracy, the civil society, as it were. A false or misplaced debate over ‘socialism’ quickly gave way to a more fashionable Nehru baiting. By the time the United Front government came to power at the centre, all this was history. The new government quietly and willingly set about the task of continuing the economic policies initiated by its Congress predecessors. When the BJP finally came to power, it sped up the pace of changes, perhaps somewhat brazenly. The Market design of politics did not aim at producing a class cleavage. However, the project of letting loose the middle class consumerist ambition and developing unbridled capitalism ended up instituting class cleavage.

In retrospect, these three ‘Ms’ look like three projects: three new frameworks of politics trying to replace the old and tattered framework left by the Congress system. It is worthwhile to pause and note what the were actually trying to replace. In its first life, the Congress system drew strength from projecting a master cleavage: the nation vs the colonial power. This construction helped the Congress system build a ‘national’ or ‘all India’ political community. This was to be the node around which Congress domination was carved out. In its second life, when the relevance of the earlier cleavage had declined considerably, Indira Gandhi sought to construct the ‘all India community’ by exploiting the cleavage between the poor masses and the rich.
This preliminary overview of the evolution of the party system at the state level brings to our attention a paradox. Our insistence on classifying the party system in Indian context along the two dimensions of the competitive format and the nature of the choice set helps us define this paradox. On the one hand, there is a trend towards opening of the competitive format: single party dominance is now an exception rather than the rule; a large number of states have shifted to a two party or two plus party competition and there are many more multipolar systems than before. On the other hand, there is no clear trend of a corresponding expansion in the range and deepening of the nature of the choice set available to the citizens. If anything, the overall impression is that of stagnation or shrinkage in the choice set. Electoral politics does provide occasions for radical choices to be placed on the political menu. But such choices do not stay there for very long. The analysis offered above suggests something of a systemic 'drag' towards what we have called 'convergence', the tendency for the major players in the party political arena to become like one another and the gradual disappearance from the political agenda of issues with transformative potential.

A tension between these two dimensions of democratic politics has existed for quite some time. But the development of the last decade in Indian Politics has sharpened this contrast. The sudden collapse of the Congress hegemony opened a radical possibility of electoral political competition becoming an instrument of social transformation through effective use of the expanded choices that it was expected to offer. Experience has not borne out this expectation. The emergence of state as the effective unit of political choice and the development of trends and patterns of state
politics independent of one another did open up the stagnant party system for a 
reconfiguration. As a result of this reconfiguration, party political completion has 
become more intense. In some cases this new competitiveness has helped 
marginalized social groups get access to a voice or register their presence. On 
balance, however, it looks like a case of more and more competition about less and 
less. Attempts at transformative politics either do not get to cross the entry barriers or 
are contained in a short span of time through various mechanisms of ‘emptying’ the 
party political space of its content.

Are we dealing here with a practical failure or is it a systemic outcome, 
something that is written in the logic of our kind of democracy? If it is a failure of 
political practice, what is the mechanism of incentives and disincentives that produces 
such a collective outcome? If, on the other hand, we are taking about a systemic 
phenomenon, which system are we talking about the electoral system or the socio 
economic system? What are the institutional constraints that account for the systemic 
‘drag’? We leave these questions for students of comparative democratic experience 
to examine.
End Notes:

7. Burke, E. 'Speech to the Electors of Bristol', in E. Burke, Select Works of Edmund
9. Ibid.,
16. Ibid.,