

# CONTEXTUALISING RELIGIOUS CASTE AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS IN ELECTORAL POLITICS: EMERGING PARADOXES

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Indian politics is confronted with a new set of issues and challenges posed by the dynamic process of development. This is reflected in the qualitative shift from a command to a competitive liberal market economy<sup>1</sup>, from one party dominance to coalition of parties<sup>2</sup>, from nation building to representation of polarised socio-cultural reality into politics<sup>3</sup>. These shifts have brought to the surface certain paradoxes as reflected in the electoral process.

The paradox in electoral promises and mandate of governments, in threat from and need of democratic institutions, in ideological monotheism and ideological pluralism has been reflective of the Indian electoral system since the mid-sixties. As a result it may not be possible to evolve neat categories of political analysis for labelling political parties as pro and anti-economic reforms, communal and non-communal, casteist and non-casteist. In fact, the two national political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), while in power favour economic reforms, but oppose reforms at the time of elections. Similarly, both parties have compromised with communal persuasions. For instance, the Congress has been accused of being anti-Sikh and branded as communal in elections in Punjab, whereas, elsewhere in India the Bharatiya Janata Party has been labelled as communal by the Congress-led front. Therefore, it would be appropriate to analyse the 2004 elections in an historical context and as a process rather than through often misleading labels, pronouncements of political parties and their shifting coalition partners.

Historically, the state-led nation-building project has provided the necessary conditions for the existence of divergent phenomena and also the emergence of paradoxes in electoral politics in India. The nation-building project attempted to bridge the gap between organised interest groups and people without means with a well entrenched middle class<sup>4</sup>. The Congress which has been the main protagonist of the nation-building project claimed in its manifesto for the 2004 parliamentary elections, the creation of the middle class as its main achievement without integrating marginalised sections into the market and decision making system. This strata in collaborative arrangement with the organised interest groups became the custodians of the state while the nation consisting of people without means looked the other way<sup>5</sup>. These poorer sections of society are reduced to mere victims, beneficiaries, clients and recipients. In this dichotomous relationship the state is seen as 'dole giver' and the nation the 'dole receiver'. In other words, a patron-client relationship defines the boundary conditions for electoral discourse.

The relationship uncovers itself in a variety of ways. Political leaders mediate between the state and the electorate through:

- (i) policies, whereby subsidies are given as doles for poverty alleviation, debt redemption, augmentation of income;
- (ii) facilitating access to schemes, government services and protection from crime and violence. For providing access to doles, the discretion available with government functionaries, enlarges the scope of political patronage. For instance, to have access to these doles, the poor need ration cards, identity proof and a residential certificate which are to be provided by the functionaries, often mediated by political leaders;

- (iii) application of ideological filters at the level of policies and their implementation. Non-secular categories like caste, religion, region and secular categories like *aam admi* (common man) are used to acquire legitimacy for their political claims.

This complex interaction between *aam, admi* and electoral politics is dynamic in nature and has been undergoing a change. The transformation agenda within the nation building project dominate Indian electoral politics.

## **PROMISES AND PERFORMANCE: FROM GAP TO PARADOX**

The paradox between the transformational discourse and economic reforms agenda has shaped the electoral politics in India. This discourse occupied a large space in electoral politics until the eighties. Populist slogans like “garibi hatao”, “land to the tiller”, “social justice for all”, “anticorruption” and “fight against authoritarianism” have been raised for election purposes. The theme of elections has undergone a change with successive political leaders. Under India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, it was social justice for all, expressed in various forms like land to the tiller. In the 1971 parliamentary elections, Congress leader Mrs. Indira Gandhi won with the slogan “garibi hatao” (poverty eradication), and under the non-Congress leadership in the 1977 parliamentary elections, it was restoration of democracy and anti-authoritarianism.

All these slogans, along with the promise of building a socialist society remained the hallmark of Indian politics. The Congress promised what Nehru called the socialistic pattern of society by following a policy of industrialisation with increased government ownership so as to command the heights of the economy. The state took upon itself the task of building infrastructure like dams, steel plants, oil refineries and machine tool factories. In fact, these were essential for the fast growth of private industries. Indian industrialists were unwilling and unable to undertake the construction and management of these capital intensive heavy industries.

In other words, the national political leadership sought to realise the goal of socialism by creating a large industrial and agricultural base and by developing science and technology. This process of industrialisation and even the policy of nationalisation were used for increasing production and not as a means of attaining social justice.

Another populist slogan of land reforms was used to create a vision of equality. Land reforms and the way they were implemented transformed big land owners from a class solely dependent on land and feudal privileges to a class of rural entrepreneurs. These rural entrepreneurs, no doubt, retained substantial interest in land, but made considerable investment in transport, warehouses and rice mills. All these measures threw up a class of privileged people who were gripped by a kind of ‘scarcity psychology’. On the other hand, the same process multiplied and marginalised the poor sections of the population.

However, after the mid-eighties, this discourse was not as dominant as it was in the earlier phase. The slogan of justice for all was replaced by justice for backward castes, Dalits and minorities. It provided hopes to the downtrodden without providing any concrete gains. The Mandal Commission itself acknowledged it.

When a backward class candidate becomes collector or a superintendent of police, the material benefits accruing from his position are limited to the members of his family only. But the psychological spin-off of this phenomenon is tremendous; the entire community of that backward class candidate feels socially elevated.<sup>6</sup>

The Mandal Commission had little to do with equality and social justice. It focused on a strategy of co-option by multiplying caste cleavages and attempting to achieve a balance of group interests. This, in a limited way, provided continuity to the discourse on transformational politics.

In the nineties the emphasis was shifted from the public sector-administering of prices, subsidies, control of wages and poverty-to structural reforms with a veneer of liberal non-regulatory state.<sup>7</sup> The major initiative for economic reforms was taken during the tenure of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Within months after taking office, the Prime Minister announced new policies to accelerate India's slow industrial growth – liberalising imports, providing new economic incentives for exports, permitting the import of technologies, encouraging foreign investment through joint ventures, reducing taxes and de-regulating the economy so as to make it more competitive.<sup>8</sup>

Thereafter, a near consensus on economic reforms package among the major political parties and actors was built, notwithstanding the occasional noises relating to *Swadeshi*. For instance, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party election manifestos for 2004 on economic reforms reinforced each other. The Bharatiya Janata Party highlighted its commitment to:

further broadening and deepening the economic reforms based on a self-reliant approach, sustained double-digit GDP growth rate to achieve complete eradication of poverty and unemployment, end of regional and social disparities and bridging the urban-rural divide.<sup>9</sup>

The Congress manifesto asserts that,

The Congress would broaden and deepen economic reforms. The overriding objectives would be to attain and sustain year after year a 8-10% rate of economic growth and to spread this growth over all sectors, particularly agriculture and industry... aimed at local level economic and social transformation that directly benefit the poor in rural and urban India, bringing prosperity to the 6 lakh-odd villages of India and improving the living conditions of the urban poor.<sup>10</sup>

The space vacated by slogans like '*garibi hatao*' was allowed to go unattended with symbolic references in election manifestos. The dichotomy between electoral promises and the mandate of governance became pronounced. Earlier, electoral promises used to be in line with the ideological commitment of the government. Now with the adoption of economic reforms, electoral promises were in contradiction with the government's mandate.

In elections, political parties ideologically support economic reforms but find it difficult to politically popularise them. This is because the content of economic reforms is to reduce employment in the public sector without creating corresponding employment in the private sector, to encourage people to participate in self-help groups and launch small businesses in the face of intense competition. Nor, can they tell the people to mind their own

health and give subsidies to private hospitals and above all, in the name of building their stakes, ‘motivate’ them to pay for life saving services even if they do not have the opportunities to earn a livelihood.

It is important to note there has been a wide gap between electoral promises and government performance in both the phases, i.e. 1947 to 1977 and 1977 onwards. The difference is that in the earlier phase, the electoral promises were ideologically in convergence with the mandate of the government, whereas in the later phase the electoral promises and the government’s mandate were ideologically divergent. The reasons identified for this crisis of non-performance range from structural causes to political behaviour of leaders. However, in the first phase it became manifested in the form of a leadership crisis, whereas in the second phase it took the form of a crisis of trust in leadership.

The 2004 elections have empirically shown that the legitimacy of the government in power declines faster due to the mismatch between the electoral promises and the stark realities of the new economic policies. The National Democratic Alliance, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party, made implementation of economic reforms a major poll plank in the 2004 elections. The campaign was labelled “India Shining”. Congress raised issues relating to “Aam Aadmi” (common man) and branded the Bharatiya Janta Party anti-poor. The mismatch between the electoral mandate of the 1999 elections and the performance of the BJP-led government contributed to poor electoral results in the 2004 parliamentary elections. It won 138 seats with 22.16 per cent vote share.

Further, this paradox between electoral promises and government performance can be captured clearly from two case studies, i. e. Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. Andhra Pradesh was considered the best governed state with shifting emphasis from state as provider of services to being merely a facilitator. In the 1994 elections the Telgu Desam Party won by opposing the economic reforms of the Congress. A decade later, in 2004, the Congress launched itself into a pro-poor bandwagon and against economic reforms to defeat the TDP-led by Chandrababu Naidu government.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1**  
**1994 and 2004 Vidhan Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh**

	1994			2004			
	Seats Contested	Seats won	% of votes polled	Seats Contested	Seats won	% of votes polled	Loss or gain % increase in seats won
Congress	294	26	33.85	234	185	38.56	611.54
TDP	251	216	44.14	267	47	37.59	-78.24
Left	37	34	6.35	26	15	3.37	-56.0
BJP	280	3	3.89	27	2	2.63	-33.34
TRS	-	-	-	54	26	6.68	-
Others	2357	15	11.78	1288	19	11.17	26.67

*Source: Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Andhra Pradesh (various years).*

The Congress made electoral promises like

free electricity for agriculture, subsidies on crop loans, more funds for irrigation projects, relief package to the families of suicide victims, loans to women self-help groups at 3 per cent interest per annum, and the sanction of a revolving fund to all DWACRA groups which completed six months, 2.5 lakh jobs for the youth by lifting

the ban on recruitment in government service, enhancement of old-age pension, and revival of the subsidised cloth scheme<sup>12</sup>.

Chandrababu Naidu opined that

the Congress was making fantastic promises that could not be implemented by anyone in power and that it was resorting to populist promises to deceive the voters. He said international financial agencies, such as the World Bank, would not approve free electricity to the agriculture sector and that would mean the stoppage of loans to the state. The Congress immediately termed the TDP government as anti-farmer and pro-World Bank.<sup>13</sup>

The results of the elections were dismal for the TDP and the Congress won the elections. The first step the Congress government took after coming to power was to announce free electricity for the farmers as was promised in its election manifesto.

In Punjab, the Congress demonstrated this paradox between electoral promises and government mandate in a blatant manner as it was caught between Assembly elections (2002) followed by Parliamentary elections (2004). In the 2002 Assembly elections it promised free electricity to farmers, removal of octroi and registered a victory over its major opponent, the Akali Dal. The election manifesto committee was chaired by Dr. Manmohan Singh, present Prime Minister of India.<sup>14</sup>

After coming to power it backtracked from its electoral promises and announced a number of initiatives for introducing economic reforms. Consequently, it did poorly in 2004 parliamentary election. Learning lessons from its defeat, the Congress government announced sops like free electricity to farmers in the wake of the forthcoming Assembly elections in early 2007. Interestingly, these sops were opposed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The Chief Minister, Capt. Amarinder Singh, reminded the Prime Minister that he chaired the election manifesto committee which made these promises in 2002 elections.

The patron-client relationship is carefully nurtured by offering doles in the name of subsistence subsidies to the electorate. Doles have been used as a poverty-alleviating and vote catching device. People without means constitute the backbone of Indian electoral politics.

There are more illiterates, rural-based people, Scheduled Castes and OBCs who comprise voters today than earlier.... In 1996 over the average polling of 58 per cent there were 1 per cent more OBCs voting as against merely 2 per cent less than the upper castes; that is 59 per cent OBCs voted as against 56 per cent upper castes. It becomes more pronounced if we look at the Scheduled Castes who are 2 per cent above the average, that is, about 60 per cent of them voted as against 56 per cent upper castes.<sup>15</sup>

It is this reality that sustains the paradoxical response of the political parties not only in terms of electoral promises, but also in their performance. The politics of populism became more pronounced with the introduction of economic reforms. Political parties, in order to compete with each other, promise doles. Consequently, it has liberated political parties from the burden of adopting political positions based on transformational politics.

## **Threat and Need Paradox of Democracy**

The interaction of the state-led nation-building project with the path of development produced shifts in political discourse from a transformational thrust to the consolidation of sectional interests. It also brought about a shift from the need of democratic institutions to meet a perceived threat from these same institutions leading to institutional collapse in the eighties.<sup>16</sup> As a result, participatory institutions were either made defunct or ineffective and consequently led to the decreased power of liberal democratic institutions and their leadership.

There has been centralisation of authority and deinstitutionalisation of governance in the midst of popular revolts in Gujarat, the mass movement in Bihar led by Jayaprakash Narayan leading to the imposition of internal emergency in 1977. This process of deinstitutionalisation was attributed to the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, by some political analysts. Myron Weiner opined that 'in Mrs. Gandhi's view, these institutions – state Congress organizations with local leaders independent of the Centre, a hostile opposition, a critical press and an independent judiciary – had impeded the movement towards a modern, socialist, equalitarian social and economic order.'<sup>17</sup> The structural and historical causes were not analysed and reflected available political options and choices. The issue of deinstitutionalisation was identified as a principle reason for the non-performance and collapse of democratic political processes.<sup>18</sup> No doubt, there has been gradual dedemocratisation and whittling down of the basic rights of the people and abdication of the basic obligation of the system leading to downgrading the most precious facet of democratic system, i. e. legitimacy. Retrospectively, it can be conceptualised as a cyclical process and can be termed as a threat and need paradox of Indian democracy.

The institutional collapse which was caused by the threat perception of these leaders was selectively reversed. Having curtailed the democratic functioning of various institutions, these leaders frequently misused the paramilitary forces to overcome the crises. The eighties saw the revival of law enforcing agencies with an overactive police; as a result, the heroes of the eighties were the supercops. The nineties produced an 'overactive judiciary' which took upon itself most of the functions of the state, including the moral and ethical role of the non-state institutions. The Chief Election Commissioner shared the glory of performing the role of reforming the system single handedly.

This selected restoration of institutional framework did not 'restore the secular institutional culture.'<sup>19</sup> However, competitive electoral politics became activated leading to the decline of one party dominance. Competing political parties in order to mobilise regional electoral constituencies based on caste, language, tribal and religious considerations, built bridges with ideologically divergent groups. This 'bridge politics' blurred ideological differences. For instance, the party responsible for atrocities against Sikhs in 1984 was being wooed by all secularists and parties known for their communal outbursts were in alliance with former socialists and liberal democrats.

## **POLITICS OF IDEOLOGICAL MONOTHEISM AND MULTI-CULTURAL SECULARISM**

This seeming paradox contributed to a shift from one variety of ideological monotheism to another and the negation of forces of ideological pluralism. Nehruvian institutional secularism was replaced by ideological monotheism having its basis in unified

conception of indigenous (Hindu) nationhood, negating the policies of appeasement of minorities and in opposition to secular nationhood terming it as pseudo-secularism. On the other hand regional, caste and tribal groups became mobilised for the expansion of electoral constituencies.

The mono-cultural secular nation-building project, in interaction with multicultural social reality, led to the subversion of the rights of various cultural and linguistic groups. This provided a context to strengthening of communal assertions and currency to caste groupings as electoral capital.

There are at least three crucial events in this chronology; the Shah Bano-Muslim Women's Act affair of 1985-86, the BJP's defection in 1990 from the United Front government of V.P. Singh, and the ongoing Mandir-Masjid saga' .... By overturning the Shah Bano decision in the widely publicized case, available and explicable to a nation-wide audience, the Rajiv Gandhi Government gave apparent credence to the widespread and long-held charge against the Congress that the substance of its secularism was "pseudo-secularism," communally divisive "vote bank politics," and "pampering" Muslims in order to get their votes.<sup>20</sup>

### Communal Monoliths as Vote Banks

The *Ram Janam Bhoomi* movement consolidated the Hindu majority vote bank and consequently the Bharatiya Janata Party increased its electoral tally in Parliament from 2 seats in 1984 to 182 seats in the 1999 elections. As a ploy to fragment and weaken the Hindu vote bank, a caste based political co-option strategy in the form of Mandal Commission was unleashed.

To illustrate, the Bharatiya Janata Party won two seats in the 1984 elections with 8 per cent vote share. It increased its tally as it won 85 seats in 1989, 120 seats in 1991, 161 seats in 1996, 182 seats in 1998 and in 1999 and 138 seats in 2004.

**Table 2**  
**Seats Won by Bharatiya Janata Party in Parliament Elections (1984-2004)**

	Seats Contested	Seats won	% of votes polled	% of seats won out of contested seats
1984	224	2	7.74	1
1989	225	85	11.36	38
1991	468	120	20.11	26
1996	471	161	20.29	35
1998	388	182	25.59	47
1999	339	182	23.75	54
2004	364	138	22.16	38

Source: Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha (various years).

Political mobilisation of backward castes found expression in parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party, Samata Party and other regional parties. Dalit politics also emerged as a powerful force and found articulation through the Bahujan Samaj Party. The participation of Dalits in elections increased.

In 1996 parliamentary elections the percentage of SC voter turnout was 89.2 per cent as against the national average of 87.3 per cent in the case of upper castes. This trend

continued in the 1998 elections where voter turnout of the SCs and the upper castes was 93 per cent and 91.9 per cent respectively. In 1971 SC voter turnout was 78.7 per cent (CSDS data unit, CSDS Delhi).<sup>21</sup>

In the initial years of post-independence India, the dominant political discourse was secular in its thrust and was not consistent with areas governed by caste or religious domains. Whereas since the mid-eighties, the dominant political discourse increasingly became consistent with a communal, sectarian and caste based cultural reservoir. The political parties transformed this reservoir into electoral capital. Therefore, to label electoral battles between political parties as communal versus non-communal is a misnomer.

Political formations in Punjab labelled the Congress as communal as it was seen as responsible for Operation Bluestar at the Sikh religious shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar and anti-Sikh riots following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Similarly, Bharatiya Janata Party could be labelled communal as being allegedly responsible for the communal carnage in Gujarat. In 2004 parliamentary elections and even in 2002 Assembly elections in Gujarat the Bharatiya Janata Party could consolidate the Hindu vote and win with massive margins.

**Table 3**  
**Party Preference by Social Group**

	<b>Congress – NCP</b>	<b>BJP</b>	<b>N</b>
Upper Castes	33	60	161
Patidars	18	75	158
OBCs	55	40	230
Dalits	67	*23	89
Adivasis	46	48	172
Muslims	60	*20	79

Note: The Sample size for Dalits and Muslims voting for the BJP is too small to be statistically significant.  
Source: *National Election Study 2004; weighted data set.*

**Table 4**  
**Performance of BJP and Congress in Gujarat Parliament and Vidhan Sabha Elections**

	<b>Lok Sabha</b>				<b>Vidhan Sabha</b>			
	<b>1999</b>		<b>2004</b>		<b>1998</b>		<b>2002</b>	
	<b>BJP</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>BJP</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>BJP</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>BJP</b>	<b>Congress</b>
Seats Contested	26	26	26	25	182	179	182	180
Seats Won	20	6	14	12	117	53	127	51
% of vote	52.48	45.41	47.37	43.86	44.81	34.85	49.85	39.28

Source: *Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Gujarat (various years)*  
*Statistical Report on General Elections to the Lok Sabha (various years)*

In the 2002 Gujarat Assembly elections, out of 182 constituencies 154 were affected by communal riots. And the BJP could win in 127 constituencies. Can communal riots influence people's response to political parties?

In fact, the results do not validate the thesis that the riot-hit constituencies or even those with high rioting had BJP as the sole claimant. Gandhinagar and Dessa were among the worst affected by riots yet they returned Congress candidates. Thus, the Congress has won in a significant number of constituencies (12 per cent) which witnessed a high degree of riots and others which had moderate riots (24 per cent). On the other hand, among the riot-free constituencies, more seats went to the BJP than to the Congress (more than 60 per cent), even

in the proclaimed anti-incumbency heartland of Saurashtra. In other words, the BJP won irrespective of the presence or the extent of riots in Gujarat, where it could win more than 60 per cent of the constituencies which had no rioting or low rioting. The Congress, on the other hand, did win seats in the heavily and moderately riot hit constituencies.<sup>22</sup>

The Gujarat elections have produced a major shift from one variety of ideological monotheism to another, i. e. from the minority religious group to the majority religious group, from nationalisation of Hindutva to regionalisation of Hindutva. The nurturing of regional sentiments and aspirations around Hindutva is a unique experiment which has serious implications for the nation-building project. It has not only reversed the secular nation-building project launched at the time of Independence, but has also distorted the RSS concept of nationalisation of Hindutva. The whole tenor of electoral mobilisation in Gujarat was a clever blend of Gaurav of Gujarat<sup>23</sup> and Hindutva identity. Providing a saffron garb to regional aspirations cannot be explained as a consequence of post-Godhra developments. In fact, the Godhra episode and the riots that followed are the products of an ideological fermentation carefully nurtured by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP.

The massive response to regionalisation of the Hindutva ideology and regional leadership can be understood in the backdrop of globalisation. The process of globalisation has undermined the concept of a nation. Having compromised on economic sovereignty, countries like India and Pakistan have surrendered their political sovereignty, as maintenance of domestic peace has been pushed into the realm of global political-decision making and diktats. It is in this context that President Pervez Musharraf raised the question of Gujarat riots at the United Nations and the '*Mian Musharraf*' symbolism gained currency in the Gujarat elections. The process of globalisation provided an impetus to son-of-the-soil movement, particularly in Gujarat, which has a long history of communalising the job market.

In the 2004 parliament elections Congress could win in 12 out of 26 Lok Sabha seats as compared to six seats held in the 1999 elections. The Congress was leading in 92 of the 182 assembly segments as compared to 51 assembly seats in the 2002 elections. The moot question is that in less than 15 months, is it possible that anti-incumbency could become a potent factor overriding communal polarisation? Or did the defensive response of the Congress under the leadership of former RSS activist Shanker Singh Vaghela provide the electorates a choice between soft and hard communalism.<sup>24</sup>

### **Caste as a Political Capital**

Similarly, caste as a political capital has found varied responses blended in regional flavours covering a vast political spectrum. The content of the emerging Dalit identity includes an assertion of de facto recognition of their rights, occupational mobility, status parity and parallel religious symbols. The local cultural context has shaped Dalit response to political parties. For instance, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) could find a positive response in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), whereas, in Punjab with the highest percentage of Dalit population in the country, it could find a nominal response. To illustrate, the BSP vote share in Uttar Pradesh increased from 11 per cent in 1993 to 23 per cent in 2002.<sup>25</sup> Both in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh the initial response was to identify with the BSP as there was a low degree of representation of the Scheduled Castes. But in Punjab there is a trend to move away from the BSP.

**Table 5**  
**BSP Vote Support in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab Legislative Assembly**

	Uttar Pradesh			Punjab		
	2002	1996	1993	2002	1997	1992
Seats contested	401	296	164	100	67	105
Seats won	98	67	67	0	1	9
% of vote	23.06	19.4	11.12	5.69	7.48	16.32

Source: 1. Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh (various years).  
2. Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Punjab (various years)

Why couldn't the BSP make electoral inroads in Punjab? Punjab has been known for its liberal ritualistic religious practices in relation to caste. Both Sikhism and the Arya Samaj have liberated the Dalits from the stringent purity-pollution based behavioural patterns. For instance, equality in religious gatherings, establishment of common kitchen and the institution of langar were initiated to overcome caste-based superior and inferior relationships. Not only this, offering of 'Karah Prasad' by any one irrespective of his caste was a symbolic departure from the notion that forbade food sharing by the upper and lower castes.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, in Punjab Dalit assertion has usurped the idea of purity to present itself as a competing identity. Notions of honour, revenge and levirate marriages ('chaddar' system) that were considered exclusive to peasant groups are now being adopted by the Dalits<sup>27</sup>. Levirate marriage, a customary practice of Punjabi peasantry in which a widow is 'married' to her deceased husband's brother or other male relative by performing a specific ritual. The patriarchal family thus retains land, assets and children within its fold, while also providing legitimate protection and space to the widow. Levirate marriages are now also being practised by Dalits in Punjab, claiming parity with the Jat peasantry by providing protection to 'family honour'.

For the Dalits, it meant preventing 'pollution' of their exclusive identity. At the individual level, the Dalits are resentful of being unable to protect their women from what they now perceive as transgression of their manhood and identity. Sharing the common cultural reservoir to acquire social parity without getting assimilated into the hierarchical system provided them with a greater political bargaining capacity without becoming hostage of a particular Dalit party.

Further the ideological content of BSP has been unable to capture the regional, cultural and economic specificities of Punjab. The purity-pollution and *Manuwad* that are the BSP's main ideological planks do not find expression in the socio-cultural domain of Punjab in its fundamental form as it exists in Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, it would be appropriate to see the impact of globalisation and regional dimension on the communal and caste-based political formations and their electoral performance.

To sum up, the above analysis shows that the promises and performance of political parties may not be analysed in terms of gap, but as a paradox. Further, the crisis of leadership has acquired a systemic form leading to a crisis of trust in politics and political leadership. Ideological filters have become convenient labels for acquiring legitimacy for what is otherwise a blatantly legislative power game.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. B. Lucas and Gustav F. Papanek (eds.), *The Indian Economy: Recent Development and Future Prospects* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> E. Sridharan, "Electoral Coalition 2004 General Elections", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 51, December 18, 2004, pp. 5418-25. Paul R. Brass, "India, Myron Weiner and the Political Science of Development", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 29, July 20, 2002, pp. 3026-40.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Stern, *Changing India: Bourgeois Revolution on the Subcontinent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> "A nation which had two-thirds of its people under the poverty line at independence is now a nation with two-thirds of its population above the poverty line in the half century since independence. The middle class of India is the proud creation of the Congress." *Lok Sabha Elections 2004: Manifesto of the Indian National Congress*.

<sup>5</sup> Pushpendra, "Dalit Assertion Through Electoral Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 36, September 4, 1999, p. 2611.

<sup>6</sup> B. P. Mandal, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, (Government of India, 1980), Vol. I, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> To quote, P. N. Dhar, the then advisor to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi:  
"The broad purpose of policy changes now is to move away from directives, regulations and controls to a greater role for market incentives and to indirect policy instruments as against direct physical controls. Greater importance is now being attached to productivity, competitiveness and technological modernisation with a view to promoting more rapid growth of manufactured exports. Similarly, quantitative limits on imports are being replaced by tariffs to expose domestic industry to a reasonable amount of external competition. Some more items have also been added to the open general licence." P.N. Dhar, "The Indian Economy: Past Performance and Current Issues", in Robert E.B. Lucas and Gustav F. Papanek (eds.), *The Indian Economy: Recent Development and Future Prospects* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Myron Weiner, *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 297.

<sup>9</sup> 'Bharatiya Janata Party: Vision Document – 2004' p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> 'Lok Sabha Elections 2004: Manifesto of the Indian National Congress', p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> He undertook a 1,500 km-long padayatra across Andhra Pradesh in May 2003. During his campaign, he called Chandrababu Naidu an agent of the World Bank and alleged that the reforms pursued by the TDP government had landed the state in a debt trap and resulted in underdevelopment. He charged huge loans taken from international agencies had been spent on unproductive sectors, and much of it had been pocketed by Telugu Desam functionaries. K. C. Suri, "Andhra Pradesh: Fall of the CEO in Arena of Democracy", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 51, December 18, 2004, p. 5494.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 5495.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>14</sup> *Punjab Congress Election Manifesto, 2002*

<sup>15</sup> Javed Alam, 'What is Happening Inside Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 37, September 11, 1999, p. 2654.

<sup>16</sup> Pramod Kumar, "Flaws in the System", *The Hindustan Times (Chandigarh)*, June 30, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Myron Weiner op.cit., 1989, p. 269.

<sup>18</sup> To quote, Rajni Kothari, "among other things, I have focused on what I believe to be the principle malaise, namely the erosion of institutions and the challenge of both 'restoring political process (by which I have meant restoring political institutions) and reinstitutionalising the political terrain in terms of processes and interactions that emerge from the grassroots upwards to macro 'political structures'". Rajni Kothari, "Fragments of a Discourse: Towards Conceptualization", in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.), *State and Nation in the Context of Social Change* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), Vol. 1, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Paul R. Brass, op. cit., 2002, p. 3027.

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Stern, op. cit., 2003, pp. 185-86.

<sup>21</sup> Pushpendra, op. cit., 1999, p. 2609

<sup>22</sup> Pramod Kumar, "Ideology Overrides Anti-incumbency", *The Hindustan Times (Chandigarh)*, December 24, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> The Gaurav of Gujarat means pride of Gujarat. The Chief Minister of Gujarat on August 12, 2002 said, "I am determined to take out the yatra and tell the world the Gaurav Gatha [Story of Pride] of five crore [50 million] people in the state. It is not the story of Godhra, Naroda Patia or Gulmarg. Gujarat was not a state of murderers and rapists as the pseudosecularists, fanatic and power-hungry Congress leaders are attempting to project"  
*India: Modi Determined to Take out Gaurav Yatra in Gujarat*. [Http://www.rediff.com](http://www.rediff.com), August 12, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> The BJP was ahead of the Congress by 7 per cent votes in LS polls of 1999. Winning 12 seats in 2004 from six in 1999 was a great boost to the Congress, which was terribly demoralized after the 2002 verdict. Then and now, the Congress has been clueless about countering the religio-communal propaganda and mobilization of the BJP. Priyavadan Patel, "Gujarat: Anti-Incumbency Begins", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 51, December 18, 2004, p. 5475.

<sup>25</sup> A. K. Verma, "Uttar Pradesh: Caste and Political Mobilisation". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 51, December 18, 2004, pp. 5463-66.

<sup>26</sup> Pramod Kumar, "Checking Caste Antagonism to Prevent Violence", *The Hindustan Times (Chandigarh)*, August 13, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Pramod Kumar and Rainuka Dagar, 'Gender in Dalit Identity Construction in Punjab' in Harish K. Puri (ed.), *Dalit in Regional Context*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 2004), p. 279.