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Democratic Transformation and the Vernacular Public Arena in India

Edited by
Taberez Ahmed Neyazi,
Akio Tanabe, and Shinya Ishizaka



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Since the structural change in Indian society that began in the 1990s—the result of the liberalisation of the economy, devolution of power, and decentralisation of the government—an unprecedented, democratic transformation has been taking place. This has caused the emergence of unexpected coalitions and alliances across diverse castes, classes, and religious groups according to the issues involved.

In this volume, we intend to understand this deepening of democracy by employing a new analytical framework of the ‘vernacular public arena’ where negotiations, dialogues, debates, and contestations occur among ‘vernacular publics’. This reflects the profound changes in Indian democracy as diverse social groups, including dalits, adivasis, and Other Backward Classes; minorities, women; individuals from rural areas, towns, and cities; the poor and the new middle classes—the ‘vernacular publics’—participate in new ways in India’s public life. This participation is not confined to electoral politics, but has extended to the public arenas in which these groups have begun to raise their voice publicly and to negotiate and engage in dialogue with each other and the wider world. Contributors demonstrate that the participation of vernacular publics has resulted in the broadening of Indian democracy itself which focuses on the ways of governance, improving people’s lives, life chances, and living environments.

An original, comprehensive study that furthers our understanding of the unfolding political dynamism and the complex reshuffling and reassembling taking place in Indian society and politics, this book will be relevant to academics with an interest in South Asian Studies from a variety of disciplines, including Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies.

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Preface

This volume is the outcome of an international workshop on ‘Vernacular publics and democratic transformation in India’ held in Kyoto in June 2012. We are particularly indebted to the participants at this event, during which part of the material in this volume was presented in embryonic form. The idea behind the workshop was to understand and explain the ongoing transformation in the nature of participatory politics in India under globalisation beyond the question of membership and representation in the nation-state. The workshop provided an opportunity to advance the concepts of ‘vernacular publics’ and the ‘vernacular public arena’ and to critically reflect on whether such frameworks can help in better understanding the ongoing democratic transformation in India. The stimulating and insightful exchanges among the participants encouraged us to organise another international workshop, titled ‘Vernacular public arena and democratic transformation in India’, in October 2012.

The workshops and this volume would not have been possible without financial support from the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) programme ‘Contemporary India Area Studies (INDAS)’ and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research programmes (no. 24251003, 24310185, 23530143, 10F00314, 23310178).

In addition to the authors represented in this volume, Bela Bhatia, Kanchan Chandra, and Kazuya Nakamizo also presented papers. Bishnu Mohapatra and Sarbeswar Sahoo did not present papers, but agreed to contribute to this volume in response to our request. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the original participants in the workshops and everyone else who joined us in the intense, stimulating, and exciting academic exchange. We are particularly grateful to Rohan D’Souza, Fumiko Oshikawa, and Minoru Mio, whose comments as general discussants at the workshops helped the volume.

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Taberez A. Neyazi, Akio Tanabe, and Shinya Ishizaka
New Delhi and Kyoto

Abbreviations

AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (All India Anna Dravidian Federation)
APL	above the poverty line
BDO	Block Development Officer
BJD	Biju Janata Dal (Biju People's Party)
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party)
BPL	below the poverty line
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party (Majority People's Party)
CAPART	Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology
DK	Dravida Kazhagam (Dravidian Federation)
DKDA	Dongria Kondh Development Agency
DKVF	Devendra Kula Vellalar Federation
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progress Federation)
DPI	Dalit Panther Iyyakkam (movement)
EVR	E.V. Ramaswami (Naicker) or Periar
FD	Forest Department
GC	General Castes
IAC	India Against Corruption
JFM	Joint Forest Management
JLA	Jan Lokpal Andolan (People's Ombudsperson Movement)
JNNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission
KNMK	Kongu Nadu Munnetra Kazhagam (The Kongu Nadu Progress Federation)
LADS	Local Area Development Scheme
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MGR	M.G. Ramachandran
MKSS	Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (Organisation for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants)
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MRUC	Media Research User Council

NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NFE	non-formal education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NTFP	non-timber forest products
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PCR	Protection of Civil Rights
PDS	Public Distribution System
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi (Toiling People's Party)
PT	Puthiya Thamizhagam (new Tamil Nadu)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organisation)
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Scheduled Castes
SEC	socio-economic classification system
SMS	short message service
SNS	Satark Nagrik Sangathan (Society for Citizen Vigilance Initiative)
SP	Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party)
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TAM	Television Audience Measurement
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VCK	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)
WEF	World Environment Foundation

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1 Introduction

Democratic transformation and the vernacular public arena in India

Taberez Ahmed Neyazi and Akio Tanabe

This volume analyses the unprecedented democratic transformation that is currently taking place in India. The study employs the new analytical framework of the ‘vernacular public arena’, in which negotiations, dialogues, debates, and contestations occur among diverse ‘vernacular publics’. It reflects on the profound changes in Indian democracy brought about by diverse social groups, including dalits, adivasis, and Other Backward Classes; minorities; women; individuals from rural areas, towns, and cities; the poor and the new middle classes, whom we call vernacular publics, all participating in new ways and becoming much more active in India’s public life. We intend to understand this ‘deepening of democracy’ in India based on the framework of the ‘vernacular public arena’.¹ The political participation of these vernacular publics is not confined to elections, but has extended to larger public arenas in which these groups have begun to raise their voices publicly and negotiate and engage in dialogue with each other and the wider world.

It is contended that the most important characteristic of the recent democratic transformation lies in the dynamic process of mediation between the multiplicity of the vernacular and the universality of the public. The diverse character of Indian society has begun to more completely manifest its political potentiality. A plethora of social groups and individuals are increasingly raising their voices from their various subject positions to reshuffle the public order of things, demanding that the universalist framework of public citizenship reflect not only its overarching rationality and efficiency, but also the diverse needs, interests, and concerns of the vernacular multitudes.² The vernacular public arena is thus the expanding space of sociopolitical negotiation and interaction in which diverse groups and individuals raise their vernacular voices to reassemble and redefine the public.

How can the framework of the ‘vernacular public arena’ be conceptually located within the landscape of Indian politics? Partha Chatterjee’s demarcation between ‘civil society’, as an associational arena for the upper middle classes who utilise the existing legal framework, and ‘political society’, where the subalterns mobilise themselves in the logic of the community to obtain a share in state resources through politically accepted but non-civil ways, is useful to describe the political processes of the colonial and postcolonial periods,

especially those from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, this dichotomous framework is not sufficient to understand the unprecedented changes that have taken place since the 1990s. Chatterjee himself highlighted that there is now ‘a new dynamic logic’ that ties the operations of ‘political society’ to the role of ‘civil society’ (Chatterjee 2008). Chatterjee’s important point that there has been ‘a fundamental change in the situation prevailing in postcolonial India’ since Subaltern Studies was launched in 1982, implying the need for a rethinking of the old subaltern framework, is accepted here. However, Chatterjee goes on to discuss the ‘preservation of the peasantry’ resulting from the transfer of resources by anti-poverty programmes amid socio-economic changes. This argument functions to preserve his old framework of ‘civil society and political society’ in a new form (Chatterjee 2008: 53).

The emerging new politics of the vernacular publics, however, does not fall neatly into these categories, but takes hybrid forms that allow people to adopt a repertoire of strategies according to the changing circumstances (see chapters by Mohapatra, Jeffrey and Dyson, Ishizaka, and Sahoo in this volume). A wide arena of collective activities is emerging that cannot be confined to either civil society or political society.

To capture the new dynamism in Indian politics and society since the 1990s, we must go beyond the type of political sociology that exclusively focuses on the major divide between the rich elite and the poor subalterns (or peasants). Although we do not deny the continuing importance of the economic divide and political hierarchy within Indian society, what Chatterjee’s framework does not capture is the extent to which diverse groups—formed along various axes of class, caste, gender, language, ethnicity, ideology, and other demographic variables—are raising their voices in different and changing patterns of alliances and confrontations and also adopting various strategies with diverse forms of discourse and practice according to the concrete issues involved. In other words, the time when we could discuss politics primarily in terms of the divide between the elite and the rest (be it the peasantry or the subalterns) is coming to an end. The political process has become much more complex and dynamic, allowing diverse groups to participate and raise issues on different fronts in the reassembling networks of party and non-party politics.

We contend that the political manifestation of a multiplicity of vernacular publics should be taken much more seriously.³ With the deepening of democracy where the state meets the social, the pluralistic and diverse nature of Indian society is manifesting more completely in the third arena of politics, beyond the dichotomous framework of civil society and political society. Currently, political interactions and negotiations take place among a plethora of groups and individuals beyond the elite/subaltern and state/society dichotomies, leading to unexpected alliances and conflicts across divisions of caste, class, and religion. We attempt to capture this third arena of democracy through the frameworks of the ‘vernacular public arena’ and ‘vernacular publics’.⁴

By ‘vernacular’, we mean the discourse, style, and place of the lifeworlds of the common people or the multitudes, in contrast to those belonging to the

official sphere of the national elite. There was a time when there was a major gap between elite national politics and subaltern everyday life. However, a new post-postcolonial era is emerging today in which, through the process of so-called globalisation, the workings of governance and the market have penetrated deep into grassroots everyday life and bridged hitherto bifurcated spheres. The infiltration of the institutions and activities of governance and the market, however, has been concomitant with the subjectification of diverse groups of individuals, who have begun to assert their rightful place in the public arena in, and from, the vernacular (Neyazi 2011; Tanabe 2007). It is in the political subjectification of diverse social groups and their multiple ways of participating in the public arena that we perceive the potential for mediation and a source of new conflicts between the multiplicity of the vernacular and the universality of the public. The term ‘vernacular public arena’ is intended to problematise the connection between the languages and lifeworlds of the vernacular and discourses and activities in the public arena and the resulting vitalisation of the public arena in which diverse vernacular social groups participate.

The rise of the vernacular public arena since the 1990s has coincided with the transformation and expansion of democracy in terms of actors, agendas, and spheres. The multitude of actors with an assertive voice now includes those who were formerly called ‘subalterns without voice’, marginalised by caste, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity (Guha 1982; Spivak 1988). The agendas of democracy have expanded to include not only national politics of representative democracy and state-led development, but also the concerns of everyday social life—such as education, jobs, food security, medicine, water, and electricity—discussed from different positionalities, each in its own terms and yet related to the workings of governance and the market. The sphere of democratic interactions has not only deepened into the regional and local levels, but has also expanded to the global level. There are now multiple issues of common interest discussed in the ‘glocally’⁵ expanding vernacular public arena in which interactions between multiple viewpoints increasingly occur (Heller 2005; Sheth 2004).

As a result of the emergence of the vernacular public arena, there now seem to be creative (and sometimes disruptive) churning between the everyday vernacular discourses and the official public discourses that have facilitated the reconfiguration and redefinition of ‘public’ interests and issues. What we see here is a bridging of the discourses, concerns, and activities of vernacular everyday lives with those of public political institutions, enabled through various political and civil organisations, legal courts, public institutions and schemes, and mass and new media.

The central issue in politics has shifted from how to include ‘subaltern’ individuals in national politics to how to ensure and promote the fair participation and representation in the glocal public arena of all ‘vernacular’ voices that can no longer escape the workings of governance and the market, even if they wish to do so. Today, we see the workings and markings of state power in nearly every corner of India. Here, the agenda of democratic politics is not particularly concerned with how to listen to and recover the voices of the

‘subalterns’ who are denied their agency in the national space. What we must examine is how the diversity and singularities of vernacular voices are mediated, represented, distorted, and occasionally violently excluded through various institutions and organisations—such as government bodies, political parties and leaders, NGOs, corporations, people’s movements, and the media—and to discern the extent to which the vernacular public has the means to access democratic channels to enunciate their voices and have them reflected in the decision-making process. Here, we must do away with the notion of recovering the genuine voices of the subaltern, as there is no such entity as a ‘pure space of subalternity’ left in this globalised world; the world is full of hybridity, where the everyday lifeworld cannot be reproduced without the workings of governance and the market.

Subalternity, in its pure sense, is lost. That is not to say that there is no longer oppression or subordination; indeed, these forces are common. Nevertheless, there is no one whose personhood and voice is not permeated and mediated by technology, institutions, and the discourse of global markets and governance in the current post-postcolonial world.⁶ There is no space left ‘outside’ global capital and power in the contemporary world, even if individuals wish to escape these forces.⁷ Thus, we can no longer hope for an alternative in the subaltern other, but must instead search for our alternate potentiality ‘to come’ within the glocally mediated hybrid space, however disordered it might appear. It is in this context that Derrida discusses the ‘democracy to come (*démocratie à venir*)’, which incorporates a pun on ‘hope’ (*avenir*) (Derrida 1997). Our hope lies not outside the present, but in the very process of its ‘becoming’ toward alterity—in altering socio-economic-political relationships from within. The vernacular public arena, situated in inter-mediation and inter-permeation between the vernacular lifeworld and global market/governance, is precisely that space of becoming. Our predicament under globalisation is that there is no alternative but to seek hope here—our subject positions from within.

Historical background: post-postcolonial transformation

The historical background for the emergence of the vernacular public arena is the structural change in Indian society that began in the 1990s, which can be termed the ‘post-postcolonial transformation’. This change was the combined effect of the liberalisation of the economy, devolution of power, decentralisation of the government, and globalisation of lifeworlds.

Here, the term ‘postcolonial’ is used to indicate that the government institutions, social and economic structures, and frameworks of cultural perception that were established during the colonial period continued to operate after Indian independence, although there was an aspiration to transcend the colonial. As argued by Kaviraj (1991), one of the basic failures of the Nehruvian state was that it did not attempt enough to create ‘popular common sense about the political world, taking the new conceptual vocabulary of rights, institutions and impersonal power into the vernacular everyday discourses of rural or small town

Indian society' (Kaviraj 1991: 90). There remained an unbridgeable gap between the elite discourse of modernity and the popular, vernacular world. Today, however, India's diverse social groups are not subject to the fixed hierarchical structure and categorisation that were substantialised by colonialism.⁸ Many of these groups have begun to exercise their own agency to participate in democratic politics and the market economy. As such, there is now a process of intermingling and mediation among popular vernacular voices and the discourse of the modern state and market.

The exercise of agency by these diverse social groups in raising their vernacular voices through public mediation needs to be distinguished from that based on 'subaltern consciousness', which Guha discussed in his influential work on the *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Guha 1983). The 'subaltern' is a relational concept defined by its difference from the 'elite' (Guha 1982: 8). Here, the subaltern group's agency is based on the subaltern's particular consciousness, which is contradistinguished from that of the elite. However, as participation by diverse persons in the vernacular public arena grows, on the one hand, the elite cannot afford to ignore the vernacular voices and, on the other, the common people attempt to learn to speak in voices that have public appeal. Therefore, the dichotomous framework of the elite and the subaltern no longer holds. Subalterns were those who were unable to speak, because they existed outside the institutionalised discursive framework (Spivak 1988). However, these individuals are now enmeshed within the institutions of governance and the market and have learned to speak in voices that are comprehensible to others and at the same time reflect their particular positionality. In other words, the 'ex-subalterns', mediated through various institutions in the vernacular public arena, have learned to speak in vernacular public voices.

The relation between state and society has also changed dramatically since the 1990s. As state governance penetrated into the grassroots and everyday life, people entered into a process of political subjectification and began to think and act from within the institutions of governance and then beyond. Rather than the top-down rule of society by state authority, there is now a trend toward governance through debate, coordination, and compromise among a variety of stakeholders, including government bodies, civil organisations, and individuals belonging to different positionalities.

If, in the colonial period, various communities were distinguished from the modern state and market and were, as a result, traditionalised and fixed, and if the postcolonial period was one during which an attempt was made to achieve the rational development of society through a pedagogical modernisation project, then the present period of post-postcolonial formation may be a period in which the diverse and pluralist characteristics of Indian society have once again become publicly invigorated and begun to influence forms of politics and the economy in substantial ways. As much as democracy has influenced Indian society, Indian society has influenced the form of democracy (Lokniti 2008). With the emergence of vernacular publics, the form of democracy increasingly reflects the nature of Indian society, which connects diversities beyond postcolonial

dichotomies. At present, state and society, urban and rural, market and community, democratic politics and lifeworld, elite and subaltern, which were divided in the colonial and postcolonial periods, have become increasingly bridged, and diverse social groups are beginning to seek agency space in these mediating, in-between spaces, which we call the vernacular public arena.

Transformation of Indian politics: from ‘politics of identity’ to ‘politics of hope’

The emergence of the vernacular public arena under globalisation was facilitated by the transformation of party politics and the growing importance of non-party politics (Kothari 1984). The limitations of representative party politics and electoral democracy in addressing the concerns of society opened up the space necessary for the rise of alternative spheres (Kothari 2005). The gaps between ‘representation and participation’ and ‘party politics and non-party politics’, however, became mediated in the post-postcolonial transformation, along with the other dichotomies described above, to constitute the hybrid network of the vernacular public arena.

From 1952 to 1967, Indian politics was dominated by one political party; this has been termed the Congress system, which prevailed because of its ability to co-opt the interests and values of different social groups.⁹ The Congress Party was able to successfully negotiate diverse interests and manage conflicts, which helped the party to win elections based on the ‘first past the post’ system. Thus, despite securing a parliamentary majority, it never secured 50 per cent of the popular vote in the democratically contested elections; the highest percentage of the popular vote that it secured was 47.80 per cent in the 1957 general election. Thus, there remained seeds of discontent within the public arena, as a large portion of the population was dissatisfied with the existing party system and sought an alternative to party politics. The Jayaprakash Narayana (JP) movement of the 1970s, which challenged the authoritarian regime of Indira Gandhi, can be said to have heralded the beginning of the emergence of an alternative to party politics in postcolonial India. Since then, civil society groups have led several important social movements, including the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which opposed megadams and worked to protect the livelihoods of displaced persons, the Chipko movement for the protection of the environment, and feminist movements for gender justice (Rao 2000; Ray and Katzenstein 2005; Ishizaka 2006). Kothari also noted the rise of the ‘non-party political process’ and its countervailing tendencies as an alternative to the state (Kothari 1988). The stance of the non-party political process was to resist the cohesive workings of state power in order to achieve popular participation in the decision-making process.

With the growth of the non-party political process, in the 1980s political parties attempted to entrench their positions by bringing the issues of previously marginalised groups into the political arena. V.P. Singh, the Prime Minister of India, decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report in 1989, which made provisions for the reservation of jobs for Other

Backward Classes. This action led to the further politicisation of caste identity in both national and state politics. The rise of caste-based identity politics doubtless played an important role in the political empowerment of dalits and Other Backward Classes in the following decades. Concomitant with the increase in caste-based identity politics was the rise in Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, which bolstered the religious-based, majoritarian identity politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). As Corbridge and Harriss (2000) have highlighted, the ascendancy of Hindutva after the 1980s can be regarded as an ‘elite revolt’ against the upsurge of lower sections of society.

The 1990s witnessed the further fragmentation of political parties. Especially noteworthy was the increase in so-called regional parties. Since 1989, the central government has taken the form of a coalition government of one or two national parties and numerous regional parties. This change meant that regional parties began to have effective power, since their cooperation was essential for the success of national parties in forming the government at the centre. Moreover, there has been a gradual delinking of state and national politics. The effective power and importance of state governments continue to increase. Policy differences are emerging among the states, which has resulted in growing differences in economic performance, human development, and the status of minorities. Therefore, there is a virtual competition between the states and political parties to determine which of their policies are capable of producing more effective government performance to improve the lives of the people.

In contemporary India, we may be witnessing the emergence of a new political dynamism beyond the ‘politics of identity’ and toward the ‘politics of hope’—a type of politics based on a competition to attract support on the basis of individuals’ desire for a better future. Major national and regional political parties compete by claiming that they can bring about better development for all. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which began as the party of the dalits, subsequently broadened its social base under the leadership of Mayawati and has attempted to transform itself from a dalit party into a party for all (Yadav 2000). Such shifts began in the mid-2000s in many states. A notable example is the state of Bihar, where the Janata Dal United (JDU), under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, was able to displace the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government in the Assembly elections of 2005 and 2010 by making development the central issue and extending their political support to Muslims and the lower castes. This strategy helped them gain the support of different caste groups, including the upper castes (Witsoe 2011).

Recently, the central and state governments have launched important schemes and programmes that have had direct impacts on the lives of individuals:

- the Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005, which has empowered citizens to seek government information from a public authority;
- the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005, which ‘aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household’; and

- the Right to Education (RTE) 2009, which has made it compulsory for all children in India aged six to 14 to receive free education.

Another important piece of legislation empowering the poor is the National Food Security Bill that was passed in August 2013. This bill permits the re-allocation of resources in the country, largely in favour of the rural poor, but the campaign was initiated and led by the middle classes and NGOs.

Such schemes and legislation are important landmarks in the democratic transformation of India, reflecting a shift in the nature of politics from a focus on representation to one of governance. Although questions remain concerning the effectiveness of these schemes and legislation, and corruption continues to hamper the full realisation of these aims, the lively criticism and debate among the mass media, auditing organisations, and everyday conversations demonstrate that the government's performance is constantly and critically evaluated by the vernacular publics. Even in the countryside, individuals are becoming increasingly aware that the state has a responsibility to provide them with basic necessities, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and, increasingly, food under various schemes, such as midday meals in school.

In this way, particularly since the mid-2000s, the major political issue in Indian democracy has shifted from the 'politics of identity'—the question of 'who' represents the nation—to the 'politics of hope'—the question of 'how' a better future for the people can be achieved. The responsibilities of the government have come to be considered as the provision of good governance to ensure that the people enjoy improved lives and life chances. Thus, questions of what type of development should be pursued, how it should be achieved, and how the public's participation in the development process can be ensured have come to occupy a vital place in the emerging vernacular public arena. The central agenda of the vernacular public arena does not concern resisting the state or the market, unlike previous people's movements of the 1970s and 1980s; rather, it seeks to realise the type of governance that can best achieve the public's desire to improve their lives and life chances in a constant revision of, and in relation to, the workings of governments and the market.

Previously, people's organisations and civil associations could only attempt to influence the state through the 'vertical' channel—voting, lobbying, and demonstrations. Only state agencies that monitored other arms of the state for administrative inspection or financial auditing procedures were granted 'horizontal' access. At present, however, there is a 'hybrid' participation, in which social groups collaborate with agencies of the state, thus bridging the vertical–horizontal divide (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). There are numerous examples highlighting collaboration and alliances among diverse sets of groups beyond the vertical–horizontal divide. The Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS: Organization for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants), which played a vital role in the passage of the RTI, not only focused on grassroots mobilisation, but also mobilised the upper middle classes in urban areas that contributed to the passage of anti-corruption legislation (see the chapter by Sahoo in this volume; also Goetz

and Jenkins 2001). In this movement based on hybrid networks, not only were civil and people's organisations and NGOs crucial, but local governments and the courts were also essential. The Right to Education (RTE) campaign was also initiated by civil society groups that made appeals to, and received responses from, political parties, state, and central governments. It involved the participation of multiple segments of society in discussions, including activists, bureaucrats, and politicians, and was successful due to the mediation of the courts.

Social activists and representatives of various stakeholders now participate in the government's decision-making process as members of committees and councils, and people's organisations and civil associations coordinate with official bodies or hold them accountable. Public-private partnerships have become common. As such, the contemporary political process takes 'hybrid' forms, in which the boundaries between the 'vertical and horizontal', 'state and society', and 'party politics and non-party politics' have become increasingly blurred. Another example illustrates this point. The Anna Hazare movement or the Jan Lokpal Andolan (People's Ombudsperson Movement; see the chapter by Anup Kumar in this volume), although it largely reflected the interests of the urban middle classes, has also increasingly involved the participation of the poor and lower middle classes. As Anup Kumar (in this volume) points out, we must take note 'the differential social base and the complexity of the populist political practice of the *andolan*'. The *dabbawallas* (lunch-box carriers) of Mumbai, who are known for not stopping work even during a crisis, such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks, went on a one-day strike to demonstrate their solidarity with the movement; this was a first in their 120-year history. Similarly, the auto rickshaw drivers of Delhi went on a one-day strike and held a protest march in support of the Anna Hazare movement on 25 August 2011. Protests in support of the movement were even organised in small towns.

What began as an organised, middle-class movement gradually came to involve many related but autonomous movements in which the poor and lower middle classes participated without any central coordination. Further, what at one point seemed a facile populism combined with a touch of totalitarianism represented by the slogan 'Anna is India, India is Anna' gradually led to public discussions of the anti-corruption measures in the media from various perspectives and generated a response from both the government and parliament. Although the movement has lost its initial vitality, its gradual unfolding to involve diverse groups, voices, and their dialogues demonstrates the potential for a fertile, mediatory arena for debate and negotiation that may transform the simple, dichotomous framework of 'the state vs. social movement' or 'elite middle class vs. poor subaltern'.

These examples demonstrate that we cannot understand the penetration of governance simply as a process whereby India's society, politics, and economy have become unified through universal values and institutions. Along with progress in democratisation and the market economy, the pluralistic and diverse nature of Indian society has become increasingly evident in the public arena.

The ‘social’ character of the vernacular public arena

There is growing concern among some scholars that the rising importance of governance may indicate a danger of depoliticisation and disregard for democracy (Jayal 1997). Indeed, as improving living standards and life chances becomes the major political concern, there is a rise of ‘the social’, which from Hannah Arendt’s perspective exclusively concerns the necessities of biological life, which in turn overrides civic values in public life (Arendt 1998).

The space of ‘the social’, which is the inter-mediating and inter-permeating sphere for the market, state, and lifeworld—that is, the very site of the vernacular public arena—is also the sphere of biopolitics *à la* Foucault, where the life of the population rather than civic values has become the central political concern (Foucault 1991; Agamben 1998). This rise of the social has also taken place in modern India. As the state in postcolonial India claimed to be responsible for, and capable of, guaranteeing the lives of those it governed (the eradication of poverty, for example, is considered one of most important responsibilities of the government), and institutions were developed to distribute state resources, the governed, in turn, became political subjects who began to demand and maximise their share of resources from the state (Chatterjee 2004, 2011). In other words, the biopolitics of the modern state came to have a dual aspect: the state’s governance over the lives of the governed and the demand by the governed for the state to guarantee and improve their lives.

Today, contemporary Indian politics is highly focused on securing the public’s lives and life chances. This rise of ‘the social’ carries the risk that depoliticisation will accompany the changing nature of civil society, because civil society no longer discusses changing the existing power structure, but, instead, often collaborates with the state in delivering social goods. Even people’s movements that once held a radical agenda and often discussed dismantling the power structure now generally demand better government policies, while maintaining their oppositional stance. At present, left-wing political parties, activists, and NGOs agree on the importance of improving service delivery for the poor. Chandhoke regards this transformation as depoliticisation and as a move toward the ‘post-ideological era ... where the state is no longer seen as the object of political contestation, but as a provider of social goods’ (Chandhoke 2012: 45).

The question here is what type of democracy is possible in the age of biopolitical governance? Are the depoliticisation and devalorisation of democracy foregone conclusions? Are we bound to succumb to consensus and conformity in the face of biopower replacing plurality and freedom? Contemporary politics rarely addresses changes in the power structure per se, which has been related to the question of who represents the nation in terms of class amid the opposition between the elite and the subaltern and the state versus the people. The end of this old style of left-wing politics may be near. However, this does not imply the triumph of the neoliberal regime, in which consensual politics dominates. Noted here are a new agenda and new possibilities emerging with the new type of

politics centred on the question: 'what kind of hope for whom?' This requires serious consideration and debate from various perspectives.

It is important to note that the term 'governance' connotes two aspects: efficiency and participation. On the one hand, governance concerns the efficiency, transparency, and legitimacy of governmental procedure. On the other hand, it refers, in broader terms, to the processes of interaction and debate among concerned stakeholders in decision-making, implementation, and auditing. In addition to the efficiency of governance, it is necessary to consider the importance of the participatory aspect of governance. Contemporary vernacular publics do not allow the state to use the provision of social goods as mere consolation for neo-liberal measures. Individuals have not ceased casting a critical eye on the state simply because the state has begun promising to provide information, education, food, and medicine. The people, whose lives are directly connected with the workings of governance and the market, have acquired an attitude of constant evaluation with respect to whether the measures provided by the government truly have the potential to improve their life chances. In this sense, the simple redistribution of state resources will not satisfy the people. The people now demand not only greater efficiency, but also a type of governance that can improve their life chances by improving education, healthcare, and job opportunities.

In the post-planned economy age, instead of only one rational and correct prescription for development, individuals now realise that there are different modes of development and different possible uses of technology and institutions to this end. This situation is leading to the politicisation of a much larger field than in the past. Political participation is not only a matter of asserting one's rights or demanding a share in state resources. What we are witnessing is the rise of contestations, debates, and interactions among a plethora of multiple and diverse publics over the question of what type of development and for whom.

This question is of global importance in a post-Fukushima age, when the dark predicament of our time under the 'Empire' of the global capital power complex has begun to openly expose itself (Hardt and Negri 2000; Nancy 2012). Our very existence is implicated in the 'global assemblages' of the technological, the economic, the political, and the social, and there is apparently no escape from this predicament (Ong and Collier 2005). The crucial question here is whether democracy can maintain an arena for individuals to seek their own forms of life under such conditions (Nancy 2008). It is in this context that, in contemporary India, questions of equity and fairness among diverse groups are raised as often as the questions of efficiency and transparency, where an increasing number of vernacular publics raise their voices from their different subject positions to seek a meaningful course of development for their lives. This is the condition of our age, when the vernacular public arena cannot but obtain a broad, 'social' character centred on the issue of life. We perceive an expansion of issues in politics and far more complex interactions among various actors and groups that warrant the renewed attention of social scientists.

Expanding diversity of political parties, civil organisations, and media

With the expansion of issues and the increased participation of individuals with diverse positionalities in the vernacular public arena, we witness the multiplication and diversification of the publics and their further division into small organisational units. The diversification of publics has contributed to the invigoration of participatory democracy, where multiple publics debate policies and their implementation.

The tendency toward diversification is clear when we consider the growth in the number of political parties over time. In the 2009 general election, 364 political parties participated; interestingly, there were only seven national parties, whereas 41 regional parties contested the election.¹⁰ This change clearly reflects the fragmentation of the social bases of political parties and the diversification of the publics. Similarly, the number of NGOs has risen rapidly in recent years. According to one study, there were an estimated 3.3 million NGOs in India in 2009 (Shukhla 2010).¹¹

Such fragmentation is not confined to political parties and NGOs, but rather has affected various groups and communities. For example, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, formed in 1973 and claiming to represent the interests of Indian Muslims, split in 2005 and led to the establishment of three parallel boards in January 2005 by Shia, Bareilvi (a sect of Sunni Muslims), and Muslim feminists (for details, see Neyazi 2007). Similarly, the dalit groups were further subdivided on the basis of their level of underdevelopment, and the poorest dalits were declared to be Maha dalits in Bihar. This split was further applied in other parts of India, including Uttar Pradesh. The number of dalit organisations has also multiplied over the years.

What does the fragmentation of social communities mean for Indian democracy? Does it mean the end of dialogue and the beginning of fragmentation among social groups? This diversification of social groups and communities seems to have paved the way for invigorated debate and negotiations and enabled micro-groups to assert their interests and positionalities in the decision-making process. Here, rather than there being a fixed and unitary imagination of the community, the vernacular public arena filled with diverse viewpoints is ‘one in which competing, and sometimes overlapping, discourses are expressed’ (Wyatt, this volume).

An important precursor to the diversification in the ecology of vernacular publics is the mass media revolution, which has facilitated communication and exchanges between diverse groups. As Taberez Neyazi points out in this volume, ‘(t)he day-to-day monitoring of the political process by the media is crucial in ensuring checks and balances in the political system and help in the deepening of the process of democratisation’. The massive growth of Indian-language newspapers since the 1980s and the expansion of television since the 1990s provided space for previously marginalised groups to highlight their grievances in the public arena (Neyazi 2010, 2011). In the new century, the media landscape

has become further democratised with the arrival of new media and technology, such as the internet and mobile phones. The vernacular publics have taken advantage of these new technologies and begun to use them to mobilise public opinion. There are many instances in which protest movements have uploaded video clips on YouTube of atrocities committed by private companies and the state that led to strong public reactions (for example, the anti-Vedanta Resources campaign; see the chapter in this volume by Tokita-Tanabe and Tanabe). Similarly, the penetration of mobile phones and the decline in mobile tariffs and handset prices since the mid-2000s has opened up another opportunity to use technology to mobilise public opinion. The latest available data released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in May 2013 shows that the number of mobile phone subscribers has increased to 870 million, which is nearly 71 per cent of India's total population.¹² This profound transformation in India's media landscape has enabled the vernacular publics to participate in a web of networks with the outside world and expanded the possibility of reaching a greater number of individuals than previously possible.

Marginalisation and beyond

It is important to note, however, that with the development of new politics comes a new type of marginalisation. As capital and governance penetrate the far corners of the world, attempting to utilise all human and natural resources, what these forces consider useful to their ends is exploited and expended, and what they consider useless or inhibiting tends to be marginalised or evicted. A case in point is the predicament faced by the forest-dwelling tribal peoples of eastern India, who global capital wishes to see relocated in order to allow the ground to be cleared for the digging of mines and construction of dams, thermal power plants, steel plants, and aluminium refineries. Contrary to Stuart Corbridge's contention that '(t)he tragedy of large parts of eastern India, to repeat, is that capital is too often absent' (2011: 77), it is the penetration of capital that is creating new problems in the forested areas of eastern India.

Despite the past two decades of rapid growth in India following liberalisation, the rate of poverty reduction has been slow—at least, slower than in the 1980s. This condition is related to the fact that, although significant measures and schemes for poverty eradication are in place, the Indian bureaucracy still lacks impersonal efficiency and is embroiled in corruption, where progress can often only be made on issues through connections and bribery. In such a system, the poor and the marginalised are placed in a disadvantaged position and often do not receive what they are entitled to. This situation can be described as 'structural violence' against the sociopolitico-economically weak. The problem is the failure of the state in combination with political inequality in terms of caste, class, and gender (Gupta 2012; Harriss and Jeffrey 2013).

Groups and regions disadvantaged by the current political and economic structure are experiencing impoverishment and marginalisation. For example, neoliberal state policies have resulted in the increased displacement of the poor

and marginalised groups to clear space for private capital to grow and expand. The state began acquiring land in the name of development to construct dams and factories (Ishizaka 2006). Such land was often acquired forcibly from the poor without awarding them adequate compensation, leading to displacement and impoverishment.

Despite, or rather because of, the deplorable inefficiency and structural defects of the state and bureaucracy and the continuing political inequality, diverse individuals belonging to different classes, castes, religions, and genders are increasingly raising their voices to demand justice. On the political front, the issues of poverty and inequality are consistently on the public agenda, and there are vibrant criticisms, suggestions, and debates. Thus, a critical question arises: in the face of such obvious dysfunction in the agencies of the state and the continuing political inequality, how does Indian democracy manage to retain such vibrancy?

It is suggested here that this vibrancy is possible because of the subjectification of diverse social groups and individuals who have begun to raise their voices in the vernacular public arena. The source of the vibrancy of the democratic politics of contemporary India lies in the participatory agency of multitudes of vernacular publics who have begun to speak from their diverse subject positions. The 'vernacular criticality', as pointed out by Badri Narayan in this volume, is not meant to reject the modernity and democracy that are disseminated in the lifeworld, but 'to create a context of critical reception for modern democratic institutions and values'. It is the creative mediation and churning of vernacular criticality and the modern values and institutions that have enabled the vernacular publics to keep a vigilant eye on the political and administrative procedures and raise their voices if there is any discrepancy (see chapters by Bishnu Mohapatra and Sarbeswar Sahoo in this volume).

Many of the marginalised, however, continue to lack the means and resources to engage in sustained dialogue. This situation provides fertile ground for right-wing mobilisation that calls for facile, majoritarian politics. Norio Kondo points out (in this volume) that the voices of Muslims do not reach the ruling or opposition parties in contemporary Gujarat and, as a result, Muslims in Gujarat still remain at the margins of the vernacular public arena. The challenge in the vernacular public arena, therefore, is to ensure the means of political participation for diverse social groups. Securing access to political participation is all the more necessary at a time of growing disenchantment with institutional, representative politics.

If affected groups are unable to make their discontent heard through democratic channels, they have little option but to resort to violent resistance to resolve their issues. The Maoist movement in the forested regions of central and eastern India is an example of such resistance. Participants in this movement chose or were forced to remain outside the vernacular public arena and thus resorted to violence in order to defend their rights. The decision to opt for a radical response is not unique to Maoist groups, but can also be found among groups in Kashmir and north-east India. It is necessary to provide opportunities

for conflicts and struggles to take democratic and political forms of expression. If they are not, these conflicts must erupt in violent form (Mouffe 2005). It is a profound challenge for Indian democracy to devise ways and mechanisms through which these groups can be engaged in debate and dialogue and participate in the vernacular public arena.

Toward participatory governance and citizenship

What is the purpose of advancing this concept of a ‘vernacular public arena’? We feel it is a useful framework with which to consider the new form of participatory governance and participatory citizenship emerging in India under globalisation beyond the issues of membership and representation in the nation-state. The vernacular public arena intermediates diverse and segmented voices in the space located between the state, the market, and the lifeworld, allowing for hybrid and diverse means of participation. On such grounds, a new framework for considering the nature and scope of political participation is required to recalibrate the conditions of contemporary democracy.

How can we ensure the political participation of diverse groups and individuals segmented by class, caste, religion, and gender in the presence of infiltration by global governance and capitalism? If the deepening of democracy persists under globalisation, how is this possible? We would like to invite scholars to employ the concepts of ‘vernacular publics’ and a ‘vernacular public arena’ to discern the realities and possibilities of the new form of participatory governance and participatory citizenship in a globalising India.

In contemporary India, there are vibrant discussions, dialogues, and interactions among vernacular publics, related to questions of how diverse sections of the public, as well as governments, corporations, and civil organisations, can and should take on the responsibility and opportunity to improve human lives, life chances, and living environments. These networks of debate and dialogue among various groups, and collective engagement in matters of common interest, however, do not necessarily lead to a consensus or convergence of understanding on issues or possible solutions. What is shared among diverse vernacular publics is an arena for public discussion and interaction. Each group and individual tends to retain its own distinctive positions and viewpoints, making points of conflict clear and occasionally even further diversifying the participants’ positionalities.

The framework of the ‘vernacular public arena’ enables us to understand this situation in which such negotiations, dialogues, debates, contestations, and confrontations occur among diverse vernacular publics. Though relevant to the Indian context, existing frameworks and their emphasis on class divisions between the rich and the poor, and identity politics based on caste and religion, are inadequate for a comprehensive understanding of the unfolding political dynamism and the complex reshuffling and reassembling now occurring in Indian society. We are witnessing the emergence of unexpected coalitions and alliances across diverse castes, classes, and religious groups, according to the particular issues involved.

This socially hybrid and mediating character of the vernacular public arena provides the basis for negotiation and dialogue, while certainly containing elements of friction and confrontation among diverse social groups.

These vernacular public arenas—that is, the networks around a matter of common interest—are often, though not necessarily, created through the mediation of educated leaders (in the case of people’s movements) and the middle class (in the case of the mass media), who, as the core or facilitator, are able to gather diverse social groups into a network. The reality of this type of social formation involving the middle class, who are supporting and enabling their subordinates, the oppressed, and the poor, is one aspect of how vernacular publics are permeated by the workings of governance and the market. We have thus tried to move beyond the binary class division by bringing the poor and the middle classes under a common analytical umbrella—that is, the dynamic domain of the vernacular public arena. This is where various groups, positioned differently within society, compete and cooperate with one another on multiple pressing issues, according to the exigencies. Such mediation and permeation, however, are the very mechanisms through which vernacular publics acquire their public agency. Both the difficulty and the potential lie in the mediation between vernacular voices and the public arena, as individuals’ subjectivity and voices would inevitably be tainted by the operations of mediation facilitated by governance and the market, but are also part of the process by which individuals acquire the capacity and space to speak in this hybrid, glocal world. It is the responsibility of scholars to discern the realities and potentialities of this emerging arena for the future of democracy.

Situating the analysis

The foregoing discussion and issues provide the context for the contributions in this volume. They represent an attempt to empirically analyse and critique how the vernacular public arena has been operating in concrete situations. ‘Politics of Relations’, the opening chapter by Yumiko Tokita-Tanabe and Akio Tanabe, examines the possibilities of the emergence of alternative democracy based on the politics of relations, which goes beyond and supplements the idea and practice of representative democracy and the right to own property, and consists of a field of interactive negotiation to redefine the relations of human beings with other human and non-human beings. Through their case study of the bauxite mining projects and the opposition movements in the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha, Tokita-Tanabe, and Tanabe show how diverse social groups are becoming active agents in the emerging vernacular public arena and negotiating the conditions for protecting and possibly improving their living environment, with the government and the corporations, as well as among themselves. This is a struggle for sustainable and inclusive development to attain socio-economic entitlements and capabilities and to secure life chances for diverse groups of people.

The chapter by Craig Jeffrey and Jane Dyson critiques the idea that civil society in India is confined to a thin upper stratum of the population. By drawing

attention to the everyday political practices of educated, unemployed youth in a remote part of the Indian Himalayas and making use of long-term qualitative research, Jeffrey and Dyson point to the capacity of young people to circulate anti-corruption discourses, engage in everyday community service, and create resources for the village by forming partnerships with sympathetic officials. The chapter offers a persuasive ethnographic account of the emergence of youth as an important agent of vernacular political action.

Going beyond existing studies on democratic deepening, which have mainly focused on electoral politics, the chapters by Sarbeswar Sahoo and Taberez Ahmed Neyazi demonstrate the participation of vernacular publics in alternative arena activities, which has transformed the nature of democracy and development in India. Through his study of NGOs and social movement groups in the state of Rajasthan, Sahoo shows how vernacular publics have utilised the civil society arena as a medium to challenge the imposed hegemony of the elites, as well as to engage with state institutions in order to influence development policies. The chapter shows the different approaches followed by people's movements and NGOs to encourage people's participation. MKSS—a people's movement that played a vital role in the passing of the Right to Information Act—focused on grassroots mobilisation and social movements, while Seva Mandir—a Rajasthan-based NGO—concentrated on service delivery and project implementation. Despite their different approaches, both organisations have been able to mobilise the vernacular publics who acted to make sure that their rights were not ignored. What has precipitated such active participation by vernacular publics in the civil society arena? Neyazi's chapter tries to answer the question by looking at the role of a Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Bhaskar*, in enabling the participation of vernacular publics in public arena activities. The chapter also uses macro-level data that shows that the growth of the Hindi media since the 1980s has been accompanied by greater mobilisation of the masses in north India. Paying attention to the mutually reinforcing relationship between the vernacular media and the vernacular publics, the chapter provides a complex and nuanced picture of the impact of the growth of the Hindi news media on enabling dialogues and negotiations among diverse people.

Anup Kumar makes a valuable contribution to the volume by analysing the recent *andolan* (agitation) launched by the Indian social activist, Anna Hazare, over the creation of an ombudsperson (*lokpal*), who would be endowed with wide-ranging powers to investigate and prosecute powerful individuals without fear of political interference. The chapter shows a noticeable difference between the English and Hindi news media in how they viewed the Jan Lokpal Andolan and its effectiveness in checking corruption. The Hindi media was overwhelmingly sympathetic towards the *andolan* and often proclaimed, '*jan sabha* (people's council) is bigger than *Lok Sabha* (Parliament)'. In contrast, the English media was rather critical about the tactics and usefulness of a strong *lokpal* and criticised it for marginalising electoral democracy.

Bishnu Mohapatra's chapter examines the political activism of women slum dwellers in south Delhi, close to middle class residences. The chapter points out

that although slum dwellers have exploited the growing potential of India's competitive electoral democracy, this strategy is effective only in specific circumstances; between the elections and in everyday life, the poor need to devise new ways to get service delivery. With the help of an NGO called Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS: Society for Citizen Vigilance Initiative), and by utilising the Right to Information Act of 2005 (RTI), the slum women fought against irregularities in the Public Distribution System (PDS) in their localities, arguing their cases with local officials and elected representatives. The data obtained through the RTI, which is widely circulated in the media and discussed in several wards in Delhi, revealed the biases of the elected representatives toward the interests of the middle class. Protests ensued, after which there was some improvement in the situation. Mohapatra points out that we may note a new kind of politics here, in which the creative use of democratic instruments by the poor may hold the key not only to transforming politics, but also to transforming the economic order.

The chapter by Shinya Ishizaka analyses the role of social movements in the emergence of vernacular publics, which have played a vital role in fighting the statist discourse of development and offer an alternative that is rooted in the vernacular tradition of the region. Through a case study of the Chipko (forest protection) movement (1973–1981), which resulted in the transformation of forest management systems in the Uttarakhand region in the 1980s, Ishizaka demonstrates the formation of a new generation of professional social activists, who not only work in their local areas, but are also connected with one another in larger networks through frequent exchanges by phone, letters or emails, occasional visits, and irregular meetings. The creation of loose networks, Ishizaka argues, has also acted as a mobilisation tool when some activists in the network need the help of other activists to organise meetings or demonstrations.

Badri Narayan examines how people at the grassroots articulate their ideas about politics and political democracy, which is rooted in a vernacular understanding of their world represented by folklore, folk stories, anecdotes, proverbs, and metaphors about kings and queens that are imbued with contemporary values. The study is based on oral data collected from the villages of Shahabpur and Jugrajpur, located in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, and highlights the ways in which mostly illiterate and marginal sections of rural people, who struggle for their daily bread and are usually considered apolitical, have been able to contest and critique the mainstream statist discourse. Narayan shows that the interaction of vernacular cultural and moral settings with the state-led democratic universe has significantly contributed to the deepening of Indian democracy by enabling the participation of vernacular publics in contemporary democratic cultural politics.

Andrew Wyatt unravels the emergence of the new politics of caste in the state of Tamil Nadu, which celebrates caste-based identities, as against a broader Dravidian identity that has long disdained caste identities. The appearance of caste-based political parties is attributed to the failure of the dominant political parties—the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida

Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)—to provide sufficient space for marginalised groups to voice their concerns in the public arena. Wyatt argues that, despite being overpowered by Dravidian political culture, the emergence of caste-based politics has posed a serious challenge to the future of state politics in Tamil Nadu. He also notes, however, that in the legacy of Dravidian politics, caste-based subcultures are by no means hegemonic even today. The Dravidian public arena was an attempt to create a new cultural context into which democratic political ideas could be given vernacular meaning, without necessarily resorting to caste identity. In the contemporary public arena in Tamil Nadu, hybrid political formulations such as caste traditions, myths, Ambedkarism, and Dravidian ideas are expressed and contended.

Anastasia Piliavsky's chapter, drawing on field research conducted in and around a rural market town in Rajasthan, demonstrates the complexities that inform the working of the public arena in a small town and critiques the liberal notion of the public sphere. Piliavsky argues that real politics does not take place openly in public, but in secret hidden places in the marketplace. Contrary to the modern idea of the public sphere where visibility and transparency are valued, people treat public exposure, which is embodied in the marketplace, as inhibiting self-expression, conversation, and, ultimately, the making of choices. Real conversations take place off-stage, behind closed doors. While only 'government talk' and ideological slogans are enunciated in public demonstrations, ordinary villagers speak vernaculars that carry resilient beliefs about how relations, communications, and politics should be articulated. Such stark differences between the liberal idea of the public sphere and vernacular Indian politics offer us a better sense of how popular politics actually works in Indian settings.

Lastly, Norio Kondo shifts our focus to the recurrent theme of communal riots in India. The chapter explains the conditions that lead to large-scale communal riots in India and suggests ways to contain such riots. In Gujarat, the voices of Muslims do not reach the ruling or opposition parties, because of the strong influence of the Sangh Parivar, and no party steadily supports the Muslim cause. In Uttar Pradesh, the Muslim communities are important vote banks, and all political parties, with the exception of the BJP, have been trying to win Muslim votes, making it imperative for political parties to look after the interests of Muslims. Through a comparative study of the states of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, Kondo illustrates the importance of political will and an 'institutionalised riot prevention mechanism' that can go a long way in averting communal riots between Hindus and Muslims.

Collectively, the essays in this volume express the importance of the idea of the 'vernacular public arena' and use this framework as a means to better understand and explore the profound democratic transformation that is ongoing in India. In the space of the 'vernacular public arena' alliances are formed along various axes, reflecting the pluralistic nature of Indian society and allowing negotiations, dialogues, and debates between diverse social groups, many of which are innovative and unprecedented. The volume looks at the vernacular public arena as a space situated between the vernacular lifeworld and global

market governance, in which occurs a dynamic process of mediation between the multiplicity of the vernacular and the universality of the public. Diverse vernacular publics are able to raise their voices to exert influence and redefine political priorities along their own lines through a variety of forms of participation, as well as maintain a constant and critical evaluation of government efforts. Thus, Indian society continues to shape the meaning of democracy in unique ways that are in keeping with the dynamic creativity of its culture.

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Notes

- 1 The concept of 'democratic deepening' here refers to the participation of marginalised groups and the general public not only in electoral politics, but also in the process of democratic transformation toward participatory governance and citizenship. Most of the existing studies of democratic deepening have focused on the participation of previously marginalised groups in electoral politics (for example, Frankel 2000; Hasan 2000; Jaffrelot 2003; Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Yadav 1996, 2000; Varshney 2000).
- 2 'Vernacular multitudes' emphasises the need to reappraise the importance of the plurality, multiplicity, and diversity of groups and individuals as political subjects who attempt to participate and speak for themselves in the public arena. This definition is in contrast to a unified 'people' founded on contractarian sovereignty and represented by the government through electoral politics (Spinoza 1958; Negri 2000, 2002). However, although the growing importance of participatory democracy among the multitudes in contemporary India is stressed here, this volume also recognises the continuing political importance of representative democracy by the people as citizens of India (*pace* Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005). Importantly, what constitutes the vernacular public arena is the variety of means of mediating between participatory and representative politics. The vernacular publics participate in politics to raise their voices and are, in turn, represented by local and national governments, media, civil and people's organisations, and political parties to different degrees in intended and unintended ways. The pressing question is how to fruitfully combine the participatory and representative aspects of the diverse vernacular publics in existing forms of democracy.
- 3 Partha Chatterjee's work has been one of most important sources of inspiration for this conceptualisation of the 'vernacular public arena', and though we would like to make clear where we differ, we are largely indebted to his ingenuity.
- 4 Tanabe (2002, 2007) attempted to capture this third arena of democracy with the category of 'moral society', in which the 'politics of relationships' takes place, in contrast to 'civil society' and 'political society', in which the 'politics of liberation' and the 'politics of demand' take place, respectively. Moral society is not the space where morality is imposed or practised, but the arena in which the moral-ethical issue of the socio-economic political relationships between persons and groups is at the core of critical negotiation and reformulation. The concept of the 'vernacular public arena' indicates the social space where moral society operates.
- 5 'Glocal' connotes the reconfiguring of social spatiality in the late modern world where

local phenomena are connected globally, while global phenomena takes local forms. Here, globalisation and localisation proceed simultaneously, making all contemporary phenomena ‘glocal’. The ‘glocal’ dynamics include interactions among various levels of socio-spatial units, including the global, regional, national, supralocal, and local.

- 6 Levi-Strauss argues that in modern societies, ‘we communicate with the immense majority of our contemporaries by all kinds of intermediaries—written documents or administrative machinery—which undoubtedly vastly extend our contacts but at the same time make those contacts somewhat “unauthentic”’. Here, ‘unauthentic’ means not ‘based on personal relationships, on concrete relations between individuals’ (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 363–364). We cannot expect to retain our ‘authentic’ voice and relationships in the wider mediated world. The current agenda is to retain ‘authentic’ relationships in our intimate sphere and personal networks, while making the most of the intermediaries of democratic communication in the public arena. It would be interesting to investigate how much the personal networks as authentic relationships have the potentiality to form a space for sociopolitical interactions in modern settings. Anastasia Piliavsky, in this volume, from her fieldwork of bazaar in Rajasthan, amply illustrates how important political decisions are made through personal relationships. Shinya Ishizaka, in this volume, also points to the importance of the personal networks of the activists in organising social movements.
- 7 This is not to deny the history, which is replete with examples of human beings attempting and succeeding in escaping states, the reach of which was limited by the lack of the technology of the governance. Scott, in his recent work, demonstrated that with advances in technology and infrastructure development in the post-World War II period, it has become difficult for individuals to escape the grasp of the state (Scott 2009).
- 8 It has been argued that the colonial regime in the first 40 years of the nineteenth century brought about the traditionalisation of Indian society, where the local power structure centring on the dominant caste became fixed, and Brahmanic views on caste were given a privileged position in the Anglo-Hindu courts of law (Washbrook 1988). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, colonial perception of Indian society as a collection of caste and religious communities largely influenced its administration, and this led to the official categorisation of Indian people in terms of caste and religion. As different administrative treatments were given according to people’s affiliations, there was a rise of caste and religious consciousness in Indian society, wherein various caste associations and religious organisations were created (Cohn 1987). While there is much historical debate over the date and process of the fixing of tradition in Indian society, postcolonial India certainly inherited a society where the hierarchical categorisation of people in terms of caste and religion mattered to a large extent. The sociopolitical dynamism of the vernacular public arena since the 1990s has been largely about deconstructing, reinterpreting, and reassembling the existing categories.
- 9 Rajni Kothari has termed the one-party domination of Indian politics from 1952 to 1967 led by the Congress the ‘Congress system’. Opposition parties, which were sharply divided among themselves, were unable to create a viable alternative to the ruling party and acted instead as pressure groups outside it. Further, the Congress was able to represent different shades of opinion and was quick to co-opt the programmes and policies of the opposition, which limited the growth of opposition parties. For a detailed discussion of the Congress system, see Kothari (1964, 1974).
- 10 One was an independent candidate, whereas the others were registered (unrecognised) parties.
- 11 This figure is for all registered NGOs, many of which may not be operational. According to government data, there are 53,376 NGOs in India, but this figure only represents NGOs that have collaborated with the government.
- 12 Although TRAI claims that mobile penetration has reached 70.9 per cent of the total

population based on actual subscribers, this figure must be treated with caution, since a number of individuals have multiple subscriptions.

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2 Politics of relations and the emergence of the vernacular public arena

Glocal networks of development and livelihood in Odisha

Yumiko Tokita-Tanabe and Akio Tanabe

Introduction

This chapter investigates the possibilities and difficulties of a new kind of democracy for sustainable and inclusive development. Today's politico-economic systems are based on ideas and institutions of property rights and representative democracy. These notions, however, disembed, abstract, and objectify partial aspects of human life and its relationship to the world. We suggest that promoting sustainable and inclusive development involves questions of not only how to satisfy individuals' needs to 'own' and who has the right to 'represent' communities, but also how and what kind of 'relations' human beings can have with other human and non-human beings. We call the politics pertaining to the latter 'politics of relations'.

Politics of relations differs from politics of emancipation, which aims to achieve political freedom for all citizens, and from politics of demand, which calls for redistribution of state resources by communities (Chatterjee 2011; Tanabe 2002, 2007). Politics of relations focuses on how to deal with the relationships between people belonging to different social groups and how to manage the relationship between humans and nature in the context of economic development, democratic governance, and the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods. Politics of relations play an important role in the newly emerging vernacular public arenas in contemporary India, where different people with diverse positions, interests, and values have begun to raise their voices and participate in multiple public negotiation processes to critically assess and attempt to improve their relations—and therefore their own standings—vis-à-vis other human and non-human beings.

The growth of vernacular public arenas in India, facilitated by the rise of institutions of mediation—civil associations, governmental schemes, market organisations, mass and new media, and so on—is filling the gap between the state/market and people's everyday lives. Public sphere has been defined as a space between the private sphere of the family and the sphere of the state (Habermas 1989). Public sphere in this sense is an intermediate space where 'public opinion' is formed by individuals taking part in associations based on principles

of civil society, which stands apart and in critical distance from the family and the state.

The peculiar characteristic of the public sphere in India is that the elite public sphere has been developed in concordance with the formation of the state in colonial experience. The gap existed not so much between the state and civil society, which were both occupied by the English-educated elites, but between the elite-led state-cum-civil society and the subaltern vernacular society. The gap was temporarily bridged in the popular nationalist movement led by M.K. Gandhi, but persistently continued and re-manifested in postcolonial India. The public agenda in postcolonial India has been how to mediate the official and subaltern discourses, institutions, and practices.

In the early years of independent India, parliamentary politics were in the hands of elites who were elected to represent the people. The subalterns failed to become protagonists in the national democratic politics (Guha 1982). There was also a dual economy, with the state-led urban economy managed by elite bureaucrats, professionals, and corporate capitalists and legitimised by representative democracy, on the one hand, and the rural agrarian economy in the hands of the subalterns, on the other. However, from the late 1960s, a democratic upsurge began, which led to the rising importance of 'political society' among the 'governed' and the rise of people's movements from the 1970s onwards (Chatterjee 2004, 2011). Beginning in the 1990s, further structural changes that involved economic liberalisation combined with measures of the devolution of power and empowerment of the subalterns—such as furthering of reservation measures, panchayat reforms,¹ the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Right to Information Act (RTI), and the Right to Education Act (RTE)—led to increased participation by more diversified social groups and individuals in the public arenas.

This process of empowerment of subalterns, in which they began to acquire a vernacular voice and subjectivity in public, was concomitant with the process of the increasing penetration of state governance and institutions in the everyday lifeworld. The emergence of the vernacular public arena was possible not because civil society acquired freedom from the state, but because there was mutual enforcement between the rise of popular demand from below and the measures provided for public participation by the state from above. The nature of people's movements also changed from subaltern resistance efforts against the state to movements calling for dialogues and negotiations among diverse social groups, as well as with political parties, government bodies, corporations, and various intermediate organisations. People's movements today include professionals, urban elites, and rural subalterns in India, as well as global human rights movements.

The dual economy of the state-led urban development versus the rural agrarian economy is also breaking down. The penetration of a market economy, combined with redistributive measures reaching out to grassroots levels, has led to vibrant cash transactions in rural areas, where small-scale retail businesses and service providers are flourishing, thus providing increased employment opportunities. Just as socio-economic development is no longer simply in the hands of

the state, corporations, in order to be successful, can no longer simply make a profit at the expense of the people. They must be seen to promote socio-economic development as part of their corporate social responsibility. Corporations are now building schools, colleges, healthcare centres, hospitals, and roads and providing electricity and running water in the places of operation, so that they get support for their industrial projects. We must, however, remain sensitive and critical about the question of who the beneficiaries of these measures are.

In this chapter, we take up a case study of bauxite mining projects and their opposition movements in the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha. This region faces serious political struggles over the use and distribution of natural resources, as well as questioning over what course of politico-economic and sociocultural development the region should take. Our study finds that the logic of property rights and representation are indeed at work; at the same time, there is an unfolding of novel attempts to overcome the institutional limitations of pre-existing systems, offering us a glimpse of the possibilities and difficulties of a people-centred and diversity-enhancing democracy (Kothari 2005).

First, we provide a brief introduction to the Niyamgiri Hills, before going on to describe the bauxite mining project in the region, which is the centre of a controversy involving various groups of local people, aluminium companies, the state Government of Odisha, the Government of India, domestic and foreign NGOs, people's movements, and researchers. We describe and analyse their activities in the region. We then discuss the connections, negotiations, fissures, and conflicts between these different actors, and how these processes are leading to the formation of a wide range of vernacular public arenas.

Ecological and sociocultural environment of the Niyamgiri Hills

The Niyamgiri Hills is a range of peaks around 900 to 1,000 metres above sea level that constitute the northern section of the Eastern Ghats range and extend across the border between Kalahandi and Rayagada districts in south-west Odisha. The hills are rich in biodiversity, covered with various kinds of tropical evergreens, tropical deciduous trees, shrubs, and bamboo groves. The forests of the Niyamgiri Hills lie adjacent to the Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary to the north-west and Kotagarh Wildlife Sanctuary to the north-east. These sanctuaries are important for the preservation of animals, such as elephants, tigers, leopards, deer, boars, lizards, and snakes. Many rare species of plants have also been discovered in the Niyamgiri Hills.²

Bauxite contained in the soil of the Niyamgiri Hills plays an important role in maintaining the biodiversity. Water permeates easily into bauxite, which has the property of retaining moisture. The peaks of the Niyamgiri Hills are flat, and the bauxite-containing soils accumulate water during rainfall. The water is then released throughout the four seasons, providing an important source of water in the dry season. Many rivers that sustain the agriculture in the flat lowlands have their sources in the Niyamgiri Hills.

The biodiversity of the Niyamgiri Hills is also supported by the people who live there. The Dongria Kondhs, who live on the slopes of the Niyamgiri Hills, carry out swidden farming (millet), gathering and hunting (honey and small animals), fruit tree cultivation (mangoes, jackfruit, and bananas), and upland cropping (turmeric, ginger, and pineapples). The Dongria Kondhs sell fruits, turmeric, and ginger as cash crops at weekly markets held in the plains, but they never clear the forest to excessive degrees. The Dongria Kondhs have abundant folk knowledge about the medicinal properties of herbs that grow in the Niyamgiri Hills and use medicinal herbs as antidotes for snakebites and to treat a variety of medical problems, such as cholera, irregular menstruation, rheumatism, wounds, swellings, and indigestion.

The Kondhs worship mountains as the father-god Dongar and the earth as the mother-goddess Dharini Penu and have continued to protect the natural environment of the Niyamgiri Hills over the years. For the Dongria Kondh, the peaks of the Niyamgiri Hills are the home of Niyam Raja, the God of Law, and they consider it taboo to cut down the forest in those areas (Padel and Das 2010: 70, 140).³ The Kutia Kondh tribal people, who live in the foothills of the Niyamgiri Hills and have settled as farmers, also consider the hills sacred.

In this way, the bauxite in the soils of the Niyamgiri Hills sustains regionally specific livelihoods, cultures, and ecologies in the network of relations between humans, living organisms, and non-living materials. It has a significant role in the relationships between the diverse geographical environments—namely, mountains, plains, rivers, and seas. Bauxite is, thus, embedded in the human ecosystem and history of the region. However, what is happening at present are active movements to disembed bauxite from its socio-ecological and environmental networks and utilise it solely as a resource for producing aluminium.

The eastern Indian states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh and the western part of Odisha are heavily forested areas that are inhabited by many tribal peoples and are rich in mineral resources. In the British colonial period, these forested areas became state property, and the rights of the local tribal people living there were trampled upon. Railways were built to transport mineral and forest resources from this area to ports. Dams were built to provide electricity and water for alumina refineries and aluminium smelters located in this region. Today, where development is advanced chiefly through the logic of capitalism and with the cooperation of the state, the circumstances of the colonial legacy have not been sufficiently rectified. It is no accident that the forested mountain belt of eastern India forms the main section of the ‘red belt’, where the armed dissident forces of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) are particularly active.⁴ Some of the local residents, who have reached the conclusion that it is impossible to have their voices heard through peaceful means, have begun to believe that they have no option but to resort to violence in order to protect their living environment. The rise of the Maoists indicates a failure of democracy, and an important agenda for democracy in India today is how to include the Maoists in vernacular publics, where they can participate in negotiations and conversations without resorting to violence.⁵

Development and politics in Niyamgiri: state development programmes and local economic activities

The Dongria Kondh living in the Niyamgiri Hills and the Kutia Kondh living in the foothills are recognised as Scheduled Tribes as per India's constitution. They are the indigenous people of the land, known as *adivasi*, which means 'indigenous people of the region'. Both the Dongria Kondh and the Kutia Kondh were designated as 'primitive tribal groups' by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, in 1975 and are the subjects of protection and development. In particular, the Dongria Kondh, who live only in the Niyamgiri Hills, are considered to be an 'endangered tribe', with a population of only 7,952 people in the 2001 national census.

In 1964, the Dongria Kondh Development Agency (hereafter, DKDA) was established by the state Government of Odisha to implement development projects, such as education, medical care, and irrigation, for the Dongria Kondh communities. At the time, it was considered necessary first to protect the Dongria Kondh from unjust trade pricing and usurious lending by the local traders and the Domb Scheduled Caste and to control the sale of alcohol in the region. The Dongria Kondh were selling their hill crops in the lowlands and purchasing items such as articles for everyday use, but were facing commercial exploitation by the Domb in the marketplaces; this was a serious obstacle to the development of the Dongria Kondh.

The Domb are engaged in small-scale commerce that links the hill and forest areas with the plains. Large-scale commerce and the administration are controlled by the middle- and high-ranking castes that migrated from the coastal regions of the Ganjam and Gajapati districts. Until about the 1960s, the Domb had a relationship of interdependence and mutual aid with the Dongria Kondh. However, as large numbers of people immigrated to the areas around the Niyamgiri Hills from adjacent regions and the population increased, the Domb came to monopolise the market for Dongria Kondh agricultural produce. Some Doms have received assistance from government development programmes and have constructed handicraft factories for the manufacture of brass artifacts (*dhokra*), which practice was formerly under the monopoly of artisan castes, and have been selling these to domestic and overseas tourists. In this way, these enterprising Doms are empowered by state development projects and are taking part in the market economy.

The people of the Scheduled Castes, Domb and Pano, while being peripheral peoples in the region, have managed to facilitate favourable arrangements for themselves in the market economy through interactions with the state, corporate capital, and NGOs and have been successful in improving their socio-economic status to a certain degree. However, the fact that they have achieved this improvement in their socio-economic status by linking up with external commercial capital, NGOs, and Christian organisations has not been well-received by middle- and high-ranking castes and the Kondhs. The opening up of opportunities for certain sectors of the population is creating friction and conflict

between Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and middle- and high-ranking castes, which is manifested in the form of serious religious confrontation between the Hindus and the Christians in western Odisha.

In nearby Kandhamal district, there is longstanding antagonism between the people of the Kondh (Kui) Scheduled Tribe, who were the traditional rulers, and the Pano, an emerging Scheduled Caste, many of whom have converted to Christianity. In recent years, this conflict has become progressively more intractable, as the Kondhs have objected to the Pano engaging in finance and proceeding to buy up land, as well as demanding Scheduled Tribe status. Further, not only is the social status of Scheduled Tribes considered superior to that of Scheduled Castes in this region, but there is also the factor that if Scheduled Tribe status is gained, the people can maintain their 'scheduled' status, even if they convert to Christianity.⁶

The international Hindu association, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Organisation, hereafter, VHP) has interpreted this socio-economic and political antagonism between the Kondhs and the Pano as religious conflict between Hindus and Christians. The VHP has turned the Pano into its enemy by linking them to overseas capital and the Christian church. It supports the Kondhs, who form the majority in the region, and religious tension between the Pano and the Kondhs is rising. After the religious riots of December 2007, the gunning down of the VHP leader Swami Laxmananda Saraswati and five others by the Maoists in August 2008 led activists of the VHP, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, the Indian People's Party), and related organisations, along with the Kondhs, to stage a systematic attack on Pano residential areas in retaliation. Further, in Kandhamal district, in contrast to other districts, it is reported that it is not the tribals, but rather it is the Pano and other Scheduled Castes who form the support groups for the Maoists. At least 38 people died in this attack and nearly 25,000 Pano were forced to relocate. With the overlapping clashes between social groups, political motivations, and religious conflict, the situation is extremely complex with entanglements between disparate forces.

Mutual distrust between government officials and the local people is also a cause of conflict. For instance, when we interviewed the officers at the DKDA, they told us that the Dongrias do not understand or cooperate with them in their attempts to improve their lives. They said:

Once a supervisor officer came and had a look at the situation in the villages. He got very angry that the water pipes were without taps and the water was running all the time. He told us off. But we have given them the taps so many times but every time they just take the tap away as they are so used to running water in the streams. They do not understand that the water will be wasted if they don't have taps on the water pipe.

When we visited a Dongria Kondh village, we, indeed, saw that the water pipe had no tap. We asked the Dongrias why there was no tap; they said that there was no tap to start with. We told them that the DKDA officers must have come to place taps on

the pipe, but the Dongrias said that no officer had ever come to their village, even to take a look. We saw half-built structures that were meant to be completed as schools, but these had obviously been abandoned a long time ago. There were also tube wells without handles. There were clearly some state resources flowing into the Dongria villages, but they were not being utilised properly.

Despite such setbacks and difficulties, government-led development projects for the Dongria Kondh are continuing, and opportunities are increasing for the local society to be connected to the outside world through such projects. There is no doubt that the redistribution of wealth and educational support to Scheduled Tribes by the government and NGOs has had a great impact on the local society. Since the bauxite mining issue has been raised in the Niyamgiri area, outsiders such as Vedanta company workers, government officials, NGO workers, social activists, journalists, and researchers have started frequently visiting the region, and interaction between the local communities and the outside world has increased considerably. When we visited a Dongria Kondh village, a middle-aged woman told us that she was called by the government to attend a meeting for tribal people in Bhubaneswar, the state capital of Odisha. We also met a Dongria Kondh person who had received education from an NGO and subsequently worked as an employee of the NGO. Some Dongria Kondh are employed as *gram rojgar sevaks* (village employment assistants) to help in government development projects as representatives of the local community.

The Indian Parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in September 2005, offering up to 100 days of employment per rural household per year on public works at the prevailing minimum unskilled wage rate. At the same time, the state Government of Odisha announced a special development programme for the poverty-stricken regions of old Kalahandi, Bolangir, and Koraput (KBK region),⁷ and huge amounts of public funding were to be invested.⁸ For example, in those regions, the Public Distribution System (PDS) supplies rice, sugar, and kerosene not only to those below the poverty line (BPL), but also to all those above the BPL.⁹ Such investments of external funding have had a great impact on local society. Many people belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category other than the Dongria Kondh are increasingly getting government subsidies.

In August 2010, when we visited a very lively market in Rayagada district on our way to Niyamgiri, we saw many Kutia Kondh and Desia Kondh buying food and everyday necessities. There we met a Desia Kondh woman who told us that her husband had died and that she was in deep trouble. Although she did not say so directly, we began to think she wanted some financial help from us. Then our guide noticed that she had some ink on her finger, which indicated that she had registered her fingerprints at a government office. He asked her what she had received there. She told us that she had received a welfare benefit from the office, because she was a widow. When we asked her how much she received, she said she got 10,000 rupees (about a month's wage for a young civil servant in Odisha). We were surprised. She was carrying 10,000 rupees with her for shopping at the market.

It is true that social security and social development are still insufficient in India, and, of course, there is the continuing problem of the disparity between the poor and the rich (Sengupta *et al.* 2008). However, compared to the situation in the early 1990s, there are more opportunities for people to obtain cash in various ways. The cash economy is penetrating into local society and the informal economy is more vibrant, in spite of the disparities and the unintended consequences of various development projects (Chatterjee 2008).

Bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri area and Vedanta Resources

It is in the context of the penetration of state governance through development projects and the diffusion of the market economy that Vedanta has come onto the scene. Today, Odisha's economy is greatly affected by the development of mining industries by foreign capital (Mishra 2010). Since 2001, Odisha's GDP has been growing at the rate of 9 per cent per annum, with 3.59 per cent growth in the agricultural and forestry sector, 12.67 per cent in manufacturing, and 9.75 per cent in the services sector. It is a characteristic of Odisha that there is a high growth rate in the manufacturing sector, whereas it is the growth rate of the services industries that is high in India as a whole (Shah 2011: 4). This development is unlike the market vibrancy supported by the local informal economy, which is related to the services industry. Rather, growth in the manufacturing sector is actualised by large-scale global capital descending like a parachute from above, and mining, processing, and exporting the local mineral resources. This type of development is highly questionable from the point of view of improving the living conditions of local people.

One of the first things we noticed when we arrived at Bhubaneswar Airport was the brightly lit advertisements of aluminium, steel, and coal-mining companies. The message they convey is that mining projects and metal processing industries are making Odisha rich. Among those advertisements, Vedanta Resources' advertisements catch the eye, as they are displayed on huge panels flanking both sides of the road leading from the airport to the city centre. Vedanta Resources is a multinational mining and metals company headed by an Indian businessman, Anil Agarwal, whose headquarters are in London.¹⁰ They try to convince people that what the company is doing is for the people's welfare and for the purposes of sustainable development by showing photographs of smiling women and children at school. The repeated phrase that Vedanta uses is: 'Fostering a better life. For the people of Orissa.' It emphasises its corporate social responsibility in several such advertisements.

Vedanta also began a major project for social development by building a university that it claims will be of equal ranking to Harvard, Stanford, and Oxford. It acquired 6,000 hectares of land on the outskirts of Puri, but protest movements against the project, pointing out environmental and human rights issues, questioned whether the land was, in fact, acquired for mining purposes and building factories. On 28 January 2011, the Supreme Court ordered a status quo on the project (Ueda 2010).

In 2002, Vedanta bought 12 villages from tribal people in Lanjigarh, Kala-handi district, displaced the residents, and immediately started to construct a large-scale alumina refinery, with a long-belt conveyer stretching from the factory to Niyamgiri, ready for digging and carrying away the bauxite. However, since they do not have permission to mine in Niyamgiri, they bring bauxite in from the neighbouring state, Chhattisgarh, to process at the refinery. It is true that Vedanta has created some source of employment in Lanjigarh for white-collar workers, labourers, and small businesses, and, by posting interviews with beneficiaries on the internet, Vedanta advertises the fact that they are improving the living standards of rural people by providing electricity, building roads, and so on.

Anti-mining movements: from Gandhian people's movements to politics over natural resources

Despite bringing some employment opportunities and other benefits, Vedanta's mining project in the Niyamgiri region is opposed by the local people and people's movements. People's movements in India are movements by people protesting against state oppression and market domination and are inheritors of the tradition of the Indian independence movement. They are similar to 'social movements', but are more politically oriented and should be seen as an aspect of non-party politics (Kothari 1984). People's movements in India differ distinctly from NGO activities, which engage in non-political development projects and emphasise links with global civil society.

In the history of Odisha, there have been many peasant, tribal, dalit, and civil society movements, but it was in the 1980s that these various movements came together to protect ecological and living environments (Padel and Das 2010: 89–95). In 1989, a people's movement involving diverse social groups succeeded in preventing the bauxite mining project in the Gandhamardan Hills by the national company Balco (Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd.). Since then, people's movements have been active all over Odisha and have been violently suppressed by the police in Kashipur and Kalinganagar. At present, there are active people's movements against the Niyamgiri mining project, the construction of Vedanta University in Puri and the Korean multinational company POSCO's steel plant project near Cuttack.

Gandhian people's movements play a significant role in people's movements in Odisha.¹¹ They have inherited Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and the philosophy and activism of the Gandhian socialist Rammanohar Lohiya (1910–1967) and conduct campaigns against industrial development due to globalisation by organising public demonstrations and protest meetings and through their writings. Prafulla Samantara, President of the Lok Shakti Abhiyan (People's Power Movement), said to Tanabe in an interview: 'Many people believe that capitalism and technology bring about wealth. That is why people welcome globalisation. But no, they don't. Capitalism and technology in fact bring about poverty.'¹² He went on to say that it is more important to first fulfil

the basic needs of the people than to proceed with economic development. When Tanabe asked him whether he denied the necessity of capital and technology, he answered that it is possible that small-scale capital and technology can be useful in securing people's livelihoods. But since, in this day and age, words such as capital and technology are used to promote globalisation, he is against it.

Lingaraj, the National General Secretary of the Samajwadi Jan Parishad (Socialist People's Association), said to Tanabe in an interview that his social movement provides an alternative to the limits of unsustainable industrialisation by promoting agriculture-centred self-reliance of the people. In the period just after independence, India tried to promote national industries against foreign ones as part of its nationalist movement. Today, however, times have changed and distinctions can no longer be drawn between national and foreign, just as Vedanta is an Indian company, but is based in Britain. So, in the age of global capitalism, Lingaraj asserts, it is most important to protect the bases of people's livelihood against the currents of capitalist economic development by emphasising people's self-reliance based on agriculture.

In the current context of globalisation, both Samantara and Lingaraj focus on politics over natural resources. Lingaraj points out that the major issue today is over the distribution of water resources. The problems of forced displacement and environmental pollution, of course, still continue to be important agendas, but more pressing is the question of whether limited water resources should be used for agriculture or for industry. He stresses that if Vedanta is allowed to mine in Niyamgiri, there will be no more water in the streams running from the hills. The streams of water go into the Bansadhara River, which serves millions of cultivators in the plains. If Vedanta destroys Niyamagiri, it is not only the Dongria Kondh who will lose their means of living, but also millions of cultivators. Samantara pointed out that sovereignty rests with the people, and natural resources should be used to ensure people's livelihood and well-being, not for a company's profits. He stressed that it is the very relationship between humans and nature that is at issue here.

Samantara and Lingaraj's movements inherit an orthodox Gandhian approach, in the sense that they have village people's self-reliance as their goals. However, it should be pointed out that their viewpoints differ considerably from the post-independence Gandhians, who problematised the inequality of land ownership, such as Vinoba Bhave (1895–1982) and the Bhoodan movement. Samantara and Lingaraj raise questions not about land ownership, but how the people can use the natural resources on which their livelihoods are based in sustainable ways. They are also aware of the importance of taking into account broader ecological implications beyond particular localities and the development of global capitalism that India is very much a part of.

Rather than asserting India's autonomy as a nation and retrieving adivasi people's land rights, the focus of their movements is to bring about public debate on who should use natural resources and how; and how socio-economic development and the human–environment relationship should be shaped. Samantara and Lingaraj's movements call for dialogue and negotiation between various

stakeholders. That is to say, they are creating new vernacular public arenas to bring to the fore the viewpoints and voices of many people who cannot be sufficiently represented through the channels provided by existing political parties and the system of representative democracy.

Participation in glocal social movements

Samantara and Lingaraj engage in public demonstrations and meetings, which are familiar means that have been used by people's movements since the days of Gandhi. However, it is interesting that these typical means are not the only strategies that are employed today. The new generation of social activists use the internet and new media to disseminate information about the problems in Niyamgiri. For instance, a filmmaker and activist, Surya Shankar Dash, produced a documentary, *Sham Public Hearing: The Real Face of Vedanta* and uses YouTube as a medium through which to reach global audiences.¹³ The film shows what happened at the hearing of the Odisha Pollution Control Board in April 2009. When an activist opposing the expansion of Vedanta's plant pointed out that there was collusion between a powerful local person and Vedanta, the hearing became chaotic and the hearing had to be suspended. However, a week later, the Odisha Pollution Control Board announced that the hearing had been successful. The film shows land and water polluted by the poisonous substances flowing from the alumina refinery, as well as people who are suffering from skin diseases and respiratory illnesses due to environmental pollution.

This documentary film was shown in New Delhi on 11 June 2009, followed by a discussion. The following day, some activists protested about Vedanta's environmental pollution at the Global Convention for Climate Change organised by the World Environment Foundation (WEF, a UK-based NGO) at Palampur in the state of Himachal Pradesh, because WEF was posed to award the Golden Peacock Award to Vedanta for its contribution to environmental control. WEF withdrew its award to Vedanta, and this was reported globally through both newspapers and the internet.¹⁴

Dash not only makes videos himself, but also sometimes uses video images taken by the Dongria Kondh.¹⁵ He said to Tanabe in an interview:

I give Dongria Kondh people old video cameras to shoot what is happening around them. I place them in YouTube so that the world can see what the truth is. If Maoists give them guns, I give them cameras—to *shoot* not the enemy but the reality surrounding them.¹⁶

He argued:

If we let it be, corporate people will write a totally different history of what happened. They will write that everybody got developed and everybody became happy. I must record the truth of what happened. I must record the people's version of their history. Documentary films often are only

circulated among the elite because of their style and message, etc. But I want to make films for the people themselves to see. If I show the films about Niyamgiri and POSCO and show the POSCO film to Niyamgiri people, they will understand that they are not alone in their struggle, that they are fighting against a common enemy.

This new generation of people's movement activists combine YouTube, DVD viewings, public gatherings, and demonstrations to link localities, towns, state capitals, and cities all over the country, including the capital, Delhi, as well as different parts of the world, constructing a glocal network of groups and organisations interested in common issues. The problem of Niyamgiri has become known worldwide, and there are global anti-Vedanta movements over the Niyamgiri issue by human rights and activist groups, including Survival International and Amnesty International. The Norwegian Government sold its stake in Vedanta in 2007, based on a recommendation from the Council on Ethics for the Norwegian Government Pension Fund.¹⁷ In October 2009, a British government agency criticised Vedanta for failing to sufficiently consult the Dongria Kondh regarding the proposed bauxite mine.¹⁸ The Church of England sold its Vedanta shares in June 2010 over Odisha human rights.¹⁹

Survival International, which supports the rights of indigenous people, draws a parallel between the relationship between Vedanta and the Dongria Kondh and the conflict between the treacherous greedy company and the indigenous forest residents depicted in the Hollywood blockbuster *Avatar*.²⁰ Here, we see that global popular culture is used to link environmental protection movements and indigenous people's movements. In this process, the Dongria Kondhs' lifestyle, culture, and knowledge about nature are discovered and re-valued globally. It is pointed out that environmental protection goes hand-in-hand with their attitude of respect for nature.

Besides the criticisms of Vedanta in Europe and the US, there have also been strong waves of resistance and criticism from people's movements at the local, regional, and national levels, as well as from NGOs and mass media in India. Such exchanges of information and activities through glocal networks link local people, urban-based activists, various people's movements, international NGOs, and so on. The local tribal people extend their socio-political agency by being connected to the networks of urban Indian and overseas social activists. We could say that this is an alternative globalisation movement that is unfolding in parallel with the globalisation of corporate capital.

Academic researchers are also a part of this glocal network. When we talked to two Dongria Kondhs (employed by the Odisha Government as *gram rojgar sevaks*) during our field trip in August 2010 and told them that we were interested in the Vedanta problem, they were delighted. They told us that there was now a great deal of international support for the anti-mining and anti-alumina refinery projects at Niyamgiri. They mentioned their longstanding friendship with Felix Padel (Padel 1995; Padel and Das 2010), who has been working in the region for nearly 30 years, and passionately told us that by keeping in close

touch with such researchers and the international community, they want to provide proper education and medical facilities in the region and protect Niyamgiri's natural environment at the same time. They were adamant about not allowing Vedanta destroy Niyamgiri. Many Dongria Kondh and Kutia Kondh take part in protests organised by the Niyamgiri Surakhya Samiti (Save the Niyamgiri Society)²¹ and come into frequent contact with outsiders through these movements. Through such activities, the local people are reflecting upon how they want their society to prosper and getting opportunities to discuss the matter both inside and outside their local communities through the formation of vernacular public arenas.

Discrepancies between central and state governments over the Niyamgiri issue

The Odisha State Government initially concluded an agreement with Vedanta Resources regarding the mining of bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills in October 2004 (Sahu 2008). In the same year, the mass movement attempting to prevent the development of the bauxite mine in the Niyamgiri Hills initiated lawsuits to annul the agreement in the High Court of Odisha and the Supreme Court of India. The citizens' case was a vital strategy in the mass movement, along with rallies and demonstrations. It was claimed in the case that the development of the Niyamgiri Hills by Vedanta Resources breached the Constitution of India, the Environmental Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act. A committee of enquiry was established by order of the Supreme Court, and a survey of the environmental problems in the region was carried out from 2005 to 2007. On 8 August 2008, however, the Supreme Court approved the clearing of trees, and on 11 December 2008, the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Indian central government granted permission to the Odisha State Government to develop the mines.

In the meantime, opposition movements grew stronger. An inspection of the region carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in January and February 2010 recognised that there were breaches of the Environmental Protection Act and especially violations of the Forest Rights Act of 2006.²² It was also pointed out that these acts of violation were carried out in collusion with the company and a number of officials in the state government. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 was of landmark significance in rectifying the long-term neglect of the rights of the Scheduled Tribes (Ambagudia 2010; Dash 2010).²³ The content of the Forest Rights Act of 2006 is gradually being enforced, and when we visited Rayagada district in August 2010 we witnessed many members of the Scheduled Tribes applying to receive forest registration certificates from the district office.

These legal enhancements have gradually opened up possibilities for political participation by the residents of the Niyamgiri Hills region. The 73rd Amendment of the constitution in 1992 resulted in a significant devolution of powers to local administrative units (especially at the village level). The three-level

structure of the district, sub-district, and village was applied throughout the country and was extended to ‘Scheduled Areas’ (designated areas inhabited by Scheduled Tribes) in 1996.²⁴ This made it necessary for the government to seek the consent of the panchayat in the area in question, in order to implement a development project in a Scheduled Area. Thus, it became possible for the tribal people and other forest dwellers to express dissent and oppose development projects that did not suit their needs. There are doubts about whether the voices of the tribal people are really being heard (Ambagudia 2010; Panda 2008); nevertheless, it is clear that this system is gradually opening up paths toward political participation for socially disadvantaged peoples. The fact that the panchayat of the Niyamgiri region did not allow the development project to go ahead later became an important factor in deciding to stop Vedanta’s mining activities there.

In July 2010, the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India, set up a committee led by N.C. Saxena and ordered a detailed investigation into the effects that bauxite mining in Niyamgiri will have on the forests of Kalahandi and Rayagada districts. The report that the committee submitted to the Ministry on 16 August 2010 pointed out that mining in the region would have serious consequences and was highly problematic (Saxena *et al.* 2010). On 24 August 2010, the Ministry of Environment and Forests announced that it rejected earlier clearance for Vedanta’s mining project in accordance with the Saxena Report. Jairam Ramesh, Minister of Environment and Forests, said: ‘There has been a very serious violation of the Environment Protection Act, the Forest Conservation Act and the Forest Rights Act’ in the Niyamgiri Hills and blamed Vedanta, the Orissa Mining Corporation, and state officials for the violations.²⁵ The Ministry had given permission to the Odisha State Government to deforest the area for the purposes of mining in 2008 and the Supreme Court had approved this. This was overturned by Ramesh’s decision.

It is said that behind the overturning of this decision was political intervention by the Congress Party and especially Rahul Gandhi.²⁶ We witnessed the unfolding of this political process when we attended a rally in Jagannathpur village near the Niyamgiri Hills on 26 August 2010, two days after the rejection of permission. The village is on the outskirts of Ranjigarh, where Vedanta’s aluminium complex is located. The youth wing of the Congress Party had organised a huge meeting as part of ‘Tribal Rights Day’. Several thousand people gathered to see Rahul Gandhi. Rahul arrived by helicopter and was presented with a huge garland by a woman dressed in traditional Dongria Kondh attire on a stage specially prepared for him. Rahul Gandhi had visited Ranjigarh in 2008 and expressed his support for the tribal people opposing the mining project. In his speech this time, he referred to his earlier visit and said that a tribal youth told him that they worshipped the Niyamgiri Hills. Rahul said:

That is your dharma. My dharma is that every voice, including that of the poor and adivasis should be heard. . . . Development means that every citizen of India develops. . . . Our government in Delhi, our PM, Sonia-ji will fight for development and to give you a voice.

Against these moves by the Government of India, the Odisha State Government (which is run by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and not the Indian National Congress of the central government) retaliated, saying that Odisha's industrialisation and economic development were being hampered by the central government. Odisha's Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik, criticised the central government's decision as being detrimental to Odisha and the interests of its tribal population. The Odisha State Minister for Industries and Steel and Mines, Raghunath Mohanty, said: 'It is extremely unfortunate that the central government has rejected environment clearance to the bauxite mining project for Vedanta.' The Agriculture Minister, Damodar Raut, said: 'Some people want to keep tribals, particularly Dongaria and Kutia Khonds, backward forever. Therefore, they oppose industrialisation.'²⁷ On 3 September, the youth wing of the BJD organised a meeting in Ranjigarh called 'Save Orissa Rally' as a protest against the central government, and several party leaders, including six Odisha state ministers, attended.²⁸

In this way, there are conflicts between political parties over the permission to mine in the Niyamgiri Hills (Ueda 2010), and each party is playing political games in trying to get support from various social groups. People's movement activists welcomed the fact that the mining project was suspended, but expressed displeasure at the fact that political parties were using this issue as a tool. People's movement activists are trying to bring about ways in which the people can make their own decisions about their lives in sustainable relationships with each other and with nature.

In April 2013, the Supreme Court decided that Vedanta's bauxite mining must have the permission of gram sabhas (village councils) of the area to go ahead. The gram sabhas and specialist observers appointed by the Supreme Court would determine whether or not to permit the mining plans after deliberating upon the cultural and religious rights of the tribals and forest dwellers (including the right to worship Niyamgiri as a deity), before reporting to the Ministry of Environment and Forests. In August 2013, the twelfth and final gram sabha in the Rayagada and Kalahandi districts rejecting the mining project unanimously voted against Vedanta mining. This means that Vedanta's mining plans in Niyamgiri are seriously hampered, since the Ministry of Environment and Forest 'has decided that the claim of even one village council for cultural or religious rights over the hills provides the legal mandate to the Central government to reject the proposal under the Supreme Court orders'.²⁹

Conclusion

In India today, where the working of the state and market are penetrating to the grassroots, no one can escape the influence of state governance and global capitalism. However, the same process of penetration by state governance and the market economy, combined with democratic institutions of empowerment, redistribution, and participation, is transforming subalterns into active subjects in the vernacular public arenas in contemporary India. In the context of today's glocal

connections of diversities, multiple agents participate in vernacular public arenas by raising their voices and taking part in negotiations to redefine sociopolitical and ecological relationships.

Such politics of relations are unfolding in emergent vernacular public arenas, where diverse social groups are becoming significant agents in socio-economic and political processes, in order to sustain the environments in which they live, attain socio-economic entitlements and capabilities, and secure life chances. Local people are now in a position to evaluate and voice their opinions about the socio-economic development efforts of corporations as well as government initiatives from their own standings. They attempt to negotiate with the state and corporations in the arena of vernacular publics and take part in the decision-making processes of socio-economic development. It is important to note here that there is no consensus among the local people regarding these issues. Some benefit from development projects and participation in the market economy, whereas others are excluded. Some say they want increased employment opportunities in the market economy, while others say that they want to benefit from the provision of basic healthcare and education, but do not want roads and other infrastructure to be built in their living environment.

The dialogue is filled with differences and frictions, and, in this way, while the socio-economic differences reproduce and are sometimes enhanced, there are emerging plural and hybrid vernacular public arenas that connect diversities in common arenas of dialogue and negotiation. In today's India, instead of there being a sphere between the state and family, there are larger glocal public arenas emerging concerning the politics of development and livelihood extending from the intimate sphere of kin-family networks and local community to the spheres of the state, market, and global civil society. In this rising vernacular public arena, there is a 'web-like structure providing for interaction' not only 'between numerous vernacular publics' (Hauser 1999: 66),³⁰ but also with the government bodies and corporations that need popular support and attempt to socially legitimise their activities. This web-like structure that connects diverse agents functions as common arenas for interaction, negotiation, and legitimation, as well as clashes and conflict. The state participates as one of the diverse agents in vernacular publics, as do multinational corporations, local people, urban intellectuals, political parties, NGOs, people's movements, and so on.

Vernacular public arenas in contemporary India constitute a cross-cutting range of agents, who converse, negotiate, collide, and dispute. There is a potential process of churning of official and subaltern discourses, giving birth to new and hybrid vernacular discourses, institutions, and practices in which people attempt to speak with their own voice. But we should also note that there is potential oppression, exploitation, and violence reaching the grassroots level. Globalisation and the penetration of state governance, on the one hand, and politico-economic subjectification and the participation of ex-subalterns in the vernacular public arena, on the other hand, are concomitant and complementary processes that are full of ambiguities and tensions.

Notes

- 1 The 73rd Amendment Act 1992, which reformed panchayat institutions, was extended to Scheduled Areas in 1996.
- 2 For example, reports suggest the existence of around 20 species of orchids (including *Acampe carinata*, *Acampe praemorsa* and *Aerides odorata*) with a variety of medicinal properties (Saxena *et al.* 2010: 18).
- 3 Padel points out that, seen from the viewpoint of the Dongria Kondh, it is *asura* (demon) that digs up the sacred mountains to extract metal, from which weapons and other articles are manufactured (Padel and Das 2010: 18; cf. Taussig 1980).
- 4 In the state of Chhattisgarh, Maoist forces and the Salwa Judum—a civil militia supported by the state government to oppose the Maoists—were effectively engaged in a civil war. In July 2011, however, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the Salwa Judum is both unconstitutional and illegal.
- 5 For details on Maoist (Naxalite) movements in contemporary India, see Nakamizo (2009).
- 6 A Christian NGO called New Hope has provided the Dongria Kondhs with a place to rest on their way to the market, information on prices and weights, mirrors, and a cooking place. Their activities are supported by donations from the UK, Australia, Japan, and other parts of the globe. The person in charge of this NGO is a Christian social worker from Andhra Pradesh. His activities, however, are looked upon with some suspicion by the local town people. We heard comments by Odia people on the religious affiliation of the organisation, which reflects Hindu–Christian communal tension in the adjacent area. Such NGOs are suspected of getting funds from abroad so that they can convert the local people to Christianity.
- 7 Namely, the eight districts of Koraput, Nawarangapur, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Bolangir, Subarnapur, Kalahandi, and Nuapada.
- 8 Government of Orissa, ‘The Biju KBK Plan: Modalities and Guidelines’, 28 September 2006. Available online at: <http://orissa.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/nov-2006/engpdf/132-136.pdf> (last accessed 23 February 2014).
- 9 There are reports that the Public Distribution System (PDS) in the state of Odisha is working better than before, although never perfectly (Aggarwal 2011). However, others also point out that the persisting poverty and famine in the tribal zone shows that their voice is not reflected in the process of politics and development (Jena 2008; Pathy 2003). In general, we may note some improvement in social welfare and the democratisation process, but they are still not sufficient.
- 10 Until the 1980s, American and French companies dominated aluminium production, but in the twenty-first century, Indian and Chinese companies are taking over. Indian companies, such as Vedanta, Hindalco, Tata, and Mittal are buying up bauxite deposits and factories in Africa, South America, and Indonesia. The deposits from the colonial period have been inherited by Indian and Chinese companies, and the exploitation of ex-colonies continues. However, what is significant is that due to the growth of multinational companies and global capital, there is no longer a clear dichotomy between so-called developed and underdeveloped nations. Indian companies take over overseas companies and get capital from overseas. At the same time, Indian companies enter into partnerships with overseas companies, and it is difficult to discern whether the capital is foreign or domestic. The agenda under the present circumstances is how to solve the discrepancies and mediate between the logic of global capital and multinational companies and ordinary people’s lives based on the agricultural and informal sectors.
- 11 The centre of the people’s movement in Bhubaneswar is the Lohiya Academi. Kishen Pattnaik (1905–2004) was one of the great leaders of the Gandhian people’s movement in Odisha. Sunderlal Bahuguna, the leader of the Gandhian environmental movement (Ishizaka 2011), visited Gandhamardan to support the anti-mining movement there in 1986.

- 12 Interviews took place on 1 August 2010 with Lingaraj and Dash and on 4 August with Samantara at the Lohiya Akademi in Bhubaneswar.
- 13 Available online at: <http://vimeo.com/11298568> (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 14 Available online at: <http://southasia.oneworld.net/todayshdlines/award-to-vedanta-withdrawn-amidst-controversy>, www.survivalinternational.org/news/4678 (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 15 Available online at: www.youtube.com/niyamagiriniyamgiri (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 16 Interview on 4 August 2010. Dash used to be a filmmaker based in Delhi. In 2004, he was asked by the Odisha Government to make a film on tribal dance in Koraput, and during that project he sensed the hypocrisy in this kind of filming. He was taking a boat to go to an island where he was supposed to shoot a show of young adivasi girls dancing. Politicians and bureaucrats would be watching the show. While he was in the boat, the boatman suddenly started crying and said that his village was under water. He had been displaced from the village, because of a dam construction. Dash was urged to do something about this kind of situation and returned to Bhubaneswar to start shooting films for different purposes. He became involved in people's movement to protect the environment and people's livelihoods.
- 17 Available online at: <http://news.in.msn.com/business/article.aspx?cp-documentid=3610604> (last accessed 28 January 2011); available online at: www.norway.org.uk/ARKIV/Other/Current-Affairs/policy/news/fundexclusion/ (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 18 The agency is the UK arm charged with promoting guidelines for multinational companies adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Available online at: <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-43106920091012> (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 19 'After six months of engagement, we are not satisfied that Vedanta has shown, or is likely in future to show, the level of respect for human rights and local communities that we expect of companies in whom the Church investing bodies hold shares,' said John Reynolds, chairman of the church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group. Available online at: <http://news.in.msn.com/business/article.aspx?cp-documentid=3610604> (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 20 Available online at: www.survivalinternational.org/news/6273 (last accessed 28 January 2011). Photograph from news page of Survival International. Available online at: www.survivalinternational.org/news/6273 (last accessed 19 February 2014).
- 21 This was established by the tribal population, who refused to sell their land to the Vedanta company in 2002.
- 22 The official name of the Forest Rights Act that came into force in December 2006 is the 'Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act'. The purpose of the Act is to approve, grant, and record the forest rights of Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers, such as the right to live on forest lands, the right to use forest products, the right to approval of, and to register, forest villages as revenue villages, intellectual property rights regarding traditional knowledge of the forest, and the right to receive basic facilities, such as schools, hospitals, electricity, and water services near the dwelling areas. The law proclaims the rectification of 'historical injustice', in which the forest rights of people dwelling on ancestral lands were not adequately recognised in the consolidation of state forests during the colonial period, as well as in independent India.
- 23 The rights of Scheduled Tribes living in the forests were ignored by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 (Bhullar 2008: 22). Wildlife and forests were considered to be subject to environmental protection, but forest dwellers were, in contrast, treated as environmental adversaries.
- 24 From the 1990s, movements demanding the securing of human rights for tribal people

became active throughout India (Patnaik 2007: 5), and in order to respond to this demand the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, requested the preparation of a report on legal enhancements for local administration of areas inhabited by Scheduled Tribes by a committee chaired by Dileep Singh Bhuria, a Member of Parliament of Scheduled Tribe origin. Following the submission of the Bhuria Committee Report, 'Report of MPs and Experts to Make Recommendations on the Salient Features of the Law for Extending Provisions of the Constitution (73rd) Amendment Act, 1992 to Scheduled Areas', the 'Panchayat Law' extending the application to Scheduled Areas was enacted in 1996. Local administrative rights provided in the 73rd amendment of the constitution thus came to be applied to Scheduled Areas by the enactment of this law.

- 25 Available online at: www.thehindu.com/news/national/article591546.ece?homepage=true (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 26 I benefitted from a report by Tomoaki Ueda on this issue in *Indo Keizai Forum* (October 2010).
- 27 Available online at: www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article591741.ece (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 28 Available online at: www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/article611094.ece?css=print (last accessed 28 January 2011).
- 29 Available online at: www.thehindu.com/news/national/12-gram-sabha-too-votes-against-vedanta-mining-in-niyamgiri-hills/article5039304.ece (last accessed 26 September 2013).
- 30 Hauser says: 'A public's emergence is not dependent on consensus but on the sharing of a common world, even when understood and lived differently by different segments of society' (1999: 69).

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3 Social politics

Youth vernacular action in the Indian Himalayas

Craig Jeffrey and Jane Dyson

Introduction

Two key forces are reshaping contemporary India. First, the spread of neoliberal economic policies is profoundly altering people's lives. State welfare systems are poorly administered, there are fewer employment opportunities in the government sector, and an ethos of success through entrepreneurialism has been widely disseminated by powerful institutions. Second, international organisations and the Indian state itself have promoted notions of liberal democracy and universal citizenship. Through the media, schooling, and international organisations such as the World Bank, people are being enjoined to sign up to the goal of democratic transformation, equality, and universal human rights.

This chapter examines how youth (aged 18 to 30) respond politically to this somewhat contradictory situation. Are youth able to embody the modernist visions of liberal democracy in an environment in which the economic and social means for sustaining a livelihood are often crumbling under their feet? Or are they abandoning liberal precepts and turning to an alternative vision of political organisation in the face of their personal struggles? Building on field research in Uttarakhand, we also consider the importance of various forms of social activity in the constitution of a vernacular political sphere.

Youth politics in India

In 2011, 63 per cent of India's population was under the age of 30 (ORG 2011), and roughly a quarter of the population falls between the ages of 16 and 30. It is broadly possible to identify three sets of young people in India, if we categorise them according to their education and employment status. First, there is a thin upper stratum of young people who have acquired an education and subsequently moved into secure jobs. Members of this elite stratum are part of India's new middle class, often highly mobile and generally optimistic about the future. A second set of young people are those who have acquired at least a secondary school education, but have been unable to acquire secure work. Increasing numbers of young people have been drawn into formal education and have, as a consequence, set their sights on 'good' (white-collar, professional) work. But

economic reforms have failed to generate large numbers of skilled jobs for graduates. This has led to a widening gap between aspirations and outcomes, with increasing frustration (Jeffrey 2010). A third set of young people is comprised of those unable to acquire a secondary school education. Women and low castes are over-represented in this category. Most of these young people work in the informal economy or conduct unpaid household work (see Dyson 2008; 2010), and, much like the educated employed, they often live in the midst of India's deeply contradictory modernisation.

Aside from the first set, young people in India have often found it difficult to make smooth transitions into adulthood. Neoliberal economic changes have, on the whole, failed to create jobs in the fields of manufacturing and services, and at the same time they have resulted in a diminution in the supply of government work. Educational services are often poor, and young people find it difficult to obtain institutional credit, cheap and effective healthcare, and affordable housing. At the same time, young people in India have often absorbed notions of liberal rights. In many contexts, they encounter the language of democratic citizenship in school or through the mass media and international organisations promoting human rights.

How are young people in India responding to these conflicting forces? Long ago, Karl Mannheim ([1936] 1972) argued that specific generations, because they have experienced the same events during the same moment in their lives, may come to constitute social units. Where a generation experiences some notable shift in its circumstances, it may become politically active; a generation 'in itself' becomes a generation 'for itself'. Mannheim argued that youth are especially likely to become change agents. They are less invested in the status quo. Their proximity to childhood lends a certain innovative quality to their actions. In addition, young people are more prone than are older generations to notable shifts in their fortunes—for example, they are often more likely to experience unemployment or migrate away from a home area—and these shifts can act as triggers for political action. Mannheim concluded that young people often have a 'fresh contact' with their social and material surroundings and, through this contact, historical change unfolds.

If Mannheim is right, we might plausibly expect to find youth at the forefront of new forms of mobilisation in contemporary India. Certainly, young people have become more visible in party politics and, to a lesser extent, in social mobilisations, possibly including the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement. But, on the whole—and with the notable historical exception of the Jayaprakash Narayan movement in Bihar in the 1970s—young people have not been especially active in politics in postcolonial India, at least not as 'youth'. Indeed, 'youth' itself is not as important a political idea in India as it is in Africa.

But this conclusion only holds if we look at electoral politics and large social movements. At the level of everyday political practice that is the distinctive concern of this volume, a variety of forms of youth politics swim into view. It is possible to identify two possible types of ground-level vernacular politics among youth in India. First, young people—faced with visions of rights, but unable to

realise their social goals—have sometimes turned to destructive, violent, and exclusionary politics. This is the situation described by Gerard Heuzé (1996) as regards central India in the 1980s, where educated unemployed youth became involved in organisations of the Hindu Right. Likewise, Thomas Hansen (1996) described educated unemployed young people's involvement in anti-Muslim riots in Mumbai in the early 1990s. Another notable example of this scenario is Prem Chowdhry's (2005) work on middle caste youth activity in caste associations in north India, where young people respond to the disappointments of neoliberalisation by aggressively policing the marriages of their peers and violently punishing those who marry across caste boundaries.

Other work shows that young people may react to the hardships associated with growing up in contemporary provincial India by upholding notions of rights and equal citizenship—a second form of everyday politics. This possibility is rehearsed in Anirudh Krishna's account of youth involvement in development in western India in the 1990s (Krishna 2002; see also Narayan 2012). It also features in Craig Jeffrey's account of young 'new politicians' from dalit and middle caste backgrounds in western Uttar Pradesh, who often assisted the poor in their negotiations with the state and campaigned in local cities around issues of rights (Jeffrey 2010).

Our emerging research in Uttarakhand suggests that young people are mainly involved in the second type of politics. A brief consideration of the village and two young men illustrates this point.

Bemni, Uttarakhand

Between March and June 2012, we conducted three months of research in Bemni, Uttarakhand. We completed a socio-economic survey of the village, a follow-up to a similar survey that Jane Dyson conducted during a 15-month research stint from 2003 to 2004. We also carried out semi-structured interviews concerning young people's educational and employment experiences, marriage, views on the state and politics, and political activity. We interviewed about 30 young people (aged 18 to 30), roughly five Scheduled Caste (SC) men and five SC women and 12 Rajput or General Caste (GC) men and eight GC women. We also carried out some participant observation around the village.

Bemni is located in a relatively remote part of Uttarakhand, bordering Tibet, at an altitude of about 2,500 m. The district in which Bemni is located—Chamoli district—is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural in character: 90 per cent of the population lived in rural areas in 2011, according to the national census (ORG 2011). People typically practise a form of agro-pastoralism. They cultivate crops for subsistence—mainly wheat, millet, and barley—while also managing large areas of the surrounding forest for pastoral use. Villagers have adopted a form of small-scale transhumance, whereby they move annually between two or three settlements located at different altitudes. These seasonal shifts allow them to coordinate arable and pastoral land use and maximise the potential of agricultural land at different altitudes.

The village of Bemni—which is actually comprised of three smaller settlements at different heights on the same mountainside—was comprised of 930 people in March 2012, of which 69 per cent were GCs and 31 per cent were SCs. To reach Bemni from Delhi, it is necessary to first take a bus, train, plane, or taxi to Dehra Dun or Rishikesh—two of the main gateways to the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand state. This in itself can take a day. From these cities, you travel by road, upstream along the River Ganges. An eight-hour journey takes you to the small town of Nandprayag and a rough road leads from there along the Nandakini Valley to the even smaller town of Ghat. From Ghat, it is necessary to board a local jeep. In 2003, this jeep took you to a tiny hamlet on the banks of the Nandakini, from which you had to make a steep 9 km (four-hour) trek to the village. Since late 2010, it has been possible to get a jeep directly to Bemni, but only after negotiating a road cut into a series of landslides above a steep thousand-foot precipice.

Bemni looked physically very different in 2012 in comparison to its appearance in 2003: less green, dustier, more ‘developed’. A few people had built new houses, several of which had two storeys. Within the GC areas of the village, many people had plastered their stone houses. In 2003, most people regarded a private lavatory as unhygienic; there were just two houses with lavatories at the time. Now there are 42 latrines in the village, and another 10 households were building them while we were there. The government greatly increased its development assistance to rural areas between 2003 and 2012, and this is reflected in Bemni’s built landscape. Two JCB excavators growled around the hillside while we were in the village, building a new ‘cricket stadium’ and widening the road. A communications tower was constructed in the village in 2009.

Change was manifest, too, at the attitudinal level. Between 2003 and 2012, Bemni was more thoroughly absorbed into wider circuits of knowledge and information, especially as a result of rising phone ownership: 60 per cent of households had at least one mobile phone in 2012. As might be expected, people were more enthusiastic about education in 2012 than in 2003, and the desire to enter service work and leave the village had increased among the young.

Allied to this ‘transformation’ of sorts has been a decline in agriculture. The area being farmed in and around Bemni appears to have declined by about a quarter over the nine years between 2003 and 2012, partly because of sales to the government for the road and other projects, and partly because of people’s general disillusion with farming; villagers reported that extreme weather events have repeatedly destroyed their crops in recent years, and the prices in the local town have been low. Younger generations, in particular, have little appetite for agriculture, and children were less involved in agricultural tasks in 2012 than they were in 2003. The population of livestock had also declined markedly with this general retreat from farming and people’s dependence on shop-bought food. At the same time, the construction of the road and various buildings in the village has taken a heavy toll on the surrounding jungle, a situation greatly exacerbated by the fact that the head of the village council responsible for managing the forest had allowed many households to plunder Bemni’s jungle.

In what follows, we use the accounts of two young men to discuss the nature of youth politics in Bemni. Three caveats must be given here. First, our initial round of research focused more on young men than young women, hence we concentrate on male experiences of social and political life in this chapter. Second, our project explicitly focused on educated unemployed youth (those from 18 to 30 who had completed their education up to at least Class 10) and excluded those who had migrated successfully to urban areas or who had not managed to acquire a secondary school qualification. Third, we focus here on GCs rather than SCs.

Suresh: the work and social politics of ‘being unemployed’

Suresh Singh, a Rajput (GC), was 27 in 2012. He was educated at Bemni Primary School and then at a government secondary school close to the village. In the early 2000s, Suresh received a Bachelors of Commerce degree from Gopeshwar College—the government degree college in the district town. He did the degree on a ‘private’ (correspondence) basis, because his parents could not afford for him to study as a regular student. In his late teens he moves to the Indian state of Gujarat where he worked in a factory for some time.

In 2005, Suresh’s mother fell ill and he had to abandon his work in Gujarat to fulfil his familial obligations at home. Suresh cared for his ailing mother and arranged the marriage of his two sisters. He also oversaw the construction of a new six-room, two-storey brick house for the family. Once Suresh’s sisters were married, the family needed a young woman in the home who could milk and feed the cows and buffaloes, which is perceived as ‘women’s work’. Suresh’s mother was still not very well herself and could not carry out these chores for much longer. It fell again to Suresh to assist the family. He married a woman with an 8th Class pass from a nearby village. When we met them in 2012, they had three children. Suresh still considered himself young, a youth (*jawaan*). But he also felt the burden of ‘adult’ life.

Suresh went back to college, but, again, only as a ‘private’ student, doing his courses through correspondence. In 2012, he was doing an MA in English. Suresh cannot obtain the original texts that form the backbone of the degree. ‘The books are only available in Srinagar and I am never there,’ he said. Instead, he purchased six ‘cheat books’, which he uses to bone up on how to answer possible questions he will face in the examination. The process was fairly mechanical: Suresh simply learnt how to reproduce critiques of plays like Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and books like Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, without consulting the originals. He cannot speak English at all.

Suresh was employed on a temporary basis in the local secondary school, helping with physical education and doing some occasional teaching. He earned a salary of Rs.3,000, which is nowhere near the amount required to live in any degree of comfort. He also ran private tutorials for many local young people, from which he earned about Rs.1,000 per month for the three months leading up to the examinations. He cultivated the family’s medium-sized (3 ac) farm and

had a large vegetable garden close to his home. He spent about 40 days a year working on government projects in the village through an employment guarantee scheme. He also occasionally went to collect forest products from the jungles and meadows above Bemni, which could be sold to local traders.

Suresh said that these various forms of employment allow him to 'get by'. But he desperately hoped that he would be able to get a government job in the near future. His chances of success seem remote. Suresh was among 86,000 applicants for 79 low-ranking bureaucratic jobs advertised in March 2012. Suresh said that his next move would be to apply for a B.Ed degree and then enter the competition for secondary school teaching positions. Here, again, the odds are stacked against him. There are reputed to be 300,000 people studying for B.Ed degrees in Uttarakhand as of August 2012, and only 200 new posts are made available every year.

We talked about the possibility of Suresh migrating again to look for work. He said that his village and family responsibilities precluded that course of action. Suresh could buy a couple of mules and probably make another Rs.3,000 per month this way. But this is hardly the type of work that Suresh has come to expect. Suresh therefore continues to 'make do', balancing farming, study, part-time teaching, and earning opportunities associated with the local environment.

Alongside his everyday work and applications for government jobs, Suresh spends a great deal of time engaged in social activities. He provides young people with tutorials on an unpaid basis. He attends funerals, weddings, and other major lifecycle events in the village. He helps organise religious festivals, assists people who are ill, and acts as a mediator in village disputes. Between March and June 2012, Suresh became involved in several family disputes in the village, trying to prevent open conflict and protect the reputation of the village.

On the one hand, Suresh stated that he abhorred politics and did not want to enter into political discussions. He said that he would never like to be head of the village council (*pradhan*). One night he got drawn into a discussion on politics with another young man in the village. Suresh started to talk loudly about the uselessness of engaging in politics. The next morning he was intensely embarrassed. He said that he usually avoids saying anything about politics. He said that he hated such discussions and would never mention a word on the whole issue of politics, politicians, and political events in the village again. What was striking was the apparent gap between this aversion to the political and Suresh's restless energy in the field of what we might term 'social politics': assisting his family and other villagers in their daily life.

Suresh's case helps us understand the difficulties faced by young people growing up in Bemni and the character of some of their social politics. Government education is in a dire state. The government has not invested in improving the curricula in most state schools and colleges. At the same time, a wide range of private educational entrepreneurs have entered the fray, many of which are fraudulent institutions. At the higher education level, universities have often been reduced to functioning as 'degree shops' in which qualified lecturers are

absent and students rely on cheat books and sample answers to pass examinations.

Suresh's case also points to the difficulty that young people face in acquiring the types of secure, usually government-based, employment that they have been led to expect. Government jobs provide relatively high salaries. Moreover, people argue that many government jobs do not require a person to work especially hard. In addition, there is a history of young people joining government service (mainly the army) in this region and a sense that government work is high status. School textbooks also make great play of the value of serving the state. Very few young people can acquire government service work, however. The percentage of Bemni men aged 36 to 45 in government service is higher than that of young men aged 26 to 35, despite the marked increase in education in the younger of these two cohorts. The low-ranking government jobs for which most villagers apply often go to those with bribe money and the right social contacts.

Several young people referred to themselves as 'unemployed', either using the English word or the Hindi term '*berozgaari*'. In other instances, they responded to the question 'What do you do?' by using the self-derogatory phrase 'break rocks' (*pathar thorna*). In still other instances, they used terms that suggest a complete absence of activity: 'timepass' or '*khaali*' (which means idle). Several young people said that they 'do nothing' all day or just play carom (a board game), watch television, and play cricket or volleyball. In two cases, men referred to having become possessed by evil spirits as a result of prolonged unemployment. In practice, however, most young men realised that they could not afford to do nothing, especially after marrying and having children. Our overall impression was of the industry of rural youth, even while they continued to imagine themselves as 'underemployed' or 'unemployed' in some sense of these terms.

Young men commonly engage in various agricultural tasks (especially ploughing), run small businesses, travel to tourist spots for work, and conduct labour work, either for the government or privately. They typically prioritise different forms of work at different times of the year. For example, young men often go to work in Badrinath or Kedarnath during the tourist season (June to August) and collect caterpillar fungus in May. Even while engaging in this array of occupations, they continue to seek college degrees and apply for government jobs. It should be noted here that, in spite of a general determination to avoid undertaking manual labour, educated young people do not object to conducting tasks such as collecting leaves in the forest or making cow dung cakes.

Since 2003, two new forms of employment have become prominent in the working lives of educated underemployed youth in the village—for young women as well as young men. First, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) plays a role in supporting the efforts of young people to survive economically. Under the MGNREGA scheme, each household is entitled to work for 100 days each year at a rate of Rs.120 per day. In practice, young people typically obtain between 20 and 35 days' work a year

under this scheme. Young people report difficulties in obtaining their wages—many SCs, in particular, have had to wait more than a year to be paid. However, the MGNREGA scheme has boosted young people's earnings.

More important than MGNREGA are new opportunities for young people to collect caterpillar fungus—called 'kira jali'—that is sold to local traders. The thin black fungi are about an inch long and can be found extending out of a mummified caterpillar. They are used in Chinese traditional medicine. The kira jali are found at about 15,000 ft—one day's long and strenuous hike from Bemni. Many young people make good amounts of money from collecting and selling the fungus, and there are a few kira jali specialists in the village who gather hundreds of the fungi each time they visit the high pastures. Five years ago, the fungi would fetch Rs.10 a piece. In 2012, they were trading at Rs.150 a piece or Rs.400,000 (US\$6,000) a kilogramme.

Suresh's case also draws attention to young people's work as social helpers in the village, especially the importance of educated youth in this arena. Youth in Bemni—women as well as men—often advised younger youth and parents on schooling opportunities and courses. They sometimes helped with homework or provided coaching free of charge. Also, they provided advice on employment opportunities and mediated disputes in the village. Even more important was young people's role in helping people obtain medical treatment. Seeking assistance from a doctor or hospital administrator entails having to bribe, cajole, and negotiate with various superiors. It also entails making frequent trips to urban areas and organising priests to perform relevant religious ceremonies. Educated, unemployed young people like Suresh had the time, confidence, and skills required to manage these varied tasks.

Finally, Suresh's example points to a tendency for young people to avoid political discussions and distance themselves from 'political' activity. Young people have to act politically when seeking treatment for relatives. They were deeply involved in the everyday political life of the village, in terms of conflict between families. But they resolutely refused to define themselves as politicians or acknowledge the political nature of their activities. Jaipal's case develops this point.

Jaipal

Jaipal obtained his primary education from Bemni, went to junior high school at a school close to Bemni, and spent Classes 11 and 12 in Ghat. He said that the schools were excellent at that time; the teachers were very good, and they took their responsibilities seriously. He went on to do a BA degree at Gopeshwar College and then an MA at the same institution. Between 2004 and 2008, he lived in Dehra Dun. There he did a B.Ed, competed in competitions, and taught at a Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) private school. He spent the next three years, he said, '*khaali*' ('free') in the village. During this period, he served as vice-head of a Block (sub-district) level government council and as a member of the multi-village area council also charged with local government

work. He did not earn money from these positions and sustained himself through doing occasional tutorials on a paid basis and farming in the village.

Jaipal was not very interested in discussing party politics. He said that he did not like this level of ‘politics’ (*rajniti*). Instead, much of Jaipal’s work as a politician entailed circulating discourses critical of the state within his village and the surrounding rural area. He spent a lot of time discussing the failings of the school system. Jaipal berated the manner in which the MGNREGA projects were run in the village. He said that the projects should be oriented towards improving the local environment. ‘MGNREGA was set up to promote projects for soil moisture retention, tree planting, and that sort of thing,’ he said. ‘But the local village council has only focused on building paths and walls in the village. It is as if something has to be concrete to qualify as development.’

Education was another key concern of Jaipal’s. The Uttarakhand state has failed to invest in educational facilities, curricular reform, and the monitoring of schools. In addition, widespread corruption in the educational bureaucracy means that teachers can give bribes in order to be posted to urban areas, which are considered more desirable. The student to staff ratio in Bemni and the surrounding villages was often 100:1. There are no science teachers in local schools, because no one suitably qualified wants to live so far from an urban centre. Jaipal campaigned around these issues while working at the Block level, and he emphasised, in particular, the question of teacher/student ratios.

In addition to campaigning on education issues, Jaipal acted as a mediator between rural people requiring assistance from the state and different sections of the government administration. For example, he was often able to help villagers bypass the local head of the village council (*pradhan*) and directly appeal to block-level government officials on issues such as the non-receipt of a widow’s pension or the inability to obtain registration as below the poverty line (BPL). Jaipal could also help poor people in negotiations with school principals, government doctors, and lawyers. In many instances, Jaipal accomplished this work by drawing on ties of kinship and caste solidarity. While conducting this work, Jaipal appeared to hold on to the idea that—for all the corruption of local state officials—the state ‘up there’ (at the district or state levels) might be fairer and more cooperative.

Jaipal participated in other forms of community service: running microcredit schemes, rural health camps, and training schemes for SCs in artisanal work. Jaipal imagined himself as a type of social ‘motivator’ (he used the English word). In 2012 alone, Jaipal persuaded a young man to take a loan in order to set up a small business supplying recorded music at local weddings; and convinced two other young men to enter the business of medicinal plants. Jaipal also tried to politicise the population by talking about the importance of voting in elections (although he was not affiliated to any political party). In 2009, Jaipal landed a government job as a secondary school teacher in a town about 100 miles from Bemni. But he often returns to the village to engage in social and political work.

As the example of Jaipal suggests, young people were important in communicating political critiques in the village. Corruption was an issue of enormous

public concern in Bemni. Many of the poorest households in the village were not eligible for government resources, because they had not sufficiently bribed the government inspectors, who had falsely registered them as above the poverty line (APL), rather than below the poverty line (BPL). Only BPL families are entitled to subsidies. Even those households labelled BPL—and therefore legally entitled to subsidised wheat, rice, sugar, and mustard oil through the Indian Government's Public Distribution System—found it difficult in practice to acquire these products. Intermediaries embezzle funds, as they do in the case of the midday meal scheme that runs in local schools, the widow's pension scheme, and various smaller government development projects.

Young people complained vociferously during everyday conversations about corruption in the process of granting contracts for MGNREGA projects and the disbursement of development monies in the village. They also bewailed malpractice and neglect within schools, hospitals, the electricity department, and among officers responsible for maintaining a clean and regular water supply in the village. They said that the land revenue officer is corrupt and that the police in local towns are venal and unreliable.

In addition to criticising corruption, a few young people spoke more generally about the need for fairness in the village. One young SC man said: 'The ethic (*niti*) of this country is that rich eat the money meant for poor people. This happens everywhere.' Another young GC man expanded on this theme:

It used to be the case that trade was simple. You had a kilo of salt and I had a kilo of sugar. You would give me some of the salt and I would give you some of the sugar—a swap. Now we have entered an age in which money is king. People with money can do anything they like. Those with agricultural goods—like potatoes or millet—cannot swap these things for the other things they require in life. They do not get any money for their agricultural produce. Those with money just hoard it up. They do not know anything about farming.

Youth also circulated critiques concerning their environment, criticising the government for not repairing the trekking route that runs through the village, lamenting the environmental degradation wrought by the road, and, in particular, bemoaning the failure of the village forest committee to manage the jungle properly. For example, a young SC man said:

This [village forest] committee should be saving the trees. Fifty people will come here and strip an area of forest to get wood for their houses and such like. I am part of a set of people who are trying to solve this problem. We are telling people not to cut down small live trees. But we may have an accident trying to save the forest. We have to tell people, 'What will happen to the next generation, our children, if we cut down all the trees? Only by saving the forest will we be able to save them.'

Educated unemployed young people in Bemni also worked as mediators or ‘link people’ between individual households and the state in its various local guises. They petitioned the village council head and Block Development Officers when development monies meant for specific family members did not arrive, for example. They also sometimes worked as intermediaries in the educational sphere, helping to get children enrolled in school or to obtain high school or degree certificates. In Uttar Pradesh (UP), such intermediaries also link the rural population and the police (see Jeffrey *et al.* 2008), but young people said that in Bemni an informal council of respected elders manage this work.

A few educated, unemployed young men had turned their capacity to mediate between the public and officials to their financial advantage. The principle route through which they made money from their local political know-how was by acting as intermediaries between the state at the district level and the rural population in the management of construction projects. These young people could usually make reasonable sums of money from this work, although three powerful families tended to monopolise the larger contracts in the region. The contractor (*thekedaar*) was a figure of hate among most villagers, especially the poor and SCs, because they tended to give work to their ‘own people’, often refused to pay wages, and embezzled large sums. Contractors defended themselves: they said that one has no choice but to be corrupt as a *thekedaar*. They cited the pressures associated with working among numerous corrupt officials and the need to make their own cut on development projects to feed their families.

Young people also sometimes became involved in open protests. Most young men said that they had participated in demonstrations in Gopeshwar on the subject of local schooling. Roughly half said they had been involved in the road protests close to Bemni. And about one-third mentioned having participated in demonstrations on the topic of the electricity supply to Bemni and the construction of a communications tower. But the main way in which young people tried to place pressure on the state was through individual interactions with government servants—chiefly, the local village head and local teachers and doctors, but also Block officials, and sometimes even the District Magistrate.

A final point emerging from Jaipal’s example concerns the state. Young people spoke in contradictory ways about ‘the state’ (*sarkar*). On the one hand, they viewed the state as a set of craven, partial, and inefficient organisations and individuals that prey on the poor and marginalised. The state is the police officer confiscating the caterpillar fungus or the teacher that does not turn up to teach at the local university. On the other hand, young people had absorbed notions of universal citizenship, rights, and entitlement; they believed that something like a ‘perfect state’ exists ‘up there’. The double consciousness of the state reflected young people’s contradictory relationship to state power, wherein they wanted jobs and assistance from the government, but encountered numerous examples of the state’s corruption. At a broader level, it reflects the manner in which the neoliberalisation of state welfare service has interacted with the gradual dissemination of notions of rights and universal citizenship.

Conclusion

It is possible to identify a particular articulation between age and capitalism in contemporary India, wherein young people in their late teens and twenties are bearers of intense social pressures. Youth in Bemni faced a wide range of frustrations: the poor conditions of local educational institutions, deterioration in the environment, and a shortage of white-collar job opportunities associated with India's economic reforms. They felt demoralised by the changes occurring around them.

But educated young men could not afford to remain unemployed; they engaged in a range of forms of paid and unpaid work. In the social and political spheres, they were similarly enterprising. They did not participate in narrowly self-interested, reactionary, or violent political activities. Instead, youth in this region—or at least GC young men—were a type of gentle generational force (cf. Mannheim [1936] 1972), incrementally seeking to improve local society through their networking, hustle, and hard work. Their politics was 'social' in that it was organised around social issues, such as education and religion, and of involving young people in building networks of mutual responsibility.

A distinctive feature of young people's social mobilisation was the determination with which they presented their actions as non-political or even as 'anti-political'. Bemni's energetic youth did not try to achieve their goals through politicians or by climbing the greasy pole within party politics. They did not spend afternoons poring over state or national election results. Instead, they tried to do everything that politicians do not do. They tried to be accountable to the people they helped, explaining patiently why they had not been able to assist them or what problems they encountered. They did not usually seek personal profit—in terms of either money or reputation—out of the work they willingly performed for others. And they often packaged their action as explicitly 'social' or 'civil', rather than political.

This account of social politics provides a basis for questioning some popular commentaries on the vernacular public arena in India, especially Partha Chatterjee's influential work (see also Jeffrey and Young 2012). Chatterjee (1998, 2004) argues that the post-Independence period in India has been associated with the emergence and consolidation of two distinct forms of politics that are mapped onto the class position of Indian subjects. The rich occupy civil society, which he defines as: '[t]hose characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating in Western societies that are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, [and] deliberative procedures of decision making' (2004: 172). The poor occupy a more obviously 'political sphere'—Chatterjee calls it 'political society'—in which they form specific groups on an ad hoc basis, in order to try to bid for government resources and help. The occupants of political society '[m]ake their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations' (2004: 233). For Chatterjee, these

‘temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements’ are often illegal, regularly unruly, and sometimes bloody. ‘Political society will bring into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life’ (2004: 74). The people occupying political society rarely use the language of abstract rights and norms of impartial solidarity (*Gesellschaft*). Rather, they petition the state through reference to kinship, caste, and religion (*Gemeinschaft*). Moreover, whereas those in civil society typically congregate within formally recognised horizontal associations, the poor are compelled to mobilise vertically, through powerful patrons and brokers.

The networking and critique of young people in Bemni occurred in the sphere of direct negotiation between people and state officials that Chatterjee terms ‘political society’. It involved persuading a Block Development Officer to channel money to the village, telling a school principal to allow someone access to a class, or ensuring that a land revenue officer investigates a crime. But young people’s practices in Bemni differed from those of people in political society, as conceived by Chatterjee. They typically went about their daily work in a civilised manner and they showed a good grasp of the law. They typically did not engage in violence. Moreover, they appealed to the state with close reference to their rights as ‘citizens’. Indeed, what is partly remarkable about contemporary youth political action in Uttarakhand—and this is also true of the parts of UP in which Craig Jeffrey worked in the 1990s and 2000s (see Jeffrey 2010)—is the extent to which ‘political society’, in Chatterjee’s terms, forms a negative point of reference for young people. This reflects the degree to which notions of liberal democracy have penetrated the hearts and minds of young people in provincial India. And yet, these young people’s practices fail to qualify for the title of ‘civil society’ in its Hegelian sense. Hegel presented civil society as a sphere of social action separate from government, wherein individuals met as autonomous agents blind to differences of background and status. For Hegel, civil society was rooted in *Gesellschaft*, rather than *Gemeinschaft*. In addition, Hegel tended to draw attention to organised forms of civil society institutionalised within associations and clubs. Politically active young people in Bemni did not meet in formal associations and their social relationships were not always or inevitably founded on impersonal ties; kinship and caste were important, too. Nor did their politics mainly or even often occur in the public sites of civicness that Hegel and others imagine as underpinning civil society (cf. Piliavsky 2012). A more generous definition of ‘civil society’ might be required in an Indian context to allow for deliberative, inclusive, civil, and progressive political practices that nevertheless take place outside formal organisations and sometimes draw on particularistic identities.

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4 Empowering the vernacular publics

Civil society and democratic participation in Rajasthan

Sarbeswar Sahoo

The decades following the 1970s witnessed extraordinary political transformations around the world. The ‘vernacular publics’,¹ which consist of marginalised groups, became organised through civil society to challenge the dominance of the elite and to redefine political discourse. As a consequence, many of the previously communist and authoritarian states in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and, most recently, the Middle East were forced to open up their political arena and make transitions to democratic forms of governance.² Scholars like Huntington (1992) and Linz and Stepan (1996) refer to this process as the ‘third-wave’ of democratisation. This was concerned with the ‘procedural’³ forms of democracy and involved a sequence of four fundamental stages: (1) the demise of non-democratic regimes (authoritarian breakdown); (2) the establishment of a procedural minimum of democracy (democratic transition); (3) democratic deepening and consolidation; and (4) the maturing of the democratic political order (see Haynes 2009). Scholars like Carothers (2007) have heavily criticised such sequentialism for the uncritical labelling of countries as ‘democracies’ in a very large number of cases where democratisation actually remains highly problematic.

In the case of India, despite the long history of democratic transition, democracy has not been successful in including the excluded or making the transition from a ‘procedural’ to a ‘substantive’ form. The majority of marginal populations are still deprived of their citizenship rights. However, since the 1980s, the vernacular publics have increasingly been asserting themselves in the political sphere. Studies have shown that in comparison to the 1970s, the 1990s witnessed the electoral upsurge of socially disadvantaged groups, whether in terms of caste hierarchy, economic class, gender distinction, or the rural–urban divide, which has radically transformed the nature of Indian politics (Sahoo 2010: 497; see also Alam 2005). Although overall turnout figures have not changed significantly between 1971 and 1996, the social composition of the voting public has changed dramatically. Evidently, the poor in India tend to participate in voting more than the middle classes and the rich. In 1971, there were more upper caste, urban, and college-educated voters; but in the 1996 election, there were more non-literate people, rural-based people, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Castes (OBC) (Sahoo 2010: 498). With this increasing participation by the vernacular

publics in the political process, democracy in India is becoming more inclusive and responsive to the interests of the poor and marginalised populations (see Jaffrelot 2003). According to Michelutti (2008), Indian democracy is experiencing a process of ‘vernacularisation’, in which ‘values and practices of democracy become embedded in particular cultural and social practices, and in the process become entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people’ (p. 1).

This chapter examines the participation of the vernacular publics *not* in the sphere of electoral politics and political parties, but in civil society. The chapter argues that the active participation of the vernacular publics in the civil society arena has transformed not only the nature of the state–society relationship, but also the nature of democracy and development in India. It further argues that the vernacular publics have utilised the civil society arena as a medium ‘to challenge the imposed hegemony’ of the elites (Tanabe 2007: 558), as well as to engage with state institutions to influence development policies. In this context, this chapter discusses the role of two major civil society actors—NGOs⁴ and social movement organisations—and their relationship with the vernacular publics.

Civil society and the vernacular publics

The modern idea of civil society emerged during the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. A host of political theorists, from Thomas Paine to Georg Hegel, developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to, but separate from, the state (Carothers and Barndt 2000). After a period of disuse, the concept of civil society resurfaced in the 1980s to refer to the Toquevillian idea of voluntary and civic associational life. This was further popularised by neo-Toquevillians such as Putnam (1993), who argued that voluntary social interaction produces high levels of trust and cooperation or ‘social capital’, which is essential for democracy and social progress. The World Bank and other international aid agencies view social capital as ‘the missing link’ in development and hence promoted it through non-government organisations (NGOs). It was believed by the World Bank that NGOs would act as enablers of vernacular agency and

give ‘voice’ to the poor; promote public sector transparency and accountability; encourage public-private cooperation and participatory approaches; generate social capital at the community level; and help to rein in the influence and reach of central state institutions.

(cited in Pattenden 2010: 486)

In India, due to the hierarchical nature of public administration, alarming bureaucratic corruption, and huge network of patron–client relationships, the fruits of development planning did not reach the vernacular publics located at the margins of the state. The politico-economic activities that were supposed to be based on the principles of equality and rationality remained dominated by the logic of power and number (Tanabe 2007: 559). It was in this context that NGOs

emerged to represent the interests, and work for the development of, people at the margins. This role of NGOs was further facilitated by the increasing concerns for social justice, inclusive growth, and empowerment of the poor and marginalised (Ghosh 2010: 229). Zaidi (1999) points out that NGOs came to play a leading role in development, because the World Bank perceived that they had 'strong grassroots links; field based development expertise; the ability to innovate and adapt; process-oriented approach to development; participatory methodologies and tools; long term commitment and emphasis on sustainability; and cost effectiveness' (see Zaidi 1999: 262). In India today, more than 1.5 million NGOs are active in various areas of development, such as education, health, service delivery, and community development (Ghosh 2010: 234). Given their large numbers and dominant role, Parekh (2001) has declared India 'the unofficial NGO capital of the world' (p. 703) and Baviskar (2001) has proclaimed them 'the very life-force for the civil society' (p. 7). However, other scholars, such as Kudva (2005) and Kamat (2002), have criticised this trend as the 'NGO-ification' of civil society and the grassroots in India. It should be noted here that although NGOs have come to constitute an important element within civil society, the space of civil society is not confined to them—all NGOs are civil society organisations (CSOs), but not all CSOs are NGOs (Ghosh 2010: 229–230).

The interests of the marginal groups were advanced not only through NGOs and constructive development activities, but also through radical social movements.⁵ Civil society became a site of struggle and political mobilisation (see Chandhoke 1995). This understanding of civil society, however, differs from Chatterjee's (2004) conceptualisation of civil and political society. For Chatterjee, civil society is a sphere of modernity that represents the values of equality and citizenship. Although the Indian Constitution has extended basic rights to all citizens of India, in actuality this has not been fulfilled. The majority of the population is deprived of many basic rights, due to various discriminatory practices related to caste, religion, tribe, and gender. Thus, the domain of civil society was confined to a small section of middle class 'citizens' (Chatterjee 2004: 38).

Despite the confinement of civil society to some middle class citizens, the marginalised 'populations' who remain outside the domain of civil society constantly negotiate with the state in the political sphere, which Chatterjee refers to as 'political society'. According to him, the foundation of political society is based on the discourse of governmentality and social welfare (Chatterjee 2004: 38). In short, for Chatterjee, civil society is the domain of middle class citizens that is guided by the principles of rights, whereas political society is the domain of populations who are living at the margins of society and polity and are dependent upon state welfare for their survival. Although Chatterjee's conceptualisation is very sophisticated, the problem lies in the ambiguities between social and political life. In this framework, it is difficult to empirically distinguish not only between citizens and populations, and rights and welfare, but also between who has access to what. This means that middle class citizens do not negotiate

with the state for welfare benefits or the marginalised populations do not have any rights.

This chapter defines civil society not as a sphere of middle class modernity, but as a non-state sphere of 'organisations and movements', such as NGOs, labour unions, social movements, and other interest associations (Haynes 2009: 1050). Within this sphere of civil society, groups are organised by class and other social bases and attempt to advance the interests of a plethora of people, ranging from those of their members to the more general interest of wider groups in society (see Chandhoke 1995). In Rajasthan, due to the lack of industry and a working class, labour unions are not prominent. Two actors that have dominated the sphere of civil society in Rajasthan are NGOs and social movements. These two actors have, in recent years, played a noticeable role in expanding the democratic space for the vernacular publics by representing the needs and interests of the poor and holding the state accountable and responsive to ordinary citizens.

Development of civil society in Rajasthan

Rajasthan is geographically the largest state in India, with a population of 56 million. 'Nearly two-thirds of its area is arid or semi-arid, with low and regular rainfall characterised with extremes of climate. For a predominantly agrarian economy these conditions prove a major handicap in ensuring sustainable growth' (Vyas 2007: 17). Population growth in the state is the highest in the country. Rajasthan also has a significantly large tribal population, which is nearly double the national average. The southern part of the state has a heavy concentration of Bhil tribes, who comprise 39 per cent of the state's tribal population. In Udaipur district, almost half the population is tribal, and some blocks like Kotra have a tribal population as high as 90 per cent. The tribal population of Rajasthan suffers from widespread poverty and marginalisation. Rajasthan was considered a BIMARU (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) (literally, 'sick') state, where more than half the population lived below the poverty line in 1981. The state also suffers from regular droughts accompanied by inevitable scarcities of jobs and food, resulting in acute hunger, malnutrition, and disease. The tribals perform miserably low on many of the socio-economic and human development indicators. Illiteracy is very high; life expectancy is very low; and infant and maternal mortality rates among the tribals are very high. The tribal society has remained 'backward'. This 'backwardness' is a generic term used by non-tribals and the postcolonial state to refer not just to the economic marginalisation and powerlessness of the tribals, but also to their social and cultural backwardness, as expressed in their dress and deportment, lifestyle, and aspirations (Baviskar 2005: 5105).

Besides the issues mentioned above, the postcolonial state structure of Rajasthan was deeply influenced by 'feudal tendencies' and was characterised by a 'hierarchical outlook, paternalistic institutions, low status of women and sharp social and economic discrimination against certain sections of population' (Vyas 2007: 17–18). It is in this context that several non-state actors have emerged to

take up issues related to the development of the poor and marginal groups. It is important to note that south Rajasthan, in particular, has had a long history of civil society activism. In the colonial period, this region was a hotbed of peasant and tribal social movements. One example was the Bijolia movement. It started in 1897 to fight the heavy taxation and feudal exploitation of peasants in south Rajasthan, and, after a long struggle, the movement succeeded in 1922 when the rulers agreed to reduce the various taxes and *lagats* (agricultural rents) on the peasantry. Bijolia's success inspired many other people's movements in south Rajasthan. Another movement was the *Adivasi Eki Andolan* or Tribal Unity movement. This movement was started by Motilal Tejawat in 1921, not just to fight the oppressive feudal social structure, but also to challenge 'the divine right to rule' theory of the feudal lords. Although the movement was not very successful, it brought in several socio-cultural reforms and generated political consciousness among the tribals and peasants of south Rajasthan.

In the postcolonial period, inspired by the Naxalbari uprising of 1967, a group of communist revolutionaries became determined to free the backward tribals from feudal exploitation. However, this movement was suppressed by the state and many of its activists were either jailed or went underground. As a result, the radical left movement in Rajasthan collapsed. Although it later re-emerged in the 1980s in the form of the Rajasthan Peasant's Union, which acted to organise tribal peasants, without a solid political agenda the movement could not be sustained. In recent years, however, several other rights-based and welfare-oriented movements have emerged in different parts of the state, which will be discussed later.

Before 1950, there were only eight established NGOs in Rajasthan. The oldest voluntary organisation in Rajasthan that was independent of the political process was the Vidya Bhawan Society, which was established by Dr M.S. Mehta in 1931 to impart adult education in Udaipur (Rajvansi n.d.). According to Rajvansi (n.d.: 15), 'there was not much of a tradition of NGO work in Rajasthan in the days of "Rajas" and "Maharajas". Feudal rule was not despotic, but did not encourage the spirit of voluntarism'. This situation, however, began to change in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the Gandhian *Sarvodaya*, *Khadi*, cooperatives, and adult education movements, which laid the foundation for secular voluntary action in Rajasthan (Bhargava 2007: 259). The first grass-roots support organisation in Rajasthan was Seva Mandir, which was established by Dr M.S. Mehta in 1966 to promote adult education among the poor tribals and peasants of Udaipur (Rajvansi n.d.: 19). In the 1970s, 'the Seva Mandir in Udaipur, the Social Work Research Center in Ajmer, Urmul in Bikaner, Cecoedecon in Jaipur and Gramin Vigyan Vikash Samiti in Jodhpur emerged as initiators of NGO movement in Rajasthan' (Bhargava 2007: 260). These organisations emphasised community development and assumed roles such as doer, mobiliser, catalyst, activist, and educator (Rajvansi 2007: 326). Although the majority leadership of these NGOs, with the exception of Seva Mandir, belonged to other states, the number of indigenous NGOs has increased since then.

The 1980s witnessed a proliferation of NGO activity in Rajasthan, which was supported by international organisations and donors: UN agencies, bilateral

agencies, private foundations, and international non-government organisations (Bhargava 2007: 260). Added to this, the flexible and favourable policies of the Indian state contributed to the growth of NGOs. Specifically, the Janata Government at the centre vastly increased funding and bureaucratic support for NGOs and allocated 500 million rupees, which boosted the role of NGOs in development. Such policies were continued by Rajiv Gandhi, who increased the funds available to NGOs in the social sector to 2.5 billion rupees. The Rajiv Gandhi Government also established the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) in 1986 to facilitate NGOs working for the development of the underprivileged and socio-economically weaker sections of society. Following this, the Rajasthan State Government also actively promoted the NGO sector and sought their involvement in education, health, watershed development, drought mitigation, and other rural reconstruction and community development activities. In the 1990s, Rajasthan became one of the states that brought about an 'associational revolution'⁶ in India. According to Rajvansi (2007: 337), by 1999 there were 452 NGOs working in Rajasthan; of these, 41 are in Udaipur district, which is the third highest after Jaipur (107) and Bikaner (45). She also notes that 80 per cent of these NGOs worked in rural areas, and 20 per cent carried out their activities in both rural and urban areas.

Since 1999, the number of NGOs in Rajasthan has increased more than three-fold. Recent data from the Planning Commission show that 1,694 NGOs are working in Rajasthan (Table 4.1). Udaipur (125) now occupies the second position after Jaipur (580), which has witnessed an exceptionally high growth in the number of NGOs. The Maharana Kumbha Sahkar Bhawan, which registers NGOs in Udaipur, reports that 3,163 organisations of different kinds have been registered in Udaipur between 1988 and 13 February 2007 under the Rajasthan Societies Registration Act 1958.⁷ Because of this increase, Udaipur is not called by its traditional name ('City of Lakes'), but is the 'City of NGOs', and Fatehpura Street is called 'NGO Street'.⁸ NGOs have increasingly been playing an important role in democratic development, most importantly with regard to the lives of the poor and marginalised.

Role of NGOs in development

In Rajasthan, since the 1980s, NGOs have played a significant role in development, especially in the welfare of the poor tribal and peasant populations. The majority of these NGOs are service delivery organisations whose main activities include poverty alleviation, the spread of education and literacy, provision of healthcare and drinking water facilities, and the development of women and children, as well as tribal and dalit populations. They also work on disaster management, human rights, agriculture, food processing, the aged and elderly, environment, Panchayati Raj, micro-finance/self-help groups, vocational training, minority issues, youth affairs, renewable energy, sports, tourism, and so on (Table 4.2). Given the high prevalence of poverty, illiteracy, and infant and maternal mortality in Rajasthan, the majority of the NGOs are working to

Table 4.1 Number of NGOs in Rajasthan by district, 2012

<i>District</i>	<i>No. of NGOs</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>No. of NGOs</i>
Ajmer	53	Jalor	9
Alwar	57	Jhalawar	23
Banswara	25	Jhunjhunu	23
Baran	17	Jodhpur	81
Barmer	40	Karauli	22
Bharatpur	62	Kota	45
Bhilwara	27	Nagaur	33
Bikaner	69	Pali	14
Bundi	10	Pratapgarh	2
Chittorgarh	22	Rajsamand	11
Churu	21	Sawai Madhopur	44
Dausa	42	Sikar	16
Dholpur	15	Sirohi	9
Dungarpur	19	Sri Ganganagar	18
Hanumangarh	17	Tonk	62
Jaipur	580	Udaipur	125
Jaisalmer	20	N/A	61
Total=1,694			

Source: http://ngo.india.gov.in/ngo_search1_ngo.php (last accessed 13 October 2012).

Note

This not a complete list of NGOs in Rajasthan. It lists NGOs that have collaborated with the government.

eradicate poverty and spread education and provide access to healthcare facilities among the poor. According to Planning Commission data, in Rajasthan more than 73 per cent of NGOs work on education and literacy, 64 per cent on rural and urban poverty alleviation, and more than 63 per cent on the promotion of health and family welfare activities. The data also show that 55 per cent of NGOs are working on the development of children, 44 per cent on women's empowerment and development, and 53 per cent on the environment and forests. In addition, 31 per cent of NGOs are working on Panchayati Raj issues and promoting people's participation in the decentralised local governance process.

NGOs in Rajasthan carry out these activities with financial support from a variety of sources, such as the government, international donor agencies, private business houses, and charity organisations. Many NGOs also raise their own funds. The state has played a supportive role and actively promoted their activities. The NGOs view the state as a 'minimal' institution that does not have adequate resources to meet all the needs and demands of the people. Therefore, the NGOs have maintained a cooperative relationship with the state and complemented its activities in development. Although some scholars have criticised NGOs for lacking autonomy and acting as mere 'public service contractors', others have highlighted their unique role in improving the lives of the poor. According to Ved Arya (1999: 2–3), the state and NGOs have worked in collaboration for four reasons:

Table 4.2 Number of NGOs in Rajasthan by sector, 2012

<i>Name of the sector</i>	<i>No. of NGOs</i>	<i>Name of the sector</i>	<i>No. of NGOs</i>
Agriculture	694	Legal awareness and aid	510
Animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries	487	Micro-finance (SHGs)	582
Art and culture	593	Micro, small, and medium enterprises	397
Biotechnology	254	Minority issues	369
Children	927	New and renewable energy	215
Civic issues	455	Nutrition	388
Dalit upliftment	487	Panchayati Raj	530
Differently-abled	301	Prisoner's issues	69
Disaster management	436	Right to information and advocacy	307
Drinking water	717	Rural development and poverty alleviation	761
Education and literacy	1,241	Science and technology	267
Aged and elderly	418	Scientific and industrial research	135
Environment and forests	894	Sports	211
Food processing	396	Tourism	153
Health and family welfare	1,075	Tribal affairs	312
HIV/AIDS	807	Urban development and poverty alleviation	328
Housing	298	Vocational training	577
Human rights	668	Water resources	414
Information and communication technology	551	Women's development and empowerment	736
Labour and employment	620	Youth affairs	359
Land resources	351	Other	194

Source: http://ngo.india.gov.in/ngo_sector_ngo.php (last accessed 13 October 2012).

- *To generate and replicate innovations for development problems.* An example is the government's *Shikshakarmi* programme in Rajasthan, which grew out of an NGO's solution to the problem of teacher absenteeism in remote villages by recruiting and training local youths.
- *To improve the delivery of services.* Since NGOs work closely with communities, they can implement government programmes more effectively in the community. An example is the implementation of the government's watershed programme.
- *To induce institutional reforms.* When the objectives of the state and NGOs converge, NGOs can help introduce and refine new approaches. For example, to achieve universal primary education in Rajasthan, the *Lok Jumbish Parishad* was created with support from the state and NGOs.
- *To address participation and empowerment.* Through village-level committees and self-help groups, NGOs encourage people to create 'public agendas' and participate in the implementation process. This puts the people's voice and their agenda at the forefront of development planning.

With this increased level of collaboration, the development paradigm is gradually shifting towards a more bottom-up approach. Groups that had previously been excluded are now becoming stakeholders in development. Because of the NGO work, there have been some improvements in the lives of the poor in the villages. For example, Johnson-Lans (2008: 2) examined the effects of the Rajdadiji-Veerni Project, a local NGO in Jodhpur, which worked to promote female health and literacy in a group of villages. Its programmes included weekly visits from mobile medical clinics, health education classes, and primary level classes for children in arithmetic and reading. After examining the impact of the project in nine villages, Johnson-Lans found some clear indications of success. According to her: 'the medical program, including the work of the health educator, is associated with a significant reduction in fertility and improvements in some measures of health and knowledge about disease prevention for both adult women and adolescent girls' (Johnson-Lans 2008: 14). She also found that

not only have female literacy rates increased significantly in the villages, but some of the girls are now going to finish secondary school and some are now undertaking university level work.... Today the NGO no longer needs to bring in outside teachers for primary level classes since villagers have been trained to conduct the classes themselves, a good example of sustainable development.

(Johnson-Lans 2008: 15)

This shows that NGOs have played important roles in not only improving the socio-economic and health status of the poor, but also in making them an active part of the development process. The next section discusses the role of Seva Mandir, which is one of the oldest NGOs in Rajasthan.

Seva Mandir and tribal development

Seva Mandir was established in 1966 by Dr M.S. Mehta with a vision of ending poverty and educating the poor. Dr Mehta wrote: 'where there is grief, where there is deprivation, where there is suffering from exploitation, where hope is vanquished, and where the darkness of ignorance prevails, it is there that Seva Mandir has its role to play' (Seva Mandir 1990–1993: back cover). Currently, Seva Mandir is working in 626 villages in the Udaipur and Rajsamand districts on issues related to education, health, agriculture, natural resources development, women and child development, and the development of village institutions. Around 60 to 80 per cent of people in these villages are members of a village development committee, where they participate in the planning and implementation of local projects.⁹ With the help of these committees, Seva Mandir runs 172 non-formal education (NFE) centres in remote tribal regions with more than 4,500 students. It is acknowledged to be one of the most successful organisations in India in imparting adult literacy. Seva Mandir's role in spreading education has not only increased the level of literacy among tribals, but it has also built up their capacity and confidence to participate in everyday political affairs. As the people of Sadha village said:

... previously people in our village didn't go to school but now all are educated and have gone at least till middle school. NFE centres in different *faldas* [hamlets] have spread education ... men and women are able to receive information on health, education, and several government development programmes. People of the village are no longer scared of government officials [especially the police, forest guards and land revenue officers]. Everybody is confident and can face government officials without any fear. Even the women can now speak to government officials.

(Author discussion, 4 June 2008)

This shows that Seva Mandir's education programmes have had significant positive effects on the lives of poor people in the tribal areas. Besides education, Seva Mandir is also working on healthcare, poverty alleviation, agricultural development, dry land and forest management, watershed development, women and child development, youth development, self-help groups, and micro-credit programmes. The Annual Report (Seva Mandir 2007) shows that Seva Mandir has involved 156 villages in its health programme; created 542 self-help groups with a membership of 9,930; established 161 full-day childcare centres with 3,803 children; and covered 751 ha under forestation and 1,105 ha under watershed development. Many of these programmes have facilitated income generation and improved the socio-economic conditions of poor people in the villages. Besides development, these projects are, argues Seva Mandir, a practical means to encourage people's participation and democratic freedom; these projects provide a concrete opportunity for the community to learn and practice self-governance. As a member of the Seva Mandir staff pointed out:

Seva Mandir's objective is not to provide services like anicuts, health, education or any other services. Its most crucial objective is to inform people about the various government programmes and help them make demands on the government. These schemes are just a medium through which Seva Mandir can reach the people. The government has many development schemes for tribals, but these are misappropriated by people in power. By creating village institutions and spreading education among tribals, Seva Mandir is informing people about the various development activities that are available for them.

(Interview, 22 September 2006)

Given its role in tribal development, Seva Mandir is considered the 'node' of NGO activities in south Rajasthan (Weisgrau 1997: 88). Through its various projects, Seva Mandir is building the capabilities of the poor by encouraging them to take collective responsibility for community planning and is creating a self-reliant and sustainable structure at the grassroots level.

Social movements and democratisation

According to Tilly (2004), social movements are a major vehicle for ordinary people's participation in public politics. He identifies three major elements in social movements:

- *Campaign*: a sustained, organised public effort making collective claims on target authorities;
- *Social movement repertoire*: employment of combinations of the following forms of political action: creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to, and in, the public media, and pamphleteering; and
- *WUNC displays*: worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment by participants through public representations.

(2004: 3–4)

Although social movements play a significant role in strengthening civil society, it should not mean that all social movements necessarily promote democratic principles and values. As Hadiz (2010) has rightly noted, social movements can promote bureaucratic authoritarianism or anti-democratic forces. Examples include Fascist movements in Germany and Italy or Naxalite and Hindu nationalist movements in India.

Although this chapter is aware of the potential negative implications of social movements, it primarily explores how they have endeavoured to include the vernacular publics in political processes and expanded the democratic space to include them. In Rajasthan, many of these movements have taken up basic socio-economic and political issues that affect the everyday life of the poor and

constrain their life choices. These movements operate within the sphere of civil society, ‘expanding the arena of politics beyond the sphere of representational institutions of elections and political parties’ (Sahoo 2010: 495). Sheth (2004) has referred to them as grassroots or micro movements, and Kothari (1984) has called them ‘non-party political formations’. Unlike the ‘old’ social movements that represented the interests of one particular group and were linked to a political party, these movements are not party-based or formally affiliated to any political parties. However, if necessary, they seek support from all political parties, irrespective of ideology or interest. The major objective of these groups is to empower the vernacular agency by developing ‘an alternative vision of justice and development that is embedded in the discourse of empowerment, rights and democracy’ (Behar and Prakash 2006: 191).

In contrast to NGOs, social movement groups have largely refused to deliver services or act as implementing agents. Instead, they have adopted a more radical approach to development and focused on building the collective capabilities of the poor to demand rights and entitlements. Social movement groups have broadly adopted a non-violent, rights-based mobilisation approach that is mainly manifested through passive resistance (*satyagraha*) to address issues that limit the democratic space. In doing so, these groups have identified the state as a major actor of engagement. Although their relationship with the state is quite complex, it is often marked by open confrontation. Many government officials and local bureaucrats, therefore, see these movement groups as agitational (*andolanatmak*) and anti-state. Social movement activists, however, argue that they are not against the state; they have worked ‘within the legal boundaries of constitutional law for the regeneration and strengthening of democratic institutions’ (Sahoo 2010: 503). As an activist in Udaipur pointed out:

We are not working against the government; rather we are working to strengthen the power of the state/government system (*sarkari byabastha*) to make the democratic values reach the ordinary people. It [our role] is, however, misinterpreted by those who do not work or those who are corrupt in the system.

(Interview, 16 January 2007)

The movement groups have identified three major actors that have the potential to, or often do, limit democratic participation of the vernacular agency:

- state institutions and their hierarchies and unaccountability,
- market forces and their exploitative policies, and
- dominant groups within civil society and their exclusionary politics.

Considering this, the social movement groups have identified issues that constrain the capabilities and freedoms of the marginal groups. As a response, they have followed issue-based activism and welfare rights discourse that have radicalised the everyday politics of development at the local level, where people’s

participation has become a direct part of their struggle for rights, entitlements, and survival. In recent years, Rajasthan has witnessed a steady growth in such movements, which has 'limited the state's power and reach and pressurised governments to restructure and reform agencies leading to greater decentralisation of power, authority and resources' (Lodha 2006: 3). The next section will discuss one particular movement where the vernacular publics, especially tribals and peasants, mobilised themselves to make the state institutions more accountable and responsive to their needs, interests, and rights. This struggle of the poor in Rajasthan is popularly known as the Right to Information (RTI) movement.

MKSS and the Right to Information movement

Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (Organisation for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants), popularly known as MKSS, is a mass-based grassroots organisation that works for the empowerment of poor peasants and tribals in Devdungri village of Rajasthan. Due to the prevalence of drought and lack of alternate sources of livelihood, people in this region largely depended on government relief works for their livelihood. During its work in the village, the MKSS discovered that labourers at the drought-relief sites were not paid the full minimum wage and the quality of relief work was very poor. This highlighted the issue of corruption and the nexus of vested interest groups that were siphoning the state's resources. The MKSS realised that to expose a corrupt system, access to information is essential. However, the Indian governance system, which is borrowed from colonial rule, is based on secrecy and does not give common citizens access to information (Behar and Prakash 2006: 208). For the MKSS, it was necessary to access records, in order to prevent corruption, try to obtain the minimum wage, and ensure that infrastructure actually got built (Roy and Dey 2001).

The MKSS adopted a multipronged strategy and used all possible means to gain the Right to Information for common citizens. At the macro level, it received strong support from elite IAS, Delhi-based intellectuals and activists, as well as the regional and national media, which contributed enormously to linking the idea of the Right to Information with debates on governance and transparency (Jenkins and Goetz 1999: 619–620). Locally, the MKSS used people power through agitation and campaigns to pressure the government into granting the Right to Information. Some of the campaign slogans that were used repeatedly by the MKSS in various phases of its agitation were: *hamara paisa, hamara hisab* (our money, our account); 'the right to know, the right to live'; and 'this government belongs to you and me, it's no one's personal property'. The strategies that the MKSS adopted to facilitate its objective were diverse and included sit-ins, rallies, slogans, marches, and street corner meetings, as well as lobbying and negotiating with the government. Apart from mobilising people and creating pressure, the street meetings became platforms for democratic debate and eliciting local views.

Through an innovative method known as *jan sunwai* (public hearings), the MKSS was able to channel the people's power to expose the corruption and make the system accountable (Behar and Prakash 2006: 209). This first became

possible because a cooperative bureaucrat had allowed the MKSS to access the documents related to the panchayats of Kotkirana and Bagdi Kalalia in Pali district. With the help of these documents, the MKSS was able to expose malpractices, such as purchase overbilling, sale overbilling, fake labour rolls, under-payment of wages, and, in some cases, ghost works (works that were on record, but did not exist). At the *jan sunwais*, person after person came to the microphone and testified to these malpractices. The *jan sunwai* put forward four formal demands: transparency in panchayat functioning, accountability of officials, social audits, and redress of grievances. The common people realised that their role in political participation did not begin or end with the vote. After the first phase of *jan sunwais*, held in Pali district on 2 December 1994, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan announced in the state legislature on 5 April 1995 that every citizen had the right to manual inspection of all official documents related to local development work. This government order was a milestone: for the first time common citizens were given the legal right to obtain such information. However, even after a year, this assurance was not followed up by an administrative order. Therefore, the MKSS began a *dharna* (sit-in protest) at Beawar in Ajmer district in April 1996. Reacting promptly to the pre-*dharna* notices, the Government of Rajasthan hastily issued an order allowing citizens the right to 'manual inspection' of Panchayat records, but 'not to obtain certified copies or even photocopies' (Mohanty 2005–2006: 22). The MKSS immediately rejected the order and continued the *dharna*.

Several eminent media and academic personalities, such as Harsh Mander, Nikhil Chakravarthy, Kuldip Nayyar, Prabhsh Joshi, Swami Agnivesh, and Medha Patkar, participated in the protest, which strengthened the credibility and stature of the protest. The mainstream press was also sympathetic. In response, the state government decided to establish a committee that would give practical shape to the assurance made by the Chief Minister. Another year passed. May 1997 saw the beginning of another epic *dharna*, this time in the state capital of Jaipur. After 52 days, the Deputy Chief Minister announced that six months earlier the state government had notified the right to receive photocopies of documents related to panchayats. The 52 days of struggle allowed the Right to Information to be understood as an issue related to basic political change. This struggle by the people resulted in the enactment of the Rajasthan State Right to Information on 1 May 2000, and at the all-India level it became effective on 13 October 2005. This shows that collective struggle by the vernacular publics, especially peasants and tribals, has not only made state institutions accountable and transparent, but has also redefined the state–society relationship and deepened the democratic process in India.

Conclusion

Civil society in Rajasthan has been dominated by two major kinds of institutions: NGOs and social movement organisations. The NGOs have acted as efficient and effective service delivery mechanisms. Because of their closeness

to the community and participatory approaches, they have gained prominence over the years. In the age of neo-liberalism, when the state is withdrawing from several areas of social welfare, NGOs are taking over some of the functions that were previously the responsibility of the state. In doing so, they have maintained a cooperative relationship with the state, as well as with foreign donor agencies that have heavily supported NGO activities in their effort to empower marginalised sects of society and make development participatory.

In contrast to NGOs, social movement groups have adopted a more radical approach, but they are not necessarily always anti-state. They see underdevelopment as the result of structural problems and believe that the technical/service delivery solutions adopted by the NGOs will not solve the problem. They have, therefore, demanded a systemic change. In this regard, social movement groups have been, at the local level, working on a variety of issues, ranging from corruption and unaccountability in the state structure to issues related to livelihood, employment, and welfare rights. Although such movements have not always been successful, they have created a mass of politically conscious citizens who make sure that the rights of the citizens are not ignored. Thus, the proliferation of NGOs and social movement organisations has not only pluralised the arena of civil society, but also deepened the democratic process at the grassroots level.

Notes

- 1 'Vernacular publics' refers to the poor and marginalised groups, consisting of dalits, tribals, Other Backward Classes, women, and minorities who live at the margins of the state and the market. Most of these people are economically poor and are deprived of their legal rights.
- 2 According to Diamond (2000: 413), since 1974 the number of democratic political systems has increased more than three times – from 39 to 120 as of January 2000. Currently, there are 117 'electoral' democracies in the world. Diamond puts the number at 115, based on his definition (Diamond 2000: 415).
- 3 This is best expressed in Robert Dahl's eight 'institutional' requirements: (1) freedom to form and join organisations, (2) freedom of expression, (3) right to vote, (4) eligibility for public office, (5) right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, (6) alternative sources of information, (7) free and fair elections, and (8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference (Dahl 1971).
- 4 NGOs have been defined as 'a sub-set of organisations that receive funds from external sources to undertake "development" activities for the *articulated purpose* of improving the well-being of the poor and marginalised' (Jakimow 2009: 469–470 [emphasis in the original]).
- 5 Social movements are 'a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people make collective claims on others' (Tilly 1978: 349).
- 6 The term 'associational revolution' was first used by Salamon *et al.* (1999). The term refers to 'a massive upsurge of organised private, voluntary activity in literally every corner of the world' (p. 4).
- 7 The data before 1988 was destroyed in a fire caused by a short circuit.
- 8 Interview with an activist in the Mine Labour Protection Campaign on 17 January 2007; similarly, a member of Sajeew Seva Samiti said: 'Udaipur is full of NGOs' (*topla bharia*) (Interview, 7 January 2007).
- 9 Interview with the head of the People's Management School Unit, 23 January 2007.

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5 News media and political participation

Re-evaluating democratic deepening in India

Taberez Ahmed Neyazi

The role of the media has already been recognised in the process of democratisation and ensuring the survival of democracy. Studies have highlighted the impact of the news media on increasing political participation and political discussion (Aarts and Semetko 2003; Dimock and Popkin 1997; Newton 1999; Norris 1996). These studies are mainly based on contemporary developed systems, and they assume that what the news media do is provide information to individual citizens. But the idea of the informed, individual citizen is only one way of thinking about citizenship and political participation, and the idea of the news media as providers of information for individual citizens is only one way of thinking about their political role. Newspapers can also play the role of mobiliser of social groups or, at times, as a vehicle for political intervention by elites. McCargo (2002), in his work on Thai media, has demonstrated the very different role often played by the media in developing countries from the standard Western assumption regarding the function of the media in providing information to citizens. Rajagopal (2001) has shown how media can misinform citizens and instigate communal conflict among communities. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini (2004) show that even in the West, newspapers play many different roles, often serving more to represent organised social groups or as tools for elite intervention than just the 'liberal' function of providing neutral information. Moreover, instead of looking at the contribution of the media to democracy, most of the existing studies have focused on the commercialisation or lack of political autonomy of the mass media.

This study analyses the role of the news media in influencing political participation and democratic deepening in the world's largest democracy. It uses the concept of democratic deepening beyond the participation of marginalised groups in electoral politics and expands its definition by including the participation of these groups and the ordinary public in the process of democratic transformation, as well as in public arena activities. While explaining the mechanisms of the deepening of Indian democracy, the chapter draws on empirical examples from the state of Madhya Pradesh, where the author has been doing fieldwork since 2005. *Dainik Bhaskar*, India's second most widely read Hindi newspaper after *Dainik Jagran*, is also based in Bhopal, the state capital of Madhya Pradesh, which helped the author to understand the political role of the news

media. *Dainik Bhaskar* has 36 editions published across 11 states of India. The 36 editions are divided into sub-editions or satellite editions;¹ one edition usually has a minimum of five and a maximum of eight sub-editions. Currently, *Dainik Bhaskar* publishes more than 200 sub-editions on a daily basis. Each edition is different, and only about 40 to 50 per cent of the stories are common across all editions, while the rest of the content is customised and editorially altered for both the local area and the specific region. This process of localisation helps the newspaper not only to connect with the national, but also to highlight regional aspirations and local sensibilities and has greatly helped in the massive growth of *Dainik Bhaskar*.²

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the theoretical framework by conceptualising political participation and democratic deepening in India. The second section outlines the evolution of Hindi media after 1947 and how it has assumed significance in the political sphere. The third section analyses the rise of Indian language newspapers, along with the vernacularisation of the public sphere, which has seen the growing significance of vernacular elites; the chapter largely focuses on the vernacular political elites of north India, who primarily use Hindi. Finally, the last section examines the role of the media in influencing the participation of vernacular publics in public arena activities and its potential in deepening the process of democratisation.

Political participation and democratic deepening

Political participation is an important act of democratic citizenship. Earlier studies of political participation were mainly concerned with the institutions of representative democracy, such as voting, party membership or contacting a politician (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972). In the case of developed nations, over the years there has been a decline in representative modes of participation and a rise in non-institutionalised and extra-representative modes of participation (Hay 2007), with people increasingly participating in social movements (Della Porta 2012), life politics and lifestyle politics (Bennett 1998; Giddens 1991), political consumerism (Micheletti 2003) and postmodern politics (Inglehart 1997). In the case of India, there has been a simultaneous rise in representative modes of participation, particularly voting, as well as non-institutionalised and extra-representative modes of participation.

There is wide consensus among scholars about the deepening of Indian democracy, and there is a great deal of academic interest in the subject. Studies have focused on institutions (Kohli 1991; Kothari 1964, 1974; Weiner 1989), changing voting behaviour and political participation (Frankel 2000; Hasan 2000; Jaffrelot 2003; Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009; Yadav 1996, 2000), and how political culture has been influenced by democratic institutions (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Varshney 2000). What is striking about India is that the process of democratic deepening has taken place despite the low level of economic development, illiteracy, and social divisions. While most of the neighbouring countries in the South Asian region have experienced authoritarian rule and military dictatorship,

India has remained a successful democracy, except for a brief interlude of authoritarian rule from 1975 to 1977, which was based on ostensibly constitutional grounds and was not a military coup.

The democratic experience of India thus stands in contrast to conventional theories of democratisation that emphasise modernisation (Lipset 1960), homogeneity, and economic development (Barro 1996; Dahl 1982; Huntington 1991; Lipset *et al.* 1993; Londregan and Poole 1996; Mill [1861] 1958; Przeworski *et al.* 1996), and civil society (Diamond 1993). The highly celebrated paradigm of modernisation theory argues that democratisation follows industrialisation. India is a classic example where democracy has not only survived, but has also been consolidated with the entry of marginalised sections of society, which, in conventional theories of democratisation, were considered ill-equipped for adjusting to democratic functioning. India's recent economic growth also disproves the commonly held belief—established through the experiences of East Asian countries—that authoritarian regimes are needed in order to achieve rapid growth.

It must be noted that most of the studies on India's democratic transformation are largely concerned with the electoral politics of marginalised groups. The present study attempts to move beyond such a narrow definition of democratic deepening and explores the participation of the vernacular publics, which consist of the poor and people from rural areas, towns, and cities, along with the middle classes, not only in electoral politics, but also in public arena activities. Thus, the study aims to extend the definition of political participation beyond the sphere of acts intended only to influence state-related outcomes.

The main hypothesis of the current research argues that the vernacular media has played a key role in the process of deepening India's democracy. The English media, which was mainly confined to the urban and English-educated sections of society, could not play an effective role in the grassroots mobilisation that started in the 1980s. The media revolution, which began with the unprecedented growth of Indian language newspapers from the 1980s, occurred parallel to the greater mobilisation of the Indian masses in north India. The importance of the vernacular press in democratisation was also recognised by the Second Press Commission Report of 1982, which states: 'It is the Press in Indian languages, more than the English-language Press, that can help in democratizing communication.'³ The rise of vernacular political elites who were spearheading plebeian politics proved instrumental for the increasing role of the vernacular media in regional and national politics. The vernacular media provided a platform for the emerging political leaders of north India to raise their voices in the public arena. The chapter shows how the emergence of the vernacular media has helped connect diverse social groups in a network of dialogues and negotiations, which have contributed to the democratisation of the public arena.

Hindi media and political transformation

Over the past 60 years, India has witnessed the transformation in the press from an agent of domination to an agent of democratisation. After India achieved Independence in 1947, the media landscape was dominated by the English language press for several decades. Politicians and bureaucrats at the national level hardly bothered about news published in Hindi and other Indian language newspapers. The domination of the English press was noted in 1954 by the first Press Commission while analysing the state of the press in India after Independence. In 1952, the English press had the highest circulation of 697,000 copies for 41 dailies, and Hindi dailies had the second highest figure of 379,000 copies for 76 dailies.⁴ This domination of the English press continued until 1979, when the combined share of English daily newspapers in circulation dropped to 22.50 per cent, compared with 27.60 per cent in 1952, while the Hindi press, for the first time, moved ahead of its English counterparts, with 23 per cent share, as against 15 per cent in 1952 (Figure 5.1);⁵ this gap has continued to widen since the 1980s. According to the latest circulation figures for 2011, Hindi dailies lead with 88.95 million copies, while English dailies stand a distant second with 27.36 million copies. Now, politicians and bureaucrats cannot afford to ignore news published in Hindi newspapers and other regional language newspapers.

The rise of Hindi newspapers since the late 1970s started to pose a challenge to the dominance of English newspapers in the public sphere. Several important social, political, and economic transformations during the late 1970s and 1980s enabled Hindi newspapers to challenge the continuing dominance of English newspapers. With the decline of the Congress system after the 1967 general election, there was a parallel rise of regional consciousness, in which the regional and vernacular press played an important role.⁶ The regional press began to align with regional political classes to provide support to the regional cause.

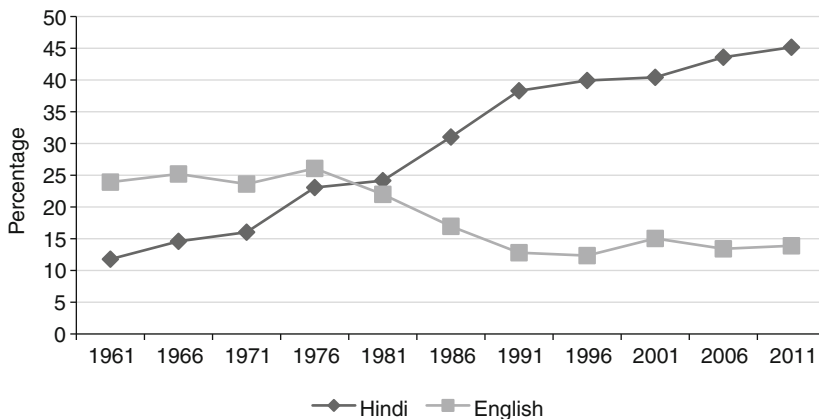


Figure 5.1 Share of English and Hindi dailies in total dailies circulation, 1961–2011 (source: Press in India, various years).

The Congress system, which had operated successfully for more than one-and-a-half decades because of its ability to co-opt the regional agenda into its national programmes, failed to accommodate the growing regional aspirations that needed different institutions to articulate themselves not only at the regional level, but also in the national mainstream. The English press, as the supposedly 'national' press, also failed to provide adequate representation for regional and local voices. This regional and local space, which was inadequately represented by the English press, was captured by the vernacular press, which started playing a proactive role in the unfolding political developments.

This rise in regional consciousness was mostly confined to south India, until the 1970s (Table 5.1). In south India, there is a very close link between the media and politics. The regional language press in south India, which played a significant role in creating regional awareness, aligned with the regional political party and contributed to challenging the dominance of the national political party, Congress, in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ This was the period when both Kerala and Tamil Nadu had the highest diffusion of newspapers compared to north Indian states.⁸ When newspaper penetration started to rise in north India, there was a parallel rise in political mobilisation. In pointing this out, this chapter is not trying to argue that the rise of media is responsible for political mobilisation. Rather, this chapter is trying to highlight the close link between the media and political mobilisation and how the vernacular media has played a key role in this mobilisation.

Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) have argued that, since 1965, there has been a rise in demand politics where voters' sovereignty is paramount, which is 'expressed through elections and through the demands of organised interests and classes, political parties, social movements and agitational politics' (89). They argue that the reasons for the rise of demand politics were partly exogenous, such as military failure in wars with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965), the

Table 5.1 Number of dailies circulation per thousand population, 1961–2011

<i>Year</i>	<i>South India</i>		<i>North India</i>		<i>All-India</i>
	<i>Kerala</i>	<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	<i>Madhya Pradesh</i>	<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	<i>India</i>
1961	40	27	5	4	11
1966	40	27	5	5	14
1971	52	30	8	6	17
1976	53	28	8	7	15
1981	57	31	10	12	22
1986	67	33	18	17	28
1991	72	30	28	29	28
1996	92	34	45	42	43
2001	99	48	76	56	56
2006	121	66	95	87	99
2011	199	105	217	187	162

Source: Press in India, various years.

deaths of two prime ministers (Nehru in May 1964 and Shastri in January 1966), and the food crisis from 1965 to 1966, when food production plummeted and prices soared. They further attribute the rise in demand politics after 1965 to an increase in electoral participation, riots, strikes, students' 'indiscipline', and agrarian unrest.

Ignored in the analysis of Rudolph and Rudolph is the role of information spread through the regional press in the entire mobilisation and rise in demand politics, especially in the 1970s.⁹ In India, as elsewhere, news plays a very important role in mobilising people and shaping public opinion. One cannot ignore the power of the vernacular press in looking at their history when they aligned with nationalist forces to fight the British during the colonial period. Even Indira Gandhi placed the blame on the press for declaring the Emergency. Therefore, it can be argued that the serious challenge to the Congress system did not come from the English press; rather, it was the regional press that was contributing significantly to the rise in demand politics. Some of the important mass mobilisations, such as the JP movement—a Gandhi-inspired protest aimed at removing corruption—were largely a north Indian phenomenon. Similarly, the Emergency greatly affected political and social life in northern, rather than in southern, India. This suggests a huge gap in the existing knowledge of political mobilisation that requires the further examination of the role of Hindi newspapers in the entire mass mobilisation starting from the 1970s or to explore how Hindi newspapers contributed to the rise in demand politics. Such a linkage becomes clear when we analyse the working of the press during the Emergency.

During the Emergency, censorship and several repressive laws were imposed on press freedom.¹⁰ Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, held the press responsible for her declaring the Emergency, since 'it was the newspapers which were inciting the people and creating a terrible situation' (*Shah Commission Report*) (Government of India 1978: 33). She went on to reiterate that 'the agitation was only in the newspapers and once the newspapers were placed under censorship there was no agitation' (*ibid.*). This resentment against newspapers clearly reflects the threat that the press as an institution was posing to the authoritarian regime of Indira Gandhi.

On 8 December 1975, three ordinances were issued banning the publication of 'objectionable matter', abolishing the Press Council, and removing the freedom of the press to report the proceedings of parliament. The ordinance relating to publication of objectionable matter was made law on 28 January 1976.¹¹ Under these circumstances, the press were unable to put up strong resistance. All newspapers were categorised based on their response to the Emergency: A denoted friendly, B meant hostile, while C signified neutral reporting by newspapers. *Swadesh*, *Vir Prataap*, and *Pradeep*—three important Hindi newspapers at that time—were placed in the hostile category. Another noted Hindi daily of the time, *Nai Duniya*, published from Madhya Pradesh, regularly left its front page blank to register its protest against the government. There were only two Hindi newspapers in the friendly category: one was *Hindustan*, which is published by the Hindustan Times group; and the other was *Naveen Duniya*, a

small newspaper from Madhya Pradesh. In the English press, noted national dailies, such as *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, and *Hindustan Times*, were categorised as friendly. Thus, Hindi newspapers were posing a serious challenge to the authority of the government, whereas major English dailies were falling in line with, or even going so far as supporting, the government's dictates.

After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the Indian media landscape started to change. The number of Indian language newspapers began growing at a faster rate, as noted in Figure 5.1. People wanted to know what had happened during the Emergency, and they wanted to know it in their own language. The growing interest of the public in the dramatic events both during and after the Emergency helped Hindi newspapers, as well as other Indian language newspapers, increase their circulation and readership among the masses. The Janata Government of 1977 to 1979, which was a result of both the Emergency and excessive centralisation by Indira Gandhi, 'exposed the state to the ongoing and dramatic democratic forces that had been working throughout society' (Hewitt 2008: 9). The regional and vernacular forces were being galvanised, which was paving the way for regional and Hindi newspapers to play a new and proactive role in the shifting political space.

The period from the 1980s onwards has seen greater mobilisation of the Indian masses in north India. Besides taking to technology, Hindi newspapers also took advantage of the social transformation that India was going through. Lower caste groups and the rural population started participating more actively in the political process (Yadav 2000). Grassroots movements and popular mobilisation, in which new social groups needed new ways of expressing their political aspirations, began entering the political arena (Hasan 2000; Kohli 1991) and found expression in vernacular newspapers. This development saw the Hindi media move to help these social groups by providing them not only with the language, but also with the institution, as well as presenting an alternative discourse of democratic participation that was more inclusive, since it provided a voice to those who were only marginally present in the mainstream English press. By offering such an alternative, it has challenged the dominance of the 'national' elite in the public sphere who depended on the English media. To access the vernacular public arena, the national elite needed the help of the vernacular media, which were becoming more robust and proactive in providing an alternative approach to development.

The emergence of important political figures in north India after 1977, such as Charan Singh, Devi Lal, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Kanshi Ram, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Mayawati, helped the Hindi media emerge from its political slumber and claim an equal, although not dominant, share in the public arena. These vernacular elites had started emerging in the 1960s, but attained ascendancy in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike the national elites who were mostly English educated from an urban background, vernacular elites came from rural backgrounds, within which English was not so important (Sheth 1995). For them, local and regional issues were as important as national issues. In other words, the rise of vernacular elites was displacing the binary discourse of national versus regional/local, urban versus rural, elites versus masses, and

English versus vernacular. Such a redefinition of the dominant discourse also contributed to questioning the ostensibly national elites’ paramount position in national politics and showed that vernacular elites are as important for national development as national elites.

Vernacularisation has helped marginalised groups participate in the ongoing process of deepening democracy more actively than before. Vernacularisation of the public sphere leads to the popularisation of politics, as the idioms of politics and expressions resonate with local cultural specificities. Such an expression of political activities invariably falls outside the theories of liberal democracies. Yet this provides space for greater participation by marginalised groups in the political process. As argued by Kaviraj, one of the basic failures of the Nehruvian state was that ‘(i)t did not try deliberately to create or reconstitute popular common sense about the political world, taking the new conceptual vocabulary of rights, institutions and impersonal power into the vernacular everyday discourses of rural or small town Indian society’ (1991: 90). There remained an unbridgeable gap between the elite discourse of modernity and the popular vernacular world. It is no surprise that political mobilisation became possible in north India only after the rise of the vernacular media. As long as the reach of vernacular newspapers was limited, north India did not witness major political movements.

The rise of the Hindi media provided a platform for the emerging vernacular elites of north India to raise their voices in the public arena. Compared with English newspapers, which have a predominantly urban concentration, Hindi newspapers in 1981 held a larger presence in small towns and rural areas—20 per cent versus 69 per cent (Table 5.2). Around this time, Hindi newspapers started consolidating their presence in state capitals, which became the centre of political activities after the regionalisation of politics in the 1980s. Thus, from 13.40 per cent in 1981, the concentration of Hindi newspapers surged to 19.2 per cent in 1991 and 33.5 per cent in 2011. This shows the ways in which Hindi newspapers were playing an active role in political transformation by increasing their concentration in state capitals, big cities, and small towns. Similarly, Stahlberg (2002) argues that ‘politics in India has to a great extent shifted its focus

Table 5.2 Concentration of English and Hindi newspapers (%), 1978–2011

<i>Year</i>	<i>Metropolitan cities</i>		<i>State capitals</i>		<i>Big cities (population over 100,000)</i>		<i>Small towns (population below 100,000)</i>	
	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>English</i>
1981	17.10	62.43	13.40	14.12	36.12	15.07	32.73	5.25
1986	16.79	61.96	16.27	14.92	33.09	14.33	33.15	5.64
1991	16.20	62.49	19.23	15.14	34.45	14.09	29.54	5.52
1996	15.29	62.79	19.73	15.16	35.29	13.94	29.21	5.41
2001	16.25	61.33	19.88	15.32	37.24	15.53	26.21	4.81
2006	17.38	60.07	22.06	15.53	39.04	17.76	20.95	3.92
2011	15.22	50.6	33.5	18.72	33.82	23.65	17.14	4.56

Source: Press in India, various years.

from New Delhi to the regional centres during the same period that the vernacular press has grown in strength' (3).

With the emergence of the Ayodhya movement in the late 1980s, the claim of the English press as 'national'—that could speak on behalf of the 'nation'—had already come under scrutiny.¹² It was the Hindi press that spearheaded the movement, and the English press largely responded to what was being reported by the Hindi press. Thus, the growth of Hindi newspapers was accompanied by a major transformation in Indian society and politics. On the one hand, there were significant transformations in the form of growing literacy, an information and communications revolution, and improved transportation. The rise in literacy created the subsequent increased demand for newspapers, while the information and communications revolution facilitated the diversification of newspaper production and distribution systems, and improved road transportation ensured that newspapers were delivered to readers even in remote places early in the morning. On the other hand, Indian society was witnessing grassroots mobilisation and the rise of identity politics based on caste and religion. The growing political awakening that mobilised the masses created further aspirations among the masses to orient themselves with ongoing political developments. Thus, all these developments—directly or indirectly—facilitated the growth and expansion of Hindi newspapers.

The second democratic upsurge, which began in the 1990s, saw the intensification of the downward thrust and participation by groups that 'suffered from one form of social deprivation and backwardness or another' (Yadav 2000: 121). Hasan (2000) argues that the democratic politics of the late 1990s is 'distinguished by a fundamental transformation: a dramatic upsurge in political participation in north India. That, of course, is not the whole story: the upsurge is most marked among the socially underprivileged in the caste and class hierarchy' (2000: 147). The entry of subaltern groups into the political arena was informed by the existence of the democratic space of participation provided by Indian democracy. These subaltern groups realised that social transformation could be achieved by actively participating in democratic politics. Access to state power was viewed as essential in the pursuit of social justice and equity, seemingly denied to these groups for decades. The entry of subaltern groups into the political arena also changed the vocabularies of politics, as these groups brought in a new language of politics that was often different than the existing language of politics (Michelutti 2008). What is important to note is that the political arena was not exclusively conquered by the subaltern groups, and there was a simultaneous presence of viewpoints and interests of the urban middle classes. This hybrid character of the political arena is often overlooked in the discussion on democratic transformation in India.

Hindi media and political mobilisation

Active involvement in politics by citizens is required for a successful democracy (Almond and Verba 1963; Diamond 1993). The media plays a vital role in informing citizens about various issues and thus preparing them to effectively

participate in politics. The impact of the media in spreading information is far greater than generally understood in most of the existing studies. The effect of news media on public discourse is more diffuse than merely influencing the immediate audience. People learn about an event through discussions with colleagues, friends, and neighbours. In one group, only a few people might have learned about an incident through the news media, but the news is spread by word of mouth and through discussion. This has been termed ‘overlapping sources of news’ by Norris (2000: 293). These informal news networks are important in India, where tea stalls and roadside discussions are an important aspect of daily public life.

It must be noted that political participation is induced and influenced by several factors, both institutional and non-institutional. News media might just be one of the many variables affecting political participation. But one needs to ask why political participation in terms of voter turnout of marginalised groups did not increase until the 1980s. It was only after the rise of Indian language newspapers in the early 1980s that witnessed the increasing participation of the poor and the marginalised in the national and state-level electoral politics. In the absence of any data related to the impact of news media on voter turnout, we cannot assert that vernacular media influenced voter turnout. But we have enough data to indicate the rise of the vernacular media along with the rise in political mobilisation. Alongside the rise of Hindi and regional newspapers, there was a simultaneous shift of politics from the national capital to regional centres or state capitals.

We have noted the rise in newspaper readership, along with the rise in voter turnout, in Madhya Pradesh (Table 5.1; Figure 5.2). Madhya Pradesh has also witnessed a transformation in the social profile of leadership, from one that is dominated by upper caste groups to one where non-upper caste groups have assumed significance in state politics (Jaffrelot 2009), which has partly been influenced by increasing participation by marginalised groups in electoral

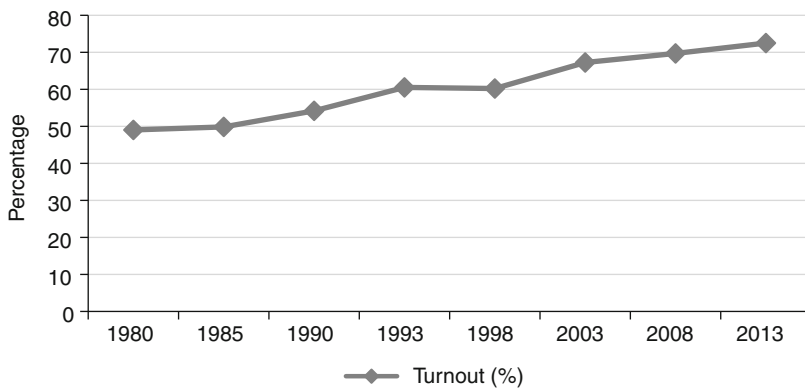


Figure 5.2 Turnout in Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, 1951–2013 (source: Election Commission of India, relevant years).

politics. But unlike Uttar Pradesh, where lower caste political parties such as the Samajwadi Party, which represents the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the Bahujan Samaj Party, which represents the dalits, have gained ground, the national political parties, such as the Congress Party and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), still dominate in Madhya Pradesh. This trend of increasing political participation by marginalised groups is in direct contrast to the trend in the US. Schlozman *et al.* (2010), in their study of political participation in the US, show that the propensity for political participation is higher among economically and educationally upward groups, which is similar to the findings in an earlier study by Verba and Nie (1972). This is in contrast to India, where economically and educationally backward groups are politically more active, particularly in electoral politics, than groups with higher socio-economic status (Hasan 2000; Yadav 2000). However, besides analysing the transformation in the nature of electoral politics, the present study aims to understand the participation of diverse social groups in public arena activities. It must be noted that several studies have blamed the process of political communication for declining civic engagement and rising cynicism toward the government in America (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Dautrich and Hartley 1999; Fallows 1996). In India, on the other hand, the process of political communication is precipitating the engagement of diverse social groups in public arena activities.

Newspapers play a central role in forming and shaping public opinion and act as an important channel for the public to raise their grievances and to make the state act in a more responsible manner. Looking at the dramatic growth of Hindi newspapers over the past two decades, one cannot ignore the power and potential of the Hindi press to influence state policies. People have become more aware of their rights, and there has been increasing pressure on local administrative authorities and government bodies to deliver. When the author visited the Municipal Corporation Office at Itarsi, the Chief Municipal Officer stated:

There has been a collaborative approach between the authority and the newspapers. Issues are brought to our notice through the newspaper and then we take action accordingly.... Two years ago we used to go through 100 files only in a day, but today we deal with around 400 files everyday.

But one could question how far the growth of Hindi newspapers has encouraged meaningful debates and discussions at the local level. Has it revealed genuine problems in the public arena or has it become an instrument of manipulation at the hands of local journalists who use it for their self-interest? Before answering these questions, this chapter utilises some empirical evidence gained through fieldwork to show how the growth of Hindi newspapers through localisation is bringing diverse groups into a network of dialogue in the public arena.

I am Shilpy Sharma, calling from California. I read the news about Tulsabai in the Internet edition of *Dainik Bhaskar*. I want to help her, please let me know the way.

Dainik Bhaskar received this call after it published a story about Tulsabai on 12 October 2006. The title of the story was *Pati ke śav ko lāvāris choḍ jāegī Tulsā* ('Tulsa will have to abandon her husband's body'), and it stated that: *antīm saṃskār ke liye Rāmcandra kī lās ko Betul le jāne ke liye patnī Tulsā ke pās paise nahīn hai* ('the wife Tulsa does not have money to take the body of her husband back to Betul for the final rites'). The story was about the experience of a woman, Tulsa, whose husband had been electrocuted while working in the fields. The only good hospital in the area was in Bhopal, which is 95 km away. With great difficulty and the meagre support of Rs.500 provided by the local police station, Tulsabai took her husband to Bhopal and admitted him in a local government hospital called Hameedia. However, her husband Ramchander died the next day on 11 October 2006. After the article appeared in *Dainik Bhaskar*, several people gathered at Hameedia hospital in Bhopal the following morning to help Tulsabai. It also resulted in an unexpected call from a woman in California, who offered to give Tulsabai money to enable her to take her husband's body back to her village for his final rites.

The next day, on 13 October, the newspaper followed this article up with a front-page story captioned 'Bhaskar impact'. It read: *Bhopāl se Kailīphornīā tak uṭhe madad ko hāth* ('from Bhopal to California, people raised their hands to help'). The story stated: *'pati kī lās ko lāvāris choḍ jāegī Tulsā' khabar chapne se jāgī mānvīe sanvednāe* ('people's consciousness arose after the publication of the story that "Tulsa will have to abandon her husband's body"'), and it highlighted the concerns of people who kept calling the *Dainik Bhaskar* office to find out how to help Tulsabai. By the time the body was handed over to Tulsabai in the afternoon, she had received a collection of Rs.30,000. Before leaving for her village, she expressed her gratitude to the local people and told them that there was not one Tulsabai, but many who go to the hospital and need financial help.

The impact of this particular news story can be judged from the way people came forward to help Tulsabai. It also resulted in vigorous debates about setting up an emergency fund to help people in need. Instead of approaching the government, people decided to set up an alternative way of dealing with such problems. The story was followed up on 14 October with the title *Tāki nahin dekhnā paṛe sarkār kā mūmh* ('So that we don't need to beg from the government'). On 14 October, the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Uma Shankar Gupta, wrote a letter, which was published in *Dainik Bhaskar*, that society should come forward to help such people in need and the government would provide some assistance. The reason behind encouraging society to take up such issues was to avoid the misuse of development organisations by different political parties that had a vested interest. It is apparent that the government is willing to provide indirect support to such organisations, but without direct interference. This incident shows that alternative arena activities are very important in dealing with development issues. After the story was published, it was not the government that came forward to help the victim; rather, the common citizens were mobilised.

In a similar incident in Itarsi, the government was forced to respond by the local media and citizens. In August and September of 2006, a *qasba*¹³ called Sohagpur, about 40km east of Itarsi,¹⁴ was affected by floods. *Dainik Bhaskar* provided regular coverage of the flood and the people affected by it. On 3 September 2006, the front page of their Itarsi edition carried a story about one of the villagers, Dhanraj, who had taken shelter on 14 August in a makeshift camp in the grounds of a government school. Dhanraj was running a fever and his condition was deteriorating. The article asked local administrators to provide Dhanraj with immediate help or he could die. When the story was published, the administration went into action, and Dhanraj was asked to go to the *Tehsil* office for help. Since Dhanraj was unwell, his wife Anita went to the *Tehsil* office on 4 September, but when she arrived, she was told that her husband had passed away. The next day, the newspaper carried the story on the front page with the headline *Antataḥ mar gayā Dhanraj* ('At last: Dhanraj died'), along with a micro-copy of the previous story that had warned the administration of this possible outcome. The newspaper article highlighted the administration's lackadaisical attitude that had resulted in Dhanraj's death; it pointed out that instead of asking Dhanraj to come to the *Tehsil* office for help, the administration should have sent someone to meet him. The following day, people blocked the main road to protest the administration's mishandling of the situation. Later, Dhanraj's family received Rs.20,000 as compensation, and his wife was given a clerical job in a local government office.

This incident highlights the viability and influence of the localisation of newspapers. The government administration came to know about Dhanraj's condition only because the newspaper published his story in its local edition. Since the news published in the local pull-out goes to the district collector as well as the local MLA and Member of Parliament (MP), and is widely read within the district and nearby towns, the administration was placed under pressure to act. The news item also provoked people to protest and to pressure the government into helping the family. Without localisation, neither would have been possible.

At the same time, the media facilitate political and civic engagement by reporting on people's experiences and linking them to the experiences of others. This results in people interpreting their own personal experiences as part of a larger societal trend (Semetko 2004). The collective action in the case studies above was the result of people feeling confronted by a similar situation, real or imaginary. Although in both cases the victims belonged to the dalit community, the issue was not pitched in parochial terms to make it a caste issue. Rather, it was presented as a general problem that might be experienced by any person. Thus, we cannot undervalue the impact resulting from the growth and localisation of newspapers. The process of localisation has helped create awareness at the local level among citizens and enabled them to unite from time to time to protest injustice. The issues highlighted in the newspaper because of localisation are related to the everyday livelihood of its vernacular publics, which might appear as trivialisation of content by the newspaper. But it has helped people to relate the issues in the newspaper to their own lives. It is not about the awareness

of high politics, but something that people feel is related to their everyday lives. This clearly reflects how the vernacular publics, who until recently remained voiceless and did not possess channels through which to highlight their grievances, are now getting their concerns mediated in the public arena. One might ask to what extent the mediation of the voices is leading to the empowerment of the vernacular publics.

How far has the growth of newspapers and localisation of news uncovered genuine problems? Is localisation merely used by local journalists for their own self-interest? To address these questions, a case study of the incident from the same *qasba* is used here. On 2 December 2006, a dalit doctor, Gopal Narayan Authay, organised a protest march along with 80 to 90 supporters against a stringer, Abhinay Soni, of *Dainik Bhaskar* in Sohagpur. On 23 November 2006, the newspaper published an article written by Soni in its local pull-out. The headline of the story was *Zindagī ko taras rahā māsūm* ('Child fighting for his life'). The story described how the doctor, Gopal Authay, mishandled a child's treatment and, as a consequence, the child's condition became critical. The story accused Gopal Authay of bribing the child's mother with Rs.12,000 when she threatened to go to the police. When Soni contacted the doctor, he denied trying to bribe the child's mother and claimed that the accusation was baseless.

When the story was published, Gopal Authay complained to the *Dainik Bhaskar* management that Soni was biased, because he belonged to the upper caste, whereas Authay was a dalit. Authay also organised a protest. He managed to get together some people from a rally of dalits going to Delhi on 2 December 2006 and organised a protest march in Sohagpur with placards reading *Dainik Bhāskar saṃvāddātā murdābād, Dalit virodhī murdābād* ('Down with *Dainik Bhaskar* Correspondents, Down with the Enemies of Dalits'). Since none of the existing local newspapers agreed to cover the protest march, he sent a photograph to the *Dainik Bhaskar* office in Bhopal, which did not publish it. One could argue that the issue was not covered because of the upper caste bias of the media, since all journalists in Sohagpur belonged to the upper caste.

The management of the Bhopal newspaper office became worried that the incident could affect the reputation and sales of the newspaper, so they asked Abhinay Soni to visit Bhopal. Interestingly, when Abhilash Khandekar, the resident editor of *Dainik Bhaskar* in Bhopal, found out that the author had met Abhinay Soni, he asked the author about him. He told the author that he was trying to cleanse *Dainik Bhaskar* of all crooks (*Sāre badmaśom ko nikālnā hai Bhāskar se*). When the author asked Abhinay Soni about the incident, he said that initially he was unhappy with the attitude of the management and felt that he went through a kind of 'court martial'. However, when he provided evidence of his innocence, they came out in his support. When he was asked whether there had been any prior differences between him and Gopal Authay, he explained:¹⁵

Since Gopal Authay had been running an NGO, he wanted publicity for it. So, on occasion, he would send me a press note about a social event organised by his NGO in the area. But I did not get them published and asked him

if his NGO organised an event why didn't he invite me so that I could provide detailed coverage. After a few days, I got an invitation from Gopal Authay and went to attend the function. To my surprise, the event was organised to discuss 'why journalists did not publish news on Dalits'.

According to Abhinay Soni, the event was organised to humiliate and pressure him into publishing press notes about social events, without allowing him to find out whether or not such events took place.

One interesting point in this incident is the immediate action taken by the newspaper management, which reflects the growing struggle in Hindi newspapers to maintain their credibility among readers. This becomes important in the Indian context, as scholars have viewed the rise of Hindi newspapers with scepticism (for example, Ninan 2007; Rajagopal 2001). This incident brings to light the contested domain of influence in the public arena between the news media and various parties with vested interests. Such contestations have not yet been resolved, and no amount of democratisation at the local level will be complete without giving marginalised groups access to institutions of democracy, including the media. By creating a new constituency of readers, localisation has provided voices to those who, until recently, were unable to effectively raise their concerns in the public arena and remained at the margins of mainstream discourse. It has also helped marginalised groups to creatively mediate with the institutions of democracy that have been created at the local level. In this context, Tanabe (2007) argues: 'what may be happening in contemporary India is the creation of a "vernacular democracy" based on people's creative mediation of embodied cultural resources and ideas and institutions of democracy' (2007: 589).

The growth of Hindi newspapers has certainly helped the vernacular publics to creatively mediate, negotiate, and engage in dialogue with each other, with the state and the outside world in the vernacular. It has also helped create a space of community feelings or 'moral society' (Tanabe 2007), where there is no shared community moral or norm, but collective engagement with matters of common interest, where the terms of community relationships are critically discussed and negotiated and which inform the everyday lives of vernacular publics. In this arena, the vernacular media have come to occupy an important place by bringing the collective experiences of vernacular publics into the external arena and connecting the local arena with the regional, national, and international arena. These vernacular voices, which are largely absent in the national mainstream news media, are beginning to challenge the dominant discourse of participation hegemonised by the English-speaking metropolitan middle class.

Conclusion

The survival of electoral democracy in India is well established. Yet, elections, which are held every five years, are only one aspect of democracy. The day-to-day monitoring of the political process by the media is crucial in ensuring checks and balances in the political system and assist in deepening the process of

democratisation. The media helps in formulating and shaping public opinion and acting as an important channel for the public to raise their grievances and hold the state more responsible. This chapter has shown that growing newspaper circulation in north India has been accompanied by increasing mobilisation of marginalised groups since the 1980s. At the same time, we have noted how Hindi newspapers have increased their concentration in state capitals since the mid-1980s—a period that witnessed the regionalisation of Indian politics. In the absence of sufficient data, one cannot assert that political participation in terms of voter turnout has been precipitated mainly by the media. However, this chapter has shown how the media can act as a mobiliser of social groups and connect these groups in networks of dialogues and negotiations. Grassroots mobilisation has certainly contributed to the subjectification of the diversity of people who have begun to assert their rightful place in democratic politics, which has contributed to democratic deepening. This chapter has, thus, attempted to expand the definition of democratic deepening beyond the participation of marginalised groups in electoral politics and has shown how the news media can facilitate micro-level mobilisation and provide a platform for vernacular publics to raise their voice in the public arena and engage in dialogue with each other and the outside world.

Notes

- 1 The sub-edition is also known as the *dak* edition or satellite edition. These terms have been used interchangeably throughout this chapter.
- 2 For a detailed discussion on localisation, see Neyazi (2010, 2011) and Ninan (2007).
- 3 The Second Press Commission Report (1982), p. 21.
- 4 Government of India, *Report of the First Press Commission* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1954), p. 15.
- 5 Also see Government of India, *Report of the Second Press Commission* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1982), p. 11.
- 6 Rajni Kothari has termed the one-party domination of Indian politics from 1951 to 1967 led by the Congress as the ‘Congress system’. Opposition parties, who were sharply divided among themselves, were unable to create a viable alternative to the ruling party and acted instead as pressure groups outside it. Further, the Congress was quick to co-opt the programmes of the opposition and absorb their leadership into its fold, which limited the growth of opposition parties. For a detailed discussion on the Congress system, see Kothari (1964, 1974).
- 7 In the case of Tamil Nadu, the media has been an integral part of politics and facilitated the rise of plebeians. Justice Party first launched a newspaper called *Justice* in 1916, before formally starting the political party. Similarly, *Dina Thanthi*, a leading Tamil daily, had close links with Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and, later, with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK). The link between cinema and politics is also evident in the case of Tamil Nadu (Dickey 1993; Hardgrave 1973; Pandian 1992).
- 8 This figure is reflected in Table 5.1.
- 9 It must be noted that the nature of demand politics changed in the 1980s and 1990s with the greater participation of marginalised groups in the political arena.
- 10 For a detailed analysis of the repression of the press during the Emergency, see *Shah Commission of Inquiry, Interim report I* (11 March 1978), pp. 33–47; *Interim report II* (26 April 1978), pp. 1–9.

- 11 For a detailed discussion of the muzzling of the press during the Emergency, see *Shah Commission of Inquiry* (1978) and Dhar (2000).
- 12 The Ram Janmabhumi-Babri mosque controversy is arguably the most important political event of Independent India. According to the Hindu holy book, the *Ramayana*, Lord Ram was born in Ayodhya. Advocates of the Ayodhya movement claim that the first Mogul emperor Babar built Babri mosque on the same site in 1528 by destroying the temple. Some radical Hindu groups have demanded that the temple be rebuilt at the original site. The Ram Janmabhumi movement to rebuild the temple accelerated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which ultimately led to the destruction of the Babri mosque on 6 December 1992. Throughout this controversy, the Hindi press played a leading role by misreporting events during the movement, which increased the circulation of Hindi newspapers. For a detailed study of the leading role of Hindi newspapers in the controversy, see Nandy *et al.* (1995), Engineer (1991), and Rajagopal (2001).
- 13 Qasba is between a small town and a village.
- 14 Sohagpur is 125 km from Bhopal. It has a population of 22,339, and the literacy rate is nearly 83 per cent (see Seshagiri 2008).
- 15 Interviewed in Sohagpur, 23 December 2006.

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6 The Jan Lokpal Andolan and alternate politics

Symbiotic interactions, vernacular publics, and news media in the Jan Lokpal Andolan

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An alliance of civil society groups¹ and India Against Corruption (IAC) staged the Jan Lokpal Andolan (JLA) in 2011 to force the government to create a *lokpāl* (ombudsperson)—what one might call an anti-corruption czar—to address structural corruption at all levels in the government. This article hopes to shed light on the complexity of the articulation of populism in *jan andolans* (people's movements) and their symbiotic interaction with the news media.

I have claimed in the past that the social logics of *jan andolans* produce populist social mobilisation that is multilayered and complex and bring together reactionary and progressive forces in their hegemonic articulations that are pivoted on key empty signifiers—for example, anti-corruption and *lokpāl* in the JLA (Kumar 2011a; Laclau 2005; Mouffe and Laclau 2001). That said, we cannot overlook the possibility that *jan andolans* strengthen alternative politics, the non-party political process, and bring millions of people to the centre of policy deliberation and governance, which are important for the 'deepening of democracy' (Fung and Wright 2001).

In 2011, the JLA claimed the public space, albeit temporarily, and was able to cut across social differences, contradictory claims, and issues to articulate equivalence on the platform of anti-corruption and the need for a *lokpāl* (Ashutosh 2012; Kumar 2011b; Yadav 2012). Later, the public space claimed by the JLA started collapsing as a result of internal ideological contradictions in the leadership, overreach, erosion of the social base, and the decision by some leaders to plunge into electoral politics.² That being said, the massive mobilisation supported by a media spectacle did succeed in highlighting the urgency of doing something about the growing problem of corruption in the political and bureaucratic class. The pressure on the government built by the 13-day hunger strike—led by Anna Hazare at Ramlila Maidan—forced the Indian Parliament to take up the *lokpāl* legislation. The Indian Parliament passed the government's version of the Lokpal and Lokayukta's Bill in December 2013 after wrangling between political parties in the committees for months. I argue that despite its drawbacks, the JLA was another attempt in a series of social protests³ staged by vernacular publics to shift the distribution of power in the 'political field' in India, which is dominated by entrenched political parties, the bureaucracy, and corporate leadership (Ray 1998).

Keeping the legal intricacies of the bill and the efficacy of any anti-corruption czar aside, the purpose here is to make sense of the JLA and the role of media in its representation and mobilisation. This article attempts to understand the symbiotic interactions between the culture of protest of vernacular publics, the culture of institutional electoral politics, and the culture of news in the JLA. By ‘vernacular publics’ I mean the social base that was distanced from institutions of power—cutting across traditional fault lines of caste, class, and religion—and turned out in support of the fast led by Anna Hazare at Ramlila Maidan and many other parts of the country in August 2011.

The findings here are based on fieldwork that I did as the Jan Lokpal Andolan was unfolding. I conducted unstructured interviews with people who joined the protests, grassroots activists of Indian Against Corruption, politicians, and journalists during the 13-day fast in Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi in August 2011. Additionally, the findings come from a close reading of the news coverage of the protests in the English and Hindi news media and interviews with journalists and protesters. I focus primarily on news channels, because not only has TV acquired a heightened presence in the Indian public sphere, but also because of its complex relationship with politics and culture (Mehta 2012; Punathambekar and Kumar 2012). Although there was a lot of activity in the digital social media, particularly on web pages, Facebook, and Twitter, especially ones created by India Against Corruption, much of the activity was the epitome of slacktivism⁴ and restricted to a very small minority within India that has access to the internet.

At a time when the influence of TV on politics was growing in America, Lang and Lang (1968: 34) observed: ‘Watching over TV may not be as good as being there; it may in fact be better.’ They argued that it constructs an illusion for viewers, on a daily basis, that they are participating in political affairs at the highest levels. In a perceptive commentary on Hazare’s campaign, Rajagopal (2011a) asked: ‘Am I still Anna when nobody is watching?’ In posing the question, he seemed to be asking whether people would have participated in such large numbers if the media operating 24/7 had not given wall-to-wall coverage to the JLA. Perhaps not—yet we cannot ignore that the media is essential for the production of large-scale social integration in populist struggles (Calhoun 1988). Later, we will see that the leadership of the JLA was aware of the need to be visible in the media.

In the rest of this chapter, first some of the commentary on the Jan Lokpal Andolan will be discussed and then placed in the context of alternate politics. Following that, the chapter will discuss how the category of self-constituting ‘publics’ that are fostered through changing patterns in media consumption offers an alternative approach to class analysis; and there will be a discussion of the symbiotic interaction between the *jan andolan* and the news media. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn on the Jan Lokpal Andolan of 2011.

Jan Lokpal and the confounding political analysis

The JLA has confounded any analysis of the political and orchestrated spectacle in the news media, especially on television. Broadly speaking, the scholarly commentary has fanned out from two perspectives. Some commentators saw the JLA, in their preliminary assessment, as strengthening democracy and as part of the great tradition of a culture of protest in India going back to the freedom struggle (Nandy 2012; Yadav 2012). Others made a more cautious and sceptical assessment. They viewed it as the unfolding of a ‘grammar of anarchy’⁵ that undermines the grammar of electoral politics (Lal 2011; Mehta 2011; Vajpeyi 2011). Seemingly responding to the criticism of the JLA in scholarly commentaries, Yogendra Yadav (2012) cautioned:

When history does not take the turn that one expected, there is a temptation to deny, to suspect foul play or hold a grudge against history.... But we do know that this movement enabled a large number of Indians, mostly young Indians, to make a transition from being mere subjects to being citizens.

(2012: iv–vii)

The critics drew our attention to a reactionary potential lurking in the repertoire of protest, idiom, and the symbols of the JLA (Mishra 2012; Vajpeyi 2011). They raised an important concern, especially about overreach by the JLA’s leadership, and the urban character of the *andolan*. That said, they also overlooked the differential social base and the complexity of the populist political practice of the *andolan*—for example, ‘anti-corruption is generic and vague issue that did not appeal to any one class’ (Yadav 2012: xv). What further confounds any analysis is the fact that the undisputed leader of the *andolan* in 2011, Anna Hazare, is not a typical representative of the middle class or upper caste.⁶ He was a truck driver in the Indian Army who spent much of his life in his village, where he and others have worked for years as social activists in the field of rural development. Although many members of Team Anna⁷ do fall within the fold of what can be seen as the traditional middle classes, the social roots of the prominent activists of the JLA lie in activism in rural development and the Right to Information (RTI) movement. Yadav (2012) has argued that there was a ‘refusal to acknowledge the widespread popularity of the movement, despite overwhelming evidence of big self-mobilized crowds in big cities, smaller mobilizations in small towns and fair degree of interest and some action in villages’ (2012: xv). Yadav (2012) has claimed that no one social group dominated the massive mobilisation in August 2011 and suggests that the *andolan* was neither entirely composed of upper caste nor middle class. Although it cannot be overlooked that the JLA was largely an urban phenomenon, I will argue that the mobilisation in 2011 was composed of self-constituting publics fostered by changing patterns of media consumption and civil society alliances.

Its primary manifestation in the urban space and the role of the news media are significant factors that give us a conceptual handle to understand mobilisation and its significance. We know that the urban social space has

special significance for the democratisation movement the world over (Nichols 2008). The urban location of a protest movement is important, both from the perspective of efficacy and the wider acceptance of key demands of a protest movement (Harvey 2012). Harvey has argued that urban spatial geographies cut across social differences and enable equivalence in the central demand articulated by a social movement. The reality is that once a social protest has earned the support of multiple publics in a mega city including the middle classes, who are sceptical of radical changes, half the battle of public opinion is won. When a movement claims public space in cities, it symbolically claims public space in the imaginations of the citizens of the nation. In the age of globalisation, urban geographies, especially capital cities, are important for a protest movement to be seen and heard—for example, Tahrir Square protests in Cairo (Youssef and Kumar 2012).

Some commentators have rightly described the JLA as a media event. In a critique of media and visibility in the public space, Rajagopal (2011b) has argued that to make participation easier, more public, and visible, Hazare's campaign was an orchestrated spectacle, which is why we must endorse it with qualifications. Moreover, it cannot be ignored that it was the massive mobilisation cutting across class, caste, and religion that forced the news media to take notice (Ashutosh 2012). In this chapter, it is argued that the media hype, which seemingly is part of the explanation for mobilisation, must be understood from an interaction perspective as a competitive symbiosis between the JLA and the news media. Explaining 'competitive symbiosis', Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) argued that social protest actors are aware that they need the news media to validate, mobilise, and advance their goals, which is why activists staging social protests make special efforts to attract the attention of the media to get the maximum visibility for their issues in the news. However, the culture of the news media leads to the presentation of the account as conflict. And by sensationalising events and selecting sources and issues, journalists influence the character of the social protest. In this interactive process, social protesters and the news media compete in the making of meaning and influence each other's internal workings (Kumar 2011a). Now, before the nature of the public and the symbiotic interaction in the JLA is addressed, let us briefly discuss the opening up of public space, which arguably has been crucial to the emergence of alternate politics in India, since the 1980s.

Expanding public space and alternate politics

Social protest, petitioning by civil society pressure groups, public hearings, and litigation are forms of alternate politics that have influenced change in democracies without resorting to the electoral process (Harriss 2007; Harriss *et al.* 2005). Using means other than an electoral process is alternative politics, in which civil society groups attempt to influence political outcomes, such as government action and legislation. Civil society's repertoire of political action bypasses the power relations of the prevailing political structure with the goal of

disrupting the distribution of power in the political field; in the process, they rely on the news media to amplify and carry their voices into the corridors of power.

In India, a new consciousness is being fostered by growth in literacy, reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) and later Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the social activism of NGOs, and the rise of vernacular news media—first print and now vernacular news television. Television overcomes the limitations of illiteracy, but at the same time includes dangers that are the outcome of sensationalism and spectacle. The space for alternate politics, closely aligned with grassroots politics, opened up in the early 1980s. Rajni Kothari (1982, 1984a, 1984b) saw this as a transition from transactional party politics of ‘who gets what’ to grassroots democracy that offered alternatives to a centralised, bureaucratic, postcolonial state. He suggested that grassroots democratic mobilisation was an outcome of a new political consciousness that had transformed millions of people in small towns and villages of India from subjects to citizens.

Partha Chatterjee (2004) described the change as ‘new politics’. One of the characteristics of new politics is that, unlike the old politics in which political parties dominated, in new politics civil society groups of the middle class are relatively more influential. Although this form of politics is not entirely new and has always existed in all democracies alongside old politics, in recent years it has become more empowered and visible. Examples of new politics are farmer and labour movements in the 1970s and environmental movements, such as Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan in the 1980s and 1990s. It is suggested that what is ‘new’ is the growing significance of the symbiotic interaction with the news media in the struggle of a protest movement to temporarily claim the public space (Kumar 2011b; Youssef and Kumar 2012). Sharansky (2005) has called this phenomenon a ‘town square test’ for mass movements led by civil society groups.

This chapter claims that the coverage in the news media amplifies popular democratic consciousness and sentiments, giving a perception of meaningful participation to the people in democratic governance. Calhoun (1988, 1998) pointed out in the context of interaction between popular politics and media that appeals to people via the mass media deflect the complexity of social differences and produces large-scale social integration. Moreover, the urban space, such as a capital city, is an important site, because the eye of the nation is focused on it, and this is where power is centralised. When a popular protest manifests itself in an urban space—especially the capital city—it attracts attention not only from the news media, but also from the rest of the country. Before discussing the central concept of symbiotic interaction, let us briefly situate the idea of vernacular publics and self-constituting publics in the context of linguistic splits in the Indian public sphere.

Self-constituting publics

The classical notion of ‘class’ confounds analysis when we look at populist mobilisation such as the JLA. We need a metaphor that accounts for the social

category that incorporates the complexity of the social base in *jan andolans*. The role of the middle class in urban democratisation movements is important to note, because they do not represent the material interests of the vast numbers of the poor (Harriss 2007; Harriss *et al.* 2005). They are seen as hegemonically sustaining social legitimacy, the status quo of the social structure (Deshpande 2003). Gupta (2000: 10) has argued that in India ‘the middle class is an ardent advocate of privilege’. No doubt, this is true, but hegemony is unavoidable in *jan andolans* that are not composed of a homogenous social group, but include groups representing different interests and backgrounds, although their leadership may belong to the traditional middle class (for example, the Singur–Nandigram protests in 2010, the farmers’ movement of the 1990s led by the Bharatiya Kisan Union, and the earlier farmers’ movement led by the Shetkari Sanghatana in the 1980s).⁸ The paradox is that without ‘hegemonic articulation’, the construction of a *jan*, a people, is not possible (Kumar 2011a; Laclau 2005).⁹

Some scholars have pointed out that there is ‘an empirical imprecision’ in any discussion of class analysis (Baviskar and Ray 2011: 5). There is a growing recognition that the social category of class cannot be used without addressing the complexity of subject positions in the Indian social fabric that constitutes multiple social groups (Agarwal and Herring 2008; Baviskar and Ray 2011; Chibber 2008). Davis (2010) argues that the middle class is a powerful and appealing idea; however, unlike in the West, in the Global South it incorporates complex subject positions, and instead of a ‘singular middle-classness’, there is a plural middle-classness that incorporates multiple, subjectively held identities. Recently, attempts have also been made to address the empirical imprecision in class by including consumption with income and social status (Sridharan 2011). Later, we will see how patterns of media consumption foster self-constituting publics across a wide range of income and education. But before that, let us understand the social construction and relevance of self-constituting publics.

From a communication perspective, ‘public’ is a more useful social category, which lumps together classes and is closely tied to publicity, the public sphere (civil society and the news media), and patterns of consumption (Habermas 1987). In this context, an important category in India is that of vernacular publics. All forms of communication, such as face-to-face in social settings (e.g. chai stalls, addas, and neighbourhood groups) and mass communication through newspapers, electronic media, the internet, and, increasingly, social media foster self-constituting publics. Additionally, in a way, the publics are fostered by a shared consumption of goods, services, and information. The metaphor of publics allows us to construct a social category that hegemonically accounts for complex subject positions of different social groups that share equivalence in the key signifiers or markers (i.e. anti-corruption and *lokpal*) in a populist struggle. Again, hegemony is unavoidable, but it also helps us understand the dangers of a reactionary potential in a populist mobilisation (see Kumar 2011a). One of the main social groups in the JLA was that of self-constituting vernacular publics that civil society neighbourhood groups and the vernacular mass media, especially television, fostered.

Vernacular publics

Here, the ‘vernacular’ is conceptualised as opposed to the culture of the ruling of elites, closer to folkways, but not the same. The vernacular publics are in a constant struggle to resist elite domination; however, these publics mostly fail, because of the inability of ‘incapacitated civil society’ to challenge the hubris of the high modernism of the institutional political and bureaucratic apparatuses that support the hegemony of the state (Scott 1998: 5). Communication is central to understanding the vernacular publics’ distancing from the state and the challenge they pose to the elites’ hold on power in their attempt to bring about social change (Lantis 1960). The discourse of vernacular culture relies on cognitive processing that views and navigates the world differently from those who control power. Hauser (1999) has argued that vernacular rhetoric and its influence on the formation of public opinion challenges the assumptions and rationality of those holding power or authority. Drawing from Habermas, he has reported that the norms of reasoning and modes of argumentation of ordinary people differ from the norms of those holding power.

In India, the culture of vernacular social space has a distinct subcategory of vernacular languages and dialects (see Mir 2010). This also suggests that a public space (one could even say public sphere) is not monolithic, but is composed of overlapping and intersecting spaces—i.e. splits—comprising multiple self-constituting publics. In the context of the splits in the Indian public sphere, it is claimed here that the patterns of media consumption emerge as sites where many of these self-constituting publics are fostered.

Self-constituting publics and split

The news media in multiple languages fosters different self-constituting vernacular publics. From this perspective, if we look at India, we see multiple publics that are socially constructed and fostered by the mass media, largely because the mass media in India comes in multiple vernacular Indian languages and English. The linguistic diversity of the Indian public sphere creates a complex social space of sub-national deliberation among a variety of publics. The news media for each linguistic subculture has its own spheres in the vast Indian public sphere held together by the common Indian marketplace and the state (Jeffrey 2000; Neyazi 2011; Ninan 2007; Stahlberg 2002). The scholarly studies on this are mostly focused on print news media, but we are now seeing something similar in the case of vernacular news television channels (cable and satellite), social media, and other forms of horizontal mass communication. Rajagopal (2002), in his study of the Hindutva movement, found that the differences in ‘inner codes of meaning’ associated with the vernacular culture (for example, Hindi) led to fundamental differences in the media discourses of the Hindi and English language press, which virtually produced a ‘split’ in the Indian public sphere. In addition, because of the correlation between the English language and its proximity to the ruling institutions of power, the linguistic split

adds a new dimension to the contestation in the public space. For example, in my interviews with journalists of the Hindi press and other regional languages, I was told that journalists working for the English language news media are closer to power, especially in New Delhi, and that is why many of them appeared to have taken a critical view of the Jan Lokpal.¹⁰

The vernacular media-fostered publics blur the social boundaries between the middle classes and those below them, as they include middle classes and working classes in urban areas and rural communities. To understand the fostering of self-constituting vernacular publics, we need to take a closer look at the emerging patterns of media consumption and how vernacular television has come to dominate the Indian public sphere.

Patterns of media consumption

The data from market research shows that TV has emerged as the main source of information for most people in India. The consumption of TV content has spread across all 12 subcategories of the socio-economic classification system (SEC) used by market researchers.¹¹

The data for 2012 from Media Research User Council (MRUC) shows that internet usage is still quite low and is largely restricted to the top three of the 12 subcategories in the SEC. In contrast, the consumption of newspaper content is more widespread across the 12 subcategories of the SEC, although it drops quite significantly as we move from the SEC categories A and B to groups C and D. The consumption of television content has become more widespread across all subcategories of SEC and has been growing consistently. This also suggests that self-constituting publics fostered by television consumption could include consumers from all the subcategories of the SEC.

If we compare media consumption across English and Indian languages, the growing power of vernacular publics and vernacular news media becomes evident. According to the Indian Readership Survey (2011), of the top 10 publications, only one is in English, which is ranked sixth in readership. Among 10 daily newspapers, once again there is only one English newspaper, which is again ranked sixth in readership. Likewise, Television Audience Measurement (TAM) Media Research found that there was not a single English news channel in the top 20 news channels in India out of 122 channels; moreover, eight of the top 10 news channels are in Hindi.¹² This gives an indication of the importance of Hindi news channels in north India. If we combine the consumption of vernacular news channels with the readership of vernacular publications, it becomes quite clear that the vernacular media is a much larger phenomenon than English media. Overall, news constitutes only about 8 per cent of overall viewership, although it is important to note that political news forms a larger share of the total content of English channels (19 per cent) compared with the Hindi channels (13 per cent).¹³ Moreover, according TAM data from August 2011—i.e. during the 13-day hunger strike staged by the Jan Lokpal Andolan—news channel viewership went up; the average time spent viewing news channels went up from

15 minutes to 23 minutes per day. The Jan Lokpal Andolan was the top story in the top 10 TV news channels, covering 83.4 per cent of all news audiences during the period; it beat down the India–England cricket series to second spot. Hindi news channels doubled their share of the overall audience from 5.9 per cent to 12.33 per cent during the protests in August, suggesting the importance of the events for vernacular publics.¹⁴

The pattern of media consumption reinforces Rajagopal's (2002) argument about the 'split' in the Indian public sphere. It creates an interesting social dynamic where the multiple fragments of the Indian public sphere, which are split into two major divisions—English and vernacular—have come to coexist and thrive in a common marketplace and a neoliberal political economy, especially since the Indian Government launched economic liberalisation in 1991. The effects of the split show up in the differences in the media discourse on major issues of the day. The differences are especially striking when it comes to economic liberalisation. The integration of the Indian economy with the global economy has produced a conflict between the English publics and the vernacular publics. Some see this conflict as a clash between India and Bharat. The vernacular publics, in a way, are resisting the hegemonic discourse of neo-liberal economic policies that promote growth at all costs. The high rates of economic growth have benefitted the English publics that are plugged into global capitalism and have increased the economic gap between them and the vernacular publics. I claim that the relationship between the vernacular news media and the publics fostered by it draws on the conflict between India and Bharat, which in a way influences social mobilisation at the grassroots.

Now to turn the focus to the main discussion of this chapter—the symbiotic interaction among cultures of protest of the JLA, institutional politics, and the news media in the context of the split between the vernacular (Hindi) and English media.

Symbiotic interactions

After the protest rally at India Gate and the first phase of the hunger strike at Jantar Mantar¹⁵ in March to April 2011, Team Anna announced its plan to stage a hunger strike in New Delhi to force parliament to pass the bill in the monsoon session, which is usually held during the months of July to August. On 16 August 2011, when Anna Hazare arrived in Delhi, he went straight to the Gandhi Samadhi at Raj Ghat. The news channels, which had been informed in advance, followed him to Raj Ghat and beamed images all over the country of Anna sitting in silent prayer at Raj Ghat. In a well-orchestrated move, Team Anna established the Gandhi frame in the media, which played out with some success in the three weeks that followed.

To stage the protest/fast, Team Anna had applied to the government (Delhi Police) for permission and was granted three days to stage their protest in a public park far from the centre of the city and parliament. Team Anna wanted permission for more days, as well as a closer location. The team refused to

accept the conditions and said they would go ahead with their plans. The day Hazare planned to start his hunger strike, the Delhi Police placed him under house arrest. Later that day, the police brought Hazare before a court, which subsequently sent him to Tihar Jail. Hazare decided to continue his fast in jail and would not budge from his demand. This action by the government reinvigorated the news and produced a level of high drama that would make any protest event newsworthy and thus transform it into a media event. It became an opportunity that the JLA used to the hilt to build on the mobilisation over the next 24 hours.

The police and government created the conditions in which the cultures of protest and the news media symbiotically reinforced each other. The arrest pushed Hazare into the national headlines. Team Anna used the time to mobilise the volunteers who kept pouring in through the gates of Tihar Jail, the largest prison of the country located in Delhi. For the news media, it was a spectacle that they had not created, but was something they could not overlook, especially in light of the competition to attract eyes to screens. As the drama on the ground interacted with the culture of television news, it was amplified and sensationalised. The news was being updated every minute, and the news channels eagerly participated by transmitting and amplifying the outrage for their viewers across the country, constructing an illusion of participation. The members of Team Anna were hopping from one TV studio to another to participate in panel discussions and use it as an opportunity to emphasise the urgency of the moment and ratchet up the pressure on the government and parliament.

Throughout the day of the arrest, several government officials and prominent personalities kept visiting and revisiting the jail, trying to convince Hazare to accept the conditions. Late in the evening, the government realised that it had no option but to release Hazare. The two sides agreed on a hunger strike for 15 days in Ramlila Maidan. Hazare told the authorities that as night had fallen, he would leave the jail the next day, but in the meantime he would continue his fast in jail. This created conditions for news channels to debate the issue until the next day and served as a recruiting tool for the JLA. The members of Team Anna and their surrogates on TV panels described the game plan; meanwhile, volunteers used the time to prepare the site, Ramlila Maidan, with an eye on meeting the needs of the news media.¹⁶ They knew they had a much larger public to reach out to across the country. The protest site was crawling with journalists; the television crews were in full force, with sophisticated technology at their disposal to stream the drama unfolding on the stage to audiences across the country. TV cameras were installed on cranes to give viewers an experience similar to that of a mega sports event. The next day, Team Anna took out a victory rally, of sorts, with Hazare in an open vehicle leading a procession from the jail across the capital to Ramlila Maidan. Along the route—announced via text messages, social media, and TV—people joined the procession from other parts of the city. Later, the image of thousands of people marching down the Ranjit Singh Flyover became the iconic image of the mass mobilisation.

The next 13 days became a test of nerves for the government and Team Anna. The JLA and the news media reinforced each other, with the crowds growing

each day. At the site, many protesters had come prepared to garner the attention of the cameras. Some were dressed in costumes representing leaders from the freedom movement, especially Gandhi. Some were dressed as Hanuman (the Hindu monkey god). To exploit the Gandhian frame, Team Anna had a large image of Mahatma Gandhi as a backdrop for the stage. They seemed to have learned from the criticism of the *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) image that they had used in the march at India Gate, a few months earlier in April of 2011.¹⁷ The Gandhian symbolism included Gandhi *topis* (caps) with the inscription ‘*Main Anna Hoon*’ (I am Anna). The *topis* were distributed free at the site, although there were also hawkers selling the *topis* in the crowd. Many young protesters in the *andolan* could be seen wearing these *topis*. This is how a young student from Seelampur, an underprivileged locality of Delhi, explained the significance of the symbolism: ‘It made me understand what the volunteers in Gandhi’s *satyagraha* must have felt when they wore Gandhi *topi* (cap). Like in the freedom we are now part of second freedom movement.’¹⁸ The framing strategy of Team Anna worked in the media, too. The vernacular (Hindi) channels and the newspapers splashed *aaj ka Gandhi* (today’s Gandhi) and *doosri swatantra ki ladaaee* (second freedom struggle) onto the TV screens. However, any publicity and representation of the public via mass media does not go uncontested, mostly because of the differences in the culture of the news and the culture of protest. And, as suggested earlier, the contestations in the Indian media were split along the linguistic divide.

English and Hindi channels

Some in the media, especially on English channels, challenged the Gandhian frame that Team Anna had sponsored. They played up events from Hazare’s past to suggest that he was no Gandhi and that his non-violence was merely a mask. For example, they pointed out how during his anti-alcohol movement, in his village of Ralegaon Siddhi, Hazare would routinely beat ‘drunkards’ with his military belt. It appeared that Team Anna was aware of the differences between the English and Hindi media, because volunteers around the stage were providing access to the leadership and Hazare for the Hindi and other vernacular journalists.¹⁹ The organisers were clearly trying to reach out to vernacular publics and saw vernacular journalists as their allies in this task. There was a lot more coordination with the Hindi journalists than with journalists from the English media. The members of Team Anna felt that journalists from the English channels were close to the political parties and saw them as part of the ruling elite of India.²⁰

Team Anna felt that the English media were distorting their message and that they did not have the same degree of control over the message. Some volunteers felt that the English media were engaging in *ad hominem* attacks on Hazare and other members of Team Anna.²¹ This view was confirmed by a senior journalist from the sister Hindi channel of a major English news channel. There was a perception among Hindi journalists that their fellow English language journalists

were pushing the government's line that Team Anna was undemocratic, arrogant, and adamant and that Hazare and his team had no respect for the Indian Parliament and constitutional democracy. The feeling among volunteers was that the English channels were reflecting the view of the political class, including the Congress, BJP, and left parties, that the JLA was undermining electoral democracy. Additionally, the English media journalists were not only critical of activist journalism, but also alluded to a fascist tendency in the JLA.²²

The English media were sympathetic to the fight against corruption, but were uncomfortable and sceptical of the utility and relevance of fasts in an electoral democracy. They often asked why Team Anna did not contest elections if they thought people supported them. At another level the differences in the media were largely about political idiom and symbolism.

Political idiom

The journalists and commentators in the English media were especially uncomfortable with the political idiom and rhetorical strategies of the JLA, including the rustic mannerisms at press conferences that were conducted in Hindi. For example, Team Anna described the political class and bureaucrats using unsavoury epithets: *ye sab chor hai* (They are all thieves), *sab dalaal hain*, *desh bech denge* (They are middlemen, pimps, and they will sell the country), *brahshta neta aur brahshta afsar desh ko ghun ki tarah khaa rahe hain* (Corrupt politicians and corrupt bureaucrats, like mites, are eating away at the country), and *janata asli malik hai aur neta naukar* (People are the real masters and politicians are their servants). From my interviews with journalists, it was clear that for the media in general, but more so for the English media, the epithets were in bad taste and uncouth. Yet another major point of difference was that English media saw Team Anna as adamant and pushy with a holier-than-thou attitude. However, the Hindi media did not play up the fact that Hazare and others were adamant and not open to negotiating a compromise. Instead, the Hindi journalists highlighted the reluctance of the political class and bureaucracy to create a *lokpai*.

For the Hindi news channels and their vernacular base, the inner codes of meaning appeared to resonate. For example, some Hindi TV journalists appeared to be quite comfortable with the claim about the legitimacy of civil society and the *andolan*, often stressing that *jan sabha* (people's council) is bigger than the *Lok Sabha* (parliament), almost suggesting that an unelected civil association is more legitimate than an elected parliament. There was some scepticism on Hindi channels, but this largely came from panelists. To some extent, one English news channel, Times Now, led by its editor, appeared to be an outlier and did not seem to see the JLA from the same perspective as the other channels.

One episode during the 13 days attracted severe criticism from the English media: this was a satirical caricature of politicians that was presented on stage by Kiran Bedi (a key member of Team Anna) and Om Puri (an actor who had joined the *andolan*). In an impromptu theatrical performance, Bedi and Puri questioned the hypocrisy of the political class. The Hindi media seemed able to

appreciate the rustic satire. For them, the rustic caricature was part of the political idiom that is very common in rural areas in India, especially during elections, when politicians are often the subjects of crude and vulgar jokes. While journalists in the studios of English news channels cringed, the crowds, mostly comprising vernacular publics, were able to appreciate the lighter moments, although the more urbane among the protesters at Ramlila Maidan were uncomfortable with the Bedi–Puri act.²³

Symbolism

The JLA, in addition to exploiting an equivalent element in the key signifier of ‘anti-corruption’, deployed nationalist symbols such as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) and *vande matram* (hail mother)—slogans that are preferred by Hindu nationalists. The national flags and cheers of *Bharat Mata ki Jai* (Hail, Mother India) were everywhere. As these symbols had been exploited in the past by right-wing Hindu nationalists, this made many journalists—again, more so in the English media—uncomfortable. They interpreted it as evidence of reactionary elements lurking in the shadows of the JLA. This tied in neatly with a charge made by dalit leaders that this movement was for upper caste Hindus and not in their interests.²⁴

This supposition about the upper caste nature of the movement was supported by the fact that there appeared to be more supportive statements for the JLA coming from Hindutva organisations, such as the Rashtriya Swaymsevak Sangh (RSS). Additionally, the alliance of the JLA with Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar—two new age Hindu gurus—also supported the charge. The fear of the Hindutva element in Team Anna was common among journalists, including some Hindi journalists, although the Hindi journalists in my interviews seemed less concerned about it. The surrogates of the government who made the charges regarding the right-wing sympathies of the *andolan* aired their views more prominently in the English media, although some commentators saw the Hindutva charge as a red herring. To allay this fear, Team Anna made a special effort to present Muslim and other minority faces on the stage. For example, Shazia Ilmi, a journalist and social activist, and Akhil Gogoi, a young RTI activist from the north-east, were made spokespersons for the *andolan*. When Hazare broke his fast on the 13th day after a resolution by parliament on the *lokpai*, a little Muslim girl was given the opportunity to hand him a glass of juice in front of the TV cameras. Once again Team Anna that it was conscious of the power of symbols and television images.

Conclusion

Based on my close reading of the TV coverage on the JLA, interviews, and participant observation at Ramlila Maidan, I found that both the news media and the *andolan* fed into each other, but also competed with each other to control the political message. The actors in the *andolan* tried to set the agenda and the message, but relied on the news media to amplify and circulate the message,

taking it to the corridors of power. Team Anna kept journalists informed of every move so that the cameras were ready to capture each moment. In this, the news media, especially news channels, did not disappoint Team Anna. They reported every move, but also filtered it through their own values rooted in the cultures of vernacular and English media. It seems that the internet, especially mobilisation by Indian Against Corruption via social media, did help get the message to Indians around the world and mitigate the effects of the English media among English publics, but because of the low penetration among vernacular publics, digital social media had limited influence on them (although, Facebook, Twitter, and SMS messages were not the focus of the analysis, for the reasons mentioned earlier).²⁵

The actors (i.e. vernacular publics) in a vernacular space are not only relatively removed from institutions of power, but are also suspect in the eyes of the state and elites who have a hold on power. Hence, a key element that vernacular publics shared was the distance from institutions of power. The vernacular discourse in the public space had to compete with the discourse of those in power. In the JLA, the vernacular discourse, its idiom, and its symbols became the main point of contestation and differences between the coverage of English and Hindi news television.

I found that some Hindi journalists felt that the differences in approach was because the English language journalists were part of the social world of the ruling elite of India, which included the political class, bureaucrats, corporate bigwigs, and the top editors of English media. One reason for this is due to what Rajagopal described as ‘inner codes meaning’ (2002: 25), which is rooted in a vernacular culture. The second reason is linked to the *habitus* (subjectively cultivated identity) of journalists and their audiences in the ‘split’ Indian public spheres. Journalists in the English media are mainly from metropolitan spaces, with a relatively cosmopolitan outlook. In comparison, journalists in the vernacular media come from small towns and rural spaces and have been mainly educated in government schools and non-elite colleges. Nandy (2012), explaining the differences in cultures, wrote: ‘They [Team Anna] share a style and a language of politics that offend the mainstream, into which they, some feel, have gate crashed.’ (2012: vii). The differences in the cultures of vernacular publics, institutional politics, and the news media presented a complex picture of the *andolan*—at one level it deepened democracy and expanded the space for alternate politics, whereas overreach and lurking reactionary politics raised concerns about anti-politics and electoral democracy.

Finally, despite the fact that the material concerns of the leadership of the JLA and IAC did not seem to be on the same footing with the majority of those who showed up in the Ramlila Maidan, the issue of ‘anti-corruption’ and Hazare as symbolic fountainhead of the *andolan* created the conditions for the *aam aadmi* (common man) to identify with Jan Lokpal. As in any populist social mobilisation, Team Anna was temporarily successful in its hegemonic articulation that it represented social groups across differences, especially the vernacular publics.

Notes

- 1 The alliance goes back to the struggle for the Right to Information Act and the movement for transparency in the early 1990s. Later, an alliance of civil society at the national level formed the National Campaign on People's Right to Information (NCPRI) to take up the *lokpal*. Several leaders of the Jan Lokpal Andolan were associated with the NCPRI. From the meetings of the NCPRI came the first draft of the Jan Lokpal Bill, but there were disagreements on the scope and powers of the Lokpal, as well as the strategy. Activists such as Nikhil Dey, Aruna Roy, and Jai Prakash Narayan argued for an incremental and decentralised approach, whereas others such as Arvind Kejriwal, a former tax officer, Prashant Bhushan, a lawyer, Kiran Bedi, a former police officer, Manish Sisodia, a social activist, and Justice Santosh Hegde argued that an incremental approach would not be effective.
- 2 A faction in JLA led by Arvind Kejriwal launched *Aam Aadmi Party* (Common Man's Party). The AAP successfully contested the Delhi Assembly elections in December 2013 and formed the government in the state that was led by Kejriwal. Although, the AAP Government resigned after only 49 days, because of disputes with the Union Government over jurisdiction, the nascent party is viewed as a major force in urban areas during the elections for Lok Sabha in 2014.
- 3 For example, the Singur–Nandigram protests in Bengal, anti-POSCO protests in Orissa, and Kudankulam anti-nuclear protests in Tamil Nadu have challenged the accelerated neo-liberalisation over the past decade.
- 4 See Morozov (2010).
- 5 Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, had warned against Gandhian political praxis during debates in the Constituent Assembly on the eve of Independence. The full speech is available online at: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/lis/debates/vol.11p11.htm> (last accessed 23 August 2011).
- 6 Anna Hazare's biography, social activism, and politics were no less confounding for scholars and commentators. For an illustrative example, see Guha (2011a, 2011b).
- 7 In the news media, the collective leadership was referred to as 'Team Anna'.
- 8 See Banerjee (2006) and Lindberg (1994).
- 9 Although it is important to keep in mind that any hegemonic articulation of universalism in discursive political practice includes the danger of reactionary nationalism, see Kumar (2011c) in the case of the populism of the Tea Party.
- 10 Interview with journalists of Hindi and English news media at Ramlila Maidan on 19 August 2011, New Delhi.
- 11 In the 1980s the Market Research Society of India (MRSI) developed the socio-economic classification system (SEC system) as an empirically reliable measure of socio-economic class. The SEC breaks down Indian consumers into 12 subcategories based on the occupation and education of the chief wage earners in a household. The new SEC system has the following 12 subcategories, starting from highest to lowest: A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, C1, C2, C3, D1, D2, E1, E2, and E3. For more information on the SEC System, see online at: www.mrsi.in/ (last accessed 24 February 2014).
- 12 TAM Peoplemeter System Report for 2010 (TAM Media Research Pvt. Ltd.).
- 13 News Content Track for 2010 (TAM Media Research Pvt. Ltd.).
- 14 See Ojha (2011) and Kumar (2012: 268–271).
- 15 During the first phase of mass mobilisation for the Jan Lokpal Bill, in April of 2011, Anna Hazare and his colleagues staged a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. The hunger strike was relatively successful. The government had entered into negotiations with the group and had promised to table the anti-corruption bill in the next session of parliament.
- 16 Interviews with volunteers at Ramlila Maidan, August 2011.
- 17 The backdrop to the stage on which hunger strikers sat in Jantar Mantar in 2011 had a large looming image of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), which is traditionally identified

- with right-wing Hindu groups. Some commentators saw the symbolism as evidence for the right-wing ideological roots of the movement (see Naqvi 2011).
- 18 Interviews at Ramlila Maidan on 19–22 August 2011.
 - 19 Vernacular channels at the site included IBN7, NDTV India, Star News, Rashtriya Sahara, Zee News, and Enadu News.
 - 20 Interviews with Hindi journalists in July–August 2011. There were some exceptions in the English news media. For example, *Times Now* and the editor of the channel, Arnab Goswami, appeared to have special access to Team Anna.
 - 21 Interviews with volunteers at Ramlila Maidan in 19–22 August 2011.
 - 22 Interviews with English media journalists conducted in July–August 2011.
 - 23 Interviews with protesters at Ramlila Maidan, 19–22 August 2011.
 - 24 Interview with a dalit leader in New Delhi, 13 August 2011.
 - 25 In my interviews with the protestors, social media only occasionally came up as a source of information.

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7 Ways of democracy

Making politics work for the urban poor¹

Bishnu N. Mohapatra

The history of urbanisation in India can be traced to the country's ancient kingdoms, where the movement of goods, royal power, and structured hierarchies defined spaces for human interaction, material and ideological productions, and social control. During the British colonial period, municipal administration emerged as a form of political rule and a space for collating petitions. It also served as a weak platform for consolidating interest, a mirror in which emerging classes envisioned their political future.

The East India Company established Madras as a corporation as early as 1687, and a modicum of municipal order came into being in the Bengal Presidency in the first half of the nineteenth century (1842). By the end of that century, there were nearly 700 municipalities in British India, and in a significant majority of them, the members were nominated by the colonial administration. It was Lord Ripon's resolution of 1882 that gave a new lease of life to municipal governance in colonial India.² He argued that local government must be constructed from below, rather than imposed from above. By the early twentieth century, the major corporations, such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, had a moderate sense of power in relation to taxation, sanitation, basic services, and health. During the anti-colonial struggles, the emerging urban spaces with limited electoral representation provided platforms where emerging nationalist leaders sharpened their political acumen. With independence in 1947, the political fortunes of cities and municipal administrations in India were eclipsed. As the provincial and national political arenas opened up for political competition, the city governments lost their earlier pre-eminence.

Despite the decline in the pre-eminence of cities, India, as evidence suggests, now lives less and less in its villages. In 1951, 17.3 per cent of its population was urban, in 2001 it was 27.8 per cent, and the provisional figure for 2011 is 31.16 per cent.³ For the first time since independence, urban areas witnessed an absolute increase in population in comparison with rural India. According to an estimate, by about 2030 nearly 41 per cent of India's population will be urban (Urban Poverty Report 2009). This is definitely not a picture of hyper-urbanisation, but in terms of population, it is the second largest in the world. A distinctive feature of Indian urbanisation is the growing concentration of the urban population in large cities. The number of cities that have a population of

more than one million increased from 12 in 1981 to 35 in 2001. The metropolitan cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Madras, and Hyderabad have grown rapidly in recent years. India's mode of urbanisation continues to remain top-heavy, although the growth of population in 'mega cities', according to the 2011 census, has slowed during the past decade (2001 to 2011). The picture of small and medium towns, largely, is one of stagnation and decay.

Historically speaking, cities and towns hold an ambivalent position within the Indian imaginary. The ambivalence, of course, varies along class and caste lines. Dalits, for instance, view cities as a place that brings good fortune and a space where caste rules do not apply with the same brutal intensity as they do in villages. In modern Indian literature, in different languages, the city is simultaneously a sign of wonder, a crucible of curiosity, and a location where individuals lose their moral anchor and their sense of community and fall prey to aggressive individualism.⁴ The power of cities as the loci and generators of fantasies is on the rise in India. This is at odds with the demographic statistics on urbanisation. From a neo-liberal perspective, cities are primarily engines for economic growth, and the future of India's economy depends on how they are governed and reproduced. From this point of view, cities should not only have adequate and cheap supplies of labour, but their productivity should also be enhanced.

The neo-liberal ambition of Indian policymakers is reflected in the consensus visible across political parties and ideological lines. For example, there is little difference between the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party when it comes to core economic policies. However, the poor and vulnerable social groups continue to challenge their legitimacy and point out their inegalitarian character. In the struggle for their own well-being, besides the traditional communitarian strategies, they have often exploited the growing potential of India's competitive electoral democracy. Unfortunately, these strategies turn out to be effective only in limited circumstances. Between elections, in everyday situations, the poor in general and the urban poor in particular have to devise new ways of ensuring the delivery of services and the implementation of a plethora of rights that the Indian state has recently granted to its citizens, such as the right to employment, to education, and to subsidised food grain.

Decentralisation: promises and parables of politics

Since the 1990s, India has adopted the paths of both neo-liberal economic development and democratic decentralisation. There is a deep tension between the two. Neo-liberalism emphasises macro-level economic growth, seeking to create conditions for the smooth running of business and the unhindered reproduction of capital. In contrast, the explicit intent of democratic decentralisation is to establish self-government at the local level by creating spaces for greater citizen participation in, and oversight of, the governance process of the city. Yet, since the neo-liberal economic order reduces the welfare and agency of the urban poor, it undermines their citizenship.

More than a century after Lord Ripon's reforms were enacted by the colonial state, the Indian state enshrined the urban decentralisation process by including it in the historic 74th constitutional amendment of 1992, which came into effect in 1993. A few years earlier, in 1989, an attempt had been made to initiate constitutional amendments for rural and urban decentralisation. However, these amendments foundered on the floor of the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of the Indian Parliament). Despite the broad democratic spirit informing this amendment, there was greater parliamentary enthusiasm for rural decentralisation than for urban; some thought the implementation of *panchayat*—local government—would realise Mahatma Gandhi's dream of rural self-governance or *swaraj*. Urban decentralisation, in contrast, did not evoke such high ideals, and often the debate was trapped in dyadic federal thinking. The dominant concern of state politicians was to check the sway of the central government, whereas federal policymakers argued that decentralisation was a better path for providing development to localities, even if it meant bypassing state authorities. It is arguable that the fate of democratic decentralisation was, and still is, sandwiched between the centralising tendencies of both the federal and state governments.

The discussion in parliament centred on development deficits, the financial constraints of both state and city governments, poor delivery of services in towns, and the rent-seeking behaviour of local elites and administrators. The debate did not carry much conviction or commitment. As local self-government is a matter for states, the constitutional amendment limited itself to providing a framework within which state governments would align the plethora of existing laws pertaining to *panchayats* and municipalities. Yet, necessary legal changes in states were put off until the last moment, and the rushed legislation that resulted did not significantly alter the internal functioning of municipalities. Many urban administrations, for example, continued to practise the indirect election of chairpersons and mayors. The 74th amendment, however, was not without benefits. In the past, the election to urban local bodies had been erratic, the power and functions were uneven, and the state governments' control over them was enormous. At least in a formal sense, some of these things changed due to the constitutionalisation of decentralisation. Whenever the election was not held on time in municipalities or corporations, people went to the courts to complain, which method of recourse was made possible by the 74th constitutional amendment. The most significant change was the entry of women, dalits, tribals, and socially disadvantaged middle caste groups into the urban political arena in India, which was enabled by the mandatory reservation of seats in urban local bodies.

Despite these benefits, the potential of decentralisation remains largely unfulfilled. Eighteen years after the enactment of the 74th amendment, urban politics in general and urban local bodies in particular continue to suffer from huge democratic deficits. Until forced to by the judiciary last year, constitutionally mandated district planning and metropolitan planning committees had not even been formed in several states. The fate of ward committees, which are the smallest units that enable citizens to articulate their interests and opinions, is no better:

in many urban areas, they are almost non-existent; in others, they are too large to be effective. Eighteen functions are assigned to urban local bodies in Schedule XII of the Indian Constitution, but these bodies have neither the autonomy nor the financial resources to carry them out. The interference of bureaucracy at all levels, the overpowering nature of parastatal bodies, such as development authorities, electricity boards, and water authorities, the absence of dedicated functionaries, the weak personal capacity of elected representatives, and the poor financial situation have combined to make urban local bodies weak and ineffective. Under these circumstances, their contribution toward economic development and social justice, as mandated by the 74th amendment, remains limited. An 18-year shadow of bad faith and inaction stands between the historic constitutional amendment and its implementation.

Although important, democratic decentralisation is not merely about creating a new institutional order. It is primarily about politics. It is important to remember this while analysing the trajectories of decentralisation in India. Some argue that the process of economic liberalisation intensified the need for decentralisation in India. The story goes as follows. Since independence, India has followed a path of economic development with the state at its commanding height. For all these years, both economic growth and the progress of social justice remained unimpressive. The rent-seeking bureaucracy presided over a system that neither produced enough collective goods nor distributed them adequately among citizens. The financial crisis of the 1990s created new contexts for changing the centralised Indian state. The need to address economic and development issues provided new impetus for change.

It is important not to confuse the demand for a neo-liberal restructuring of the Indian state with the yearning of its citizens for democratic decentralisation. If neo-liberals' focus is on efficacy, constraining of politics, and greater mobilisation of instrumental rationality, the advocates of democratic decentralisation put a great deal of emphasis on citizens' autonomy, agency, and collective power. It is not difficult to imagine a conflict between these contending views about how to restructure politics and the state in India, and some try to incorporate both views into a capacious discourse on governance. It is not surprising that social activists in India make great efforts to rescue the project of democratic decentralisation from the neo-liberal trappings of governance discourse. They like to anchor the project in the radical notions of democracy, citizenship, and social change.

The tussle between the contending visions is clearly visible in the policy space created by an ambitious federal programme (Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission or JNNURM) on urban renewal in India. It is ironic, but not surprising, that the urban renewal agenda has been crafted at the top. The first phase of the JNNURM ended in 2012. In the 65 cities where it was implemented, the level of governance reforms as envisaged by the policy remains haphazard at best. The transfer of functions to urban local bodies also remains largely perfunctory. Planning in the cities, as mandated by the JNNURM, has largely been the work of consultants, rather than a product of citizens' deliberation. It is not

surprising that the ongoing urban reforms in India have witnessed, as well as been accompanied by, a greater 'governmentalisation' of the state, wherein citizens seem to reposition themselves in relation to the new institutions and practices of governance. There is no doubt that with the intensification of economic reforms, the larger governance discourse as legitimised by the state pertaining to urban spaces has been inescapably transformed.⁵

The struggle of the urban poor: ways of taming politics

Delhi is not a single entity, but contains a multitude of distinct and overlapping spaces and enclaves. With its layering of history from medieval to modern, it is a palimpsest. As the capital of India, it houses the country's most powerful people, but it is also home to many powerless and homeless people. Delhi is also a city of *babus*—civil servants—whose presence is strongly visible in the public sphere of the city. However, nearly 80 per cent of the workers in the city belong to the unorganised sector, many of them without any security of employment. According to a recent government estimate, 45 per cent of the city's population lives in slums (Urban Poverty Report 2009). Delhi attracts migrants from different parts of the country, and according to the 2011 census, the population of the city is nearly 16.3 million. One of the striking features of the latest census data about Delhi is that the rate of population growth has declined considerably during the last decade. If the reported growth for the decade 1991 to 2001 was 52.24 per cent, for the next decade (2001 to 2011), it declined to 26.69 per cent. A similar decline is observed in other mega cities, such as Mumbai and Kolkata. Have the 'mega cities', including Delhi, become more inhospitable for poor migrants?

On 1 March 2011, 50 women of Motilal Nehru Camp—a slum close to the middle-class residential colony of Munirka in South Delhi—met in a community room, as they did every week. I was allowed to attend the meeting as a researcher. Members of the SNS (*Satark Nagrik Sangathan*; Society for Citizen Vigilance Initiative), a civil society organisation that has been working with the urban poor since 2003, also attended the meeting. The discussion at first focused on the role and responsibilities of elected representatives (both in the Legislative Assembly and Municipal Corporation of Delhi) and how the residents could monitor their activities. Some women were critical of the candidates bribing voters with cash and liquor, which is a common practice before an election. The discussion was as much about the existing political system as it was about active citizenship. Often, urban middle classes express their cynicism about their elected representatives, but they rarely come together to change the system. In contrast, here, the critiquing of the system by the poor went hand-in-hand with their desire to improve the system.

Toward the end of the meeting, the proposed cash-transfer programme of the government came in for intense criticism. Arguments were offered about why the new way of delivering services may not be good for the poor. As an old woman perceptively said: 'If we are not getting the old age pension on a regular

basis, what is the guarantee that the cash transfer system will work?' Finally, several women expressed their desire to join a demonstration on 4 March 2011 to protest against the proposed cash-transfer system in Delhi. For the past eight years, with support from the SNS, they have fought against irregularities in the Public Distribution System (PDS—a programme that provides subsidised food grain and kerosene to the poor) in their localities. They have also advocated on these issues with local officials and elected representatives. Because of their continuous monitoring, the PDS works better in their localities today, and they are not ready to sacrifice this for a new system of getting cash in lieu of subsidised grain. Through regular conversations on concrete issues and providing easy-to-digest information on policy issues, the SNS has undoubtedly played a significant role in quickening their political agency.

How does one make sense of the political activism of these women? It is certainly not merely a reflection of their general distrust of politics and politicians. One could clearly see in their discussion a reasoned political logic, an attempt to reflect on the importance of monitoring in changing the character of electoral politics and elected representatives. They also clearly saw an intrinsic connection between their political assertiveness and their socio-economic well-being. The political agency of these slum women is an achievement: the product of ongoing mobilisation, collective reflection, and support from local activists. This is not to argue that prior to this period they were without any agency. The point is that greater collective deliberation about, and an ongoing engagement with, their immediate and larger political contexts helped enhance their agency and gave it greater focus. In this context, the deep and respectful engagement of the SNS with slum dwellers is significant. The ongoing leadership programme of the SNS is also useful. It brings in local youth, trains them in issues concerning public policy and governance, and makes them aware of a repertoire of tools for citizen mobilisation and action.

The SNS has assisted slum dwellers in and around Delhi for some time. Soon after it was founded in 2003, the SNS began work with the residents of Jagadamba Camp, a slum in Sheikh Sarai, and in Begumpur colony in Malviya Nagar, South Delhi. Both the Jagadamba and Motilal Nehru Camps contain nearly 1,500 to 2,000 households each. Densely populated, these two camps suffer from poor living conditions. The supply of water and electricity is erratic, and the sanitary conditions are appalling. A significant number of families in these two camps have been there for a long period of time. However, their fear that their dwellings would be demolished used to be exploited by the local politicians. Before an election, candidates from different political parties would promise slum dwellers that they would protect their localities from demolition if they vote her/him into power. There were occasions when the slum dwellers, using the Right to Information (RTI) Act, discovered that the threat of demolition was not real.

In the beginning, the SNS's mobilisation of slum dwellers in these camps was focused on the Public Distribution System (PDS), a scheme in which the government provides essential commodities such as food grain and kerosene at a subsidised rate to people below the poverty line (BPL). In these camps, as in many

other places in India, the distribution of goods through the PDS was erratic, and many poor people were forced to make do without their entitlements. The SNS mobilised families around this issue, and used the RTI Act to get records of the number of ration shops in these localities. As expected, the records revealed irregularities in distribution, and subsequently the SNS organised a public hearing on PDS, where a significant number of PDS cardholders provided testimony on the working of the ration shops in their localities. This achieved three things: first, the distribution of rations in these localities improved; second, the government department dealing with the PDS and the Chairperson of the Ration Vigilance Committee (a member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly) were sensitised during the process, because their duties and responsibilities were pointed out; and, finally, it demonstrated that the RTI was an important building block for securing transparency and accountability in the system.

Introduced in October 2005, the RTI enables citizens to access non-classified information. Over the years, civil society organisations and social activists in India have used, and continue to use, the law creatively to impact the workings of government administration, service delivery, and the realisation of socio-economic rights. It is arguable that Indian social activists have not only consecrated the marriage between the right to information and the right to life, but also made it work in many inspiring ways. The strategy of the slum dwellers was not only to point out the leakage in the delivery of services, but also to create an ongoing structure of demand that puts pressure on the institutions and personnel responsible for the delivery of services. Today, in the slum clusters where the SNS works, citizen vigilance groups work to oversee the delivery of services, including the PDS and old age pensions.

For some years now, the elected representatives in the parliament, state legislatures, and urban councillors in India have each been assigned a specific fund for local development. Delhi's Legislative Assembly has 70 elected representatives and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has 272 councillors. Each Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) gets 20 million rupees to spend on development in their constituency, which is known as MLA LADS (Local Area Development Scheme), as well as five million rupees annually to be spent exclusively on water development in the constituency, which is known as the Delhi Water Board Priority Fund. Each councillor gets between five and 10 million rupees to spend on development in the ward that he or she represents. The MLA and councillor are responsible for the allocation of funds, and depending on the nature of the work, the appropriate department of the MCD implements the project. In the absence of strong scrutiny, councillors used to spend the development funds entirely at their discretion. The maximum resources were spent on road and pavement construction, which overwhelmingly benefit middle-class colonies. This is largely for two reasons: first, large construction projects, which can fetch better rent, are only possible in non-slum areas; second, there is an absence of robust accountability mechanisms that could connect the urban poor with their elected representatives. In 2007, however, the SNS used the RTI to obtain information regarding the allocation of funds by councillors in Delhi. This

information, which was widely circulated in the media and discussed in several wards in Delhi, revealed the biases of the elected representatives toward the interests of the middle class.

The slum dwellers felt betrayed. While they were forced to live without adequate drinking water, their representatives were spending development funds on building water fountains in parks in middle-class neighbourhoods. The SNS's efforts to focus their gaze on their elected representatives were generally effective. On more than one occasion, the slum dwellers forced their MLA to allocate funds for digging tube wells or providing basic amenities in their districts by pointing out the irrational and biased allocation. Such changes became possible whenever it became obvious to representatives that they might lose the electoral support of the poor, who vote in large numbers, in comparison with their middle-class counterparts.

After its initial experiments, the SNS began producing report cards on individual MLAs in the Delhi Assembly, once again using information collected through the RTI Act. The first time round in the election of 2000, the cards reported only on the allocation of each councillor's development funds; the latest version documents a representative's performance in the legislature and as a member or the chair of various government committees. As a remarkable innovation in the sphere of political accountability in India, the MLA report cards were widely circulated through media campaigns and in community meetings in different parts of Delhi during the Assembly election of 2008. According to Banerjee *et al.* (2011), voter turnout increased by about 4 per cent in areas where the campaigns used report cards. Recently, the SNS unveiled a mid-term report card that gives elected representatives the opportunity to enhance their performance during the remaining time of their mandates.

Have report cards made MLAs and councillors more accountable to the citizens of their constituencies? Although far from being a magic formula that can bridge the gap between elected representatives and the citizenry in India, the importance of this invention cannot be underestimated. There is no doubt, for example, that it can serve as a building block for making elected representatives more accountable—and there is evidence to suggest that improved political accountability has the potential to yield not only democratic, but also development dividends. During my fieldwork in Delhi, for example, several slum dwellers in these camps recounted stories to me about the re-allocation of development funds to their proper uses. To keep this process moving, however, electoral reforms, such as transparency of campaign finances and debarring people with serious criminal charges from contesting elections—to mention a few—are also necessary.

A new kind of politics?

The tension between the neo-liberal economic order and democratic decentralisation is evident in several parts of India today. In a substantive sense, the 74th constitutional amendment is yet to be fully implemented in many parts of India,

including Delhi. The struggle of citizens living in the Motilal Nehru and Jagadamba Camps, therefore, is not shaped by urban decentralisation; on the contrary, it is the absence of true decentralisation that they are protesting against. Whenever the Delhi Government has expanded the space for citizen participation, it is the middle-class-dominated resident welfare associations that have captured it. The public sphere of the city remains insensitive to the needs of the urban poor; in judicial rulings, the poor are still typically characterised as intruders, polluters, and encroachers upon public spaces. It is within this hostile environment that the urban poor continue to fight for their rights and entitlements.

Can urban decentralisation in cities in India be read as ‘tactics’, by which the government tries to domesticate the political energy of the urban poor? Or is it an attempt to bring the collective action of the urban poor within the constraints of civil society and its norms of negotiation? Or is it that ‘political society’—an evocative phrase that Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2011) uses to capture the urban poor’s intense negotiation with politics for welfare and basic necessities—is yet again being mutated under the conditions of a neo-liberal capitalist order? I am not attempting to answer these questions in this chapter. However, it is worth noting that the ways in which the urban poor fight for their welfare are hybrid, an eclectic mix of styles that goes beyond the civil and political society binary. It is true that at times their action is not moored in the values of citizenship of liberal democracy, but they are quick to pick up and use the language of rights (often in an expansive sense) if it helps them to fight against the draconian policies of the state and to combat the regime of unfairness. If the middle-class resident welfare associations use administrative and judicial routes to exercise their pre-eminence in the city, the urban poor often use the political route to bend the administrative structure of the city. There are times when the urban poor use the competitive electoral environment as a strategic resource; at other times, they use clientelistic modes; and in yet another context they use existing laws to fight for their interests. The larger objective for them is to use these multiple strategies in an optimal way.

In this context, the Right to Information Act has emerged as a potent instrument in their struggle by enabling the combination of two critical principles. The demand for information often deals with ‘what’ questions: it helps poor citizens find out what is happening to their entitlements, for example, and the status of their applications for redressing grievances. Meanwhile, the struggle for political accountability is more often about ‘why’ questions. Why are officials behaving the way they do? Why don’t they act according to the rules? Why were the poor refused their entitlements? It is in combining the ‘what’ with the ‘why’ questions that the urban poor manage to connect the pursuit of transparency with that of accountability.

By focusing on their elected representatives’ oversight functions, the urban poor of Delhi are contributing toward the effectiveness of institutions responsible for the delivery of basic services. The larger question is: can the monitoring of elected representatives on a regular basis make the political system more responsive and poor-friendly? In other words, can taming and strategic use of

the existing breed of politicians enable a new kind of politics to emerge? In a society that is riven by inequalities and hierarchies, inclusive growth cannot be achieved by administrative fiat; the creative use of democratic instruments by the poor may hold the key not only to transforming politics, but also to transforming the economic order.

Notes

- 1 This is part of a larger study that I am currently undertaking on urban politics and imaginings. I would like to thank the inhabitants of Motilal Nehru and Jagdamba Camps in Delhi for their help and kindness in sharing stories of their collective struggles with me. Without the generous help of members of the SNS, this study could not have got off the ground.
- 2 For a brief history of urban local governance in India, see Sivaramakrishnan (2009).
- 3 The provisional figures for the 2011 *Census of India* are from the official website of *Census of India*, available online at: www.censusindia.gov.in (last accessed 24 February 2014).
- 4 For an interesting exploration concerning the city and subjectivity, see Nandy (2001).
- 5 For an understanding of the ongoing reforms in urban governance, see Baud and De Wit (2008) and Ruet and Lama-Rewal (2009).

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8 Re-evaluating the Chipko (forest protection) movement

The emergence of the vernacular public arena in the Uttarakhand

Shinya Ishizaka

Introduction

This chapter aims to reveal the early phase of the history of the emergence of vernacular public arena in the Uttarakhand in north India by focusing on the initiatives of activists in the Chipko (forest protection) movement (1973–1981). Although the Chipko movement became famous as an example of the ‘environmentalism of the poor’ in the 1980s, it began to be criticised after the 1990s, because, according to some scholars, the movement ended in failure, due to the fact that the local people’s true desire to develop the local economy by using the forest’s resources was denied by the movement’s achievement of a total ban on commercial logging. Moreover, other scholars have stressed that the prohibition of commercial deforestation was not the outcome of the Chipko movement, but rather the consequence of the victory of the Department of Environment over the Ministry of Agriculture at the centre. Against these previous studies, this chapter argues that the Chipko movement did play a role in transforming the forest management systems, and it would be wrong to say that the transformation was not beneficial for the local people. Moreover, the movement was also significant for the formation of a new network of social activists.

Chipko movement as an ‘environmentalism of the poor’?

The Chipko movement began in the village of Mandal in April 1973.¹ To resist commercial deforestation by timber contractors coming from outside the Uttarakhand, village residents, including many women, used the tactics of hugging trees for the first time. The lumber quota that had been allocated to a local-based association every year was not approved for that year. Instead, a sports goods manufacturer in Allahabad obtained the license to use the trees in the forest in Mandal. At the town meeting held to protest this fact, the participants approved the proposal by Chandi Prasad Bhatt to use the tactic of ‘hugging’ trees that were scheduled to be cut down.² When the timber contractor’s staff entered the Mandal forest, local residents stood at the forefront and risked their lives to protect the forest in a non-violent manner, which prevented deforestation. After this protest, the contractors returned several times, but could not cut the trees

down, because large numbers of local residents again used the protest tactic of hugging each tree scheduled to be cut down. From that time onwards, this 'hugging' approach has been employed repeatedly in other areas in the Uttarakhand. The Chipko movement spread to many locations in the Uttarakhand. When timber contractors came to Reni village in March 1974, it is said that a large number of women led by Gaura Devi, a leader of the village women's organisation, kept an all-night vigil for four days at the logging area to prevent deforestation, enduring the cold weather, as well as the contractor's threats. In addition, Sunderlal Bahuguna and others were active in demonstrations against forest auctions. In October 1974, for instance, he entered the auction hall at Uttarkashi and made a plea for the proceedings to be halted. He also played a leading role in conducting the 'Askot–Arakot foot march (*pad yatra*)' in October to November 1974. In this march, participants walked from Askot, a village in east Uttarakhand, approximately 700 km to Arakot, a village in west Uttarakhand, in order to disseminate the messages of the Chipko movement to the whole of the Uttarakhand.³ In 1978, the Chipko movement entered a new phase in Advani village in the western Uttarakhand with the launch of a new slogan by the villagers: 'What do the forests bear? Land, water, and fresh air!' This new slogan was said to reflect a new awareness for forest/environmental conservation that was different from the movement's previous mainstream slogan: 'What do the forests bear? Resins, timber, and business!' The participants in the movement at Advani called for abandoning the local community's rights in addition to the outside contractor's right to cut down trees and insisted that forests should be preserved for environmental conservation purposes. The background to this shift in attitude was said to be the pitiful conditions in the rural area, such as a shortage of fuel-usable firewood and fodder, the loss of topsoil, and water shortages. The villagers believed that this desperate situation was the result of the disappearance of the forests. The villagers around Advani village, and especially Bahuguna, had realised that it was necessary to prevent deforestation if they wanted to improve people's living standards. After that, the Chipko movement came to its climax in January 1979. At Badhiyargarh village, Bahuguna started his 'fast unto death' to oppose deforestation. On the eleventh day of his fast (*upvaas* or *vrat*), he was arrested and taken into detention. This event further fuelled the resistance of the participants, with more than 3,000 people rushing into the village from neighbouring villages. It is said that they continued non-violent resistance for eleven days, until the contractor withdrew from the site. Finally, the Chipko movement arrived at a conclusion when the Government of Uttar Pradesh ordered a ban on the commercial deforestation of living trees above 1,000 m in Uttar Pradesh on 18 March 1981.

The academic evaluation of the Chipko movement has changed drastically. The literature in the 1980s regarded it as a successful movement, because it was thought that the total ban on commercial deforestation, which was considered a major achievement of the movement, would benefit subaltern people in the area. For example, Guha (2009) considered the Chipko movement both a shining example of a long tradition of peasant resistance in the Uttarakhand region and

an outstanding illustration of the 'environmentalism of the poor'⁴ and claimed that the total ban on deforestation not only saved the minimum subsistence levels and livelihoods of the poor people, but also prevented the exploitation of natural resources by private logging companies outside the region. He also stressed that it was remarkable that the forest-based poor people's voices gained international recognition through their movement. In contrast, subsequent studies since the mid-1990s have revealed that the movement ended in failure, because the poor people's 'true' desire to develop the local economy by using the forest's resources was denied by the complete prohibition on tree cutting, and the possibility of economic development in the Uttarakhand through the forest-related industry was removed by the ban on felling (Linkenbach 2007; Mawdsley 1998; Rangan 2000). Moreover, another scholar has stated that the transformation of forest policy was not derived from any movements, but was the result of a power struggle among politicians and bureaucrats in Delhi (Pathak 1994).

However, one should not stress too much the subaltern people's view of the movement or how the movement brought direct profits to the subaltern peoples. The contributions by Linkenbach, Mawdsley, and Rangan, who tried, through their fieldwork, to expose the 'realities' of how local residents regarded the ban on deforestation are certainly worthwhile. However, we cannot assume that there is such an eternal and unchangeable entity as the 'subalterns' voice'. There are many kinds of opinions among the local people in many cases, and these opinions can change according to the situation.⁵ For example, we have to keep in mind that the mood of a period can affect peoples' opinions during that period. In the Uttarakhand, the 1990s saw a backlash regarding the evaluation of the Chipko movement, which ended in 1981. Especially from 1994 to 1996, the Chipko movement was held up as one of the main reasons for the backwardness of the Uttarakhand by protagonists of the Uttarakhand movement, which aimed at creating a new and separate hill state of Uttarakhand. According to them, the Chipko movement prevented people from seizing a precious opportunity to develop forest-related industries in the area.⁶ Since Linkenbach, Mawdsley, and Rangan conducted their fieldwork mainly in the mid-1990s, their analyses could have been biased by such an atmosphere in the Uttarakhand movement. Interestingly, during my own fieldwork in the area from 2003 to 2010, I did not encounter any severe criticism of the Chipko movement. Moreover, the focus of peoples' discontent can change in accordance with the situation. The local people in the Uttarakhand in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, who every day saw a large number of trees being cut down with chainsaws and taken away to the outside plains by trucks or through waterways and rivers and who then suffered from frequent soil erosion and the drying up of springs on the slopes of the denuded hills, might have been conscious of a crisis or felt angry about the situation. However, it is natural that the same people or the next generation in the Uttarakhand in the 1990s had different discontents, because they might feel impatient about the stagnation in the local economy after the ban on commercial logging. I was very surprised when I recently saw a scene in which trees in this region were cut down and dozens of logs were filmed floating down

a waterway in the documentary 'The axing of the Himalayas', which was produced and broadcast by the BBC in 1982. For the generations born after the late 1980s, it may be difficult to get a real sense of the crisis that people felt in the 1970s. Therefore, the subjective evaluation of the movement by the local or sub-altern people should be complemented with an analysis of the objective context within the framework of a more comprehensive and long-term perspective.

The next part of the chapter outlines how forest policy in the Uttarakhand changed from the 1970s to the 1990s by using data from forest statistics and the *Working/Management Plans* of the Forest Departments (FDs) and then clarifies how the Chipko movement played a role in the process of the realisation of the total ban on commercial deforestation in 1981. Then, the latter part of this chapter clarifies how the activists' network was formed during the movement and how it survived after the movement.

Transformation of forest policy in the Uttarakhand from the 1970s to the 1990s

Forest management policy in the Uttarakhand changed completely from the 1970s to the 1990s. The changes in, and continuities of, the policy can be summarised as follows:

- The basic attitude behind the forest management policy was changed from one that was market-oriented to one that was preservation-oriented;
- the emerging private companies' access to forests was nearly completely shut down in the Uttarakhand; and
- although local people's participation in forest management under the name of Joint Forest Management (JFM) began in the 1990s, starting in the Uttarakhand as in other regions in India, control over the large area of the forest by the FD remained unshaken.

First, the basic attitude behind forest management policy was transformed from one that was market-oriented to one that was preservation-oriented. In other words, the forest started to be regarded in terms of its environment value, instead of being considered as an economically profitable resource. This change occurred nationwide, and we can clearly perceive it in the policies of the FD in the Uttarakhand. In the Chakrata Forest Division in the western part of the Uttarakhand, for instance, there was a dramatic change between 1977 and 1987 (Joshi 1987; Srivastava 1977). In the 'Introduction' to the *Working Plan* for the period from 1977–1978 to 1987–1988, commercial exploitation of the forest was strongly promoted:

Most of the remote and inaccessible areas of the division have since opened up due to the construction of several motor roads in recent years. The hitherto unexploited species of industrial importance are proposed to be exploited in the new plan under an Industrial Timber (Overlapping) working circle.

(Srivastava 1977: 1)

However, only ten years later, the 'Introduction' to the next *Management Plan* for the period from 1987–1988 to 1997–1998 in the same Forest Division shows how quickly they changed their stance and started to behave as the prime custodian of the environment:

Keeping in view the latest Government policies and in order to contribute towards the protection of the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, a more conservation approach has been adopted. The salient features of the plan are:

- 1 There are to be no green fellings; only dry uprooted and broken trees will be removed. In vulnerable areas no felling will be permitted for any purpose whatsoever.

(Joshi 1987: 1)

The drastic change of attitude in the Forest Divisions in the Uttarakhand in the mid-1980s was precisely in tune with the nationwide current: the FD were taken from within the ambit of the Ministry of Agriculture and merged with the Department of Environment, and a separate Ministry of Environment and Forests was formed in 1985 under the strong initiative of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (Pathak 1994). However, we also have to pay attention to the phrase 'there are to be no green fellings' in the 'Introduction' to the 1986 *Management Plan* cited above. This phrase indicated the order by the Government of Uttar Pradesh on the ban on green felling issued on 18 March 1981, which was appended to the same *Management Plan*. It states:

No fresh contracts, allotment or any commitment for felling of green trees for commercial purposes above a height of 1,000 meters above sea level should hereafter be made till the expert committee being set up for the purpose has submitted its report and the state government has taken a decision on it.

(Datta 1987: 179)

The direct cause for the transformation of attitude toward the management of forests from a market-oriented one to a conservationist one in the Forest Division in the Uttarakhand might have been the order from the centre. At the same time, however, the Uttarakhand had a distinct history that was preceded by the politics at the centre at the beginning of the 1980s, as we shall see in the next section.

Second, the emerging private companies' access to India's forests was nearly entirely shut down in the Uttarakhand. Although India started to liberalise its economy in the 1990s, with globalisation quickly gearing up after that (and some scholars even arguing that India made a 'pro-business shift' in the 1980s [Kohli 2012]), India's forests, which comprised 23.41 per cent of the geographical area of India in 2009 (Rawat and Chandola 2010: 180), have been kept away from market principles from the 1980s until now.

In the Uttarakhand, the production of timber, for instance, doubled in the 1960s (from 421,187m³ in 1960–1961 to 991,207m³ in 1970–1971), then decreased from the beginning of the 1970s (874,147m³ in 1975–1976 and 572,427m³ in 1980–1981), and finally became almost one-fifth of the amount of 1970 to 1971 in 2010 to 2011 (201,900m³) (Misra 1983: 64; Rawat 2012: 61). Further, in 1966 to 1967, the timber was allotted to various industries: plywood to Ashok Plywood Trading Co. (Jawalapur), Plywood Products (Sitapur), Bharat Plywood Udyog (Ramnagar), and Kumaon Plywood Udyog (Ramnagar); matchwood to W.I.M. Co. (Bareilly); and sawmills to Lokmani–Ishwari Datt Sangauri (Haldwani), Bhatia Saw Mills (Hardwar), Kailash Industries (Haldwani), and Himalaya Wood Industry (Haldwani) (Soni 1969: 400–408). However, after the UP Forest Corporation Act 1975 was enforced under the Congress (I) government in Uttar Pradesh, a state-owned corporation was created and began to monopolise the production and sale of timber and other forest commodities (Rangan 2000: 163).⁷ According to the *Uttarakhand Forest Statistics 2010*, only two private companies were supplied with forest products in 2009 to 2010: Century Paper Mill and Star Paper Mill were supplied 4,336,000 kg of eucalyptus (in 2001 to 2002, those two companies had been supplied 65,000,000 kg of eucalyptus) (Rawat and Chandola 2010: 67–69). After 2000 to 2001, all timber and firewood and some non-timber forest products (NTFP) have been auctioned and retailed through depots managed by the Uttaranchal Forest Development Corporation (Rawat and Chandola 2010: 67–69). It is doubtful that the Chipko movement was entirely responsible for the de-privatisation of forests, because the initiative for this change had already started in 1975, which was before some sections of the Chipko movement took an environmentalist turn in 1978.

Third, more than 70 per cent of the total forest area in the Uttarakhand continued to be controlled by the FD, in spite of the increase in the areas of Panchayat forest (forests under the management of the village councils) after the 1990s. In India, local people's participation in forest management under the name of Joint Forest Management (JFM) began in the 1990s (Nagamine 2003; Yanagisawa 2002). The JFM in India aimed to stop the deterioration of the forest and to afforest denuded land in collaboration between the FD and local people. This venture was launched because the long tradition from the colonial period of a unitary forest management by the FD to protect the forests had turned out to be ineffective by the 1980s, since deforestation and the deterioration of the forest were continuing at a rapid pace. This participatory approach was encouraged, because it was regarded not only as a more effective system of forest governance, but also because it could be an important tool for people's empowerment.⁸ In the Uttarakhand, according to *Forest Statistics*, the areas of the panchayat forests increased more than twofold, from 2,447.640 km² in 1969 to 5,449.642 km² in 2011.⁹ However, the forest areas under the management of the FD have remained almost the same, from 24,960.160 km² in 1969 to 24,414.804 km² in 2011.¹⁰ The increase in the areas of panchayat forest was produced by a decrease in the forest areas under the Revenue Department (6,072.000 km² in 1979 to 4,768.704 km² in 2011) and under private and other

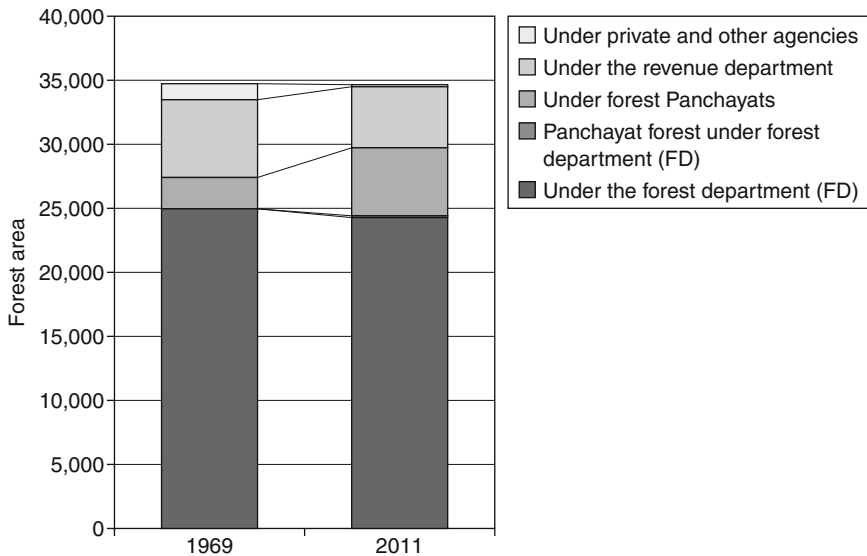


Figure 8.1 Forest area in the Uttarakhand by management (1969–2011) (source: *Forest Statistics, Uttar Pradesh* (1969) and *Uttarakhand Forest Statistics* (2011)).

agencies (1,251.190 km² in 1969 to 157.517 km² in 2011) (Rawat and Chandola 2010: 1; Soni 1969: 35–38). There is no clear sign of a relationship between the Chipko movement, the continuity of FD control, and the increase in the areas of panchayat forest.

The Chipko movement in the political process

The Chipko movement was a key actor in the political process for the transformation of the forest management systems in the Uttarakhand in the following three ways: first, of the four investigation committees that were established during the 1970 to 1980s regarding the management of forests in the Uttarakhand, at least two were directly set up in close relation with activists in the movement; second, at least three formal demands of the movement were delivered directly to the top authorities; and third, an activist's activities directly invoked a reaction from the government.

Regarding forest management in the Uttarakhand, four investigation committees were founded (Mishra and Tripathi 1978; Rangan 2000; Weber 1988):

- the Virendra Kumar Committee in 1974;
- the M.S. Swaminathan Committee in 1974;
- the K.N. Kaur Committee in 1980; and
- the second M.S. Swaminathan Committee.

Of the four, at least the first two were set up as a direct outcome of the activists' approaches. According to Anupam Mishra and Satyendra Tripathi (1978), following the Reni struggle in March 1974, the Chief Minister of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, H.N. Bahuguna, invited Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna for discussions at Lucknow on 24 April 1974. In that meeting, Bhatt proposed the setting up of an official committee to investigate whether the deforestation at Reni should be allowed and the chief minister agreed. Further, the minister allowed the appointment as chairperson of the committee to go to someone unconnected with the government, and it was Bhatt who visited and requested Dr Virendra Kumar of the Botany Department at Delhi College to become the chairperson. Kumar accepted the chairmanship. The Governor of UP officially appointed the Reni Investigation Committee (Virendra Kumar Committee) on 9 May 1974. Bhatt was also one of the nine members. The committee was originally meant to submit its report by 30 June, but its work ended up taking two years, because Kumar insisted that the entire region and not just Reni should be investigated. It finally submitted its report and the UP Government accepted the recommendations of the committee. On 15 October 1977, tree felling in the catchment area of Alakananda and its tributaries was banned for 10 years (Mishra and Tripathi 1978: 29–35; Weber 1988: 46–51). After being inspired by the agitations at the auctions in October 1974, and following discussions with Sunderlal Bahuguna, the chief minister set up another committee to conduct comprehensive research on forest abuse in the entire region. M.S. Swaminathan, the Director-General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, was nominated as the chairperson. The government also appointed Sunderlal Bahuguna to assist the committee in surveying the forests in north-western Uttarakhand. A moratorium on the auction of forests was also introduced until this committee completed its report. Although, for various reasons, the committee never completed its report, in March 1982 the second Swaminathan Committee did submit its report of the Task Force for the Study of Eco-Development in the Himalayan Regions (Mishra and Tripathi 1978: 31–33; Weber 1988: 46–47, 141–150, 156).

The idea of a ban on green felling first appeared in the resolution at the meeting of the Uttarakhand Sarvodaya Mandal at Almora in August 1974 (Weber 1988: 46). The meeting of the Uttarakhand Sarvodaya Mandal in June 1977 again made a resolution to stop commercial green felling and to rest over-tapped resin trees, and this was submitted to the Prime Minister Morarji Desai. It was said that Desai seemed sympathetic, but the state government did not change its policy at that time (Weber 1988: 51, 135). The movement's voice finally functioned as a real pressure on the state government in October 1980, when Sunderlal Bahuguna submitted a memorandum signed by prominent public figures for a ban on felling, following the recommendation by the central government for the ban (Weber 1988: 140). On 18 March the following year, the state government ordered a total ban on commercial green felling.

It is also noteworthy that Sunderlal Bahuguna's fast in January 1979 did have an effect on the state government. After his arrest, he broke his fast on

2 February, when the state government declared that no felling or auctions would be carried out until a meeting was held between Sunderlal Bahuguna and the chief minister to discuss the issues (Weber 1988: 55–56).

How did the Chipko movement contribute to the transformation of forest management systems in the Uttarakhand? First, the movement might have had a significant influence on the attitudinal turn from commercial forestry to conservationist forestry in two separate ways. The state government order on 18 March 1981 on the total ban on commercial logging was mainly the direct result of the victory of the Department of Environment over the Ministry of Agriculture at the centre. However, the idea for the total ban on tree cutting originated from the movement's appeals. Indira Gandhi might have felt lucky when she found support from the movement for the formation of her new image as an environmentalist. At the same time, it might be more accurate to say that the movement also utilised the environmentalist camp at the centre to meet their own ends.

Moreover, the local activists' appeals concerning the multiple functions of the forest, such as for the prevention of floods or landslides (Bahuguna 1979, 1983; Bhatt 1980), might have greatly contributed to forging a general understanding of the importance of forests. It is especially remarkable that Chapter 19, 'Scope and potential for development', in the *Management Plan* for the Chakrata Forest Division 1997–1998 to 2006–2007 began with the following paragraph:

Whatever be the level of technological and material attainments of human being he always needs sustainable environment for his survival. Perhaps, that is why activists of Chipko movement used to chant this slogan for pressing their demand for imposing ban on indiscriminate commercial exploitation of forests in seventies.

*Kya hain jangal ke upkaar?
Mitti paani aur bayaan.
Mitti paani aur bayaan.
Zo hain zine ke adhaar.*

(What are the benefits from forests? Soil, water and air that are essential for our survival.)

(Singh 1997: 443)

In the cited paragraph, the FD admitted that the commercial exploitation of forests in the 1970s was 'indiscriminate' and praised the environmental consciousness of the Chipko movement. This indicates how the attitude of the FD changed completely over 20 years, because, according to Poldane (1987), almost all FD officials in late 1983 answered the question regarding what should happen if the felling ban were to be lifted by saying that

though the needs of people and hill industry should be met, there must also be export of the surplus to the plains. Only one man—a Deputy

Conservator—said that there should be no export. The general opinion is that it is a waste not to fell trees in areas distant from people.

(Poldane 1987: 707)

At the beginning of the 1980s, soon after the ban on felling was announced in 1981, no one in the FD praised the Chipko movement.

Second, how did the movement affect the anti-business policy? It might be said that the movement was not really responsible for the loss of opportunities for the advancement of private forest industries, because at that time such opportunities could not be realised, due to the defeat of the Ministry of Agriculture and Indira Gandhi's staunch hostility towards capitalists (cf. Rangan 2000: 161–164).

Third, how did the movement contribute to the devolution of forest rights to *panchayats*? There is no sign of any obvious contribution to this matter. However, the efforts to establish tree plantations by the movement might have implanted in the local people a degree of zeal for the self-management of forests.

Formation of the networks of local environmental activists

As a scholar of social movement theory, Tarrow argued that as a cycle of protest was extended, simultaneous processes of institutionalisation and radicalisation tended to occur, as some sections of the movement started to become involved in formal political processes (to form a political party, for instance) and the opponents of such a move tried to differentiate themselves by taking more progressive or extreme stands (Tarrow 2011). In the case of the Chipko movement, however, neither institutionalisation nor radicalisation in their proper senses happened. Although the activists of the movement became involved in the political process that we saw in the previous section, no one became a politician or an agent of the government and no political party incorporated the movement. Most of the activists remained activists involved in other movements following the Chipko movement, by occasionally interacting with the authorities, instead of radicalising and breaking off their interaction with the authorities. In other words, they acquired the art of living as social movement activists during the movement and retained it even after the conclusion of the movement.

During the Chipko movement and the Himalaya Foot March that followed soon after the movement, many young activists were trained. They became professional social activists later by basing their activities at the grassroots level in the Uttarakhand and other places in India. It is noteworthy that most of them were educated by a senior activist, Sunderlal Bahuguna, either when they lived together in a student hostel (in the cases of Kunwar Prasun and Shamshed Singh Bisht) or when they took part in the foot marches (in the cases of Dhoom Singh Negi, Kul Bhushan Upmanyu, and Pandurang Hegde).

Soon after the Chipko movement ended on 18 March 1981, Bahuguna, in order to survey the environmental and social situation of the entire Himalayan region and to propagate the Chipko message (to protect trees from cutting by hugging) in that region, started the Himalaya Foot March (also called the

Kashmir–Kohima Foot March) on 30 May 1981. The idea was born during Bahuguna's eleven-day fast on 2 April 1981 at Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand. Bahuguna and others completed the 4,870 km walk across the Himalayan region from the western edge (at Srinagar in the state of Jammu and Kashmir) to the eastern edge (at Kohima in the state of Nagaland, which they reached in February 1983) with three breaks. Everywhere they went, Bahuguna and the others actively sought meetings with politicians, government officials, scientists, and students, compiled reports about the environmental situation in each area, and submitted them to the local government. Many youths who marched became social activists. In other words, the walkers in the march (and also in the Askot–Arakot march in 1974, which I mentioned in an earlier section) were educated and trained to become professional social activists.

The next section describes, through the example of Dhoom Singh Negi, how some youngsters became activists by committing to the Chipko movement and the foot marches.

Dhoom Singh Negi

Dhoom Singh Negi (1938–) was the principal of an elementary school before he became a full-time activist in 1974. He told me that there were two reasons behind his switching careers.¹¹ After he participated in the study meetings on environmental issues that were carried out by Bahuguna, Negi became acquainted with global environmental movements. He also took part in a learning camp with local loggers, which was conducted as part of the study meetings, and he seriously discussed forest problems with the labourers while sharing their room and board. In addition to these opportunities to learn about the problems of the forest, he realised first-hand the seriousness of the environmental degradation in his locality. At that time, the loggers cut down every tree, including small ones, and landslides frequently occurred on the barren hills. These landslides caused severe damage to the villages below, but the villagers could not receive any compensation for their broken irrigation systems, such as the watermills. Negi, after facing such a pitiable situation, changed his opinion and decided that the forest should be protected at all costs, rather than choosing the alternative of inviting small-scale logging contractors in and asking them to employ local people, as he had originally considered in the initial stage of his commitment to the Chipko movement.¹² These experiences convinced him of the necessity of having committed activists to help solve the forest's problems.

In the agitation at Advani village in 1978, Negi became one of the key organisers. He played a crucial role in the initial stage of the movement by saying that he would fast until the villagers took action against the deforestation. His five-day fast lifted the morale of the villagers, and many people started to take part in the movement after that.

After the Chipko movement, he co-organised the Himalaya foot march with Bahuguna in 1981 to 1983. Those days of marching with Bahuguna brought him the confidence to live as an activist, and he learned much about the tactics of

mobilising local people. During those foot marches, Bahuguna demanded that the co-walkers join the march without any money. The marchers were to ask for lodging and meals from the villagers in the villages they reached at the end of each day. Although Negi confessed that they, as vegetarians, suffered a little from the meals they received when they were in north-east India, where almost all the local people were non-vegetarians, they did not experience any difficulties regarding communication and accommodation. In addition, Bahuguna and Negi brought many books with them in their rucksacks and sold them at each town they visited, and they used this money to buy necessary items, such as batteries for their loudhailers. In order to mobilise local people to attend their gatherings in the public squares, they used strategies such as setting one *roti* (an Indian bread) per household as a participation fee for the meetings. They appealed to people's curiosity and urged them to come to the meetings. Negi was trained to live as an activist through such on-site education.

He also participated in the anti-Tehri Dam movement until the mid-1990s and in several other environmental movements in his area, such as the Save Seeds movement, which aimed to preserve the diversity in traditional grain and vegetable seeds. He continues to be a professional social activist, who, at present, also lives off his farming.

These activists work in their local areas. It is important that most of them are connected with each other through frequent exchanges by phone, letters or e-mails, occasional visits, and irregular meetings called '*mitra milan* (gatherings of friends)'. This loose network has been functioning as a mobilisation tool when some activists in the network need other activists' help to organise meetings or demonstrations.

Thus, the Chipko movement has also produced a new generation of professional social activists in the Uttarakhand and in other places in India, and these activists are connected with each other through extensive networks.

Conclusion

Recent studies on the Chipko movement have arrived at a negative evaluation of the movement, because the local people's right to determine how to use the local forest resources and their 'true' desire to cut down the trees was denied by the movement. However, it would be wrong to simply consider the movement a 'failure'. We should not overlook its significance.

First, the biggest cause of the people's discontent regarding forest policy in the Uttarakhand—i.e. the non-local companies' extraction of the forest's resources—disappeared after the Chipko movement. The expulsion of the companies from the region was brought about not only by initiatives from politicians and bureaucrats at the centre, but also by local activists, as we have seen. This was one of the main achievements of the Chipko movement. It is true that the opportunity for regional development based on local forest-related industries was lost after local forest cooperatives were also expelled, due to the ban on commercial logging. However, it would be unfair to accuse the movement for

this 'loss'. The politicians and bureaucrats on the side of the Department of Environment at the centre at the beginning of the 1980s had the strong intention to remove private companies from forest-related industries. Further examination would be required to discover whether or not there was ever a chance of only local companies and cooperatives being allowed to exploit the forest's resources in such a political situation.

Second, there is scope for further study on the various effects on the local people of the total ban on green felling, which was mainly brought about by the Chipko movement. The movement has been blamed for blocking the chance to profit from local forest-related industries. However, it is important to note that the ban on felling did not destroy local people's minimum subsistence; rather, it might have contributed to a reduction in the vulnerability they faced in earning their livelihoods. If the commercial logging had continued at the pace of the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the following problems could have become much worse: the shortages in firewood, fodder, and fertilisers could have been exacerbated; soil erosion and the degradation in the quality of manure could have had a negative effect on agriculture; and floods and landslides could have become more frequent. If the local people's subsistence was secured and their risks reduced under the mask of environmental protection, it would be wrong to assert that the movement was a failure, even if, superficially, the local people's 'true' desire seems to have been thwarted.

Third, after the Chipko movement, the participatory forest management system was introduced and the area of panchayat forest increased in the Uttarakhand. Further examination regarding the direct relationship between these trends and the movement is required. Looking back, there could still be room for activists in the movement to work harder to improve joint forest management.

Fourth, several young grassroots activists were trained, and their networks were formed during the Chipko movement. There is a common characteristic among these activists, in that, although they are actively involved in politics, they aspire neither to become politicians nor to be affiliated with political parties. Making a clear distinction between grassroots activists and politicians, they attach greater value to the former. The author thinks these activists should not be regarded as elites, as opposed to subalterns. Although Dhoom Singh Negi, for example, is without doubt an intellectual and is ranked among the upper strata of society, since he has his own land to cultivate, his proposals for better forest management, his opposition to the large dam, and his initiative in the movement to save traditional varieties of seeds were all derived from his life experience as a farmer and a villager and his belief and attitude of always prioritising the uplifting of those who suffer most in society. These activists, who aim to transform society in order to secure the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people in society, never give priority to increasing their own profit or power. The birth of these activists and their networks during the Chipko movement has constituted a part of the early history of the emergence of vernacular public arena in the Uttarakhand.

Notes

- 1 The description of the development of the Chipko movement in this section is based on Mishra and Tripathi (1978), Weber (1988), Mawdsley (1998), Guha (2009), and the author's interviews at the locality (2003–2010). See also Ishizaka (2011).
- 2 Some researchers insist that Ghansyam Sailani suggested the 'hugging' approach for the first time, while other researchers argue that this tactic was not suggested by either of them, and that local female residents spontaneously took this approach.
- 3 For more on the Askot–Arakot Foot March, see Ishizaka (2007).
- 4 'Environmentalism of the poor' was proposed by Ramachandra Guha and others. According to these authors, the claim that people in the Third World were too poor to care about environmental issues was totally groundless. Mainstream environmentalism in developed countries focuses on efforts such as preserving wildlife or the fight against urban pollution, but in the south, there is another environmentalism, which is the 'environmentalism of the poor'. Poor people (often landless or tribal) who largely rely on natural resources for their livelihoods must fight, as a matter of survival, against development projects, such as large-scale deforestation or the construction of large dams promoted by their governments or private enterprises; such development literally threatens their lives. In many cases, their struggles to protect natural resources not only involve protecting their own lives, but they are also about obtaining social justice and equality.
- 5 Linkenbach, Mawdsley, and Rangan originally tried to depict the diversity of local opinions, but unfortunately their work focused almost exclusively on people's economic aspirations.
- 6 For the Uttarakhand movement, see Kumar (2000), Kumar (2010), Linkenbach (2005), Mawdsley (1998), Pathak (2000), Rangan (1996), and Robinson (2001).
- 7 The UP Forest Corporation was originally meant to employ local people, but it was said that it tended to hire labourers from Himachal Pradesh or western Nepal (Rangan 2000: 163–164).
- 8 After the JFM in India in the 1990s, some south-east Asian countries were said to follow this example of participatory forest management. For critical analyses on the JFM in India, see Poffenberger and McGean (1996) and Sundar *et al.* (2002).
- 9 The number for 1969 is calculated by tracing back to district-wise data, since the seven districts that would constitute the separate Uttarakhand state in 2000 had been in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Of 5,449.642 km² in 2011, 139.653 km² was panchayat forest under FD management.
- 10 Of 24,414.804 km² in 2011, 139.653 km² was panchayat forest under FD management.
- 11 Interview with Dhoom Singh Negi on 21 September 2006 at Piplet in Tehri district, Uttaranchal (Uttarakhand), India.
- 12 According to Negi, most villagers support the idea, because they are farmers, and farmers naturally aim to protect their farms, villages, and the environment.

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9 Grassroots and vernacular articulations

Politics and popular democracy in Uttar Pradesh villages

Badri Narayan

This chapter deals with the political articulation of people at the grassroots, especially concerning democratic politics. Our focus is on understanding their language in defining politics and their expectations about politics, which lie in the hidden layers of their cultural expressions. We also highlight vernacular criticism of the official state-led democratic sphere-in-the-making in north Indian rural society. The term 'grassroots people' here denotes the mostly uneducated, illiterate, marginal section of rural people, struggling for their everyday bread, who are usually considered apolitical. Academics and political agencies usually expect direct replies and responses from grassroots people on political questions that are similar to the ones that we have developed from the mainstream mass media, but people at the grassroots have their own idioms for articulating politics. These grassroots people may also be called vernacular, in the sense that they speak in mostly non-official cultural resources of discourse and have practices that are historically accumulated and practical-morally embodied in the lifeworld of the villagers (Tanabe 2007: 569). Their creative reflections are expressed in idioms that are mostly rooted in the folklore and cultural traditions existing at the grassroots, which are often very different from the mainstream public sphere found in urban areas.

In this chapter, we will explore the articulations of these people regarding politics and political democratic ethos, which are reflected in their folklore, folk stories, anecdotes, proverbs, and metaphors about kings and queens. The kings and queens may not be those who lived in the ancient period, but can be contemporary figures that are imbued with contemporary values. Cultural resources, as patterns of practice and discourses that assign meanings and values to the world and society, are historically accumulated in the social reservoir (Demmer 2002; Shotter 1993). Here, we believe that political society is a sphere of competition for state resources by communities extended to rural society in India; the expansion of the state interacting with the moral sphere of rural society to create new contestatory negotiations with modern institutions.

The idea of democracy also created cultural resources that bear a process of critical adjustment with outer modernity (Tanabe 2007: 561). These cultural resources, both old and new, provide materials and possibilities for people to employ in creating new patterns of practice and discourse that match the

contemporary context. Here, the idioms and rhetoric of morality may be used to affirm, resist, or transform the existing sociopolitical order (Tanabe 2007: 561). The vernacular marginal spheres interact with the state-led democratic institutions with a critical note. These critical notes, produced through the compulsory interaction of the rural, traditional, and moral universe with modern democratic systems and institutions created by the state, are reflected in satirical folk forms in the genres of folk tales, stories, proverbs, idioms, and so on. This vernacular criticality originates in the collective folk wisdom of communities and reflects their feelings that although they are appreciative of the interventions of modern democratic institutions in their everyday life, they are not being reshaped as they desire.

The common sense of the vernacular, which developed through the cultural systems of their everyday life and continues through the ages with additions and deletions based on changing times and contexts, also provides the resources of vernacular criticism (Geertz 1983: 10). Common sense circulates in the folk wisdom, which is shaped by centuries-old traditions and civilisations in south Asian societies such as India, and continues to be reshaped due to interactions with contemporariness (Alexander 2011: 149). These wisdoms mostly appear in the oral literatures of communities. The vernacular criticalities that contain the potential for radical political elements in the consciousness of rural communities have not yet been explored in depth by political agencies that are involved in social change. These critical notes of vernacular people do not appear as black-and-white rejections of state-led democracy, but contain appreciative–interactive criticality that originated due to the interventions of democratic institutions in rural areas. Such forms of vernacular criticality in literary representations can be observed in the work of the eminent Hindi novelist Phaniswarnath Renu. His Hindi novel, *Maila Aanchal*, which documents the reactions of a Bihar village in the decade of the 1960s, describes the confusion, nervousness, and criticality of vernacular (*aanchlik*) people that emerged while dealing with new democratic institutions installed by the newly independent Indian state (Renu 1954).

Cultural data for this chapter was collected from people mainly belonging to the marginal castes of two villages in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. These are the villages of Shahabpur and Jugrajpur, both located in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. Shahabpur is a tiny village in central Uttar Pradesh approximately 20 km from Allahabad. It is located 5 km north of Hathiganh Chauraha on the Allahabad–Lucknow highway. The village is divided into thirteen *pattis* (hamlets and sub-hamlets, also called *poorvas* and *tolas*). People of various castes live in this village. Castes such as Patels, Pasis, Mauryas, Kumhars, Chamars, Turks (Muslims), and Dhobis, which are numerically stronger, are mostly settled in their own *pattis*, while numerically weaker castes, such as Yadavs, Darzis, Lohars, Nais, Bhujas, Dafalis, and Churihaars, live mostly in Shahabpur Bazaar or are scattered in other *pattis*. Jugrajpur village is situated 55 km from Allahabad on the Allahabad–Kaushambi highway. It is a Brahmin-dominated rural community, but there are a large number of lower castes, such as Pasis, Dhobis, and Kumhars, in the village. There are also around 70 Chamar households in the village (Narayan 2011: 48).

The methodology used to collect data was the *baat se baat* methodology, which involves extracting information from semi-structured conversations. For the preliminary survey, we identified people of different ages who had encyclopedic memories of the village, local history, culture, traditional knowledge, and so on, and who were articulate and talkative. Besides conversing with these people, we also recorded their facial expressions and body language to enrich the content of the conversation. We chose six respondents—three males and three females—mostly from dalit and backward castes from each of the two villages. Their age groups were 20 to 30, 30 to 50, and above 50. Apart from discussions on other matters, our main inquiry involved listening to ‘*kissas*’ (anecdotes and folk stories) about various aspects of social life. The stories were narrated in the Awadhi dialect, which is a form of old Ardh Magadhi. There is also some influence of Khari Boli, which is spoken around Allahabad. This form of Khari Boli, which is mixed with Allahabadi Awadhi, was identified as ‘Purvi Hindi’ by George Grierson (Srivastava 1937: 119).

Politics and the grassroots

Politics also lies at the grassroots. This is because politics is perceived as a means of defining society’s selfhood by renegotiating the distribution of power and the legitimacy of existing centres of power in different domains of life (Nandy 2003: ix), which may be observed even at the grassroots. Here, one can observe that politics as an instrument of collective creativity is being articulated in popular language in the everyday lives of the people. Politics was disseminated to rural societies with the extension of the state even in pre-colonial society. However, the nature of the politics of people changed with the changing nature of the state. During colonial times, the state became more visible, intervening and working as a power for governmentality to control the people, not for distribution, but for the extraction of resources from local communities. In post-colonial times, when the process of Indian nation-making intensified, welfare-centred development projects were implemented, and in this process Indian democracy developed, but alongside vices such as corruption, misuse of power, dishonesty in the delivery of democracy, and manipulation in the distribution of resources, which became prominent, as in most postcolonial states. This was more obvious after the 1970s, when the populist turn of the Indian Government, which tried to secure political support in exchange for the distribution of state resources in the name of development, brought about a situation in which the state became pervasive in rural society with the increase of competition and corruption in the politico-economic sphere (Tanabe 2007: 559).

Politics as an ideology and action for the equal distribution of power and legitimacy, which disseminates through modern politics by the state from above, is also perceived and expressed creatively by the grassroots villagers, who are commonly believed to be an apolitical community that lacks the capacity to desire in the era of democratic politics (Appadurai 2004). Politics at the ground level sometimes appears in a moral form and not as an instrument of

self-interest, as many politicians expect (Nandy 2003: ix). In fact, a hybrid of conditions generated through the intermixing of political society (Chatterjee 1998) and moral society (Tanabe 2007) works at the grassroots in villages in India, where the lower strata use survival strategies, in which the imaginative power of a traditional structure of the community is interspersed with outer modernity and modern institutions to create and adjust to the new situation with an ethical, critical vision. In this way, grassroots appear as a social, cultural space of the people that, directly or indirectly, contains ‘the people’, who in their cognitive world create an imagination that transforms the dominant institutions, in order to either improve them or replace them entirely.

In society, we often use the phrase ‘the people’ as a substitute for ‘social majorities’. In doing so, we refer to groups of persons who compose the new commons. ‘The people’, we realise, has all kinds of social and political uses, including pejorative connotations: opposing rulers and the ruled, the powerful and the powerless, the strong and the weak. In its more technical sense, it differentiates the governing elites from the governed of ‘civil society’ (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 12). Grassroots people tell their politics in their own language, which is different from the state-oriented language. As Thiong’o (1986) argues, language appears for them with dual meaning—as a means of communication and as a carrier of culture. Many times in their language, even the political and state-oriented language appears in the form of cultural genres, such as stories, proverbs, and metaphors. They are not merely words, but have a suggestive power beyond their immediate and lexical meaning (1986: 13). Even though grassroots people become transformed from ‘people to population’ during the dissemination of state governmentality through development processes, advertisements and media, they retain their own language (Chatterjee 2004: 3).

The expansion of the mediascape in rural societies may bring a change in the cognitive world of rural people and habituate them in media imagination, which is heavily loaded with state-oriented development language, corporate, and market advertisements (Appadurai 1996: 35). However, in one of our studies, in which we tried to observe the impact of television in Shahabpur village, we found that they still negotiate with visual media in their own ways. They mainly watch channels such as Doordarshan and ETV Uttar Pradesh, which predominantly broadcast local news and culture, and so on, while watching religious serials on both local and national channels. The low availability of electricity in villages and the vibrant community and family life in them saves the villagers’ imaginative world from deep penetration by the media, at least to an extent. The politics of power and development that is disseminated to them through various processes is received by them in their own way and is reflected in their own language and in their own form.

Delivery, distribution, and grassroots perception

In both villages, we observed that no one understood the word democracy (*jantantra*). When we tried to incorporate the concept of democracy into our

questions, the values that they understood and could relate to were *izzat* (dignity), *bhagidaari* (participation), and *baraabari* (equality). From this, we realised that 'democracy' is a state term that is slowly permeating among the people. The practices of democracy have changed and have been drastically modified in India over the past four decades, and the forms of involvement of the subaltern classes with government activities have both expanded and deepened (Chatterjee 2010: 201–202). During the expansion and deepening of democracy, grassroots people relate their own life values to the democratic condition.

The term *baraabari* may not be taken as a mere translation of the modern democratic term equality. Equality, as practised in Indian state-led democracy, means the distribution of resources and does not fully involve the element of equality with respect, regard, and honour, which is the basis of the vernacular term *baraabari*. In spite of various provisions in the Indian Constitution for protecting the right of the marginalised to lead a dignified life, the form of democracy that is evolving in India does not explicitly emphasise the element of self-respect for the marginalised in practice. From the *thana* (police station) to the *kutchehary* (court), one may observe how the element of dignity (*izzat*) is being negated from the practice of democracy for the marginalised at the grassroots. Democracy appears here as a form of distribution of resources for the purpose of acquiring popularity by the political parties to come into power so that they can control state resources.

According to Khan (2012, personal communication), the state-led democracy does not hold itself accountable for the dignity and respect of the marginalised. The humiliation of dalits and atrocities against them are growing rapidly in Uttar Pradesh. When the results of the recent Uttar Pradesh Assembly election were announced, dalit *patties* in several villages of the state were burned, and dalits were beaten and killed. In fact, atrocities against poor and vulnerable dalits by powerful middle castes and supporters of the Samajwadi Party have been on the rise in the state, but there have been hardly any protests by political parties. In one protest, an 80-year-old dalit leader, Balram Prasad, immolated himself in Ambedkar Park in Azamgarh, UP, near the office of the Superintendent of Police; the suicide note in his bag stated that he had taken this extreme step because of the increasing number of incidents of atrocities against dalits and the knocking down of Ambedkar's statue. In another incident, some dalits of Kazipur village in Chandauli district were forbidden from offering prayers at the Shiv temple.

The latest crime figures released by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) under 'Crime in India – 2009' show that Uttar Pradesh still leads in crimes against dalits:

Not only in Uttar Pradesh, but in other parts of India too visible and invisible attempts of exclusion, discrimination and humiliation of Dalits are growing day by day. Untouchability has not only survived but it has taken new forms and has now been adapted to new socio-economic realities. Research done on 565 villages across 11 states brings to light that

untouchability still exists in some form or the other in more than eighty per cent of the villages under study.

(Shah *et al.* 2006: 15, 166)

The distribution of resources is an important constituent of the democratic condition that is linked with the distribution of power and legitimacy. This has been a constant issue for people in rural society. The whole process of distribution needs an agency for proper delivery. This is the crux of the democratic process initiated by the state and political institutions that claim to be the proper agencies for such delivery. The claim is reinforced during democratic electoral politics when different parties offer various allurements and sops to woo the electorate. The uneducated, marginalised people in villages, however, have their own comments, criticisms, and suggestions for such delivery agencies, which they express in creative ways through stories that they tell and listen to among themselves. These oral stories, called *kissas*, are usually narrated by elderly women (*aaji, dadi*) or men (*aja, baba, dada*) to their grandchildren in the evening or at night. In this way, these stories circulate from generation to generation as critiques of misplaced or mishandled democracy.

Such criticisms as a creative act of democratising the process of delivery and distribution may be considered the politics of the people. This consciousness may be considered pre-political, since it does not result from conscious leadership developed over a long time or have a well-defined aim, organisation, and commitment to achieve a particular objective (Guha 1983: 5). Rather, they may be considered traditional forms of discontent in social science literature (*ibid.*). It may also be described as pre-political because it has not yet found, or has only begun to find, a specific language in which to express the aspirations of people about the world (Guha 1983: 6). The term 'specific language' contains a language of modernity and Western notions of governance and policies that are being disseminated to our academia, media, and state policymakers through the World Bank, international funding agencies, and Western democracy. However, we fail to understand the indigenous grassroots articulation of politics that cultivates democratic values on their own soil. We, thus, propose that such consciousness by the act of telling, and also sometimes converting into political choice or voting choice among the people, may be called politics or political.

Here, we have documented a *kissa* that is filled with grassroots aspiration, suggestions, and corrective critique of the process of democracy. The story was narrated to us in Awadhi dialect by Sugiya, a 60-year-old weaver woman of Shahabpur, and is translated below:

There was once a Kori who used to weave cloth with the help of his wife. They were very poor and used to eke out a living with whatever little they earned through weaving. One day the weaver weaved a good quantity of cloth. In the evening, his wife told him to sell the cloth and buy some meat, which the couple would eat with relish that night. So, the weaver went to the market and sold the cloth to the Mahajan. With the money that he

obtained he bought some meat. He then thought that he would spend some time in the market buying and eating *paan* but that would make him reach home late. He decided to send the meat to his wife so that she could cook it and they could eat it as soon as he reached home. Just as he was wondering through whom he should send the meat, he saw an eagle flying in the sky. He called the eagle and requested it to carry the meat to his wife. The eagle readily agreed to carry out the request and assured the Kori that he would transport it immediately as he could fly very fast.

Late in the evening when the Kori reached home, he asked his wife whether the meat was ready or not. The wife retorted that he had just come home so how could she have prepared the meat. The Kori was surprised and told his wife that he had sent it to her through an eagle in the evening. On hearing this, the wife sarcastically asked how he could expect an eagle to transport the meat safely without eating it.

The crux of this story lies in the sarcastic comment of the wife: 'Don't expect an eagle, which is known for its greed for meat, to deliver it safely.' The story poses the question of right choice for delivery and distribution as a basic condition for the success of any democracy. This choice at the grassroots level tends to be woven with moral content. The narrative seems to be building a moral frame of politics that is based on the notion of an absence of lust and greed, which have been considered basic values for all kings and delivery agencies since pre-modern societies in rural Indian society.

Apart from the agency of delivery, another issue regarding the people-state interface in state-led development, democracy, and welfare epistemology is the disconnect between desire and delivery. This issue is linked to the problem of interaction between state-led politics and the grassroots. The basic aspect of this problem is the language in which people express their desires and the medium through which the state gives responses that it has not understood properly. This is because the state is habituated in thinking, conceptualising, and responding in a language that is quite different from the language of grassroots people. The disconnect between grassroots people and the state on the issue of desire and delivery can be perceived through the metaphor of a hearing-impaired person. Just as a hearing-impaired person acts as if he is hearing but actually cannot hear, the state power acts as if it is trying to hear the common people, but actually does not. Even if it hears, it does not understand their language. Bhullar of Shahabpur, who is 60-years-old, narrated a story that expresses this disconnect:

Once there was a king who was very fond of listening to songs. He used to ask his guards to call a singer for him every day. One day the guards could not find any singer so they took a lower-caste peasant labourer to the king. The king asked him to sing. The man requested the king to let him go, as he could not sing. The king, however, insisted that he sing and ordered the guards to beat him if he did not sing. Out of fear, the man started singing the line '*maar maar sasura gawaawat baate*' (the king is making me sing by

threatening to beat me). At that moment, the man's wife came to the palace in search of him, as she could not find him anywhere. When she heard him singing the line, she sang, '*tu rajwa ke kahe gariwat baate*' (Why are you abusing the king?). The man replied in a singing tone, '*u sasura samjha nahi ke i sasura samjhawat baate*' (the king cannot understand that I am cursing him but my wife is telling him).

The king thought that the husband and wife were performing a chorus. He was very pleased with them and gave them many *asharfis* (gold coins) as a gift. In other words, the king could not understand their language but rewarded them out of pleasure.

This story implies that the common people want to communicate, but those in power cannot understand their problems, difficulties, or requirements; like hearing-impaired people, they pretend to understand and provide them with *all-ball* (absurd) things that they themselves value. This metaphor may have many meanings, but one interpretation could be that the welfare state provides welfare measures that have no correlation and do not connect up with the common peoples' desires and requirements. The common people do not just criticise the state power, but also exercise self-criticism. They often see themselves as oxen grinding mustard seeds to extract oil with blinkers (*chhopni*) over their eyes so that they cannot look around. In the same way, without understanding anything, they are asked to accept the identities imposed on them by political leaders, such as caste and religion, and in this democratic political electoral market, they are converted into governable subjects:

Doodhnath Pasi, the *gram pradhan* (village head) of Shahabpur, who is a politically aware person even though he is semi-educated, says that 'even though we live harmoniously and behave like ordinary villagers, once the elections *chhopnis* of caste and religion are tied to our eyes and we are asked to behave like oxen grinding oil'. This reminds us of an interesting observation by Dean (1999) in his book 'Governmentality' that during the elections a psychic discourse is constructed as technologies of self that transforms the people into governed subjects for voting.

(Brijendra Gautam interview with Doodhnath Pasi, 3 April 2009)

Ideal, real, and the making of legitimacy

While conducting fieldwork in the two villages during the Assembly elections held in UP in early 2012, we heard two metaphors narrated by the villagers that help us understand present-day politics. The first is the metaphor of *jogi-raj*a (a king who renounces and sacrifices) and the other is that of the *sukhbhogwa* (pleasure-loving leader). The term *jogi-raj*a was used by an old woman belonging to a middle caste in Jugrajpur, who told us that there was once a king who became a *jogi* after observing the sorrow of the people and wandered from village to village. In the same manner, 'Sonia's *bitwa*'¹ is now wandering among

us like a *jogi*. The term *sukhbhogwa* was used by a man in Shahabpur to describe all the leaders of today. These two metaphors co-exist side-by-side in the folk consciousness. *Jogi-rajās* are like Sorthi-Birjabhar and Bhartahari, who are popular characters in folk ballads in north Indian dialects, such as Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Magadhi, and who used to roam among people after sacrificing their material comforts. Along the same lines, the rural people narrate stories (with great admiration) about kings who performed their kingly duties, but had no desire to enjoy them. In these stories, the kings slept on simple cots, ate simple food, and led simple lives.

In contrast to the *jogi-rajās*, *sukhbhogwa* (pleasure-loving) leaders have attained a powerful position in the power circles of the state. They misuse the legitimacy granted to them because of the idea of a welfare-oriented state propagated by the government and siphon all the money and benefits allotted by the state for development. In the power circles of the government, these leaders have become symbols of pleasure-loving, flamboyant, and ostentatious leaders who openly flaunt their power and money. Such power-mongers are known as *lal batti ki shakti* (power of the red beacon)² in UP parlance. In fact, the people of India see the advent of the modern state as the cause of corruption. One of the criticisms of corruption in the people's perception is that the advent of modern time—*kalijuga* is represented by self-centred politics (Tanabe 2007: 560). The dissemination of state-led democracy in the form of distribution of resources led to an increase in corruption, which produced satirical metaphors such as *sukhbhogwa* as a reaction.

In all these folk narratives, sacrifice and austerity are the major characteristics of kings. These stories can be seen as the counter-imagination of grassroots people against the state and the dominant trend of state formation and politics of power. The archetypal narratives about governance can also be seen as being created by the fantasy of grassroots people as a critique of the dominant 'present'. These stories are not merely narrated for entertainment, but are creative mediums through which to understand today's politics, governance, and democracy. Nandy (2003) points out that the state, while acquiring its legitimacy through three factors—security, development, and modern science—creates internal colonies, new hierarchies, and a recipient culture (27). However, my observation is that people at the grassroots do not receive the state-oriented dreams, desires, language, and cultural logics *in toto* as the elites do, but receive them in their own way. Even during the process of accommodating themselves in the 'state-space', they develop critiques of them. The earlier story of the eagle as a delivery agent is one example. The tax system is also based on the state's promise to provide development, security, and scientific facilities in the everyday lives of the people, but part of the tax goes toward maintaining the luxury of the ruling elite.

Rania, a 90-year-old dalit woman from Jugrajpur, narrated a story that critiques the state for misusing the people's money collected through taxation, which has remained the basis for the formation of the state from ancient times. The story, in Awadhi dialect, is translated below:

There was once a king. He did not take anything from the people. He passed his days in great poverty. His wife did not even have any jewellery, nor did she have any servants. She used to do all the household chores herself. On top of that, she used to visit the pond each morning with a clay pot that had a weak string tied around its neck to fill water. She used to balance herself on the lotus leaves that covered the pond while dipping the pot in the water. All the people living in the kingdom were very happy and contented because of the king and queen.

One day the queen noticed that all the women of the village had come to the pond to fill water wearing expensive clothes and jewellery. Their pots were made of gold and had silken strings tied around their necks. The queen, on the other hand, was wearing tattered clothes. She felt very embarrassed. She thought that if the king imposed a tax of one paisa on everyone, it would not pinch them and she would be able to live like a queen with expensive clothes and jewellery. She came home and told the king to impose a tax of one paisa per head and to buy clothes and jewellery for her with the money. 'I go to collect water in tattered and torn clothes, which is very embarrassing for me,' she complained. The king agreed and announced in the village that everyone would have to pay a tax of one paisa each. When a lot of money had been collected, he bought expensive sarees and jewellery for the queen with it. The queen went to the pond to fill water in the clay pot wearing her expensive clothes and jewellery. When she tried to balance on the lotus leaf, she slipped into the mud because of the weight of her heavy clothes and jewellery. This angered her and she came home crying. She said to the king, 'Sell all these clothes and jewellery and return all the money to the people. I am better off as I was earlier.' At this, the king laughed and returned the money to the people. The queen once again started visiting the pond in her old clothes to fill water in the clay pot tied with a string, and the people became happy and contented once again.

This story is a critique of the system by which the hard-earned money of the people is collected by the state and used to fulfil their desires. The story also sets a moral frame for state formation in society which says that if the king is corrupt, the kingdom will not develop. Additionally, it suggests that if the king lives like his subjects, without any lavishness or extravagance, the people will be happy. Taxation has remained a basic constituent of the project of state formation from ancient to contemporary times. States imposed heavy taxes, corvee labour, etc. on the people for the expansion of the state. People at the periphery either protested or fled to refuges in the hills and mountains, where they developed alternative governance, lifestyles, and oral cultures as strategic positioning designed to keep the state at arm's length (Scott 2010: ix-x). People at the grassroots still keep alive those memories of the oppressive journey of state formation in society and recall those memories in the contemporary context when they view lavishness, misuse, and the siphoning of public money through corruption by the political class. From the terms 'king' and 'queen', it should not be inferred that the

story represents an older period; it is relevant even today. The critique of growing greed for power and money among people, especially those who have to distribute democratic resources, may be observed in these vernacular criticisms in the form of tales.

The state-oriented terms of the modern state still have not entered the language of the common people, and they still think in terms of kings and queens. In fact, they talk about present-day leaders in terms of kings and queens who rule over them. During our fieldwork to understand popular democracy, we came across several terms coined by the people to denote contemporary political processes. For example, the castes that serve as base votes for a particular political party are called '*pakke pani ka vote*': voters who do not change their loyalties. The spouses of *pradhans* are known as '*pradhan pati*' (husband) or '*pradhan patni*' (wife). These satirical terms point to the misuse of power by family members without official sanction.

Another term with rural origins that is used to describe the functioning of the state is the term '*bhaykaal*', which is used to describe a reign of terror. This term was used by a woman to describe the situation in Bhatta Parsaul—a cluster of villages in UP, close to Delhi—where the agricultural land of farmers was acquired by the government for development projects. Remembering the incidents, Omwati, a resident of this village, whose husband was killed in the revolt against the police, said that a great terror befell them. The forced acquisition led to clashes between the administration and farmers in May 2011, after the farmers protested against the move. Two policemen and two farmers died in the violence. According to the women in the village, several hundred Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) personnel and local policemen, who were manning the village, went berserk. They ransacked homes, allegedly looted shops, and set fire to whatever village property they could lay their hands on; they dragged the men out of their homes, beat them mercilessly, and took them to an unknown destination. Omwati describes the *bhaykaal* (terror) by saying that it was not the state or the bureaucracy, but a group of terrorists who wreaked havoc and destroyed the village. Although there was no actual human carnage, by setting fire to their mango trees the police conveyed the message that the villagers should keep quiet; otherwise, the entire village would be set ablaze. A large number of villagers are still missing, and many adult males have deserted the village. Many villagers come back to the village during the day, but leave as soon as dusk sets in. This is because the terror of the incident is still present in the everyday lives of the villagers and appears to them like an unending age of misfortune.

'*Bhaykaal*' describes a time in which '*bhay*' (terror) is experienced. This term reminds us of the traditional term '*Kalikaal*', which is circulated by traditional Puranic texts and epics that originated in the Mahabharata. *Kalikaal* denotes a time of injustice and anarchy. People of Bhatta Parsaul recreated this term and reconstructed the new term '*bhaykaal*'. Similarly, rural people at the grassroots communicate their social, political, and everyday experiences in their own terms and language, which may be entirely different from the terms, vocabularies, and language of modernity and state-oriented language.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to understand how people at the grassroots articulate their ideas about democratic politics, and the language they use to define present-day politics. We highlighted forms of vernacular criticism generated by the interaction of vernacular cultural and moral settings with the state-led democratic universe in Indian society. The study was carried out in two villages of Uttar Pradesh—namely, Shahabpur and Jugrajpur. Theoretically, this chapter owes many things to Nandy's critique of modernity, dominance, and state-oriented epistemology as the only language to articulate politics (Nandy 2003), but it tried to escape from the binary of culture-oriented and state-oriented language that he creates. Here, we also interacted with Hobsbawm (1978) and Guha's (1983) notions of the pre-political and understanding subaltern consciousness in terms of insurgent consciousness and the dissent of marginal people, but we tried to understand the political in terms of the so-called pre-political in the context of democratic politics (Guha 1983: 5). Here I have tried to extend the meaning of pre-political by showing that the vernacular always expresses their desires and aspirations in critical form, but one may say that they express their desires in indirect political form, which may be understood by the framework of pre-political. The intermixing of political society (Chatterjee 2004) and moral society (Tanabe 2007) helps us understand the making of critical narratives by grassroots and marginal people about state-led democracy. These critical narratives are not meant to reject outer modernity and state-led democracy being disseminated in the villages, but to create a context of critical reception for modern democratic institutions and values.

In the study, we found that people do not accept all the state-oriented terms that are disseminated, but receive them in their own ways. The manner in which they are received is based on their specific moral universe, which is reflected in their folklore and culture and in the folk consciousness that has developed through orality over generations, from the moral stories narrated by grandparents and older people to their grandchildren during leisure time. In this process, they also set a moral frame for the state-oriented political processes that are distributed to them through various delivery agencies. Thus, people at the grassroots are not merely passive recipients of the state-oriented ideas circulated among them, but engage with them and also critique them based on their political consciousness. They work as a moral society to legitimise or criticise politico-economic practices in a wider sphere, including the market economy and democratic politics. This also works to modify and reconstitute people's embodied sense of morality in relation to modern institutions and ideas of democracy, in accordance with changes in the wider socio-political context (Tanabe 2007: 561).

Notes

- 1 Sonia's *bitwa* refers to Rahul Gandhi, Vice-President of the Indian National Congress Party in India.
- 2 A flashing red beacon on a vehicle indicates that it belongs to a judge of the High Court

or Supreme Court, a powerful bureaucrat, state and central ministers, and the top echelon of the police. This beacon is the official stamp and recognition of power. It is enjoyed by those who are part of the governance of the district, state, and country. To common people in both the urban and rural space, these beacons symbolise power. This is similar to the lords and knights in medieval Europe, who were seated on horses to raise them above the common crowd.

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10 Caste and vernacular politics in Tamil Nadu, South India¹

Andrew Wyatt

Introduction

Contemporary commentators frequently express surprise at the resurgence of caste politics in Tamil Nadu. The distinctive Dravidian regional culture, it is assumed, had put Tamil Nadu on a path to social reform and the eradication of caste. This perception is usually signalled with references to the outspoken Dravidian social reformer Periar.² Such readings are rather superficial, but they do draw our attention to the expansion of a vernacular public arena in Tamil Nadu that gathered momentum in the 1950s and reset the ways in which the politics of caste was discussed and understood.

The interpretive frame of vernacularisation can be usefully applied to an analysis of caste politics in Tamilnad.³ Recent literature on other regions of India provides insights that inform my treatment of the Tamil case. Michelutti (2008) discusses the topic of vernacular democracy at length, based on ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. She concludes that democracy has been vernacularised in the sense that democratic politics has been folded into the social and cultural contexts in which it is practised. Michelutti's study of the Yadav caste cluster identifies commonalities with some other caste groups in India. She observes that socio-cultural contexts vary between caste groups and so (vernacular) democracy will be expressed in a variety of ways according to location (2008: 221, 226). Michelutti offers the suggestive thought that '(w)hen the idea of democracy takes social roots in a nation and becomes independent from the elite, popular politics thrives' (ibid.: 229). This demotic trend is amply illustrated in Michelutti's work and connects with other literature on the recent rise of lower status groups in north Indian politics (Chandra 2004; Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009).

Tanabe talks of a vernacular democracy 'based on people's creative mediation of embodied cultural resources and ideas and institutions of democracy' (Tanabe 2007: 569). He refers to a grassroots process, whereby ordinary villagers use 'nonofficial cultural resources of discourse and practice that are historically accumulated' to frame their political claims (ibid.). Tanabe makes the further point that these cultural resources are used to evolve moral bases on which social and political relationships are established or contested in a

democratic context. A vital question is then: ‘What should the moral and social basis be for local political relationships that include multiple caste groups?’ (ibid.: 563) A variant of this question has been central to politics in the Tamil-speaking area of south India since the 1920s.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first sets the context by outlining the way in which the Dravidian movement contributed to the decisive reshaping of the public arena in Tamilnad in the mid-twentieth century. This regional view of politics established a different way of addressing the question of caste and decreasing its profile as an object of contestation. The second section considers another vernacular transformation in which caste returned to the foreground of Tamil politics from the late 1980s onwards. In light of the literature on vernacularisation discussed above, I have assessed developments in each period in a threefold way. First, with regard to democratic transformation, I have assessed the significance of the changes, giving a sense of how public policy and the vocabulary of politics have shifted. Second, I have asked how vernacularisation has had an impact on the incorporation of different social groups. Third, I have asked to what extent institutions have accommodated and mediated the demands of groups in the transformed vernacular public arena. I show that the move to create a Dravidian public arena and recent attempts to reconstitute that arena threw up different rhetorical answers to the question of how social and political relationships should be constituted in a society marked by caste. Finally, I argue that it helps to think of the vernacular public arena spatially, both in a physical as well the metaphorical sense in which it is generally discussed in this volume.

The Dravidian vernacular public arena

The Tamil public arena evolved continuously over the course of the twentieth century, with the Tamil language being a frequent point of reference in political contestation and quotidian political practice. Congress nationalists, with varying degrees of success, attempted to dominate politics and public debates in the first half of the twentieth century. A cross-current during this period was the emerging Dravidian movement, which had its origins in the rediscovery and celebration of distinctive south Indian culture and languages (Ramaswamy 2001: 19). The ‘Dravidian’ languages of south India were contrasted with the supposedly Aryan, Sanskritic languages of northern India.

The Congress movement in Tamil Nadu did not demur from some Dravidian sentiments, forming a Tamilnad unit of the organisation in 1921 and using Tamil as a language to conduct business and agitations from the 1920s onwards (Wyatt 2009: 32–33). However, the Dravidian movement pulled away from the Congress as E.V. Ramaswami (EVR) Naicker became a prominent advocate of Dravidian ideas. EVR, or Periar as he became known after 1938, left the Congress in 1925 and became a fierce critic of the nationalist movement. Periar was viscerally hostile to the adoption of Hindi as a national language and attacked the caste privileges of the Tamil Brahmans, a small but influential minority in the

Madras Presidency of the 1930s. His vision of unity among the speakers of the four main Dravidian languages of south India came to little, but he did much to develop a vernacular public arena among non-Brahman Tamil speakers. Periar wrote a great deal, founding and contributing to newspapers such as *Viduthalai* (Liberation) and the journal *Kudiarasu* (Republic). His polemics and controversial public acts drew attention to his political views. This 'politics of heresy' (Subramanian 1999: 113) gained notoriety for Periar and his organisation, the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), formed in 1944. Periar promoted dramatic performances of a particular version of the *Ramayana*. This alternative reading gave the heroic role to the Dravidian king, Ravana, and portrayed the conventional hero, Rama, as an Aryan villain (Barnett 1976: 92). Periar influenced the thinking of younger followers, such as C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi, who broke from Periar in 1949 to form a political party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

The Dravidian movement marked out a political space in which elite interests were challenged and groups of modest social standing were able to express themselves. Brahmans, their culture, and their social practices were targeted in Dravidian rhetoric articulated by activists who were usually from lower caste backgrounds. The DMK attempted to soften its position, by opposing Brahmanism rather than Brahmans as individuals (Subramanian 1999: 138), but in practice it became very difficult for Brahmans to take leading positions in party politics from the 1950s onwards.⁴ Some DMK leaders were economically and ritually privileged, coming from high-status castes, such as the Saiva Vellalar, but many party members, including both Annadurai and Karunanidhi, came from backward caste families of modest means living in small towns and villages in Tamilnad. DMK activists from ordinary backgrounds in the 1950s and 1960s were often engaged in local struggles against powerful Congress notables, who had social power stemming from their status as landlords and/or party resources to distribute as patronage (Barnett 1976: 97–100, 164). The Dravidian movement also defined politics in largely regional terms, expressing hostility towards policies of the national government (Subramanian 1999: 133–135), and argued in favour of autonomy for a Tamil-speaking state (Wyatt 2009: 34–38).

The creation of a Dravidian vernacular public arena and the spread of DMK propaganda were assisted by relatively high rates of literacy in the Tamil-speaking areas that became Madras state in 1953 and also by comparatively high rates of newspaper circulation (Neyazi 2011: 78–79). This allowed the DMK to enhance its profile through newspaper reporting and the party's own publications. Leaders of the DMK reworked the language in which politics was conventionally expressed. Initially, this was done by promoting a version of Tamil that was closer to that used by the middle castes and avoiding the style of Tamil favoured by Brahmans (Ryerson 1988: 127–129). Over time, a distinctive and ornate style of Dravidian oratory emerged, and its correct use is taken as a marker of political skill. This *centamil* or 'pure' Tamil is said to reach back to classical Tamil and enables speakers to connect contemporary politics with ancient Tamil history (Bate 2009: 15). Dravidian politicians have used Tamil

history to give their political project authenticity, associating themselves with the achievements of ancient kings and mythical heroes (Rajadurai and Geetha 1996).

The DMK gained even greater influence over the public imagination with the growth of the Tamil film industry and the wide distribution of its outputs. DMK activists were attracted to the industry, and those who worked as screenwriters took the opportunity to promote their ideas in plots with Dravidian themes (Kannan 2010: 194–202; Pandian 1992). The actor and DMK supporter M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) starred in a number of these films, taking heroic roles that were, and still are, put to political use. The highly popular *Nadodi Mannan* (Vagabond King), released in 1958, showed MGR in two heroic roles fighting on behalf of the oppressed (Dickey 1993: 355–356). The film was re-released before the 2011 Assembly elections, in which political posters were banned, but MGR could be shown on posters advertising a film. MGR split from the DMK in 1972 and formed his own party, the Anna DMK (later renamed the All India ADMK [AIADMK]). Ardent supporters of MGR assumed his compassionate film persona informed his conduct when he became chief minister (Dickey 1993: 356–357). MGR was renowned for his personal generosity, acts of charity, and interest in the poor. He offered a milder interpretation of Dravidian ideas and promoted a brand of political virtue that resonated with a number of popular assumptions in Tamil culture. MGR was thought to embody many kingly attributes, as a Tamil king (*puravalan*) was expected to be generous and to protect his subjects (Price 1999: 69).

The significance of the Dravidian public arena

The reconfiguration of the public arena in Dravidian terms has been highly significant, greatly assisting the DMK and then the AIADMK in their dominance of state politics since 1967; but it has not been without tensions, contradictions, and exclusions. To what extent then did the rise of Dravidian ideas transform democratic politics in Tamil Nadu? A central legacy of the Dravidian movement was a decisive shift in political culture in Tamil Nadu towards one dominated by Dravidian rhetoric and assumptions (Price 1996; Rajadurai and Geetha 1996: 550–551).⁵ The Tamil ‘people’—a category defined in various ways—are said to be united by a common language and by wariness of an imperious north Indian elite that dominates the country. Culture and language remain politically relevant issues, with the state government acting as official patron of Tamil scholarship.⁶ The once-dominant Congress Party has lost three-quarters of its support since the 1960s and has the status of a junior ally in the bipolar alliance politics of the state (Wyatt 2009). The political elite of Tamil Nadu has been reconstituted as several generations of Dravidian politicians—many from modest caste backgrounds—have dominated the State Assembly since 1967. The politics of caste, which I will discuss in more detail below, has changed. The backward castes are very well represented in both the Assembly and the state cabinet. Reservation policies have exceeded constitutional norms, such that 69 per cent of state

employment is subject to one quota or another. M. Karunanidhi, the current leader of the DMK, takes great pride in his backward caste identity. He claims that the DMK has inverted social hierarchy in politics, illustrated in his anecdote that, when criticised for leading a 'third rate' (*moondram thara*) government, he clarified that he ran a 'fourth rate' (*nangam thara*) government. In other words, Shudras, in the fourth rank of the Varna hierarchy, rule the state (*The Hindu* 2006).

The extension of the vernacular public arena in Tamil Nadu by the Dravidian movement also had the potential to incorporate groups that had previously been excluded, giving them political recognition and a hearing in public life. The public sphere in south India was in various ways controlled, segmented, and censored until the 1950s (Pandian 1991, 1995). The Dravidian movement struck against this, arguing for caste equality, better status for women, and opening up public debate (Geetha and Rajadurai 1998: 381–382). There was some effort to diminish the social influence of caste, with caste names much less used after the 1960s, and a normative presumption against making public claims for caste privilege gained some currency.⁷ In the first two decades of Dravidian party rule, the politics of caste was pushed into the background (Dirks 1996: 290). The status of many among the backward castes improved as they gained recognition in education, business, and government employment.

The extent to which the Dravidian public arena was fully open and able to incorporate diverse social groups has been debated, with some consensus that the progressive potential of Dravidian politics has not been fully realised (Harriss 2002; Subramanian 2002: 136–138; Subramanian 2003). The Dravidian presumption against caste distinctions masked a more complex picture, as some, though not all, social inequalities were sustained in everyday practice. Dalits, in particular, were not liberated from some caste-based indignities, and in some ways, the earlier Congress political dispensation gave them better political representation. In terms of political representation, both the DMK and the AIADMK nominated candidates for the State Assembly in the reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and appointed a few dalit ministers to the state cabinet. However, with the temporary exception of Sathiyavani Muthu, who resigned from the DMK cabinet in 1974, dalit politicians remained in the background of state politics between the late 1960s and the late 1990s. The Dravidian parties have struggled to deal with the politics of caste (Barnett 1976: 299; Harriss 2002: 98). In terms of gender, the Dravidian parties did not do as much they could have done to allow women to contribute to public conversations. The DMK reinterpreted some of the earlier Dravidian arguments in favour of gender equality and promoted a political ethos that was far more masculine (Rajadurai and Geetha 1996: 568; Spary 2008: 155).

The AIADMK had a slightly different record, as it was prepared to act on behalf of women and has been led by a woman since 1989. Even so, it has not recruited a large number of women into elected office. Overall, it can be said that the Dravidian parties have not encouraged women to contribute to political dialogue. Political spaces are often gender segregated, with political parties in

the state having separate women's wings. The various party offices I have visited in Tamil Nadu since 2000 have been conspicuous for the absence of women officials and volunteers. Public conversations are gendered, as men 'have the opportunity to tarry in public spaces where they may have newspapers read out to them or participate in political discussion' (Subramanian 1999: 256)—places where women are not expected to be at leisure. Women are not completely excluded from politics, but neither is it easy for them to participate in the full range of party activities.

Dravidian political culture has another facet that is exclusionary in that the rhetorical style it has cultivated makes heavy demands on activists and audiences. Bernard Bate notes the irony that this language of democratic politics has been anything but democratic, as it strongly favours elites who are schooled in the intricacies of *centamil* and marginalises the majority who are most comfortable speaking *kochaitamil* (everyday or vulgar Tamil) (2009: 36–37).

Finally, it needs to be asked if the Dravidian vernacular public arena was able to help accommodate and mediate the demands of diverse social groups. This points my analysis towards institutions, and the answer is again mixed. Both the DMK and the AIADMK pursue a form of populist politics, esteeming the Tamil people, and this has resulted in policies that are, to some extent, inclusionary (Wyatt 2013). For the DMK, this has been expressed in the reservation policies discussed above and other assertive policies that increase the autonomy of the more upwardly mobile segments of the backward castes (Subramanian 1999; Swamy 1998). The AIADMK, in contrast, has directed its attention towards lower status groups, providing them with food subsidies via ration shops and free noon meals in schools. Accommodating the aspirations of vulnerable groups by material means was relatively straightforward, though the extent to which equality was promoted by paternalist welfare has been contested (Harriss 2000: 337; Swamy 1998: 144–146). On other issues, such as the spike in inter-caste violence in the mid- to late-1990s, the governing Dravidian parties had a poor record of mediating between social groups. In various ways, the Dravidian public arena was seen as compromised and exclusionary by the end of the 1990s (Gorringe 2005: 80). The ability of the governing parties to use populist politics as the basis on which to mobilise support was visibly diminishing as the 1990s progressed (Subramanian 2003). It was in this context that several initiatives were taken to extend the vernacular public arena, to take up longstanding grievances, and to give voice to groups that had been overlooked.

'Re-caste-ing' Tamil politics

From 1987, a number of mobilisations were organised by caste groups seeking a presence in the public arena of Tamil Nadu. The dominance of the Dravidian parties was brought into question as caste-based parties forced their way into the state party system. The politics of caste played out at the grassroots when caste inequalities were challenged or when dalit assertions were repressed by the locally powerful. Political parties, NGOs, and associations often became

involved in local disputes, pushing the issue of caste up the political agenda and making it a topic of political comment. Tension and violence receded after an upsurge in caste-related violence in the 1990s, including several large-scale incidents in the southern districts and the Chidambaram Lok Sabha constituency in 1999. However, the link between caste and public disorder returned to Tamil politics in 2012. The public arena is significantly different, because of the shift towards identity politics after 1987. The revived interest in caste politics can be illustrated with reference to four parties that have entered electoral politics since 1989: the PMK (1989) advocates the interests of the large, but low status, Vanniar backward caste group; the PT (1998) is a party of the Pallars, a dalit caste group concentrated in southern Tamil Nadu; the VCK (1999) argues for caste equality in terms inspired by the wider dalit movement, although its primary support comes from the Paraiyar caste group; and the KNMK (2009) aggregates the interests of the Kongu Vellala Gounders, a dominant caste group in the western Kongu region of Tamil Nadu.

The PMK

In September 1987, a series of demonstrations were launched in northern Tamil Nadu to demand a change in the reservation policy of the state government. Roads were blocked by felled trees, vehicles were burned, and hundreds of houses belonging to dalits were set on fire. The protestors were from the Vanniar caste group, who demanded that their 'Most Backward' caste status be officially recognised. When their demands were not met, a party was formed in 1989—the *Pattali Makkal Katchi* (PMK: Toiling People's Party), led by Dr S. Ramadoss. Shortly afterwards, the Vanniars were granted 'Most Backward' caste status, but the party remained active, getting about 5 per cent of the state-wide vote in subsequent state elections. As these votes are concentrated in northern districts, the PMK was eventually recognised as a valuable alliance partner and has been an important, if fractious, member of an alliance at every national and state election since 1998.

The PMK followed a number of prior political interventions. During the colonial period, a number of caste associations for Vanniars were formed that claimed higher ritual status for the caste group and sought greater access to public employment. In the 1950s, two short-lived parties were formed when it was felt the Congress Party was unreceptive to Vanniar entreaties (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967). Caste associations became less prominent with the rise of the DMK, who reached out to many among the backward castes, providing jobs and education via expanded quotas. Making overt claims for caste preferment was not encouraged in the Dravidian public arena, so the aggressive demonstration of Vanniar solidarity in 1987 was a moment of rupture. The caste orientation of the PMK, officially denied by its leaders, is revealed in the slogan *Vanniyar vottu anniyarikkku illai* (Vanniar votes are not for others) and continual demands for jobs and the representation of Vanniars in public life. In an interview with local PMK cadres, who also denied that they were members of a caste party, I was

quickly told how few Vanniars held senior judicial positions (Mahabalipuram, 5 December 2009). The PMK has contravened a widely held norm that expects politicians to be reticent when making public claims in favour of their own caste. In numerous interviews I have conducted in Tamil Nadu since 2000, the PMK has been singled out as a ‘communal’ or a ‘caste-ist’ party that makes overstated and inappropriate demands. The leader of the party is referred to irreverently in the Tamil press as *maravetti* Ramadoss (Ramadoss the tree-cutter), reminding readers of the direct action that culminated in the formation of the PMK.

The PMK draws on a range of ideas and discourses of politics current in India. The term ‘social justice’, popularised by backward-caste politicians in north India (Michelutti 2008: 33–35), is used to describe the agenda of the party. Politics is regarded sceptically and as having failed the Vanniars. Dr Ramadoss rejects the label ‘politician’, with its venal associations, in favour of the title ‘leader’. The PMK attempted to shake off its image as a caste party (though it has reverted to overt caste appeals very recently). When I spoke with Dr Ramadoss, I was surprised how keen he was to discuss policy issues and it was emphasised that the party took a close interest in governance matters. To confirm this, I was shown various party research papers (in English), though, unusually, I was not allowed to take any away with me (Personal interview with Dr S. Ramadoss, 27 June 2003). In the early 1990s, the PMK adopted a Tamil nationalist agenda offering support for the Eelam struggle in Sri Lanka. The party also promotes the Tamil language, often using direct action methods of the kind favoured by DMK activists in the 1960s. The PMK did badly in the 2009 Lok Sabha and 2011 Assembly elections. Leaders of the PMK have taken up caste issues much more overtly since then, and the party again looks to be a sectional one, advocating Vanniar causes. In November 2012, an outbreak of disorder in the Dharmapuri district resulted in the systematic destruction of nearly 300 houses owned by dalits. The PMK seized on the apparent cause of the incident, an inter-caste marriage involving a young Vanniar woman, and began to campaign against inter-caste marriages. The PMK may be widely despised, and often feared, but others have tried to emulate its success in gaining separate representation for their caste. Most new caste parties have failed, including numerous small parties floated just before the 2001 state Assembly elections. However, two parties that have taken up the issue of caste discrimination have been more durable.

The PT

Increased dalit assertiveness has contributed to the revival of caste politics in contemporary Tamil Nadu. The Pallar caste group of Tamil Nadu has long been wary of the Dravidian stream in state politics. The Pallars are the second largest caste group among the dalits of Tamil Nadu and are concentrated in the southern districts of the state. A series of attempts were made to mobilise the Pallars throughout the course of the twentieth century, involving caste associations, local campaigns, and political parties. In 1995, a very serious outbreak of violence involving the Pallars gave a new impetus to mobilising efforts. Dr K.

Krishnaswamy, who had earlier formed a caste association—the Devendra Kula Vellalar Federation (DKVF)—emerged as a key leader as the Pallars gave public voice to their frustration. He won an Assembly seat in 1996 and other DKVF candidates showed they had strong Pallar support (Manikumar 2001: 74–78). This encouraged the formation of a party, the *Puthiya Thamizhagam* (PT: new Tamil Nadu), which, to general surprise, won just over 450,000 votes in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections (Wyatt 2009: 136). After the events of the 1990s, the Pallar mobilisation lost some momentum. The PT performed badly in the 2001 election when it allied with the DMK, and the tense relationship with the Thevars made it difficult for the party to join alliances in later elections. Dr Krishnaswamy's political fortunes turned when he was able to make an alliance with the AIADMK to contest the 2011 State Assembly elections. The PT was given two seats, both of which it won.

The Pallar mobilisation was inspired by a number of causes and normative assumptions. The mobilisation has grown out of concerns common to many caste associations that extend to both material and symbolic issues (Michelutti 2008: 216). The Pallars are keen that the history of the caste be revived in public memory and used to restore dignity to its members. Their descent is traced back to the god Devendra, and this link has been worked into an alternative dignified title for the caste: Devendra Kula Vellalar. It is also claimed that the Pallars were once wealthy landowners, who were dispossessed of their lands by the Nayak kings (Manikumar 2001: 66). A significant caste memory is the brutal repression in 1957 of earlier attempts to politically organise themselves, including the murder of the Pallar leader, Immanuel Sekharan, in September of that year. Material concerns include access to public employment and political representation. So, in August 2001, posters could be seen displayed on the walls of the Ambedkar Law College in Chennai complaining that no Devendra Kula Vellalar held a post in the state cabinet.

The Pallars have long resented the caste indignities meted out to them by the dominant Thevar caste cluster. These include exclusion from the main village water supply, reserving the best tumblers for caste Hindus in teashops, and residential segregation. These humiliations became increasingly irksome as a growing number of Pallars gained access to education and thus improved their economic standing (Pandian 2000). Some of these issues have been addressed by the assertion of caste identity, which includes the act of erecting and protecting statues of Immanuel Sekharan or responding violently to the desecration of his image (Devakumar 2007: 44). Conversely, resistance to Thevar dominance has taken the form of attacks on statues of Muthuramalinga Thevar. At other times, the grievances of the Pallars have been put forward as human rights issues, with many NGOs pressing for public recognition of these concerns (Manikumar 2001: 79). The demands made by the Pallars include remedial action by the state government and the implementation of state and national legislation. Krishnaswamy makes frequent use of the courts as a way of raising some of these issues and is very adept at using the print media to ask awkward questions that will gain public attention.

The VCK

Another significant dalit mobilisation in Tamil Nadu began with the formation of a social movement, the Dalit Panther *Iyyakkam* (movement) (DPI) in 1982. This Tamil organisation was inspired by the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra and took up local issues of caste discrimination. The movement stood out for its activism and radical image. Its rhetoric of resistance and willingness to engage in direct action helped attract followers. The slogan ‘A hit for a hit’, popularised by the movement’s leader R. Thirumavalavan, illustrated the intention to retaliate against caste oppression and violence (Gorringer 2007: 55). The DPI entered electoral politics in 1999, when it joined a third front and put forward candidates for the Lok Sabha election that year. The DPI opposed caste discrimination in general and was not formed out of a caste association, though it is strongly associated with the Paraiyar caste group. The movement slowly changed its name, with the term *Viduthalai Chiruthaigal* (Liberation Panthers) being used as an alternative title. In 2006, the change of name was formally recognised when the *Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi* (VCK) was registered as a party with the Election Commission.

The VCK is influenced by several political traditions and seeks support using a number of methods. The wider dalit movement, including the legacy of Ambedkar, shaped the DPI, though it also argued for a distinctive and more assertive approach to politics. One of the demands of the movement is that the constitutional ban on untouchability be enforced (Interview with R. Thirumavalavan, 22 February 2000). Dalit NGOs provided intellectual and practical resources that the DPI could draw on (Gorringer 2005: 76–77). Thirumavalavan’s powerful rhetoric expressed the assertive sentiments of the DPI and outlined the context of caste politics in Tamil Nadu as one in which the Dravidian parties favoured the backward castes and suppressed the dalits. The failure of leading parties to represent the dalits meant that independent representation was necessary, a sentiment implicit in the slogan used by DPI supporters in the 1999 election campaign: ‘Our votes are for ourselves’ (Gorringer 2007: 60). The term ‘dalit’ is widely used by the English-language press in Tamil Nadu, and NGOs advocate a dalit agenda that would be easily recognisable among dalit NGOs in other states of India. However, the terminology of the movement has not slipped easily into vernacular use. So, for example, one VCK local official I spoke with at length did not use the term ‘dalit’ at all, preferring an English variation, ‘SC people’ (Interview, Kanchipuram district, 5 December 2009). Similar experiences have been reported by other researchers (David Mosse, personal communication, 24 April 2012).

The VCK gains some support, because of its close connection with the Paraiyar caste. Though the VCK was not formed as a caste party, but rather as an anti-caste party, much of its membership comes from the Paraiyar caste (Gorringer 2010: 136). Iyothee Thass, an influential dalit intellectual and also a Paraiyar, was acknowledged by Thirumavalavan as ‘the first leader of our community’ (Interview, 22 February 2000). The formation of the PMK assisted the DPI,

given that many Paraiyars do not trust the Vanniars, who sit immediately above them in the social hierarchy. After violent attacks by Vanniar supporters of the PMK during the 1999 election, the DPI gained some credibility by offering to protect the Paraiyars from future attacks. The DPI supported the cause of Tamil Eelam, which boosted its assertive image and, it was hoped, would broaden its support. The iconography of the party referenced the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with images of Thirumavalavan alongside panthers or leopards on its signboards. The term 'Liberation Panthers' was intended to associate the DPI with the Liberation Tigers, even though no formal links existed between the two movements (Gorringe 2005: 62, 65). The DPI also made several attempts to co-opt progressive elements of Dravidian ideology. So, for example, Thirumavalavan has expressed his opposition to 'Aryan' Hinduism (2003: 165–168). In doing so, the DPI converged with the PMK, which was also looking to present itself as an authentically Tamil party. Both organisations helped form the *Tamil Padukappu Iyakkam* (Tamil Protection movement) in September 2004. The VCK and the PMK worked together for a number of years, using Tamil nationalist issues as a bridge, but the parties diverged after the Dharmapuri attacks in November 2012 and the renewed emphasis on caste pride in PMK propaganda.

The KNMK

The tide of identity politics seemed to have turned in the mid-2000s as large-scale caste violence did not reoccur and the 2006 Assembly election was dominated by welfare issues. After it gained power in May 2006, the DMK put a great deal of effort into expanding state welfare provisions and the mass provision of consumer items, such as gas stoves and colour televisions, to ordinary voters. Somewhat surprisingly, another party raising the issue of caste was formed just before the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. The Kongu Nadu Munnetra Kazhagam (KNMK) is notionally a party for the western Kongu region, but it was launched by members of the Kongu Vellalar Gounder caste federation. In some ways, the KNMK resembles the PMK in that it is concerned with the issue of representation of the caste, and it is concerned that the Gounders should not lose ground to lower-status dalits, who are making stronger demands. In other ways, the parties differ. The Gounders have a higher ritual status than the Vanniars and are, for the most part, economically prosperous (Vijayabaskar and Wyatt 2013).

The KNMK is somewhat unusual in state politics in that it does not make anything more than the most superficial connections with Dravidian political ideas or symbolism. The party falls back on a number of themes that resonate with Gounder identity. The Gounders are sensitive about their social position; many, but by no means all, Gounders are wealthy. Gounder leaders feel they do not get their due from the state; they claim they are taxed heavily, but the region gets insufficient investment in infrastructure. Gounders dominate the party organisations of the DMK and AIADMK in the Kongu region, but they do not hold the most senior posts in the party or the state cabinet. A very sensitive issue

is the use of the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR), which is supposed to protect dalits from caste abuse. Gounders claim that the PCR Act is misused by dalit Arunthaiyars to settle grievances against Gounder employers. The KNMK argues for changes to the Act, and party cadres take direct action to prevent cases from being registered (Vijayabaskar and Wyatt 2013). The KNMK presents itself as a sub-regional party, linking itself to the earlier existence of a separate kingdom in western Tamil Nadu. However, this kingdom is said to have been a Gounder kingdom, and the twin heroes of the Ponnar–Shankar epic, which features in images used by the party, are claimed as Gounders.

Assessing the impact of caste-based mobilisation on the vernacular public arena

The increased salience of caste-based mobilisation since 1987 has changed politics in Tamil Nadu. There has been significant party system change, with the four parties discussed above being admitted to the electoral alliances headed by the DMK and AIADMK. Politics is more plural, with a larger number of parties in the State Assembly and election outcomes having an element of uncertainty generated by the alignment of the smaller parties. The willingness of junior parties to switch alliances partly explains why the AIADMK and DMK have not been able to win re-elections since 1989, after a period in government. This pluralism is also reflected at the local level, whereby multiple parties are working to mobilise support and speak for their supporters. The party controlling the state government may influence the flow of material resources at the district level, but they do not monopolise political activity. So, for example, in the Kanchipuram district, the political terrain is very diverse. As well as the major parties, the PMK and the VCK are active, with minor party functionaries organising local campaigns and speaking up for their supporters on issues of concern. In addition, local movements and NGOs have contested the ownership of land set aside for dalits (Personal communication with Jerome Samraj, 5 December 2009).

The vocabulary used in the public arena in which state politics is debated has shifted since the late 1980s. Dravidian political culture is less influential in shaping discussions of caste politics. Political leaders of the new parties appeal to caste pride, referencing the virtues associated with their caste, and claim a fair share for their community. The influence of dalit activism has had the unusual effect of obliging regional and local arenas to absorb elements of national politics. Diane Mines comments on the use of an image of Ambedkar in a village temple festival in southern Tamil as ‘a powerful, pragmatic use of a nationally recognized sign that indexed an explicitly egalitarian political ideology’ (Mines 2002: 72). The figure of Ambedkar has become commonplace in Tamil Nadu, with statues being erected in many villages and his picture adorning the posters of many political parties. That some view Ambedkar as an outsider to the region was revealed in speeches by DMK leaders in 2000 that equated Periar and Ambedkar and complimented Ambedkar on re-affirming the aspirations of the Dravidian movement across India (*The Hindu* 2000).

Dravidian politicians have not always been resolute in resisting the trend towards caste-based appeals. The DMK was criticised as opportunistic for allying with the minor caste parties that sprang up in 2001. In 2006, it was alleged that the DMK made a crude appeal to Thevar caste pride during the Assembly election campaign. Conversely, the position of new parties on Dravidian ideas varies. Krishnaswamy rejects Dravidianism, which is signalled in the name of the party. Referring to *Puthiya Thamizhagam* (new Tamil Nadu) suggests that the 'old' Dravidian Tamil Nadu was not an equal society (Interview, 28 February 2000). Thirumavalavan of the VCK and Ramadoss of the PMK are more equivocal. They identify strongly with Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and have appropriated Dravidian themes, including Tamil language issues. In summary, it can be said that caste is debated in different ways, and the topic cannot be ignored. Dravidian ideas remain present, but they contend with, while also contributing to, hybrid discourses on caste.

The increased emphasis on caste in state politics has resulted in some changes in the incorporation of lower status groups. The dalit parties were treated warily at the time of their formation, and their early experience of alliance politics was unhappy, with reports of activists from other parties declining to work with them in 2001. The VCK joined the AIADMK alliance for the 2006 Assembly elections, but VCK sympathisers were upset that the leader of the AIADMK refused to address election rallies alongside other leaders. These tensions have subsided in recent years, as the dalit parties have been treated with more respect by the mainstream parties. The VCK worked closely with the DMK between 2006 and 2011. The leadership of the VCK had good access to the DMK Deputy Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, and could lobby him without difficulty (Personal communication with M. Vijayabaskar, 30 November 2009). In the 2011 Assembly election, Krishnaswamy of the PT shared a platform with the AIADMK leader, Jayalalithaa.

Among the mainstream parties, a little has been done to recruit more dalits. In the DMK, the career of A. Raja, the former Perambalur DMK District Secretary and Union Cabinet Minister, took off just as the dalit parties came to prominence. The DMK has added additional posts at the district level for women and dalits to increase their representation and compensate for their general absence among the powerful district secretaries of the party (Interview with A.S. Panneerselvan, 18 December 2009). However, the incorporation of groups previously overlooked is far from complete. Some VCK sympathisers worry that their leaders have sold out and have ceased to work for substantive change (Gorringe 2007). In 2011, only 17 of the 234 MLAs elected were women, and dalits are still not prominent in the state cabinet.

The extent to which the demands of lower status groups are accommodated and mediated remains limited. The attitude of the state is often paternalist when it engages with 'weaker sections'. Policies for women tend to be top-down initiatives delivered unevenly (Spary 2008). Since 2006, the Government of Tamil Nadu has been able to increase spending on welfare, which has benefitted many (Vijayabaskar 2011). Some benefits are entitlements, such as the PDS scheme,

but others are discretionary and given in ways that do not increase the dignity of the recipients. Between 2006 and 2011, the DMK Government organised countless events at which ministers and MLAs distributed benefits as if they were gifts to poor recipients. Caste tensions have been ‘managed’ more effectively since the late 1990s, but this has been achieved partly by more active policing and discouraging local protests. The installation of new statues is tightly controlled, and in the southern districts, protective cages are often used to protect these images of caste leaders. The limits of policing were revealed in September 2011, when seven dalits were killed when the police fired live rounds during a riot in Paramakudi. Collectors do convene peace committees and seek to mediate disputes that are more serious, but on other occasions, dalits are coerced by the locally powerful into not pressing charges in cases of caste-related crimes (Vijayabaskar and Wyatt 2013).

The role of the media in shaping the vernacular public arena has changed. The expansion of satellite and cable channels has proven advantageous to those with resources, especially the DMK and AIADMK, and it is impossible for smaller political organisations to get an equivalent voice. In terms of news coverage, the AIADMK benefits from controlling Jaya TV, and the DMK usually gets strong support from Sun TV, even though it is financially independent from the party. The PMK recognised this and established its own channel, Makkal TV, and the VCK has acquired a weekly slot on another channel. Even so, these are small efforts compared to the larger organisations, with Sun TV controlling several Tamil newspapers as well. Yet there is still plurality, as the reading public can access a variety of viewpoints from the weekly Tamil magazines that are prepared to run stories that the more cautious English language press are reluctant to publish. The tradition of small political and literary journals continues, with monthly magazines like *Dalit Murasu* providing alternative perspectives.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to comment on the format and spatial arrangement of the vernacular public arena. Much of the discussion in this volume refers to an arena in a metaphorical sense or to a ‘virtual’ arena that is not predicated on face-to-face encounters. Protagonists frequently seek the sympathy of a larger audience and seek to enlarge the public arena using media outlets. To gain attention, they may emphasise performative aspects of their intervention in public conversation and disputation. This introduces the possibility that claim-making, discussion, and dialogue will be amplified, or distorted, as it is mediated by different communication outlets.

The material spatiality of the public arena influences the development of vernacular politics in several ways. An important issue in recent Tamil politics has been physical access to public spaces. As Gorringer observes, dalit activists have been concerned to claim the right to use public space for political purposes. The erection of flags on roadsides and pasting posters on walls involves the public

expression of political beliefs and makes claims visibly present in public spaces (Gorringe 2005: 196–203). Raising statues raises similar issues about presence and the recognition of the political standing of the statues' sponsors. Demands to erect statues of Ambedkar and Veeran Sundaralingam have been made by dalit activists in many localities in Tamil Nadu. Religious festivals are an important public arena in which questions of social status are negotiated, because decisions are made about the routes for processions and the ritual roles assigned to different groups (Mines 2002). The physical proximity and the spatial arrangement of protagonists in a public arena also have an impact on what is discussed or contested. In small villages, contentious claims, such as insisting on caste privileges or challenging those privileges, may be suppressed so that costly social conflict can be avoided (Mosse 2006). Economic dependence also skews the public arena, as dalits risk boycotts if their political activity offends their employers (Gorringe 2005: 12–13). Much political activity remains local, where the spatial aspect of the arena has significant implications for public discussions.

Politics in Tamil Nadu has been profoundly shaped by the rise of Dravidian ideas and the subsequent delineation of a vernacular public arena that brought many social privileges into question and created a distinctive regional outlook. However, as we have seen, the drive towards equality was partial and not all lower status groups were incorporated. Even with these shortcomings, the Dravidian public arena was notable for its breadth and the attempt to transcend narrower identities by promoting a sense of Tamil-ness. What I think is particularly interesting about the Tamil case is that the cultural context in which vernacularisation occurs is not given. It is not necessarily the case that the caste group will provide the cultural context that will influence the social understanding of democratic ideas, though of course the empirical evidence given here and elsewhere shows that it often is (Michelutti 2008: 216). The Dravidian public arena was in part an attempt to create a new cultural context into which democratic political ideas could be given vernacular meaning, and that continues to be the case where the Tamil public does not use caste to define their social existence. Clearly, caste does remain highly influential for many, but a legacy of the Dravidian movement is that some individuals allow other forms of identity to order their social life, shape their political outlook, or supplement their caste identity.⁸

Many Tamil intellectuals still believe that the ideas of the Dravidian movement, including those voiced by Periar, offer a viable basis on which to articulate progressive politics relevant to contemporary problems. This contrasts with the ruling Dravidian parties, which have been criticised for failing to advance a progressive agenda that involves significant redistributive reforms and for acting to reinforce economic privilege by, among other things, coercing labour organisations (Harriss 2000; Washbrook 1989). Some argue that party politics, dominated as it is by the two Dravidian parties, narrows political debate and that the parties do not act on the concerns of ordinary people. These critics claim these omissions oblige progressive–leftist social movements to outline a more comprehensive agenda that includes issues such as environmental degradation, women's rights, rural development, and redistribution (Interview with Samy, 30 April 2006).

Dravidian vernacularisation did provide a moral basis for ordering social relations in a society with multiple castes (Tanabe 2007: 563). Caste privileges were de-legitimised in the public arena and inter-caste marriages suggested as one mechanism for weakening social stratification. However, the Dravidian movement and the Dravidian political parties did not, and perhaps could not, promote the social change necessary to drastically reduce caste inequality. Thus, the Dravidian public arena did not do enough to incorporate or accommodate the aspirations of various lower-status groups, which could have provided space for alternative narratives to develop.

The caste-based mobilisations launched since the late 1980s have challenged the assumption that the Dravidian public arena allowed all Tamils to contribute equally to public life. The result is that a relatively cohesive regional political culture has been fragmented as dissident views have been strongly expressed. The contemporary public arena is one in which competing, and sometimes overlapping, discourses are expressed. Several of the new parties have created rival political cultures built from a combination of different cultural resources (Michelutti 2008: 216). These hybrid political formulations mix a selection of caste traditions, myths, Ambedkarism, and Dravidian ideas. Yet caste-based subcultures are by no means hegemonic; they still contend with other political narratives expressed in Tamil society.

Notes

- 1 I am very grateful to the participants at the conference workshop and to Carole Spary for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
- 2 So, for example, a chapter on caste politics in Vaasanthi's 2006 book on Tamil Nadu is titled 'Caste politics in Periyar's Tamil country'. In December 2000, *The Indian Express* ran a story under the headline 'Caste outfits to the fore in the land of Periyar'. On 12 May 2012, an op-ed article in *The Hindu* newspaper titled 'Perpetuating the scourge of caste' opened with the sentence: 'In the land of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, founder of the Self-Respect Movement and the Dravida Kazhagam through which he worked for eradication of the caste system, caste is still the worst scourge.'
- 3 The term *Tamilnad* is used to refer to the Tamil-speaking area of south India. It was commonly used to refer to the region informally, until Madras State was officially renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969.
- 4 The leader of the AIADMK, Jayalalithaa Jayaram, is an obvious exception, but very few others hold elected office in contemporary Tamil Nadu.
- 5 This political culture was widely, but not universally, accepted. In addition to the Brahmans, some other segments of Tamil society were not that enamoured of Dravidian ideas (Subramanian 2002: 132).
- 6 In June 2010, the Government of Tamil Nadu spent over Rs.300 crore on the *Ulaga Tamil Semmozhi Manadu* (World Tamil Conference) in Coimbatore (*Frontline* 2010).
- 7 In January 2010, the DMK party leader M. Karunanidhi gave voice to this view at a wedding ceremony, after it was alleged that one of his ministers boasted about the number of his caste fellows present. In comments that were seen as a rebuke, Karunanidhi said: 'I cannot see people based on their caste or creed. For me everyone is Tamil. That feeling should bind us together' (*News Today* 2010).

8 Dickey (2012) provides a fascinating account of the growth of middle class identities among the residents of Madurai, and it might be said that these identities were shaped in a process of vernacularisation.

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11 Against the public sphere

The morals of disclosure and the 'vernacular public sphere' in rural Rajasthan¹

Anastasia Piliavsky

Disclosure is a social achievement. It is the result of a great deal of communicative effort in a studied process of concealment and revelation. It is an outcome of transmission, not a freestanding or natural state in which people simply happen to find themselves. All public things—statements, images, persons, facts—are man-made, and they have all had to be prefigured before being put on display. Public disclosure requires a dual will to reveal and to receive revelation. Extreme disclosure, on which the culture of publicity, auditing, transparency, and mass media now insists, requires people to have such a will and to espouse a particular set of values that would incline them to revelation. Within such a culture, people must value visibility rather than secrecy and social inclusiveness rather than social difference. The values of visibility and inclusion are basic to the idea of the public sphere, as it has been advanced by metropolitan theorists and activists of the political good life.

This chapter takes its readers to a very different world in the north Indian countryside. Drawing on three years of field research in Rajasthan (conducted between 2005 and 2013), it offers a worm's-eye view of the political world in a rural market town, which I shall call Fararpur. As in most rural towns in northern India, in Fararpur literacy is sparse, electrical supply unreliable, access to the internet available to few, and the bazaar remains the major hub of political communications. It is, as Badri Narayan put it, the main political 'talking sphere' (2011: xxv) where news and rumours circulate wildly, political alliances and careers are made and unmade, and many political views and collective decisions take shape. The bazaar is the 'off-stage terrain' where political facts that later reach public view take shape (Shryock 2004; also Herzfeld 1997). If the publicly available facts of democracy (political campaigns, statistics of party loyalties, elected politicians, election results) are the 'outputs' of political process, discussions in the marketplace are its 'inputs'. It is in the bazaar that we may begin to see how communications that yield political outcomes may actually occur.

I treat the editors' call to examine the 'vernacular public arena' as an invitation both to think sociologically about an arena of Indian political communications and to respond critically to the liberal concept of the public sphere through the optics of rural Indian life. Were it not for Jürgen Habermas's launch of the

phrase 'public sphere' into global intellectual circulation, the volume would not bear its present title. Thus, we cannot speak of *a* (vernacular) public sphere without thinking about *the* public (liberal) sphere. I argue that vast stretches of Indian popular politics cannot be usefully understood through the category of the liberal public sphere and that, if we use the concept at all, it must mean something very different.

At first sight, the bazaar in Fararpur may look like the Rajasthani equivalent of Habermas's salons and town squares of eighteenth-century Europe: an unstructured, open arena of uninhibited disclosure. But in this chapter I show that things are not as they seem. As Rajasthanis see it, visibility and inclusion do not help communications, political or otherwise. On the contrary: secrecy is the predominant value and the main structuring force in discussions. So, if for liberal theorists *transparency* is a virtue that allows greater discursive and political possibilities, for the residents of Fararpur visibility is the threat of *exposure* that inhibits self-expression, conversation, and, ultimately, the making of choices. Declarations made in the open are slogans not meant for dialogue. Real, productive conversations take place somewhere else: off-stage and behind closed doors.

India and the idea of the public sphere

India is the most celebrated contemporary triumph of global political modernity, and leading commentators ceaselessly applaud the verve with which ordinary Indian citizens have embraced democracy, political activism, the institutions of civil society, and other signs of modern political civilisation (Banerjee 2008; Kaviraj 2011; Khilnani 1997). The post-independence surge of democracy on the subcontinent has indeed been astonishing, perhaps even miraculous (Desai 2011; Guha 2007). Just a few decades ago, India was a fragmented collection of kingdoms, little kingdoms, and tiny kingdoms, countless castes, sub-castes and sub-sub-castes, with people speaking different languages and worshipping different gods every few miles. But by now it has emerged as a vastly energetic democratic state boasting nearly a billion active voters. Indian national elections are the largest single organised social event in the world, and voter turnouts on all levels consistently outdo those in most of Europe and the US (Yadav 2000). Moreover, counter to all expectations, tribals, dalits, villagers, and the urban poor vote with no less enthusiasm than townspeople, middle classes, and urban elites. How did, and how could, this happen? How could a society so recently and so deeply divided, so readily rise to the task of mass political participation that democracy sets?

There are no clear or comprehensive answers, but a general consensus has by now emerged: at the base of India's democratic boom lies a tectonic shift in the foundations of its society. Previously, Indian society comprised a hierarchical order of ranked and interdependent status groups, known by old convention as 'castes', in which the balance of political agency was tilted toward those with status, money, and power. Political modernity, when it arrived, drastically

changed all that. Provisions of equal citizenship and universal adult suffrage alone have encouraged the growing participation of the poor, the marginal, and the oppressed in the domain of political action. And the domain itself has grown: since independence, India has been the site of a remarkable efflorescence of mass protest movements, vernacular media (Neyazi 2011), and NGOs (of which there were 3.3 million in 2009)—the institutions of modern associational life we call ‘civil society’. Commentators tell us that such a society, or perhaps a more narrowly defined ‘political society’ (Chatterjee 1997; 2004), has been operating in the growing, politically conscious, openly vocal, and socially mixed political domain, the shorthand for which is the ‘public sphere’ (e.g., Nussbaum 2007). The old logic of caste has not altogether disappeared, critics say; old castes have closed their ranks, and new castes and even ‘super castes’ have emerged (e.g., Michelutti 2008; Rudolph and Rudolph 1960). These communities, however, are no longer the interdependent, hierarchically ordered castes, but increasingly freestanding, internally mixed, and egalitarian ethnic groups that compete over political and economic resources (e.g., Barnett 1975; Chandra 2004; Fuller 1996). We have been told, in other words, that caste has persisted more in form than in substance, displaced as it has been by various mixed ‘publics’ united by shared political and economic concerns. The transformation is by no means complete, analysts tell us, but the changes have been dramatic, forcing the framework of the old edifice of social difference to buckle under its weight.²

These accounts extend to India the story already told about Europe. Its most influential living narrator, Jürgen Habermas, proposed that the rise of democratic governance in eighteenth-century Europe was inexorably linked to the emergence of a bourgeois sociopolitical domain he called the ‘public sphere’.³ This new domain was a communicative space where people congregated to discuss shared concerns and potentially form collective judgements. Under feudalism, public disclosure was no more than a spectacle, as royals and aristocrats performed the dramas of grandeur before their subjects. In the emergent bourgeois order, publicity acquired a different sense, becoming the key aspect of political communications. The new public arena was a space where differences of status were suspended in favour of differences of opinion expressed in open and rational debate. Total discursive openness and rejection of status was initially no more than a bourgeois conceit. Locations of ‘public debate’ in early modern Europe—cafés and literary salons—were the exclusive haunts of the urban middle class. In time, however, the culture of publicity spilled out onto the street, where people of all classes increasingly gathered to voice their views, engage in debate, and make collective political decisions. This seismic shift, Habermas tells us, shook European political life to its very foundations. Whereas previously social position determined political decisions, now it was the rational–critical arguments of open and mixed assemblies which formed the authoritative basis for political action and consent (Habermas [1962] 1989).⁴

Habermas’s case is not only historical, but also normative: the public sphere was as foundational to the rise of democracy in Europe as it continues to be

around the world today. The logic of this claim is easy enough to follow. Democracy, as rule by the *demoi*, is governance by the governed, whose political involvement requires discursive space. In today's democracies, this space is formally provided by the institutions of universal adult suffrage and political representation. But for a democracy to truly flourish, this is not enough. In its primal and ideal form, democratic governance relied substantially, as it should have, on face-to-face debate of the kind once staged in ancient Athens, eighteenth-century French salons, and nineteenth-century German market squares. Most of today's democracies are at some remove from the ideal of direct and open deliberation, but the ideal remains the widespread basis for judgements over the extent to which any given democracy succeeds or fails.

The ideal of complete social disclosure, which requires total social inclusion and visibility, is basic to the very idea of 'public' (or a public, or the public). Whether defined as 'the people as a whole' (a university, a nation, a state, the body politic, Christendom, or the human race); as property belonging to, or as those who represent this whole; as an audience of a play or a book; or as a public house—'public' implies, first, total, undifferentiated inclusion and second, wholly unobstructed visibility. These are the basic 'institutional criteria' of the public sphere, as described by Habermas, for whom whatever the 'size and compositions of their publics, the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations', the early public arenas were defined by their socially inclusivity and discursive openness ([1962] 1989: 36ff.). The liberal theory of political emancipation elevates the virtues of inclusion and visibility to the status of master principles of good governance—participation and transparency—which supposedly expand political possibilities and ensure better political outcomes for all. NGOs, watchdog organisations, and the Occupy Movement protesters alike prescribe these principles as remedies for most political ills.

As a deliberative institution, the public sphere presupposes a theory of communication, which describes a space completely open to debate and shaped solely by practical reason. In the public sphere, the individual transcends society, as all social barriers are removed to allow the free flow of individual opinion. This picture of a communicative vacuum with no social divisions or interactional rules, filled with pure individual opinion, will strike a social scientist as odd. But for an individualist, it is precisely this picture that carries appeal.

The bazaar and the gaze

For ordinary Rajasthani villagers, the word 'public', or rather its vernacular homophone *pablik*, carries a very different sense. First of all, it is never an adjective: linguistically, there are no public meetings, toilets, or intellectuals in rural north India.⁵ Second, there is no vernacular 'private' to which *pablik* can be opposed. Anyone who has ever needed a public latrine while travelling in the region will readily perceive this linguistic and conceptual gap. Latrines are only one aspect of the general layout of north Indian towns and villages, which strike

a European visitor with the absence of what they recognise as public space. Few streets in northern India resemble the ordered, open spaces of European cities; most of them are chaotic, dirty, and dangerous, open to everyone, yet belonging to none. There are few places where one can congregate or even walk freely (sidewalks are a colonial introduction); pedestrians, rickshaw drivers, and housewives who sweep their rubbish out directly onto the street (where hardly anyone ever collects it) use streets as cesspits into which detritus can be freely disgorged. Homes, in contrast, are kept fastidiously clean at the street's expense, as much in small-town India as in its metropolitan centres (Rajagopal 2004). Only 'bazaar people' loaf about in the streets—uncouth youths, rickshaw drivers, beggars, and other riffraff. Respectable people move quickly and cautiously across roads from one familiar place to the next.

As a noun, *pablik* does not refer to any communicative sphere, but to a grand, external, and perhaps even mystical force, an all-knowing source of authoritative knowledge that stands apart from society and above ordinary man. In rural Rajasthan people imagine it as one of the constituent powers in the triumvirate of the Indian state: 'public, government, and administration' (*pablik, sarkar aur prashasan*). Reporters and politicians who insist that India is governed by the 'public' confirm the popular sense of *pablik* as a discrete and distant entity. And in so doing, they join political analysts in their celebrations of the rise of the Indian public sphere. Ordinary villagers join in the festivities. If you asked them: 'Who governs India?', they might say: 'public, government, and administration'. What would make much less sense to them is the idea that the villagers themselves are somehow included in this *pablik* or a 'public' where their own expression, interaction, and decision-making really take place. Yet the lack of a vernacular word that may be neatly translated as 'public' (either as noun or adjective) need not prevent us from tracing the contours of its local sense.

Just as in Ancient Greece or in eighteenth-century Europe, in northern India the marketplace, the bazaar, is the ultimate 'public' environment; like the English term 'market', the word 'bazaar' refers both to a physical location and a conceptual space. In rural north India, any sizeable village or town must have a bazaar, the heart of its commercial and social activity. This is where farmers sell their produce and catch up on the latest gossip, gangs of boys roam in search of girls to ogle, public buses crowd at stations, sellers lounge in tea stalls, and politicians do much of their business. Conceptually, the bazaar is any space in principle available to all, where one can observe, and be observed by, anyone who happens to be there.⁶ The bazaar and the public sphere share two key characteristics: in principle, both are internally unstructured and wholly available to all. In everyday speech, the 'bazaar' refers not just to the marketplace as such, but to the general chaos of life on the streets. Moral ambivalence over the bazaar is reflected in several Hindi phrases and words. A *bazarani* is a 'loose woman' and unreliable rumour or corrosive gossip is commonly known as *bazaru chiz* (marketplace thing) or *bazar ki bat* (marketplace talk).

So why is the bazaar such a disquieting place? Its real dangers are not the risks of slipping on cowpats, being bitten by dogs, or being run over by a bus

(real though these may be). Its menace is social, not physical. The marketplace threatens with its potential for complete openness. It threatens exposure. The very conditions that might make it an ideal public space alarms villagers in Rajasthan. Here, total, unmitigated exposure is a threat, and many ordinary villagers avoid excursions to the bazaar; when they do venture out, many prepare for the trip for days on end and finally attend with trepidation and preferably in familiar company. One must emerge at one's best, and the dressiness of the marketplace—the immaculately pressed shirts, the starchy whiteness of loincloths, the special brightness of turbans and saris, the oiled hair—communicates as plainly as anything that the marketplace is a stage. Because the stage is so completely exposed to promiscuous inspection, the performance must be tightly choreographed. Women lower their veils, children quiet down, and the otherwise boisterous young boys from reputable families suddenly take on an air of poised maturity. The general rule for respectable people is that in the bazaar all personal expression must be subdued: one must not speak much, gesticulate wildly, laugh loudly, or even smile broadly enough to show teeth.⁷

Why this apparent agoraphobia? Rajasthanis are not reclusive by custom or culturally taciturn, but the permissiveness of the bazaar as a place changes all that. Instead of promoting expression, it gets in its way. And the extreme veiling vigilance among women in the bazaar is but one obvious expression of anxieties at unrestricted exposure. Appearances matter, particularly when close to home. To speak out in the open, at once to no one in particular and to everyone, is to speak out of turn. And casual visitors to the bazaar eschew speaking almost entirely, lest they say the wrong thing, in the wrong way, at the wrong time, to the wrong person, and reveal a lack of social competence—a vital virtue. This is what children and foreigners do, not sane and respectable adults. In the words of a Fararpur vegetable seller, 'only madmen babble in the bazaar'.

This attitude to public exposure may seem peculiar, but all instances of speech are shaped minimally by considerations of speakers' and listeners' identities, their relations to one another, and the circumstances in which they take place (e.g. Goffman 1959; Hymes 1974). Whether, how, and what one says is dependent on social context. This is just as true of communication in Europe or the US as in India or anywhere else. However intimate and comfortable the environment, there are always constraints on what can and cannot be said and prescriptions for what ought to be said, for what purpose, and how. The Habermasian picture of opinion that is cleanly one's own and flows unreservedly in the public domain suppresses all this and would sound peculiar to the residents of Fararpur, at ease with the thought that how people express their views, and indeed how they form their judgements, is socially embedded.

In the bazaar

The marketplace is also a place of many opportunities. An entire class of men (they are mostly men) make being in the bazaar their principal business. Aside from the shopkeepers, most of these men are political entrepreneurs: party bosses

and their acolytes, members of village councils, caste leaders, village headmen, and other political fixers, pushers and go-betweens. Tea stalls, jewellery shops, and tractor showrooms in the bazaar are usually full of such men sipping tea, chatting, watching. These men are not idling. They are doing important business, which we might call ‘politics’, although locally it is rarely called just that. The word ‘politics’, *rajniti*, as circulated in official circles and the press, is both too vague and narrowly formal for an activity with such a vital presence in everyday lives. Usually, it is simply called ‘business’, *dhandā*, the elusive yet all-pervading preoccupation of aspiring men. Once one’s eye is attuned to its subtle movements, one can see it at work all around the bazaar.

Just what is this business? Whatever the aims of any particular political entrepreneur, the business of politics, as locally conceived, is essentially a communicative enterprise, perhaps better glossed as ‘politicking’. The bulk of political practice—what most politicians of all stripes spend most of their time doing—consists of negotiations to forge alliances with businesspeople, make deals with bureaucrats, arrange administrative favours, and secure electoral loyalties.⁸ Naturally, people ‘talk politics’ in all sorts of places: at home, in temples, in police stations and offices, and while working in the fields. But the marketplace is the real hub of political discussion, abuzz with talk of parties and candidates, rumours of village council politics, and chats that forge and break political coalitions and deals. This is where ‘talking politics’ turns from abstract reflection and idle rumour-mongering into focused discussions, where political views and desires are forged, and outcomes intermittently secured. This is as close as rural Rajasthan gets to late eighteenth-century European town squares, alive with face-to-face debate.

This claim is no contradiction of my argument thus far. If public exposure impedes expression, why should the bazaar, the most exposed public space, function as the hub of political communications? The contrast between bazaar as a *conceptual space* and *physical location* is important. Whilst in principle the bazaar is a completely open space, as a location it is deeply divided (Gell 1982; Yang 1998). People of respectable standing never just wander about here. They follow their own well-established routes. Only visitors from afar with no connections in town roam the streets and buy things from whichever seller happens to offer better products or price. Anyone taken shopping in rural north India knows that the process follows social associations, not economic advantage. Your Indian host will never take you to just any shop, but to their own vegetable or bangle seller, sweetsmonger, or tea stall. Political entrepreneurs who spend most of their waking hours in the bazaar do not mill around in the open among the lowly and free-range ‘market folk’. Instead, they hide from sight in their circles of associates and regular haunts, their ‘stations’. As my research continued and I developed a sense of the political topography of the marketplace, I realised that most cafés and shops in the bazaar teem with politicians.

In 2005, when I first began field research in Fararpur, I met a man I shall call Gopal. He is a Brahmin by caste, a lawyer by profession, and the owner of a tractor showroom. He is an important player in the local unit of the Janata Party

(one of the two major national political parties at large at the time in Fararpur and Rajasthan) and is also involved in the local 'land mafia' (*bhoomi dal*)—the local name for the loose cartel of wealthy and politically connected men who buy and sell land. The land mafia business is brutal, often extortionist, and Gopal certainly has a dark side. His son and several of his nephews are members of the Bajrang Dal, a militant Hindu youth organisation that often provides the muscle required by the land mafia. But Gopal himself operates less through muscle than political acumen. Politically astute and witty, he was always instructive company, and I spent a great deal of time in the marketplace 'station' where he can be found throughout the day.

The station is a medicine shop run by his nephew. In most respects, it is identical to a dozen others in the Fararpur market, if smarter: immaculately clean, centrally located, and with a colour TV, it is pricier than most others and attracts a finer clientele. Like most other local shops, it is still a crammed little place, no more than four feet wide and receding several feet back from the street. It has a counter that faces the street and some storage space in the back, but most of the space is taken up by a bench that stretches into the shop's depth and, although meant to seat no more than three men, usually bears at least five. Gopal's usual place is at the far end of the bench, where his figure is barely discernible in the darkness of the shop's interior, made blacker by the blazing light outside. I knew that on most days I could find Gopal in his station, but often walked past the shop, and sometimes peered right into it, but did not see him at all. For him and his friends, this was a source of endless amusement: 'What, can't you see me, Asia (my local nickname)?' he would call out to me, chuckling. 'It is more difficult to see a Big Man than to see Lord Krishna himself.' I would confirm that he was, indeed, as magnificent as the God Krishna; he would laugh in response and carry on: 'Darkness, Asia, is where politics happens, and the bigger the politics, the darker the darkness.' Or: 'In politics, you never see what is actually going on ... what you see on the streets is not politics. It may be dirty, but it is not politics.' Gopal's witticisms were only ever half-jokes. They point to something at the heart of local political communication: seclusion and the business of politics go hand in hand. Politics is quintessentially something that is carried out off-stage, behind screens, 'in the dark'. This may sound like spy novel talk, but there is more to it than the rhetoric of intrigue.

It is no coincidence that local political entrepreneurs haunt the interiors of shops, not the open space of the market square. Although most shops open directly onto a thoroughfare, their contents are closely guarded, and prying strangers who linger outside are briskly moved on. What goes on inside is not for public disclosure. As the Muslim butcher, whose eatery provides the local Muslim community leader's station, put it: 'We don't like all sorts of people hanging around here. This is a place for conversations (*bat-batchit*). It should stay closed.' Suitably enough, his establishment looks dark and cavernous, more like a Hindu temple than a mosque. Most politicians' haunts have this womb-like feel. Political entrepreneurs deal in conversations, and conversations need screens.

Not everyone can hide in a shop. Only men of consequence, like Gopal, are so well positioned. Others spend their time in roadside teashops and snack stalls, open to the flow of all and sundry and full of folk of lower standing. Men of Gopal's stature rarely enter such dives. They have tea and snacks delivered to their stations. The teashop, with all of its street traffic, is still preferable to the wide-open places in the bazaar, where only the lowly mill. On closer inspection, however, even its most open areas are full of screens concealing conversations. What at first sight appears like a chaotic human mess is in fact a very orderly and deeply divided interactional sphere. Whenever there is need for conversation, 'screens' go up. A wide repertoire of communicative means—oral, proxemic, commensal—is at hand to screen discussions. The commonest type of enclosure is a formation seen throughout the bazaar: a tight huddle of men with their backs turned to the rest of the world. Another widespread communicative barrier is commensal. Wherever a group of men is seen drinking tea together, 'business' is afoot. Another tool for creating momentary enclosure is the cigarette. Whenever men wish to 'talk business', they share a cigarette, often lighting it for the others, and in so doing hoist a visual 'do not disturb' sign. Others simply leave the larger group to speak in confidence, a manoeuvre that might offend a Euro-American sensibility (it is rude to whisper in company), but a common and wholly unobjectionable practice in north India.

Seclusion is such a crucial condition for conversation, and the ability to converse is such a key function of a political entrepreneur's life that the degree of seclusion marks rank; the more important a man, the less available to the public gaze. The most important 'VIPs' (Members of Legislative Assemblies, party bosses, aristocrats) hide inside shops, behind doors and curtains of offices, beyond the tinted windows of cars, only coming into full view on special occasions (major holidays, election campaigns). Even then, they are usually ring-fenced from crowds by henchmen (Piliavsky, 2014). This hierarchy of seclusion among politicians rests on the much more general value placed on secrecy or discretion in north Indian social life. Highness and hiddenness go hand in hand. In villages, this idea underpins the convention that higher castes veil more fully than lower castes.⁹ It structures devotees' dealings with divinities in Hindu temples, where the idols remain screened from sight except for moments of *darshan* (holy vision), when gods are unveiled before the crowds.

Politicians do appear before public audiences. But their public appearance is never the occasion for dialogue. The speeches they give from podiums are neither meant nor treated as invitations to dialogue or contributions to debate, but as sermons. At political rallies in Fararpur and other cities and towns I have visited across northern India, people often sit with their backs to the stage. Few actively listen to the noises floating down from it, even if these are not distorted beyond comprehension by loudspeakers. Most, in fact, neither understand the officious Hindi that politicians use, nor know who the speaker is. In any case, the content of such speeches hardly matters and most people treat them like the cacophony of party slogans blaring out from megaphones during elections. Many

are corralled in such rallies by local politicians eager to display large crowds of voters to their superiors. Others come out of curiosity. Those who see political significance in attending the rallies do so to show loyalty and to receive the *darshan* of this or that VIP. The schedule list for the 2013 BJP electoral 'pilgrimage' (*yatra*) across Rajasthan lists the appearance of Party President Vasundhara Raje before the people as '*darshan*'. One young man in Jaipur explained:

People come to political rallies to see the politicians. Their own [community leaders] explain why they should vote for him and they tell them to come [to the rally]. So, they come and see what sort of a man is he. Most of them don't even understand what he is saying.

Substantial conversations that affect political choices take place behind closed doors, where discussions can range beyond slogans or polite conversation. The idea that discussions require clearly defined circles of intimacy and trust is clear and explicit in the local imagination, in which conversation is only possible with two or three people, definitely not with five. Of course, most conversations are not literally limited to three people, but they are limited indeed. If you wish to step inside a teashop full of people and start a discussion of politics (as I did many times), you will either run into uncomfortable silence or declarations of generalities akin to political speeches. Occasionally, you may succeed in eliciting views. But if views clash, debates become quarrels, which must be smothered quickly, lest they turn into brawls. At this point, you may be told: ask people separately, take them aside; then, only, they will tell you what they think. Political discussions require people to close ranks. If we wish to find a 'public sphere'—where people express political views, formulate judgements, and make decisions—we need to look off-stage.

Consider a pair of sketches of what actually happens behind the scenes. They took place during elections to the Rajasthan State Assembly in 2008. At the time, the MLA from Farapur, whom I shall call Mr Kishan, was in his third term of office. He was a member of the Janata Party and belonged to the locally dominant farmer caste, which provided most of his vote bank. Over his last term in office, he had distanced himself from his constituents, losing much of his electoral clout, even with his caste. The Janata Party had to re-win the voters' favour, and Gopal was busy at work. While outside loudspeakers blared out party slogans and candidates marched through the town, Gopal stayed inside his station, which he scarcely left in the week before polling day. The party strategy was to build support for a handful of dummy candidates, who could detract a few Congress votes.

A man of many trades and more connections, Gopal was well suited for the job—to pull in votes. Leading up to elections, he stretched his web of connections to its full reach to net the maximum number of votes. Most politicians secure voters' favour by recruiting a hierarchy of political leaders, who bring votes from 'their own' people. These may belong to caste and village councils,

be large landholders, or be influential or popular among their caste mates or in their villages. Some are heads of large families. All undertake to sway 'their people's' electoral choice in return for political favour, whether they bring several hundred votes or a handful. Gopal called on as many men as he knew, filling his station from morning till night in the days before the elections. Many were disaffected farmers from Mr Kishan's caste, whom he hoped to bring back into the fold. He promised that, if elected, the Janata Party, if not Mr Kishan himself, would take their interests in hand. These were often men from the margins of the Congress vote bank, from which he hoped to acquire votes for the dummy candidates. He assured them that if their people helped to put Janata on top, the party would not fail to repay the debt. Gopal received each of these men individually. He worked hard, and I doubt he slept that week at all.

Despite all the effort, the Janata candidate did lose, leaving Gopal with time to answer my many questions. Why did he not join processions on the streets and candidates on their podiums? Why hide away during such a vital moment in the campaign? Why hold individual instead of group meetings for such negotiations? And, if politics really happens off-stage, as he had assured me earlier, what are the public speeches and street parades for? This was his answer:

What you see on podiums is not politics. Just look who is at the rallies: women, young men. . . . The young men go there for a good party; they get booze and then go into the jungle to drink. Children love these; they run around with caps and stickers. They love all the noise. My wife loves these. She dresses up and goes there with all her friends to bring back all the gossip. But does anyone really talk politics there? These are just shows. Nobody ever decides anything there.

It was true that at rallies no one really 'talked politics'. Few listened and fewer argued or held forth about a political issue, figure or party, the way Rajasthanis in cities and villages do in *chai* shops and at home. It is clear that, contrary to what Gopal claimed, public political events were certainly not inconsequential to 'real politics'. But, whatever such events were—exhibitions of loyalty, festivals, gossip swaps, or simply good parties where one could catch sight of local celebrities—they were not arenas for dialogue, deliberation, or reasoned debate.

Open discussions are no more a feature of political communications in the town's back alleys and outlying villages than they are in the bazaar. Every village has what may look like public spaces—open platforms (*chabutaras*) and temple verandas where men congregate, as well as caste and village councils—but do not be fooled. Over the past ten years of research in rural Rajasthan, I must have spent dozens of hours catching up on gossip on village platforms. Occasionally, a big man would hold forth with a sermon on the state of national politics, the price of onions, or the fate of the universe. Occasionally, the audience was treated to two or three simultaneous speeches. Village councils, which are supposed to be nodes of political debate, were also spaces of projection rather than of debate, where members announced decisions, instead of

putting forward questions and problems for debate.¹⁰ Decisions here, as in the run-up to polling days, were reached in huddles and homes. This is also how Gopal's leaders operated: door-to-door and over cigarettes they lit for each cousin and neighbour they met in a *chai* shop or on the side of the road. Gopal's 'real politics' was about loyalties—as he often said himself—and not deliberation.

Beyond Fararpur

If meaningful political communication is not meant for the market square and village council, what are we to make of the celebrated repertoire of public 'agitation'—*rokas*, *dharnas*, *gheraos*, *bandhs*, and *hartals*—as central to the making of the Indian nation as they are to its politics today? As in Europe, the idea of populism in India invokes images of mass protest, associated equally with the founders of the nation (Gandhi, Ambedkar) and its defenders today (Anna Hazare). Much has been written about the ideologues and formal ideologies of Indian public protest, but we lack the ethnography to elucidate how and why ordinary Indian citizens across the spectrum of contexts and causes organise themselves. Public protest is not evenly distributed around the country: it has hotbeds, like Delhi, Calcutta, or Darjeeling, where street protests have become routine, but there are other places, like rural Rajasthan, Bihar, or Madhya Pradesh, among many others, where they hardly ever occur. In Fararpur, like in all other rural towns I visited in Rajasthan, most public demonstration is confined to party rallies (mostly at election times), not protests. And the general attitude to such events is pretty well aligned with Gopal's: they are displays of opinions shared by demonstrators, but of loyalties to political parties, organisations, or leaders. Some may suspect that an anthropologist working in the backwaters of the most culturally conservative Indian province is ill-placed to comment on cultures of mass protest. But most of India still lives in villages¹¹ and, if we wish to see widespread local attitudes in this regard, and not merely the *hartal* cultures of Darjeeling or Delhi, the back row may not be a bad place from which to view it.

Beyond Rajasthan, consider the view of a young woman from a village in western Uttar Pradesh, whom I met on a road construction site in north Delhi—a city perennially ablaze with public protests. In her words: 'Political leaders (*netas*) organise strikes (*hartals*), people go to these to show the leaders that they are their men. Sometimes they also get paid; sometimes they are afraid of *goondas* (gangsters). That is why people go.' This was also a commonly held understanding at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur among students, who saw student protests as the stuff of student union politics and competition among its leaders, not expressions of ordinary students' views (for a parallel from Uttar Pradesh, see Jeffrey 2010). Similarly, a Delhi University student said:

Public agitations are just about politics, they don't have much to do with what ordinary people think. It's all about loyalty to your party leaders. Very

few protesters have their own opinions. These things are not about ideals, they are about politics only.

Not everyone is so sceptical, but the view, from Fararpur to Jaipur and the University of Delhi, is clear: public demonstrations do not, overall, contribute to political debates.

On India's independence, Ambedkar complained that the plebeian masses occupying the newborn nation had no 'constitution consciousness' to make of them proper citizens and political agents. Today the growing literature on popular politics in India assures us that the masses have learned this consciousness, abandoning centuries of indigenous bemusement for the true beliefs of Ambedkar, Habermas, and Amartya Sen. To a large extent, the source of this view is, indeed, empirical: most research on Indian popular politics centres on formal political institutions, persons, and processes like elections, political activists, and NGOs. Many of the 'people's voices' are employees of organisations that orientate themselves, sympathetically or adversarially, towards the state. Their conclusions are endorsed by the most influential political theorising emanating from Columbia, Harvard, or Cambridge, where the cream of India's social and intellectual elites are now found.

Off the beaten track, such judgements sound far less convincing. Ordinary villagers who speak the vernaculars (*khari boli*) and still constitute most of India's population do not, for the most part, speak the 'language of officialdom' (*sarkari boli*) and do not necessarily espouse the ideology it reflects. This is not to say that terms from *sarkari boli*—democracy, public sphere, civil society, citizenship, human rights, and so on—are absent from everyday speech, but their meanings are often drastically transformed in the vernaculars. A proper map of the vernacular language of formal governance is yet to be plotted, but my sketch of the term *pablik* gives a sense of the gap dividing official and vernacular political discourse. Resilient beliefs about communications, politics, and the nature of political debate do not easily yield to commitments to the national constitution or global principles of good governance. This is not to say that nothing has changed since 1947, but if we wish to get a better sense of the distinctly Indian modes and spaces of demotic political assertion and debate, we need to look to the demos itself for answers. Its voice is easily drowned out by noisy celebrations of India's political modernity, making it all the more urgent to listen more closely.

One may wonder whether the culture of discursive concealment, which I describe, is confined to the backwaters of rural India, still not fully part of the global ecumene of public disclosure. Reports from the other India—the India of aggressive mass mediation, electronic governance, and internet hype—suggest otherwise. As Mazzarella (2006) argues, this 'transparent' India is no less full of opacities and enclosures than the marketplace of Fararpur. Orientation toward concealment rather than unremitting publicity is not a peculiar feature of Rajasthan or northern India, but resonates with experiences of popular political life across the globe. Peter Lienhardt, whose ethnography describes the Arabian

marketplace (*suq*) as a place where people shy away from exposure and hold political debates within closed circles of associates might be writing about Rajasthan (2001: 52–53), as might Herzfeld writing on Greece (1997). Insistence on discursive secrecy is not confined to the Middle East or the backwoods of Europe; it structures equally the heartlands of the public sphere: western Europe and the United States. There, it is less openly acknowledged. The public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe was as much a secret of the bourgeoisie as any place of debate in the *suq* or the *bazaar*. Discursive openness and social tolerance in the West today do not guarantee, but often thwart, reasoned debate (Strathern 2006). Communicative enclosures seem integral to Western cultures of publicity and mass mediation. Disclosure demands—indeed, depends on—enclosures from which to emerge.¹²

The very idea of the 'public sphere'

The novelty of mass mediation technologies and the speed of global communication prompt us to think about global modernity in equally novel ways. New kinds of ethnography and fresh analytical concepts, we are often told, are needed to study 'global communities' connected by discourses of nationalism, telecommunication, or transnational commercial, political, and cultural flows. Political modernity's shibboleths like the 'public sphere' readily present themselves as ideal heuristics for social life today. Criticisms of the neoliberal vision of human society thus inadvertently endorse it. The success of Habermas's idea of the public sphere is symptomatic (as well as generative) of the current habit of treating neoliberal sound bites as categories of analysis. Habermas convinced social scientists that post-1945 modernity made a very singular type of community—bound by commitment to discursive openness and social inclusiveness—blossom suddenly across the world. Many have felt uneasy at the reproduction of this European bourgeois conceit in reports on the rest of the world. Much has been written about alternative public spheres: 'vernacular', 'subaltern', and 'intimate', as well as 'postpublics' and 'counterpublics'.¹³ For all the well-documented variation in the social location of these public spheres, and the communicative styles and discursive techniques operating within them, the term itself persists.¹⁴

The public sphere is a sleight of hand. The trick begins with collapsing two discrete objects—a spatial location and a social body—into a single phenomenon. The public sphere refers both to a spatio-temporal location, where discussions may happen, and to a particular kind of collectivity, constituted through discussion, 'the public'. When the two fold into one, magic happens. The magician can invert the causal relationship between the two or represent either one as the other, without the audience even noticing. In the story Habermas tells about early modern Europe, the cafés and salons came to be defined as 'public' spaces for political debate in specific socio-economic circumstances, including the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie. Here, the site was determined by a distinctive emerging notion of collectivity: a politically minded community of individuals bound by rational–critical debate. The case Habermas makes is not only

historical, but also normative, and it is the normative case that retains momentum in the circulation of the concept today. When the historical case becomes normative, the causal relation between the public sphere as spatial location and social body is reversed. The space itself becomes the force that shapes collectivity. Communities of rational–critical individuals form naturally, if only the appropriately open spaces—market squares, newspapers, chat rooms, and so on—are put in place. But if we return to its historical context, sites like cafés became part of the public sphere only insofar as they were thought to promote a particular style of communication and constitute a particular type of community.

The suitability of any setting for discussion depends on how people conceive disclosure: where it is possible, appropriate, or necessary, and whether and in what forms it achieves successful political communication, action, and outcomes. In principle, anyone should be able to speak with equal freedom from a scaffold, a theatre stage, or a street corner. But they don't. There are no physical conditions preventing Indian villagers from engaging in a free and unstructured debate out in the open. But they don't. On the contrary, the more open a space, the less that can safely be said within it. Here, full disclosure is neither the precondition for discussion nor its aim. Instead, disclosure is a carefully managed process that unfolds incrementally, as things are revealed to one closed circle at a time. Instead of the atomised mixed collectivities, there are relationally situated and tightly structured interactive circles, where discussions are far from the Habermasian zero-gravity zones held together by 'the forceless force of a better argument' (1971: 137).¹⁵

If the 'public sphere' as spatial location and social body differs so much around the globe, where, then, should we expect to find it? And why should we look for it at all? As a vague and general reference for any site of popular political communication, the 'public sphere' does little analytical harm. But since most people everywhere usually come together in one or another way to voice, debate, and authorise political choices, it also adds little. It has analytical force only as a term of art: a distinct notion of a socio-spatial location organised through the values of inclusiveness and visibility. When used in this way, as it usually is, this term obscures more than it reveals, causing us to look in the wrong places for the wrong things.

Notes

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- 2 The majority of Indians remain just as, if not more, politically marginalised than they were before independence (Bhargava and Reifeld 2005; Chatterjee 2004; Kaviraj 2010).

- 3 Although there were others who contemplated open deliberative spheres before Habermas—most notably, Immanuel Kant ([1788] 1993)—the phrase 'public sphere' (*Öffentlichkeit*) comes from Habermas.
- 4 Habermas has written a great deal about public deliberation and democratic process. But since this essay is not about Habermas and concerns him only insofar as he launched the concept of the public sphere into global circulation, I confine my references to his seminal *The structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere* (where he first developed the concept).
- 5 There are Hindi synonyms for *pablik*, including *jan*, *janata*, or *lok* ('people', 'the people', or 'folk'). But these have a heavy flavour of 'government language' (*sarkari boli*) and are almost never used in casual conversation.
- 6 On this in Ancient Greece and beyond, see Geuss (2003).
- 7 There is another side to exposure in the bazaar, which can thrill as much as it can intimidate. The bazaar is titillating to many young people. For them, its promise of promiscuity holds a kind of hypnotic lure.
- 8 On India's political 'fixers' and entrepreneurs, see Anjaria (2009), Berenschot (2014), Jeffrey (2002), Piliavsky (2011), and Witsoe (2012).
- 9 This structure of veiling is most visible among women, but it applies correspondingly to men: traditionally, Brahman and Rajput men have been much more covered, wearing longer tunics and loincloths and larger turbans. Men of lower standing wore less, often under pressure from their status superiors.
- 10 A fuller engagement in the discussion of cultures of debate in Indian *panchayats* is beyond the scope of this article and will be pursued elsewhere.
- 11 According to the 2011 *Census Report*, out of 1.21 billion Indian citizens, 833 million, 69 per cent, still live in villages.
- 12 See Graan (2010), Graham (2005), and Shryock (2004).
- 13 On 'vernacular public sphere', see Asad (2005), Eickelman and Anderson (1999), Emirbayer and Sheller (1999), Hauser (1999), and Smith (2007). In the Indian context, see Bate (2009), Mantena (2013), Narayan (2011), Naregal (2001), and Orsini (2002). In Indianist scholarship, this work appears in the context of a more general increase of interest in 'vernacular' forms of political modernity (Michelutti 2008; Tanabe 2007).
- 14 See Cody (2011) for an overview of this literature.
- 15 Thanks to Jonas Tinius for this citation and its translation from the German.

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12 Communal riots and states

A comparative study of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh

Norio Kondo

Introduction

It was a specific combination of particular historical contingencies that enabled the emergence of Hindu nationalism led by the so-called ‘Sangh Parivar’. The contingencies included the political vacuum after the collapse of the one party dominant system under the Indian National Congress, which resulted in the emergence of Hindu majoritarian discourse, the evolution of the Ayodhya problem as an issue utilised by the Sangh Parivar to mobilise the Hindu masses, and the repercussions from the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) movement, especially the reservation issue. Besides these factors, there is another important factor—that is, the large-scale ‘communal riot’. A communal riot is very likely to widen the cleavage between the Hindu majority and the minorities, which strengthens majoritarian sentiments for ascendancy over minorities. If the communal riot is an indispensable element for the creation of Hindu majoritarian ‘nationalism’, the latter might instead be called Hindu ‘communalism’, as it was usually described before the 1990s. Undoubtedly, communal riots, along with the demonising discourse against minorities, have been playing an important part in expanding Hindu majoritarianism. In this chapter, I will look into the conditions leading up to the communal riots by comparing Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh (hereafter, UP). In the next section, the general situation of communal riots in India is explained briefly, with a special reference to the two states, followed by a brief review of the studies on Hindu communalism or nationalism and communal riots. The cases of the two states are detailed in the following sections. In the conclusion, the two states are compared and the condition leading to a large-scale communal riot is hypothetically mentioned.

Communal riots in India: Gujarat and UP

Contemporary majoritarian Hindu communalism was not automatically produced as a result of the ‘natural’ evolution of Hindu society, but is an artifact of social and political movements. The most important sociopolitical organisations propelling Hindu communalism are the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its offshoots, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad

(VHP), and Bajrang Dal. The popularity or social acceptability of these Sangh Parivar organisations has been changing in correspondence with the social and political situation. Among them, communal riots are especially important. Indeed, there is a possible correlation between the intensity of communal riots and the electoral popularity of the BJP, which is seen in Figure 12.1. The votes polled by the Jan Sangh (forerunner of the BJP before 1977) and the BJP in the Lok Sabha election show a remarkable rise from the end of the 1990s in the wake of the intensification of communal riots. The conspicuous accordance of the moves of the two variables suggests that the intensification of communal riots is an important factor explaining the electoral rise of the BJP. However, in order to verify that point, it is important to perform a more detailed analysis, at least at state level, which is the main reason the cases of Gujarat and UP are studied here.

These two states are, indeed, a contrast to each other. Both states experienced the rise of communal riots from the latter half of the 1980s to the early 1990s, mostly in accordance with the evolution of the Ayodhya problem and the resultant heightened emotion between Hindus and Muslims all over India, which Jaffrelot called 'the nationalization of communal conflicts' (Jaffrelot 1998: 81). However, there is a marked difference in the frequency and scale of communal riots after 1992, when Babri Masjid was systematically demolished by militant Hindu forces, as shown in Figure 12.2.

In spite of the fact that Ayodhya is located in UP, the severe communal violence was, by and large, contained within UP, because the central government

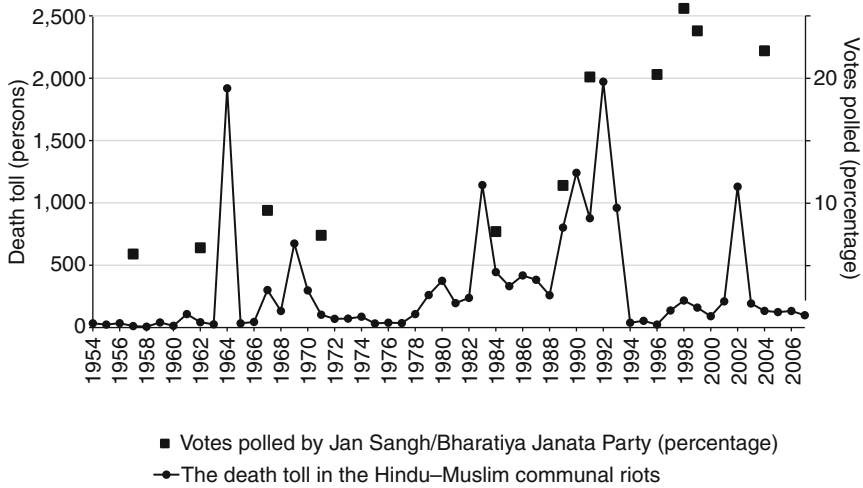


Figure 12.1 Death toll in Hindu–Muslim communal riots and votes polled by Jan Sangh/ Bharatiya Janata Party (source: made by the author from the following data sources: Rajya Sabha (2000), Lok Sabha (2004), Engineer (2004: 223–224) (for the years of 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000), Lok Sabha (2005), Ministry of Home Affairs (2007: 37)).

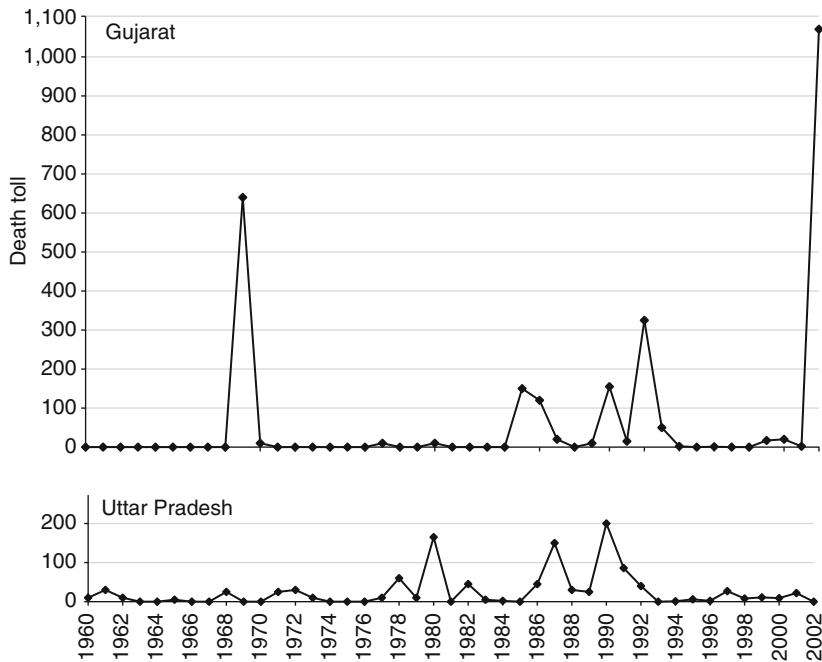


Figure 12.2 Death toll in Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Gujarat and UP (source: made by the author based on the data in Engineer (2004: 228)).

took over the BJP State Government through President's Rule immediately after the demolition, preventing the communal clashes from spreading. In contrast, in Gujarat, which was under the government led by Chimanbhai Patel, the demolition was followed by serious communal riots. The riot in Surat was especially gruesome (Chandra 1993). Also, in 2002, Gujarat saw one of the worst communal riots just after the Godhra incident. In contrast, there has been no large-scale communal riot in UP since the Ayodhya incident. The difference between the two states appears to be remarkable, which is the main reason to make a comparison of the two states.

Studies on Hindu nationalism and communal riots

The movement propagated by the Sangh Parivar to create a political community based on 'Hindutva' (Hinduness) (Savarkar [1923] 1989) ideology can be called 'nationalism' in the sense that the political and the national unit should be congruent (Gellner 1983: 1). However, the creation of a nation in that sense will be a difficult task, if we take into consideration that India, being divided by religion, language, and caste, is the most heterogeneous society in the world (Asian Development Bank 2006: 54). In order to create a politically integrated

'nation', there must be a dominant and culturally homogenous 'majority'. And a convenient way for the Sangh Parivar to create such a majority is to create the concept of 'threatening others' (Jaffreot 1996: 50)—that is, the minority who is considered to be the 'others' threatening Hindu cultural integrity. Such 'threatening others' can be legitimately oppressed or excluded, with or without force, if their loyalty is questionable. Here, 'nationalism' can be mingled with communalism. The expansion of Hindu communalism/nationalism might not have been so rapid, however, if there had not been a political vacuum resulting from the decay of the Congress Party, which has been analysed by Manor (1997) and Kohli (1990). The decay of the Congress seems to be a necessary condition for the BJP to expand, which changed the quality of political discourse in favour of Hindu majoritarianism. Accordingly, the concept of 'Hindu nationalism' began to be used frequently and interchangeably with Hindu communalism, around the end of the 1980s. It was as if a communalism of the 'majority' could be equated with 'nationalism' (Basu *et al.* 1993: 2).

There were not many studies on Hindu communalism or nationalism until the 1980s, but Baxter (1969), and Andersen and Damle (1987) were important studies that analysed the historical growth of the RSS and the BJP. It was after the 1980s that several excellent studies appeared in correspondence with the rise of Hindutva politics. Bidwai *et al.* (1996) approached the religious and ideological aspects of Hindu nationalism; Malik and Singh (1994) and Ghosh (1999) studied Hindu nationalism vis-à-vis party politics. It was Jaffreot (1996) that appeared to give the most dynamic picture of the growth of Hindu nationalism. His argument that the strategy of the Sangh Parivar to build an image of 'threatening others' against Hindus and to utilise it to consolidate Hindu identity contributed to the expansion of Hindu nationalism is one of the best explanations for the growth of the phenomenon. And his study with Hansen (Hansen and Jaffreot 1998) uncovered the state-specific variety of Hindu nationalism in the main states. In addition, Hansen (1999) insightfully showed the relation between Hindu nationalism and social class. Japan also produced several important studies. Kotani (1993) discussed the entangled historical lineage of Hindu revivalism, and Naito (1998) analysed the evolution of the Shiv Sena, which was the son-of-the-soil party propagating the interests of Maharashtrians and Hindus. The Mitsuhiro Kondo (2002) and Nakajima (2005) studies shed light on the religious and ideological aspects of the problems.

The studies mentioned above have a common focus in understanding the expansion of Hindu nationalism—that is, 'communal riots'. This is because a communal riot is an extreme form of dealing with 'threatening others'. Rajgopal (1987) tried to make a typology of communal riots based on the statistical data on riots. McGuire *et al.* (1996), as well as Nandy *et al.* (1997), revealed how the evolution of the Ayodhya movement was entangled with social tension and violence. Varshney (2002) submitted a hypothesis that a communal riot was likely to break out in cases where inter-community relations were weak and intra-community cohesion was strong. In relation to Varshney's argument, Kaur (2005) also insisted that the existence of a local social network was important to

localise the expansion of communal riots. On the other hand, Wilkinson (2004) used statistical analysis to argue that the intensification of electoral politics tended to precipitate polarisation, leading to communal violence. Besides, Bohlken and Sergenti (2010) showed that economic growth might reduce the possibility of communal riots based on a state-level dataset. In addition, we cannot discard the series of contributions by Asghar Ali Engineer; in particular, Engineer (2004) is a useful data collection on communal riots. Among the studies, Brass (2003) is especially relevant to this chapter. Brass insisted that a communal riot did not break out spontaneously, but was ‘planned and produced’ by vested interests, who consequently benefitted from the riot taking place. Brass named such a structure the ‘institutionalised riot system’. Not all communal riots, however, may be explained by the theory of institutionalised riot systems, but it explains an important part of the recent ‘large-scale’ communal riots, especially the one that occurred in 2002 in Gujarat, where the role of the Sangh Parivar was clear.

Based on these studies, it can be said that the decay of the Congress Party, due to various factors, including the failure of socio-economic development and the rise of OBCs politics, made room for the Sangh Parivar’s Hindutva to expand. The most convenient strategy of the Sangh Parivar was to mobilise the Hindu masses, with Ayodhya being the focal symbol, which sometimes resulted in communal violence. Next, we will look into the conditions leading to large-scale communal riots or, contrarily, the conditions restraining riots by comparing the cases of Gujarat and UP.

Communal riots in Gujarat in 2002: tyranny of the Hindu majority

In Gujarat, large-scale communal riots occurred in 1969, 1985 to 1986, 1990, 1992, and 2002, as shown in Figure 12.2. In the case of the riot in 1969, a skirmish near the Jagannath temple in Ahmedabad resulted in large-scale violence (Government of Gujarat 1971). In 1985, the mass movement in Ahmedabad opposing the government’s policy to expand the reservation quota for OBCs resulted in communal violence (Shani 2007: 80–88). Although the real causes of these riots were complex, many people thought they were both political and accidental. According to one survey conducted between 1987 and 1991, urban dwellers perceived the following to be main causes of riots—political rivalry: 22.6 per cent; religious processions: 22.6 per cent; election propaganda: 17.9 per cent; and sudden quarrels: 15.1 per cent ($n=1,257$) (Pillai 2006: 120). Although politics was an important factor in people’s perception, the riots appeared to have been more accidental and, in that sense, spontaneous compared to those after 1990.

The riots in 1990 and 1992 were different, because they occurred in line with the Ayodhya movement, which the Sangh Parivar spearheaded. The riot in 1990 occurred in the wake of the *rathiyatra* (religious chariot parade) led by L.K. Advani; in 1992, it occurred just after the destruction of Babri Masjid in December. The sensitive nature of the Ayodhya movement in Gujarat can be

seen by the fact that many *karsevaks*¹ from Gujarat had participated in the demonstration to demand the construction of the Ram temple (Concerned Citizens Tribunal – Gujarat 2002a: 14; hereafter, CCTG 2002a). The riot in 2002 after the Godhra incident was the worst in India since independence, where the Sangh Parivar played a decisive role. An important reason for the 2002 riot being so gruesome was that the state government was under the BJP. Before going into analysis of the riot, I will first describe its political context.

Decline of the Congress and the emergence of the BJP Government

In Gujarat, the Congress had been the ruling party until the 1980s, except for the brief Janata Party Government periods of 1975 to 1976 and 1977 to 1980. In the 1970s, the support base of the Congress Party was said to consist of a broad social stratum of the so-called ‘KHAM’, which is a combination of the initials of Kshatriyas, Harijans (=Scheduled Castes: SC), Adivasis (=Scheduled Tribes: ST), and Muslims. Such a broad alliance was, however, a source of dissatisfaction for the upper stratum of society, such as the Patidar—a socially and politically powerful community. In addition, the corruption of the ruling Congress Party and social disturbances such as the 1985 riot disappointed the people. These factors combined to lead to the decline of the Congress, as shown in Figure 12.3, which intensified factional fights and led to the split of the party.

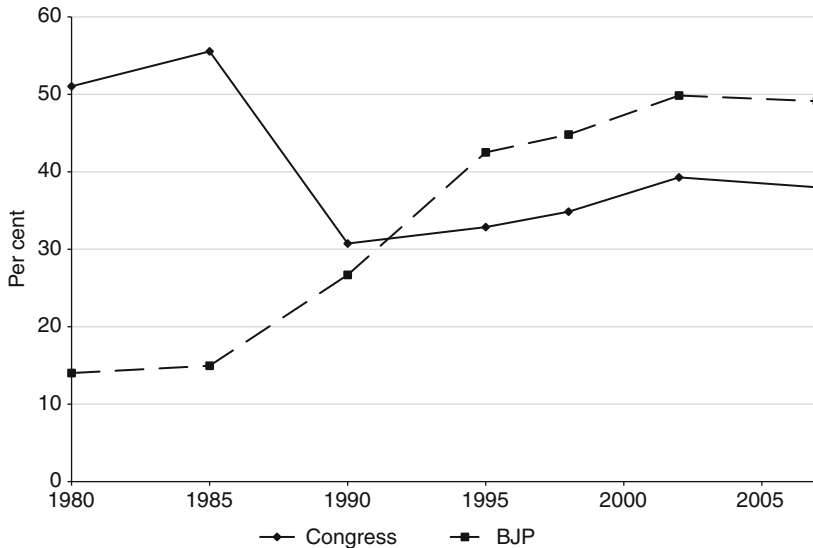


Figure 12.3 Votes polled by Congress and BJP in Gujarat Assembly elections (%) (source: made by the author based on the following data source: <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp> (Home Pages of Election Commission of India: Last accessed on December 30th, 2008)).

As a result, the rebel faction led by Chimanbhai Patel took over the state government and ruled the state from 1990 to 1994.

It was the BJP that utilised the decay of the Congress system and expanded its support basis. In 1996, the BJP won the Assembly election for the first time. The rapid expansion of the party, however, meant the inclusion of heterogeneous elements in the party and resulted in the split of the Gujarat BJP, which led to the formation of the Shankersinh Vaghela Government in the next year. However, this government was also short-lived, and the 1998 Assembly election saw the victory of the BJP, led by Keshubhai Patel. These intensified political competitions undermined the relatively stable relation between party and caste/community, which seems to be in the background of the communalisation of state politics. The installation of the BJP Governments in such a fluid sociopolitical situation was a cause, as well as a result, of the ‘communalisation’ of state politics. For example, in 2000, the state government removed the ban on the adoption of RSS members to the state government, and it was said that the government also removed some Muslim policemen from important posts (CCTG 2002b: 89). However, the removal of the ban on the recruitment of RSS members met with strong criticism and was withdrawn.

The sociopolitically fluid electorate did not ensure stable electoral popularity either for the Congress or the BJP. The panchayat election in 2001 revealed the declining popularity of the Keshubhai Patel Government, which resulted in the decision by the BJP at the centre to send a fresh leader to the state. Narendra Modi, who was, and still is, a hard-line Hindu nationalist with an RSS background, became the new chief minister. The 2002 communal riot occurred under his government.

The Godhra train burning and communal ‘riot’

The ‘riot’ in 2002 was ignited by a train fire on 27 February 2002 in Godhra, located 110km east of Ahmedabad. Fifty-eight *karsevaks*, including members of the VHP, who were coming back from *karseva* in Ayodhya, died. When news of the incident reached people the next day, a communal frenzy broke out in the major cities of Gujarat and in 16 of the 24 districts. Muslims became the main victims of the violence (CCTG 2002a: 18–22), which continued intermittently until June.

There are different understandings concerning the Godhra train fire, depending on the political slant. Opinions are divided, even between the central government and state government, as to whether the train fire was an ‘accident’ or a ‘pre-planned crime’. At the centre, the U.C. Banerjee Committee, appointed by the Ministry of Railways of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government in 2004, concluded in the final report in 2006 that it was an accident, although the Gujarat High Court ruled the formation of the U.C. Banerjee Committee ‘illegal’ and ‘unconstitutional’ in October 2006.² However, in its report submitted to the state government in September 2008, the Nanavati Commission, which was established by the BJP Gujarat State Government, supposed that the fire was plotted (Nanavati and Mehta 2008). Thus, there is a

large difference in understanding, depending on the political position and materials. In this article, my analysis is mainly based on the report of the 'Concerned Citizens Tribunal – Gujarat 2002' (CCTG 2002a, 2002b), which was organised immediately after the riot by eminent journalists, retired judges of the Supreme Court, and the staff of several human rights organisations.

Immediately after the Godhra incident, the VHP announced a *bandh* (general strike) to protest it. Chief Minister Modi, while visiting the site, said that the incident was pre-planned terrorism and decided to carry out the state *bandh*. On the other hand, local Gujarati newspapers, such as *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar*, reported the incident sensationally (Indian Social Institute 2002: 108). In an atmosphere of deteriorating communal tension, the Sangh Parivar took the train fire for Muslim terrorism and prepared to attack the Muslim community, according to the CCTG (CCTG 2002b: 18). The features of the attack were as follows.

The most peculiar feature was that, in many cases, the acts of violence were 'one-sided attacks' on Muslims by Hindu mobs agitated or led by the Sangh Parivar. According to the 2001 census, the Muslim population was 14.2 per cent in urban areas and 6.0 per cent in rural areas. This meant that Muslims were confronted with an overwhelming Hindu majority and, therefore, the casualties were far larger in the Muslim community. In Ahmedabad, there were a few instances where mobs of thousands of Hindu participated in the raids. The one-sided nature of the violence was further accelerated by the fact that, in many cases, the raids were organised by the Sangh Parivar. Muslim residences and shops were targeted precisely and systematically, even in areas where Hindu and Muslim residences or shops were mixed (CCTG 2002a: 84, 209, 222, 260).

Although the violence was more intensive and gruesome in urban areas, especially in Ahmedabad, the attacks upon Muslims broke out even in villages where peaceful social relations had been maintained over generations (Communalism Combat 2002: 100). Such widespread and systematic attacks might not be imagined without instigation by the Sangh Parivar. There were some cases where local Hindu influential, such as the village Patidar sarpanches, led attacks (CCTG 2002a: 67, 83, 96). There were some instances where SC or ST sarpanches spearheaded the raids under the influence of the VHP and RSS. It is said to have been in 1987 that STs first took part in an attack (CCTG 2002a: 84, 209, 211).

Further, the most serious cause of the rapid spread of the communal attacks was the inertia of the state law and order machinery. Although Muslims asked the police for help during the initial stages of the spreading attacks, the police responses were quite slow and sloppy on the whole (CCTG 2002a: 247). Further, some police personnel were said to have participated on the side of the Hindu mob. The report of the CCTG alleged that the inertia of the police was due to directions from higher up in the state government. The deployment of the army was overdue by two days, which further increased the number of victims. The Modi Government, as well as BJP/VHP leaders, however, insisted that the 'riot' was a 'spontaneous reaction' by Hindus to the Godhra incident and tacitly

justified the attacks on Muslims (CCTG 2002b: 19, 37, 60, 76). The central government under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP also acquitted the Modi Government of any responsibility.³

Thus, the systematic instigation of the Sangh Parivar and the inertia of the state government, at least during the few days immediately after the outbreak of communal violence, were the main factors behind the spread of violence and resulted in heavy casualties among Muslims. According to the government announcement, the victims of the 'riot' numbered 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus. The ratio of Muslims reached 76 per cent of the whole.⁴

Assembly elections and politics after the 'riot'

The 'riot' deepened the social cleavage seriously. In addition, it was the posture of the BJP State Government that aggravated the cleavage. The Modi Government took a callous attitude towards relief measures. It was only Muslim organisations and some NGOs that were active in the rescue and relief operations (CCTG 2002b: 122). One reason for the callous attitude seems to be that the Modi Government was anxious about the views of the Hindu majority as well as the Sangh Parivar, especially since the next Assembly election was just around the corner. In fact, the BJP and the RSS appeared to desire to go into election 'before the memory of their "contribution to the nation building" disappears from the minds of the people' (Indian Social Institute 2002: 3). Here, 'nation building' means the growth of Hindu majoritarian sentiment against Muslims, as well as the exclusion of those who were detrimental to such a 'nation'. The Assembly election was held under such a situation in December 2002.

The two graphs in Figure 12.4 show the relation between the intensity of communal violence and the change in votes polled by the BJP and the Congress from 1998 to 2002, based on district-level data. On the basis of the graphs, it is apparent that there was a trend for the BJP to gain more votes in districts where there was severe violence. Table 12.1 shows the regression analysis, with the Muslim Population Ratio as a control variable. Although the number of samples is small, still, the relation is statistically significant. Taking into account the fact that most Muslims would not vote for the BJP, what happened in seriously afflicted districts was that more Hindus voted for the BJP. On the other hand, there seems to be no clear impact on the Congress votes, though a subtle tendency can be seen that there were more Congress votes in districts with no communal violence.

Concerning the community-wise impact of the communal violence on elections, the study by Ghanshyam Shah reveals the following important points (Shah 2007: 173). In the three consecutive elections of the 1998 Assembly, the 1999 Lok Sabha, and the 2002 Assembly, the support for the BJP was, by and large, stable among high castes. The percentages of support were 77, 77, and 79, respectively. But the support level of OBCs changed widely. Its percentages were 57, 38, and 59, respectively. OBCs consisting of many castes comprise a large portion of the population. So, the most important strata that contributed to

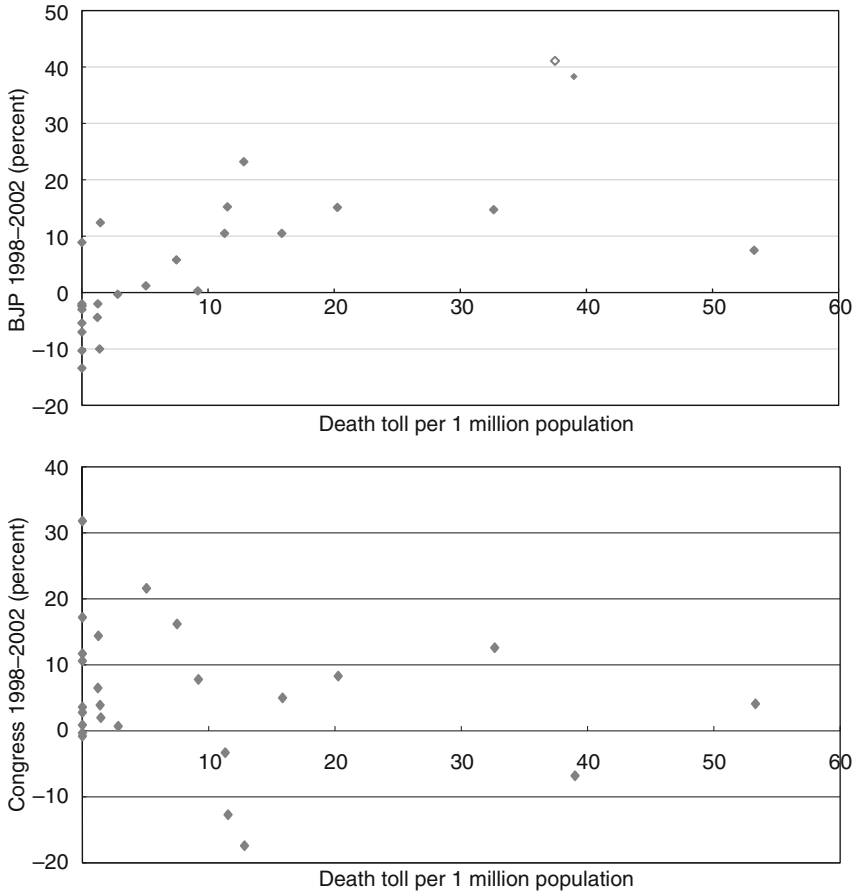


Table 12.1 Impact of the communal riot in 2002 on the electoral performance of the BJP in Assembly elections, 1998–2002

<i>Dependent variable: votes polled by BJP in 2002 minus BJP votes in 1998 (%)</i>				
<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>Variance inflation factor</i>
Muslim population ratio (%)	-0.2302	-0.36	0.724	1.03
Death toll due to riot per 1 million population	0.4288	2.41	0.031	1.03
Constant	4.582	0.65	0.526	–

Source: calculated by the author based on the data mentioned in Figure 12.4.

Note

Estimated on OLS.

1 No. of samples =16 (only for districts where there were deaths due to communal riots).

2 $R^2=0.330$, Adjusted $R^2=0.227$.

3 White's heteroskedasticity test: $\chi^2(5)=9.86$, $\text{prob}>\chi^2=0.0794$. The problem of heteroskedasticity is not significant at the level of 5 per cent.

4 Variance Inflation Factor shows no sign of multicollinearity.

seems to have resulted in disappointment with the existing major parties among Muslims.

What kind of influence have these situations brought to state politics? There is an interesting investigation (Ganguly *et al.* 2006) about the consciousness of people after the communal violence. In the opinion poll conducted in March 2004 for the whole state ($n=2,961$), 64 per cent of total respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'Hindus are in the majority, so Hindus should rule', while 32 per cent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Besides, concerning the statement '[a]ctivities of RSS should be supported by the government, as [they] promote patriotism', 57 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 31 per cent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Ganguly *et al.* 2006: 65, 68). That is to say, Hindu nationalism was justified by the 'majority'. The most remarkable consequence of such an evolution is that the 'Muslim problem' has been pushed back in the discourse of the party politics.

In the 2007 Assembly election, it was said that 'development' became the most important issue. Even the Congress, whose important support base was traditionally Muslim, could not grapple squarely with the Muslims' problems in the electoral discourse. This was because it might have caused an overreaction from the Hindu majority and brought disadvantageous consequences to the Congress in the election, even though the Congress could gain some additional Muslim votes. It was true that the Congress election manifesto for the 2007 Assembly election took up the issues of speedy justice in the case of the 2002 'riot', prevention of communal venom, and several welfare programmes for Muslims, but it was 'development' that occupied the largest part of the manifesto (Gujarat Pradesh Congress 2007). On the other hand, in the BJP 2007 election manifesto, there was no reference to the 2002 incident or the welfare of

minorities. 'Development' problems and good governance occupied the greater part of the manifesto, while the 'Hindutva' plank disappeared (Bhartiya Janta Party [Gujarat Pradesh] 2007). It was as if 'Muslim problems' were caught below the surface in the politics of the two parties. The case of Gujarat might be unique, which is to be understood if we comparatively examine the case of UP.

UP: prevention of communal disturbances in the balance of party–caste nexus

Historically, UP was an important focus of the communal riots. There are several cities that have experienced severe communal riots, such as Meerut, Moradabad, Aligarh, and Kanpur. Figure 12.2 shows that there were three large communal riots before 1990. There were large-scale riots in Moradabad and Meerut in 1980 and 1987, respectively. In the former case, an accident developed into a communal riot. In the latter case, the beginning was an accident, but the Ayodhya issue aggravated it and this led to a riot (Engineer 2004: 51, 86). The majority of the victims were Muslim. In the case of the Meerut violence, some SCs also joined in the raid on Muslims (Engineer 1988: 26–30). These riots broke out under the Congress State Government, and the oppression of the Muslims by the Provincial Armed Constabulary ruined the confidence of Muslims in the state government. In 1990, a riot broke out in Bijinor under the influence of the Ayodhya movement.

UP witnessed some communal violence just after the destruction of Babri Masjid, but there have been no large-scale communal riots since 1993. It is important to investigate the reasons that prevent the large-scale communal riot in UP, where there are many potential factors precipitating communal violence. After the destruction of Babri Masjid in December 1992, the state was placed under President's Rule by the central government, because of which the spread of communal violence was avoided. It was most important that the will of the state government, which came under the central government, was made clear, so as to contain the spread of the violence (Brass 2003). Next, I will look at the transition of state politics in and after 1993.

Nexus between political parties and castes in UP

In UP, the Congress, which was once able to accommodate a wide spectrum of castes and communities, lost electoral support after the 1980s. The main reasons were its failure in socio-economic development, the rise of OBCs, and the spread of Hindu communalism or nationalism (Hasan 1998). After the Congress, it was Janata Dal that, with a wide OBC support base, got a near majority with 208 of the 425 seats in the 1989 Assembly election. But the Janata Dal collapsed, due to factional fighting. The BJP emerged in the 1991 Assembly election, getting a majority of 221 seats in the heyday of the Ayodhya movement, which was successful in mobilising not only the higher castes, but also many other castes, to support the BJP. It did not, however, last long as shown in Figure 12.5.

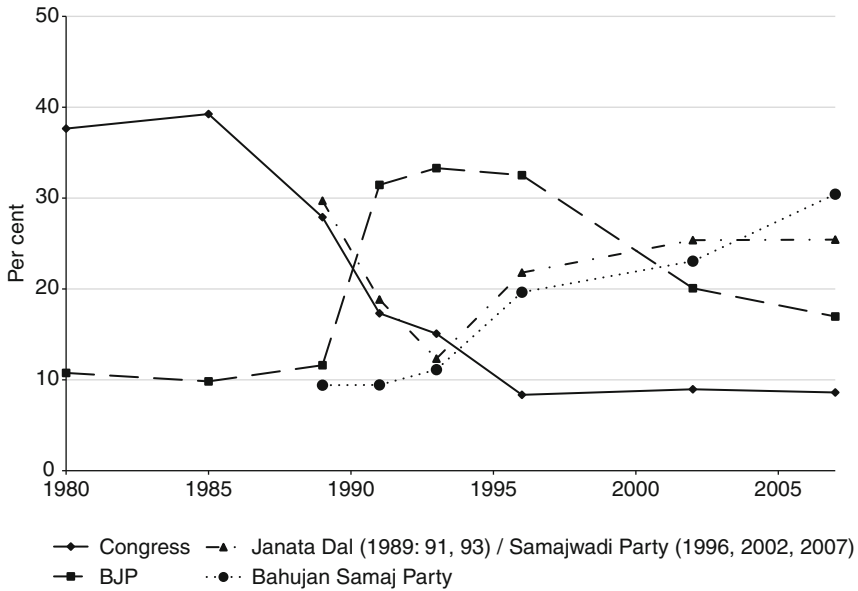


Figure 12.5 Votes polled by parties in the UP Assembly elections (source: Data Archive of the Election Commission of India: <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp> (last accessed on December 30, 2008)).

No party could command a majority of seats from 1993 to 2007. In the process of the fragmentation of the party system and under an unstable coalition government, there emerged a tendency for each caste or community to have its ‘own’ party to project its own interests in politics. The consequence was the emergence of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The core support base of the former encompassed the Yadav caste and Muslims, while in the case of the latter it was SCs, which was obvious from the results of many surveys (Yadav 2004).

Such a nexus between a political party and castes/communities has been comparatively stable. The castes/communities would continue to vote for the party in the election, because they know that only that particular party represents their interests and that other parties do not, whether the party is in the government or outside it (Chandra 2004). And each party could not deviate much from its original political position if it violates the interests of its ‘own’ caste/community. So, this polarised fragmentation seemed to be stable. Therefore, it became difficult for a political party to command a majority independently in the election, which led to a series of unstable coalition governments or, if it failed, President’s Rule, as in the periods of 1995 to 1997 and 2002. The average term of office of the chief minister was about 1.2 years from 1993 to 2007. Although in the 2007 election the BSP succeeded in commanding the majority of seats, with about 30 per cent of the votes, the

polarised fragmentation does not seem to have changed much. We must consider the political position of minority groups in this situation. I will examine this point, based on the discourse in the election manifestos of the main political parties.

The Muslim issue in main parties

We can see the typical political discourse of the party in its election manifesto. Conclusively speaking, the appeal to the Muslim community was obvious in the election manifesto of the 2007 Assembly election in every party, except for the BJP, which hardly relied on the support of Muslims. It is difficult for the SP to win an election if it loses the support of either the Yadavs or Muslims. Yadavs are a stable support base, but Muslim support is not as obvious as it seems to be. Muslims tend to vote strategically for the party that provides their safety and interests. The SP, therefore, could not but make genuine efforts to secure the support of Muslims. The SP election manifesto for the 2007 Assembly election showed every effort to woo the support of the Muslim community. It insisted that there would be no major communal riots when it was in power, and the SP would be ready to provide assistance to the Muslim community, including reservation, when it returned to power (Samajwadi Party 2007: 1, 5, 9, 10). The appeal was clearer and more intense than the SP's manifesto for the 2004 Lok Sabha election (Samajwadi Party 2004).

The BSP has been trying to extend its base to other communities beyond SCs since the second half of the 1990s. One of the important targets was Muslims. In its appeal to Muslims, issued at the end of the 1990s, it criticised the high castes for aggravating the communal relations that led to the heightened enmity between SCs and Muslims. It also claimed that the reason the BSP cooperated with the BJP in the government formation in 1997 was to thwart policies hostile to Muslims or that it was under the BSP Government that Muslims could feel at ease (Bahujan Samaj Party n.d.(a)). The BSP, however, needed more extensive support in addition to SCs and Muslims to gain a majority in the State Assembly. The BSP, therefore, began to try to remove the unease of higher caste people towards the BSP, which had been speaking ill of the higher castes, claiming that they had 'Manuwadi' mindsets. The appeal issued by the BSP around 2006 said that although the BSP opposed an unequal society as depicted in the Manu Code, it was not against 'Savarna' people (castes belonging to three varnas—i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya) if they were not imbued with discriminatory thoughts; this led to the inclusion of several high-caste people in the candidate list for the 2007 Assembly election (Bahujan Samaj Party n.d.(b)). The BSP won a majority of seats in the 2007 Assembly election, showing the success of such a strategy.

Finally, it is clear that the Congress needed to court the support of Muslims. Muslims were once one of the stable support bases for the Congress. Although their support for the Congress decreased in the 1980s, there was a possibility that their support would return, because of which possibility the Congress has been

repeatedly trying to regain Muslims' confidence. In the Assembly election in 2007, the Congress manifesto put forward several points, which included generous treatment for minorities by the state administration and police, strengthening of the Human Rights Commission, strict punishment against the instigator of a communal riot, application of reservation to Muslims, strengthening of the Urdu language, maintenance of Muslim Personal Law, and protection of household industries (Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee 2007: 19–23). This stand is completely different from the Gujarat Congress manifesto for the 2007 Assembly election.

In the ways shown above, the polarised fragmentation of nexuses between party and castes/communities has made parties compete with each other for the support of Muslims in electoral politics. In particular, the SP has been trying hard not to lose the support of Muslims. Such a situation is making it impossible for the main parties to disregard the voices of Muslims, except for the BJP, which has become a weak third party. The BJP's support base has shrunk to the higher castes and a portion of OBCs. Further, the polarised fragmentation has made the lower castes or communities more independent of the higher castes and socially powerful sections, which has reduced the possibility that the lower castes or communities would side with the Hindutva agenda. Thus, in this system, the 'institutionalised riot system' could not emerge easily. A large-scale communal riot has not been seen since 1993.

Conclusion

It is very difficult to generalise the cause of a large-scale communal riot. It can be said, however, that the large-scale communal riots after the 1980s were more instigated and institutionalised than spontaneous. The important factor differentiating the riots before and after the 1980s might be the successful mobilisation by the Sangh Parivar after the 1980s in the changing political situation, with the Ayodhya problem as a symbol institutionalising the Hindu masses.

Comparing the two states after the 1990s, the case of the 'institutionalised riot system' is more clearly applicable to Gujarat. The systematic instigation by the Sangh Parivar and the inertia and omissions of the state government in preventing the violence are evident. This was because the state organisation had been penetrated by the influence of the Sangh Parivar. The widespread rioting seems to have resulted in an increase in BJP votes in the 2002 Assembly election. Even the main opposition party—namely, the Congress—seems not to have been serious enough to take up Muslim causes. It was found that a fluid relation between the parties and castes/communities was an important reason for this situation.

In contrast, in UP there has been no large-scale communal riot since the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The basic reason for this is considered to be the generation of a situation where the main parties, except the BJP, have a strong motive for attempting to gain Muslim support, because the electoral politics is

experiencing polarised fragmentation. In every election, these parties had been eagerly wooing Muslims. In the case of the BJP, its support base has shrunk to the higher castes and a portion of OBCs. In addition, the polarised fragmentation is considered to make the lower castes or communities more independent of the higher castes and socially powerful sections, which has reduced the likelihood of the lower castes or communities siding with the Hindutva cause. In Gujarat, the large-scale communal riot widened the social cleavage between the two communities and deflected the Hindu public in the direction of Hindu communalism/nationalism, which resulted in an increase in Hindu support for the BJP. But the BJP, as a responsible governing party, cannot neglect law and order, which sets a limit for the BJP to rely upon the Hindutva and communal riots.

The comparative study of the two states demonstrates an important point concerning the large-scale communal riot. It is the party system of polarised fragmentation, sensitive to the voice of Muslims, which is most likely to prevent large-scale communal riots, where the ruling party cannot ignore the demands of Muslims. And it is the state government that has all the resources to contain communal riots, if it has firm political will. In Gujarat, the voices of Muslims do not reach the ruling or opposition parties, because the Muslim voice is buried under party politics. Even the Congress Party is not eager to clearly support the cause of Muslims in the fluid party caste/community relation, due to possible repercussions from the Hindu majority.

Finally, a couple of points should be noted here. The point derived throughout this chapter is a 'necessary condition', not a 'sufficient condition', to prevent large-scale communal riots. There can be other conditions to prevent it. One of the other important conditions might be the ideology of the leftist parties, which could explain the absence of large-scale communal riots in West Bengal or Kerala. Also, it should be pointed out that the effect of federalism is also important. First, federalism is likely to compartmentalise the communalism to a particular state. The 2002 riot in Gujarat was not contagious to other states, which theoretically provides useful leverage for the central government to contain riots, depending on which party is in power at the centre. Second, the role of the central government is important vis-à-vis the state government. For example, when Babri Masjid was destroyed by the Sangh Parivar and others, the Congress Government at the centre under Prime Minister Rao immediately introduced President's Rule in the BJP State Governments and tried to prevent communal riots from spreading. In the riot in the state of Gujarat in 2002, however, the BJP Coalition Government at the centre, led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, did not take such a drastic measure. This was clearly due to pressure from the Sangh Parivar, which the prime minister belongs to.

Thus, there is a significant difference in dealing with communal riots, depending on the nature of the central government. It may not be so difficult to establish an 'institutionalised riot-prevention mechanism' at the centre, if the mechanism does not clash with the interests of the Hindu majority. But if it clashes with the latter, it will be impossible to establish such a mechanism.

Note

This chapter is a revised version of the following Japanese paper written by the author: Kondo, N. (2009). Indo niokeru Hindu nationalism no Tenkai: Shu-seiji to communal Bodo. In N. Kondo (ed.), *Indo Minshushugitaisei no Yukue* (pp. 267–316). Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies (Japanese).

- 1 *Karseva* means ‘volunteering for a religious cause’, and *karsevak* means ‘those who conduct *karseva*’.
- 2 The interim report of this committee was submitted in January 2005 (Government of India 2004).
- 3 See the article in *The Hindu*. Available online at: www.hinduonnet.com/the-hindu/2002/04/13/stories/2002041308430100.htm (last accessed 16 April 2002).
- 4 According to the BBC news, on 11 May 2005, the Minister of State of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr Sriprakash Jaiswal, revealed the figures in the *Rajya Sabha*. The figures include the victims in the Godhra incident. Available online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4536199.stm (last accessed 16 January 2009).

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Glossary

aam aadmi	common man
aanchlik	vernacular
aaji	elderly woman
aaja	elderly man
all-ball	absurd
andolan	movement
andolanatmak	agitational
asharfi	gold coins
baba	grandfather; elderly man
babu	a civil servant
bandh	strike
baraabari	equality
bat/batchit	conversation
bazaru chiz	marketplace thing
bazar ki bat	marketplace talk
berozgaari	unemployment
bhagidaari	participation
Bharat Mata	Mother India
bhay	terror, fear
bhaykaal	a reign of terror
bhumi mafia	land mafia
chabutara	open platforms
chhopni	blinkers
dada	grandfather; elderly man
dadi	grandmother; elderly woman
darshan	holy vision
dhanda	business
dharna	sit-in protest
dhokra	brass artifact
gherao	a form of protest
goonda	gangster
gram sabha	village council
hartal	strike

- izzat** dignity
jantantra democracy
jan andolan people's movement
jawaan youth
jogi-raja a king who renounces and sacrifices
jan sunwai public hearings
kalikaal time of injustice and anarchy
kalijuga the age of discord, denoting the advent of modernity
khaali free
kissa anecdotes and folk story
kutchehary court
lagat agricultural rent
lal batti ki shakti power of the red beacon
lokpai an ombudsperson
Lok Sabha Lower House of the Indian Parliament
mitra milan gatherings of friends
neta a political leader
niti ethic
pablik public
pad yatra foot march
panchayat local government
pathar thorna literally, break rocks; a form of expression to denote unemployment
pakke pani ka vote a form of expression to refer to voters who do not change their loyalties
paan beetle leaf
patti a hamlet or a sub-hamlet
poorva a hamlet or a sub-hamlet
pradhan/gram pradhan a village head
pradhan pati a village head husband
pradhan patni a village head wife
prashasan administration
Rajya Sabha Upper House of the Indian Parliament
rajniti politics
roti an Indian bread
sarkar the state/government
sarkari boli language of officialdom
sarkari byabastha state/government system
sarpanch an elected head of a village
satyagraha 'insistence on truth' or nonviolent resistance
sukhbhogwa pleasure-loving person
swaraj self-governance
tikedaar a contractor
thana police station
tola a hamlet or a sub-hamlet

topi a cap
upvaas fast
vrat vow, fast
yatra pilgrimage
zimmedaari responsibility

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