THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates that different and competing nationalist movements were able to join forces for the purpose of achieving self-rule in India in the presence of an external hegemonic force (Britain) controlling politics. However, once independence was accomplished, these competing movements have traded self-rule for self-interest. The result has been secession, threats of secession, mass population exchange at great cost to human life, authoritarian rule, political bifurcation along religio-national nomenclatures, violent transfers of power through assassination, and a general absence of compromise necessary for the successful rule of a large democracy.

Keywords: *India, Nationalism, Gandhi, Nehru.*

ÖZET
HİNDİSTAN'DA MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİN GELİŞİMİ

Hindistan'da ortaya çıkan birbirinden farklı ve hatta birbirine rakip milliyetçilik hareketleri koloni yönetiminden bağımsızlık kazanmak amacıyla işbirliği yaparlar. Ancak bağımsızlık sonrası dönemde milliyetçilik hareketleri arasında rekabet işbirliğinin önüne geçer. Sonuç bölünme, ayrılma, pek çok insanın hayatına mal olan nüfus mübadelesi, otoriter yönetim, dinsel-ulusal elitler arasında siyasal ikileşme, siyasi suikastların iktidar devirme aracı olarak kullanılması ve büyük bir demokrasinin yaşaması için gerekli uzlaşının ortadan kalkması olur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Hindistan, Milliyetçilik, Gandhi, Nehru.*

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Introduction

Indian history since 1885 may be perceived as the manifestation of a political idea: nationalism. However, once the nationalist movements succeeded in bringing India to Independence in 1947, democracy an alternative political idea emerged as a competing approach to study the history of India. Thus, the very national groups that achieved independence for India now destabilize and threaten the world's largest democratic state.

This study will reveal why this is so, focusing first on the national movement that paved the way for Indian independence during the period 1885-1947. Then, the Indian experiment in democracy since independence will be scrutinized with reference to its interaction with various Indian nationalistic movements. Finally, an assessment of the state of democratic institutions will be assessed.

1. Pre-Independence Period

In the pre-independence period, three distinct waves of nationalism leading to independence are clearly discernable, namely, a first, liberal wave, a second wave directed by radicals, and a third wave characterized by passive resistance. Each of these nationalist movements contributed to the growing Indian national consciousness.

1.1 First Wave: Liberal Nationalists, 1885-1905

The impact of British colonialism has been one of the most controversial issues that sharply divide the scholars of Indian history. Nevertheless, one of the remarkable legacies of the British rule was the creation of an autocratic state, that is to say, establishing order over a defined territory (Rajan, 1969: 94-5). For the effective functioning of the state, the British required the assistance of the indigenous population that was competent in the English language and acculturated to British ways. With this intent, the British founded schools and colleges to develop a new elite class, 'Indian in color and blood but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Khilnani, 2002: 22-3).

Although the British-style education in the English language merely aimed at creating a class that could contribute to the effective administration of the country, it also had several unexpected consequences for the British administration. The most important of these was a nationalist movement that first emerged from a loyal

opposition that culminated in independence.

These early nationalists reacted against the arbitrary ideas and protocols of the British rule by founding the political organization known as the Congress or Indian National Congress in 1885 (Khilnani, 2002: 25; Rajan: 1969: 92). At this early stage, the main purpose of the Congress was 'to secure constitutional reform by cooperating with the British authority rather than defying it' (Smith, 1968: 608). They formally rejected the idea of revolution on the grounds that 'persistent Indian appeals to the British conscience together with efforts to prove themselves capable of parliamentary self-government, would eventually persuade Britain 'to grant India her independence as a willing gift' (ibid: 609). This implies that they made no overt demand for independence, but wanted, rather, that privileges of British subjects be extended to cooperative/compliant Indians so that conditions necessary for independence may be fostered (Khilnani, 2002: 25). However, as these conditions failed to materialize, a second, more radical, wave of nationalists arose, intending to be more proactive in their effort to realize Indian national independence.

1.2. Second Wave: Emergence of Radicals, 1905-19

The liberal approach adopted by the early nationalists could only prevail until the partition of Bengal in 1905, which led to the emergence of a radical nationalist program. After the partition, Muslims would dominate the East, which would weaken the position of Bengali Hindus who were more politically engaged. The nationalists therefore perceived the partition as an application of divide and rule policy, an attempt to divide India along religious lines between Muslims and Hindus. The result was the adoption of a more radical program.

The first aspect of this new program focused on economic nationalism. Indian nationalists understood that 'the British policy was keeping India unindustrialized and that economic decisions were based on the assumption that India would export raw materials and import British manufactured goods, the arguments in favor of Indian independence seemed more imperative than ever' (McLane, 1970: 86). In response, a movement to promote economic self-sufficiency was launched, known as the *Swadeshi*, which literally means 'native'. At first it merely entailed the idea of boycotting British goods. In various parts of India, British goods were boycotted and thrown onto bonfires, *swadeshi* clothes were worn, and *swadeshi* shops and industries were set up. Soon thereafter, however, as the *Swadeshi* movement gained momentum, it turned into a direct struggle against British rule and promoted Indian economic, social and spiritual autonomy (Sartori,

2003: 271). Led by a new generation of middle class nationalists who had been educated under the British system, such as Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, *Swadeshi* nationalists were convinced that the boycott of British goods should be extended to British institutions, including schools, colleges, law courts and government service (Wolpert, 2000: 276-7). In keeping with this notion, they founded 'National Schools' with an Indian curriculum, favored Indian languages over English, and encouraged a new respect for indigenous values. A moderate *Swadeshi* leader G. K. Gokhale, once described *Swadeshism* as a movement with a broad agenda entailing any sort of issues that have an impact on an Indian's life:

> "…Swadeshism at its highest is not merely an industrial movement, but that it affects the whole life of the nation, -that Swadeshism at its highest is a deep, passionate, fervent, all-embracing love of the motherland, and that this love seeks to show itself, not in one sphere of activity only, but in all: it invades the whole man, and it will not rest until it has raised the whole man" (McLane, 1970: 86-7).

Besides the social and economic aspect of nationalism, revolutionary political characteristics of the nationalist movement began to emerge in the period after 1905. Radicals within this new group of nationalists were determined to make it impossible for the British to continue to function, and by implication, to rule, in India (Wolpert, 2000: 267). Spurred by this goal, the youth, especially the students, within the new movement resorted to violence. Liberation societies appeared in Bengal, Bombay, Punjab and in other provinces of India, which were responsible for the killing of Britons and moderate Anglophile Indians alike (McLane, 1970: 61). In short, the partition of Bengal in 1905 marked a turning point in the history of Indian nationalism by provoking the emergence of a second, more proactive and antagonistic nationalist movement that adopted radical social, economic and revolutionary methods to overthrow British rule.

The rise of radical nationalism also provoked tensions within the Congress. After the Bengali partition in 1905, division grew between the radicals and moderates. Pherozshah Mehta and G. K. Gokhale emerged as the leaders of the moderate wing whereas Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak began to represent the radical faction of the Congress. Tension reached their peak during the 1907 Surat session of the Congress when Lala Lajpat Rai became the radicals' first candidate for presidency (Wolpert, 2000: 281). For the moderates Mehta and Gokhale, his candidacy was completely unacceptable. The heated debate that ensued precipitated a factional fight that remained unresolved by the end of the session and split India's premier nationalist organization (ibid: 281). The Congress

remained a house divided for the next nine years. Nevertheless, the moderates managed to preserve their dominant position in the Congress, mostly owing to an interregnum period of the radical movement. By 1908, the more radical leaders were largely out of the picture; Tilak was arrested and charged with sedition and sentenced to six years in prison after the first bombing taking British lives in Bengal. While Tilak was in prison, other leaders somehow became unengaged and missing. Bipin Pal moved to London, and Lajpat Rai journeyed to the United States (ibid: 282). Without its key leaders, the radical movement lost momentum, and the moderates were able to maintain their supremacy in the Congress until 1914.

By this point British authorities, seeking expanded political peace, saw an opportunity after the death of moderate leaders, Mehta and Gokhale and released Tilak from prison. Tilak returned to claim leadership over the nationalist movement, but in the interim came to the realization that independence, or at least the transformation of India, was impossible through radical politics (Kulke and Rothermund, 2001: 399). He therefore rejoined his fellow nationalists in the Congress in 1916. From this position he advocated Indian self-government possessing a dominion status within the British Empire. To this end he co-founded the All India Home Rule with Irish socialist and theosophist Annie Besant and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Indian Muslim leader (Mortimer, 1983: 73).

At this juncture Indian politics became subject to wider international developments. Britain declared war against Germany soon after World War I began. The initial response of India was supportive of the crown. However, as soon as the casualties were reported, it became clear that the war would only bring calamity to India. The war years were grueling for the Indian people. They constantly feared German invasion, underwent an economic crisis stemming from the cessation of German trade, and simultaneously experienced widespread famine due to increasing demand for food by England and her allies (Wolpert, 2000: 289-291).

These war conditions engendered the beginnings of political change in India. First, because the Britons were fighting against the Ottoman/Muslim Caliph, Indian Muslims abandoned their pro-British stance (ibid: 286). Under the leadership of Jinnah, Indian Muslims joined forces in 1916 with the Congress and signed the Lucknow Pact. Together they sought to pressure the British Government to grant Indians greater autonomy in running their own affairs in their country. Specifically, they called for 'elected majorities on expanded provincial legislative councils, as well as on an enlarged Imperial Legislative Council' (ibid: 294).

Secondly, the war awakened new aspirations, a new pride and a new consciousness in India. More than a million Indians were shipped overseas during the war and returned home with a wider vision of the world. They saw how French and English peasants lived in comparison to Indians, and demanded equal status (ibid: 297). Nothing less was satisfactory.

Thirdly, during the unusual circumstances of the war, the radical and moderate wings of the Congress established harmonious relations, as demonstrated in its annual meeting in 1917 (Kulke and Rothermund, 2001: 400). The effects of the war brought unforeseen advances in Indian nationalist movements. The All India Home Rule and the Lucknow Pact united the radicals, moderates and Muslims of India together against the British rule. The result was a new political environment of impatience for liberation from imperial constraints (Inamdar, 1983: 227).

However, these developments alone proved incapable of bringing peace to India. In fact, at war's end the British administration turned their attention to these new developments in India and responded with the repressive measures of the 1919 Rowlatt Acts. This legislation vested the British Administration with extraordinary powers to quell any sort of sedition through such measures as silencing the press, detaining political activists without trial, and arresting suspected rebels without a warrant. The Acts were passed despite the universal opposition of Indian members in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1919. In protest, all anti-British nationalist groups called for a nationwide work suspension day, which led to a deeper sense of independent national identity and led to a new leader in the cause for Indian national independence (Wolpert, 2000: 298).

1.3. Third Wave: Gandhian Nationalism, 1920-40

The unrest stemming from the Rowlatt Acts strengthened the opposition against the British Administration and fostered conditions for the rise of a new leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) who had studied Law in London and worked in Bombay and in South Africa as a barrister. Against the apartheid regime in South Africa, he came up with the idea of *Satyagraha*, or resistance through non-violent means. After he returned to India in 1915, he introduced his method of resistance to the masses. Confronted by the Rowlatt Acts, Gandhi called all Indians to pledge themselves to civil disobedience of such unjust laws, and declared a nationwide work suspension day during the first week of April 1919, as a prelude to the launching of a national *Satyagraha* campaign (cf. Dessai, 1998: 94).

Anti-Rowlatt activists answered Gandhi's call throughout the country. Fearing the loss of control, the British military responded to the protests very harshly. On April 13, 1919 British General Dyer ordered his soldiers fire into an unarmed crowd of peaceful demonstrators. According to the General's report, his goal aimed at more than merely dispersing the crowd and sought to reduce the morale of nationalists by killing as many Indians as possible:

> "I fired and continued to fire till the crowd dispersed and I considered this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand the casualties would have been greater in proportion. It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more specifically throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity" (as cited by McLane, 1970: 69-70).

The severity of the General's actions contrasted sharply with his intentions. The massacre of a thousand Indians (Lapping, 1985: 38),[1] turned millions of Indians from loyal supporters of the British Administration to pro-nationalists striving for independence. Under these conditions Gandhi easily transformed the small nationalist struggle into a mass movement.

With this momentum Gandhi perfected his policy of *Satyagraha* and called for regular campaigns of civil disobedience. Among the most famous of these protests is the 1930 *Salt Satyagraha* in which Gandhi and his followers made their own salt from seawater and thereby challenging the tax. Another significant *Satyagraha* campaign of Gandhi was in 1942 when he launched the 'Quit India Movement', a civil disobedience campaign aimed at catalyzing immediate independence of India.[2] Gradually these campaigns brought the desired effects, and

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[1] Colonial authorities estimated the fatalities at 379 but according to the Indian National Congress the number of casualties was approximately 1000. See Lapping (1985: 38).

[2] 'Quit India' was the last great *satyagraha* campaign of Gandhi. The process that ultimately launched the campaign, started with Cripps Mission in March 1942. Cripps Mission was a British delegation sent to India for the purpose of negotiating total cooperation during World War II, in return for devolution of power from British rule to an Indian legislature. Following the failure of talks between Stafford Cripps and the Congress, a resolution was passed in July 1942 asking for immediate independence in return of war support. Should the British remain unresponsive, a civil disobedience movement would be launched. The British government rejected these demands and in August 1942 the 'Quit India Resolution' was passed in the Bombay session. Gandhi called upon all Indians to join a massive civil disobedience movement and instructed them to act as an independent nation.

after more than two decades of civil disobedience, British resolve flagged and in 1947 India was granted its long-awaited independence.

This was not the end of the conflicts for Gandhi, however. From his assumption of the leadership of Indian national movement in 1921 Gandhi had led nationwide non-cooperation movements in order to attain independence from British Raj. Gandhi spoke of Hindu-Muslim unity as 'the breath of our life' deploring all communal conflict and violence (Wolpert, 2000: 309). Gandhi sought to counter communal politics by being equally respectful to all religions and by incorporating symbols of various religions in his public prayers and other rituals. Although his approach in dealing with communal aspects of Indian politics was rooted in the folk culture of India, it was not only non-modern in its meaning of secularism but was also impractical in a plural society where social mobilization was taking place on the basis of subgroup identities (Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989: 309). Gandhi was even criticized of turning the Indian independence movement into a religious one in an unintentional way. While the Mahatma's leadership mobilized masses, it also appealed mostly to Hindu cultural roots through its use of Hindu symbols and thus tended to polarize India's pluralistic communal society. However, his support for the Khilafat movement until 1924 contributed to broaden this narrow religious appeal. The Muslim population sought to win not only independence from India, but to create their own Islamic state. This was accomplished first in August 1947 with independence from Britain and then division from India. The Islamic state was established officially in 1956.

Gandhi stood against the vivisection of his motherland and two nations theory of Jinnah, but he was marginalized even within the Congress in 1947, and his assassination by a Hindu extremist on January 30, 1948 was an embarrassment for the Congress. Gandhi had argued that assets of Pakistan left in India should be proportioned fairly. That was one of the reasons behind the accusations of fundamentalist Hindus against his pro-Muslim posture.

However, it would be wrong to attribute Indian independence alone to Gandhian civil disobedience campaigns. Several other factors contributed to the creation of conditions leading to the British decision to quit India. One such factor was the activity of Subhas Chandra Bose who organized an armed resistance campaign against the British with his Indian National Army (INA), which was comprised of Indian soldiers who had been captured by the Japanese as prisoners of war. This convinced the British Administration that they could not trust the Indian soldiers in their army. These factors together, coupled with the changing international order after the Second World War, forced the British regime to review

its mandate in India (cf. Ghosh, 1969). Ultimately the cost of staying in India after the War was greater than leaving. That persuaded Britain 'to grant India her independence as a willing gift' (Smith, 1968: 608).

Thus, nationalism in India emerged as a liberal elite movement that aimed at political reform through cooperation with the British authority. This type of nationalism was conservative and non-revolutionary in its essence. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, a new wave of nationalism emerged that had a decidedly more radical nationalist program. Led by a new generation of lower-middle class nationalists, this group adopted antagonistic methods of confronting the established regime, including boycotting British goods and institutions, and the use of violence as a political means. Lastly, Gandhi emerged as a nationalist leader who won the support of the masses, and built the necessary momentum that neither the liberals nor radicals could achieve. However, despite the popular support, Gandhi pursued a conservative and non-violent approach in his search for liberty from the British rule. This culminated in the longed-anticipated independence on August 15, 1947, but led to a host of new challenges for the modern Republic of India.

2. Post-Independence Period

Once liberated from the ties of the British Empire, the nationalists now undertook the task of establishing the Indian State with democratic roots that ideally would serve all Indians fairly. The challenges began early with the departure of a significant portion of India's Muslim population wanting to create the independent state of Pakistan. Quite apart from Pakistan, which sought to create a religio-political unity from its predominantly Muslim polity, India was compelled by its cultural and religious diversity to create a pluralistic political environment to serve its constituency. The effect of this division changed the face of Indian demographics significantly, displacing approximately 12.5 million people with estimates of loss of life up to a million (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006: 221-2). How these religio-national issues affected the establishment and institutionalization of the new Indian State under Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi will be the focus of the remainder of the article.

2.1. Secular Nationalism in the Nehru Era, 1947-64

From the very beginning, India's diversity makes it difficult to categorize the many nationalist expressions into any one nationalism, or any one group. Now, without the British in control, these various national groups continually struggled

for power and control, rather than power-sharing mechanisms of a 'mature' democracy. The fledgling institutions of this new democracy are regularly defeated by the self-interest of (religio-) nationalist groups who gain a measure of legitimacy as a recognized political party, but seek only to move the whole of India under their domain of power. The diversity of national movements can be illustrated through the words of the poet A. K. Ramanujan: 'One way of defining diversity for India is to say what the Irishman is said to have said about trousers. When asked whether trousers were singular or plural, he said, "Singular at the top and plural at the bottom" '(as cited by Khilnani, 2002: 6). Commenting on this excerpt, Khilnani argues that Indian nationalism was plural even at the top, 'a *dhoti* with endless folds' (ibid.: 6). Diverse and competing visions of India's future existed in the minds of nationalist leaders in the early years following independence. The foremost visionaries of this era were Patel and Nehru, but they represented rival conceptions of modern India.

Sardar Patel (1875-1950), the first deputy prime minister of independent India in charge of Home Affairs, inclined to a more conservative and authoritarian approach to the new India. For him, the state would function in a way to express 'an existing pattern of India's society, with all its hierarchy, particularity and religious tastes' (ibid.: 33). Nehru, by contrast, was determined to reconstitute India's traditional society and to transform it in line with universal ideas and values, typified by his commitment to Enlightenment *secularism. Nehru acquired this worldview as a child brought up in a British system, a student educated in England at Harrow and* Cambridge, and as *an intellectual inspired by Fabian socialism. These factors contributed to Nehru's cultivation of cosmopolitan and secular ideals.*

Nehru assumed the leadership of *the first national government and instituted a secular basis for policy-making, which he most clearly articulated in* Pancha Sheela*, or the Five Principles. These emphasized secularism, reason, free-thought, science and progress, and were the foundational principles of India's new state (Akbar, 2002: 27). Sardar Patel, Nehru's deputy, did not fully share Nehru's secular ideals and 'continued his flirtation with the militant Hindu organization, the* Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangha (RSS)' (Upadhyaya, 1992: 827). Conversely, Nehru 'had always had a strong aversion to Hindu communal organizations,' and, with the departure of many Muslims to Pakistan, regarded the Hindu majority to be 'a greater threat than the minority Muslim League' (ibid: 827). The Hindu right, who opposed his secular policies, accused Nehru of being a crypto-Muslim. This criticism stems from the Nehruvian model of majoritarian secularism that emphasized 'the freedom of religion for minorities and restraint and generosity from

the majority' (ibid: 828).[3] Confrontation between the two visionaries ended upon Patel's death in 1950, which finally yielded 'singularity at the top' of Indian nationalism. Thus, Nehru's universalist idealism prevailed in India during the period between 1950 and 1964. Among the most significant accomplishments of Nehru's universalism was the institutionalization of the Indian state, construction of an Indian identity based on citizenship, and inroads to the eradication of the caste system. These will be discussed in turn.

Nehru's nation-building project needed to transform the state that India inherited from the British Empire. To fuel the appetite of the voracious Empire, the Brits had created a state system efficient in extraction and exploitation of the Indian people. One of Nehru's first tasks was the redistribution of resources aimed at producing public/common goods. In Khilnani's words, 'the state in India was enlarged, its ambitions inflated, and it was transformed from a distant, alien object into one that aspired to infiltrate the everyday lives of Indians, proclaiming itself responsible for everything they could desire: jobs, ration cards, educational places, security, cultural recognition' (Khilnani, 2002: 41). Thus, Nehru transformed the state into a mechanism for the production, allocation and distribution of public goods.

Nehru also strengthened the unity of India by peaceful accommodation of ethnic tensions. Many nationalists in the pre-independence era feared the balkanization of India, which discouraged earlier attempts for independence. Reaching a level of political maturity was more significant for the majority of nationalists rather than immediate independence from the British Administration. Nevertheless, the nightmares of Indian nationalists seemed to come true when, on the eve of India's declaration of independence, Muslim Pakistan declared its independence from Britain and seceded from India. Other secessionist tendencies followed the example of Pakistan, and demanded a linguistic redesign of the Indian federation. Although Nehru was initially reluctant to reform, 'he recalculated that the dangers of not devolving power to linguistic groups were greater than of doing so' and reorganized the federal system along linguistic states in 1956 (Kohli, 2004: 286-7). In this redesign, Nehru sought a balance between power of the center and of the provinces. He thereby quieted the demands for secession, such as the case of the Tamil nationalist movement, and strengthened the unity of India (ibid: 285-288).

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[3] Secularism as tolerance and generosity towards minorities carried connotations of forbearance or self-restraint; it implied that the numerical majority, the Hindus, would not use their power to give Hinduism a favored place over other religions. See Bajpai (2002: 185).

Nehru also sought to eliminate the antiquated but enduring caste system. He did so by instituting universal rights to all citizens, and by introducing positive discrimination, which compensated for the historical injustice suffered by the lowest-ranking Hindu castes, namely, the so-called untouchables, known today as Dalits (Sutherland, 2012: 93). Dushkin defined this policy, which was widely known as scheduled caste policy, as follows:

> "Seats are reserved in proportion to population in the Union and State legislatures, with an additional provision at other levels of government. Various reservations, often equal to or greater than the proportion of population, are provided for direct recruitment and some types of promotional posts in government service; a number of other concessions go along with them. Reservations are also provided for admission to many higher educational institutions. Financial assistance is granted under a variety of programs, notably in education" (Dushkin, 1967: 626).

Initially this policy of scheduled castes appeared to correct long-established, systemic injustices inflicted upon the untouchables. However, this policy had unforeseen consequences. On the one hand it failed to eradicate the remnants of the caste system, and on the other hand the political game imposed by democratic elections turned these categories into new political self-identifications:

> "At election time, politicians now promised -in the name of equality- to extend the proportion of reserved places, and to make them available to newly defined 'backward class' categories; caste groups, meanwhile, in a curious inversion of the ideal of social mobility, competed to be defined as 'backward' in order to corner the benefits of reservation" (Khilnani, 2002: 37).

Designed as a policy to dissolve categories of caste system, the scheduled caste policy became an instrument that intensified identity politics of nation-building in the Post-Nehru era under Indira Gandhi. This we now explore in greater detail.

2.2. Identity Politics and Nationalism under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, 1966-89

Those who believed that India and the Congress were held together solely by Nehru's charisma predicted chaos when Nehru died in 1964 (Kochanek, 1966: 288). Nehru's persuasive leadership in fact had become a fundamental element of national identity for the Indian state. Nevertheless, Nehru's passing did not create enduring chaos, but rather a short period of succession uncertainty. After Nehru, provincial leaders of the Congress formed a kind of collective leadership known as

the 'Syndicate' that arranged the smooth transfer of power to the new Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri (Hardgrave, 1970: 256). Upon his unexpected death in 1966, the Syndicate again arranged an orderly succession by settling on the premiership of Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter (Kochanek, 1966: 288; Brecher, 1967). With the exception of three years of the Janata coalition between 1977 and 1980, she would rule India for the next two decades.

Although the Syndicate was certain that they could manipulate her, Mrs. Gandhi was able to introduce radical changes in the organization of the party, the conduct of democratic politics, and character of the state that reached beyond the Syndicate's control. She first changed the structure of the party. Since the 1930s 'a combination of strong central command and relatively independent provincial leadership [-i.e. the Syndicate] was the axis of the Congress machine' (Khilnani, 2002: 43). Although this model restricted the hand of central leadership, Indira Gandhi preserved this mechanism because it reduced the risk of conflict between the center and the provinces. However, the widespread defeats inflicted on the party in the 1967 elections accentuated the conflict between the central/governmental and provincial/organizational wings of the party. The 1969 presidential elections brought the conflict to center stage and catalyzed a crisis that split the Congress Party after four months of inner-party conflict (Hardgrave, 1970: 256). The split dissolved the networks of patronage and voter banks controlled by the organizational wing of the party. As a result, Mrs. Gandhi was urged to adopt a more populist approach and appeal directly to India's poor millions. She launched the *Garibi Hatao* (Abolish Poverty) campaign and then called for early elections in 1971 (Khilnani, 2002: 44). Not surprisingly, her populist strategy paid off in the elections, but it inaugurated a new pattern of democratic politics in India.

Deprived of its organizational wing, the Congress Party increasingly relied on populist politics to mobilize the masses, who now had become more aware of the significance of their participation in elections. This brought about a transformation in democratic politics: traditional institutions, such as caste and religion, underwent a process of politicization, and their constituents began to vote in pursuit of their own interests (Kothari, 1970: 938). This trend eventually led to politicization of all 'social groups whose identities could be activated for political ends: religious, urban and rural, caste, language, class or ethnic origin' (Khilnani, 2002: 50). Now electoral politics had the character of reciprocal, give and take relations between the party and the social groups.

Another unexpected consequence of Mrs. Gandhi's new strategy was a

growing political crisis. Within a few years after her victory in the 1971 elections, those unhappy with her policies openly challenged her. This time opposition moved from within the party ranks to the streets. The government could not prevent countrywide protests and strikes, and Mrs. Gandhi, under the influence of her corrupt and eccentric son Sanjay, advised president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to declare a national state of emergency. During this crisis in 1975, her autocratic rule altered the character of the state and thereby deviated from Nehru's democratic idealism and universalism:

> "Fundamental rights and legal remedies protected by the Constitution of the Republic of India were suspended for foreigners as well as citizens. Most major political leaders in the Opposition were arrested, as were some members of Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party and others believed to be engaged in activities harmful to the State. The number of persons arrested never has been verified, but more than 10,000 appear to have been jailed by August, and the total up to September may be much higher. Censorship of the press was introduced" (Park, 1975: 996).

Mrs. Gandhi's choice to accommodate ethnic tensions indicated another case of her divergence from Nehru's principles. After the 1980 electoral victories she turned to Hinduism in her personal and political life and Congress became a primary vehicle to mobilize and exploit Hindu militancy (Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989: 320). In the need to appeal to minority groups in 1980, Indira Gandhi started flirting with communal themes, occasionally courting India's majority Hindus by railing against other religious groups, especially Sikhs (Kohli, 1997: 332). Representing about half of Punjab's population, Sikhs made various political demands, including secession from India and the creation of a sovereign state called Khalistan. Sikh nationalists were divided in two groups; moderates aiming at reform and concessions, and militants willing to use violent means. Not wanting to project weakness through accommodation with minorities, which might have lost her votes among electoral pluralities, Indira Gandhi rejected compromises with the Sikh moderates. Faced then with secessionist Sikh challenges in Punjab, her reaction was 'not only unaccommodating but [she] actively sought to divide and rule the Sikhs. The strategy backfired, as some Sikh groups turned sharply militant' (Kohli, 2004: 288). In response, she adopted repressive military measures, which served only to intensify the conflict. In 1984, she even ordered an assault on the Golden Temple, a Sikh holy site in Amritsar. Such provocation proved to be her death sentence when two of her bodyguards of Sikh origin assassinated her as revenge for the attack on the temple. This incident was not only the end of one political era, but also the harbinger of a new one in which politicized religion would become a major actor in Indian politics (cf. Hardrave, 1985).

Compromises were offered to moderate Sikhs under the government of Rajiv Gandhi (1985-89), who was determined to attain reconciliation. These compromises led to the attenuation of violence, but this was a short-lived peace. The primary deterrent to compromise was again political opportunism. The major obstacle was Rajiv Gandhi's own growing political vulnerability; as his national popularity declined, starting in 1986, he was increasingly pressed within his own party not to make any further concessions to minorities (Kohli, 1997: 337; Kohli, 1992: 59).

Similar to Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi engaged in manipulative management of ethnicity to stimulate awareness for short-term political advantage, which had damaging results in the region in the long run (Manor, 1996: 470). Specifically, his manipulative ethnic policies deepened the ethnic strife in Kashmir and Sri Lanka. His brutal involvement in Kashmir had damaging results for India and unnecessarily preserved the tension between Muslim and Hindus in the region. Similarly, when he was involved in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in favor of the Tamil Tigers, he was only concerned with short-term interests. However, the closure of the Tamil Tigers' camps in India subsequent to the agreement between Sri Lanka and India brought about Tamil hostility towards India. Furthermore, the Indian army had to fight against the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka as part of the peace enforcement agreement between the two countries. His political oscillation for short-term gain cost Rajiv Gandhi his life. Ironically, the Tamil militants who assassinated him were trained in camps once located in India (Roberts, 2010: 25-29).

Before his assassination, Gandhi's political career, at least his premiership, came to an end when the 'Bofors scandal' broke out over military expenses. The corruption allegations resulted in a great lack of confidence in the 1989 Congress, leaving the ground open for the rise of the Hindu right, which implied that militancy would reemerge after a brief interlude of peace.

2.3. Hindu Nationalism and the rise of the BJP

Although it remained insignificant until 1970s, the Hindu right has always existed in independent Indian politics and had managed to gather ardent opponents of Nehru's secularism under their organizational umbrella. The most prominent of these was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), National Volunteers Organization, founded in 1925. Baldev Raj Nayar describes the relationship between RSS and Hindu right, particularly Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as follows: 'The RSS as the sun or mother and the BJP as the satellite or child, with cadres from the former constituting a large part of the membership of the latter' (Nayar, 2000: 795). While

the RSS represented the extreme version of Hindu nationalism, the moderate version arose during the 1970s and found wider acceptance among India's middle classes. The emergence of Jana Sangh[4] as the leader of the new incarnation of BJP in 1980 was a part of the 'revisionist' ideological posture that was a clever and subtle departure from the militancy of RSS. Although it maintained a complete repudiation of Nehru's concept of Indian national identity, the BJP recognized his successes in balancing competing political forces. Nehru was particularly conscious of the contributions of Islam and other religions to Indian culture and civilization, and he prevented Hindu predominance in the formation of India's national identity. As a result, RSS militants viewed Nehru's 'pro-Islamic' policies as anti-Hindu (Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989: 313). The BJP reinvigorated this criticism of Nehru's policies by claiming that: 'India is Hindu', as expressed by the term 'Hindutva'. The Hindutva-oriented assertions claimed that Islam and Christianity are alien to India, and argued plurality and for unity with the slogan 'one nation, one culture and India first'. The call of the Hindu right found response particularly from urban middle class, which led to the rise of BJP in 1990s. Thus, the 1990s represented an era in which the competing ideologies of Hindu fundamentalism and neoliberal economic policies became fused and found resonance within an influential sector of India's polity.

If the governing style of Nehru can be described as accommodationist, and the style of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi is autocratic, the Hindu right's style may be described as polarizing. This demonstrates tendencies more centralizing and homogenizing manner than the accommodationists, and less strident than the autocrats (Manor, 1996: 470). Sikh militancy in Punjab and government action in the Shah Bano[5] cases were both factors of provocation that gave rise to the Hindu right. In their view, the Hindu elite spent too much effort appeasing minorities.

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[4] As the BJP's predecessor, Jana Sangh, founded in 1951, took part in the country's political process; it came to moderate its political stance and engage in forming alliances with other political parties. In 1977 it merged itself into the hastily created Janata Party, which came to power at the center in that year following the electoral defeat of the Congress Party. The Janata coalition collapsed in 1979. See Nayar (2000: 797).

[5] This case was significant since it represents an example of appeasement of minorities in the eyes of Hindu fundamentalists. In the case of Shah Bano, who was a Muslim woman divorced by her husband and looking for maintenance, the Supreme Court invoked section 125 of Code of Criminal Procedure, which applies to everyone regardless of caste or religion. The judgment was perceived as violation of Muslim Personal Law and protested by conservative Muslims. The government under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, passed an act 'The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986', that repealed the judgment of the court. This incident was criticized on the grounds that fundamentalist minorities could put pressure on government and judicial decisions. 'The new law was a concession to the conservative Muslim lobby according to which Muslim society is subject to Sharia everywhere and for all time'. See Madan (1993: 688).

Among other issues, the banning of Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*[6] (1988) was perceived as an unnecessary concession to the Muslim minority.

Denouncing Nehruvian secularism was also an integral part of the propaganda of the Hindu right. Hindu fundamentalists claimed that Nehru's westernized secularism was incompatible with Indian identity, which needed to reflect Hindu traits and culture. This assessment may indeed be descriptively correct of Indian nationalism prior to Nehru's leadership in the movement. Mahatma Gandhi made extensive use of Hindu symbols, particularly at the outset of the nationalist movement, and by the extremist members of the Indian National Congress such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Thus it is possible to suggest that India's nationalist movement, based upon Hindu cultural revival, was basically non-secular in character and was hijacked by the secularists like Nehru (Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989: 323).

With populist appeals such as these, the Hindu right-wing BJP saw remarkable political ascendency in the 1990s. The party held only two seats in the Eighth Lok Sabha in 1984, but increased its total to 85 in the 1989 election with 11.4 percent of the vote, and to 119 in 1991 with 19.9 percent of the vote (Thakur, 1993: 653). The rise of the party has occurred in a period marked by the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies in India. The Congress Party government under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao accelerated economic liberalization. As the main opposition party, the BJP appealed to those who have been disenfranchised by economic liberalization and accused Rao's accommodationist management of flaming communal tensions. As Atul Kohli remarks, the nationalist element in Indian business's protests found a strong echo in the swadeshi politics of India's main opposition party at the time. The BJP mobilized these sentiments effectively in the mid-1990s, putting the ruling Congress government on the defensive (Kohli, 2006: 1363). The most prominent example of these sentiments surrounds the Ayodhya debate that culminated with Babri Mosque attack in 1992. At the center of this debate was the question of whether a Hindu temple on this location had been demolished in order to build the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The BJP headed the Uttar Pradesh state government from 1991 to 1992, and was deeply

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[6] *The Satanic Verses*, published in 1988, has been at the center of debates because of the Muslim reaction. The book, inspired in part by the life of Muhammad, has been criticized of having blasphemous references. *The Satanic Verses* was banned in India, in the same month of its publication. According to Ramesh Thakur, the banning of *The Satanic Verses* written by the Indian-born Muslim, Salman Rushdie, was the next nail in the coffin of secularism in India. See Thakur, (1993: 650).

involved in the controversy. The site of Babri Mosque was considered to be one of the most sacred sites for Hinduism, and BJP launched a nationwide campaign for the construction of a temple dedicated to Ram in Ayodhya. The BJP's leader Advani undertook the campaign in 1990, which heightened communal conflicts dating back to mid-1980s. In 1986 Rajiv Gandhi unlocked the doors of the Babri Masjid, particularly to appease Hindus who protested his actions in the Shah Bano case. The opening of Babri Masjid for worship at the Ram shrine led to increasing communal riots in the second half of the 1980s (cf. Chibber and Misra, 1993).

Increasingly acrimonious debate and altercations focused on the Ayodhya issue ended with the demolition of Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992. The destruction of the mosque fueled the already heated atmosphere, and riots broke out in big cities causing thousands of deaths. The social upheaval led many to question not only the role of the BJP in the Babri Mosque incident, but also the government's weak measures against Hindu militancy. Rao's government took action after the Ayodhya incident and dismissed the BJP-led state government in Uttar Pradesh. This unilateral and unwarranted action in turn led to harsh criticism that *strengthened the electoral base of the BJP: 'Rao's tough measures against the BJP leaders and the ban on the BJP's three auxiliary organizations galvanized the party and its supporters into a common stand against the government' (Parikh, 1993: 675-6). Nevertheless the provocative role played by BJP in the Ayodhya incident was undeniable, and this translated into the major factor causing the delay of its electoral success. As Bouton noted: 'Voters punished the BJP in the 1993 state elections for its involvement in the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992. From then on the BJP retreated from the more aggressive version of its Hindu chauvinism' (1998: 84). Additionally,* the BJP discarded its earlier strident position on economic nationalism (*swadeshi*) in favor of a position convergent with that of the Congress Party. Favoring a free market economy, BJP regained the support of the business community.

The last wave of nationalism in India came with the BJP, who appealed to the middle and lower-middle classes suffering from the economic transformation in the country. The party was able to win hearts and votes through a populist rhetoric underlining religion and tradition. This, however, led to the polarization of politics between Hindus and non-Hindus in the 1990s, which were marked by ethnic tension and confrontation. Now that the lower classes suffer less and benefit from the fruits of the economic transformation, the degree of their support for chauvinistic policies is declining. In 1998, the electoral support for the BJP decreased but it was still sufficient to make a return to the office by establishing a coalition with other right

wing parties, i.e. National Democratic Alliance. In 2004, a coalition of center-left parties led by the National Congress, known as United Progressive Alliance (UPA), took over the government from the BJP; and Manmohan Singh, an ethnic Sikh has become the Prime Minister for the first time in the history of India. Furthermore, Singh managed to return to office following the second electoral victory of UPA in 2009. However, this does not imply that Hindu nationalism has come to an end. Nationalism, it seems, is karmic, and the legacy of the past will not soon disappear. More than likely we will again see its next reincarnation in Indian politics.

Conclusion

This historical survey of Indian nationalist movements reveals several important issues. First, in the presence of an external hegemonic force like Britain controlling Indian politics, different and competing nationalist movements were able to join forces for the purpose of achieving self-rule. However, once independence was accomplished, these competing movements traded self-rule for self-interest. The result has been secession, threats of secession, mass population exchange at great price to human life, authoritarian rule, political bifurcation along religio-national nomenclatures, multiple assassinations and general absence of will for compromise necessary for the successful rule of a large democracy.

Secondly, Indian democracy is both shaped and threatened by conflicting religio-national interests. In the pre-independence period these various groups were willing to work together in some loose coalition in order to throw off the bonds of British hegemony in order to achieve self-rule. However, this self-rule did not in any significant way create an affinity for pluralism, as was immediately evident with the secession of Muslims to form their own, non-pluralist Islamic state guided by Shari'ah Law. Since the creation of Pakistan and independence, India has undergone severe tests to the democratic processes, and seething hostilities have occasionally erupted into violence and assassination. Each ruling party has resisted instituting policy-sharing mechanisms in favor of retaining the privileged position of governance, and transitions in leadership have often been accomplished through violence and bloodshed. Thus, democratic channels have proved to be more channels for acquiring power than creating fair governance for all.

Thirdly, these signs indicate that, in the absence of an external hegemonic power to consolidate and focus internal ambitions, the world's largest democracy is still very immature in its development, and that self-interested religio-national groups could lead to India's division and demise. The result would be even greater

regional turmoil as various national groups attempt to establish their own statelets, much as Bangladesh did in 1971.

Finally, autocratic and militant postures have only fostered resentment, fear and inter-communal violence, whereas the benchmark of democracy, accommodation and compromise, have ultimately brought a modicum of stability. Promoting democratic institutions, both in India and regionally, will temper partisan religio-national initiatives.

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