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INDIAN ELECTORAL POLITICS
AND
THE RISE OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

By
YOOSUK KIM

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Yoosuk Kim defended on February 6, 2006.

Dale Smith
Professor Directing Thesis

Scott Flanagan
Committee Member

Bawa Singh
Committee Member

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

To
Wilhelm von Humboldt

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GLOSSARY

<i>Bahujan Samaj Party</i>	Party of the dalits and other disadvantaged groups
<i>Bharat</i>	‘India’ in Sanskrit
<i>Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS)</i>	India People’s Party; Hindu nationalist party founded in 1951; merged with the Janata Dal party in 1977; essentially the predecessor of the BJP
<i>Bharatiya Janata</i>	Indian People
<i>Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)</i>	A Hindu nationalist party formed in 1980 by former members of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) party and the Janata Party.
<i>Bharatiya Rashtra</i>	Indian Nation
<i>Congress</i>	Oldest party in India founded in 1885. The party of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. A moderately nationalist and secular party. Also known as the ‘Indian National Congress’ or ‘Congress (I)’ with ‘I’ for ‘Indira’
<i>Dalit</i>	Ex-Untouchables
<i>Hindu Mahasabha</i>	Great Hindu Association
<i>Hindutva</i>	‘Hindu-ness’; the defining ideology of Hindu nationalism
<i>Janata Dal</i>	People’s Party
<i>Lok</i>	People
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	House of the People; lower house of parliament
<i>Mandal Commission Report</i>	A 1980 report on the need to provide opportunity of employment to the backward classes and castes. The recommendation of the commission was implemented in 1990 with 27% of central administration and public sector jobs reserved for the backward classes and castes.
<i>National Democratic Alliance (NDA)</i>	A coalition of parties formed just before the 1999 general election. BJP is the major party in the coalition.
<i>Other Backward Classes (OBCs)</i>	Backward classes other than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
<i>Raj</i>	Rule, government, administration; royal
<i>Rajya Sabha</i>	Upper house of parliament

<i>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)</i>	‘National Volunteer Association’; a well organized Hindu militant association; many of the BJP members were and are members of the RSS
<i>Sabha</i>	Council or house
<i>Scheduled Castes (SCs)/Scheduled Tribes (STs)</i>	Those castes and tribes whose positions in the legislature, government posts etc. are reserved under the constitution.
<i>Svadeshi</i>	Indian made goods; “of our own country”; also, economic self-reliance
<i>Swayamsevaks</i>	Members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)
<i>Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)</i>	Universal Hindu Society; militant Hindu organization

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the Indian electoral politics and the rise of the Hindu nationalist party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from the early 1980s. Specifically, I focus on the effect of the weakening of the Congress party on the rise of the BJP. I explore the broad contours and conditions of Indian electoral politics and explore how its evolution over the years has affected the fortunes of the BJP. This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions. What were the electoral implications of weakening of Congress? What were the rationales behind the rise of the BJP since the early 1980s? Was, and is, Hindu Nationalism the main cause of BJP's rise? Has India entered into an era of multi-party system? What are the implications of India's electoral re-alignment on participatory democracy? What are the effects of the new electoral environment on the lower castes and classes? More importantly, is India becoming more democratic as a result of the realignment of its electoral politics?

I argue that the rise of the BJP had been facilitated by the weakening of Congress party. With the weakening of Congress, the electoral playing field has been leveled as to provide the opportunity for the BJP and regional parties to enter national electoral politics. I argue that the rise of the BJP was not due to a significant shift of the Hindu electorate from Congress party to the BJP. Congress had weaker support from the northern Hindi Belt states than from the southern states, and it is from these dormant northern Hindi states that the BJP tapped for electoral support. I argue that the economic liberalization program launched in the early 1990s aided the BJP in garnering electoral support as it jibed well with free market plank of the BJP. I argue, the BJP, in order to appeal to a broad swathe of the electorate, has moderated its Hindu nationalist card but this moderation is not a foregone conclusion. The BJP remains a Hindu nationalist in hue. I argue the weakening of Congress has diminished the representation of the lower castes and classes, and this development led to the increasing power of regional parties with narrow electoral constituents. The hitherto under-represented groups—the lower caste groups and the lower economic classes—has found a footing in Indian electoral politics. I argue India has entered an epoch of multi-party electoral politics where national parties, in order to form a government, will be forced to reach out to smaller regional parties for support. I argue that the devolution of political power from Delhi to regional capitals and groups is a better reflection of Indian society and its attendant politics. I argue India is becoming more democratic and increasingly the most deprived members of Indian society are exercising their right and taking part in electoral politics and their vote is more valuable than ever before.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Argument

This thesis analyzes the transformation of India's electoral politics from the early 1980s, namely, the effects of the electoral re-alignment on the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This thesis seeks to analyze how the weakening of Congress provided the political and electoral opportunities for nascent and erstwhile marginal parties. In addition, this thesis seeks to shed further light on the rationale behind the electorate's support of the BJP since the early 1980s when the one party dominated Indian electoral politics segued into a two-party dominated multi-party system with the BJP eventually constituting the second pillar of the system with Congress.

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Background

Hindu nationalist party like the BJP is not new. In fact, the BJP is continuing the legacy of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS, Indian People's Party), which was formed in 1951. The BJS' support for a Hindu state did not resonate with the electorate during the 'Congress Raj' as the Congress party, under the leadership of Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and subsequently his daughter Indira Gandhi, dominated Indian politics. Congress' secularism provided an overarching tent where India's various social, ethnic and religious cleavages were brought into the fold where tensions were mollified, or suppressed, by the shrewd use government subsidies and policies. This Congress Raj, in effect, provided limited political and electoral opportunities for parties such as the BJS. Congress' chink in the armor appeared in 1975 when Indira Gandhi imposed a state of emergency, in effect suspending the constitution, after a court found Indira

Gandhi guilty of campaign malpractice, a verdict that would bar Indira Gandhi from participating in politics for six years. This imposition of emergency rule was the result of pressure from a mélange of non-Congress parties that called themselves Janata Morcha (People’s Front). This period is significant in Indian politics as it heralds the inexorable decline of the Congress party. It is in this context, that in 1980, the former remnants of the Janata Party, a party closely associated with the BJS, formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People’s Party). The key question here is, was the decline of the Congress a necessary and sufficient condition for the rise of the BJP? Stated differently, could the BJP have attained and sustained its electoral success from the 9th (1989) Lok Sabha (‘House of the People,’ National Assembly) election onwards had Congress remained the dominant party? I argue that the demise of Congress was *a* reason, but not necessarily the main cause. There was something more fundamental germinating in Indian polity—the awakening of the electorate, both of the middle and upper caste Hindus and lower castes in general. This awakening put these two groups in a collision course that provided the political opportunity for the non-Congress parties, including the BJP.

Indian Electoral Politics

The 9th Lok Sabha election held in 1989 was a watershed moment in Indian electoral politics. First, the heretofore dominant Congress saw its majority reduced from 404 seats in the Lok Sabha to 197 seats in a period of four years. Except for a brief interlude between 1977 and 1980 when the Janata Alliance held a simple majority in the Lok Sabha, Congress, from India’s independence in 1947, never failed to muster an absolute majority. Second, the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party saw its seats increase from 2 seats in the previous election to 85 seats. Since India’s independence, no Hindu nationalist party has been this successful in national elections. The most seats a Hindu nationalist party was able to win was 35 back in 1967 when the BJP’s predecessor the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) was able take advantage of the leadership vacuum in Congress after Nehru’s death in 1964. Third, the 9th Lok Sabha election heralded in a period where no single party held an absolute majority to form a government on its own. Coalition building became an essential feature of Indian electoral politics.

Table 1.1: Lok Sabha Elections in No. of Seats

Year	Congress	BJP (BJS until 1971)	Communist Parties	Others
1952	364	3	16	106
1957	371	4	27	92
1962	361	14	29	80
1967	283	35	42	160

Table 1.1 continued

Year	Congress	BJP (BJS until 1971)	Communist Parties	Others
1971	352	22	48	96
1977	154	-	29	359
1980	353	-	47	129
1984	415	2	28	97
1989	197	85	45	202
1991	232	120	49	120
1996	140	161	41	201
1998	141	182	41	179
1999	114	182	36	211

Total Number of Seats: 489 (1952), 543 (1999).

Source: Election Commission of India (ECI)

The degree of fundamental change precipitated by the 1989 election becomes even more apparent and salient when we place the election in a historical context. The Indian electoral politics can be divided into three phases: the Nehru Era (1947-1964), the Indira Era (1964-1977) and the post Indira Era (1978-present). The Nehru and Indira eras are collectively called the ‘Congress system’ or the ‘Congress Raj’ where Congress so fully dominated electoral politics that other parties were left with little room to maneuver.

The Nehru Era gave birth to the Congress system whereby powerful state-level factional leaders provided critical support for Congress at the national level in exchange for political patronage (for more detailed analysis of the Congress system see Chapter 2). Through this system of political patronage, Congress’ tentacles reached deep into state level politics. This dominance of electoral politics both at the national and at the state level engendered what Kothari called a “dominant part system” (Kothari 1964). According to Kothari, this system is a multi-party system where Congress dominates the national Lok Sabha and the state assemblies via its organizational network. This dual dominance of both the national and state level electoral politics by Congress made forming coalitions against Congress difficult. As a result, opposition parties, despite receiving more votes in aggregate than Congress, were unable to dislodge Congress from its grip in the Lok Sabha and in the state assemblies (see Table 1.2). In addition to the Congress’s formal structures linking the local level to the national level, the informal structure played a crucial role in assigning, maintaining party discipline and a link through which political patronage could be exercised. This discipline was enforced by the so-called ‘High Command,’ Nehru’s loyal close supporters who mediated among the different factions within Congress. Because Congress was an extensive network of political patronage seeping deep into local politics, Congress was also not impervious to local factional infighting. Under Congress’ umbrella were various factions that were tied to their localities and hence factional infighting within Congress was common. What kept these various factions mollified were the sheer

charisma of Nehru and his shrewd policy of political patronage and economic rewards to localities through the central government. Factionalism also brought a key benefit to Congress. Each faction in order to out compete other factions had to prove themselves by enlisting as many supporters as possible (Brass 1990). This competitive nature provided an incentive for national and local leaders to maintain and cultivate a close relationship with the local electorates. Nehru and his High Command, in effect, were able to maintain party cohesion through what Brass calls the “mastery of policy and politics” (Brass 1990: 66).

Table 1.2: Congress Vote Share in National Elections

Year	Congress	National Opposition	Other Parties and Independents	Total
1952	45.0	22.8	32.3	100.0
1957	47.8	25.2	27.0	100.0
1962	44.7	33.7	21.5	100.0
1967	40.8	35.5	23.8	100.0
1971	43.7	34.1	22.2	100.0
1977	34.5	50.1	15.3	100.0
1980	42.7	42.4	14.9	100.0
1984	48.1	29.7	22.2	100.0

Source: V. B. Singh and Shankar Bose. 1984. *Elections in India: Data Handbook on Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-85*. New Delhi: Sage.

After the death of Nehru in 1964 his daughter Indira took over the reins of Congress but not without challenges. Powerful Congress operatives collectively called the ‘Syndicate’ increasingly challenged Indira Gandhi’s leadership. In response to this challenge, first, Indira Gandhi turned to populism, in effect, side-stepping the powerful operatives and the vast network of organizations built-up by her father. The very people and the organization that sustained Congress since independence were not fully utilized by Indira Gandhi. Second, she centralized power to an unprecedented degree. In the days of Nehru, Congress via its formal and informal networks was a decentralized party that provided a setting whereby different factions could compete against each other but still work within the party. With centralization of power, containing factionalism within the party became increasingly difficult. Indira Gandhi’s populism and centralization of power vitiated institutions that so successfully served to contain and manage factionalism in the Nehru Era. These institutions linked the grass roots movements to the upper echelons of power in Congress, but they progressively weakened. With the weakening of ties between the national level and the state level, Indira Gandhi increasingly found herself unable to control her party. This tension between Indira Gandhi and the party leadership came to a head in 1969 when she was ‘expelled’ from the party for ‘indiscipline.’ In response, she

founded the ‘New Congress’ or ‘Congress (R)’ with ‘R’ for ‘Requisitioned.’¹ Despite her expulsion, over two hundred members from old Congress in the Lok Sabha followed her and joined Congress (R) while her Congress challenger Morarji Desai could only count on sixty-five members from old Congress. Congress (R) split again in 1977 after a challenge to Indira Gandhi’s leadership from within the party and was renamed Congress (I) with ‘I’ for ‘Indira.’ The year 1977 marks the end of the Indira Gandhi Era not because she stopped centralizing power, but because the year marks the end of compromise as a means of resolving internal party differences. The Congress (I) increasingly became a party not for its constituents, but a party working for Indira Gandhi.

The third phase of electoral politics, 1978 to present, was in part a consequence of Indira Gandhi’s centralization of power and the concomitant deinstitutionalization of Congress from the previous years (Manor 1988). First, centralization and the declaration of a state of emergency between 1975 and 1977 by Indira Gandhi accelerated the awakening of the electorate. Second, with the awakening of the electorate, incumbency did not guarantee the re-election of national and state-level governments. Third, centralization, deinstitutionalization and the awakening of the electorate facilitated the rise of regional parties, especially from the early 1980s (see Table 1.3).

Table 1.3: Number of National and State Parties

Year	National	State
1951	14	39
1957	4	11
1962	6	N/A
1967	7	14
1971	8	17
1977	5	15
1980	6	19
1984	7	17
1989	8	20
1991	9	27
1996	8	30
1998	7	30
1999	7	40
2004	6	51

Source: Election Commission of India (ECI)

Although the awakening of the electorate did not begin from the late 1970s, its effects were more pronounced after the end of the Emergency in 1977. James Manor trenchantly argues that the electorate was less motivated by political loyalty than by political representation.² In

¹ ‘Requisitioned’ refers to the requisitioned Congress party meeting called by Indira Gandhi during the party split. The suffix ‘R’ later represented not ‘Requisitioned’ but ‘Ruling.’

² Manor, James. 1988. *Parties and Party System*. In Atul Kohli ed. *India’s Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

other words, voters sought out and voted for parties that would represent their interests. Although the awakening of the electorate cut across religious, ethnic and economic lines, it was the upper class that was most aggressive in seeking political representation. The upper class' aggressiveness is not surprising as their wealth, education and access to power nodes provide the means and the opportunity to effect electoral politics. What is surprising, however, is the awakening of the lower class. As a result, Electoral politics were no more a top-down phenomenon where national and state level parties were more interested in electoral turnout than in reflecting voter preferences. Electoral politics increasingly became a bottom-up phenomenon whereby the electorate became more assertive and in response the parties themselves had less control over the voters. The bottom up phenomenon resulted in higher voter volatility, especially from the early 1970s (see Table 1.4). The Indian electorate was, in effect, maturing.

Table 1.4: Voter Volatility (Average Congress Swing Between Lok Sabha Elections %)

	1952- 1957	1957- 1962	1962- 1967	1967- 1971	1971- 1977	1977- 1980	1980- 1984	1984- 1989	1989- 1991
Swing*	2.8	-3.1	-3.9	2.9	-9.2	8.2	5.4	-8.6	-3.0
Average (Absolute)	3.2				6.9				

* Swing: Increase or decrease in the Congress percentage of vote between elections.

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things, p. 36.

During the Nehru and the Indira eras, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) party, BJP's predecessor, lay largely dormant. Although BJS was formed in 1951, as opposed to Congress which was formed in 1885, this tardiness to formal political organization belies the organizational capacity of the Hindu nationalists. The BJS was buttressed by a large well-organized national network. The Hindu Mahasabha (Grand Congregation of Hindus) was the wellspring from which Hindu nationalist ideology was propagated. It is important to consider that the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu nationalist ideology was not the sole purview of the BJP alone. It must be noted that Congress was the first nationalist party of India formed to act against the British. The Hindu Mahasabha and its attendant Hindu nationalist ideology was, then, as much part of Congress as it was that of the BJP. The critical difference between Congress and the BJS was that whereas Congress—via the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—saw the necessity of pursuing a secular policy, the BJS did not. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru saw that India's diversity simply did not lend itself to Hindu nationalist politics. The BJS on the other hand did not. The BJS leadership equated Hindu nationalism with Indian nationalism. Buttressed by the well organized Hindu nationalist

network Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Association, RSS), BJS unsuccessfully sought electoral gain. One of the fundamental reasons why the BJS was not able to make electoral inroads into Congress territory was its platform. The BJS, although Hindu nationalist in hue, sought a platform that was ‘national’ rather than ‘communal’ (Weiner 1957). As a result, BJS’ platform supported Bharatiya Rashtra (Indian Nation) and not Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation). BJS’ national platform directly impinged upon Congress’ platform. This overlap of platforms had dire consequences for the BJS. The BJS could not compete with the well-organized electoral machinery of Congress where powerful local party bosses were successful in mobilizing voters. The BJS primarily relied on the RSS, but RSS’ loyalty was fickle as RSS’ Hindu nationalist view clashed with the more national platform of the BJS. The BJS and Congress were seeking the vote from the same electorate. Moreover, the BJS drew its electoral support primarily from the northern ‘Hindi Belt’ states and this geographical limitation would profoundly affect how the BJP leaders—many of whom were former members of the BJS and the RSS—would adopt its electoral strategy.

BJS’ only stint in power came through the Janata Party coalition in 1977, soon after the end of the Emergency (1975-1977).³ The only glue that united this motley collection of parties was its quest to dislodge Indira Gandhi from power and this they did in 1977. For the first time in thirty years, Congress was out of power having received 34% of the vote against 43% by the Janata Party. The Janata coalition did not last long as controversy brewed over the dual loyalty of the BJS members to both the Janata coalition and the RSS. With the break-up of the Janata coalition, Congress swept back into power in the January 1980 general election winning 353 seats out of a total of 529 seats in the Lok Sabha. Congress was, still, a major force to be reckoned with.

It is in this context the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed in April of 1980. The BJS was resurrected in the form of the BJP. Although many of the BJP leadership were both members of the BJS and the RSS, the BJP leadership consciously adopted a party constitution that was borrowed not from the BJS but from the Janata Party. This is a clear indication, from its inception, that the BJP leadership sought to steer the BJP away from the mistakes of the BJS (Malik and Singh 1994). The BJP leadership learned their lessons during their BJS days that Hindu nationalism can alienate the party from the broader electorate. As a result, The BJP leadership adopted a more watered-down version of Hindu nationalism. In addition, the BJP adopted five commitments: (1) nationalism; (2) national integration, (3) democracy, (4) positive

³ The Janata coalition comprised of the BJS, socialists, former Congress members and the Bharatiya Lok Dal.

secularism, and (5) value-based politics. The important point here is that the BJP leadership molded their principles and strategies for maximum electoral effect, which includes heretofore neglected non-Hindus. The BJP was born as a result of electoral politics and not as a result of ideology. Undoubtedly, Hindu nationalism in the form of 'Hindutva' or 'Hindu-ness' is an important principle for the BJP but not at the cost of electoral loss. The BJP leadership, who has painfully fired their political reputations in the electoral kiln, made the BJP an electoral animal different from that of the BJS. The BJP leadership was careful in selectively framing Hindu nationalism when they deemed it electorally necessary. In other words, through framing of symbols and emotive words, the Hindu nationalism card was selectively used by the BJP especially during the run up to elections, but its use was increasingly problematic as its electoral resonance was limited to Hindu nationalists, an electorate although substantial but not large enough to independently vote the BJP into power. More importantly, the BJP leadership knew this limitation and adopted their electoral strategies accordingly.

The move towards a genuine multi-party system from the 1990s, the decentralization of electoral politics with the rise of regional politics and the awakening of the electorate can be interpreted as the dénouement of India's political and electoral development over the past few decades. The weakening of Congress provided a political space for other parties to enter the electoral arena and have a genuine shot at influencing the formation of a government. At this stage, an important caveat is in order. The weakening of Congress does not mean Congress is out of the electoral picture. The weakening of Congress should be viewed in the context of Congress' historical domination of electoral politics. Congress, at the time of this writing, is back in power, albeit in a coalition government. The mere fact that Congress could only form a government only with help of smaller parties is a testimony how the electoral map has changed. Congress by any measure still remains the only 'national' party in India drawing its support from a diverse electorate. The BJP on the other hand is trying to join Congress as the second national party and its success will largely hinge on its ability to represent the electorate across various political, social, religious and economic spectrums.

Conceptualization

This thesis begins with the assumption that political parties when faced with electoral exigencies moderate their ideological doctrines and transform themselves into 'aggregative parties.' This

conceptualization draws heavily from Hampton Thomas Davey's 1969 dissertation on the BJS.⁴ In his dissertation, Davey argues that 'the requirements of attracting and maintaining electoral support has encouraged the partial transformation of Jana Sangh (BJS) from a militant Hindu ideological movement into a pragmatic aggregative party.'⁵ In this vein, Davey's thesis is more relevant in the contemporary Indian electoral politics where a decentralized and fragmented party system necessitates the formation of electoral alliances for political survival and the pursuit of power.

The notion of aggregative party is not novel. Almond and Powell have argued that aggregative parties are structured to aggregate voter interests.⁶ Moreover, according to Almond and Powell, voter loyalty is built by hewing the party's policies to the interests of the voters. Similarly, Kirchheimer argues that the decline of ideological parties was precipitated by the exigencies of short term electoral success where political parties re-invent themselves as 'catch-all' parties.⁷ In this line of thought both the aggregative and the catch all parties do not have strong ideologies, are decentralized, and lack discipline. The most interesting aspects of the aggregative and catch all models are not their structures and functions, but, more importantly, how they react or pro-act to electoral winds. According to Davey, aggregative and catch all parties "are subject to major transformation parallel with changing public values, social conditions, electoral support and leadership recruitment patterns" (Davey 1969: 12).

Davey on the other hand goes further and argues that, especially in the case of India, policies are not enough to build voter loyalty. "Aggregative parties," according Davey, "do blend group demands into general policy alternatives and recruit group representativeness, but they also attract support by skillfully manipulating vague symbols like nationalism, preservation of social morality and anti-communism. Moreover, the recruitment of group representatives does not necessarily entail the incorporation of group demands into policy alternatives." (Davey 1969: 10-11). The major thrust of Davey's argument—that aggregative parties are not built on policy loyalties alone, and that there not necessarily exists a direct link between the policy demands of the sub-groups and the overall party policy—bears heavily on this thesis paper. The

⁴ Davey, H. T. 1969. *The Transformation of an Ideological Movement into an Aggregate Party: A Case Study of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*. Diss. University of California Los Angeles.

⁵ Davey's second hypothesis posits that BJS leadership's increased exposure to national politics, in the form of representation in the Lok Sabha, and the leadership's interaction with non-BJS party elites, had had 'socializing effects in the leaders of the Jana Sangh [BJS].' This hypothesis is still germane to contemporary Indian electoral politics, but it goes beyond the scope of this thesis, which takes the political party as the unit of analysis and is concerned with the broad electoral politics rather than the politics of the political elites.

⁶ Almond, Gabriel and G. Bingham Powell Jr. *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966.

⁷ Kirchheimer, Otto. "The Transformation of Western European Party Systems," in *Political Parties and Political Development*, Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

loyalty, and ergo, the vote, is not solely based on the fit between personal policy preferences and party policy pronouncements, that there exists a wiggle room for the parties to ‘manipulate’ the electorate’s perceptions of political parties. In addition, electoral exigencies constrict how much a party member can incorporate his/her constituencies’ preferences into party policy.

Another type of party is the ‘ideological movement party,’ which is usually under girded by external movement organizations. These types of parties are Janus-faced: the legislative organization—the members of national assembly or parliament—have a different agenda, namely, electoral success, than the external movement organizations that are more concerned in propagating their ideologies and doctrines than electoral victories per se. The party’s legislative organization, because of electoral exigencies, tends to moderate its views to hew to the interests of the electorate. The extent to which the party’s legislative organization ‘moderates’ its views is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a key driving force behind the decision to moderate its doctrinal views is the time horizon considered by the leadership in the legislative organization. Those who take a long-term view tend to advocate a more moderate and flexible approach to employing party’s ideology for electoral purposes. Unlike aggregative parties, ideological movement parties possess well-disciplined and centralized organizational structure that is susceptible to manipulation by the parties’ leadership.

The strong discipline of the ideological movement parties places the parties in ideal positions to exploit social and political crises (Davey 1969: 17-18). In times of social, economic and political upheaval, some sections of the electorate that are most acutely affected by change and instability tends to turn to ideological movement parties that are seen as providing stability and continuance.

The effect of electoral systems on electoral politics has been researched in-depth by Maurice Duverger, Giovanni Sartori et al. Duverger’s law propounds that the first-past-the-post system leads to two party systems, and the proportional representation system leads to multi-party systems. The first-past-the-post system, because only a plurality of votes is required, could lead to the formation of a coalition government with only minority electoral support. Assuming the opposition is a *mélange* of parties that is unable to garner plurality of votes, and further assuming the political environ is such that there exists one dominant national party, the first-past-the-post system could lead to a stable political system led by the dominant national party. The first-past-the-post system could, also, lead to political instability as it does not adequately represent the diversity of the electorate’s opinion. In a multi-ethnic society with deep religious and ethnic cleavages among different groups, the first-past-the-post system can lead to a political

environ where parties with diametrically opposed views can form coalitions and counter coalitions ushering in a sustained period of instability.

Party Alliance Formation

I use India's electoral politics to show when national political parties are embedded in a culturally and ethnically diverse society and fail to garner the necessary electoral support for government formation, they build alliances with regional and local parties. Further, I argue that a culturally and ethnically diverse electoral constellation provide incentives to national party leaders to adapt to local political realities.

Studies of modern party systems stem from the works of Maurice Duverger. But, sadly, Duverger research is primarily based on European and the US party systems, as a result, his research might not be fully applicable to India—a post-colonial society whose electorate and environment is different than those of Europe and the US. In fact, the study of Indian party systems, especially that of alliances, in the context of cultural and ethnic diversity, has been neglected by non-Indian scholars. Undoubtedly, the need was not there: India was dominated by Congress until the 1996 general election. Despite the overall paucity of research, the research by some Indologists, namely, Yogendra Malik and V. B. Singh's Hindu Nationalists in India has provided a trenchant analysis of alliance formation strategies in Indian electoral politics. According to Malik and Singh, party alliances are a function of factional power distribution within parties. Alliance formation depends on which faction has control of the party, and depending on the types of ideologies held by the party leaders (Malik and Singh 1994). In the end, according to Malik and Singh, party leaders form alliances on the basis of “cold electoral calculations.” Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman have found that party aggregation occurs when governments centralize political and economic power and, as a result, are able to better form policies that affect local areas, which in turn provides incentives to local leaders to form alliances with national parties. Gurharpal Singh on the other has found that a party in a culturally and ethnically diverse electorate, ideology is the prime determinant of alliance formation. Ramesh Thakur has found the compatibility of party values as an important determinant of alliance formation. Devesh Kapur and Pratap Mehta have found that parties form strategic alliances to balance against opposing parties.

Plan of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into four chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to Indian electoral politics. In the second chapter, I analyze the weakening of the Congress party and its electoral implications. I take a broad view of Indian electoral politics by tracking the major support bases of the major political parties, especially that of Congress. In this chapter, I am primarily interested in fleshing out whether, indeed, Congress had an overwhelming grip on the electorate. Put it in another way, did Congress receive the majority of electoral votes, or was it able to dominate Indian politics with a mere plurality of votes? What structural, political, economic and societal factors facilitated Congress' domination of Indian electoral politics?

In the third chapter, I analyze the rationale behind the rise of the BJP. I analyze whether Hindu nationalism—as it is widely assumed—is the major driving force behind the rise of the BJP? Hindu nationalism is not new, then, why did it come to the fore of Indian electoral politics at the time as it did? Is Hindu nationalism a fleeting phenomenon, as it bears on Indian electoral politics, or, will it linger and affect Indian electoral politics? I also analyze the limits of Hindu nationalism as it relates to Indian electoral politics. More importantly, I ask whether Hindu nationalism, alone, is sufficient in propping up the BJP in times of electoral difficulty. In this chapter, I am interested in learning whether Hindu nationalism can take center stage in Indian electoral politics in a period of rapid economic development with the concomitant increase in personal wealth. In other words, can Hindu nationalism, as a tool for invigorating the Hindu electorate, withstand the onslaught of pocketbook issues, which gained added currency with the liberalization of the Indian economy from the early 1990s?

In the final and concluding chapter, chapter four, I analyze the most recent development of Indian electoral politics—the multi-party system. India has always been, ostensibly, a multi-party system, but it was a multi-party system in name only. Congress dominated the multi-party system. From the mid-1990s, India has been moving towards a true multi-party system without a dominant center. Some have argued that India is moving not towards a multi-party system, but towards a two-party system with the BJP and Congress dominating electoral politics. The purpose of this chapter is to super-impose the BJP and Congress onto the nascent electoral environment and analyze the interaction between the two main national parties, the BJP and Congress, and the electoral environment. Finally, I explore the potential implications of the new Indian electoral politics on Indian politics in general and on democracy. Making political predictions—especially that of Indian political milieu with its sheer size, diversity and complexity—is always fraught with difficulty, uncertainty, and, not least of all, risk, but based

on sound analysis of collected data and assumptions, making predictions could have the added benefit of answering the following questions? Has India entered an epoch of unstable multi-party system with fluid coalition politics or will Congress and the BJP remain the dominant center in electoral politics? Can, or should, the BJP transform itself from an ethno-religious party to a more centrist party in order to cater to the interests and the views of the electorate? Is Hindu nationalism an appropriate principle for the BJP as India enters a period of unprecedented economic expansion with the formation of a wealthy middle-class? Will the largely Hindu electorate vote based on its ethnicity or economic interests?

CHAPTER 2

THE WEAKENING OF CONGRESS AND ELECTORAL IMPLICATIONS

From India's independence in 1947, electoral politics was synonymous with the so-called 'Congress System' (Kothari 1964). This appellation, popularized by Rajni Kothari, is apt in depicting Indian electoral politics up until the late 1970s. According to Kothari, the Indian party system can be characterized as a one party *dominant* system and not a one party system. The Indian party system, according to Kothari, "is a competitive party system but one in which the competing parts play rather dissimilar roles" (Kothari 1964: 1162). The system is constituted by (1) the party of consensus (Congress), and (2) parties of pressure aligned with Congress, and (3) opposition parties. According to Kothari the Congress System is the amalgamation and the inter-connectedness of the party of consensus and the parties of pressure aligned with Congress.

Congress is the party of consensus that provides the overarching umbrella under which the various parties of pressure coexist. Consensus building is supported and maintained by an extensive network of factions that exist at every level of politics. Moreover, these factions are connected via an extensive network of 'faction chains' (Kothari 1964: 1163). In addition, the party of consensus is flexible in coordinating power relationships among the various factions, which gives the party of consensus resilience (Chiriyankandath 1992: 55).

The parties of pressure that are aligned with Congress operate in the margins. This peripheral belt located in the margins is constituted by the various factions within Congress. These parties of pressure provide the critical sensitivity to the overall Congress system. The will of the electorate is channeled to Congress by these parties of pressure who are much better tuned in to the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of regional politics than Congress. The effective channeling of electoral pressure depends on the degree to which these parties of pressure are given room to maneuver by Congress and by the extent to which various factions and groups are incorporated into the Congress System. As a result, the building of, and the maintenance of, the Congress System necessitate flexibility on the part of Congress. These parties of pressure provide the means through which factionalism is internalized and contained within the Congress System.

In the context of Indian electoral politics, due to the Congress System, opposition parties did not play the role of alternative party to the ruling party. The role of the opposition party "is to constantly pressurize, criticize, censure and influence it by influencing opinion and interests

inside the margin and, above all, exert a latent threat that if the ruling group strays away too far from the balance of effective public opinion, and if the factional system within it is not mobilized to restore the balance, it will be displaced from power by the opposition groups” (Kothari 1964: 1162). The opposition parties lacked the means and the network to challenge the Congress System. Moreover, opposition parties were ideologically more narrowly focused than Congress, which was primarily organized not around ideologies but around patronage.

Although the exact date of the birth of the Congress System is difficult to pin down, at this time it is helpful to understand historically why and how the Congress system came to be. Before India’s independence in 1947, Congress was a nationalist movement that cut across various religious, ethnic and political factions. With independence, this factional network that came together for the purpose of gaining independence within Congress was transformed and internalized into the Congress Party. At the time of independence, there existed various political parties other than Congress, but none had the reputation and the extensive network of Congress’. Independence, in essence, gave Congress a fillip that other parties were not in a position to receive.

In the post-independence era, the Congress System was continuously characterized by an extensive network of patronage system whose tentacles reached deep into the countryside.⁸ According to Weiner, the Congress System was based on three attributes: (1) party organization, (2) party’s adaptive quality, and (3) monopoly over patronage resources (Weiner 1968). These attributes of Congress was possible because of the sheer charisma and national standing of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Congress system was artificially propped up by Nehru’s personality. The importance of Nehru in sustaining the Congress System cannot be over estimated. Without Nehru, Congress would not have been able to dominate Indian politics as it did until the mid-1960s. Nehru gave Congress a true national character. Although the Congress System is not wholly interchangeable with Nehru, it by and large was sustained by Nehru. The death of Nehru in 1964 marked the end of an era where Congress was, by far, the best organized national party. As a result, the Congress System started to show signs of weakness. The fight for succession between the party and state elders collectively called the ‘Syndicate’ and Nehru’s daughter Indira clearly showed chinks in Congress’ armor. With Nehru no longer there to sustain the Congress System, Congress was torn apart from within. In 1964, the syndicate anointed Shastri Lal Bahadur as leader of Congress and hence the prime minister. The syndicate was also

⁸ The patronage system was not exclusive to Congress. All political parties in India have their own patronage systems. Congress, this thesis seeks to argue, had the most extensive patronage system than other political parties.

instrumental in electing Indira Gandhi as the leader of the party in 1965 and 1967. The office of the prime minister was nothing more than an instrument for the powerful Syndicate. Indira Gandhi sought to rectify this power imbalance by challenging the Syndicate using ideology. The Syndicate was by and large non-ideological with close ties to big business and the landed class (Hardgrave 1970: 259). Indira Gandhi re-affirmed her commitment to socialism and sought to exploit the ideological chasm to her advantage. Heretofore a well-disciplined party, Congress was riven by ideological factions.

Eventually, the mantle was passed onto Nehru's daughter Indira, who, instead of energizing the Congress System as whole, and, more importantly, imbuing Congress with a national character, turned Congress into a personal vote aggregating machine (Chiriyankandath and Mitra 1992). Despite Nehru's charisma and personality, he was able to keep Congress a cohesive national party. Indira Gandhi, on the other hand, made Congress a subservient entity to her personality. This subservience, in effect, led to the de-institutionalization of Congress. Congress' strength had been its well-disciplined and well-organized national structure. Indira Gandhi "sought to transform the party into an instrument of personal power and to assure that it nurtures no one who might challenge her position as prime minister or endanger the succession of her children" (Hardgrave 1984: 405-406). Congress' provincial and district level organizations, which were so crucial in feeling the pulse of the regional electorate, were rendered moot with the centralization of power by Indira Gandhi. "The grassroots have been cut, and the Congress is an organization with no base. Inder Malhotra of the Times of India describes the Congress as 'no more than a rabble held together by one towering personality'" (Hardgrave 1984: 406).

Congress, unlike most its smaller opposition parties, was not a party based on ideology. The much-vaunted Nehruvian Socialism, which Indira Gandhi embraced, was not the central ideology Congress was organized around. Congress was a party with a broad spectrum of ideologies and interests, and these ideologies and interests were amorphous (Mendelsohn 1978: 45). Congress, "functions through an elaborate network of factions which provides the chief competitive mechanism of the Indian system" (Kothari 1964: 1163). Moreover, patronage took precedence over ideology. This lack of central ideology that could have furnished Congress with the means necessary to rally its base in the face of electoral setback was absent.

With Indira Gandhi's personality dominating Congress, and with the resultant weakening of the party organization due to the selective patronage system instituted by Indira Gandhi, Congress' overall influence on electoral politics started to wane from the late 1960s. As a result,

the weakening of Congress in the 1980s should be considered in light this historical background and trend.

Congress' Support Base

It is widely assumed that the Congress System had a lock on the Indian electorate, especially on the majority Hindu electorate. The data reveal otherwise. Congress' electoral base in the northern Hindi Belt states was limited at best. Except for 1984, the Hindi Belt accounts for less than half of Congress' support base as measured by the number of seats in the Lok Sabha (see Table 2.1). From the 1989 9th Lok Sabha election, the Hindi Belt provided less than a third of Congress' Lok Sabha seats. Congress' received far more support from the non-Hindi Belt states such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu than from the Hindi Belt. In other words, the Congress never had an electoral lock on the northern Hindi Belt states. More importantly, Congress drew only a third of its total Lok Sabha seats from the northern Hindi Belt states in the 1990s.

Table 2.1: Congress Electoral Support in the Northern Hindi Belt States (No. of Seats in the Lok Sabha)

State	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
Northern 'Hindi Belt' States											
Bihar	34	39	0	30	48	4	1	2	5	4	3
Gujarat	11	11	10	25	24	3	5	10	7	6	12
Haryana	7	7	0	5	10	4	9	2	3	0	9
Himachal	6	4	0	4	4	1	2	4	1	0	3
Madhya Pradesh	24	21	1	35	40	8	27	8	10	11	4
Rajasthan	10	14	1	18	25	0	13	12	18	9	4
Uttar Pradesh	47	73	0	51	83	15	5	5	0	10	9
Hindi Belt Total	139	169	12	168	234	35	62	43	44	40	44
% of All India Total	49.1	48.0	7.8	47.6	56.4	17.8	26.7	30.7	31.2	35.1	30.3
ALL INDIA TOTAL	283	352	154	353	415	197	232	140	141	114	145

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things pp. 110-111 (1967-1991 data) and Election Commission of India (1996-2004 data).

Congress' support base is located in the south and in the west (see Table 2.2) while the BJP's support base is located in the north and in the west. This geographical disposition of support base is not limited to the 1991 Lok Sabha. It is yet another of Congress' lack of grip on the overall electorate. Congress benefited from the first-past-the-post system and a divided opposition. Congress' national organization and reach paid electoral dividends as long as there were no other major opposition party and a divided opposition.

Table 2.2: 1991 Lok Sabha Election by Region

Region	Seats Declared	Congress			BJP		
		No	% of Region	% of Party Total	No	% of Region	% of Party Total
North	102	18	17.6	8.0	56	54.9	47.9
South	130	90	69.2	39.8	5	3.8	4.3
East	135	34	25.2	15.0	7	5.2	6.0
West	140	84	60.0	37.2	49	35.0	41.9
Total	507	226	44.6	100.0	117	23.1	100.0

Source: *India Today*, 15 April, 1991, pp. 52-3; 15 July, 1991, pp. 34-5.

One of the salient aspects of Congress' support base is the lack of a core electoral support base. In terms of demographics, Congress' support base is a motley collection of the electorate (see Appendix A). No core group of the electorate with a critical mass was behind Congress' electoral success. Congress' support base was multi-colored and multi-layered, the only problem was that the color was muted and the layers were starting to disintegrate. In a political milieu with a divided opposition, a secular political culture, and the lack of an alternative party all helped Congress, with the help of other smaller parties, to attain majority in the Lok Sabha.

Divided Opposition and Congress

Congress' domination of electoral politics was as much due to the divided opposition as it was due to the strength of its national organization. It is a mistake to impute Congress had an absolute lock on the electorate, it did not. Moreover, from India's first national election, Congress never had a majority of electoral votes (see Table 2.3). Congress, on average, mustered only 42.3% of the national votes until 1991. Even in elections (1952, 1957 and 1962) with the charismatic Nehru, Congress failed did not receive the majority of votes. A divided opposition and the first-past-the-post voting system led to a Lok Sabha that was over-represented by Congress. This over-representation by Congress is easy to grasp by looking at the 1952, 1957 and the 1962 national elections. Congress with less than half of the national vote, occupied three-quarters of the national assembly (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Congress Votes and Seats

	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	Average
% Votes	45.0	47.8	44.7	40.8	43.7	34.5	42.7	48.1	39.5	36.5	42.3
% Seats	76.0	77.0	73.5	55.0	68.1	28.5	66.7	76.7	37.3	44.5	60.3

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 28.

Table 2.4: Number of Seats Won for Every 1% of Votes

	Election Year										
	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	Avg.
Congress	8.1	7.8	8.1	6.9	8.1	4.5	8.3	8.6	5.0	6.4	7.2
Others	2.3	2.4	2.4	4.0	2.9	5.9	3.1	2.4	5.5	4.6	3.6

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 29.

Partly, Congress' grip on electoral politics can be explained by the divided opposition. The number of candidates per constituency and the number of parties standing for elections increased steadily over the years (see Table 2.5). The sharp rise in the number of parties is especially pronounced since 1984.

Table 2.5: Number of Candidates per Constituency and Number of Parties in Each Election

	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	Average
Average no. of candidates per constituency	3.9	3.2	4.0	4.6	5.4	4.5	8.6	10.2	11.6	16.7	7.3
No. of parties	74	16	29	24	53	62	36	37	118	144	60

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 28.

At this juncture, an important caveat is in order. Despite the decline of Congress since the late 1960s, its influence and reach into Indian society still remains powerful today in 2005. Congress is, still, the best organized national political party in India. Despite its failure to garner a majority of electoral votes over the course of its electoral history, Congress remains the only party with national orientation and reach. Because no other party had the influence and reach of Congress, its decline should not be mistaken to have necessarily benefited the opposition parties. Moreover, the lure of the revival of the Gandhian dynasty should not be underestimated. Sonia Gandhi, the wife of Rajiv Gandhi, is the current President of Congress and has been in charge of Congress since 1998.

The key issue is whether a national party such as Congress was able to maintain a simultaneous grip on national politics *and* local state-level politics into the 1980s and 1990s—it was not. India's national opposition parties are by and large a coalition of state parties. The weakening of Congress and India's economic development altered the yardstick by which individuals vote. Economic performance increasingly became the key yardstick for the voters (Mendelsohn 1978: 49). India's electoral, economic and social milieu no longer was amenable to Congress' manipulation.

Two key developments facilitated Congress's decline. First, "increasing economic claims of various sections of Indian society; the Government's failure to meet these claims brought increasing rejection of Congress. Second, "a challenge has been mounted on the basis of both ideology and group interest to a set of people who have formed something of a ruling class

(Mendelsohn 1978: 46). According to Mendelsohn, these two developments critically weakened Congress' ability to "represent a consensus of the Indian population" (Mendelsohn 1978:46).

These two developments coincided with the weakening of Congress' grass roots organizations due to centralization of power (Mehra, Khanna and Kueck 2003: 231). In other words, Congress' national organization became detached from the critical local organizations that played so critical a part in Congress' past electoral successes. In the past, because of Congress' sheer organizational strength from top to bottom, local politics was subsumed under and assimilated into Congress' national politics, but with a weakened organization, Congress was no longer able to seamlessly integrate local and national politics as it did in the past.

Moreover, two events further facilitated the weakening of Congress. First, Babri mosque issue, and second, the Shah Bano case. The Babri mosque was built in 1528 by Muslims on the site claimed by Hindus as the birthplace of Lord Rama. The mosque located in the northern city of Ayodhya has been the center of religious tension between the Hindu and the Muslim community for centuries. Tensions over the mosque increased from 1984 when the Hindu nationalist organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) formed a committee to "liberate" the birth place of Lord Rama and build a Hindu Temple in the place of the mosque. In 1991, the BJP attains power in the state of Uttar Pradesh where the mosque is located. In 1992, the mosque is torn down by the members of the VHP, Shiv Sena and the BJP.⁹ As a result, the Hindu and the Muslim electorates were riled up and this had the effect of benefiting the BJP more than Congress. Congress did not draw its majority support from the Hindi Belt and the Babri mosque issue had the effect of further limiting Congress' efforts in courting the northern Hindu electorate. The Babri mosque issue provided BJP with a lightning rod to attract heretofore passive northern Hindu electorate. The Babri mosque issue split Congress' Hindu supporters vertically. Hindus, irrespective of caste, economic and social standing, saw the BJP as a better representative of Hindus in India.

In addition, the Shah Bano case further drove the Hindu electorate away from Congress. Shah Bano, a Muslim woman divorced by her husband in 1978 sued her husband for alimony. The case reached the Indian Supreme Court which held that she had a right to alimony from her husband. This decision caused tremendous resentment on the part of the Muslims who saw this ruling as the infringement into their well established Muslim family law. In 1986, Congress, with an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, nullified the Supreme Court's decision and re-instated the Muslim Personal Law as it pertains to the Shah Bano case. Not surprisingly, the

⁹ Note that this is one year after the launch of India's economic liberalization program by Prime Minister Rao of Congress.

Hindus did not take Congress' 'appeasement' of the Muslim minority well. As a result, this case had the effect of further alienating the Hindu electorate from Congress.

The Acceleration of Congress' Decline

Although Congress did not attain electoral majority in national elections, Congress was considered as the only party representing India's independence movement and hence received universal support from the majority of the electorate. As a result, from the first national election, Congress was recognized as the movement that liberated India from the British rule. Because Congress was founded as a movement, and because Congress was considered as the one political party representing all Indians, Congress' lure and influence was greater than results from national elections. This perception of Congress started to change gradually since the death of Nehru in 1964. Congress' internecine struggles between Indira Gandhi and the regional party elders, the breakdown of Congress' institutions and the imposition of the Emergency rule by Indira Gandhi in 1975 had the effect of changing the perceptions of Congress from the heir of the independent movement to a mere political party no different than other political parties. Congress was, in effect, resting on its laurels. This transformation of perception by the electorate of Congress was complete by the 1980s, and, as a result, the electorate was more receptive to the idea of supporting political parties other than Congress. Congress was no longer seen as the party representing all Indians.

The weakening of Congress and the Congress System from the late 1960s is not in doubt. The key question still remains: why did Congress decline precipitously from the late 1980s? More accurately, which set of conditions and events accelerated Congress' decline from the late 1980s when it saw its seat decline in the Lok Sabha from 404 in 1984 to 197 in 1989? Undoubtedly, there is no single cause of Congress' decline, but a confluence of events and conditions facilitated the acceleration of its decline.

One of the fundamental changes that have taken place in Indian society from the late 1980s is the liberalization of India's economy. The roots of economic liberalization stem from the inability of the central government in maintaining economic growth. The central government—for the most part occupied by Congress—was persistently burdened with poor economic performance.

Economic Liberalization

India, the country of Jawaharlal Nehru's socialism, suddenly changed tack and embraced, wittingly or unwittingly, economic liberalism in the summer of 1991.¹⁰ Ever since India gained freedom in 1947, she had steadfastly followed a planned economy and import substitution policy both of which was in large part driven by the governing elite who were concerned with poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and social welfare in general. Both Nehru and his daughter, Indira, believed in a centrally planned economy. Both believed India could be self-sufficient, or, more accurately, that India *must* be self-sufficient.¹¹ The idealistic perfume of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Indira still wafted into the early 1990s, but nonetheless the drastic economic reform policy was announced in July of 1991. The then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and his Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, both members of the Congress, the party of Nehru and Indira, launched a series of macro-economic reforms that opened the heretofore closed Indian economy to the world. Why this sudden change? Was it sudden at all? Or, was India already on the juggernaut bandwagon of market economy in 1991? What drove the Indian leaders to do such a volte-face? Why abandon forty-years of centrally planned economy? What happened to Nehru's quest for social justice?

Some of these questions can be answered by fleshing out the interplay between politics and economy in India. Indeed, there are untold numbers of theories that deal with economic policy reforms by developing countries. But, these theories only deal with the economy, ergo, their expositions have been limited to the economic sphere. But, decisions on reforms are not solely based on economics alone: in all reforms, there is an undercurrent of politics as reforms entail a political cost or benefit from the leadership. The cost/benefit analysis undertaken by the leadership before a reform policy is launched is influenced by the domestic audience's distributive concerns. These distributive concerns, and how they are mollified by the leadership, influence electoral politics. India is no exception. In fact, Indian politics have had an overweening influence on the economy since the Congress party dominated electoral politics since independence until a bi-furcated party structure emerged in the late 1970s. The Congress held sway over many of the economic policies emanating from the central government *and* from the regional states. Politics was so intertwined with economics in India that one could not be

¹⁰ More accurately, Nehru was a Fabian Socialist.

¹¹ Panagariya posits two main rationales for India's pursuit of a centrally planned economy: (1) to emulate the putative economic success of the former Soviet Union in the early 1950s; (2) to distribute resources more efficiently in a poor country such as India (Panagariya 1994).

Self-sufficiency slogan was not new. Mahatma Gandhi propounded the ideal of *Swadeshi* (self-reliance, buy Indian, be Indian) over seventy years ago.

explained without the other. Hence, the radical economic reforms launched in 1991 are all the more surprising as they were launched by the Congress which was head of a coalition government since it failed to garner enough seats in the Indian lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) to form a government on its own.

Although politics played a conspicuous part in the formulation of, and the governance of, Indian economic policy, its influence started to wane as India started to open its doors to the outside world in the mid-1980s. The first economic five year plan launched in 1948 put the state at the center of the economy, and the state was entrusted to protect nascent industries and simultaneously industrialize India. This state-centric economic policy was forcefully implemented by Nehru and Indira Gandhi, both of whom pursued a socialist agenda. With the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984, the socialist agenda pursued by the Indian government for the past forty years was stunted. Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's eldest son, claimed Congress' mantle by leading the party to an absolute majority in the November 1984 Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) elections.¹² In mid-1985, Rajiv Gandhi visited the United States and addressed both houses of Congress and sought to increase trade between the two large democracies.¹³ Rajiv Gandhi did not launch a comprehensive liberalization reform, but more importantly, he opened a small floodgate to economic liberalization that acquired a life of its own. If the then Finance Minister and the current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the architect of liberalization, Rajiv Gandhi was the unwitting mother of the reforms.¹⁴

¹² The mantle was supposed to have been passed to Sanjay Gandhi, the younger son of Indira Gandhi, but he died in a plane crash in 1980.

¹³ Although Rajiv Gandhi was more receptive to US economic overtures than Indira Gandhi, he maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union, and especially with Mikhail Gorbachev. In other words, the Treaty of Friendship signed with the Soviet Union by Indira Gandhi in 1971 remained unaffected by Rajiv Gandhi's closer relations with the US.

¹⁴ It is highly unlikely someone other than Rajiv Gandhi could have attempted to open India's economy to the world at the time that he did in mid-1980s. Rajiv Gandhi had the cachet of being the grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru and the son of Indira Gandhi. The personal prestige and charisma of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty cannot be overestimated. The mere fact, Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, an Italian by birth, had become the leader of the Congress (I) party and lead the party to victory in the 2004 general election is a testament to the cachet carried by Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in Indian society.

Rajiv Gandhi, like Mikhail Gorbachev, unwittingly launched series reforms that tumbled out of control or met ends that were never intended. Gorbachev, after the break up of the Soviet Union, admitted that his *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms were never intended to break up the Soviet Union. Similarly, Rajiv Gandhi unwittingly left the liberalization door ajar not realizing that it emboldened market reformers within India. Unlike Gorbachev, Rajiv Gandhi did not live to witness his creation as he was assassinated by a Tamil "Tiger" suicide bomber in May of 1991.

Economic policies are the result of policy *choices* by the governing leadership. The extent to which the policies are the result of voluntary/involuntary choices determine the role of politics in economic policy formulation. An involuntary policy choice theory posits that demand groups influence the choice of policies to their advantage. Bardhan has argued that in India three demand groups—industrial capitalists, rich farmers and professionals—wield sway over economic policies.¹⁵ According to Bardhan, the power constellations of these three demand groups affect the economic policy choices faced by the governments. Bardhan further argues that in India, because these three demand groups have attained more power over time, the role of the government in managing the economy has waned. On the other hand, the Rudolphs argue that the government or the state has been the key player in Indian economic development. The Rudolphs argue that the dominance of the Indian National Congress party embodying the values of Gandhi, Nehru and later that of Indira were critical in the political economy of India. Rudolphs accept the role of demand groups—especially that of organized agrarian groups—but their effectiveness has been limited due to the overweening power of the state. Whereas Bardhan attributes the political economy of India to systemic structural conflicts, the Rudolphs attribute it to India's historical development.

Although Bardhan and the Rudolphs posit compelling rationale for the economic policy choices of the governing leadership, their rationale is incomplete. In order to parse the role of politics behind Indian economic development it is important not to leave out the role of *ideology*. Nehru was a dyed-in-the-wool socialist and his Congress party members were also, by and large, avowed socialists. Nehru's primary concern was *social justice* not economic or material wealth. Moreover, social justice, according to Nehru, is furthered by the state. This Nehru's worldview cannot be overestimated in the role of politics in Indian economic development. For Nehru, economic development served a distinct and important purpose: to redress social and economic inequalities. In other words, economic development was simply a means not an end in itself. Nehru believed that centrally planned economic policies were shielded from the short-term whims of the market economy and demand groups.

Unlike other developing states, the role of the state in economic development in India never lacked legitimacy—India was democratic in the strictest sense of the word. The electoral process, although beset by fraud, never undermined the democracy in India as it reflected the

¹⁵ In the 'professionals' category, Bardhan includes the large state bureaucracies.

will of the electorate. The fiercely independent Indian Election Commission played a critical role and oversaw fair and democratic elections since India's independence. As a result, this paradoxical mix of a centrally planned economy and democracy defined Indian political economy since her independence.

The confluence of a centrally planned economy and the pursuit of self-reliance set the tone of Indian economic development. Politics, in effect, set the economic goals and agendas. The whole Indian economic apparatus—the leadership, bureaucracy, academics et al.—hewed to the goals set by the government. Ergo, the Indian economy was structured to be self-sufficient with exports relegated to the backburner. Moreover, the first foreign exchange crisis in 1956-57 disabused the Indian leadership of the benefits of exports and of the international trade and capital markets in general. India, in essence, became an introvert economy, and it is from this context the Indian economy should be analyzed.

Electoral Politics: 1984 – 1991

In October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. Indira's only remaining son, Rajiv, a pilot for Indian Airlines, was thrust onto the main political arena and was duly elected leader of the Congress party soon after his mother's assassination. Rajiv Gandhi called for elections in December 1984 and his Congress party won a majority in the Lok Sabha winning 400 seats. No sooner had Rajiv Gandhi started his tenure as Prime Minister than he started cutting the claustrophobic economic red tape, lowering taxes on wealth and inheritance and relaxing licensing requirements. The young and cosmopolitan Rajiv Gandhi embraced economic liberalization.¹⁶

Rajiv Gandhi's Congress party, having been embroiled in corruption scandals lost seats in the 1989 national election and was unable to maintain power. The socialist Janata party, under the leadership of V. P. Singh, having won 145 seats in the Lok Sabha formed a fragile coalition

¹⁶ It is not entirely clear why Rajiv Gandhi embraced economic liberalization. When he formed his government in January 1985 the gross fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP was hovering around 5.9% level, which was not much different from the previous five years. The fiscal deficit did jump to 7.05% of GDP by the end of 1985.

It is more likely that the new government under Rajiv Gandhi was acutely sensitive to the precarious Balance of Payments (BOP) deficits. The BOP deficit became perennial from 1981 with a deficit of \$1.14bn (1981), \$2.52bn (1982), \$1.32bn (1983) and \$0.56bn (1984). India's foreign exchange reserves was not sufficiently large enough to cushion a BOP crisis and have enough left over for reserves. It must be noted that the foreign exchange reserves were primarily filled by remittances from Indian workers in the Middle East and Indian expatriates dollar-denominated deposits in Indian banks and not by export revenues. The foreign exchange reserves: \$6.22bn (1981), \$4.39bn (1982), \$4.90bn (1983) and \$5.65bn (1984).

government with the support of the Hindu nationalist BJP party and the two Communist parties from West Bengal.

Singh's coalition government did not last a year as the BJP party withdrew from the coalition. In November 1990, Rajiv Gandhi was given the opportunity to form a new coalition government but Gandhi refused realizing that he had only 190 seats in the Lok Sabha. Instead, Gandhi supported Chandra Shekhar's Janata (S) party and, as a result, Shekhar was sworn in as Prime Minister. This fragile government also did not last a year as Rajiv Gandhi's Congress party withdrew its support in March 1991.

With no party able or willing to form a coalition government, national election was organized in May 1991. During the election campaign, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in Chennai (formerly Madras) in May 1991. Despite the loss of its leader, Congress won a plurality of 220 seats in the Lok Sabha and formed a government under the leadership of Narasimha Rao. Prime Minister Rao picked as his finance minister Manmohan Singh, a Cambridge-educated economist. It was in this fragile electoral context that the Indian government faced a balance of payments crisis.

Balance of Payment Crisis of 1991

The catalyst that prodded the Indian leadership to launch the policy of liberalization was *economics*, not politics. India, prior to 1991, was suffering from balance of payment problems, if unaddressed, would force India to default on its external debt obligations.

Until the early 1980s, India recorded current account surpluses as she relied on official aid for capital infusion. But, from the mid-1980s, the current account balance started to tip against India. From the mid-1980s, Rajiv Gandhi (Congress) initiated a gradual shift from import-substitution to export-led growth. Although this shift was intended to be incremental and hence cautious, the Indian government, from the very beginning of liberalization was fighting a losing fight. Export-led growth policy instantiated an increase in the current account deficit as the value of imports exceeded the real depreciation of the exchange rate. In other words, there was persistent pressure on the Indian Rupee to devalue. Moreover, the current account imbalance was further exacerbated by the precarious fiscal position. The Indian government doled out large sums in the form of subsidies to protected domestic public industries. As the current account deficit ballooned, India sought to redress the current account deficit by tapping the vast market commercial financial market. By resorting to the commercial market for financing, India left herself vulnerable to the whims of the international capital market. India's

short-term borrowing from the international capital market resulted in a double-whammy for India: borrowing was more costly, but more importantly, borrowing was *short-term*. With India dependent on short-term maturity financing from the international capital markets, the government lost even more control over the capital markets.

This increasing dependence on the international capital markets for financing coincided with the Gulf War in 1991. The rise in petroleum prices worsened India's current account balance. Moreover, the Indian government was saddled with the huge bill of evacuating 112,000 of its citizens working in the Middle East—the largest civilian evacuation by air in history. India also lost the valuable capital inflows in the form of remittances from the evacuees. Although, the rise in petroleum prices and the loss of remittances played a role, they did not by themselves precipitate the balance of payment crisis.

Electoral Implications

The weakening of Congress led to the decline of secularism in India. The Babri mosque issue and the Shah Bano case played a part in as well, but Congress' relative decline vis-à-vis smaller parties provided a lacuna where smaller parties such as the BJP and the regional parties could enter the national political stage. Moreover, Congress' lack of electoral hold on the northern Hindi Belt meant the vast Hindu electorate in the north was fluid and untethered. In this electoral environ, the BJP was well-placed to take advantage of the increasing importance of ideology and group interests.

CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF THE BJP

The rise of the BJP as the major force in Indian electoral politics has been mostly ascribed to its Hindu nationalist plank. Although Hindu nationalism is an important part of the rise of the BJP, it is not the whole story. If Hindu nationalism was the sole attraction for the electorate, they had another sound choice—Congress. Although Congress is avowedly secular in its policy pronouncements, it is, and has been, nonetheless a Hindu nationalist party in its own right, albeit more moderate than the BJS and the BJP. Congress, especially after Indira Gandhi took over the helm, has never been shy to invoke the ‘Hindu Card’ in times of need. It is well known that Congress’ policy pronouncements themselves are filled with ‘coded messages’ targeted towards the Hindu electorate. The key question at this juncture is to ask what persuaded the Hindu electorate to increasingly vote for the BJP. Although there is no single rationale for this phenomenon, there are noticeable trends and developments that shed further light as to why the BJP was able to garner support in the way it did.

Hindu Nationalism

Modern Hindu nationalism has its roots in the British colonial era. More importantly, Hindu nationalism drew its energy from the injustices dispensed by the British rule. In this respect, Hindu nationalism gained its structure and direction during British rule. Two Brahmins especially affected the direction of the Hindu nationalist movement and their legacy endures to this day. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) were both Brahmins from the regional state of Maharashtra considered the bastion of Hindu culture. Tilak and Gokhale, in essence, gave Hindu nationalism its essential character during the fin de siècle. Moreover, Tilak and Gokhale, although both Hindu nationalists, had a different diagnosis and prognosis on troubles faced by the Hindu community. This different worldview affected the subsequent development of Hindu nationalism.

Gokhale was a moderate and an internationalist who believed Hindu and Anglo cultures were not intrinsically at odds. Gokhale had no compunction in supporting the adoption of humanitarianism and liberalism from the West. Gokhale blamed the contemporary state of India not on colonialism, but on the inequities of the Hindu society (Wolpert 1962). Gokhale in

essence laid the blame for the powerlessness of India in the face of British colonialism on Hindu society itself. For this view, he was stigmatized as an anglophile, but this label seems unwarranted. Gokhale was a Hindu nationalist who saw colonialism as the symptom of India's weakness in education and in her lack of progressivism in general. Gokhale believed there was a lot to learn from the British and by doing so India could become stronger. For Gokhale, if India is to become stronger, she had to become more secular and democratic.

Tilak, on the other hand, is the antithesis of Gokhale. Tilak's worldview is dominated by orthodox Hinduism and with Hindu lore. For Tilak, the British were a predatory presence and had to be expelled in order for the establishment of 'Hindustan' or a nation for the Hindus. Tilak repudiated Gokhale's vision of a more secular and westernized India and denied the need for a western style of scientific innovations if India were to develop. For Tilak, 'foreign ideology and religion' were anathema to him and had no place in Indian society. For Tilak, the cause of India's misfortunes lay not within Hindu society but lay outside. Because he placed the blame for India's misfortunes on the Other, Tilak sought to tap into the discontents and prejudices of the masses.

Throughout the early 1900s, Hindu nationalism was given a structure with the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha (Great Hindu Association) in 1913 by the merger of two regional Hindu movements: United Bengal Hindu Movement (1907) and the Punjab Hindu Sabha (1907). The Hindu Mahasabha was the overarching umbrella under which the Hindu nationalist movement operated. Moreover, three geographically disparate traditions merged under a single roof. Before the merger, the Hindu nationalist movements were located in three regions: Maharashtra, Bengal and Punjab. Some members of the Mahasabha were also concurrently members of the Indian National Congress party. With the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha, two strands of the Hindu nationalist movement, the modernist and western leaning group following Gokhale's legacy, and the Hindu revivalist and Hindu orthodox group following Tilak's legacy, were intertwined. Although the Hindu nationalist movement was ostensibly under the same roof, it was by no means united. Moreover, the radical Hindu groups were not fully incorporated into the Hindu Mahasabha, and these groups eventually provide the backbone of the more radical Hindu nationalist movement.

Of the various radical Hindu nationalist organizations, none is better organized and better staffed than the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or National Volunteer Association. Founded in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar who worked under Tilak, the RSS volunteers are easily recognized with their khaki colored shorts, a color which was borrowed from the British police. The RSS would subsequently provide the ideological and organizational muscle

to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), BJP's predecessor, and to the BJP itself. The RSS is organizational structure is extensive both vertically and horizontally. The basic unit is the *shakha* or local branch. *Shakha* permeated even into the remote corners of India. *Shakha* is composed of *swayamsevaks* or members who pledge to dedicate their lives to the RSS with 'their whole body, heart and money, for in it lies the betterment of Hindus and the country' (Jaffrelot 1996). The RSS was primarily composed by Brahmins or members from the upper castes. Therein lay the contradiction of the RSS membership. Although the RSS espouses the principle egalitarianism, its members are inordinately Brahmin in background. Moreover, the RSS' ideology was Brahminical in nature. Many members were from the high castes of the region of Maharashtra where historically the upper castes served as martial leaders.

RSS espoused the principle of 'Hindutva' or Hinduness and sought as its goal 'Hindu Rashtra' or Hindu nation. Hindutva was codified as the ideology of the Hindu nationalist movement by the publication of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in 1923. According to Savarkar, Hindutva is constituted by: geographical unity, racial features and a common culture. Note that Hinduism as religion is not one of Savarkar's criteria. Scholars have asserted that this was because Savarkar himself was not religious, but that he was only an ideologue or he saw no place for Hinduism as a religion in a diverse society such as that of India's (Jaffrelot 1996). With religion relegated to the backburner, for Savarkar, it is race and ethnicity that constitute Hindutva.

With India's independence in 1947, the Hindu nationalist movement was given an electoral cover by the formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) or India's People's Party in 1951. The BJS espoused the ideal of 'One Country, One Culture, One Nation.' The formation of the BJS was partly precipitated by the ban of the RSS and the arrest of its members during 1948-49. Hitherto Hindu nationalist leaders saw the Hindu nationalist movement as less a political organization than a socio-cultural organization. The crack-down of the RSS during 1948-49 made it clear that first, the RSS was vulnerable to politically organized groups, and second, the RSS had no political representation, especially national representation. It is in this context that the RSS lent its support to the formation of the BJS. It must be emphasized that the RSS never shed its socio-cultural anchor while supporting the BJS. The influence and persistence of the RSS lie in its non-political hue. As a result, there was a built in contradiction in Hindu nationalist movements such as the RSS. The BJS, being a political animal and undergirded by the RSS, was Janus-faced and was pulled in two different directions. The politicians in the BJS were sensitive to electoral winds while the RSS, who had substantial representation in the BJS, was attuned to Hindu nationalist ideology and principles even at the

cost electoral support. This contradiction of the BJS was never resolved and was imparted to the BJP in the 1980s.

Electorally the BJS was largely overshadowed by Congress from the 1950s to the early 1970s (see Table 3.1). This is all the more surprising since the BJS did not pursue a strategy solely based on garnering support through ethno-religious planks (Jaffrelot 1996). BJS’ electoral strategy is not surprising when the political landscape is considered. Congress cast a large shadow over Indian politics. What made Congress so powerful a party is its ability to control the central government supporting secularism and its control over local level politics. Incumbency provided Congress a powerful means of limiting the rise of communalism. In addition, many of the local level Congress leaders were themselves Hindu traditionalists depriving the BJS political space to maneuver. The BJS was, in effect, deprived of one of its attractions—Hindu nationalism.

Table 3.1: BJS Lok Sabha Seat Distribution

Year	Congress	BJS	BJS Seats from Northern States
1952	364	3	3
1957	371	4	2
1962	361	14	14
1967	283	35	35
1971	352	22	22

Source: Election Commission of India (ECI) and David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things pp. 114-115.

Moreover, Nehru’s socio-economic development program was very popular with the electorate further limiting BJS’ space to maneuver. With little room to maneuver the BJS concentrated on two planks: attacking the state’s meddling in the economy and highlighting the importance of national integrity. Note that BJS’ anti-state intervention and the national integrity planks are virtually synonymous with the current planks of the BJP.

Geographically, the BJS support base was limited to the northern ‘Hindi Belt’ states (see Table 3.2). The northern states of Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh provided the bulk of BJS’ seats in the Lok Sabha. BJS’ geographical limitation is consistent with BJP’s experience in the 1990s. Moreover, the BJS and the BJP were strongest in the Hindi Belt while the Hindi Belt did not provide Congress with a large support base. The BJS and the BJP, in effect, drew its support from a geographically narrow base while Congress drew its support from a geographically broader base.

Table 3.2 BJS/BJP Lok Sabha Performance by States (Number of Seats)

State	1967	1971	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
	BJS		BJP						
Northern 'Hindi Belt' States									
Bihar	1	2		8	5	18	20	23	5
Gujarat			1	12	20	16	19	20	14
Haryana						4	1	5	1
Himachal				3	2		3	3	1
Madhya Pradesh	10	11		27	12	27	30	29	25
Rajasthan	3	4		13	12	12	5	16	21
Uttar Pradesh	12	4		8	51	52	57	29	10
Hindi Belt Total	26	21	1	71	102	129	135	125	77
% of Total	76.5	100.0	50.0	83.5	85.0	80.0	74.2	68.7	55.8
Others									
Andhra Pradesh			1		1		4	7	
Assam					2	1	1	2	2
Chandigarh	1					1	1		10
Daman & Diu				4	1		1		
Delhi	6				5	5	6	7	1
J & K						1	2	2	
Karnataka					4	6	13	7	18
Maharashtra				11	5	18	4	13	13
Punjab	1						3	1	3
West Bengal							1	2	
Others Total	8	0	1	15	18	32	47	57	61
% of Total	23.5	0	50	16.5	15	20	25.8	31.3	44.2
TOTAL	34	21	2	85	120	161	182*	182**	138^

Source: Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things pp. 114-115.

* Includes Orissa (7), Tamil Nadu (3) and Dadra Nagar Haveli (1).

** Includes Goa (2), Orissa (9), Tamil Nadu (4) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1).

^ Includes Arunchal Pradesh (2), Goa (1), Orissa (7), Jharkhand (1) and Uttar Anchal (3).

Up until the early 1980s, Hindu nationalism gained little inroad into electoral politics. Congress held a firm grip on electoral politics by its espousal of secularism, which in effect bottled up latent Hindu nationalism. However, since the declaration of the Emergency rule (1975-1977) by Indira Gandhi, Congress' political hold on the national electorate started to slip putting Congress on the defensive. Indira Gandhi, facing electoral backlash from her authoritarian rule during the Emergency, sought new electoral strategies to lure the electorate. This new electorate strategy came in the form of exploiting Hindu nationalism. Faced with a restless electorate and a united opposition, Congress could not afford to espouse only secularism. Congress increasingly utilized Hindu symbols for electoral gain. When Congress returned to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi visited numerous Hindu temples and Hindu holy sights. There are many arguments as to why Indira Gandhi turned politically or personally more religious at this juncture. One argument holds that the death of her son and heir apparent Sanjay in 1980 prompted Indira Gandhi to turn to religion. This argument seems less than convincing in light of

historical facts. Even before the early 1980s, Indira Gandhi and other Congress leaders exploited Hindu nationalist sentiment when faced with electoral necessity. The exploitation of Hindu nationalism by Congress became acutely more pronounced from the early 1980's due to the weakening of Congress and more importantly electoral necessity.

In addition, from the early 1980s, separatist movements became increasingly more vocal, which had the effect of encouraging Hindu nationalism. Congress utilized Hindu nationalism to discredit the separatist movement in the state of Jammu and Kashmir during the 1983 election. Congress utilizing Hindu nationalist themes portrayed the Jammu and Kashmir separatist movement as threatening the integrity of the Indian state. Congress' communalization of politics provided a fertile breeding ground for Hindu nationalism.

Communal violence was common between 1980 and 1987, and this increase in violence is indicative of the decline of secularism. The Shah Bano affair is a case in point. Shah Bano is a Muslim divorcee who sued her husband, also a Muslim, for alimony payments. Her ex-husband in return appealed to the Supreme Court that he was not obliged to pay alimony beyond the three-months required under the Muslim Shariat law. The Supreme Court sided with Shah Bano, in effect defending secularism by applying the Indian Constitution to both non-Muslims and Muslims. Congress, however, after a string of violent demonstrations by Muslim groups, amended the Constitution to exempt Muslim men from paying beyond the three months required under the Shariat law. This active intervention in communal affairs by Congress engendered a new norm in Indian politics whereby secularism took a backseat to electoral exigencies. The Muslim electorate always saw Congress as its protector, and Congress duly moved to maintain this constituency.

This retrenchment from secularism, in effect, eliminated the shackles imposed on Hindu nationalism in the days of Nehru (Jaffrelot 1996). To this end, the recasting of the BJS into BJP in 1980 was fortuitous for the BJP in that the communalization of politics jibed well with its electoral strategy.

BJP's Support Base

BJP's support base is primarily urban, the well educated, large farm cultivators, white collar professionals, upper caste, Hindu, and upper economic class (see Appendix A). In broad terms, the BJP is the party of the urban middle class: small traders, civil servants and professionals. BJP's support base becomes even clearer by looking at BJP's policy pronouncements and the target of these pronouncements. The BJP from its inception portrayed itself as a party of the

urban middle class. As a result, the BJP committed itself to the free market promising to eradicate bureaucratic controls on the economy and streamlining the tax laws. Moreover, the BJP postured itself as the anti-corruption party tapping into the latent discontent of the electorate of political corruption under Congress.

Nonetheless, the BJP realized early on that they would have to expand their support base beyond the middle and upper class electorate in urban areas. As a result, small and poor farmers and lower caste groups were also included in BJP's policy pronouncements. For example, the BJP promised a "Charter of Rights of Kisan [Farmer]" to farmers, in effect, promising high prices for agricultural goods and guaranteeing a minimum wage for the farm laborers.¹⁷ In addition, the BJP supported the reservation of government jobs for backward castes. From these efforts of the BJP, it is quite clear that the BJP leadership realized early on that the Hindu nationalist plank was neither sustainable nor desirable if the party is to challenge Congress as one of the two catch-all parties.

Nevertheless, behind BJP's moderating tendencies, there clearly lurked its Hindu nationalist face. 'National Integrity' and 'oneness' of all Indians were catch-phrases intended to energize its Hindu base. BJP's election manifesto supported the building of a Hindu temple at the site of the Babri mosque. Clearly, the BJP, in terms of its electoral pronouncements, was Janus-faced. It could neither alienate its Hindu base nor afford to neglect those who had little Hindu nationalist inclinations.

The tenth Lok Sabha election in 1991 saw the apex of BJP's Hindu nationalistic plank. In 1991, the BJP formed a coherent ideological and organizational network with the Hindi nationalist movement RSS and the Hindu nationalist cultural movement VHP. This triple alliance gave the BJP access to the vast Hindu nationalist network. More than 50% of BJP's office bearers at the national and state level were former members of the RSS (Venkateswar 1997: 133). As a result, in the 1991 election, the BJP became the primary opposition party winning 120 seats compared to 244 for Congress. The Hindu nationalist plank clearly paid dividends for the BJP.

Although the Hindu nationalist plank was an important part in BJP's electoral victory in 1991, it was by no means the only factor. The BJP benefited from the backlash resulting from the Mandal Commission report. The Mandal Commission released its report in 1991 recommending a quota—an affirmative action—for the lower castes for government jobs. The report had the effect of riling up the middle and upper caste Hindus who held a monopoly on

¹⁷ BJP, *Election Manifesto, 1991*, pp. 12-13.

government jobs. Moreover, even the lower castes that were not included in the Mandal Report switched their support to the BJP (Venkateswar 1997: 135).

The 1991 election also exposed the soft under belly of the BJP. The BJP's support base was limited to the northern states; it virtually received very little support from the southern states. The northern states of Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were where BJP's support base lay. The BJP received no support from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It clearly had some ways to go in order to become a true national party.

The Hindu nationalist plank was also used to a great extent in the eleventh Lok Sabha election in 1996 with the BJP winning 161 seats as opposed to 140 for Congress. For the first time, a party espousing Hindu nationalism eclipsed Congress. But the significance of this election lies less in BJP's election victory over Congress than in the harsh lessons learned by the BJP. The BJP, despite having attained the most seats in the Lok Sabha, was unable to form a coalition government. It was unable to attract the support smaller parties. This failure by the BJP to form a coalition government led to the formation of a minority government collectively called the United Front led by Congress with the support from the Janata Dal party and the two Communist parties. This failure by the BJP to form a government taught the BJP a harsh lesson in electoral politics—that it needed to move towards the center.

The Middle Class Support of the BJP

India's economic liberalization from 1991 gave the BJP an opportunity to win over the middle class electorate. From 1991, the BJP adopted a policy of economic liberalism, and this policy struck a chord with the urban middle class. The BJP's support of the free-market economy and private enterprise was a welcome reprieve for the newly rising urban middle class. The BJP early on rejected the Soviet and the Fabian models of economic development. The BJP's laissez-faire policy allowed it to capture the political and economic right; this was possible because the BJP was, initially, the sole party espousing laissez-faire economic policy. As a result, the BJP was able to attract the support of the urban middle class. It is important to note that the urban middle class was, by and large, composed of upper caste Hindus.

The middle class support of the BJP was not only due to strictly economic issues. The urban middle class, also, sought social security and stability. The Mandal Commission report and economic liberalization also affected the lower castes. The lower castes became increasingly independent and economically more active, which in turn, in the eyes of the urban middle class

and the upper castes, threatened the established social hierarchical order. Moreover, in the northern Hindi Belt states, BJP's appeal stems from the insecurity of the upper castes towards the Muslims and the lower castes groups.

The Mandal Commission report had a profound effect on the psyche of the urban middle class and the upper caste Hindus. The report, in effect, gave an opportunity to the lower castes groups to ascend to a higher social group, especially for lower caste peasants, traders and entrepreneurs. Indian society, in effect, became more mobile. This rising ascendancy of the lower castes groups in the social and economic hierarchy imbued a sense of insecurity into the urban middle class who sought to stem this ascendancy by voting for the BJP who espoused the maintenance of the existing social order.

Another rationale behind the rise of the BJP posits that the electorate was disillusioned by the economic and policy failures by Congress in the 1980s and this resulted in the electorate being vulnerable to the 'Hindu Card' (Swain 2001; Malik and Singh 1992). Popular discontents due to economic stagnation in the 1980s and various corruption scandals, all of which occurred under Congress' watch, in effect forced the Hindu electorate to look for an alternative party to represent them.

The Political Awakening of the Lower Castes and Communities

India's social stratification, in general, can be grouped into five social hierarchies. On the top are the two upper castes (with the appellation of 'Upper Castes, 'Dominant Castes' or 'Forward Castes'), which constitute about 17% of India's population. The remaining population mostly falls under the general rubric 'lower castes.' The lower castes are sub-divided into three further hierarchies: Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (ex-Untouchables or 'Dalits') and Scheduled Tribes.

The group collectively known as the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitutes about 52% of India's population (see Appendix I for the official criteria for determining who is eligible to be considered as OBC). The majority of the OBCs are farmers with the dominant farmers above them and the untouchables under them. Within the OBCs, 83% are Hindus. The upper castes and the dominant castes constitute less than one fifth of Indian population. The remaining population—over 80% of population—is essentially non-upper castes. Of these non-upper caste electorate, the OBCs in the Hindi Belt has, from the 1980s, played a pivotal role in Indian electoral politics. The key question is why and how did the OBCs increasingly occupy an important role in Indian electoral politics?

Table 3.3: Caste Division

Social Hierarchical Division	% of Population
Upper Castes	11%
Dominant Castes	6%
Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Hindu	43%
Other Backward Classes (OBCs), non-Hindu	8.4%
Scheduled Castes	16.5%
Scheduled Tribes	8.1%

Source: *Census of India, 1991 and Report of the Backward Classes Commission* (Mandal Commission Report), 1980.

Although the complex caste system or structure, and especially its linkage with electoral politics, is beyond the scope of this thesis, it behooves to ask why the OBCs became increasingly powerful from the 1980s. The most prominent rationale for the rise of the OBCs is the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990; that the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, in effect, 'empowered' the OBCs politically. The Mandal Commission had awoken the political awareness of the OBCs (Jaffrelot 1996: 508). The Mandal Commission's recommendations, inter alia, was the setting of 27% quota for federal, public and educational positions. But the 27% quota was not the sole rationale for the rise of the OBC after 1990.

In addition, the empowerment of the OBCs was already in the works well before the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. In early 1977, the Janata Party—a mélange of parties opposed to the authoritarian rule of Indira Gandhi—attained electoral victory. The BJS, the forerunner of the current BJP, was also a member of the coalition that formed the Janata Party. The BJS, realizing the limitations of its Hindu nationalism card, joined other opposition parties in order to defeat Congress.

The election of the Janata Party in 1977 provided a crucial political fillip to OBCs (Jaffrelot 1993). This grand alliance by opposition parties forced the opposition to build alliances across not only the political spectrum, but, more importantly, across the caste divisions. As a result, from 1977, the OBCs were in a path to increasing its political representation (Jaffrelot 1993). More specifically, Jaffrelot argues that the number of OBC legislators in the north Indian assemblies and in the Lok Sabha has been rising steadily while the number of upper caste legislators has been declining. For example, in the first Lok Sabha elections between 1952 and 1957, 64% of members of the Lok Sabha from the northern states were from the upper castes with only 4.5% coming from OBCs. By contrast, in 1996, the numbers were 30.5% and 24.8% respectively (Jaffrelot 1993). Clearly, a fundamental change was afoot from the late 1970s in the realm of OBC political representation. The upper castes are no longer the dominant political force in northern India.

The flexing of OBC's political muscle from the late 1970s was also tied to the economic advancement of the OBCs. Agricultural modernization made the OBCs better off economically, and it started to flex its political muscle. India's Green Revolution began from the mid-1960s, with the objective of making India one of leading food producer nation of the world.

The BJP, realizing the growing political power of the OBCs, used a two-pronged strategy to woo the OBC electorate. First, from 1977 onwards, the BJS, and subsequently the BJP, increasingly nominated OBC candidates. The logic being that "the electors vote as much for people as for parties, if not more."¹⁸ This strategy of nominating OBC candidates, according to Jaffrelot, paid off handsomely for the BJP. Second, BJP indirectly wooed the OBC through alliances with regional parties. For example, the BJP's alliance with the Samata Party in the state of Bihar tied the BJP into the network of OBCs who are large farmers. As a result, in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the second largest voting bloc for the BJP after the upper caste bloc was the OBC.

Although the aforementioned BJP's strategies for wooing the OBC electorate were important catalysts for attaining OBC support, there were two developments that further prodded the OBC into the BJP camp. First, the liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s led to the formation a new economic middle class that was mostly constituted by OBCs. The affirmative actions policies in the days before the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations led to well-educated OBCs working for the federal, regional and district-level governments. The advancement of OBCs in the bureaucracies was increasingly stymied by the upper castes. This backlash by the upper castes had the effect of uniting the lower castes under the OBC flag. Second, with the weakening of the Congress System, the lower castes were seeking for alternative political representation. But instead of seeking a surrogate party—like Congress—to represent them, the lower castes increasingly formed their own parties and fielded their own candidates. This increased political assertiveness of the lower classes, especially in northern India, provided an opportunity as well as a threat to BJP's efforts to woo the OBC electorate. Hindu nationalist rhetoric from the BJP was initially popular among the Hindu-dominated OBC, but once the Babri mosque was torn down in 1992, it no longer resonated with the OBC electorate. The Babri mosque was viewed by Hindus as the symbol of Muslim domination of India. As long as the mosque stood, the Hindu nationalists could exploit its emotive nature for political gain, but, once it was torn down, the Hindu nationalists lost an important symbol to unite the Hindu population. Without an emotive symbol to exploit, the BJP

¹⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, "India in the Hands of the Hindu Nationalists," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1998, English internet edition.

had to turn to other issues. The destruction weakened the appeal of Hindu nationalism, and the BJP leadership was well aware of this fact. In its quest to garner OBC votes, and without an adequate issue to exploit, the BJP sought the OBC vote by forming strategic alliances with regional OBC parties. Instead of directly appealing to the OBCs, the BJP enlisted the help of the regional and local parties in marshalling the OBC vote.

Although a great majority of the lower castes are in the OBC category, the other lower caste groups such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been extending its political power in their own right. SCs and STs have been less inclined to support the BJP as they have political representation through the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The BSP became a national party after attaining 3.64% of the national vote in the 1996 elections. In 1998, the BSP attained 4.7% of the national vote. The BSP benefited politically as the STs and SCs flocked to the BSP in order to counter the efforts by the OBCs and the upper castes to limit reservations for the STs and the SCs.

Table 3.4: Caste Community of the MPs Elected in the Hindi Belt, 1980-1999 (%)

Castes and Communities	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999
Upper Castes	46.90	38.20	37.11	35.30	34.67	30.90
Intermediate Castes	5.31	8.00	5.43	7.53	8.89	6.40
OBCs	11.10	20.87	22.60	24.80	23.56	22.20
SCs	17.26	17.78	18.10	18.14	18.22	17.80
STs	7.52	7.56	8.14	7.52	7.56	7.30
Muslims	9.73	5.78	4.52	3.54	5.33	5.00

Source: Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Subordinate Caste Revolution," in *India Briefing: Quickening the Pace of Change*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and Philip Oldenburg (New York: East Gate Book, 2002), 138.

BJP Support by the Upper Castes and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

One of the most intriguing trends in electoral support of the BJP is the simultaneous support by both the upper castes and the OBCs. The BJP is inherently an upper caste-dependent party drawing most of its support from the higher caste Brahmins and the urban middle-class. What causal factors explain the OBC support of the BJP?

The upper caste support of the BJP can be attributed to five main causes. First, the role of Hindutva cannot be discounted for it played, and still plays, a role in the psyche of the Hindu electorate irrespective of caste and economic class. The Hindu electorate believes India is, and should be, a Hindu nation. The BJP, by espousing the Hindutva ideology, has tapped into this discontent and exploited it to the hilt. Second, economic liberalization has primarily benefited the upper castes and the urban middle class. Although, economic liberalization program was launched by Congress, it is the BJP who electorally capitalized on this development by

advocating a more competitive market economy than a market economy advocated by Congress. Third, for the upper castes and the urban middle class, the BJP was seen as the party of the upper castes and the urban middle class and hence able to check the political rise of the lower castes and poor rural farmers. Fourth, with Congress mired in one corruption scandal one after another, for the upper castes and the urban middle class, the BJP, with its vociferous anti-corruption plank, was seen as the anti-corruption party. Fifth, the BJP was seen as the party that could bring order and stability to India. For the upper castes and the urban middle class, there was nothing more important than order and stability, and the BJP was seen as the party best able to bring order and stability to India.

The BJP support by the OBCs is more nuanced than the support by the upper castes and the urban middle class. The OBC support of the BJP is primarily due to the structural developments of Indian electoral politics, namely, political regionalism. India has a long tradition of regionalism with numerous state and local-based parties playing an active role in local politics. With the weakening of Congress and hence the decline of the one party dominant electoral environment, economic liberalization and the awakening of the lower castes groups to electoral politics, regional and local parties became more assertive as they increasingly played a pivotal role in national politics. A multi-party system necessitated coalition building that traversed local, regional and national political boundaries. To this end, the BJP formed alliances with regional and local parties and it is for these parties, not for the BJP directly, that the OBCs voted. The OBCs vote more for parties and candidates than for party planks. To attract OBC votes, the BJP fielded OBC candidates whenever possible, which paid rich electoral dividends.

BJP's Electoral Performance Since its Inception

Lok Sabha Election	Results (Seat Distribution)	Party In Power	Electoral Significance
1980	Congress: 353 BJP: 0	Congress (simple absolute majority)	
1984	Congress: 404 BJP: 2	Congress (two-thirds majority)	Although the BJP attained only 2 seats in this election, BJP's support was actually stronger. The sympathy vote phenomenon for Congress after the death of Rajiv Gandhi masked the strong support for the BJP.
1989	Congress: 197 BJP: 85	Congress	Although Congress is in power, the majority coalition of opposition party is led by Janata Dal.
1991	Congress: 244 BJP: 120	Congress	Congress was able to cobble together a government with the assistance of smaller regional parties. Economic liberalization program launched by Congress. BJP actively campaigns on the Hindutva plank. Congress' Rajiv Gandhi assassinated during election campaign. The government of Prime Minister Rao is the first in that it did not have a committed majority in parliament. As a result, post-election alliance building became a critical issue.
1996	Congress: 140 BJP: 161	United Front minority coalition government supported by Congress	Despite having garnered the most votes, the BJP is unable to attract smaller regional parties and form a coalition government. BJP's Vajpayee's was initially named Prime Minister but resigns after a few days unable to form a government.
1998	Congress: 141 BJP: 182	BJP-led coalition government (National Democratic Alliance)	BJP able to form a government only after forming alliances with state-based parties.
1999	Congress: 114 BJP 182	BJP-led coalition government (National Democratic Alliance)	BJP's regional allies crucial in aiding the BJP form a coalition government.
			BJP loses power after six years in government. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) calls elections six months early. NDA was expected to retain power with a booming economy. Despite strong economic growth rate, NDA loses power to a resurgent Congress led by Sonia Gandhi.
2004	Congress: 145 BJP: 138	Congress-led coalition government (United Progressive Alliance (UPA))	The BJP was unable to garner support from the rural poor who did not benefit from technological and economic boom. Moreover, the Hindu nationalist plank that so well worked in the state elections in Gujarat in garnering electoral support fell short of expectations. BJP was unable to elevate the Hindu nationalist card onto the national level. The role of the smaller regional parties was crucial in the 2004 elections. Congress, for the first time in its history, entered into a pre-poll alliance with the regional parties. The regional and caste-based parties received nearly 50% of the overall vote. Congress' alliance with the regional and caste-based parties led to Congress being more attuned to the interest of the rural population.

Electoral Implications

Whether the rise of the BJP was totally dependent upon the weakening of the Congress system is difficult to ascertain. Undoubtedly, the weakening of the Congress system provided the BJP and other smaller parties the space to maneuver, but the BJP would not have been able to make the leap from 2 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1984 to 85 seats in 1989 without an electoral plank that goes beyond mere Hindu nationalist rhetoric. The key question here is whether the rise of the BJP was at the expense of Congress. Put differently, did Congress' supporters move en masse from Congress to the BJP? Were the BJP and Congress dividing up the same electoral pie or a different pie altogether? Initial evidence shows that BJP's electoral support in the northern Hindi Belt did not come at the expense of Congress. One of the key findings in this study is that Congress from the first national election did not have majority support from the northern Hindu electorate. Congress' support base was diverse, and it derived most support from the southern states where the BJP was the weakest. The BJP drew its support primarily from the northern Hindi Belt states where Congress was weakest.

The rise of the BJP had a system-wide electoral effect by speeding up the weakening process of Congress. Congress was no longer the sole national party that the electorate could turn to. The weakening of the Congress system meant there arose opportunities for parties such as the BJP, but in order for smaller parties to have a fighting chance in effecting change, they had to build alliances with regional parties that have not only increased in numbers but also in power. As a result, the regional parties became a hot commodity for parties such as Congress and the BJP. The regional parties, in effect, became balancers that increasingly held the key to the formation of a government. India was moving towards a multi-party system.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM

Regional Parties

India is a diverse society taken to the extreme. It is surprising for students of India to discover that electoral politics did not accurately reflect this diversity. Electoral politics was in essence played out on a different plane than the society. This was despite India's federalism, which was considered essential at the time the constitution was drawn up if India was to avoid disintegration according to ethnic and religious cleavages. Within the context of the Congress System this de-linking of electoral politics between the national and the state level is not surprising. Congress was a catch-all party that was effective in aggregating regional, ethnic and caste interests. Congress' ability to aggregate the interests of the state level parties started to wane from the late 1980s with Congress only controlling 36% of state-level governments in 1991 (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Congress Performance in India's State Assembly Elections (1952-1991)

	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991
No. of States	8	13	14	17	18	23	23	23	25	25
No. of Congress Ruled States	8	12	14	8	12	10	13	15	15	9
% of States Under Congress Govt,	100.0	92.3	100.0	47.1	66.7	43.5	56.5	65.2	60.0	36.0

Source: Steven Wilkinson. *Party Fractionalization and Ethnic Violence in India*. Paper Delivered at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington DC, August 31-September 3, 2000, p. 6.

As a result, there has been an astonishing growth in power of the regional parties in the Lok Sabha. For example, in 1998, regional parties account for 26.6% of the seats in the Lok Sabha (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Number of Seats in the Lok Sabha by Party, 1977-1998

Party	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998
Congress (I)	154	353	415	197	244	140	141
BJS/BJP	-	-	2	86	120	161	179
Janata Party/Janata Dal	295	31	10	142	59	46	6
Communist Party (Marxist)	22	36	22	33	35	32	32
Communist Party India	7	11	6	12	14	12	9
BKD/LD/SJP	-	41	3	-	5	17	1
INC	3	13	5	1	1	4	-
Regional Parties	49	34	73	27	51	118	100
Independents	9	9	5	12	1	9	6
Others	3	1	1	19	4	4	65
TOTAL	542	529	542	529	534	543	539
TOTAL REGIONAL	78	81	101	72	100	162	141

Table 4.2 continued

Party	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998
PARTIES*							
REGIONAL PARTIES PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL	14.4%	15.3%	18.6%	13.6%	18.7%	29.8%	26.6%

Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage, p. 131.

* The Communist Party Marxist (CPM) and the Communist Party India (CPI) are Bengal-based regional parties and hence were added into the 'Regional Parties' tally.

With no one party able to attain a simple majority in the Lok Sabha elections from the early 1990s, the regional parties have become crucial in the formation of a government. This dependence on the regional parties has led to what the Rudolphs call a 'federalized coalition' (Rudolph and Rudolph 2001: 4). According to the Rudolphs, the three 'national' parties are the BJP, Congress and CPI-M (Communist Party India – Marxists). But since none of these parties are independently able to garner a majority in the Lok Sabha, they are beholden to the smaller regional parties for the formation of a government (see Table 4.3).

Political fragmentation of Indian electoral politics came to a head in the 1998 Lok Sabha election. The BJP attained a plurality with 182 seats; Congress reached the nadir of its political existence with 141 seats. With both parties unable to form a government on its own, both BJP and Congress turned to regional parties for the formation of government. Their efforts were frustrated by the unification of regional parties under the 'United Front' banner. The United Front tallied 98 seats in the Lok Sabha. With the United Front drawing regional parties away from the BJP and Congress, the BJP was left with the uninviting prospect of forming a government by forming alliances with smaller regional and ideologically distant parties. The BJP was able to form a government only after cobbling together a coalition government under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) banner.

NDA is a loose collection of over a dozen parties, most of them regional. To form a government, and with the major regional parties united under the United Front banner, even a small regional party became a gem for the BJP. In a fragmented polity, one additional seat count in the Lok Sabha can have great political mileage.

Table 4.3: Votes Won by Major Parties in the 1998 Lok Sabha Elections (Percentage of Total Valid Votes)

State/Territory	BJP	BJP Allies*	Congress	Congress Allies	United Front [^]	Others
Andhra Pradesh	18.30	1.20	37.55	-	38.37	4.58
Arunchal Pradesh	21.75	-	23.90	-	1.89	52.47
Assam	24.47	-	38.97	-	18.16	18.40
Bihar	22.03	15.46	6.94	24.75	15.50	15.31
Goa	30.18	-	31.53	-	13.15	24.14
Gujarat	47.72	-	37.95	-	3.47	10.87
Haryana	18.89	11.60	26.02	-	1.07	42.42
Himachal Pradesh	48.60	-	43.57	-	2.02	5.81

Table 4.3 continued

State/Territory	BJP	BJP Allies*	Congress	Congress Allies	United Front^	Others
Jammu and Kashmir	23.31	-	22.54	-	36.66	17.49
Karnataka	26.69	11.50	36.23	-	21.82	3.49
Kerala	8.02	-	36.55	7.13	42.40	5.90
Madhya Pradesh	45.86	-	38.46	-	2.65	13.04
Maharashtra	23.11	19.26	43.48	2.61	3.81	7.72
Manipur	12.61	-	18.60	-	20.47	48.32
Meghalaya	9.01	-	47.62	-	1.99	41.38
Mizoram	2.94	-	34.86	-	-	62.20
Nagaland	-	-	86.70	-	-	13.30
Orissa	21.43	27.80	40.27	-	6.45	4.05
Punjab	14.90	32.87	25.87	9.44	8.64	8.28
Rajasthan	41.65	-	44.45	-	6.57	7.32
Sikkim	-	-	33.11	65.72	-	1.17
Tamil Nadu	6.86	41.75	5.43	-	43.42	2.53
Tripura	8.19	-	42.12	-	48.80	0.90
Uttar Pradesh	36.44	1.49	5.99	1.16	29.48	25.44
West Bengal	10.00	24.14	14.98	2.03	46.65	2.19
Andaman and Nicobar	35.53	-	35.91	-	5.67	22.89
Chandigarh	42.39	-	38.72	-	1.61	17.28
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	52.29	-	4.02	-	-	43.69
Daman and Diu	41.96	-	1.98	-	-	56.06
Delhi	53.51	-	42.64	-	2.76	1.08
Lakshadweep	-	-	51.55	-	48.45	-
Pondicherry	-	25.09	32.13	-	41.11	1.67
India	25.46	11.59	25.68	3.59	22.42	11.26

Source: *Frontline*, 17 April 1998, p. 134.

* National Democratic Front (NDF): Collection of over 20 regional parties led by the BJP.

^ United Front: Collection of regional parties.

The rationale behind the rise of the regional parties has been primarily explained by the lacuna in the wake of Congress' decline. The Rudolphs posit yet another rationale—economic independence of states. The economic liberalization launched in 1991, according to the Rudolphs, imbued the states with a sense of economic independence as the central government was no longer able to dole out large subsidies to state government due to its fiscal deficit. As a result, the increasing economic independence of the states coupled with the transformation of the party system (regionalization) has led to a 'federal market economy' (Rudolph and Rudolph 2001: 6). The central government's role in Indian economy had changed from an interventionist one to one of regulator. Economic independence of the states had an important spillover effect on the political arena.

The effect of India's political economy on the development of a multi-party system cannot be overstated. The decentralization of political power from the central government to the states went hand in hand with the central government's devolving of economic management to the states. Until the launching of economic liberalization in the early 1990s, the central government with its large intrusive bureaucracy interfered with the operations of the economy.

With economic liberalization, the central government no longer single-handedly dominates India's economy. As a result, power was redistributed from the central government and its bureaucracies to state governments and independent regulatory agencies. Although the weakening of the Congress system was an important cause for the decentering of India's polity, the role of economic liberalization was an additional factor that spurred political decentralization enhancing the status of regional parties.

The importance of the regional parties for the BJP, and for the Indian electoral politics in general, is crucial since none of the 'national' parties have enough support to gain a majority in without the help of regional parties. In this vein, the BJP tasted a bitter lesson in the aftermath of the 1996 Lok Sabha election despite having the plurality of votes (161 out of a total of 545 seats), the BJP could not muster enough support from the regional parties to form a lasting government. The BJP hastily cobbled together a loose coalition under the banner the 'United Front,' but the coalition fell apart in less than two weeks and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP) had to resign ignominiously.¹⁹ In addition, in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, BJP was only able to form a government with the help of smaller regional parties under the banner 'National Democratic Alliance (NDA).' As a result, the regional parties have been critical for not only the BJP but to Congress as well as both parties were no longer able to attain a majority in the Lok Sabha by themselves. India has become a case of wag the dog polity where smaller regional parties determine the fate of larger, national and well-established parties. After the 1999 Lok Sabha election, BJP was able to form a government only after cobbling together a coalition of twenty smaller regional parties. Congress was not immune from the multi-party politics either. After the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, having attained only a plurality in the Lok Sabha, Congress was able to form a government only after reaching out to smaller regional parties.

With the weakening of Congress, many of the regional parties lost a reliable means of furthering their agenda from the national stage. With Congress pre-occupied with stanching its decline, it was less-inclined to further the agendas of the regional parties. The regional parties sought means to further their agenda by supporting parties with platforms amenable to theirs. Regional parties no longer supported a party just to help a major party form a government. Regional parties have increasingly become single-state parties representing a specific cultural and ethnic group within a state. These single-state parties were formed with sole purpose of furthering their platform. Support was issue-specific. The regional parties realizing the

¹⁹ With the BJP unable to form a government, Congress formed a government with the help of Janata Dal, Communist Party of India (Marxists) and Communist Party of India.

importance of their support for BJP and Congress demanded their fair share of political capital and say in the formation of public policy.

Congress was able to attract the support of regional parties with an aggressive economic decentralization plank that jibed well with the agendas of the regional parties who were seeking less intervention from Delhi.

The BJP was better than any other party in adjusting to the decentered Indian polity.²⁰ The moderation of its Hindu nationalist rhetoric meant the BJP had more space to maneuver and form alliances with regional parties. In order to form alliances, the BJP was willing to field smaller number of candidates in national elections—it was a price BJP had to pay in order to enlist the support of the regional parties. The BJP was, in effect, better than Congress in forming coalitions (Echeverri-Gent 2002).

Multi-Party System

Studies of modern party systems stem from the works of Maurice Duverger. But, sadly, Duverger research is primarily based on European and the US party systems, as a result, his research might not be fully applicable to India—a post-colonial society whose electorate and environment is different than those of Europe and the US. In fact, the study of Indian party systems, especially that of alliances, in the context of cultural and ethnic diversity, has been neglected by non-Indian scholars.²¹ Undoubtedly, the need was not there: India was dominated by the Indian National Congress party until the 1996 general election. Despite the overall paucity of research, the research by some Indologists, namely, Yogendra Malik and V. B. Singh's *Hindu Nationalists in India* has provided a trenchant analysis of alliance formation strategies in Indian electoral politics. According to Malik and Singh, party alliances are a function of factional power distribution within parties. Alliance formation depends on which faction has control of the party, and depending on the types of ideologies held by the party leaders (Malik and Singh 1994). In the end, according to Malik and Singh, party leaders form alliances on the basis of “cold electoral calculations.” Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman have found that party aggregation occurs when governments centralize political and economic power and, as a result, are able to better form policies that affect local areas, which in turn provides

²⁰ Source: John Echeverri-Gent, “Politics in India’s Decentered Polity,” in *India Briefing: Quickening the Pace of Change*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and Philip Oldenburg (New York: East Gate Book, 2002), 26.

²¹ Mehra aptly asserts, “Theoretical studies on modern party systems, because of their Eurocentric focus, do not enlighten us sufficiently regarding the evolution of political parties in post-colonial societies.” (Mehra 2003).

incentives to local leaders to form alliances with national parties. Gurharpal Singh on the other has found that a party in a culturally and ethnically diverse electorate, ideology is the prime determinant of alliance formation. Ramesh Thakur has found the compatibility of party values as an important determinant of alliance formation. Devesh Kapur and Pratap Mehta have found that parties form strategic alliances to balance against opposing parties.

2004 Lok Sabha Election

No other election better exemplifies the rise of the multi-party electoral politics than the 2004 Lok Sabha election. In the previous 1999 Lok Sabha election, the BJP was able to form a coalition government under the banner of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) by garnering 182 seats while Congress was able to garner only 114 seats. The BJP called for an early Lok Sabha election after having won convincing state-level electoral victories over Congress in December 2003. Moreover, the BJP sought to capitalize on a booming economy. For the BJP, as well as the rest of the parties, a shock was in order.

In an unexpected turn of events, the BJP was only able to garner 138 seats, losing 44 seats from the previous election. Moreover, it was Congress, with 145, not the BJP that garnered the most seats. With both the BJP and Congress fallen well short of a majority required to form a government on its own, both parties resorted to reaching out to smaller parties to form a government. The formation of alliances with regional parties became critical in forming a government. It was Congress, under the banner of United Progressive Alliance (UPA), who was able to attract enough support from smaller parties to form a government. The UPA coalition had 219 seats while the NDA coalition led by the BJP had 185 seats. In a multi-party system, the ability to attract and subsequently form coalitions has become paramount if a party is to form a government.

The 2004 election also showed the strength of the leftist parties in India. The leftist alliance parties, under the banner of Left Front, garnered 62 seats with nearly all of them coming from West Bengal and Kerala. The left front is officially not part of the UPA coalition but it nonetheless supports the UPA coalition. These leftist parties are regionally-based, especially in West Bengal, but their heft in national politics have risen as no single party no longer dominates national politics.

In May of 2005, Manmohan Singh, a Sikh and an Oxford-educated economist was sworn in as the first non-Hindu prime minister after Sonia Gandhi, leader of Congress and the widow of the former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, declined the position of prime minister. With twenty

other parties to appease, Manmohan Singh's government has, so far, found it hard to push through economic and social reforms.

The reasons behind the poor electoral performance of the NDA coalition in the 2004 election are manifold, but the most glaring is that for the rural poor, the economic boom, especially the information technology boom that was so feted by the NDA coalition was not palpable. The BJP aggressively campaigned with the 'India Shining' slogan emphasizing the economic and technological boom in India. For the rural poor, they were less concerned with the rate of high speed internet connection than '*bijli, sadak, pani*' (power, roads, water). In other words, the rural poor held the NDA accountable for neglecting the rural infrastructure projects that were once synonymous with Indira Gandhi and Congress. On the other hand, Congress' election plank was based on wooing the economically dispossessed and the rural poor, which paid electoral dividends in 2004.

The 2004 election also showed the limitations of the Hindu nationalist ideology. In the run-up to the elections, the BJP invoked the Hindu nationalist rhetoric to counter the possibility of Sonia Gandhi, an Italian by birth, becoming prime minister. For the BJP, the Hindu nationalist plank paid dividends in the 2002 Gujarat state elections, and it sought to apply this plank in the 2004 national elections without much success.

Electoral Implications

India, since the mid-1990s is going through a political transformation never witnessed in Indian history since its independence. The BJP became the first party to defeat the mighty Congress in the 1996 Lok Sabha election. Moreover, the increasing assertiveness of the regional parties with close ties to local politics no longer meant the national parties—the BJP, Congress and Communist Party India (Maxist)—could ignore local concerns. Indian "electoral process produced not a national verdict, but an aggregation of local verdicts"²² aptly depicts the current state of Indian electoral politics.

The decline of Congress and economic liberalization had the effect of leveling the playing field for political parties. Congress and the BJP remains the dominant national party, and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. But the Indian electoral is such that these two parties are no longer able to dictate politics from the high perch of Delhi. Smaller regional parties that are beholden to local politics and constituents have increasingly played a pivotal role

²² Rob Jenkins, 'Appearances and Reality in Indian Politics,' *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2000), pp. 49-66.

in determining which of the two national party forms a functional and stable government. The BJP was able to form a stable government after the 1999 elections by forming alliances with over twenty smaller regional parties with diverse political hues. Whether this transformation will lead to more democratic accountability depends on the extent to which the national parties accept the regional parties as a serious partner and not as a simple means of forming a government.

CONCLUSION

In the 1984 Lok Sabha election the BJP could only muster two seats in the Lok Sabha; in the following election in 1989, the BJP mustered eighty-five seats. What accounts for this sudden electoral success? Has the BJP become the second major party in India? More importantly, can the BJP maintain its position as the second major party with Congress? These are some of the questions this thesis sought to explore and answer.

Five findings have been adduced in this study. First, the rise of the BJP was facilitated by the weakening of the Congress party, the secular party that dominated India's electoral politics since independence in 1947. I argue that the erstwhile electoral politics was anything but normal with the Congress party skewing the electorate to its advantage. I argue, with the rise of a multi-party system, India is shedding the veneer of 'democracy' and entering a period of electoral re-alignment where parties align themselves with their natural constituents. India's mass participatory democracy had a bottleneck, viz., the domination of the electoral politics by Congress. With the weakening of Congress, and the rise of the BJP, the electoral playing field has been leveled providing opportunities for the under-represented disparate groups to enter electoral politics.

Second, the rise of the BJP was *not* due to a significant shift of the Hindu electorate from Congress to the BJP. I argue that Congress, from the first national election in 1952, did not have a majority support from the so-called northern 'Hindi Belt' states, and, if anything, Congress only drew a limited support from these states. Support for Congress has been traditionally weak in the northern states where Congress faced a more united opposition parties than in the southern states where opposition party unity was weak. Moreover, support for Congress was based on an elaborate network of patronage system, which was more effective in the southern states where opposition parties are more divided than in the northern states. Congress also derived more political power than warranted from India's single member district first-past-the-post electoral system. As a result, a significant portion of the northern Hindu electorate sought political representation. It is this dormant northern Hindu electorate that the BJP was able to tap for electoral support.

Third, the rise of the BJP was also facilitated by its adoption of a free-market economic policy from the early 1990s. BJP's policy shift to economic liberalism coincided with the economic liberalization program launched under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi of Congress in

the summer of 1991. The severe fiscal and political crisis from the 1980s under Congress had left the middle and upper middle class disappointed at Congress' management of the economy. At this juncture, the BJP, by adopting a free-market policy, was able to tap into the frustrations of the middle and upper classes for electoral gain.

Fourth, a nationalist party embedded in a diverse society, with vertical and horizontal social stratification and cleavages, and regionalism, cannot sustain its political following by solely relying on its nationalist platform. I argue that the BJP by adopting a highly emotive Hindu nationalist plank was successful in mobilizing the Hindus against the Muslims, but was less successful in transforming this emotion into a reliable vote and support base for the BJP. I argue that the BJP's leadership has already steered the party away from its Hindu nationalist course, but its change of tack might be limited due to its historical ties to the militant Hindu volunteer organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). BJP's support base will remain largely Hindu, but its ultimate test in becoming a truly national, not nationalist, party, like Congress, will depend on its ability to enlist the support of a broad swathe of the electorate from different regions. Until BJP's support base is national, BJP, like any other party in India, will be forced to rely on the support of regional parties. Hindu nationalism played a part in the rise of the BJP, but its role is increasingly trumped by the electorate's economic and political concerns. I argue that the 'Hindu Card' had only limited success and its effect has been largely limited to the northern Hindi Belt states. I argue that the principle Hindu nationalism goes against BJP's effort to become a national party.

Fifth, the rise of the BJP was also facilitated by the awakening of the lower castes to electoral politics. I argue that the weakening of Congress diminished the electoral representation of the lower classes and castes. Congress has traditionally been the vanguard of the lower castes, but its decline, has left the lower castes without an adequate national representation. As a result, I argue that the lower castes, in order to further their interests, have resorted to direct actions by direct participation in electoral politics, even to the point of establishing their own parties. I argue that this political awakening of the lower castes had the perceived effect of threatening the middle and the upper castes. I argue that the middle and the upper caste Hindu groups are concerned with social hierarchy, order and stability and these groups seek a party that will protect their interests—the BJP. I further argue that Hindu nationalist rhetoric from the BJP was met with only limited success and, ergo, cannot fully explain the rise of the BJP. The rise of the BJP is the consequence of social tensions between different classes and castes. I argue the pressure from the lower classes and castes had the effect of herding the right-of-center middle and upper caste Hindus into the arms of the BJP.

Indian electoral politics has changed significantly since the early 1980s. Before the early 1980s, Indian electoral politics was synonymous with the ‘Congress System’ where the Congress party (officially known as Indian National Congress) dominated electoral politics to a degree that left little or no opportunity for other national parties. At first blush, this electoral domination by Congress seems absolute and obvious if electoral success (the number of seats won in the lower house of national parliament or the Lok Sabha) is used as the yardstick. Despite the putative dominance of Congress, there rose a party from the early 1980s that eventually eclipsed Congress in the 1996 national elections, namely, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Like Congress, the BJP has a distinguished pedigree. The BJP is the successor to the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), a Hindu nationalist party formed in 1951 with close connections to Hindu nationalist organizations. By studying the rise of the BJP, this thesis seeks to discover the circumstances and the environment that facilitated the rise of the BJP, and the transformation of Indian electoral politics from a single party dominated system to a multi-party system where coalition building had become a necessity for forming a government.

Indologist Rajni Kothari first coined the term ‘Congress System’ in 1964. The Congress System for Kothari meant a one party dominant system and not a one party system. From India’s independence in 1947, electoral politics was competitive in nature with a few national and hundreds of regional and state parties jostling for power. Despite the competitive nature of Indian electoral politics, it was a foregone conclusion which party would govern—Congress. Congress, the party of Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi, dominated Indian electoral politics from India’s independence to the mid-1980s. This domination, according to Kothari, was possible because Congress was a party of consensus and had the wherewithal to integrate the myriad of parties and factions within the Congress umbrella. The building of consensus and integrating the various parties and factions under the aegis of Congress necessitated flexibility on the part of Congress. As a result, Congress was a large national party that to all intents and purposes was amorphous. Moreover, despite its size, Congress’ flexibility meant it could adapt well to the vicissitudes of regional, state and local politics. The integrative and flexible nature of Congress was possible because of the vast political patronage system that Congress built and maintained. Congress’ patronage system was characterized not only by its sheer breadth, but also its depth—Congress’ tentacles reached deep into local-level politics.

The Congress system was built and given succor by Nehru. It was Nehru, with his charisma, who was the chief architect of the Congress System. It was Nehru’s personal standing among the Indian populace that provided the essential fillip to Congress in the 1950s and up to the early 1960s. Nehru’s death in 1964 meant Congress could no longer rely solely on Nehru’s

standing among the populace. Nehru acted as the centrifugal force for Congress and its allies, but once Nehru was gone, Congress showed signs of splintering. Nehru was able to maintain a cohesive national party by institutionalizing Congress. Under Nehru, Congress was a well organized party with elaborate patronage networks. Moreover, Congress was not a party built on ideology. Socialism, or, more accurately, Nehruvian Socialism, was the ideology under-girding Congress, but being a political party bent on winning elections, ideology played second fiddle to patronage.

With Nehru's death, his daughter Indira Gandhi took over the helm of Congress from the mid-1960s. Unlike her father, Indira Gandhi was less successful in sustaining Congress' institutions. The much-vaunted Congress' patronage system started to weaken when Indira Gandhi attempted to centralize power at the expense of powerful regional party elders. As a result, Congress, as an institution and a political party, started to weaken from the late 1960s. It is from this vantage point that the electoral transformation from the early 1980s should be viewed and assessed, namely, the Congress System was already weakening from the late 1960s.

In national elections, Congress did not have the majority vote. On average, up to 1991, Congress mustered only 42.3% of the national vote. Even in national elections with Nehru, Congress failed to win an absolute majority. If Congress never received the majority of votes, then, what explains Congress' dominance of electoral politics? Congress was able to dominate electoral politics because the opposition was divided and the first-past-the-post electoral system. Congress' opposition parties were divided and was not able to mount a credible challenge against the well organized Congress. In addition, geographically Congress' electoral success was largely based in the southern states where the opposition was more divided than the northern states.

The decline of Congress led to the decline of secularism in India. Congress was a secular and a catch-all party. Congress, with its vast reach and patronage system, was able to put a cap on religious and ethnic tensions. Moreover, Indira Gandhi played the 'Hindu Card' in the run up to the 1980 national elections with great success. From the early 1980s, the environment was ripe for religion to enter electoral politics.

One of the key hypotheses of this thesis had been that the decline of Congress was already well under way from the early 1970s and, ergo, the electoral milieu was already ripe for change. Moreover, Congress, like any other political party, adapts to political exigencies. Secularism, so successfully espoused and implemented by Nehru, was challenged by the actions of Indira Gandhi who exploited ethnic tensions for political gain from the late 1970s.

In 1980, the remnants of the former Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) party formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party with a Hindu nationalist bent. More than 50% of BJP's

officers were former members of the RSS, a Hindu nationalist organization. As a result, the 'Hindu Card' was a natural extension of the BJP's electoral politics. Soon after its founding, the BJP exploited the religious tensions among the Hindus (who account for 82% of India's population) and the Muslims. A mosque in the city of Ayodhya became a lightning rod for religious tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. The mosque, according to Hindus, stood on the site where a former Hindu temple once stood. For this reason, Hindus sought to tear down the mosque and build a Hindu temple for one of its Hindu gods. The BJP, realizing its significance, exploited the Ayodhya issue to the fullest and ratcheted-up the party's Hindu nationalist rhetoric. BJP's Hindu nationalist card helped the BJP in expanding its seat count in the national parliament from 2 in 1984 to 120 in 1991. The Hindu nationalist card helped the BJP in acquiring votes, but was the Hindu nationalist card sustainable without any religious issues to milk? This thesis seeks to argue that the BJP's Hindu nationalist card was only effective as a stopgap measure. With the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992 by Hindu nationalists, religious tensions, in the context of electoral politics, became less salient of an issue for the electorate, and the BJP responded accordingly by toning down its Hindu nationalist rhetoric in the run up to the 1996 national election. The BJP was, and still is, a Hindu nationalist party, but, electoral exigencies severely limit the use of its Hindu nationalist card. Like Congress, the BJP is also amorphous and is able to adapt to win elections.

The BJP's support base is primarily urban, well educated, large farmers, white collar professionals, upper caste, Hindu and upper economic in class. The BJP is a party of the urban middle class. As a result, BJP's party planks supported market liberalization and the streamlining of the tax code. To this end, India's economic liberalization program launched in 1991 helped the BJP in attracting middle and upper class voters in the urban areas.

The BJP's effort in attracting middle, upper class and upper caste voters was further facilitated by the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990. The Mandal Commission—a commission established to find means to rectify the plight of the lower caste groups in Indian society—recommended a 27% quota for some of the lower caste groups in federal, public and educational organizations. This reservation of quotas was not well received by the upper castes who stood to lose employment opportunities in public organizations.

The implementation of the Mandal Commission report had a yet another effect. The report, in effect, empowered the lower castes groups as they saw opportunities for advancement in Indian society, albeit only in public organizations. More importantly, the lower caste groups, constituted a large proportion of Indian society. The group called the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitutes 52% of India's population and hence a too large an electorate to ignore.

Moreover, a significant portion of the OBCs were moving upwards in the economic ladder and constituting the urban middle class. As a result, both the BJP and Congress sought the OBC vote. In order to woo the OBCs, the BJP fielded more OBC candidates and established alliances with regional OBC parties. Alliance formation became critical to both the BJP and to Congress.

The BJP, like Congress was not a national party in terms of geography. BJP's support came primarily from the so-called 'Hindi Belt' states in northern India. Congress, on the other hand, primarily derived its support from the southern states where regional and local parties were divided and hence were unable to mount a united challenge to Congress. BJP was unable to derive significant electoral support from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. BJP's strength lay in the northern states of Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This geographical limitation has forced the BJP to build alliances with parties in southern states—politics make strange bedfellows.

The BJP from its inception was not a dyed-in-the-wool Hindu nationalist party. BJP was a political party with the sole purpose of winning elections. It is true that most of the BJP's leadership and the grass roots members were former and contemporary members of the Hindu nationalist movement the RSS. The key question is which was more important for the BJP leadership, advancing the Hindu nationalist cause, or successfully competing in national elections? For the BJP leadership, the latter took precedence. Hindu nationalist rhetoric was used, but only selectively if it was considered beneficial to BJP's electoral efforts. Moreover, the BJP realized that it could never become a geographically national party if it were to solely rely on the Hindu electorate. As a result, the BJP moderated its Hindu nationalist rhetoric.

An important exogenous factor that facilitated the rise of the BJP, and, more importantly facilitated the transformation of electoral politics, was economic liberalization launched by Rajiv Gandhi in 1990. Economic liberalization affected electoral politics by cutting across geographical, caste and ethnic divisions. Economic liberalization led to the creation of a middle class, and the BJP was quick to tap the frustrations of this group by supporting free market economy with more fervor than any other party.

Economic liberalization also facilitated the political awakening of the OBCs. The Mandal Commission and its effects on the lower castes would not have been as strong had it not been economic liberalization from which the lower castes gained economic and political power. The agricultural Green Revolution from the late 1960s to the late 1970s made India self-sufficient in agriculture providing the rural farmers with the opportunity to sell their products in the open market, which in turn provided the opportunity for economic advancement for poor rural farmers.

India has currently entered an era of multi-party politics. Although Congress and the BJP are still the dominant national parties, both stand on shaky ground. Congress can no longer rely on its patronage system to deliver electoral victories. Patronage system was based on the notion of quid pro quo: the central government doled out benefits and political favors in exchange for marshalling of votes. In an era of decentralized politics and the devolvement of economic power to the states, making electoral inroads using the patronage system becomes increasingly difficult. The BJP, with its support base limited to the northern Hindi-speaking states is having difficulty making electoral inroads in southern states. As a result, in order to form a government, the BJP was forced to form alliances with regional parties after national elections. The BJP was especially successful in building alliances with regional parties even at the cost of withdrawing its own candidates.

Moreover, there are signs that the BJP has further moderated its Hindu nationalist stance. Currently the BJP is led by the octogenarian Atal Behari Vajpayee and the few years younger partner L. K. Advani who are seasoned politicians and former members of the BJS. These two leaders are slated to retire from politics within a few years. Vajpayee, to all intents and purposes, has signaled he has no intention of seeking national office, in effect, announcing his retirement from national politics. Advani is also under pressure to retire from politics with younger BJP politicians waiting in the wings to take BJP's mantle. Even the traditionally hawkish Advani had shown signs of moderating his views. The BJP is undoubtedly a Hindu-based party, but the degree to which it can accentuate its Hindu nationalist card will be further limited by the nature of Indian electoral politics—multi-party politics.

Whether the moderation of the Hindu card by the BJP is permanent or not is difficult to predict at the writing of this thesis. The BJP was, and still is, a Hindu nationalist party with the majority of its party members having connections to the Hindu nationalist movement organization RSS. Moreover, BJP's support base is largely constituted by Hindu fundamentalists and it is difficult to predict whether the BJP will swing right with the rise of yet another religious issue. As leopards do not change its spots easily, the BJP itself is a Hindu nationalist animal with spots. Although the BJP has moderated its Hindu nationalist card, this moderation was out of the sheer necessity of forming a government. If the electoral calculus could be altered without resorting to alliances, there is no predicting whether the BJP will utilize its Hindu nationalist card. BJP's Hindu nationalist tinder remains dry and a small spark could ignite it.

These trends suggest politics is indeed local where local and regional electoral politics increasingly influence national politics. The BJP, so far, has adapted well to electoral exigencies

but it is too early to tell whether the BJP will be able to maintain alliance formation streak without alienating its support base.

Indian politics, especially electoral politics, even at the writing of this thesis, cannot be fathomed without studying the role of Congress and its legacies. Congress, although much weakened, is still a national party to be reckoned with. Moreover, the lure of yet another Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, the grandson of Indira Gandhi, becoming prime minister, cannot be discounted.

Although, the political power is increasingly being devolved to regional and local politics, Congress and the BJP remains the only two parties with national reach and orientation. The regional parties will play an important role electoral politics so long as they tied to these two national parties.

Indian electoral politics is undergoing a transformation from a single party (Congress) dominant electoral system to a multi-party system with no single dominant party. The electoral milieu is characterized by a symbiotic relationship between the two national parties and the regional parties. The key question is where is India heading in the next few decades? Will this latest electoral development further democracy in India where the poor and lower castes groups have yet to find acceptance and footing in Indian society? Although it is too early to tell whether democracy had been advanced due to this latest development in Indian electoral politics, one thing is for sure, the most deprived members of Indian society are exercising their right and taking part in electoral politics and their vote is more valuable than ever before.

APPENDIX A

SOCIAL BASES OF PARTIES (1996 and 1998 in Percent)

	1996					1998			
	INC+	BJP+	NF	LF	BSP	INC	BJP+	UF	BSP
Gender									
Female	27.6	23.0	9.4	7.6	3.1	28.0	29.5	19.6	2.8
Male	27.4	26.8	10.8	7.4	3.6	26.5	36.3	18.7	3.0
Locality									
Rural	28.1	22.6	10.6	8.8	3.8	27.0	31.8	19.6	3.1
Urban	25.6	32.2	8.7	3.4	2.0	28.2	36.3	17.7	2.4
Age									
~25	25.7	27.0	10.2	6.9	3.8	24.4	35.0	17.8	4.3
26~35	27.1	25.5	9.9	7.7	3.5	27.5	33.9	18.6	2.6
36~45	28.8	25.1	9.7	8.1	2.9	27.4	32.4	20.5	2.6
46~55	27.0	23.6	10.2	8.4	3.5	28.2	32.0	21.5	2.2
56~	30.0	21.3	10.9	6.4	2.9	29.7	29.9	18.2	2.6
Education									
Illiterate	28.6	21.1	12.3	6.6	5.0	29.1	28.9	18.3	4.0
Up to Middle	28.4	23.8	9.2	8.9	2.8	26.9	34.3	20.8	2.4
College w/o degree	25.8	31.3	8.0	7.7	1.6	25.7	36.5	19.1	1.8
Graduate~	21.1	36.7	6.1	6.0	0.9	21.5	42.5	16.6	1.6
Occupation									
Unskilled Worker	30.6	17.0	9.9	10.8	5.2	34.6	23.0	21.4	4.1
Agricultural	28.4	17.8	11.5	8.9	5.2	26.2	26.2	24.5	4.5
Artisan/Skilled	27.3	24.1	9.3	7.7	3.0	26.9	30.6	23.1	2.1
Cultivator (~5 acres)	26.1	26.2	14.0	6.4	4.9	21.7	32.8	18.3	3.1
Cultivator (5 ~ acres)	29.7	34.6	8.2	1.6	2.5	31.1	41.9	10.8	2.0
Business	23.3	33.0	10.1	7.6	0.7	26.2	37.9	21.5	1.5
White Collar/Professional	26.2	30.8	5.6	8.0	0.3	24.3	39.6	15.7	1.0
Caste									
Scheduled Caste	31.6	14.4	5.6	11.0	12.1	29.6	20.9	22.2	11.2
Scheduled Tribe	39.2	19.0	6.2	6.5	1.0	41.9	25.6	11.6	0.4
OBC	21.7	23.6	16.3	5.9	2.3	22.5	34.6	21.0	1.6
Upper Caste	28.4	33.6	7.1	7.3	0.4	28.1	38.5	17.4	1.1
Religion									
Hindu	26.2	28.9	8.4	7.4	3.7	25.6	37.4	17.4	3.0
Muslim	35.3	3.1	25.3	10.1	1.2	35.1	6.8	34.4	1.3
Christian	39.9	3.0	2.0	5.6	-	42.1	9.1	18.6	0.4
Sikh	18.3	14.3	16.7	2.4	5.6	21.9	39.8	18.0	10.2
Other	26.5	6.0	12.0	2.4	4.8	39.5	19.7	3.9	10.5
Economic Class									
Very Poor	29.6	16.0	10.7	11.3	4.4	27.3	27.1	23.7	2.7
Poor	28.3	23.1	10.5	6.7	4.7	27.4	31.8	19.0	3.3
Middle	26.1	31.1	10.9	5.6	2.2	26.9	37.3	16.6	2.7
Upper	22.4	40.1	7.9	3.4	0.4	28.3	38.9	14.3	1.9

Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage, pp. 134-135.

INC+: Congress and alliance parties

BJP+: BJP and alliance parties

NF (National Front): Janata Dal + Samajwadi Party

LF (Left Front): Communist Party (Marxist) + Communist Party India + Revolutionary Socialist Party + All India Forward Bloc

BSP: Bahujan Samaj Party (Scheduled Castes)

UF: United Front

APPENDIX B

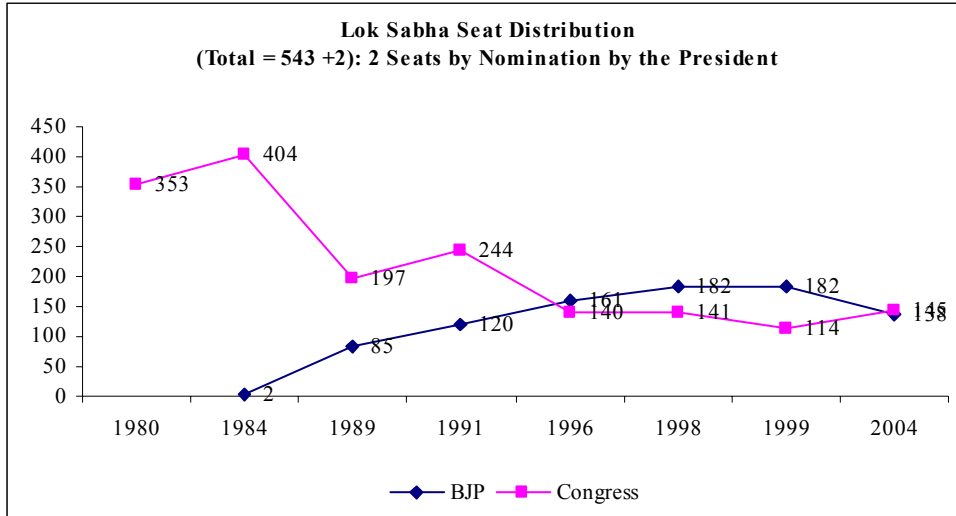
EXIT POLL RESULTS Lok Sabha Election (1991)

	Congress	BJP/Shiv Sena	Janata Dal/TDP	Janata Dal (S)	CPI/CPM	Others	Total	Refused
Overall								
Exit Poll	36.1	32.6	13.7	4.6	7.5	5.5	100	(5.1)
Actual	36.5	20.9	14.8	3.4	8.7	15.7	100	
Age								
~21	30.3	39.2	13.5	5.0	7.0	5.0	100	(2.5)
21-30	34.3	34.5	13.2	4.5	7.7	5.7	100	(3.6)
31-40	37.0	30.6	14.0	4.9	7.8	5.7	100	(5.4)
41-50	38.0	30.3	15.2	4.6	6.7	5.2	100	(6.8)
51~	41.0	29.8	12.4	4.2	7.5	5.0	100	(9.6)
Sex								
Men	35.5	33.3	14.7	4.3	7.1	5.1	100	(4.7)
Women	37.5	31.1	11.7	5.2	8.3	6.1	100	(6.5)
Caste								
Brahmin	30.4	59.2	4.5	2.3	2.3	1.0	100	(5.0)
Kshatriya	35.0	41.1	8.5	5.7	7.0	2.7	100	(5.8)
Vaishya	28.4	49.6	11.5	1.8	7.2	1.4	100	(5.8)
SC/ST	43.5	23.5	12.4	2.4	6.5	11.7	100	(4.7)
OBC	29.9	34.9	17.0	7.3	6.1	4.9	100	(5.2)
Other Hindu	53.4	19.4	8.5	0.2	13.7	4.7	100	(8.7)
Muslim	45.4	3.4	28.0	5.5	13.9	3.8	100	(3.8)
Other Religion	27.4	30.0	6.2	13.8	0.4	22.2	100	(7.8)
Location								
Rural	35.8	41.2	12.6	2.3	4.6	3.5	100	(7.0)
Urban	36.3	29.8	14.0	5.4	8.4	6.1	100	(4.8)

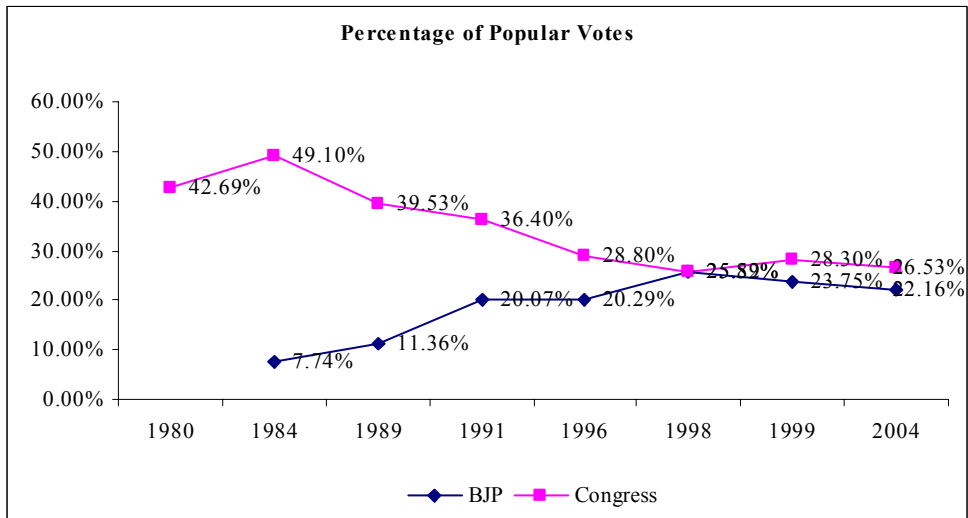
Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 11.

APPENDIX C

CONGRESS AND BJP ELECTORAL RESULTS (LOK SABHA)



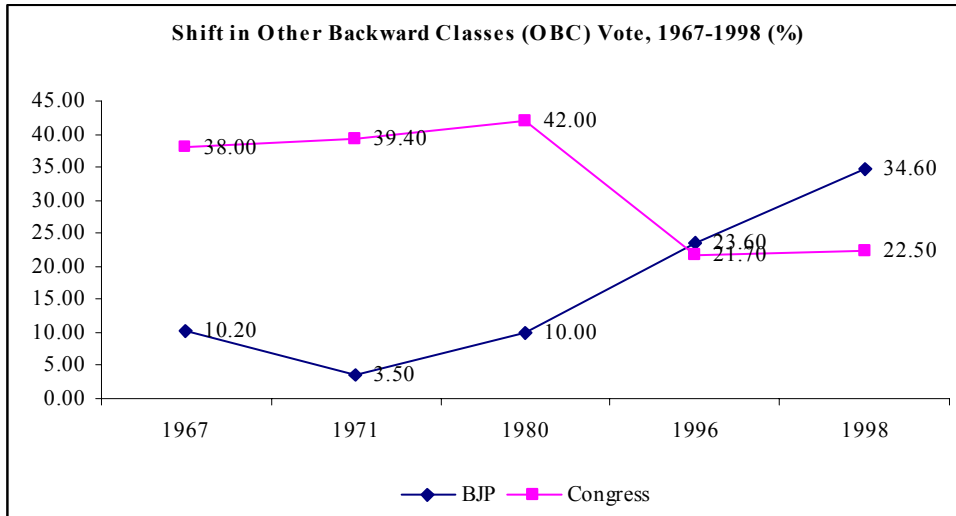
Source: Election Commission of India (ECI)



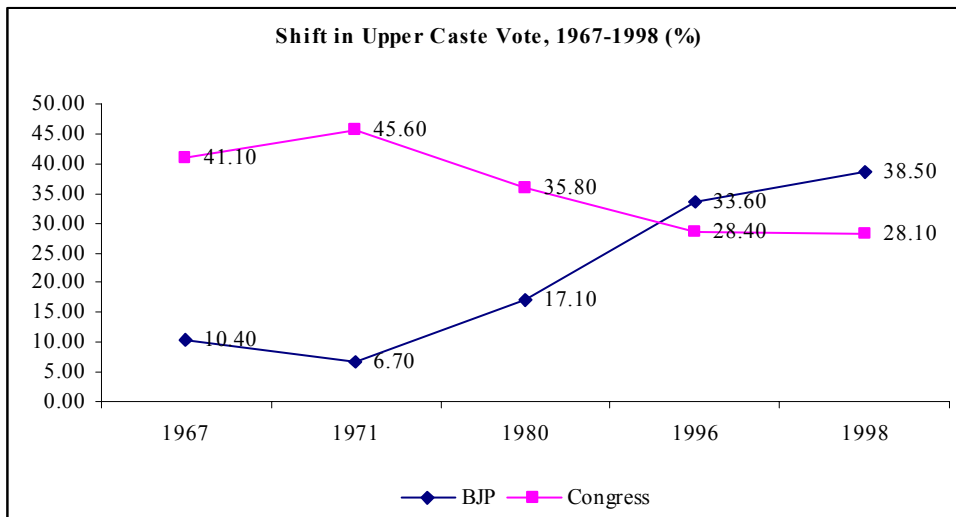
Source: Election Commission of India (ECI)

APPENDIX D

SHIFT OF VOTES BY CASTE



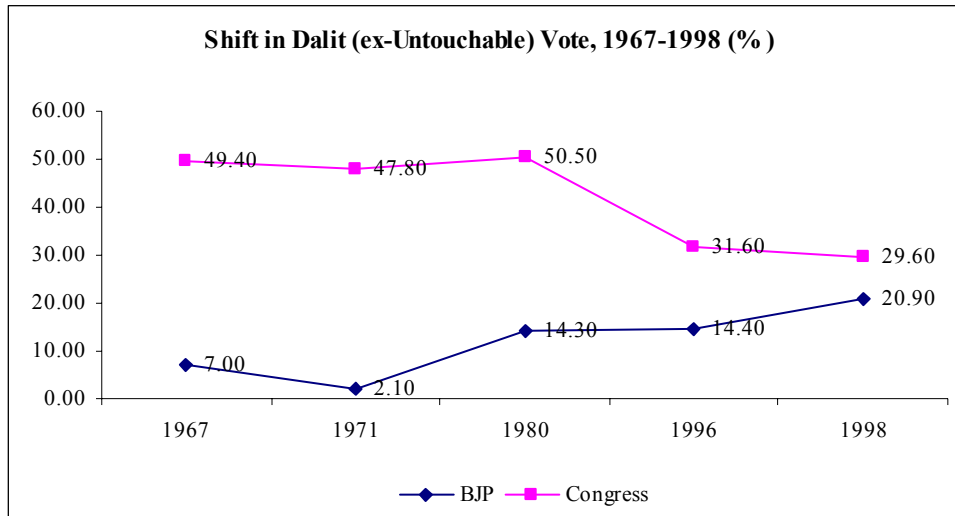
Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage.



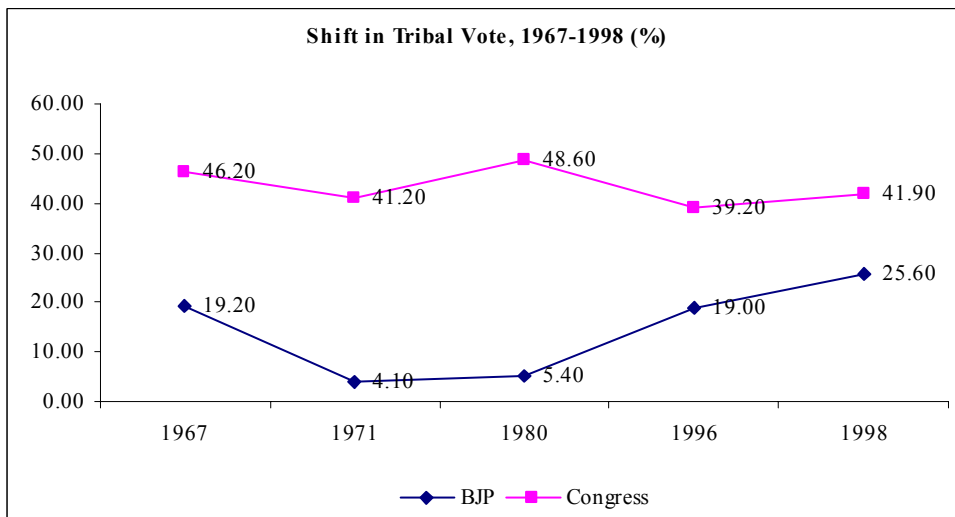
Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage.

APPENDIX E

SHIFT OF VOTES BY CASTE (Ctd.)



Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage.



Source: Subrata Mitra and V. B. Singh. 1999. *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate*. New Delhi: Sage.

APPENDIX F

CONSTITUENCY AND LOK SABHA SEAT RESERVATIONS

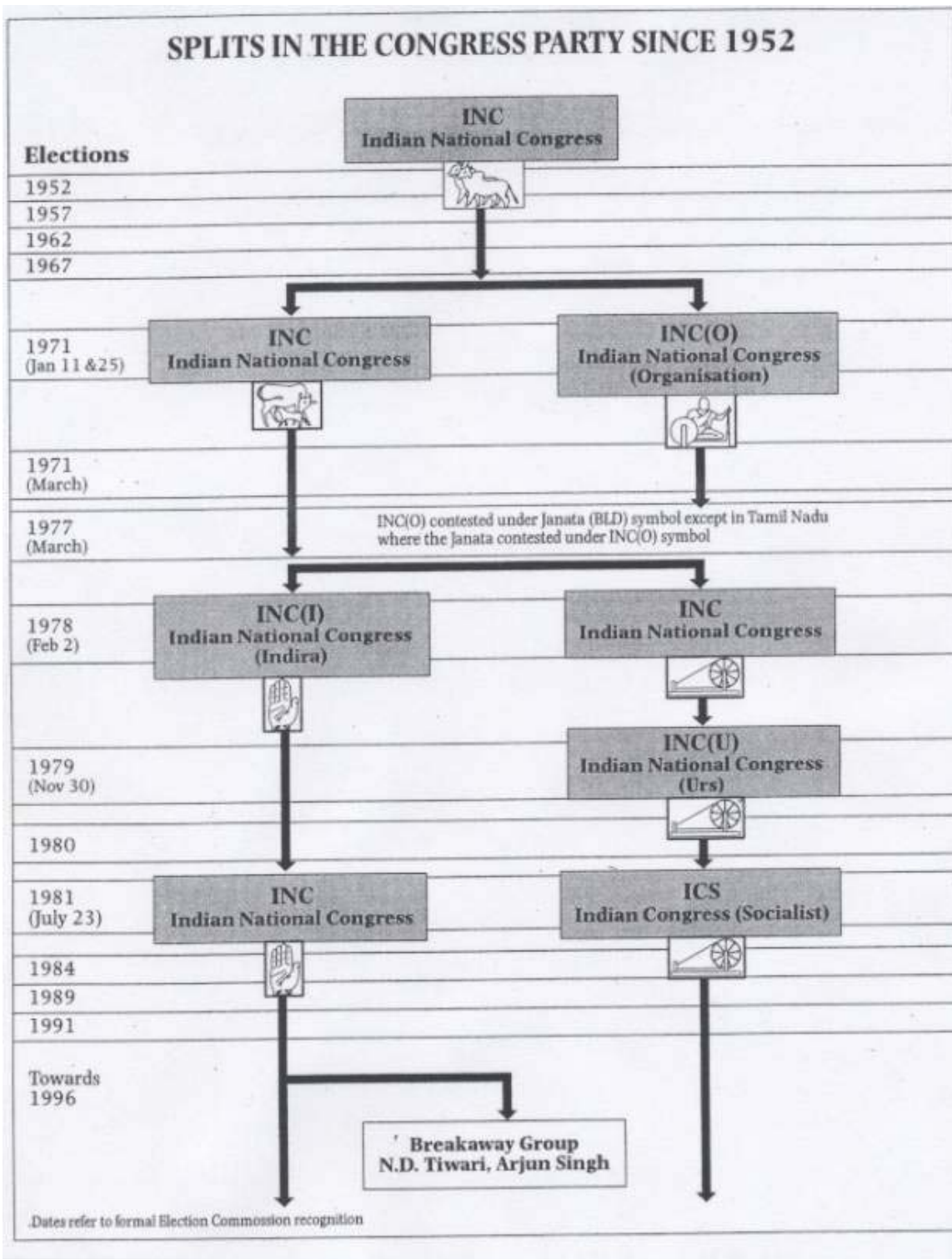
Year	No. of Constituencies	Seats Reserved for Scheduled Castes	Seats Reserved for Scheduled Tribes	Total Reserved	Percentage of Seats Reserved
1952	401	72	26	98	24
1957	403	76	31	107	27
1962	494	76	31	107	22
1967	520	77	37	114	22
1971	518	76	37	113	22
1977	542	78	38	116	21
1980	542	79	40	119	22
1984	542	78	41	119	22
1989	543	78	41	119	22
1991	543	78	41	119	22

Article 330(2) provides seat reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) to each state according to proportion to total state population.

Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things, p. 15.

APPENDIX G

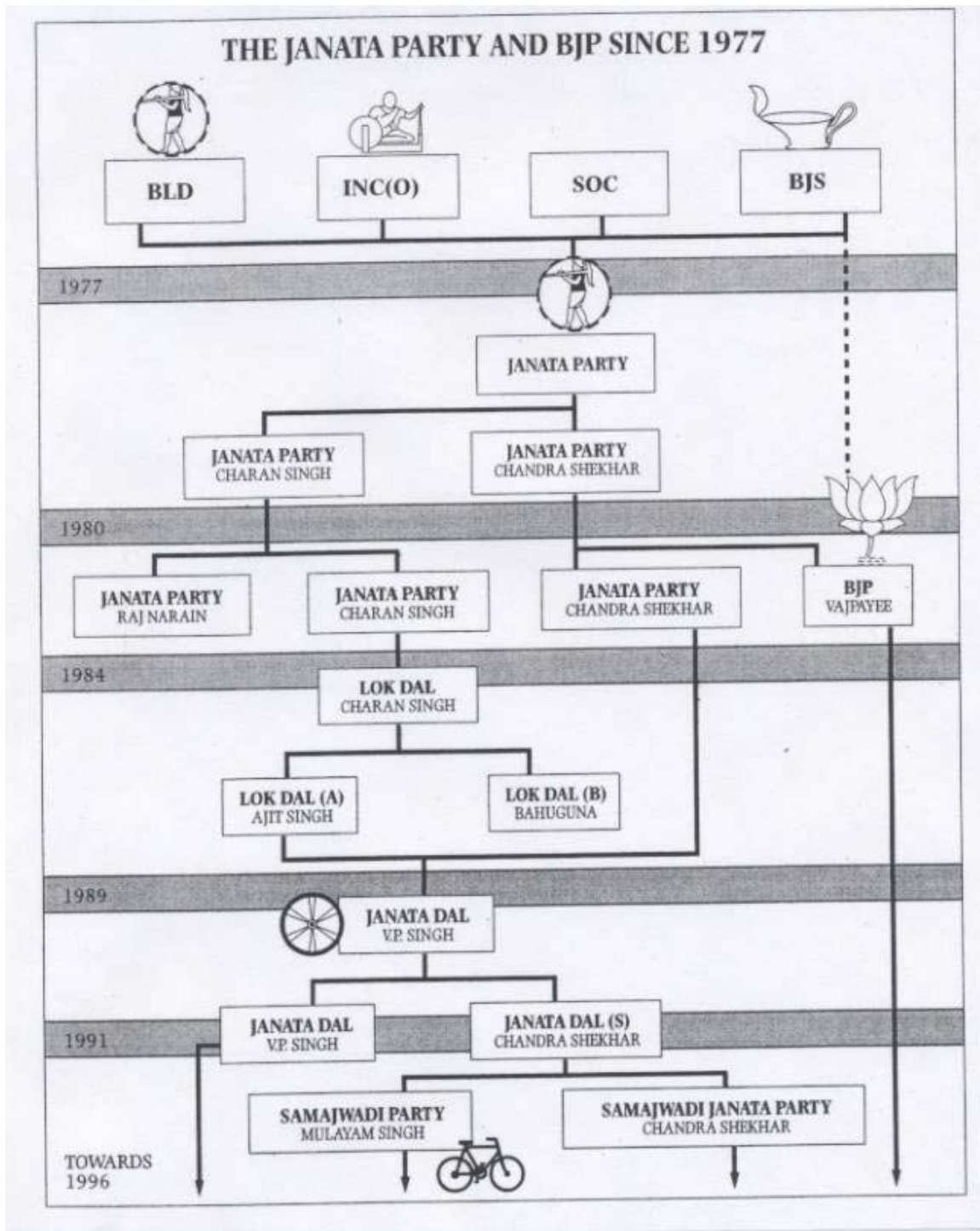
CONGRESS PARTY'S EVOLUTION



Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 22.

APPENDIX H

EVOLUTION OF THE BJP



Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy. 1995. *India Decides: Elections 1952-1995*. New Delhi: Books and Things p. 23.

APPENDIX I

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES (OBC)

(Source: National Commission for Backward Classes, Government of India)

SOCIAL

1. Castes and communities, generally considered as socially backward.
2. Castes and communities, which mainly depend on agricultural and/or other manual labor for their livelihood and are lacking any significant resource base.
3. Castes and communities, which, for their livelihood, mainly depend on agricultural and/or other manual labor for wage and are lacking any significant base.
4. Castes and communities, the women of which, as a general practice, are for their family's livelihood, engaged in agricultural and/or other manual labor, for wage.
5. Castes and communities, the children of which, as a general practice, are, for family's livelihood or for supplementing family's low income, mainly engaged in agricultural and/or manual labor.
6. Castes and communities, which in terms of caste system, are identified with traditional crafts or traditional or hereditary occupations considered to be lowly or undignified.
7. Castes and communities, which in terms of the caste system, are identified with traditional or hereditary occupations considered to be 'unclean' or stigmatized.
8. Nomadic and semi-nomadic castes and communities.
9. Denotified or Vimukta Jati castes and communities
10. Castes and communities, having no representation or poor representation in the State Legislative Assembly and/or district-level Panchayati Raj institutions during the ten years preceding the date of the application

The term "poor representation" may be taken to refer to a caste or community whose presence in the body is less than 25% of its proportion in the population.

EDUCATIONAL

1. Castes and communities, whose literacy rate is at least 8% less than the State or district average.
2. Castes and communities of which the proportion of matriculates is at least 20% less than the State or district average.
3. Castes and communities, of which the proportion of graduates is at least 20% less than the State or district average.

ECONOMIC

1. Castes and communities, a significant proportion of whose members reside only in Kachha houses.
2. Castes and communities, the share of whose members in number of cases and in extent of agricultural lands surrendered under the Agricultural Land Ceiling Act of the State, is nil or significantly low.
3. Castes and communities, the share of whose members in State Government posts and services of Groups A & B/Classes I & II, is not equal to the population-equivalent proportion of the caste/community.

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Times of India
Week, The

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Think Tanks and Research Institutes

Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, India.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

NAME: Yoosuk Kim
DATE OF BIRTH: January 30, 1970
PLACE OF BIRTH: Seoul, Republic of Korea
NATIONALITY: Republic of Korea

EDUCATION

2006 (Expected) FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY (Tallahassee, FL)
M.S., Political Science

1994 Fisher Graduate School of International Business (Monterey, CA)
MONTEREY INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
M.B.A., International Management

1992 STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT BINGHAMTON
(Binghamton, NY)
B.A., Economics

1988 AMERICAN EMBASSY SCHOOL (New Delhi, India)
High School Diploma

1985 SCOTS COLLEGE (Wellington, New Zealand)
Secondary School Diploma