



THE IMPORTANCE OF DECENTRALIZATION FOR A MORE MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi at the time of Indian independence said that India lives in its villages and for the development of villages, he advocated "Gram Swaraj" which was a vision of villages developing fully to take care of their own needs by raising the means themselves. Gandhi rejected the mores of Western Civilization because they had become amoral due to distancing from their religious beliefs. But, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar criticized the Gandhian model of development citing villages to be cesspools of all that's undesirable such as casteism, untouchability and other social evils and opted for constitutional reform of society through the operationalizing of fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian constitution. However, both these arguments were constructs of a time when what existed was "government" which refers to the institutions such as the parliament, bureaucracy and the judiciary. Today, however, the emphasis has shifted from government to governance which denotes the process of delivery of various goods to citizens be they through the Public Distribution System (PDS) or other channels. The shift in emphasis occurred in India in the '1990s when Prof Manmohan Singh preferred to use governance instead of government when he assumed the office of the Finance Minister of India.

In the early years of Indian independence, the country was witness to enclave development, which was a colonial legacy. Development tended to be concentrated around the littoral areas such as Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and New Delhi, which was the capital of the country. The Indian hinterland was left without any development. To bring about parity in development between the developed littoral areas and the underdeveloped hinterland, India's first Prime Minister who had an inclination towards Fabian Socialism opted for a model of democratic centralism. Overtime, only centralism was left leading to more uneven development and concentration of nation's resources into areas, which were vote banks. This therefore led to the failure of any form of equitable development.

Now therefore the focus and emphasis have to be on decentralization of the developmental process so that every area gets to analyse its own problems and formulate its own strategies of development keeping in view its resources and necessities in developmental terms. This decentralization -is more important in the context of rural areas because they have traditionally been the areas of neglect. Since the urban dwellers have no sympathy to the problems of rural areas, it is only reasonable to say, decentralization for meaningful development should start with rural areas. So far, in the name of decentralization schemes are being prepared at the central level while using the state level and panchayat level as agencies of implementation. That is not decentralization. True decentralization is when the rural areas truly empowered to take care of their own destiny through their own governance processes. This paper will seek to study how that can be achieved.

Keywords: Democracy, Decentralization and Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION:



The title of the paper though innocuous to see actually contains within itself several tensions some of which can be resolved and others that cannot be resolved easily. The lack of Case is due to the fact that academicians so far have been trying to fit Indian politics into frameworks that have been inherited or borrowed from the west. Thus despite the talk of decentralization which has been around for some time now is still going on with the same serve, indicating that not much has changed. Therefore, I felt it is time to write about the airy fairy nonsense that most academics indulge in and how people doggedly cling to models of explanation that have been proven to be inadequate, antiquated and sometimes downright wrong. In the past some of these models served well in some historical contexts in certain geographies but in the context of India even if they did serve a purpose at some point in time, they no longer due. The explanation for this is simple. Social reality is not static and neither are politics which operate within those social realities which are changing. Social realities change politics, which in turn change society depending upon the way in which they (the politics) are played out.

One of the well-known facts about Indian academics is that it has always tried to use models that were used for the explanation of social, economic and political processes by other countries which were by default countries in the Northern Hemisphere. Not only have models have been copied but even the proponents of the models have been lionized and almost deified. At the time of India's struggle for independence the models of Western socialism and specifically Marxist communism were in vogue. After all, the Bolshevik Revolution in the USSR had demonstrated to the world that Capitalism could be bypassed and a society based in equality was in the process of being created. In India, the notion of socialism, albeit Fabian Socialism was quite close to the first PM of this country, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress party had even set aside the Gandhian model due to various criticisms from personalities such as B R Ambedkar who called Indian Villages "Cesspools of decadence and casteist thinking" and being educated in the Columbia University, he also threw his weight behind the Western model of development as the blue print for the future of India.

The dominant communist model of thinking at that time believed that the days of Capitalism and the State that came into being in order to support the exploitation of the workers by the capitalists were numbered. Lenin believed that it was the duty of those countries which had successfully accomplished the Communist Revolution to take the word of the revolution forward and support all movements against capitalist tormentors in their fight for freedom. The history of the middle of the 20th Century is replete with different parts of the world fighting for freedom from Colonialism which was described by Lenin as the Highest and Final phase of Capitalism. India too received notional support for the freedom movement from the USSR of then.

Pandit Nehru believed in industrialization and called dams and industries as modern temples. India adopted the 5 year plan model of development for the USSR and embarked upon a



programme of modernization and development. India also developed a public sector for growth and the public sector in its initial years was confined to what was called “mother industry”; steel plants being the best example of the same. It was much later that Indira Gandhi’s powder puff model of socialism embraced the making of consumer durables by industries set up by the State and employing more and more people at the top levels and less at the lower levels of the industrial hierarchy. All these actions were also supported by a socialist rhetoric which in Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s own time grew shrill.

Pandit Nehru and Indira Gandhi’s adoption of socialism and socialist rhetoric respectively more or less negated the necessity of the Communist Part of India (Lenin had believed that every country should have its own communist party) but the entity continued to exist on the sidelines. In 1964 however there was a split in the party, the original Communist Party of India owing its allegiance to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union while the splinter group (which later became the dominant group) owing its affiliation to the Communist party of China.

From the time that India became independent till today the scholarship of social sciences has been firmly rooted in the theoretical models of the Western Socialist left. From asking for welfare measures to splitting states the model that came in handy was something which owed its existence to some kind of leftism of the Western variety. Everyone believed that as the country progressed more and more the traditional ways of thinking would change and new India would emerge from the shadows of its filthy, superstitious and most backward past. It was believed that as the country produced more social wealth and as more people even from the lower castes and other downtrodden sections gained access to wealth their caste identities would be wiped out and replaced with class identities. While caste is a social identity, class is an economic identity. The liberals who were also left leaning believed that development and growth of the Western variety would negate all the other identities which were a throwback to a society that existed in a primitive past. But India’s experience with globalization and liberalization of the economy did not produce the results that all leftists of various hues had predicted. In order to demonstrate this I shall look into the latest round of liberalization of the economy of India which happened in the 1990s and some of the results that it produced.

As is well known, India as a country, has diversity which cannot be fully estimated and this one factor alone is sufficient reason to argue that any proper and complete comprehension of the country’s functioning, its governance and more importantly its politics are played out is a task that probably defies totally clear and precise explanation. Indian Politics keep throwing up exceptions to any rule that might seemingly appear, thereby nullifying the rule immediately. The only way to beat this problem is to not believe in any kind of essentialism as an underlying principle of the appearance of the nature of politics. In fact, one can assert that this is probably true not just of politics but of other areas such as business as well. It is a well-known fact that captains of various industries making statements about the difficulty that



is associated with understanding the Indian consumer preferences and the dynamics of the market process itself.

At the outset itself, it would be desirable to state that politics in India can be seen in the post liberalization of the economy phase, cannot be seen as a sequence of cause and effect. However tempting such as exercise maybe, it will not be able withstand stringent scrutiny and provide sustainable answers; on the contrary the cause-effect sequencing will begin to collapse once it is subjected to questioning. Therefore, this will be more about the surprises that defy understanding which say was well used and established in European countries or in the United States of America. There are myriad reasons for this and as the arguments in the article begin to unravel so will the reasons for the futility of comparison with other countries and their politics become clearer.

Much of what will constitute this article will be about capitalism and what it has done in the case of India. In fact, expressions such as liberalization, integration into the global economy, structural reforms are all in more ways than one concerned with India openly giving up the socialist rhetoric that it once used to describe itself and embracing global capitalism whole heartedly. It would be prudent to insert a parenthesis here. Usually, in India, even among the social scientists there is a tendency to use globalization and liberalization inter-changeably. While at a very primary that may not be bothersome, it becomes exactly that when one takes the arguments to higher levels. Equating globalization with the economic liberalization of the 1990s generates a false picture. It verifies in an apocryphal manner that globalization is a phenomenon that came into being in the 1990s, which is completely untrue and causes a huge distortion in the understanding of history of the world in the Modern period itself. Globalization is a process that can be seen as beginning with the European countries looking out for new markets and subsequently new colonies. If this is the first phase of globalization the second phase is more in evidence in the 18th and 19th centuries where populations could move across the world with very few impediments. The story of the USA both in terms of the settling white population and also the black slaves by the whites is testimony to this. The third phase of globalization is perhaps a late 20th Century phenomenon that emerged with the growth of various forms of technology, especially technology that facilitated the rapid movement of money, which was hitherto not possible. One saw the emergence of the term "Hot Money" in the 1990s which signified that money could be made to move from one market to another depending upon which market offered greater returns on investment. The third phase is more to be seen as the easy movement of money globally. It is in this period that India opened its economy to the world; a process which is termed "liberalization".

It would be legitimate to raise a question here. Why did India give up its socialist rhetoric and embrace global capitalism? How voluntary was this decision? Those who are in vaguely familiar with world history and the history of India will know the answer. One of the biggest occurrences of the late 20th Century was the collapse of the erstwhile USSR and the Unification of Germany; two processes that happened almost simultaneously. The USSR



collapsed into its original independent sixteen republics as a result of the pursuing of the Cold War policy of arms build race with the USA. While USA and the Western European countries did not suffer from shortage of money, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European allies that it had, suffered from acute shortage due to overspend on defence technology. No intervention from outside was required to engineer the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many Eastern European countries also start collapsing. Yugoslavia became Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Croatia etc. and the Czechoslovakia became the Czech Republic and the Slovakia Republic. Other Eastern European countries such as Romania and Poland saw movements for democracy which were successful and showed a corruption of unprecedented proportions in Romania under Iliescu.

On the other hand Germany grabbed this opportunity to bring down the Berlin Wall and unify itself. Capitalist Europe was so confident that it moved on from being the European Economic Community (EEC) to the Economic Union (EU), wherein there was the adoption of a single currency by all European countries (exception being the UK) and travel in Europe no longer needed visas. For a change it was traditional rivals Germany and France that played a pivotal role in the creation of the EU. In fact, many scholars of International Relations argued that Europe was building itself as a rival power to the USA and some of these theories which looked like conspiracy theories were later found to have some basis when the EU's attempt to creating an alternative OIL BOURSE with Iran came to light. The Europeans were aware of the strength of the Petro-dollar since it was the de jure and de facto currency for oil trading. In Russia the situation was the opposite with inflation at one point rising 1500% and people having to stand in lines for hours together to "buy" a loaf of rationed bread. The story of Eastern European countries was not very different except that it had the additional component of Serbs slaughtering non-Serbs.

The Indian story is similar but different. India's ambitions were not to become a Superpower and though it had its own small problems with Pakistan and China and a certain amount of over spend on military hardware, its main problem stemmed out of a total mismanagement of its economy in the name of Socialism. During the time that Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister of the country, he showed a vision of what the future of India would be like and how the country would be self-sufficient and not depend upon imports. Nehru borrowed the five year plan idea from the USSR and set goals to be reached. He also emphasized on industrial development and adoption of modern methods of agriculture and he called industries the "Temples of a New India". It is not an exaggeration to say that Nehru most definitely laid the blue prints for the India of the future and whatever development we have today is in more ways than one a result of the Nehruvian Vision. There are people who oppose this but the opposition to this theory while not without substance would do injustice to Nehru and his efforts.

This was the time that the Indian National Congress party was functioning without a viable opposition and the country could perhaps be said was being ruled by "Oligarchs". Usually,



the people thus represented were Nehru himself, Vallabh Bhai Patel, Babu Rajendra Prasad and some eminent jurists as well. While the term oligarchy carries negative connotations, especially in the context of a democracy, it should be understood that since the figures identified above were true patriots with hardly any personal agendas, the oligarchy worked reasonably well for India. In fact, it was the passing away of this generation of “freedom fighter oligarchs” that set the tone and tenor for the degeneration of Indian politics into murky strategies and the descending of Indian politics into those very quagmires from which it was trying to ascend. The death of Jawaharlal Nehru post India's loss to the Chinese in the war of 1962 had showed the first chink in Nehru's planning. Nehru, ever the idealist, did not desire to spend money on defence, a decision which ultimately led to the defeat of India in the war with the Chinese.

Nehru's death is attributed to his depression and disheartenment due to the defeat to the Chinese. Whatever the reason maybe, India's problems perhaps started after his death. His successor Lal Bahadur Shastri, a man of slight built but immense courage, fought a war with the Pakistanis and defeated them totally. Then came the peace talks at Tashkent at the behest of the USSR and it was in Tashkent that Shastri breathed his last, after having been Prime Minister for a short period. Shastri was not an oligarch. He was a simple man who had just a few thousand rupees as his possession. He had no land, house or motor car. He brought into focus the necessity for monetary austerity and the necessity for moral courage, but the shortness of his reign meant that these could not be ingrained into the psyche of the people. Lal Bahadur Shastri's death also inaugurated a new phase in Indian politics; one that relied on manipulation, deception and amorality in order to stay in power. The Congress party also became a house to a number of factions each trying to overthrow the other. This peculiar phenomenon was mainly due to the fact that there were no opposition parties that could stand up to the might of the Congress party.

The understanding of factions and factionalism is a categorical imperative when it comes to understanding Indian Politics. When the Indian National Congress Party still had the towering oligarchs who were seen as being selfless and dedicated to the growth of the nation, opposition to them or their leadership was negligible; this in spite of the existence of disagreements. Usually the party relied upon using the services of senior leaders to broker peace and bring “unanimity” in decision making. After the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the vacuum created due to the absence of leaders who were considered to be above selfish agendas, the Congress became a party of squabbles among different leaders. Claimants to the chair of the Prime Minister became many, prominent among them being Morarji Desai. At this time Kamaraj Nadar formed what is today called the Syndicate and sometimes also as the Kitchen Cabinet in order to prop up, Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi as the Prime Ministerial candidate. While Kamaraj Nadar saw Indira Gandhi as a pawn that could be moved around by the Syndicate, the lady herself had a different ambition. She wanted the Prime Ministership with all the powers in her hand.



It was this ambition that led to the inauguration of populist policies and emphasis being laid on “socialism” which was perhaps the first big transformation in Indian Politics. Mrs. Gandhi took up programmes such as Nationalization of Banks, easy and low interest based credit to farmers, launching of schemes of daily savings by the poor and increasing employment by expanding the public sector undertakings and opening new ones as well. Though the nationalization of banks was well received, the problems began with many farmers being unable to service the loans that they had taken and Indira Gandhi taking up loan waiver schemes. The employment in the public sector also increased but the patterns of employment saw more people employed in the upper echelons of companies rather than in the lower echelons. Line workers were far fewer than staff supervisors and this meant that most of the public sector companies had become top heavy and over a time were primed to collapse.

The realization that the top heaviness of the public sector companies and their being ready for collapse was noticed by Rajiv Gandhi who became the Prime Minister post the assassination of his mother. Rajiv Gandhi was young, dynamic and also had a vision of the future for India. He was also the first to usher in economic reforms in a limited manner by opening up some of the sectors of the Indian economy. The sale of badly managed public sector undertakings was also mooted and investment up to 49% by foreign companies was allowed in some of the sectors. This process was slow, since Rajiv Gandhi faced opposition within and outside his party for allowing the entry of foreign capital and sometimes the pushback was so severe that forward movement slowed down to a snail's pace. Unfortunately, this also became a time when the verdict was delivered in the Shah Bano case saying that a woman who was a Muslim was entitled to alimony and maintenance. The Muslim leaders within the party cried foul and said that this went against the spirit of the constitution which gave room for a separate Muslim Personal Law. Rajiv Gandhi yielded to the pressure and this led to the right wing parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) mounting pressure on Rajiv Gandhi to introduce a uniform civil code. The net result of this was that Rajiv Gandhi went from hero to zero and his party, the Indian National Congress lost the elections in 1989.

In more ways than one the year 1989 is very significant for Indian politics. India ushered in the era of coalition governments with coalitions being formed after the electoral verdict was delivered. One of Rajiv Gandhi's trusted lieutenants Vishwanath Pratap Singh who had abandoned the ranks of the Congress to join the newly formed Janata Dal became the Prime Minister. Unsurprisingly, the first statement that he made to the people of the country on State Television was that the “government coffers were empty”. He was ridiculed by many an economist on the grounds that he was using a non-existing situation to describe an existing one. It was argued that coffers was not something that could be talked about in that day and age, since most governments functioned on the principle of accumulating foreign exchange. However, Singh was doing exactly the same thing but used an archaic term that was better understood by the people. V P Singh had to deal with not only the problem of forex reserves but also with the rising ambition of his deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal. Devi Lal was keen



to wrest the Prime Ministership from V P Singh on the grounds that the latter was a Congressman and that he himself was always the main opposition.

Devi Lal's party was called the Bharatiya Kisan Dal and Devi Lal embarked upon a tour of many parts of Rural India (especially in the North) rousing the passions of the farmers and highlighting the fact that farmers were getting a raw deal under V P Singh. When it began to look as if the sentiment against V P Singh was reaching the critical mass, the coterie that advised V P Singh asked him to counter Devi Lal by introducing the Mandal Commission based OBC reservations at the National Level. It must be stated here that only Tamil Nadu and the erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh (under the leadership of N T Rama Rao in 1985) introduced OBC reservations. Tamil Nadu and the undivided Andhra Pradesh were implementing the system on the basis of caste and V P Singh also decided to take the same route. It can be argued as SC leader Chandra Bhan Prasad did that there was a consensus among the people of India about the necessity for those low caste people who once were untouchables and were deprived of all the social goods that were available to others. But the creation of reservations for OBCs disrupted the consensus. This disruption happened for a good reason. Unlike the Scheduled Castes or SCs, many of the BCs were not deprived of social goods. In Tamil Nadu, the Mudaliars and the Nadars are quite powerful, as are the Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka. The Yadavs and the Gouds in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are also powerful enjoying the patronage especially of the Telugu Desam Party but also that of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi and even the Congress Party. In Northern India despite the existence of dominant Brahmins (called Bhumihars) decades the Yadavs and the Khurmis are becoming more powerful than the Brahmins and Rajputs. To go back to the argument of the disruption of the consensus on reservations, the anti-Mandal commission agitations that spread across the length and breadth of the country with many students immolating themselves. This was countered by the BCs and the country's education system came to a stand still for a few months while both the sections sparred with each other. What is important to be noted here is the abandoning of categories such as farmers, factory workers, north Indians, south Indians, Aryans, and Dravidians which were used to essentially camouflage the language of caste. Now caste came out into the open and political groups and parties started to be formed along caste lines.

The most obvious part of this exercise (probably better described as the nadir of Indian politics) is when the V P Singh government was forced to face a no confidence motion, one of the MPs Ram Vilas Paswan gave a clarion call to members of the Lok Sabha not to vote along party lines but along caste lines. This was also the time when the BCs decided that like the SCs they too required an icon around whom they could rally. B. R. Ambedkar was the leader of the SCs and starting with Maharashtra and going on to many of the southern states, Ambedkar was deified. This deification of Ambedkar led to the usage of the term Dalit (a Marathi word signifying the oppressed) to describe the SCs. Around this time some of the BC intellectuals dug out the history of Joti Rao Phule and found that he had worked for unity of all people through his Satya Shodhak Samaj and strove for the creation of a "Bahujan Samaj"



or society comprising of different people all of whom enjoyed equality. When the Maharashtra Government included the caste that Phule belonged to in the list of BCs, the BCs made Phule a BC icon and started calling themselves “Bahujans”.

In Uttar Pradesh, Kanshi Ram who was a small time leader started the Dalit-Bahujan Party which was supposed to be a show of unity of the BCs and the SCs. This unity really did not happen but Kanshi Ram's protégé Mayawati an SC woman became the Chief Minister while the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh came together as Samajwadi Party or Socialist party and in Bihar the Yadavs united under the banner of Rashtriya Janata Dal which again was a party led by Lalu Prasad Yadav. Both UP and Bihar came under the leadership of the so called BCs; the Yadavs. It is time yet again to insert another parenthesis for clarity since there was a parallel development happening in the northern part of India with an otherwise fringe political party called the Bharatiya Janata Party using an opportunity to build itself into a viable party. Later history has shown that the BJP did succeed in this endeavour. The success of this endeavour is more to be attributed to V P Singh and his cohorts rather than the BJP itself. So here is the parenthesis.

While this was the main act, a side show also was being enacted by one of the small but deadly players in Indian Politics. The CPI-ML groups (also called the Naxalites since this group took its birth in a place called Naxalbari) believed in the violent overthrowing of the Indian State which according to them was “semi-feudal; semi-colonial”. This rather unusual description was due to the fact that the CPI-ML groups (now called the Maoists since the palace coup in Nepal which was supposedly engineered by this group and in India all the different CPI-ML (Marxist, Leninist) groups came under this one banner of Maoists) attributed private capitalism to those who were in cohorts with multinational capitalism and therefore they were called colonial and the northern parts of the country where feudalism was rampant (according to them) made the Indian State semi-feudal; semi-colonial. This needless to say is a description that cannot stand any serious scrutiny and therefore would be as meaningless as saying “this also; that also”. Yet a mention of this has been made albeit in the form of a parenthesis for a reason. Even during the pre-Independence times, specifically in the 1930s Indian Marxists like Rajni Palme Dutt, who was the maternal uncle of assassinated Swedish Prime Minister Svend Olaf Palme, had argued that the most important category of social analysis in India was caste, since it was not only unique to India but it also lent itself to being used in conjunction with other categories. For example upper caste also signified being the more moneyed segment of society, more educated segment of society and being the dominant or ruling segment of society. D. D. Kosambi famously argued as did his followers that Caste in India plays the role of a Class. But the actual politics on the ground were veiling caste with some other name. It could be race, colour or region. The CPI-ML groups were claiming that some of the upper castes had become capitalist and therefore friendly with colonialism the highest form of capitalism (as described by Lenin) and some of them remained rooted in feudalism and therefore semi-colonial; semi-feudal had to be seen as upper caste dominated society.



However coming back to the 1990s V P Singh's famous Mandal Commission based reservations for the BCs it can be said that not only did this act bring caste into the limelight and without any camouflage but it also strengthened the notion of Hindutva of the BJP which sought to construct Hinduism as a religion or an overarching structure which had smaller components which were the various caste groupings. In reality however, Hinduism is really not a religion nor are the caste groups its components. Hindu is a Persian/Arabic term that was used by the Persians to describe the people who lived on the other side of the Indus (Latin), Sindhu (Sanskrit) and Hindu (Persian). In fact, the landmass which is called the Indian Sub-continent was called Hind by the Persians. The name India was derived from Indus. What has been called Hindu was actually a Cosmology, one of many in the world but perhaps more advanced than any. It was in the 19th Century that Hinduism was formally designated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy though he saw it as perverted due to the existence of caste hierarchy and therefore set up the Brahma Samaj to rid Hinduism and Hindu Society of its perversion. Mohandas Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi was more charitable. He saw this Sanatana Dharma (ever unchanging Dharma) and as a cosmology and called the Varna or caste "a person's natural calling. He argued that one family could have members from all the four varnas and this argument has been strengthened by Indologists such as Patrizia Novolari who claim that a person's varna was decided by his horoscope and not by parentage. Gandhi argued that it was the intervention of Brahminism that perverted Sanatana Dharma and made parentage the deciding factor for one's caste and also that Brahminism created a hierarchy among castes. Perversion it maybe but this is the model that is accepted today and the BJP was quick to latch on to it.

The V P Singh strategy to survive in power was to talk of SC, OBC, ST and Muslims as being those that were deprived of power (a revival of an argument that Ambedkar had originally made) and that they had to come into power in order to experience the goods of democracy. This strategy instead of strengthening V P Singh led to his downfall and gave impetus to the BJP that was arguing that Hindu were all one and problems of caste could be tackled within the family. The BJP was emphatic that Muslims were outsiders and suppressors of Hindus for centuries and therefore the idea that all these people could come together was preposterous. The ground reality of the SCs and BCs also was very different. BCs had proximity to power if not power itself, something which the SCs who were always the heathen never had. The BCs were not very happy to be lumped with the SCs. The fascinating part of the caste system is that its logic runs through the hierarchy where everyone believes that they are superior to someone else. The BCs see themselves as superior to the SCs and even within the SCs the Mahars see themselves as superior to the Chamars.

The BJP coopted the OBC groups into the important areas of the structure of the organization and was thus able to break the model that V P Singh had created. V P Singh was out of Indian politics for good and the BJP was suddenly a contender. The elections that followed the fall of the VP Singh government after an extremely short tenure saw that no party had the required majority and the Congress with 240+ seats and with some support of smaller parties



formed a minority government in 1990, with P V Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister. After a very long time someone from outside of the Gandhi-Nehru family became the Prime Minister of India. In his appearance P V Narasimha Rao looked like a mild man who could possibly not be assertive. In reality however, the man proved not only to be assertive but also someone with gumption. When he took over the forex position of the country was in doldrums with reserves just about sufficient to last a few weeks. Narasimha Rao pulled out Prof. Manmohan Singh from his position as the Chairman of the University Grants Commission of India and made him the Finance Minister of the country. Manmohan Singh was a renowned economist whose economics tended to lean towards those of John Maynard Keynes, but he set aside ideologies and opened up the Indian economy to foreign investments. Narasimha Rao's greatest achievement is the fact that he was able to, with the help of Manmohan Singh, to run a minority government which pulled the country out from the economic quicksand that its various previous administrations had slowly dragged it into. Narasimha Rao completed the full 5 years of his tenure and by 1995, the country was well out of the problems and on the road to not just recovery but to development as well.

India has been criticized for the size of its population but ironically enough from the 21st century's beginning onwards, it has been China and India (in that order) that have become prime drivers of the world economy. The disappearance of bipolarity and the appearance of India as one of the important economies in the world, also changed the way in which global politics were played out. Till the disappearance of the USSR the world was being seen from the vantage of geo-politics, but with the disappearance of the USSR and the ideology of communism and the creation of an economy based in capitalism globally, what came to the fore was geo-economics. It is here that the vision of Nehru and his grandson Rajiv Gandhi stood India in good stead. Nehru's emphasis on modernization and Rajiv Gandhi's emphasis on computerization along with the fact that India has the second highest English speaking population in the world, gave it a competitive edge to deal with the problems associated with Y2K bug and this made the country virtually the service industry for all big corporations. The Americans with the help of George W Bush the President and Mitt Romney were successful in moving jobs to India so that even large corporations could benefit ensured a windfall of employment for Indians not just in India but in other countries as well.

The politics of the country defied this logic and with good reason. After 1995 when the Congress under Narasimha Rao lost the elections and the NDA or the National Democratic Alliance came into power, one saw the rise of white collar crime rising and cases such as the Harshad Mehta case where the Bombay Stock Exchange was manipulated by the stock broker with a little help from his political friends, were increasingly frequent. In the absence of a strong and powerful Union Government regional parties assumed national significance and the then Chief Minister of the Undivided Andhra Pradesh, N Chandra Babu Naidu was taking loans from the IMF and soon his example was followed by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as well. Naidu in particular inaugurated a new form of corruption wherein someone from within the ruling party would buy out huge tracts of land at cheap prices and after sometime the



government would then announce projects in those areas wherein the prices went up from Rs. 5000 per acre to Rs. 50 lakh per acre. The federalism component of the country was to be built on the principle of cooperation but ultimately it turned out to be competitive federalism which in its wake brought newer and more difficult to detect forms of corruption.

The expanding gap between the rich and the poor ensured that the United Progressive Alliance would come to power. The second term of the UPA was a disaster characterized by policy paralysis and it culminated in the loss of the UPA in 2014. Interestingly the BJP was able to get a majority of 272 seats on its own but continues with the NDA.

As things stand today there is a clear division between social and political processes in India. Socially, there is a reduction in the importance attached to caste but politically there is a greater divide along caste lines. But there is no universality to this principle either. In the north where levels of education are very low and prospect of employment still tied to the UPSC, the emphasis on caste is firm both socially and politically. In the south there is a movement away from government employment to work with multinational corporations who have dropped anchor in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai. In the West apart from the traditional commercial hub Mumbai, Pune has also started emerging as a manufacturing hub. Narendra Modi has been doing his best to attract investments to Gujarat. Does this mean that caste is not an important factor socially and politically in the south? The unfortunate answer is that it is still very important. Local businesses and industries are still the preserve of caste groupings and the desire to possess political power is very much steeped in caste though now like in the past the caste name is replaced by say a name of region like in the case of Telangana. Telangana has always been the fiefdom of the Reddy and Velama castes but with the rise of Kamma (from coastal Andhra) caste in the business sector the Reddys and Velamas have found themselves dispossessed of the power that they once held. The separate Telangana agitation therefore signifies the desire of the Reddy and Velama caste groupings to repossess the power that once belonged to them. What helped them here is that this was a backward region with huge unemployed population that could be manipulated in the name of providing them employment.

This brings us back to the question so is there a possibility of establishing cause-effect sequencing in identifying and underlining politics and political processes that came into being in the last 25 years of liberalization. The answer cannot be a firm yes. Given the nature of social, economic, geographic and political diversity of India it is impossible to construct a narrative about politics around one or two issues. In fact most narratives are continuous with the history of the country which again has many constructs. It is possible to see the involvement of corporate money power in Indian politics today, and that perhaps is the only take away from the story of economic liberalization. Other more complicated processes may have nothing or very little do with the liberalization process directly. And given that process are enmeshed over a long period of time, it is impossible to see which strand is effected by liberalization of the Indian economy. Therefore Indian politics if seen as before and after,



show very little difference between before and after liberalization in terms of the social structures changing form but more or less retaining the substance.

In this Endeavour of mine I have tried to show a glimpse of the history of Indian politics from the time of the freedom movement till the recent example of liberalization. I have done this with a specific reason. All the above examples that I have talked of, with the exception of Gram Swaraj by Gandhiji, have tried to build vote banks across the country called India and for this to happen centralization of politics became a necessity. Strategies adopted from one place were replicated in other places and this basically meant that each of the places where development had to take place was ignored completely in terms of its necessities of the economic variety and even if some one wanted to talk about those issues, that voice was usually drowned out by the empty and mostly repetitive rhetoric of caste based politics. While Ambedkar believed that the Gram Swaraj System would become a cesspool of backwardness and encourage caste based discriminations, the new centralization that has been carried out has been doing exactly the same even converting urban areas into cesspools of caste politics. Caste has now become a political variable and is used for the sake of creating vote banks and garnering votes in its name. Therefore my suggestion is a shift of focus from the social (caste based politics) to economic (class based) politics. Politics should cease being about identities and focus on development instead. Only then will the country come out of the morass that it finds itself in today. For that just a shift to the economic as the primary variable is not sufficient. It needs to be accompanied by decentralization where people living in different parts of the country decide for themselves as to what sort of development would constitute proper economic development. This is the only way of having any proper development which would be truly inclusive and not become just a play ground for political parties to play their political and electoral games.

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