EMERGENCE OF MAJORITARIAN POLITICS IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract
The politics of majoritarianism brought a new twist in Indian politics and society as well. By doing so the Congress, at least, paved the way for the more ideologically committed and organisationally cohesive forces of Hindutva-the BJP, the RSS and the VHP to emerge as a major forces on the Indian political scene and the most controversial/emotional symbolic issue of temple-mosque came to the fore. Some extremist Hindu groups, the VHP in particular, began demanding that the Babri Masjid be pulled down and a mandir to Ram built in its place. The demand was based on the claim that Rama, the mythical hero of the great Hindu epic Ramayana, was born exactly on the spot where the mosque stands. On the eve of 1989 elections to the Lok Sabha it along with the corruption charges against Rajiv Gandhi determined the further path of Indian politics. It has rightly been said, ‘Nehru ignored corruption when he took no action against some corrupt leaders, Indira Gandhi encouraged corruption when she described it as a global phenomenon and Rajiv Gandhi allowed himself to get besmirched by corruption in the wake of the Bofors scandal. This inning of Mrs. Gandhi’s premiership had changed the earlier role of religious figures as she began to rely on appeal to specific category of voters. She drew Hindu religious figures into the lime light through her patronage of religious institution and played the Hindu card against the minorities. Alike India in other countries too as electoral democracy advances; the ruling parties focus their attention towards majoritarian group-religious or otherwise and prepare them as their polarized vote bank. It’s a global issue and this India-based study would generalize many patterns in the context with increased preference for power politics. This development in electoral democracy, no doubt, undermines the real meaning of democracy as a rule of law, it also begets challenges to face and a problem to be addressed fruitfully.

Keywords: Society, Religion, Electoral democracy, Majoritarian politics and Prospect.

Predecessors of Majoritarian Politics
Considering the deteriorating social, economic, political and defence conditions of the country the Fourth General Election held in 1967 proved an ‘electoral miracle’ which exerted a far-reaching impact on the Indian political scene. After holding its first national elections in 1951-52, India achieved the status of the world’s largest liberal democracy with universal suffrage. Dr. Ambedkar and the other founding fathers believed this to be a necessary pre-condition, although India’s literacy level in 1947 was abysmal. But from the first election onwards, the Election Commision of India (ECI) helped illiterate electors to identify candidates during voting, by alloting a symbol to each (Chawla, 2012). Once seen against a backdrop of illiteracy and social tensions, the evolution of the electoral process has involved the vitality of greater and more broad-based participation. In encompassing traditional values and newer integration processes, confronting social tensions with innovative measures to help constructively resolve them, the focus has been to bring different strands into the electoral mainstream. The right to vote has emerged not only as a fundamental right, but as an instrument of political awakening. It resulted in the assertion of the Backward and Scheduled Castes in several states which had a direct bearing on the changes of Indian political situation. The ruling configurations that had dominated the Congress had been vigorously challenged by the newly empowered middle and lower castes and classes, with serious consequences at least in states. Each successive election saw a broadening of the political base, placing the organisational machinery under greater pressure from newly mobilised social groups. Thus, it was clear that the deinstitutionalisation of the Congress was already well underway before the setback registered in the fourth general elections in 1967.

Politically using the carrot and stick approach in dealing with his own party leaders, Nehru showed considerable ingenuity and skill in leading the Congress to victory in three successive general
elections. Even though each election underscored the limitations of the party bases of support, Nehru neglected to initiate the kind of reforms that might have offset the processes of organisational disintegration within Congress. Nehru's failure to reform the party proved fatal and it continued as a legacy after his death under the Premiership of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Without the necessary organisational reforms, its limited social support base was turning into a liability, not the asset as it had been in pre-independence period. About the time there were serious divisions in the party organisation at the lower levels which helped fuel a slow but steady downward leakage of power and initiative. Under increasing pressure from members of the Congress state bosses, known as the syndicate, Shastri sought refuge among the notables of the higher civil services (Bose and Jalal, 2004). Rule by the Congress state bosses came to an abrupt end with their failure to deliver the vote banks in the 1967 general elections. While scraping through at the centre, the Congress was ousted from power in several states. Challenge of regionalism was now plainly coming from political forces outside the pale of Congress. A simple partnership with the civil bureaucracy was no longer sufficient to maintain Congress hegemony or central authority. The dynamics of centre-state relations had begun shifting the focus of power away from the parliament towards executive authority residing in the hands of the prime minister. They prevented the genuine democratisation of the state and the premier political party.

**Coming of Mrs. Indira Gandhi**

In 1966, Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India after the sudden demise of Lal Bahadur Shastri. It was the time when the country was surrounded by a variety of problems and everything appeared in a transitional phase. The negative side of earlier governance began to show its limits in the late sixties despite Mrs. Gandhi's initiatives in spheres of party organisation along with economic reforms. In post-1967 period discerning Congressmen realised that substantial steps had to be taken to reverse the process and rejuvenate the party and the government and that mere manipulation would not work. Although the party had got a clear majority in 1967 elections at the centre her worry was due to organisational problems and fast recede of the traditional vote bank of the Congress. Her support base one time consist the SC, ST, women and minorities. After the split in the party in 1969 she even attempted land reforms in the 1970-72 periods, but soon she retreated from structural change and instead concentrated on strengthening her personal power base. At the time intermediate castes and classes especially big farmers and middle to richer peasants, had been providing the principal power base of the opposition to the Congress at the state level in most regions. But there were more radical challenges in the states of West Bengal and Kerala, where left-wing coalitions came to power. The late 1960s also witnessed the Maoist Naxalite movement involving poor peasants and militant students in West Bengal as well as parts of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Faced with a variety of challenges, Indira Gandhi set about trying to link the top and bottom layers of agrarian society through renewed efforts to woo the high-caste, old landed elites and advocating the interests of subordinate castes and classes cutting across local and regional arenas. Her populist anti-poverty programme was designed to get the Congress substantial electoral support from scheduled castes and tribes, who also happened to form the bulk of the rural poor. Mrs. Gandhi's socio-economic programme captured by the ringing slogan 'garibi hatao' helped her in getting resounding success in the general elections of March 1971 and also in the 1972 elections to the state assemblies. All this turned into euphoria with the defeat of Pakistan in the war and the creation of Bangladesh out of the erstwhile Pakistan province of East Pakistan.

However, the crushing success of Indira Gandhi one after another presented a momentous challenge to the Indian state. Her success in restoring the Congress Party's sagging electoral fortunes with her brand of populism came to be seen as a threat not only by dominant rural groups but also paradoxically, by the bearers of the central state authority. Her alliances with populist leaders in the states had only delivered the votes. They had not succeeded in vanquishing, the old rural power structures dominated by the syndicate bosses with whom she had parted company. Although they lost the elections, the erstwhile Congress bosses could rely on their middle to richer peasant supporters—many of whom were strategically located in the state police and civil services—to foil a centrally orchestrated populist challenge. Opting for more democracy entailed reorganising the Congress Party to consolidate the gains, of the new and broader-based electoral alliances. But this meant strengthening popular regional leaders at the expense of the centre, a reversal of fortunes that was untenable without substantially modifying both the party and the state structure. It also meant to extract greater concessions for their constituents and, more dangerously, provide them with ammunition to blast their way into power at the centre. As this was anathema to Indira Gandhi, she reacted by scrapping any semblance of inner party democracy within the Congress. In the circumstances she preferred to appoint her own loyalists as state and local leaders. The state, which was
going through a process of rapid centralisation of power ever since Indira Gandhi effected a split in the party in 1969, met all such challenges increasingly with sharp authoritarian measures. More people were arrested during this period and more died in police firing than at the time of Quit India movement (Alam, 2012). It culminated in the darkest chapter in the history of independent India the jettisoning of democracy and the imposition of internal emergency in June 1975. Authoritarianism, which was sporadic and ad hoc in Indian politics till then, became institutionalised.

**Internal Emergency and Its Aftereffects**

By imposing emergency Indira Gandhi attempted to ward off both sorts of regional challenges and made centre the sole repository of supra-local and supra-state populist programmes. Aided by the non-elected institutions of the state, the resort to overt authoritarianism aimed at augmenting central power's against the regions. A workable enough strategy in the short-run, it lacked legitimacy and could not for long withstand concerted opposition from an array of political forces. Democracy as a system of governance, or a mode of organising power, or a space for struggles, after its long journey through turbulent times, stands independent, valued for its own sake. It does not any longer require crutches in the shape of powerful leaders-as guardians of democracy and as trustees of the people in order to survive. It was Nehru's commitment, or Indira's populism, which provided democracy with the cushion to survive in what was considered an inhospitable environment. But emergency, changing all this, showed the people what it means to lose freedom. They learnt retrospectively that it is possible to fight for liberty, and also realised how precious is the possession of freedom. Ordinary people were always subjected to institutionalised violence, oppression and terror in Indian society, apart from exploitation, which is normal in every class-divided society. Earlier with the exception of exploitation, all other oppressive measures were ad hoc and sporadic in nature. Emergency made it systematic and pervasive to the extent that the privacy of the person, though little, was daily invaded by the lumpen elements of the ruling party and agents of the state. Since then criminalisation of politics became a regular feature of Indian politics.

Apart from this the over-centralisation of the polity under the Indira Gandhi regime led to regional assertions and alienation of people in many parts of the country. The rise of the Telugu Desham Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, consolidation of DMK vs. AIADMK politics in Tamil Nadu, the autonomy movements in Jammu and Kashmir, north-east India and Punjab were consequences of over centralisation. Growth of regional disparities, persistence of poverty and under development has continued to give birth to many new regional parties. This political process has finally forced the Congress and the BJP to take federalism seriously and support decentralisation of power. At the time the Indian National Congress failed to grapple with the class-caste dynamics which came from the backward-class leader Charan Singh in the late sixties. Thereafter, this challenge took many other forms leading to parties such as the Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Prasad Yadav (Mohanty, 2001). The period also witnessed in Indian politics the rapid popular reversal of moods. The electoral process and the outcomes of elections, as well as the structuring of political responses between them were breached. The same people who voted the governments in with huge mandates soon turned against their own government, and the Indian state was under constant popular assaults. The Janata government which followed the defeat of the Emergency regime and which restored democracy faced the same situation of popular agitation. Once in power, the Janata with its regional base confined to the north Indian Hindi heartland fell prey to its own internal contradictions. The same was the case in 1980 and 1984. This is an important indicator of the unresponsive nature of the ruling class vis-a-vis the problems of the people, and the lack of adequate accountability of the government of the day. This phase of politics devalued the leaders, political parties and certain institutions which lost their autonomy and were converted into mere instruments of powers.

The decade 1980s exhibited the declining strength of Congress's claim to power at an effectively unitary all-India centre and therefore, the Party substituted its populism with implicit, if not explicit, to religious majoritarianism. Communalism against regionalism was a well tried formula of the colonial state. Its implementation in this period must be placed squarely in the context of the many powerful regional challenges to central authority. As ideologies of secularism and socialism lost credibility the Congress regime turned implicitly to region-based majoritarianism to meet regional threats. Earlier in 1970s and 1980s several regional political parties, such as TDP, in Andhra Pradesh. Akali Dal in Punjab and others in different parts of the country claimed to have achieved national status and some of them, especially more extreme elements of the Sikh religious community launched a violent campaign for the attainment of a separate Sikh homeland called Khalistan. It culminated in the brutal assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards and her son Rajiv Gandhi registered a record-breaking victory in the 1984 elections with the help of sympathy wave and Hindu card. Viewing Indian society through the
colonial lens that revealed a majority and a minority community based on the religious distinction, the new regime took a couple of decisions. On the one hand Rajiv Gandhi's government opened the doors of the Ayodhya mosque to Hindu worshipers. On the other, in a curious and ill-advised attempt to placate Muslim opinion after India's judicial system has awarded alimony to Shah Bano, he railroaded through Parliament a deeply conservative Muslim women's bill. The new steps appeared to give a new lease to the continued exercise of central authority by the Congress.

The politics of majoritarianism brought a new twist in Indian politics and society as well. By doing so the Congress, at least, paved the way for the more ideologically committed and organisationally cohesive forces of Hindutva-the BJP, the RSS and the VHP to emerge as a major forces on the Indian political scene and the most controversial/emotional symbolic issue of temple-mosque came to the fore. Some extremist Hindu groups, the VHP in particular, began demanding that the Babri Masjid be pulled down and a mandir to Ram built in its place. The demand was based on the claim that Rama, the mythical hero of the great Hindu epic Ramayana, was born exactly on the spot where the mosque stands. On the eve of 1989 elections to the Lok Sabha it along with the corruption charges against Rajiv Gandhi determined the further path of Indian politics. It has rightly been said, 'Nehru ignored corruption when he took no action against some corrupt leaders, Indira Gandhi encouraged corruption when she described it as a global phenomenon and Rajiv Gandhi allowed himself to get besmirched by corruption in the wake of the Bofors scandal (Sinha, 1991). This inning of Mrs. Gandhi's premiership had changed the earlier role of religious figures as she began to rely on appeal to specific category of voters. She drew Hindu religious figures into the lime light through her patronage of religious institution and played the Hindu card against the minorities (Dyke, 2002). From other side was VHP, itself a religious organisation, took a prominent position and emerged into a powerful interest group along with a major player in national politics. This adoption of religious symbolism in political mobilisation was one of the factors that led to huge increase in BJP's vote share and Lok Sabha seat. The anti-Congress and pro-religion forces the BJP, Janata Dal and the Communists also aggressively carried on propaganda of pseudo-secularism of the Congress, which in practice, is the policy of appeasement of minorities in order to exploit them as their vote-banks.

The Crucial Years
On the eve of the general elections of 1989 took place in a religious environment. This time it was not the Congress but the Bharatiya Janata Party which was poised to do best on the issue of a Hindu Rashtra. On the eve of elections the BJP took part in the transportation of 'holy bricks' to Ayodhya and a foundation laying ceremony for a temple to Ram near the mosque. The Congress government afraid of losing some Hindu votes, did not stop the ceremony from taking place. There was a miracle victory and increase of seats for the BJP and it supported the Janata Dal led by V.P. Singh to form second non-Congress government at the Centre. With the support from both the BJP and the Communists the electoral verdict spelled the beginning of the end of the Nehru Gandhi dynasty and represented the most decisive success of certain groups influential at the regional level in exercising state power directly from the centre. In less than a year the government of V.P. Singh decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission to reserve jobs at the centre for backward castes in August 1990. All political parties of the time including the BJP adopted that blank to seek the votes of this largest caste conglomerate. The scheme appeared designed to divide the Hindu community by caste and thereby undermine the BJP's electoral project of mobilising support by playing the Hindu majoritarian card. In response, the Hindu movement led by the BJP and others, such as RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal became active and left a decisive effect on party system. Its leader L.K. Advani responded by undertaking a Rath yatra and threatened to arrive in Ayodhya and start building the temple. It resulted in the polarisation of Indian politics on communal line. By doing this the BJP had taken on not only its political rivals but had also challenged one of the main ideological foundations of the Indian state. In coming years the dynamics of this trend has been fully played up in course of the fragmentation of the parties in the nineties. It is in conjunction with other issues - economic, secular, federal that these forces have played a substantial role in Indian politics. However, in this brief period the nature of state and its dealing with issues remained unchanged. The Janata Dal had little option and it settle down to working within the established parameters of the compromise between formal democracy and covert authoritarianism. The incidents, taking place severely damaged the secular facade of the Indian state. We do need religious values but certainly not politisisation of religion.

The campaign and blind wave of religion finally led to demolition of the Babri Masjid in the presence of the leaders of the BJP, the RSS and the VHP on 6 December 1992, setting off some of the worst attacks on the Muslim community in many parts of India. The Bharatiya Janata Party from seventies onwards sincerely executed its two pronged policy. Especially after the dramatic success of the Rath yatras
its own agenda was rewritten in a retrograde direction but it also adhered to its more secular constituency. From the advertising tactics it continued to appeal to the constituency of modernist groups but on the other it persisted with its blatantly communal propaganda aimed at the more traditional Hindu groups. But once again the political economy of India took a turn when Congress Party formed the government with a working majority after 1991 elections under the premiership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. The new regime began economic reforms - privatisation of public sector units, liberalising of rules allowing freedom for investors and globalisation of flow of capital and consumer goods and services. The initial impetus for the economic reforms came as a result of an acute balance of payments crisis in mid-1991, making it necessary to seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and accept certain terms of a stabilisation and structural adjustment programme. However, the economic reforms pursued by the Congress government addressed only the first part of a two-pronged problem facing Indian economic development. The reforms concentrated on addressing the negative effects of over - intervention by the state in certain sectors and removing the more stiff bureaucratic controls on industry. They moved tardily to rectify state negligence of critical social sectors, notably, health and education. The political costs of pursuing a lop-sided reform process contributed to the defeat of Congress in 1996 elections. 

As a result of the general elections held in 1996 two successive governments were formed led by H.D. Devegowda and I.K. Gujral respectively. It enabled the long - forgotten intrinsic values of development to re - enter the discourse. It received the support of several regional and left - wing parties and displayed deep taints of localism and agrarianism with a rich farmer bias while proclaiming solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged majority. As any successful realisation of the idioms of equitable development requires the appropriate instruments, both economic and political, the failed institutions of state could not easily be imaginatively refashioned. On the other even though the anti- BJP forces acquired strength for some time, in this election the BJP emerged as the largest political party. In this election the BJP's election manifesto clearly adopted the theory of ‘cultural nationalism' and noted, ‘Our nationalistic vision is not merely bound by geographical or political identity of India, but defined by one ancient cultural heritage. From this belief flows our faith in cultural nationalism which is the core of Hindutva'(Noorani, 2003). But soon the BJP's electoral politics and desire to remain in power led it to forge alliances with other known secular parties. Till then the ‘Hindu nationalist BJP had been regarded as politically untouchable by reginal parties, the further decline of the Congress Party in the general elections of 1998 and 1999 created the conditions for the formation of BJP-led coalition governments at the centre. In the 1999 elections, it formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with 22 parties in it and came to power at the centre. The NDA's agenda of governance set aside such contentious issues as building Ram temple in Ayodhya, abrogating of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and framing of a uniform civil code for citizens which would mean that the Muslim would not be governed by the Shariat law on civil matters. Once again, the debate on the issue of defining Indian nationalism goes on among the parties within and outside the NDA. While BJP pursues the Hindu Rashtra agenda, the rest of the parties stressed the pluralist, multi-religious, multi-cultural character of the Indian polity.

In approach and content the coalition partners - BJP and others remained poles apart. During election campaigns regional parties emphasised local issues and sought more autonomy for the states and a legitimate share of power at a more federal and less unitary centre. Surprisingly the regional parties were able to get more than 250 seats out of 537 with limiting the BJP on 182 and the Congress on just 112 seats. The major regional parties on the side of ruling included Telegu Desham, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Samata Party and Trinamool Congress while the opposition bench consisted Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The general elections of 1999 dented the all India, national pretentions of the Congress and BJP alike, a string of defeat in state election led the BJP to fall back on its hard Hindutva line. The incident of 2002 in Gujarat occurred despite the personal view of the NDA Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that in a country as diverse as India it would be patently undemocratic to have a single-Party government. Politicisation of religion in our democracy has already done enough damage.

Conclusions and Challenges
Unfortunately, in India politics has not only been politicised but also commercialised. Religious leaders identity themselves with one or the other politician or political parties. They have amassed wealth by exploiting religious beliefs of people and lead a life of luxury. They enter into profitable bargains with powerful politicians and politicians go to them for money and votes. Both together they thus exploit religious belief of common people(Banu,2009 ). A state should never priorities one religion over the other, particularly in a secular country like India. But most of our politicians while paying lip service to
secularism grossly misuse religion for political purposes. The irony is that these politicians take oath for secularism while filing their nominations but having filled that beg for vote openly in the name of religion and caste. In addition, religion in our society has also become the greatest obstacle for any meaningful change. Religion, unfortunately identified with status quo. Most of the religious leaders oppose any change as violation of religious beliefs. This attitude does not arise from religious beliefs per se but by the interest associated with status quo. Every religion in the world brought social change and a truly religious person would always fight against status quo and try to change society to make it more just and meaningful. Religion is basically a transcending force and fights against all sorts of vested interest. Unlike others, the religion in India has promoted and prompted vested interests to gain short-term selfish mottos-power, wealth or anything else. If even formal democracy in India has been a success it is not because of religious ethos but owing to its secular credentials.

In this era of globalisation only a partial number of population has been benefitted from the economic reforms initiated in early 1990s by the P.V. Narasimha Rao's government. While the other larger part of people still remain in poverty, destitution, illiteracy and misery, the benefitted lot operates the state as well as the party system to carry on further economic reforms to enhance their own interests. Now the beneficiaries of reforms, the rich peasants and the bourgeoisie have linked to global capital, use state power to manage the economy and generate surplus. The electoral system is used to legitimize this process. Thus, contradictions continue to grow in Indian society and are often manifest in various kinds of social violence. Autonomy movements including separatist and militant movements, tribal movements, dalit movements as well as workers and peasant movements—constitute a whole range of political action distinct from party politics. The Indian state apparatus responds to these movements in a variety of ways. Whenever, challenges has taken place the form of armed struggle, state repression seems to have been the main policy of successive governments. However, repression has failed to curb these movements for they have popular support in most cases and raise basic structural issues such as land reforms, poverty eradication, right to land and demand for autonomy, which the dominant political parties have failed to highlight in their preoccupation with electoral politics. In this turbulent situation counter - politics has given rise to large scale corruption and criminalisation. Thus, Indian polity at the turn of the century, experienced these trends in the development of a multi - party system, a range of social movements and outbreak of violence in society.
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