WHOSE DEMOCRACY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Hegemony and democracy in India

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Democracy appears to be a consensual phenomenon not only in India but globally too. On the one hand there are pronouncements of vindication of liberal democracy and of course, the 'end of history' spurred by the collapse of communist regimes in East Europe; on the other hand, "(I)t also suited the economic interests of the US government, the World Bank and others involved in the global capitalist system in the early 1990s to put 'democratization pressures' on authoritarian regimes." (Potter, 1993, 360)[1]. Whether it is the 'end of history' argument or the pursuit of democracy by global capitalist system, an impression is created that there is one democracy. This may be described as consensual construction of democracy. Such a consensus on the issue of democracy can be misleading and harmful to the prospects of democracy. Often, instead of being an objective condition where a certain regime of norms is accepted by the society, consensus exists as a dominant normative regime upheld by one section only. Ideas and aspirations of one section masquerade as consensus. Such an engineered consensus serves to legitimize the ideas and aspirations of one section by transforming them into socially upheld ideas and aspirations. If globally, US and global capitalist system seek to create 'consensus' around the idea of democracy; at the national level also a general consensus regarding democracy is sought to be built in order to sustain and legitimize the structures of social power.

I

Democracy was the most generalized ideological component of Indian polity at the time of its beginning as a nation-state. The anti-colonial struggle was seen as a democratic struggle and the post-colonial future was seen in terms of a democratic polity. In a sense, democracy as an objective and as an ideology was widely acceptable because it was possible to read different meanings into democracy. As India embarked upon its journey as a free nation state, the democratic constitution expressed a consensus among the ruling classes regarding the structures of formal power. The nascent ruling classes had accepted the principle of electoral democracy much before actual independence. Through the constitution, this consensus was articulated as national consensus. (It is another matter that this democratic constitution provided a basis for popular aspirations. We discuss this point later.) Over the last fifty years, political actors have arrived at another consensus, viz., consensus about 'empowering' different segments of the society. This empowerment means two things: a) giving some space in the formal legal-political structures to the aspirations of some segments and b) accommodating the claims of various segments in the national ideological discourse. The exercises of 'empowering' tribals, grassroots, women, etc., are examples of this. These two consensuses have evolved two meanings of democracy: elections and empowerment. But there can be other democracies also. People might actually want power, seeking to bridge the gulf between people and power (Mukarji, 1996). Or, sections of people may resist certain decisions and agitate against

such decisions (Sathyamurthy, 1996,446-47). Or, mobilization may lead to new demands on the distribution of resources (Kohli, 1998- 9-10)[2]. Within the sphere of democratic constitution, a number of struggles have been situated in the discourse of democratic rights by civil rights activists (Nauriya, 1996). Another area of 'meaning' of democracy lies in the sphere of power sharing: Gandhi's famous dream of having a Harijan as Rashtrapati, Lohia's more strident slogan of 'Pichchada pave sou mein saath' (Sixty percent share to the backward); Karpoori Thakur's reservation strategy; Kanshi Ram's invocation of Ambedkar's appeal to 'untouchables' to become a 'ruling community', Laloo Prasad's unprecedented reelection on completing five years in power; and so on. Then, there is the BJP's meaning of democracy as majoritarianism. These are only a few instances of different meanings of democracy. The claims and counterclaims unavoidably make India a 'noisy democracy' (Kohli, 1998, 14). But is there only one democracy or can we visualize many democracies? Is it not necessary to break a generalized notion of democracy into: a) different meanings of the term for different people and b) different - perhaps internally related - layers of the meaning of democracy transforming the concept progressively into a terrain where the universal meaning allows the contestation among particular meanings? Such an exercise will show us that the goal and the practice of democracy can have a sharp focus and a radical content.

Meanings of Democracy
Ever since India became independent, there has been a general acceptance of democracy and a contestation on its meaning. In the field of constitution and its interpretations, issues surrounding fundamental rights may be seen as a platform of this contestation. In the area of policy making the question of state's authority to limit the right to private property and to regulate the economy was seen as the question involving democracy. During the eighties and the nineties reservation policy, communalization / cultural assertion and the new economic policy have provided further ground for contesting meanings of democracy. Politics forces a certain amount of crudeness to these contestations. Thus, it is asked whether or not reservation policy is compatible with democracy. Questions are asked about the motives of those who challenge the prevalent development framework. While certain type of politics is branded by critics as communal, supporters of Hindutva politics wonder why is the 'democratic' expression of one community seen as threat to democracy. Contemporary politics consists of these and many more similarly crude and hotly contested questions.

The questions are deliberately presented in a crude form. Firstly, because in their present form, the questions explain what is the 'noise' all about. The conflicts involving these contestations is not around the fine meanings of concepts but it is about the material conditions of sections of society. Secondly, and following from the first, the issue at stake is not so much about the theory of democracy. The crude form of the questions implies that the debate is not   (at least not only) about liberal, deliberative, etc. theories of democracy. Different meanings of democracy - India's democracy - are being produced by the practices of different sections of Indian society: the upper castes and lower castes, the well-oiled sections with material security and those without material security are producing their own meanings of democracy. Therefore, the foregoing

questions are not just theoretical / epistemological, they force upon us the other question: Whose democracy are we talking about?

Liberal and deliberative models of democracy do not admit this question. For them democracy is (respectively) negotiating the issue of individual right / autonomy and negotiating an array of choices through rational deliberations. Therefore the question 'whose democracy' will be seen as lacking in lacking in theoretical salience. Representative democracy might just handle the question. Representation may be seen as representation of interests and of sections of society. But a representative body will be merely a collection of interests or it will have to collate those interests and produce 'public interest' or 'common interest'; thus skirting the issue. At one level, however, representative democracy too, may not consider the question legitimate; because although it recognizes the right (of groups/sections) to representation, it holds on to the principle that all sections merit equal representation. Secondly, representative democracy approaches the question of representation either in terms of political representation or in terms of overlapping plurality. Thus understood, representation becomes a 'general' category devoid of sectional focus; merely a mechanism whereby electors choose a set of decision-makers for taking decisions on behalf of the 'electorate'.

In order to translate the crudely political question 'whose democracy' into a theoretically intelligible problem we need to break the concept of democracy into layers: procedural and substantive; electoral and agitational; regulative and distributive. These layers are not mutually exclusive, nor are they dichotomous. Ayesha Jalal (1995, 3) has suggested a distinction between formal and substantive democracy.[3] Substantive democracy refers to existence of citizens as 'active agents capable of pursuing their interests with a measure of autonomy from entrenched structures of dominance and privilege.' Formal democracy refers to a set of genuine guarantees regarding political rights. Extending this position Bose and Jalal (1998, 4) further argue that quality and substance of democracy are related to equitable and just distribution of resources. In a somewhat different manner, Sathyamurthy makes a threefold distinction: electoral democracy, substantive democracy (opportunities for people to remove threats to constitutional guarantees of democracy) and participatory democracy (Sathyamurthy, 1996, 472). Procedural democracy would refer to a well-defined constitutional machinery along with a meaningful and accessible remedial element with respect not only to political rights but socio-economic rights; a guarantee of electoral principle and provisions for democratic and transparent exercise of power in course of decision-making and implementation. Substantive democracy refers to application of rights / remedies with reference to deprived and dissenting sections; the actual performance of the electoral principles (not only in terms of free and fair elections, but also in terms of availability of alternatives and possibility of challenging domination); and the process of democratic governance, both procedurally and in terms of the policy content of governance.

The layer of electoral democracy would originate from the second feature of substantive democracy. As understood here, electoral layer would incorporate Sathyamurthy's 'substantive' democracy. The main concern here is on the quality of electoral democracy. I have argued elsewhere that elections are not merely a media-event or 'politicking'. More seriously, elections provide for an interplay of domination and

aspiration. Electoral politics is firmly rooted in the interplay of social forces. (Palshikar and Deshpande, 1999, 2409). Therefore, the electoral arena needs to be understood as a battleground for competing social forces and not just a competitive arena for choosing the elites. Secondly, elections provide opportunities to the disprivileged and deprived, to express their dissent and anguish. Thus, there is a need to decipher the democratic meaning of elections and strengthen that meaning by sharp redefinitions of political choices. Thus understood electoral democracy can become related to agitational democracy. The latter layer refers to movements of people for expansion of democratic rights, for democratic governance and above all, for redistribution of resources. Agitational democracy refers chiefly to the right of people to redefine boundaries of the concept of democracy; thus agitations or movements emerging from variegated demographic or positional locations will constitute democracy. This layer of democracy presupposes a fundamentally conflictual nature of democracy rather than the consensual one. Competing claims to authenticity constitute agitational democracy. It is not in opposition to or in isolation from the electoral layer of democracy. The agitational layer would, instead, keep on pushing the conflicting issues on to the electoral terrain. Like the procedural and the substantive, the electoral and agitational layers are and need to be enmeshed into each other.

The third set of layers deals with state-civil society relationship and the nature of civil society. Regulative democracy refers to the character of state, exercise of state power, the object and direction of state-action, the issue of state-repression as also the question of an interventionist state. Retaining the existing civil society, can the state arise as 'independent authority', deriving legitimacy from this independence? A regulative democracy needs to be seen as a system where there are mechanisms to protect the disprivileged from state action. Democratic regulation implies fairness and moderation in the application of coercion. This calls for transformation of state and its democratization (Held, 1996, 316-334)). Regulative democracy draws attention to the role of state in the reproduction of inequalities and to the risk in establishing 'democracy in the context of a sea of political, economic and social inequality' (Held, 1993, 24). Distributive democracy deals with this question of inequality. It focuses attention on social and economic inequalities emanating from both production relations and social practices. Democratization of state will be an unsuccessful agenda without democratization of civil society. Therefore regulative democracy cannot really be separated from distributive democracy. This layer of democracy presupposes both: introduction of democratic principle of fairness and equality to the issue of distribution of material goods and redistribution of material resources encouraging non-state, non-private experimentation in the field of governing the economy.

The multi-layered conception of democracy discussed here firmly believes that there is a gap between formal commitment to democratic procedure and the normative substance expected to occur from this commitment. It is difficult to be persuaded by Dahl's argument that substantive rights are integral to democratic process (Dahl, 1991, 163-175). In the first place, liberal as well as pluralist arguments fall short of a substantive element since they continue to emphasize the 'mechanisms.' Secondly, experience of actually existing democracies suggests that there is a tendency to derive satisfaction from

formal adherence to democratic norm while actual participation may be very slender. Thirdly, the 'political' is so narrowly constructed as to exclude both social and economic inequalities. In the absence of distributive element, democracy cannot become meaningful. Hence the insistence here on distinction between procedural and substantive.

A Question of Democratic Claims

However, this distinction does not imply negation or rejection of the procedural or electoral. Rather, we look upon these layers as very useful for evolution of the substantive and agitational layers of democracy. The multi-layered conception followed here facilitates the privileging of certain claims to democracy over other claims. A claim to being authentically democratic can be situated in the broader context of state, class and other markers of disprivilege in the society (e.g. gender, region, ethnicity, caste) in order to decide whether the claim is appropriational, aspirational (mobilizational) or transformational. A group, party or section of society may take an avowedly democratic position in order to appropriate the democratic space and claim legitimacy for itself. Democratic claims may stem from groups/ sections which aspire for a dominant position in a given society. Such groups might have acquired some political mileage through organization and mobilization. Besides, a group might have gained control over resources (although only politically) thus improving its material condition. Such claims may not be appropriational but due to their aspirational character, they may endorse the appropriational mode of democratic practice. Aspirational claims might lack a universal approach. They would not comprehend the broader democratic movement. Such claims will be limited in that satisfaction of one group's aspiration will be seen as an adequate condition of democracy. Therefore, the social transformative or emancipatory potential of such claims will be very thin. The value of such claims, however, lies in their ability to confront the established appropriational claims. This might result into erosion of established claims, and perhaps their replacement or removal. The third set of claims may originate from groups/ sections which experience disprivilege and discrimination. We call such claims as transformational not necessarily because they explicitly demand or outline social transformation. (It is possible that this might happen in some cases.) But the transformational nature originates in their objective condition and the necessity of reconstituting state and civil society in order to accommodate these claims. In other words, these claims will be in fundamental conflict with appropriational claims. This takes us back to the issue of privileging one type of claims over others. If the above three claims are roughly in descending order of social privileges our conception of democracy posits authenticity to each of these three in the ascending order. This is not just a question of taking moral judgmental stance. Over and above that, this is an effort to decode and understand the dynamics of inegalitarian societies. In a class (and caste, gender) society, both discourse and action are influenced / governed by the modes of exploitation. The expressions and acts of the disprivileged are often muted and misunderstood. Therefore conceptual tools need to take into account the structures alongwith actions. The concept of democracy as proposed here seeks to comprehend the structural universe of claims to democracy through different meanings of democracy. It is hoped that this will help in avoiding the trap of treating as equal different claims and meanings of democracy. Further, the concept of democracy as constructed here, can take note of dissent, conflicts,

resistances, violence and a whole range of diffuse actions and demands as constitutive of and enriching the discourse of democracy.

II

In this section we propose to take an overview of India's political experience in the post-independence period. Our attempt will be to trace the evolution of the three types of claims regarding democracy discussed in the previous section. The argument will be that in the different areas of political activity there have been moments of appropriation, aspiration and transformation. It has generally been observed that India has attained a democratic status through its history of half a century as an independent nation-state. Presence of a democratic state has been emphasized as 'one powerful continuity' stretched across this half-century. It has been further observed that '... the democratic idea has penetrated the Indian political imagination..' (Khilnani, 1998,16-17). It is indeed noteworthy that the Indian democratic experiment has been gigantic and that politics has been taking place 'out in the open'. But we also need to go back to the question: Whose democracy has this been? The continued existence of democratic institutions, practices and struggles, along with keenly contested elections; suggests that Indian democracy is a complex phenomenon. It is not merely a case of democracy appropriated by entrenched interests, just as it is not a case of successful transformative democracy. In fact Indian democracy has been a terrain for contenstation among these claims mentioned above. As Kothari (1988, 154) observes, there is a deep commitment to the democratic norm on the part of large sections of society. On the other hand, 'elites and dominant classes have been able to provide a semblance of democratic government' although there is resistance from oppressed segments of the population (Sathyamurthy, 1996, 443). Kothari and Sathyamurthy are taking entirely different views of Indian politics and yet their observations may be linked to each other. The story of Indian democracy has been complex precisely for this reason: it is a story of continued domination by entrenched interests; it is a story of competitive politics; it is a story of hope and expectation for the masses because they can resist their subordination. In other words it is a story of coexistence of subordination and democracy; coexistence of domination and democracy.

Institutions
The story must begin with the constitution of India. At best the Indian constitution is an ambivalent document. As is well known, the constitution is a far too unitarian and homogenizing document. It gives more powers not only to the center but creates a strong-some would say, overbearing - state apparatus. Thus, the question is not confined to federal distribution of power; but distribution of power between the people and the state. Take the case of fundamental rights. While the right to work or right to health or right to education are conveniently pushed into the section on directive principles, civil rights are meticulously circumscribed by provisos and restrictive qualifiers. This is then compensated by magnanimous - and indeed potentially effective - constitutional remedies which have proved almost a paradise for civil right activists. The constitutional remedies as also the Directive principles are instances of the transformational democratic claims being accommodated in the constitution while the right to private property exemplified almost an appropriational coup staged in the constituent assembly. The clumsy provisions regarding protection of special treatment of certain communities (art.14. 3,4, art.16.4)

balanced by article 335 almost as an afterthought also testify to the simultaneous existence of appropriational and transformational claims at the time of making of the constitution. Constitutional amendments, too, are witness to this complexity. The entire controversy over the power of parliament to amend the constitution finally did not benefit transformational claims. Instead, the 24th, 25th and later the 42nd amendments helped in consolidating the entrenched interests and state power vis-à-vis the people. The inclusion of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' represent the classic example of how the constitution could be appropriated by the established networks of power. More recently, the 73rd and 74th amendments, too, while providing only limited scope for people's initiative, have successfully appropriated the democratic claims on behalf of the people, resulting into strengthening of the state structures. At a more general level, the constitution provides us with a good example of creation of a strong state for purposes of social change, without adequate provisions for protection from the state when it turns anti-people.

Among the other institutions, the judiciary has also been the site of claims and counter-claims by appropriational and transformational democracies. One can cite a number of Supreme Court (and High Court) rulings that strengthened appropriational claims (in the field of property rights, rape, reservation issue etc.) Similarly the judiciary has generally been sensitive to issues of national security, national interest etc. But judiciary has also been a source of expansion of the right to life and liberty. The judiciary, in the pre-1980 period, sympathetically addressed the tension between fundamental rights and directive principles. Since the 1980s, judicial interventions have facilitated considerable space for legitimating a range of transformational claims, many times unsettling the entrenched interests (Sardar Sarovar, environmental degradation, corruption, being some of the interesting issues.) Paradoxically, judicial activism also underscores an interventionist role of state while momentarily appearing to protect 'people'. Thus, active judiciary can be seen as an extension of statist constitution. The activism of judiciary can turn to protect the 'establishment' also. Therefore, present activist gesture of judiciary does not guarantee a victory for transformational claims. Another point that deserves attention is the propensity to deflect movements. Judicial activism means frequent resort to judiciary in cases where long-drawn battles are required. Judicial victories can be pyrrhic. They tend to pacify or replace agitations and being mired in legality and bureaucratic interpretations, judicial victory can become ineffective also. Moreover, the close link between judicial activism and Delhi-based lawyer - intellectual- journalists implies that the transformational agenda may be governed by myopic highbrow brand of political well-wishers. Recent history shows that judicial activism is easily available to residents of Delhi (pollution in Delhi, Delhi's phat-phatis, allotment of residence to Delhi babus, and so on!). This warns us about the possibility that claims might be transformational but these may express the wishes and ambitions of elite.

Of the various institutions, bureaucracy stands out for being non-transformational. The colonial legacy of unresponsive administration has continued unabated. But the massive machinery is seen as an instrument of social change. This resulted into concentration of power in the hands of the administrators. The machinery has the right powers and the right kind of orientation in terms of rhetoric adopted but it has turned out as the single most organized appropriator of democratic claims. The efficiency in serving entrenched

interests (land acquisition, enforcement of industrial peace) is matched by lackluster performance in the welfare field (health, literacy etc.). This cannot happen merely due to 'inefficiency'. A class-caste bias alone produces this differentiated performance. Since bureaucracy is the important, visible and most numerous location of power, the aspirational claims are strongly directed at the bureaucracy (Vithal, 1994). While sons-of-soil policies may be seen as claims of regionally ascendant sections, the bitter struggle over reservation of jobs is the chief arena of aspirational politics. The statistics compiled by the Mandal Commission indicated a strong upper caste character of India's bureaucracy. In the light of this, the demands for OBC reservations can be seen as emanating from sections that aspire for a dominant position.

In fact reservation policy needs to be examined as an institutional framework since it is the site where all the three types of claims are present. In a sense, this policy is a suitable appropriational program. On the one hand reservation policy seeks to appropriate the legacy of radical social movements of lower castes. On the other hand this policy can effectively coopt the articulate and vocal elements from lower castes. Secondly, the issue of reservations for OBCs has become one area of confrontation between upper castes and aspiring sections of lower-middle castes. Therefore, reservation policy represents the aspirational claims. But thirdly, for the unorganized, small lower caste communities, dalits and tribals, the transformational element of reservation policy cannot be denied. This mixed reality cautions us against branding the institutional framework either merely as appropriational -cooptational or upholding it as radical-transformative.

Electoral Arena
Nowhere is this point more relevant than in the case of party and electoral politics. In the post-independence period the congress system emerged as the centerpiece of Indian politics. (Kothari, 1964). This development has been seen as representing a consensus (Kothari, 1988, 164-171)[4] accommodating landed gentry, businessmen, industrialists and supplementing the high caste base by adding supporters from middle and lower castes. But Congress upheld the electoral democratic framework, thus creating an atmosphere favorable to democracy. Emergence of parties like the Jan Sangh and Swatantra, helped Congress in gaining an image of being pro-people. For two decades - or even longer - the Congress represented both appropriational claims to democracy (by and on behalf of the entrenched classes) and aspirational claims. Besides, it spoke the language of welfare and development which provided some space for the democratic demands of the downtrodden. Thus, congress system mediated between domination and democratic expectations, between competing sections of ruling classes and between upper castes and the numerous middle castes (Palshikar, 1998).

In the electoral arena, the first three general elections may be seen as a series of appropriation effected by the congress system. Although opposition parties existed and democratic norms were followed, competitive element was absent. Moreover, these elections were mostly devoid of any serious ideological contestation. Communists, Socialists, Swatantrites and Hindu Nationalists did have a presence but they were not able to force serious debate regarding social reconstruction. Thirdly, these elections did not witness any tangible voter polarization along caste, class, region etc. Congress could consolidate its electoral base by bargaining 'developmental' benefits for electoral support

from various strata (Kothari, 1988, 165). Since 1967, elections became more competitive (1971 and 1984 are exceptions) because new aspirants claiming to represent democratic expectations of people arrived on the scene. These included rich peasants (1967), middle castes (1977), regional elites (1996, 1998), upwardly mobile backward castes (1989, 1996, 1998) and the middle class (1996, 1998,1999). During the period 1967-1991, non-cogressism was a continuing theme because of the aspirational nature of the claims that were being advanced. The newly awakened social sections, having gained some access to material resources, now claimed that they represented 'people'. To consolidate electoral strength, they resorted to alliance formation on the basis of common opposition to congress. All of them had stakes in the displacement of Congress both as a party and as an alliance of social forces.

The elections to sixth Lok Sabha (1977) provide a classic case of aspirational claims regarding democracy. The election campaign was pitched on the issue of authoritarianism. Vs. democracy. Having won the election, Janata Party contented itself by undoing the 42nd amendment, instituting inquiry against Indira Gandhi and brazenly dismissing nine state governments run by congress. While such hotchpotch response was only to be expected since Janata Party was an amalgam of parties with different predilections, this response was also shaped by a lack of alternative democratic program. Those in the Janata Party did not have any idea about democratization. And the proposals of the patron saint of Janata Party, Jay Prakash Narayan, were mostly platitudinal. The actual forces that made up Janata Party - Lok Dal and Jan Sangh- were not interested in democratization. All this resulted into a betrayal of Janata's democratic campaign. But the Janata interlude helped the Congress in taking up a sharply pro-bourgeoisie character. After 1980, the class character of Congress became well-defined and consequently its ideological pronouncement, too, shifted ground. As the Congress developed an openly favorable stance towards industrial bourgeoisie (and also adopted a new image under Rajiv Gandhi), agrarian interests and middle caste interest could again regroup themselves as Janata Dal. Thus, the second moment of aspirational politics emerged in 1989.

However, the 1989 regrouping should not be seen as a straightforward confrontation between two contenders. The angularities of aspiring forces forbade such twosome contest. The competition between industrial bourgeoisies vs. rich peasants only provided a launching ground. The more prominent issue was caste. On the caste issue the BJP and Congress almost shared a common position. They also shared a common position regarding capitalist development. Since 1990 onwards, the BJP followed a hard communal line which distinguishes it from all other parties. As the aspirational claims of forces outside the Congress gained ground, the BJP emerged as the beneficiary of non-congressism. It is possible to see two contending paradigms in the period between 1989 and 1998 fighting to inherit the post-Congress polity. They are the caste paradigm and Hindutva paradigm. (Palshikar: 1998a). Both are insufficient to go beyond the Congress politics while the Hindutva paradigm actually threatens India's democracy.

Although the legacy of Lohia may be traced in the caste paradigm, this paradigm is a post-mandal phenomenon insisting on power sharing alone. The caste paradigm does not

seriously address the question regarding caste inequality. Therefore, its contribution to the transformational anti-caste discourse is very limited. Bahujan Samaj Party, Laloo Parasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Samajwadi Party are the main proponents of the view that decisive control of political apparatus must be exercised by lower castes (dalits or dalit-OBCs or OBCs). In this sense, we describe these claims as aspirational, i.e., claims of upwardly mobile sections to become competing elites. In the context of caste society these claims are valuable in that they undermine the legitimacy of upper caste domination. But the relative silence of these claims on questions of broader transformation makes them only weak allies of masses. Besides, the actual politics of these groups/parties suggests that some of them may not be enthusiastic in sharing power with Muslims, tribals, dalits or women. What is more intriguing is the fact that many groups / parties expressing aspirational claims fail to forge alliances or even fail to maintain close links with the various emerging movements taking up the cause of oppressed, disprivileged people at local levels. This means that the transformational value of caste politics will be only symbolic. Only if caste politics takes up the transformational agenda at least partially, then electoral victories of this type of politics can expand democratic spaces. Campaigns (1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999) and post-election performances do not provide much hope in this direction.

In the mid-eighties the BJP adopted an aggressive Hindutva position. Since then the Hindutva paradigm of politics has become prominent. Electorally, this means that BJP has been able to occupy a significant position. The rise of BJP has resulted into the growth of communalism. Communalism implies violence and justification of violence on grounds of religious appeal. The BJP has succeeded in attracting large sections of OBCs on the basis of Hinduist appeal. This success has undermined the efforts of various parties like Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party etc. to evolve OBC politics. BJP has also managed to incorporate OBC leaders at high positions in party and government at state level, thus fulfilling the demand for power sharing. The exclusionary strategy of BJP and its efforts to construct a Hindu identity by homogenizing the Hindu society make the BJP an important obstacle to democratization. The party has been able to get the support of one quarter of the electorate. This indicates the extent of communalization in Indian politics (Vanaik, 1997, 311-319, 342-43). In a period of decline of Congress, the BJP has won the support of the dominant classes. With its communalization program, it is successfully appropriating the democratic space also. The threat of Hindutva paradigm is more serious than it appears in the context of competitive electoral context.

The foregoing overview of electoral politics may be summarized as follows: i) The electoral arena leaves very limited room for transformational democratic claims. ii) Some aspirational claims have the potential of unsettling entrenched interests. iii) The competitive electoral field represents a considerable democratic space. iv) Communalization of electoral politics results into loss of the democratic space or at least erosion of this democratic space. v) The decline of Congress has not necessarily resulted into better prospects for democracy in the country, and vi) Given the liberal-democratic structure adopted by the constitution, electoral and party politics is bound to dominate the political process. Therefore, substantive democratic interventions have to relate themselves to the electoral arena**.

The Indian nation-state emerged as a result of a long agitation involving the masses. This bestowed upon the political process a mobilizational / agitational legacy. Apart from the anti-colonial struggle, a number of other mobilizational agitations had taken place in the pre-independence period. These included the trade union movement, caste-based mobilization of the ex-untouchables, etc. Post-independence politics unfolded in this background. One effect of this mobilizational background has been that political parties resorted to competitive mobilizations for electoral support. On the other hand, mobilizations took place outside of the electoral arena also. They took a variety of forms - agitations, protest movements, insurgencies, etc. There is a tendency to look upon such agitations as symbolic of democratic aspirations of the masses either against the ruling classes or against the Indian nation-state. It is true that their mobilizational character makes agitations more mass-oriented than the electoral political process. However, agitational politics can also become the platform for different sections of society to fight out their competitive claims to public resources. Therefore, the agency of mobilization, the ideological positioning and the result of the agitation need to be considered in assessing the claims of different movements based on agitational - mobilizational methods.

Agitational Politics
The movements of the early period (trade unionism, naxalite movement, linguistic-regional movements) were a response to India's complex class structure and an ongoing struggle between the industrial capitalist interests and the agrarian interests. The trade union movement tried to intervene in the ongoing process of capitalist development and force the state to take a welfare and pro-labor stance. The trade union movement (including socialist trade unions) was an attempt to polarize the political process along class lines. However, strong unions found if difficult to translate their strength into political leverage. In the eighties non-ideological unionism emerged and developments in the direction of segmented structure of industrial production resulted into fragmentation of the trade union movement (Tulpule, 1996; Bhowmik, 1998). At present, trade unions of non-left political forces are stronger than left / socialist unions. Secondly, trade union movement does not have much influence on the political process. In fact, except unions of white-collar workers (government employees, bank and insurance employees etc.) other unions have a very limited role in the present situation. Historically the trade union movement represented the working class. But within the trajectory of India's social development and political economy, organized labor is located on a comparatively privileged position. Besides, in the last two decades, there has been considerable growth of 'middle classes' and at least some sections of the working class qualify for a position among middle classes. This situation weakens the claims of trade union movement regarding transformative politics.

India's peculiar class situation coupled with Maoist ideology produced the naxalite, i.e. marxist-leninist response. The naxalite movement made an important contribution to the organization of poor peasants, landless laborers and tribals in many parts of the country.

Their activities brought into sharp focus the issue of agrarian question and the class character of Indian state. (Mohanty, 1977, Mohan Ram, 1971). But the naxalite movement also raised the questions of terrorist violence, state repression and revolutionary potential of India's agrarian society. In the later period, marxist-leninists have also been forced to take notice of the caste issue. In the nineties, sections of marxist-leninist groups decided to engage in open political activity. But on the whole, the naxalite movement chose insurrectionary guerrilla methods. This isolated the movement and restricted it to cadres and areas of strong influence; leaving the masses outside the reach of revolutionary struggles. Notwithstanding these limitations, the naxalite movement represented a strong transformational moment in the post-independent political career of India in that this movement put the poorest sections at the center of political struggle. This significant democratic advance was lost on account of an overbearing 'agency' and due to victory of tactics and strategy over ideology.

Regionalism, demands for linguistic states, autonomy movements and separatist struggles constitute an important terrain of agitations. They are analyzed in three different ways. One analytical response is to treat all such agitations as essentially democratic expressions. The second type of response would be to look at such movements as expressions of contradiction among the ruling classes. And the third response treats autonomy movements, as expressions of ethnic identity. The three responses mentioned here sometimes get mixed with each other. In particular, the argument about ethnic identity and the argument about democratic expression are often combined. In both these arguments the emphasis is on state and nation-state as the factor responsible for suppressing expressions of autonomy and ethnic identity (Navlakha, 1996). But many autonomy movements are propelled by the desire of regionally restricted dominant sections and ruling classes to enter into a competitive relationship with the industrial bourgeoisie. The green revolution in particular set in motion such a response. (Gill, 1995 and 1998) [5]. But even before the green revolution, local/regionally dominant sections particularly from upcoming middle castes saw an opportunity in linguistic states and mobilized the masses on the basis of language, regional identity and formation of separate state (Andhra, Maharashtra, Punjab) (Brass, 1992, 148-152). Movements for the formation of states on linguistic basis or for autonomy, thus, may be seen as combining the interests of local level elites with 'democratic' sentiments.[6] Historically, movements for formation of states constituted apppropriational and aspirational democratic claims and only a mild transformative element. Autonomy movements and separatist movements contribute to a double displacement of transformational claims. In the first instance they bring the nation-state into focus without either questioning the class basis of state or challenging the prevailing class relations in the realm of civil society. Secondly, these movements take recourse to identity formation and ethnicity claims. This tends to ignore-remove from political consciousness - internally hierarchical structure of identities. Ethnic identity tends to universalize identity claims, in the process resulting into displacement of class, caste, gender (and in some cases tribe) as crucial meeting ground for material and cultural disprivilege.[7]

During the seventies, the youth movement in Bihar and Gujarat attracted the most attention as being a democratic upsurge (Shah, 1977). But except contributing to the

defeat of Congress in the next elections, it is difficult to trace the contribution of this movement to long-term politics. One of the reasons for this is ideological diffuseness of the movement. Although it spoke of '*sampoorna kranti*', i.e. total revolution, the focus was mostly on the apolitical question of character building and morality. The movement did not seek to focus on specific issues or sections of the population and quickly faded once post-emergency events unfolded. Since then, two agitations have had considerable impact at the all-India level: the caste agitations and farmers' agitations. In the case of caste movements we can observe a general pattern of lower caste agitations for reservations (and other demands) and the anti-reservation (anti-Dalit) agitations. In her analysis of 'new' social movements, Gail Omvedt begins with the Dalit Panthers movement (Omvedt, 1998, 220) and insists that movements of OBCs also need to be considered within the scope of anti-caste movements (Omvedt, 1998, 226). These caste movements made significant contribution in terms of transformational democratic claims. They did not merely raise the question of social status; but focused on the links between class and caste. This has helped in the theorizing of class-caste relation and also helped in searching for ideological responses to the existing modes of domination. The lower caste movements received a response in the form of anti-caste agitations. Widespread violence against dalits of Maharashtra (1978-79) on the issue of naming a university after Dr. Ambedkar, violent student agitation against reservations in Bihar (1979-80) and later in Gujarat (1981) gave a foretaste of anti-Mandal agitations that were to sweep many states in 1990. Anti-reservation agitations were first strong indicators of movements opposed to transformational claims to democracy. The entrenched interests had so far followed the technique of adopting conformist rhetoric and using state machinery to forestall social change. Since the early eighties, the militant response by entrenched interests inaugurated the era of anti-people movements.

In some ways caste movements were linked to farmers' movements. The agitations of OBCs threw up leadership from middle and lower middle castes. Some of these were peasant castes. However, farmers' movements did not take a consciously caste-oriented position, neither were they necessarily pro-dalit. The growth of farmers' movements in U.P., Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka presents a case of rising middle peasantry fighting against the industrial bourgeoisie and in the process also creating democratic space for ordinary small farmers. Sharad Joshi's movement (Shetkari Sanghatana) drew a lot of attention because of this peculiarity. The Shetkari Sanghatana has been hailed for being reformist, anti-communal and pro-gender equality (Omvedt 1991, 1998, Lindberg, 1998, 257-58). While such description fits the positions taken by the Sanghatana, the middle peasant base of Sharad Joshi's (and Tikait's too) movement (Lenneberg, 1988) severely limits the transformational claims made by (on behalf of) farmers' movements. It would therefore be appropriate to characterize the farmers' movement as representing the aspirational moment.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, there have emerged many small movements that seek to assert democratic rights of local peoples. These movements broadly challenge the path of development, the statist model and claims of national-state homogenization. Beginning with dispersed women's movements, such agitations gained

public attention with the rise of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). The NBA questioned not only unjust rehabilitation policies but also the method of not consulting the 'affected' people in the course of decision-making. The NBA, thus questioned terms like people, public interest and national interest etc. It has shown that 'public interest' is always understood as interests of 'outsiders' vis-à-vis the local. Thirdly, the NBA went on to challenge the notion of development as understood in terms of 'mega' projects. It situated 'development' in the transformational perspective as resulting in maximum benefit to poor people and development as based on democratic decision-making. These arguments have later become pertinent not only to dams but various other projects including environmentally degrading or hazardous industrial development. These movements have evolved, although in a somewhat uncoordinated manner, a perspective called alternative or sustainable development. Key problems pertaining to these movements are their localized nature, susceptibility to NGO phenomenon, failure to grapple with the deep-rooted interests of metropolitan capital, national capital and dominant castes and lack of a political vision bordering almost on being apolitical. Since many of these movements celebrate the local in opposition to the national, they retain a specifically local character which limits the   movement to locality or local issues. Many new movements advocating alternative development tend to ignore the broader processes of domination such as capitalist development, land ownership and local caste configurations (Krishna, 1996, 238-257 and Krishna, 1996a, 410-434). Most 'alternative' movements despise political parties and electoral politics. Many movements also refuse to adopt broad political ideological vision since that may develop a universalizing tendency. The single-issue movements are not interested in collapsing different issues which is necessary for broad based political struggles (Krishna, 1996a, 433-34, Deshpande 1998, 131-136). These problems notwithstanding, the movements challenging development discourse have raised immensely rich transformational democratic claims which have a potential of challenging both Hindu homogenization and the advance of capitalism. In fact, anti-caste movements, women's movements and alternative development movements can find a common basis if they broaden their perspectives and avoid both essentialization and a   tendency to tilt towards some forms of fashionable anti-foundationalisms.

During the eighties, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and many organizations affiliated to it pushed ahead the issue of Ayodhya. This agitation almost entirely occupied the attention of the nation for around one decade. The Ayodhya agitation sought to communalize the political process as also the civil society. Mass mobilization by RSS and its affiliates almost entirely usurped the agitational strategy and put it to anti-people use. In terms of large numbers mobilized by the agitation, it could claim to represent the 'democratic' sentiment in a formal sense. But engineered on the basis of hatred and directed at one community, the Ayodhya agitation sought to establish the cultural and political superiority of the 'Hindu' community. By homogenizing the 'Hindu' society, the Ayodhya agitation implicitly discredited or displaced other agitational politics. The rise of the Ayodhya movement, thus left very little scope for agitations on issues concerning the people. In this sense, rise of anti-people agitations poses serious problems before the transformational democratic claims as well as before democratic theory.

This review of politics of mobilization indicates that there have been only weak moments of transformational intervention. An alliance between transformational claims and aspirational claims has the potential of confronting entrenched interests to some extent. The Hindutva mobilization has effectively shown that dominant sections are prepared to appropriate mobilizational spaces. In the light of this mapping of different democratic claims in the Indian context, we now turn to the question of prospects of democracy. This will require an analysis of the entrenched forces and their strength to establish durable normative regimes legitimating domination.

III

Post-independence politics unfolded a nuanced text of domination punctuated by democratic aspirations. When the democratic state structure was created, the civil society was dominated by emerging bourgeoisie and entrenched landed interests. It is interesting to see how/why did dominant interests allow the emergence and continuance of democratic political structures. Firstly, the Congress, as the nationalist movement, played a key role in evolving this democratic structure. The various evaluations of Congress and Gandhi as being representatives of the bourgeoisie and landed interests notwithstanding, the Congress did play a crucial democratic role as a popular anti-colonial movement in deciding to build a democratic state apparatus. In other words, the Congress-led freedom movement was instrumental in realizing the democratic moment since 1947. As a movement with mass following and a party with expanding social base from 1937 onwards, Congress had attained a capacity to operate at least partially, in an autonomous manner. The progressive role of Congress first in demanding expansion of political rights (and not merely freedom) and later in leading the exercise of constitution making has to be recognized. These might have benefited certain sections but Congress was not acting merely as an instrument of specific dominant interests. Thus, the national-democratic moment produced a democratic state apparatus.

Secondly, the Indian state, inheriting the colonial bureaucratic apparatus and claiming popular sanction, quickly developed relative autonomy. This autonomy was threefold. The Indian state achieved / maintained a degree of independence from international political pressures. It also sought / achieved autonomy from the masses. And the state functioned in relative autonomy from direct interventions of entrenched interests (Vanaik, 1990, 11-14). The first was reflected in the non-aligned policy. The second was seen in postponement of full implementation of linguistic state formation as well as in prioritizing industry over agriculture. The third may be seen from the welfare policies. In the face of a relatively autonomous state resorting to democratic rhetoric, the entrenched interests must have felt it prudent to operate within the constraints of democratic political process. Besides, absence of a single organized dominant section was also a crucial factor. At the time of independence, no single interest could assert itself exclusively. The trading and business class (merchants, bankers, money lenders), the landed interests (big land lords, inamdars, jagirdars, etc.) and the emerging industrial bourgeoisie did not have identical agenda of domination. In fact, they were internally engaged in a competitive

relationship. None could singly take over the control of the state. For their internal competition, these dominant interests found the 'autonomous' state very suitable.

This, however, does not mean that acceptance of democratic state signified surrender or setback for the entrenched interests. A democratic state indicated a particular kind of state-civil society relationship. In this relationship, state retained the (formal) right of intervention in the sphere of civil society (economy, social customs, religion etc.), claimed relative autonomy (claiming that the state was a neutral center of public power), but being 'democratic', the state also refused to shape the civil society (the economy in particular) in a forceful manner. On the other hand, the autonomous state operated with care in order not to endanger entrenched interests. This roughly bourgeois democratic arrangement implies indirect influence of the entrenched interests over state policies and administration. But such implication also leads to a tension because it requires a democratic state to act for the advantage of one set of class-interests, which undermines the 'democratic' nature. In order to overcome this tension, the dominant interests have to ensure an overall normative superiority for themselves. Thus, the disjunction between a democratic state and its undemocratic behavior is sought to be overcome, with the help of hegemony.

Consensus or Hegemony ?
How did this hegemonic project shape up in the Indian context? In the period immediately after independence, as we noted above, no single class enjoyed a predominant position. The main divide among the entrenched interests was between industrial interests and agrarian interests. This competitive relationship required that both were engaged in a struggle for favorable state policies. This relationship considerably reduced the prospects of a hegemonic project. The bourgeoisie and the landed interests had to undermine each other's claims. While science, technology, self-reliance, modern development and values associated with capitalism would be upheld by the bourgeoisie, the landed interests would contest these values or at least read different meanings in them. Even the Indian state had constantly to engage in a balancing act. Although it decidedly favored the path of capitalist development, the state had to go slow on both the fronts of land reform and social reform. The rhetoric was modern development but the policy content was always mixed. Much has been said about the Nehru period and Congress dominance. Congress did evolve a political network of consensual policy-making. But two points need further examination in this regard. Firstly, the Congress developed political consensus, i.e. a political method for mediating between contesting claims. This method - way of negotiating political issues - does not necessarily amount to hegemony. More importantly, did Congress directly represent the specific entrenched interest? For instance, was it a bourgeois party or party of the landlord? Here is a paradox. A party narrowly representing specific dominant interest cannot claim to articulate hegemony. On the other hand, a party which is a coalition of dominant interests, cannot produce hegemony because, then, it becomes the platform of contestations. The factions within the Congress have been variously described as being in favor of different sections of dominant interests. One famous juxtaposition is between Nehru and Patel (Khilnani, 1998, 33-38). But even after the death of Patel, interests of regionally located agricultural section continued to be expressed within the Congress. In

terms of electoral strategy Congress could not ignore or offend these landed interests. In such a situation, congress could not have evolved hegemony. In lieu of hegemony, it evolved a consensual strategy. This situation indirectly strengthened the democratic rhetoric. As we stated at the beginning, democracy became the celebrated aspect of India's political process. However, this consensus over democracy should not be confused with ruling class hegemony.[8] Hegemony of the ruling classes is characterized by the emergence of a hegemonic bloc. The conflict among the ruling classes is contained by the rise of one class as dominant within the coalition of ruling classes. Scope for collaboration among the ruling classes outweighs their conflictual relations. Secondly, hegemony implies legitimation of superiority through competitive democratic exercise. The ruling classes seek legitimation more on the grounds of their acceptability than by resort to repressive apparatus. This acceptability stems from the view held by opposing classes that the existing dispensation holds (limited) possibilities of their advance. Emancipatory urge is replaced by expectations of such limited advance. Finally, hegemony operates on the terrain of civil society. The ruling classes do not merely enjoy political domination; they exercise cultural domination too. Social relations are increasingly governed by a set of norms produced or sanctioned by the ruling classes.

In the post-independence period, the ruling class was composed of the capitalist class and the feudal landed interests (Sen, 1976, 675-77; Wilson, 1994, 264). Soon, the bourgeoisie emerged as more dominant within the ruling class. This was due mainly to the capitalist development adopted by the Indian state. The green revolution produced a class of rich peasants. Along with the middle peasants, this well-to-do class of farmers was prepared to enter into alliance with the bourgeoisie. By the mid-eighties, it could be argued that industrial bourgeoisie, rich peasants and professionals constituted the coalition of dominant interests (Bardhan, 1984, 40-41). However, as we shall argue below, the caste background of the rich peasant class was an obstacle in its search for a leadership role within the ruling coalition. Besides, the capitalist course of development meant that the bourgeoisie would be the ascendant section among the ruling alliance. However, the bourgeoisie was not in a position to give ideological leadership. It consisted of different layers--the big bourgeoisie, the small and medium entrepreneurs, etc. Their interests did not always complement each other. Even among big bourgeoisie, the social, cultural background of the Parsee industrialists used to be different from that of the Marwari industrialists who came from a feudal, Bania background. Most of the bourgeoisie were themselves not well ingrained with the values of modern capitalism. Besides, the bourgeoisie as a whole depended on the state for protection in the market. Even in the field of shaping and expanding new markets, the bourgeoisie did not have much initiative. Combined with its colonial background, this post-independence scenario contributed to retarded capitalism. Not only was the Indian capitalism retarded in terms of its growth potential but also in terms of its inability to expand its social base and formulate a socio-cultural vision. As a result, capitalism could not provide a normative regime for the society as a whole. Thirdly, a narrow market base implied more exploitation of the workers in the industrial sector corroding the legitimacy of capitalism. These handicaps coupled with the competition between bourgeoisie and the agrarian interests constrained the growth of hegemony.

It has been argued that in the Nehru period and to some extent during the initial period of Indira Gandhi's leadership, there existed 'something like hegemony... of a rural elite drawn from the dominant castes' and the 'ideological underpinnings of this hegemony were provided by the idiom of caste' (Lele, 1994, 40-43). However, the agriculture based rural elite never had an all-India identity. They came from different peasant castes in different states. The dominant agricultural castes did enjoy considerable control over the congress organization at provincial level. But they had a secondary position at the national level both within congress and as a ruling class in the dominant coalition. Even at state level, their autonomy to act independently was severely restricted (Vora, 1990; Palshikar- Deshpande, 1999). The domination of this class was retained at provincial level mainly because it accepted this secondary role. The rural elite did resort to the old caste idioms and brought some justification to bear on their dominance. This helped them in two ways. Firstly, they could mobilize the rural population against industrial bourgeoisie and secondly caste idiom ensured electoral base. Yet, the anti-caste movements have considerably eroded the legitimacy of caste argument. Appropriating caste-loyalty for electoral purposes is one thing and situating a moral-cultural order on it is another. Both the Gandhian and Ambedkarite critiques of caste have severely undermined the viability of a caste based hegemonic project. Add to this the force of national movement, the factors of modern education and reservations, and one finds caste as a weak basis for hegemonization. Lele has based his argument on the basis of intra-caste evolution of caste consciousness which endorses the dominance of the elites from that caste. (Lele, 1981)9. It may be conceded that when caste mobilization begins among a cluster of castes (dalits, OBC) the political leadership of one (Mahars, Jatavas, Marathas, Jats) is accepted by others in that group of castes. But this does not ensure a leading role nationally and does not imply hegemony. On the contrary, resort to caste has led, in most cases, to internal friction among the rural agricultural castes. In view of this, it is unlikely that there was even for a brief period anything like hegemony.

Therefore, our argument is that during the Nehru-Indira period the state evolved slogans - ideas-values like democracy, welfare, development, secularism, nationalism, garibi hatao, socialism etc. and in the absence of hegemony the ruling classes adopted this ideological package. This situation has changed after 1980. The defeat and fluctuating political fortune of Congress have alerted the ruling classes to have both an alternative to Congress and to develop a hegemonic project. Other developments since the eighties have also facilitated the hegemonic project. Movements striving at democratic transformation have considerably weakened. Politics is characterized more by the combination of and competition among appropriational and aspirational claims. In the form of the BJP, a political apparatus has emerged which seeks to combine both these claims and seeks to delegitimize transformational claims. More importantly, the internal composition of ruling classes has changed in favor of the aggressive bourgeoisie. In the contest between the bourgeoisie and agricultural interests, the former has attained an upper hand. At around the same time, role of the junior partner in the ruling alliance has increased in significance. The middle class has not only grown in size but it has gained a position from where it can become the architect of the hegemonic project.

Middle class

Middle class has always been an enigma for social scientists. It poses a number of riddles-definitional, empirical, ideological. The following discussion, therefore, has to take place within these constraints.[10] In the Indian context Bardhan used the term professionals and incorporated the public bureaucracy in it (Bardhan, 1984, 51-53) but later expanded the term to include all white collar job holders and professionals (Bardhan, 1989, 155).   Rudra employed a more confounding term intelligentsia that included entire   bureaucracies in public sector and private sector, public administration, salaried or self-employed engineers, medical professionals, lawyers, teachers, journalists, writers, artists, politicians etc. (Rudra, 1989, 142-145). Notably, both Bardhan and Rudra have desisted from using the term 'middle class'. The multi-class social reality of advance capitalism requires us to map out sections of society that defy inclusion within bourgeoisie and proletariat.[11] Discussion of middle classes also helps in situating the ambivalent, location of many sections in the capitalist society (Wright, 1989, 19-57).

What constitutes middle classes ? Briefly following points may be made : i) non-ownership of means of production, but effective control over means of production leading to a sense of authority and near-ownership; ii) generally non-productive realm of activity; predominantly service-sector activity or intellectual labor, iii) salary or fee structure which is not objectively determined; hence a very favorable structure of income; iv) indirect share in surplus by being instruments of surplus appropriation or legitimation of the system, share in surplus through unearned incomes and corruption; v) control over systems of administration, opinion-formation, culture, knowledge etc.; vi) social status disproportionate to income and disproportionate contribution to production; vii) control over consumer and services market and emphasis on life style (Palshikar, 1997, 72-75).

Middle classes in India have performed three different roles so far. The first role was played in the pre-independence period. It was the role of a self-conscious modernizer and supporter of national movement (Desai, 1994, 196-97). In this role of modernizer, the middle classes emphasized modern education and industrial development. They appreciated the importance of modern institutions like administration and representative legislatures. Therefore, their politics was concerned with entry into administration and expansion of right to representation (Mishra, 1961, 359-367). This role attributed a nationalist and 'progressive' image to the middle classes. Secondly, in the post-independence period the middle classes were engaged in quiet acquiescence and consolidation. Whatever their 'progressive' pretensions, these classes were skeptical about 'people' and democracy. Therefore, they remained aloof from direct political activity. But during the process of state-building, the middle classes got an opportunity for expansion and self-aggrandizement. State-control of economy meant a powerful public bureaucracy armed with 'welfare' and public interest.' On the other hand, self-reliance and rapid industrialization meant an enormous increase in the size of technocratic, managerial and professional sections. Thus, 'socialism' was not seen as a favorable ideology; yet the middle classes acquiesced into the socialist rhetoric for it

produced an ever expanding bureaucracy. This consolidation of middle classes - in terms of size, stability and effective control - took place between 1950 and 1980.

Hegemonic Potential
The third period, roughly coinciding with Indira Gandhi's departure, is the period of expansion and rising influence. It is not merely the increase in the size of middle classes - even that is certainly very important - but the central position being achieved by them that signifies this contemporary role of middle classes. Therefore the middle classes can now develop the hegemonic project on behalf of the capitalist class. In exchange, the core of middle classes will gain entrance to the ruling coalition. At the present juncture of so-called globalization India's ruling classes will require a hegemonic project. The process of globalization will not be without its own paradoxes. For one, a clash between global capital and national capital is bound to take place. Similarly, globalization also means retreat for certain sections of bourgeoisie and rich farmers (resulting from global trade treaties). In the course of competition with global capital, Indian capitalism will require internal strength and support. internally, too, capitalist development implies more iniquitous distribution of resources and marginalization of the poor in India. Repression and authoritarian measures can not ensure success. It is far better if a favorable normative regime is evolved. Thirdly, in the course of capitalist development, role of Indian state is going to be most crucial. While there is talk of retreat of state (probably meaning retreat from welfare responsibilities), capitalist class will need the state more than ever because the regulative task will increase. State will be expected to manage (democratically) the popular agitations. State will be crucial in providing necessary   'nationalist' backing during the process of globalization. These factors underscore the urgency of a hegemonic project.

During the period of Congress dominated politics, the political atmosphere was favorable for hegemonic project but the ruling classes then lacked necessary internal cohesion and cultural equipment. Today, when we are on the threshold of post-Congress politics, the ruling classes have a cultural ally in the form of middle class and a political ally in the form of BJP. Politics is not consensual as it was during the period of Congress domination. But the mutual dependence of ruling classes, middle class and BJP may just contribute to the successful realization of a hegemonic project. In order to appreciate the hegemonic potential of middle classes in its contemporary role, we need to consider the following responses of the middle classes to the current political economy of India : a) From the time of early and indirect efforts to liberalize the Indian economy (1980) to direct actions in that regard (1991) the public bureaucracy has been supportive; the middle classes are favorably inclined; the media has sometimes in a very voluble manner endorsed the shift. The middle classes were enamored by Rajiv Gandhi and later fascinated by both Manmohan Singh and Chidambaram. On the whole, the new, aggressive turn in capitalist development has generated enthusiasm among the middle classes. Moreover, sections of middle class - rather than the bourgeoisie - have been spending their energies to defend / justify the shift in capitalist development. The arguments are not merely economic, they relate to global trends, market survivals, modernity, national power and a host of moral-cultural aspects involved in new economic policies. The present discourse on new economic policies might even outsmart the forum

for free enterprise of the sixties! The capitalist development is seen as an opportunity to transcend India's conditions of living by globalizing them. In this sense, the argument is non-economic and more directed at social norms. At no time in India had capitalism gained such acceptance and credibility as it has presently. The role of middle classes in this process is very significant.

b) Among the population above the poverty line, there are very substantial inequalities in terms of access to / ownership over assets. But the market of consumer goods is all set to penetrate these different strata. The middle class is in the forefront of bringing about this consumer society on the basis of common aspiration, possession of goods and a standardized notion of life. The effects of a standardized concept of status and life on an internally stratified society are yet to be properly evaluated. But it seems very probable that the normative intervention of middle classes may lead to the structuring of civil society on a new basis: on the basis of market. The market-based society will be self-centered, ideologically insensitive and more significantly, it will require its reproduction as a precondition of political support. The middle classes are instrumental in spreading this new life style popularized by media. The central issue is access to life style. This bypasses the issue of ownership of assets. In the present structure of consumer markets a monthly family income of Rs. 3000 is deemed sufficient for the family to qualify as a consumer. Assuming a family size of four persons, this condition suggests that vast sections can be amalgamated into the market and subsumed as modern consumers, their income inequalities notwithstanding. Hence the claim that the middle class accounts for twenty per cent of the population. The implication is obvious. Low incomes will not necessarily matter; the system (capitalism) will be seen as providing status opportunities irrespective of assets and incomes.

In yet another sense, the new market society restructures civil society. On the one hand the question of life style becomes a public concern : social pressure, media and market will collude in defining what your life should be like. On the other hand income, assets and actual financial condition are excluded from discussions in the public realm. They are personal matters. The argument will be that merit, ability and hard work will structure one's economic position in a private manner. Acceptance of this new division of public / private arenas is going to be the contribution of middle classes.

c) In the political arena, the middle class plays an important role not just as defender of entrenched interests but as appropriator of democratic spaces. The bourgeoisie and rich farmers are handicapped by their small populations. They can claim to be democratic on someone else's behalf. But they cannot themselves claim the entire democratic space. The middle class is unencumbered in this respect since it is not the 'owner' - neither the industrialist nor the large farmer- it can thus claim to being 'common man.' Numerically, its size is rapidly growing. This can ascribe a leading political role to the middle classes. At the juncture of coalition politics, the size of middle classes can produce democratic claims.   Of course, it is not due to numerical strength alone. The middle classes in India have been engaged in redefining what constitutes India. It is no more the India of millions of poor. It is the India of the smart executive, sly stock broker, upcoming sales persons. The Indian image of India is qualitatively

changing. The middle classes appear to be succeeding in privileging their image of India. Politically these sections claim to 'represent' India. Such claims require a political instrument for their realization. For a brief period, Rajiv's Congress tried to fulfill this role. But middle classes quickly retraced their steps and discovered (or perhaps literally created ?) their true political ally : The Bharatiya Janata Party. It is not just the pro-liberalization policy of BJP that makes it the ally of middle classes. Many other parties would offer the same policy package. It is the historical character of BJP and its affiliates : the RSS has always been the darling of middle classes. Also, the social composition of earlier RSS and BJP made the BJP a better candidate. The present middle class, open though it is to middle level OBCs, is predominantly upper caste in character. The cultural aspiration of these castes are inclined towards homogenization. The BJP fulfills this through its project of Hindu homogenization. In other words, BJP adequately satisfies the material, social and cultural expectations of the middle classes. Since 1991, but more significantly in the last two elections, the middle classes have enthusiastically supported the BJP and produced 'mandate' for the BJP (Yadav, 1996, 48-50, Yadav, 1998, 49-52, Yadav, 1999, 31-40). Data suggests that BJP has been consistently getting sizable support from urban, educated and upper caste voters, more from the men than women. But links between middle classes and BJP go beyond electoral choices. These sections have been generally supportive of the communalization of society undertaken by RSS and its affiliates. The endorsement of BJP comes mainly from the fact that BJP aggressively upholds 'Hindu' interests. These responses of middle classes to contemporary political economy can be described as attempts to construct hegemony. The middle classes that have been emerging since the 1980s, are not confined to urban sections only. Even among the rural, agrarian sector middles class is emerging both in terms of access to resources and in terms of life-style aspirations. This development has the potential of creating a hegemonic bloc by unifying the different sections of the ruling classes. On the other hand, the middles class epitomizes the possibilities of upward mobility involved in the capitalist development. In this sense, the middle classes can place before the masses a promise of 'progress'. Already, the life-style and values of the middle class have made an impression on the masses. This has produced changes in the ways of approaching life and in the cultural modes that exist among the people. Thus, the middle classes facilitate unity among the ruling class and produce a structure of morality which is adopted by the dominated classes.

Two significant changes may be noted which result from this growing strength of the hegemonic project. In the earlier period when the hegemonic project was weak, there was some space for transformational claims. In the absence of hegemony, these claims could enjoy considerable ideological space. Besides, transformational claims were in a position to forge alliances with aspirational claims. This possibility held the politics of dominant classes under check. Thirdly, non-hegemonic politics required charismatic leadership and populist politics. Both had to indulge in democratic rhetoric which further gave some strength to transformational claims. This situation appears to be fast changing. A hegemonic regime does not require/ produce charismatic leadership or populist politics. The political rhetoric of social change has therefore lost its shine. The regime now does not require the transformational polemic. The new hegemonic regime allows very little room for transformational movements within the structure of liberal democratic

political competition. Movements representing transformational claims have to be content with their fringe existence. They will not be necessarily displaced but more or less ignored as activities of the dissenters. As in western liberal democracies, these movements even run the risk of being coopted within the official discourse as internal dissent. The rise of the NGO sector typically hints at this possibility.

The second change may occur in the field of political contestation. Hegemony operates in the realm of values and norms. As such, it is not the politics of state power but politics of culture which is besieged by hegemony. The hegemonic moment is already characterized by this siege of culture. We have noted above the coup staged by the middle classes in the field of life-style. This coup was and still is actively aided by the media. Nowhere else is this link between capitalism and the cultural siege so blatant than in the case of the media. But in a poverty stricken, caste-ridden society like India, media may not be an adequate instrument of cultural takeover. It needs the supplement of a homogenizing ideological discourse. Communalism has been performing this task. The cultural terrain is occupied by this discourse of communalism. The growing spread and acceptance of communalist framework for understanding society and politics suggests that the hegemonic project is well under way. The Ayodhya agitation was violent rupture which upset the earlier balance among the different claims to democracy. In a sense, the spread of that agitation marked the inauguration of the hegemonic moment. Yet it is remarkable that the hegemonic project could not be articulated solely on the basis of a capitalist discourse. Equally notable is the fact that the cultural coup of communalism required violence and rioting in order to gain mobilizational advantage. These factors indicate the cracks in the hegemonic project. And yet, so long as the alliance between bourgeoisie and the middle classes holds firm, Indian democracy faces the possibility of being swept by appropriational claims.

The challenge

We have tried in this paper to look at the Indian democratic experience in the context of changing political economy. It may be useful to look at the concept of democracy in terms of different layers because this might yield to a more specific and desegregated meaning. Democratic politics involves attempts by entrenched interests to appropriate available spaces in the name of people. Opposed to this, popular claims take the form of competing aspirations or transformative projects. The Indian experience has been a constant interplay of these different claims to democracy. This understanding of Indian politics differs from the assessment that India's democracy is merely a bourgeois take over. On the other hand, the argument presented here, also tries to avoid romanticization of the democratic experience. We look upon politics as an interplay of democracy and domination. Bourgeois democracy hinges on hegemony. The Indian experience suggests that in post-independence India, ruling classes were not in a position to construct a hegemonic project. However, it appears that we are now entering the moment of hegemony. The rising middle classes are poised to shape the hegemonic project and appropriate democratic spaces.

The present challenge, thrown up by the hegemonic project, is *not how to build a democratic politics of transformation but how to protect both the transformative spaces*

and the formal procedural spaces that are now available. The Indian experience has brought forward some democratic spaces in the past half century. The challenge is to retain those spaces. Putting the prospects of democracy in this fashion is perhaps, singularly unambitious, yet the dream of standing up to the present challenge is certainly ambitious. In conclusion, we need to go back to the question with which we initiated this discussion : Whose democracy ? The hegemonic project seeks to turn democracy into a handmaiden of domination. On the other hand we have also noted the spaces that belong to the masses. In this sense, the question is political. But the question is academic as much as it is political. Because our conceptualization is going to decide whose democracy we are talking about.

Notes :
1. Potter actually summarizes the arguments of Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992) who situate the analysis of democracy in the context of relationship between state and dominant classes. Following this Potter suggests that colonial legacy, place in the transnational structure of power and global capitalist pressure can push democracy in many countries (Potter, 1993, 359-60). While his observation regarding democratization pressure is correct, two questions arise :i) Does the 'democratization pressure' actually lead to democrtization ? and ii) what are the contents of democracies arising out of such global pressure for democratization; i.e., which classes actually seize power in such democracies ?
2. It is interesting to note that what Kohli (1998: 9) describes as conflicts exacerbated by introduction of democracy may actually be democracy itself and not consequences thereof. This again suggests that one may look upon democracy as an externally applied mechanism OR as the actual struggles waged by people.
3. Marxian critique of liberal / bourgeois democracy strongly puts forth such a distinction between formal and substantive notions of democracy but there is a tendency among orthodox Marxists to reject outright the 'formal'. For an account of Marx's early views on democracy and separation of formal and substantive aspects of democracy, see Pierson (1989: 8-16). Democratic politics is also seen as a bridge between the citizen and the state. If form and content are fully separated, this bridge ceases to exist giving way to unmediated interaction between citizen and state (Offe, 1984, 162-178).
4. Kothari's (1964, 1970) analysis of the role of Congress may not be acceptable to many scholars. But his characterization of Congress as a party having support across class, caste seems to be endorsed by many. (Kaviraj, 1986: 1698, Vaniak, 1990: 60, 77-80)
5. Ishtiaq Ahmed (1998) has tried to situate the problem of separatism in the context of post-colonial state and nation-building project. The autonomy demands and their effects on local minorities creates a more complicated situation in the North Eastern region compared to Punjab and Kashmir (Tilottama Misra and Udayon Misra; 1998).
6. Popular expectations that linguistic states will be formed were inspired by congress party's position in the pre-independence period. But they were 'democratic' in one more-and more valid-sense. Self-rule implicitly recognizes the right of people to retain local identities and to manage their local affairs. Self-rule, as a principle

approves of both, autonomy to constituents of nation-state and decentralization. The former includes cultural right; hence linguistic states. In this sense, demands for linguistic state were democratic. But their 'democratic' nature poses a question : How far were these demands spontaneous, popular or people-oriented and how far were they constructed and mobilized by competitive politics and dominant interests ?

7. Thus, Misra and Misra observe how women are expected to 'symbolize' traditional identity and are unrepresented both in legislatures dominated by regional autonomy movements and in the decision-making bodies of these organizations. (Misra and Misra, 1998: 138). They also refer to ethnic cleansing and inter-tribe conflicts (136-142).

8. The term hegemony is often used in varying ways by scholars. Kalpana Wilson (1994) has summarized the debates regarding the character of Indian state and nature of hegemony of the ruling classes in India.

9. Lele's thesis has mainly dealt with the question of Maratha caste in Maharashtra. I believe that there is room for a critical examination of Maratha hegemony thesis as applied to post-1960 Maharashtra, See Vora, (1990).

10. The following discussion of middle class is based on my Marathi article on the middle class (Palshikar, 1997).

11. Although Marxists have always confronted this issue and although it is possible to trace the issue in Marx's writings, (Marx, 1959: 290-300, Marx 1976: 45) insightful and provocative discussion of new petty bourgeoisie, (Poulantzas, 1975) and writings of Carchedi (1977), Ehrenrich and Ehrenrich (1979) and Erik Olin Wright (1978 and 1989) have given contemporaneity to the discussion of middle class.

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